



EFFECTS OF BEHAVIOUR CONTRACTING TECHNIQUE ON SECONDARY SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS PREMARITAL SEX

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex has become a worrisome societal problem in Nigerian society, both to the students' development and their over-all well-being. This study investigated the effects of Behaviour technique on secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex. The design for the study is quasi-experimental, non-randomised pre-test and post-test, control group research. The sample comprised 64 students purposively selected from a population of 260 students. A standardised instrument "Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale (PSPS)" was used for data collection. The internal consistency reliability coefficient for the instrument is 0.73. Data was collected through direct delivery of the instrument to the respondents. Mean scores were used to answer the research questions, while the null hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA). The norm of the instrument guided the decision. The finding of the study revealed among others that contracting technique is effective in reducing adolescents' permissive attitude towards premarital sex. The findings further revealed that the differences in the effect of Behaviour Contracting technique on male and female secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex are not significant. Based on the findings and implications of the study, it was recommended that Guidance Counsellors should adopt the use of the techniques in counselling and therapy among secondary school students to modify their permissive attitude towards premarital sex.

KEYWORDS: Adolescents, attitude, behaviour contracting, technique, premarital sex

1. INTRODUCTION

Attitude towards premarital sex is a critical issue among the adolescents which have the tendency to be exposed to various health hazards such as teenage pregnancy complications arising from induced abortions, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS. Pre-marital sex today has become a moral issue in institutions of learning. Students tend to engage in promiscuous behaviours without even at first recognizing just how dangerous it could be. Sex for these students is usually perceived as the ultimate source of pleasure.

The word sex in this study is used as a short term for sexual intercourse. In this perspective, sex includes the feelings or behaviours resulting from the

urge to gratify sexual desire. Sex according to Ayodele, Omolayo and Bose (2012) includes embracing arousal and activities associated with sexual feelings, fantasies, masturbation, foreplay or intercourse for the purpose of pleasure and reproduction. It usually takes place between married people. However, when people engage in sex while they are not yet married, it is termed premarital sex.

Premarital sex may have different connotations to different people and groups, but the definitions are analogous. According to Ayodele, et al. (2012), premarital sex refers to sexual activity practiced by people who are unmarried. Similarly, Sprecher, Treger and Sakaluk (2013) saw premarital sex as sexual relations between two people prior to



marrying each other. However, in the context of this study, pre-marital sex is seen as erotic or sensual behaviours or activities that adolescents engaged in without being married.

Adolescent in the context of this study is a child, either male or female within the age group of 13 to 19 years and schooling in secondary school. The adolescents' behaviour towards sex is determined to a large extent by the way they think or feel about sex hence their attitude towards sex is one of fantasy and exhilaration. Attitude according to Hornby (2015) means the way one thinks and feels about somebody or something. Therefore, attitude towards premarital sex in the context of this study thus refers to a positive or negative evaluations or feeling for or against any activity that is related to sex before marriage.

According to Adegoke (2014) and Wells and Twege (2015) noted, the perception of adolescents over the years about premarital sex have been changing and acceptance of premarital sex as normal has become more apparent. The situation where premarital sex is now practiced without hindrance contrasts the traditional Nigerian societal norm in which premarital sex was regarded as being sordid and forbidden and sex was an exclusive reserve for the married. Thus, it was common feature in most Nigerian cultures then for the unmarried persons to stay away from sexual practices until their marriage night (Egbunugha, 2005). This however was achieved through social punishments such as songs of contempt and degradation meted to girls whose loss of virginity was discovered at marriage night.

However, in recent times, such social punishments has not seems unattainable as the era of sustained virginity till marriage appears to be gradually fizzling away, making room for a more permissive sexual culture that tends to accept premarital sex as a norm. Consequently, there has been an increasing interest, inquiry and curiosity in premarital sexual activities among the present day adolescents. For instance, it has been observed in studies (Adegoke, 2013; Alarape, Olapegba & Chowwen, 2008) that the rate of premarital sexual activities among adolescents and young adults in Nigeria is quite high and the continuous increase in the behaviour has become quite worrisome. This is because such unwholesome behaviour tends to endanger the lives of the adolescents by exposing them to increased sexual health risks which could lead to various psychological, academic and reproductive health problems.

Some of those problems as Ayodele, et al. (2012) noted include contraction of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), early motherhood, unintended pregnancy, induced abortion, maternal mortality and other reproductive morbidity. These afore-mentioned health risks or

challenges according to Rena (2016) could have serious influence on the physical development as well as academic achievement of the adolescent.

Thus, the problem of premarital sex if left unaddressed or unattended to could have an all-rounder effect in the lives of adolescents, especially those in the secondary schools. So far, guidance counsellors in schools are making use of various counselling strategies to modify issues related to premarital sexual activities in schools. Notwithstanding the effort made so far, such problem seem to have persisted. The reason could be attributed to the efficacy of the behavioural modification techniques used to address challenging behaviours.

