

Intergenerational Sexual Relationships: Are Older Men and Women Sex Predators?

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Abstract

Age-disparate sexual relationships are couched in unequal gender power dynamics, with grave social and health consequences. Older men dominate young women in sexual relationships owing to a masculine tendency. However, there is limited information on a new vista of age-disparate sexual relationships involving older women and young men. In this regard, this study explored gender and social inequalities in sexual relationships, which are largely undocumented. This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore age-disparate sexual relationships between older men and young females, on the one hand, and young males and older women, on the other hand. Thirty (30) in-depth interviews (IDIs), six (6) focus group discussions (FGDs), and eighteen (18) key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted across the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria. The findings showed that older men dominated young women in sexual relationships through suppression, which undermined their

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ability to negotiate safer sex, diminished their individual agency, and led to multiple sexual partnerships. On the other hand, participants reported that older women lured young men into sexual relationships because of financial vulnerability, sexual urges, and young men's intentions to build contacts with the cream of society. Older men and women also preyed on their unsuspecting young victims for fetish reasons, such as ritual money and metaphysical atonement. This study showed that disadvantaged socio-economic status makes older men and women exploit and take advantage of young, unmarried women and men in sexual relationships. Wide age difference and the notion of fulfilling their side in a paid sexual intercourse make younger females and males unable to negotiate safer sex. These findings speak to gender and social inequalities in sexual relationships, which are largely undocumented in Nigeria. The study concluded that gender-based norms diminished the individual agency of emerging adults, especially females, in achieving positive sexual practices. There is a need for increased awareness of the inimical effects of age-disparate sexual relationships and transactional sex.

Keywords: Age-Disparate, Transactional Sex, Sex Predators, Older Men and Women, Emerging Adults

Background

Marked age difference in sexual relationships between young women and older men is associated with adverse sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Age-disparate relationships are couched in imbalanced gender and power dynamics, which prevent young women and men from negotiating safer sex. Sexual relationships between older men and young women have been implicated for grave sexual health outcomes, including sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, high school drop-out, maternal morbidity and mortality, among others (Maughan-Brown et al., 2018). It is also known as age-disparate or intergenerational sexual relationships. Older men are found to have sexual intercourse with young

women because of the younger women's disadvantaged socio-economic position (Amare et al., 2019). This sexual relationship promotes adverse sexual health outcomes because young women are unable to exert their agency, and their ability to negotiate protective sex is compromised. This increases the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS because older women and men override young women and men who exchange sex for money.

Young people in Nigeria are susceptible to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Some studies have linked surge in HIV infections among young people in Nigeria to risky sexual behaviour (Adedini et al., 2022; Odimegwu & Adewoyin, 2022; Ugwu & Odimegwu, 2024). Factors associated with HIV infection include age at first sex, age-disparate sexual relationships, as well as multiple sexual partners and inconsistent or non-use of condom (Evans et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2017; Odimegwu & Adewoyin, 2022; Odimegwu & Ugwu, 2022). Thus, lack of individual agency to assert firm sexual decisions and poor social-economic status are positively related to age-disparate sexual relationships. While there is an avalanche of quantitative studies linking a range of factors—including poverty, parental supervision, peer influence, family living arrangement, and age disparate sexual relationships, (Seidu et al., 2021; Duby et al., 2021; Ugwu & Odimegwu, 2024)—there is limited information on another vista of age disparate relationship, older women's sexual relationships with young men. This study intends to provide insightful information that can be added to the body of scholarly literature in Nigeria regarding this area of study. Focusing on one side of the coin, age-disparate relationship between older men and young women, creates a research lacuna and limits intervention, aimed at reducing transactional sex.

