

# *Demographic Factors Influencing Sexual Abuse Among Secondary School Adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria: Implications for Counselling*

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**Abstract** – This study investigated demographic factors influencing sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria with a view of establishing implications for counselling. Two research questions and three hypotheses were answered and tested respectively. The study adopted ex-post facto design. As at the time of the study, the marginal estimate of the population of adolescents in Rivers State was about 1,587,864. The sample of the study comprised 1,000 adolescents. The study adopted multi-stage sampling to select 10 Local Government Areas out of the 23 Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. The instrument for the study is Contact and Non-contact Sexual Abuse Inventory (CNSAI). This is a non-cognitive instrument which was adopted from Finkelhor's Sexual Abuse Scale (SAS) and Odemelam's Students' Sexual Behaviour Inventory (SSBI). The instrument was validated by three experts and the reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha method. CNSAI had reliability coefficient of 0.71. Mean and Standard deviation were used in answering the research questions while 2-way ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses. The study established that adolescents from both rural and urban areas were involved in sexual abuse as well those from Christian and Islamic religions. However, adolescents from urban and Christian religion were more sexually abused than. Among the recommendations made were that Pastors and Imams who are the spiritual leaders in faith-based religious organizations should modify their messages to include topics on sexual abuse. They should stand as crusaders and ensure that their members model good behaviours. Again, churches and mosques should organize talks and seminars to enlighten adolescents on the new trends of sexual abuse. Furthermore, government should hasten up to implement the bill on harassment and sexual abuse so that the offenders can be subjected to the full weight of the law.

**Keywords** – Contact Sexual Abuse Non-Contact Sexual Abuse, Location, Religion.

## BACKGROUND

Children are heritage from God and so require love, care and affection. They are fragile, hence depend on adults for welfare and survival. Their fragile nature makes them in need of special protection and care. It emphasizes the responsibility of family members, guardians and significant others towards their upkeep. Some parents and guardians have handled this responsibility with much levity as we hear of incidences of sexual abuse of children in the media.

The World Health Organisation [1] gave a very comprehensive definition of child sexual abuse as the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent or that violates the laws or social taboos of the society. It is also sexual activity between a minor and the older person in which the dominant position of the older person is used to coerce or exploit the younger

(Robyn in Ernest-Ehibudu, [2]). Here sexual abuse is viewed as a matter of age and the use of force. In a situation where there is much age disparity and force is applied in the issue of sex then it tantamount to sexual abuse.

The clinical definition of sexual abuse is related to the definitions given so far but the guiding principle is whether the encounter has traumatic impact on the child. It is not all sexual encounters experienced by adolescents that do have traumatic effects. According to Ernest-Ehibudu [2], there are three factors that are useful in clinically differentiating abusive from non-abusive acts – power differential, knowledge differential and gratification differential. These three factors are likely to be interrelated. However, the presence of any of these factors should raise concerns that the sexual encounter was abusive.

Power differential was defined by Ritch in Ernest-Ehibudu [3], as implying that one party (the offender) controls the other (the victim) and that the sexual encounter is not mutually conceived and undertaken. Power can be derived from the role relationship between offender and victim. For example, if the offender is the victim's father, the victim will usually feel obligated to do as the offender says. Similarly, persons in authority positions, such as a teacher, minister, Boys' scout leader, coach etc, are in roles that connote power. Thus, sexual activities between these individuals and their charges are abusive. According to Patrick and Caroline in Ernest-Ehibudu [3], power can also be derived from the larger size or more advanced capability of the offender, in which case the victim may be manipulated, physically intimidated or forced to comply with the sexual activity. Power may also arise out of the offender's superior capability to psychologically manipulate the victim (which in turn may be related to the offender's role or superior size). The offender may bribe, cajole or trick the victim into co-operation.