Behaviour contracting is a behaviour modification technique used in schools to help monitor and modify student's behaviour. According to Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, and Sugai (2008), it involves creating a written document between the teacher and the student that specifies target behaviour, a set criterion for performance of the target behaviour, and the consequence available to the student upon meeting that criterion. So, as a contract, it outlines the individual counselee's behavioural obligations in meeting the terms of the contract, as well as the counsellor's obligations once the client has met the agreement.

Furthermore, behaviour contracting includes a listing of the specific student behaviours that are to be increased and the inappropriate behaviours to be reduced (intervention central, 2011). It also includes the reinforcers or actions of the adults when those behaviours happen. The contract also includes a section explaining the minimum conditions under which the student can earn a "reward" for showing appropriate behaviours, which can take the form of a sticker, privilege, special activity or another reinforcer agreed on by the student (Cooper Heron, &Heward, 2007)

This technique, behaviour contracting is widely used in schools in the western countries and is noted to present a positive goal-oriented method to motivate behavioural change. The technique has demonstrated effectiveness for individual or small groups of students with different behavioural problems (Hawkins et al., 2011), in addition to being efficient and effective in eliciting more appropriate school and home behaviours in students.

Behaviour Contracting as depicted in literature is a technique that have shown to be effective in the treatment of many forms of socially undesirable behaviour (Egger, Springer & Gooding, 2015; Selfridge, 2014), attribution behaviour, aggression, depression, anxiety, unhappiness, low self-concept and low self-esteem (Miller, Brownell & Smith, 2009), hence, these techniques would likely be effective in modifying the attitude of adolescents towards premarital sex. It is based on these assertions



that this study is being carried out to investigate the effects of behaviour contracting technique on secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The issue of premarital sex tend to be a challenge to many adolescents all over the world today. Young people seem to have exalted notions about sex such that the prevalence of pre-marital sex among students is now a serious social problem both within and outside Nigeria. For instance, it has been observed that there seem to be much prevalence of premarital sexual indulgence among secondary school adolescents in Onitsha North Local Government Area, which may be associated with lots of sexual health risks. The adolescents' indulgence in premarital sexual practices may stem from their unwholesome attitude which exposes them to various sexual health challenges ranging from sexually transmitted Infections (STIs), unintended pregnancy, induced abortion and other reproductive morbidity.

Although a lot of research efforts have also been made, however, such efforts were geared towards determining the causes, consequences, attitude of adolescents and factors influencing their sexual engagements. None of these research efforts however was geared toward treatment approach to investigate psychological techniques that could help the counsellors and therapists in working with adolescents with such unwholesome attitude towards premarital sex. This therefore, prompts this study, to investigate the effect of Behaviour Contracting technique on the attitude of secondary school adolescents towards premarital sex in Onitsha North Local Government Area, Anambra State.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of Behaviour Contracting technique on secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex. Specifically, the study intends to determine:

1. The effect of behaviour contracting technique on secondary school adolescent's attitude to premarital sex.
2. Differences in the effect of behaviour contracting technique on male and female secondary school adolescent's attitude towards premarital sex.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

School counsellors will find this study beneficial since it will provide them an effective tool to deal with the academic and health hazards which these adolescents who are sexually active are confronted with. They could achieve this through the use of their wealth of knowledge and experience and

appropriate therapeutic techniques as helping professionals to make those students change their attitude in a more positive direction. It will also make the counsellors to see the need for organizing regular or periodic individual and group counselling. They will use such gathering as a forum where these students will be properly educated on matters of sexuality and its attendant problems.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the effect of behaviour contracting technique on secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling?
2. What is the difference in the effect of behaviour contracting technique on male and female secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex using their post-test scores?

Hypotheses

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

1. There was no significant difference in the effect of behaviour contracting technique on secondary school adolescents with who received treatment using behaviour contracting and those exposed to conventional counselling.
2. There was no significant difference in mean post-test scores of male and female adolescents who received treatment using behaviour contracting and those in the control group.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is a non-randomized pre-test, post-test, control group quasi-experimental research, involving two treatment conditions (Experimental and Control group) on students attitude towards premarital sex.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in Onitsha North local government of Anambra State, Nigeria. Many young people in this area, especially the adolescents in secondary schools while unsupervised seemed to assume more responsibility for their own sexual standards and behaviour, to the extent that more girls and boys now accept premarital coitus once there is an emotional involvement with the partner with or without commitment to marriage in the future. There have also been cases where the girls got pregnant out of marriage and had to drop out of school. With such situation in the area, there is need for a study of this



nature to determine the best treatment approach to address the issue.