The preponderance of new cases of HIV is associated with economic deprivation of young women and men who engage in sexual relationship for social or financial gain in a skewed gendered power relationship (Stenersen et al., 2020). Age-disparate sexual relationships may be attributed to the spread of HIV infections, owing to socio-economic vulnerability of young women and men having sexual relationships with older persons with whom they are subordinate (Maina et al., 2022). In Nigeria, there is limited information on age-disparate sexual relationships, especially those involving older women and younger men. Thus, this study investigates age-disparate

sexual relationships between older men and younger women, on the one hand, and younger men and older women, on the other hand, across the main ethnic groups in Nigeria. However, it is important to add a caveat that it is not in all cases that intergenerational sexual relationships involve the exchange of financial favours. Some romantic relationships between older men or women with opposite-sex partners may be based on natural love or some other reasons which sustain serious romantic sexual relationships (Wamoyi et al., 2019).

Most studies focus on the vulnerability of young women in sexual relationships with older men because they are oriented and socialised in a patriarchal context that makes men superior in social and sexual relationships (Wamoyi et al., 2016; Wamoyi et al., 2017). Clearly, young women are subservient to older men in sexual relationships. Men, on the other hand, are assertive, self-assured, independent and domineering in their sexual decisions; however, it is not known if their assertiveness and proactive agency could be exerted in exchange for sex with older women (Wet et al., 2018). This is the novelty of this study. We hypothesise that skewed sexual relationship affects younger men and women in negotiating safer sex. As such, unwanted pregnancy, induced abortion, loss of self-worth and spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS are ubiquitous among this young demographic.

A study conducted in South Africa established that women who engaged in transactional sex had higher odds of being infected by HIV than their counterparts who did not do such (Heise et al., 2019). Factors related to transactional sex include use of alcohol and substance use, multiple and concurrent partnerships, exposure to intimate partner violence, lack of condom use and lack of agency or sexual autonomy (Hansen & Johansson, 2022; Dana et al., 2019). As a consequence, there is a higher probability of a surge in HIV infection. In Nigeria, age asymmetry is associated with increased HIV infection. Evidence suggests that young women who are involved in transactional sex with older men are likely to acquire HIV (Adedini et al., 2021). This is commonest among young people from socio-economically disadvantaged homes.

In Nigeria, few studies have interrogated gender and social norms which shape the individual agency of emerging adults to navigate sexual

relationships. These studies reported high unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted infections, high school drop-out rates, which are shaped by gender norms and socio-cultural factors embedded in age-disparate sexual relationships (Agunbiade & Aransiola, 2016; Odimegwu & Somefun, 2017). A vast majority of quantitative studies in Nigeria show differences in sexual behaviour of young people without using the real gender constructs (Adedini et al., 2021; Odimegwu & Somefun, 2017). Many of these quantitative studies reported that females exhibited more positive sexual behaviour than their male counterparts. In most of the studies, published evidence shows that females tend to give socially desirable responses and underestimate their sexual behaviour because of social stigma. Yet, males may overestimate their sexual behaviour with a view to flexing masculinity and dominance in sexual relationships. This study is a departure from previous studies as its explored gender and socio-cultural nuances in the context of transactional sexual relationships.

Drawing on gender power theory (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2013), with a theoretical foundation that men dominate women in the scheme of things and unnecessarily usurp women in household decisions, including sexual matters, this study explored socio-cultural and gender-based issues which shape sexual behaviour in a context of age-mixing. In SSA, including Nigeria, several studies extensively focused on the relationship between individual, household, and community characteristics and sexual behaviour of young people (Odimegwu et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2017). These studies have contributed to knowledge on the sexual and reproductive health of young people. Yet, some evidence shows their drawbacks and how that may substantially limit their relevance for reproductive health interventions in Nigeria. First, most of the studies missed out information about age-disparate sexual relationships. Besides, many studies in SSA on transactional sex used quantitative approaches, which could not explore nuanced sexual characteristics and draw on theoretical foundations of gender and power relations (Maina et al., 2022; Wet et al., 2018; Dana et al., 2019). This is because most quantitative studies essentially overlooked some deep-rooted socio-cultural and gender norms that could be best explored qualitatively.