The second factor is knowledge differential. Eva in Ernest-Ehibudu [3], opined that the act is considered abusive when one party (the offender) has a more sophisticated understanding of the significance and implications of the sexual encounter. Knowledge differential implies that the offender is either older, more developmentally advanced or more intelligent than the victim. Generally, clinicians expect the offender to be at least five years older than the victim for the act to be deemed predatory. When the victim is an adolescent, some persons define the encounter as abusive only if the offender is at least 10 years older (Kelly in Ernest-Ehibudu, [3]). Thus, a consensual relationship between a 12-year-old and a 16-year-old would not be regarded as abusive, if other case factors support that conclusion. Generally, the younger the child, the less able he/she is to appreciate the meaning and potential consequences of sexual relationships, especially one with an adult.

The third factor is gratification differential. Ethol in Ernest-Ehibudu [3], defined this as "the sex offender attempting to sexually gratify or satisfy him/herself". In most but not all sexual victimizations, this is actually the case. The goal of the encounter is not mutual sexual gratification, although perpetrators may attempt to arouse their victims because such a situation is arousing to them. Alternatively, they may delude themselves into believing that their goal is to sexually satisfy their victims. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of the sexual activity is to obtain gratification for the perpetrator.

There are two types of sexual abuse- contact and non-contact sexual abuse. Sexual abuse can happen in person or online. Contact sexual abuse is where an abuser makes physical contact with a child's sexual organs. This includes:

- Touching or fondling the child's body, attempts to have the child arouse the adult, or touch his or her body or kissing in a sexual way.
- The adult rubbing his or her genitals against the child's body in a sexual way.
- Touching the child's genitals with the mouth or having the child touch the adult's genitals with the mouth.
- Having anal or vaginal penetration by penile or other body parts or digital object and complete anal or vaginal intercourse.

Non-contact sexual abuse is where a child is abused without the sexual organs being touched by the abuser. This can be in person or online. It includes:

- Exposing or flashing
- Showing pornography
- Exposing a child to sexual acts
- Making them masturbate
- Forcing a child to make, view or share child abuse images or videos
- Forcing a child to take part in sexual activities or conversations online or through a smartphone.

Child sexual abuse can occur in a variety of settings including home, school, church, sports arena etc. most sexual abuse offenders are acquainted with their victims: approximately 30% are relatives of the child, most often fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, around 60% are acquaintances such as friends of the family, baby sitters, neighbours. Strangers are the offenders in approximately 10% of child sexual abuse cases [4].

Gonzalez in Ernest-Ehibudu [2] opines that the greatest risk to children do not come from strangers but from friends and family relations. Most children are abused by someone they know and trust. Abuse typically occurs after the ‘grooming stage’. This is a period when the offender often develops a relationship with the targeted victim and his/her family, enjoying family activities, gaining acceptance, earning trust and waiting for time alone with the child. The word pedophile is commonly used indiscriminately to anyone who sexually abuses a child but child sexual offenders are not pedophiles unless they have strong sexual interest in pre-pubescent children [5].

Studies on the prevalence of sexual abuse have been conducted. Boys can be victims of sexual abuse; their perpetrators can be males or females. Many people believe that male victimization is more under-reported than female, in part because of societal failure to identify the behaviour as abusive. Moreover, the boy himself may not define the behaviour as sexual victimization but as sexual experience, especially, if it involves a female offender. American Medical Association [6] found out that boys were less likely than girls to report sexual abuse because of the fear of retribution, the social stigma against homosexual behaviour, the desire to appear self-reliant and the concern about loss of independence following disclosure.

Pagare [7] conducted a study to assess the magnitude and pattern of sexual abuse among inmates of observation home in Delhi. A total of 189 boys aged 6-18 years were assessed for sexual abuse using Finkelhor’s scale and Child Maltreatment History Self-Report followed by clinical examination using American Medical Association’s guidelines. On clinical examination, 61.1% showed physical signs and 40.2% showed behavioural signs of sexual abuse.

In a study of male college students, Fromuth and Burkhart in Ernest-Ehibudu, [2] found that prevalence estimates of childhood sexual abuse were directly related to the definition of abuse. Prevalence was 22% when either a graded age differential or coercion was required, 14% when only the former was required and 10% when both were required. Prevalence fell further to 8% when physical contact sexual abuse was included.