4. PARTICIPANTS

The sample of the study comprised 64 students selected from a population of 260 students. The population comprised all the students identified with permissive attitude towards premarital sex.

5. INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

The instrument that was used for assessment of secondary school students' attitude towards premarital sex is Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale (PSPS). The instrument was developed by Reiss (1967). The original PSP questionnaire was based on one used in a study by Reiss (1960) at an Iowa college, USA. The same instrument has been used in Nigeria by Ojedokun (2009). This scale measures the level of premarital sexual permissiveness that an individual accepts. It allows one to precisely place a respondent on the cumulative, low to high, scale of permissiveness. The scale consisted of 12-items on a five-scaled response options asking about the person's acceptance of kissing, petting, and intercourse in relationships involving no affection, strong affection, love, or engagement. An internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.73 was obtained for this study.

Experimental Procedure

The researcher obtained the approval of the schools' management for carrying on with the research through a consent letter that was given to the school management. The experimental training sessions then took place at the two schools chosen for the study. The researcher, with the assistance of the guidance counsellors in the schools conducted a training programme which held for eight weeks for both the treatment and control group. The treatment sessions were carried out in the school's counselling centres. The day and time for each group's training

was established and maintained throughout the treatment.

Each training session lasted for 45 minutes using the counselling scheduled periods as specified by the schools.. Each of the groups received training for the eight weeks. After the eight weeks of treatments, PSPS was re-administered on all the participants in both the experimental and control groups. The scores obtained recorded and tagged post-test. The post-test scores along with the earlier elicited pre-test scores were then collated and statistically analysed.

Control of Extraneous Variables

Measures were put in place to control the likely effect of extraneous variables such as participant's mood, location, discrimination, method, and time of the day which if not well controlled may contaminate the study and possibly interfere with the findings.

Statistical design

The completed instruments were scored following the scoring instructions provided in the instrument's manual. Responses to the 12 individual items were summed to create an overall score for the scale. Scores on the 12-item scale ranged from 12-60. Scores that are above the norm 30.0 were seen as indicative of having a positive attitude towards premarital sex. The scores were collated and analysed using SPSS version 23. Research questions were answered using the mean while the null hypotheses were tested using the Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA).

6. RESULTS

The data analysed are presented as follows:

Research Question 1

What is the effect of behaviour contracting technique on secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling?

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test attitude towards premarital sex mean scores of adolescents treated with behaviour contracting technique and those treated with conventional counselling (Norm= 29.50)

Variables	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Reduced Mean	Remark
Behaviour Contracting Tehnique	34	41.74	24.59	17.15	Effective
Control	30	43.33	38.37	4.96	

Table 1 revealed that the adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex, who were treated with behaviour contracting technique, had pre-test mean score of 41.74 and post-test mean score of 24.59 with reduced mean 17.15 in their permissive

attitude, while those in the control group who received conventional counselling had pre-test mean score of 43.33 and post-test mean score of 38.37 with reduced mean 4.96. Therefore, with post-test mean score of 24.59 which is below the norm of 29.50,



behaviour contracting technique is effective in reducing adolescents' permissive attitude towards premarital sex.

Research Question 2

What is the difference in the effect of behaviour contracting technique on male and female secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex?

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test attitude towards premarital sex mean scores of male and female adolescents treated with behaviour contracting technique and those treated with conventional counselling.

Variables	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Reduced Mean	Remark
Male	44	43.74	30.41	13.33	
Female	20	42.33	32.15	10.18	

Table 2 revealed that the male adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex, who were treated with behaviour contracting technique, had pre-test mean score of 43.74 and post-test mean score of 30.41 with reduced mean 13.33 in their permissive attitude, while the female adolescents who were treated with behaviour contracting technique had pre-test mean score of 42.33 and post-test mean score of 32.15 with reduced mean 10.18. Therefore, with reduced mean score of 13.33 for male which is above the reduced mean score of 10.18 for female, behaviour contracting technique

was more effective in reducing male adolescents' permissive attitude towards premarital sex.

Testing the Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the effect of behaviour contracting technique on secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex when compared to those who received treatment using conventional counselling.

Table 3: ANCOVA on the attitude towards premarital sex post-test mean scores of adolescents treated with behaviour contracting technique and those who received conventional counselling

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F	Pvalue	Decision
Corrected Model	2941.014	2	1470.507			
Intercept	183.848	1	183.848			
Pretest	2.556	1	2.556			
Treatment_Group	2127.638	1	2127.638	94.332	.000	S
Error	1375.846	61	22.555			
Total	65635.000	64				
Corrected Total	4316.859	63				

P<0.05

Table 3 shows that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 63df denominator, the calculated F is 94.332 with Pvalue of 0.000 which is less than the stipulated .05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. So, the effect of behaviour contracting technique on secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex is significant.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in mean post-test scores of male and female adolescents who received treatment using Behaviour Contracting technique and those in the control group.