It is against this background that this study explored the perspectives of emerging adults, health providers, community and religious leaders on gender

norms and socio-cultural factors that shape transactional sex of emerging adults across the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional research design, which involved a qualitative approach. In this study, focus group discussions, key informant and in-depth interviews were conducted among emerging adults and community and religious leaders. The data were obtained from Osun, Ebonyi and Kaduna States. The overall aim of this qualitative inquiry was to gather an in-depth understanding of deep-rooted contextual (socio-cultural and gender-based norms) issues that shape age-disparate sexual relationships and the reasons that govern such across the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria. The study areas were purposively selected based on evidence from previous studies that ethnic and cultural differences influence sexual behaviour.

Study Setting

The study areas were selected purposively based on ethnic diversity and cultural differences in Nigeria. Ethnic and cultural differences have been found to influence the sexual behaviour of young adults in Nigeria (National Population Commission & ICF International, 2019). With this, one state, representing each of the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria, was randomly selected. The three main ethnic groups in Nigeria are Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba. Thus, Ebonyi, Kaduna and Osun States were purposively selected. Thereafter, one local government area with at least a university or polytechnic was selected in each of the states, making a total of three local government areas. This was with a view to getting emerging adults in large numbers in a school environment. Ife Central in Osun, Kaduna North in Kaduna, and Abakaliki in Ebonyi were the three local government areas selected based on proximity to a university and a polytechnic. Health facilities in close proximity to these areas were selected purposively to interview health professionals.

Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected through in-depth and key informant interviews, as well as focus group discussions. All the participants of the study were purposively selected across three states, namely Osun, Ebonyi and Kaduna, for ethnic representations. Comparable to the standard age group for emerging adults, 18-25 years, females and males aged 18-25 years who were living in the randomly selected states at the time of the study and willing to participate were eligible for the study. Young females and males aged 18-25 years were recruited for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-depth Interviews (IDIs). Participants were selected within the study's settings in each of the local government areas with the help of local field assistants. Research assistants were trained, and pilot interviews were conducted among a few subjects outside the study areas but with similar background characteristics, for quality assurance. Female research assistants interviewed female interviewees, while male research assistants interviewed male interviewees. There were two research teams, and the same interview guides were translated into the appropriate languages. Each in-depth and key informant interview spanned 50 minutes on average. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated from local languages into the English Language.

Semi-structured interview guides were used to explore the perceptions of emerging adults and the worldview of health professionals, community and religious leaders on the motivations and drivers of transactional sex among emerging adults in Nigeria. Discussions and interviews were conducted in the local languages, including Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo in Ife East, Abakiliki and Kaduna North local government areas, respectively, until saturation was reached and no new findings emerged during the study's team debriefings. Interviews and focus group discussions were held in audibly private areas. Data were gathered by ten trained research assistants divided into two teams. The interviewers recruited were people with experience in conducting qualitative research. The author of this paper supervised all data collection to ensure quality control and assisted in note-taking. All participants in the study were encouraged to openly discuss their opinions. No personal information in the form of names or other identifying data was obtained. The study population for the qualitative inquiry was

emerging adults aged 18-25 years who were not married and were sexually active in the past 12 months prior to the period of interview.

Recruitment of Participants

Ten (10) in-depth interviews were conducted in each of the local government areas, states, and ethnic groups, disaggregated by sex. Five (5) males and five (5) females were selected in each of the local government areas, making a total of thirty (30) in-depth interviews. For the focus group discussions, two were conducted in each of the three local government areas in Osun, Ebonyi and Kaduna. This makes a total of six (6) FGDs in all. In each local government across the three states, one female- and male-FGD each was conducted. Thus, two FGDs were conducted in each of the states and LGAs. This gives a total of six FGDs in all. The key informant interviews were conducted with health professionals (Nurses and Medical doctors), community and religious leaders. In each of the LGAs across the three (3) states, two religious, community leaders and health professionals were purposively selected, making a total of 18 KIIs. Emerging adults who had lived in communities for at least 3 years were selected, especially in areas close to higher institutions.