Female children are much more likely than their male counterparts to be sexually abused in their homes. Finkelhor in Ernest-Ehibudu [2] opined that majority of child sexual abuse victims are young females. It could be four times higher than that of males. It is highest either when they are young, pre and early adolescence. Ages 4-7 and 12-15 are greater victims than ages 0-3 or 8-11. In a study of 938 adolescents admitted to residential, therapeutic communities for the treatment of substance abuse and related disorders, 64% of the girls reported histories of sexual abuse (Hawke, Jainchill and Deleon in Ernest-Ehibudu, [3]). Bolen [8], observed that in 1995 B.C Children’s Hospital found that 58% of cases seen by the child abuse team involved sexual assault with 78% of the victims being female and 44% being under 5 years of age.

Sexual abuse is illegal in all countries about which information is available. The laws may differ in details but, all set an age-typical between the typical onset of puberty and the age of maturity under which all sexual contacts with an adult is termed abusive. Notwithstanding, above this age, sexual contact may be judged abusive depending on the use of violence, coercion or the type of relationship involved. Child sexual abuse is a social problem with adverse consequences to the abused child and the society at large. It can cause infections and sexually-transmitted diseases. Depending on the age, size of the child and the degree of force used, child sexual abuse may cause internal lacerations and bleeding. In severe cases, damage to internal organs may occur, which may cause death in some.

Adolescents in secondary schools live in various places and belong to different religions. Hence, the variables of this study are location and religion. According to Wikipedia online encyclopedia, location is defined by geographers to mean a point in physical space, although they also include a dimension of relativity between these points. The two specific points in this regard are rural and urban areas. It could be a person’s place or area of residence. Researches show that rural locations are generally constrained in education and health services compared to urban areas. They have limited economic opportunities that serve as sources of livelihood. The rural areas are connected with villages and communities with underdeveloped and developing infrastructures.

Religion according to Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary [9] is the belief in and worship of a god or gods or any such system of belief or worship. It also sees it as one of the systems of faith that are based on belief in the existence of a particular god or gods. In this research, the religions considered are Christianity and Islam. The incidence of sexual abuse is becoming rampant in told and untold stories. This can pose harmful effects and hamper proper functioning in adolescents. Therefore, it is against this

background that the researcher conceived the idea of investigating demographic factors influencing sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria: implications for counselling

### **I. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions were answered in this study

1. What is the influence of location (rural and urban) contact and non-contact sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents?
2. How does religion (Christianity and Islam) influence contact and non-contact sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents?

#### **1.1. Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses which were tested at 0.05 level of significance, have been formulated to guide the study.

1. Secondary school adolescents from rural and urban areas do not differ significantly in their experience of contact and non-contact sexual abuse as measured by their mean scores.
2. The interaction effect of location on contact and non-contact sexual abuse is not significant.
3. Christian and Moslems secondary school adolescents do not differ significantly in their experience of contact and non-contact sexual abuse as measured by their mean scores.
4. The interaction effect of religion on contact and non-contact sexual abuse is not significant.

### **II. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The research design of this study is ex-post facto design because it involves collecting and analyzing data from variables which are already in place without manipulating any of them in order to find out how some of them relate to the variables under study. The population of the study consists of all the adolescents residing in Rivers State, Nigeria. As at the time of the study, the marginal estimate of the population of adolescents in Rivers State is about 1,587.864. The sample of the study comprised 1,000 adolescents. The study adopted multi-stage sampling to select 10 Local Government Areas out of the 23 Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. The schools in Rivers State were grouped according to their Local Governments Areas where they are located. Using the disproportionate sampling technique, the researcher drew three schools from the 10 Local Government Areas thereby arriving at 30 schools from which the sample was drawn for the study. The instrument for the study is Contact and Non-contact Sexual Abuse Inventory (CNSAI). This is a non-cognitive instrument which was adopted from Finkelhor's Sexual Abuse Scale (SAS) and Odemelam's Students' Sexual Behaviour Inventory (SSBI). The instrument consists of three sections A, B, and C. Section A is designed to elicit personal data from the students on location and religion. Section B contains 20 items, which focus on contact dimension of child sexual abuse. Out of these 20 items, 5 items are negatively keyed while 15 items are positively keyed. Section C contains 20 items, which focus on non-contact dimension of child sexual abuse. Out of these 20 items, 5 items are negatively keyed while 15 items are positively keyed. The items of the instrument were responded to on a 5-point likert scale of Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely and Never weighted 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively for the positively-keyed item and vice versa for the negatively-keyed ones. The instrument was validated by three experts and the reliability established using Cronbach Alpha method. CNSAI had reliability coefficient of 0.71. The instrument was administered and collated. Mean and Standard deviation was used in answering the research questions while 2-way ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses.

### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Research Question 1: What is the influence of location (rural and urban) on contact and non-contact sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents?

This research question was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The results obtained were presented in table 1.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of rural and urban influence on contact and non-contact sexual abuse of secondary school adolescents

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Rural	452	2.47	16.991
Urban	548	3.49	20.240

Table 1 shows that the respective mean scores for rural and urban adolescents on contact and non-contact sexual abuse were 2.47 and 3.49. It indicates that the urban adolescents had a higher mean score than the rural adolescents.

Research Question 2: How does religion (Christianity and Islam) influence contact and non-contact sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents?

This research question was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The results obtained were presented in table 2.

Table 2: Mean score and standard deviation of Christian and Moslem adolescents on contact and non-contact sexual abuse

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Christianity	768	3.30	20.203
Islam	232	2.61	12.797

Table 2 shows that the respective mean scores for Christian and Moslem adolescents on contact and non-contact sexual adolescents were 3.30 and 2.61. It indicates that the Christian adolescents had a higher mean score than the Moslem adolescents.

Ho<sub>1</sub>. Secondary school adolescents from rural and urban areas do not differ significantly in their experience of contact and non-contact sexual abuse as measured by their mean scores.

Ho<sub>2</sub>. The interaction effect of location on contact and non-contact sexual abuse is not significant.

These null hypotheses were analyzed and tested using 2-way ANOVA. The result obtained were summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Summary of 2-way ANOVA on the influence of location on contact and non-contact forms of sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents.

<b>Sources of variation</b>	<b>Sum of squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean squares</b>	<b>Calculated F</b>	<b>Critical F</b>
Main effects	91287.785	2	45643.892	19.421	3.00
A	88922.341	1	88922.341	6.424	3.85
B	3363.520	1	3363.520	11.969	3.85
2-way	46.177	1	26.604	6.095	3.85
Interaction					
A B	26.604	1	26.604	6.095	3.85
Explained	91314.389	3	30438.130	50.312	2.61
Residual	279898.215	996	281.022		
<b>Total</b>	<b>371212.604</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>371.584</b>		

A critical look at table 3 showed that the calculated F-value for location (A) 6.42 is greater than the corresponding critical F-value of 3.85 at 1 and 996 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. There is therefore significant influence of location on contact/ non-contact sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents. Table 3 also showed that the calculated F-value for contact and non-contact (B) 11.97 is greater than the corresponding critical F-value of 3.85 at 1 and 996 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there is significant influence of contact and non-contact dimension of sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents.

Again, the table showed that the calculated F-value for interaction effect of location and contact/non-contact sexual abuse 6.10 is greater than the corresponding F-value of 3.85 at degrees of freedom of 1 and 996 at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, there is significant interaction effect.

The results showed that urban adolescents are involved in sexual abuse more than their rural counterparts. This is because adolescents from urban and rural areas had mean scores of 69.72 and 49.39 respectively. This difference is statistically significant and was proved using 2-way ANOVA. Based on the analysis it was found that the calculated F-value 6.42 is greater than the corresponding critical F-value of 3.85. Hence, there is significant influence of location on adolescents' sexual abuse experience.

This finding is in line with that of Nanyangwe [10] and George and Winfield-Laird [11]. They found that urban areas are more susceptible to sexual abuse than rural areas.

Indeed, this finding was expected because there are many social activities going on in the urban areas than the rural areas. These social activities bring people of different age brackets, lifestyles, levels of discipline together and as a result, some may not have control over their sexual desire.