Table 4: ANCOVA on the Attitude towards Premarital Sex Post-Test Mean Scores of Male and Female Adolescents Treated With Behaviour Contracting Technique

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F	Pvalue	Decision
Corrected Model	840.703	2	420.351			
Intercept	115.612	1	115.612			
Pretest	799.030	1	799.030			
Gender	27.327	1	27.327	.480	.491	NS
Error	3476.157	61	56.986			
Total	65635.000	64				
Corrected Total	4316.859	63				

P>0.05

In table 4, it was observed that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 63df denominator, the calculated F is 0.480 with Pvalue of 0.491 which is Greater than the stipulated .05 level of significance. Therefore, this fifth null hypothesis is accepted. Thus, the difference in the effect of Behaviour Contracting technique on male and female secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex is not significant.

7. DISCUSSION

Findings of this study were discussed as follows:

Effect of Behaviour Contracting technique in reducing adolescents' permissive attitude towards premarital sex

Findings of the study revealed that Behaviour Contracting technique is effective in reducing adolescents' permissive attitude towards premarital sex. This shows that the technique when applied in treatment was able to reduce the permissive attitude of the secondary school adolescents. The finding equally revealed that the effect of behaviour contracting technique on secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex is significant. This means that the effect of the treatment using the technique is weighty and substantial. This finding agrees with Cutrell (2010) and Dodge, Nizzi, Pitt, and Rudolph (2007) whose study highlighted the effectiveness of behavioural contract in decreasing inappropriate behaviour of students and improving students' responsibility.

Dodge, et al. also noted that using a behavioural contract with a student is that it provides explicit expectations, structure, consistency, routine, and organization for everyone involved, including the teachers, students, administrators, and parents. In doing this, the expectations and responsibilities for both the student and adults are clear, and the process of negotiation can be beneficial to the insight of the student about his or her behaviour.

More so, Selfridge (2014) examination of the effects of behaviour contract in the elementary general education classroom suggests that the behaviour contract was successfully implemented to increase a desired behaviour (engagement) with students in the general education classroom. The possible reason for this finding is that behaviour contracting can be a very powerful tool for motivating struggling learners to apply a skill or knowledge that they already possess but otherwise fail to use. In the same way, students are confronted with peer pressure and some fall into promiscuous behaviour without even at first, recognizing just how far they have fallen. The finding of this study thus suggests that Behaviour contracting can make a difference in the experience that students have in their classrooms. A decrease in the permissive attitude towards the inappropriate behaviours could allow the students learn more in their education classroom because more of their time will be focused on academic work.

Another important possible reason for this finding could also be attributed to the consistent daily contact that the resource Counsellors had with each participant. Throughout the study, the students developed a stronger relationship with the resource counsellor. It was noticed that the students began visiting the resource counsellor throughout the day to check in with her and tell her of their positive behaviours in the classroom. They obviously felt a connection to her, which may have also contributed to the decrease in problem behaviours.

Differences in the Effect of Behaviour Contracting technique in reducing male and female adolescents' permissive attitude towards premarital sex

Findings of this study also revealed that the difference in the effect of Behaviour Contracting technique on male and female secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex is not significant. This simply shows



that the male and female experience of the training programme using the Behaviour contracting technique did not produce meaningful difference in its effects. Both male and female responded in a similar manner. The possible reason for this finding is that Behaviour Contracting can be used as a flexible tool for managing a highly individualized program or for one student in a specific situation. Going by such notion, one would understand that male and female would probably respond to the training programme as an individual and not as male or female.

Although it has been suggested that men and women are likely to hold different psychological contracts (Freese & Schalk, 1996; Scandura & Lankau, 1997), their response to the treatment programme in this study did not seem to reflect that notion. The reason possibly could be because the treatment was not gender-based. The goal was to discuss the root cause for the behaviour and alternative reactions that the student can make to have reduced permissive attitude towards premarital sex. The student and the Guidance Counsellor establishes the alternative attitude that could lead to alternative behaviours and also the consequences that they will face for not following through with these behaviours, which are then written down in the form of a contract.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that:

Behaviour Contractive technique has significant effect on secondary school adolescents' permissive attitude towards premarital sex. Therefore, the technique could be used by the school Guidance Counsellors in administering therapy to adolescents identified with such permissive attitude towards premarital sex.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counsellors and therapists should adopt the use of the Behaviour contracting technique in counselling and therapy among secondary school students to modify their permissive attitude towards premarital sex.
2. The school teachers should collaborate with the school Guidance Counsellor in identifying the "at risk" students and making appropriate referral to the Guidance Counsellor for assistance

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