Data Analysis

All discussions and interviews were recorded or transcribed verbatim in English Language. After validating the transcription, the typed narratives were translated into English and verified for accuracy. Analysis of the data was conducted by the researcher and included several iterative steps. Using thematic analysis, the transcripts were reviewed several times, and a set of codes was developed to describe groups of words, or categories, with similar meanings. Transcripts were then coded and managed using Atlas_tqi version 8. The grouped categories were refined and used to generate themes emerging from the data. Direct quotations from females and males were presented in italics to highlight the key findings. The IDIs transcripts were coded with Atlas_tqi software, using a pre-established node structure based on the interview guide. Each interviewee was treated as a unit of analysis. Analysis was done through ethnographic summaries of substantive themes. Quotes were presented for relevant themes which emerge on the topic of

analysis. For consistency, only emerging adults who were sexually active in the last 12 months were interviewed. This qualitative data speaks to the perceptions, meaning and understanding of broad socio-cultural and gender-based issues surrounding transactional sex.

Ethical Considerations

This study is a qualitative inquiry that involved human subjects. Thus, ethical approval was obtained to conduct this study from the Health Research and Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Institute of Public Health, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria (with reference number: HREC NO: IPH/12/1039). Local leaders in each of the local government areas were invited to review and approve the in-depth interview, focus group and key informant interview guides. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all potential participants in the study. Only the research teams had access to the data of the study. Each participant was informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and the right to withdraw at any point or withhold any information that impinges on their privacy. Verbal consent was given to use a digital voice recorder at the outset of each interview. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of information and were guaranteed to the extent that information would never be traced to these participants. Ownership of the data and the benefits of the research were discussed prior to data collection. Interviews were conducted in four languages, namely English, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and some research assistants. The researcher and some research assistants translated Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba into the English Language.

Findings

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

This section presents the results of the study. This descriptive session contains a presentation of the discussion of the evidence on socio-demographic characteristics of the participants to provide a foundation for the inquiry. The research questions addressed the worldviews of emerging adults and expert opinions on how and why socio-cultural and gendered issues shape transactional sex of emerging adults.

Socio-cultural and gender-based issues showed diverse and nuanced views on the sexual behaviour of emerging adults in this study. Common issues recurred, and main themes were identified to summarise all the views that were collected. Some of the themes which emerged were scripts of male dominance on sexual matters and the nuanced scripts on age-disparate sexual relationships. Among the participants, the youngest of emerging adults were 18 years, while the oldest were 25 years. Also, the oldest among the religious/community leader was 64 years. The participants have a different level of education, ranging from no education to post-secondary. Moreover, different tribes were represented in the FGDs, and informal occupation was common among the vast majority of the participants, such as traders and artisans, health practitioners, among others. Different religious groups were duly represented in the FGDs and IDIs.

The Question of Older Men and Women as Sex Predators

The way people perceive wide age difference between older men and young women, on the one hand, and older women and young men, on the other hand, determines their understanding of intergenerational sexual relationships. Older men and women engage in sexual relationships with young females and males, especially those in tertiary institutions. The concepts “Aristo” and “Jingolo” are a common practice and the main issues in transactional sex. Findings from this study revealed that young females and males engaged in sex with older men and women for financial or material gains. Most of the young females and males are lured into the act by their peers who work within a syndicate and get commission from the proceeds of exchanged sex. Generally, wide age difference in sexual relationship is not mainly predicated on love. It is mostly purely commercial. Yet, another twist to the issue is that older men sometimes use younger women for money rituals. So, aside the danger of dominance of older men in such sexual relationships, which makes females unable to demand protective sex, there are reported cases of ritual making “juju” and some young males and females have been killed in the process. In other words, some of these ladies and boys have also met untimely deaths from their sexual interactions with sex predators who lure young ladies with material wealth and later use them mysteriously for money rituals.