Furthermore, the parents living in the urban area have different occupations that may require them to be away from home for longer periods thus giving adolescents opportunity to be alone without adequate adult monitoring.

Finally, it was found that there was a significant interaction effect of location and contact/non-contact experience in sexual abuse. This indicates that the combined influence of location and contact/non-contact sexual abuse had influence on the adolescents' experience in sexual abuse.

Ho<sub>3</sub>. Christian and Moslems Secondary school adolescents do not differ significantly in their experience of contact and non-contact sexual abuse as measured by their mean scores.

Ho<sub>4</sub>. The interaction effect of religion on contact and non-contact sexual abuse is not significant.

These null hypotheses were analyzed and tested using 2-way ANOVA. The result obtained were summarized in table 4.

Table 4: Summary of 2-way ANOVA on the influence of religion on contact and non-contact forms of sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents.

Sources of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	Calculated F	Critical F
Main effects	48470.908	2	24235.454	10.388	3.00
C	46105.464	1	46105.464	3.423	3.85
D	6158.878	1	6158.878	9.158	3.85
2-way	2558.878	1	2551.878	0.936	3.85
Interaction					
C D	51022.087	1	17007.362	24.841	3.85
Explained	91314.389	3	30438.130	321.476	2.61
Residual	320190.517	996	281.022		
<b>Total</b>	<b>371212.604</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>371.584</b>		

A critical look at table 4 showed that the calculated F-value for religion (C) 3.42 is less than the corresponding critical F-value of 3.85 at 1 and 996 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is no significant influence of religion on contact/ non-contact sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents. Table 4 also showed that the calculated F-value for contact and non-contact (D) 9.16 is greater than the corresponding critical F-value of 3.85 at 1 and 996 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there is significant influence of contact and non-contact dimension of sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents.

Again, the table showed that the calculated F-value for interaction effect of religion and contact/non-contact sexual abuse 0.94 is less than the corresponding F-value of 3.85 at degrees of freedom of 1 and 996 at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, there is no significant interaction effect.

The result showed that Christian adolescents are more involved in sexual abuse than Moslem adolescents. This is because Christian adolescents had a mean score of 66.02 while their Moslem counterparts had a mean score of 52.10. This was not significant when tested with 2-way ANOVA. This is because the calculated F-value 3.42 is less than the corresponding critical F-value of 3.85. Thus, there is no significant influence of religion on adolescents' experience in sexual abuse.

A study carried out by Gabarino [12] had among the factors studied as connectedness to a formal religion, physical isolation and connectedness to a friendship network. He found out that there is a relationship between religion and sexual abuse. Another study on religion was carried out by Bolen [13]. This study was a re-analysis of Russell's [14] study on religion. The study found that this relationship was more complex. Only females under the age of nine whose parents did not endorse a particular religion

were at increased risk of sexual abuse. On the other hand, these same children were significantly less likely than Protestants to be sexually abused as adolescents.

The results of no significant difference between Christian and Moslem adolescents indicates that the difference in their mean scores was a negligible factor. Obviously, their finding is surprising to the researcher because she expected that the institution of Sharia law and Moslem mode of dressing would have prevented them from the experience of sexual abuse. Anyway, for the fact that adolescents from both religions find themselves almost in the same environment like school and market they are expected to face the same challenge of sexual abuse.

Another result showed that there was a significant interaction effect of religion and contact / non-contact dimension of abuse on the adolescents' experience of sexual abuse. This indicated that the combined influence of religion and dimension of sexual abuse was very significant on the adolescents' experience of sexual abuse.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Pastors and Imams who are the spiritual leaders in faith-based religious organizations should modify their messages to include topics on sexual abuse. They should stand as crusaders and ensure that their members model good behaviours.
2. Churches and mosques should organize talks and seminars to enlighten adolescents on the new trend of sexual abuse.
3. Counselling is needed to assist victims of sexual abuse and so establishment of counselling centres should be made compulsory at all educational levels.
4. The Ministry of Education should ensure that topics on sexual abuse are enshrined into sexuality education of pupils and students.
5. The government should hasten up to implement the bill on harassment and sexual abuse so that the offenders can be subjected to the full weight of the law.

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