Vulnerability to Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Ritual Money Atonement

Age disparity in sexual relationships has been found to promote the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and money rituals. Sexual relationships between older men and women and young ladies and boys, respectively, reinforce gender inequality in sexual relationships. One argument that reinforces the patriarchal system in Nigeria is that men are seen as the decision-makers on sexual matters. The asymmetry of the sexual power relationship makes older men take advantage and prey on their having canal knowledge of unguided or unsuspecting young women. In this case, it is more difficult for young women to exert their individual agency in a skewed sexual relationship because it is based on tit-for-tat, exchanged sex. It is like a buyer and seller, where both parties maximise their utility from a transaction. That is to say, the older men expect maximum satisfaction from the sexual intercourse, and as such, non-use of a condom may not be negotiable.

On the other hand, the unequal gender power as regards transactional sex between older women and young men negates the idea of male dominance in sexual relationship and lends credence to the discourse of gender as a social construct, which is couched in power and resources wielded in any social relationship, but not biological difference of sex. Older women also dominate young men in transactional sex, prey on their financial needs and use them to satisfy their sexual urges. Furthermore, older women also engaged in transactional sex with young men for ulterior and fetish motive of ritual money.

Some of the participants shared their views:

Transactional sex is now dangerous because older men use young women for rituals. These men not only come for them with the intent of sexual pleasure; they also infect them with diseases and use them for rituals. It is not possible for young females to compel older men to use condom and they also want to satisfy them to increase their pay and make them regular customers like a commercial sex worker. The young females do this because of poverty and they are lured to it by their friends, at least to conform to social groups.

(An In-depth Interview, a student, Kaduna).

A key informant opined that:

Transactional sex affects their health and some young men and women have their academics affected. Some older men also use them for rituals. We have read and seen much of this with some of them beheaded" (**KII, Pastor, Kaduna**).

In the view of another informant, who is a female community leader,

Transactional sex has serious implications when a young female cannot negotiate safer sex because it is transactional sex; they are prone to diseases and rituals for money. They sell their body, and campus girls are in the business for making money" (**Female Community Leader, Ebonyi**).

Furthermore, another informant opines that:

A lady may be involved in Aristo, maybe for financial reasons. At times, older men who may be older than your father, you can't instruct them to use condom. So, you do as instructed. The female girls cannot look at the older men's face. Off your pant, you do that, face here, you do it, because she is doing it for money and wants to satisfy the older men. So, how could you look up the face of someone older than your father? So, you dare not negotiate for a condom so that he will not reduce your pay. They want to satisfy the men so that they will be well paid. The older men will look at them as not sociable when they talk of protective sex (**Female Community Leader, Osun**).

A New Vista in Age Disparate Sexual Relationships

Older women now engage in casual sexual relationships with young male adults. Sexual relationships between older women and young male adults are rife in Nigeria. Several factors are attributed to these age-mixing sexual relationships. One of the factors is marital dissolution. A disrupted marital union does not halt sexual desire or urges. This makes most formerly married women engage in casual sexual relationships with young male adults to satisfy their sexual urge by enticing young men with material wealth. Some

young male adults, on the other hand, favour sexual relationships with older women because of the pecuniary benefits, improved social status and sexual satisfaction without expectation of pregnancy and financial obligations. This form of age-disparate sexual relationship has also been linked to fetish and mystical atonement for money rituals. Young male adults are reportedly drawn to this sexual relationship out of being covetous and their unbridled desire to achieve higher social status. Young men use this sexual connection to build a hub of social networks among the cream of the society. It was reported that a syndicate system makes sexual relationships between older women and emerging male adults rife in our context, apropos to what obtains in sexual relationships between older men and young women.

Some of the discussants shared their views on sexual relationships between older women and young male adults in the Nigerian context:

Sexual advances from older women are a commonplace in our environment, particularly among married women whose union is dissolved. I have encountered such overtures from older women sometimes ago through subtle and seducing bosom relationship. But I declined such advances because for me, there are potential dire consequences which prior knowledge has taught me. I have watched on social media and stage movies how older women used young male adults in their prime for money rituals. For me, I suppose there is public resentment to such sexual relationship in our context, especially a casual one (**IDI, a young undergraduate male participant, Osun State**).

Another key informant says that:

Sexual relationships between older women and young male adults are common among emerging male adults in higher institutions. It is now dangerous because older women use young men for rituals. These women not only come for them with the intent of sexual pleasure; they also infect them with diseases and use them for rituals. It is not possible for young men to compel older women to use a condom, and they also want to satisfy them to increase their compensation

and sustain such a symbiotic sexual relationship. Young men currently engage in sexual relationships with older women for financial gains and other material support, in what is dubbed “Jingolo” in the Nigerian context. (**A Key informant, Community Leader, Osun State**)

Another participant opined that:

Boys are motivated to engage in sexual relationships with older women to amass financial wealth and social capital. Some boys emulate their friends in joining the circle of people in the practice of transactional sex. Although, it is common among young ladies to have sexual relationships with older men, however, young boys have also found a market in transactional sex, especially when many homes have broken, and women might be unable to stop sexual intercourse after marital dissolutions. Young men are enjoying the sexual relationship because of postponement of marriage and the opportunity cost of financial obligations of stable marital relationship. We have read and seen much of this, and some of them get beheaded (**KII, Pastor, Kaduna**).

Another participant in the FGD opined that:

The sexual relationship between young men and older women has adverse implications, such as sexually transmitted infections, money-making rituals and disillusionment to making money through this unusual sexual relationship. This sexual relationship also makes boys to satisfy the sexual urge of women whose husbands are not sexually virile owing to aging or underlying ailments. It also has implications in terms of money rituals, and public rout which may be fatal (**Female Community Leader, Ebonyi**).

Another in-depth interview revealed this:

Older women prey on young boys to satisfy their sexual urges and/or metaphysical power. Most women engage in

this act out of not being loyal to their partners. In most cases, such women are used to sexual exploitation because it is an intergenerational habit. I mean, they engaged in transactional sex when they were young with older men. When they are married to much older men, they are used to frequent sexual activities, and as such, they need sexually virile and young men to satisfy their sexual needs. In this sexual relationship, young men must comply with the demands of their paymasters and satisfy them even against their wishes and to the detriment of their lives (**Female, FGD Discussant, Osun**).

FGD also shows that:

The sexual relationship happens in quick succession and does not last because older women have a retinue of young and sexually virile men to satisfy their sexual needs (**Male FGD Discussant, Ebonyi**).

Discussion

This study explored how socio-cultural and gender-based issues shape transactional sex among older men and young women on the one hand and older women and young men on the other hand, in Nigeria. Analysis revealed some salient findings. Narratives from the interviews and discussions confirmed that young females and males engaged in transactional sex with older men and women.

This study provided insights into the predatory nature of older men and women, as well as the motivation, drivers and consequences of transactional sex for the victims. Narratives and discussions from this study revealed gender imbalance and social inequalities in age-disparate sexual relationships. Perceptions and insights from the interviewees and discussants revealed that older men and women dominate young females and males in transactional sexual relationships because of patriarchal orientations and low social status. These findings align with prior studies conducted in a multi-country study in sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa, respectively (Seidu et al., 2021; Duby et al., 2021). The plausible reason for this skewed

sexual relationship is the possession of resources by the better-placed sex predators. The sex predators provide the financial resources and handouts to the victims of transactional sex. There is a need to empower young males and females to discourage the lure and overtures of sex predators.

Moreover, young females and males are passive in transactional relationships. Studies have confirmed the passiveness of young women in sexual relationships, as they are vulnerable. This stance provides support to the hypothesis of gender imbalance in sexual relationships (Connell, 2013). Young females satisfy their older male partners to sustain their relationship with sex predators for pecuniary motives and other material gifts (Maina et al., 2022). However, masculinity and gender power dynamics do not favour young males in transactional sexual relationships with older women. This is because older women still dominate young men in their sexual relationships, and this is counter-intuitive to the patriarchal sexual orientation in Nigeria. The possible reason for this stance is couched in material possession of resources and social capital. This echoes the notion that gender is a social construct, and not a mere biological difference of sex.

Besides, young female engagement in transactional sex with older men was attributed to financial challenges, covetous disposition and unbridled desire for material things. However, some young women who are financially buoyant engage in transactional sex because of other reasons, such as peer influence and building social networks with sociable men. This position is consistent with the findings of some existing studies (Amare et al., 2019; Hansen & Johansson, 2022). The plausible reason for this finding is attributable to the economic vulnerability of young women and the tendency to emulate their peers who are involved in transactional sex. There is a need for an increased awareness of the detrimental implications of the engagement of young women in transactional sex.

This study found evidence of intergenerational sexual relationships between older men and young females. Evidence from this study showed young females engaged in sexual relationships for material or monetary gains. This stance is corroborated by previous studies (Wamoyi et al., 2019; Heise et al., 2019). A critical issue that speaks to the discourse of gender-power imbalance in sexual relationships includes the inability of young females to negotiate safer sex. This evidence supports the findings of

previous studies that older men are not inclined to using condom because of sexual satisfaction with young females and the belief of getting value for money or material gift (Heise et al., 2019; Odimegwu & Ugwu, 2022). What is more, this study argued that an imbalanced sexual relationship is not shaped by the biological difference of sex but by the power and resources wielded by the older partner, predating on the disadvantaged position of the younger one.

As it is in age-disparate sexual relations between older men and young women, so it is between older women and young men. This is the novel idea which this study contributes to scholarly literature. These sexual orientations resonate with the discourse of economic satisfaction and utility maximisation. Equilibrium is achieved when sexual satisfaction is equal to the money or material expended. The question to ask is: would non-use of condom shortchange the satisfaction of older men/women or strengthen it? There is a need for comprehensive sexuality education among young women and men, especially those in higher institutions. Older men and women should also be empowered through educational programmes regarding the detrimental effects of unprotected sexual practices. Many studies have linked age-disparate sexual relationships to sexually transmitted infections (Wamoyi et al., 2019; Schaefer et al., 2017). The findings of these studies are in agreement with scholarly literature. The plausible reason why age-disparate sexual relationship is linked to sexually transmitted diseases is because protective sexual intercourse is not often practiced as sex predators are wont to maximising their sexual satisfaction based on resources expended on the phenomenon. Young men and women also conform with risky sexual practice of unprotected sex to satisfy the sexual urge of the clients and sustain the predatory sexual relationship. There is a need for policy and interventions to focus on these at-risk populations in the effort to reduce the scourge of sexually transmitted infections.

Another issue with age-disparate sexual relationship is money rituals. The phenomena of “Aristo” and “Jingolo” in Nigeria have been dubbed avenues for using young males and females for “blood money” as older men and women go fetish with ulterior motive of transactional sex in order to use their victims for money rituals. Emerging adults in Nigeria wait endlessly for job opportunities but remain in casual sexual relationships

until the elusive markers of responsible adulthood (gainful employment, separation from parents to mention a few) become fruitful. Also, youth-friendly centres for reproductive and sexual health information are lacking and should be provided. Similarly, the economy of the country should be improved, so as to provide employment opportunities for emerging adults. The theory of gender and power provides the theoretical foundation for this argument. There is critical mass of emerging adults that remained unemployed. This has affected the development efforts of Nigeria as youth development is an integral part of national development.

Conclusion

This study established that transactional sex is rife between older men and young women, on the one hand, and older women and young men, on the other hand. In addition, the study took the philosophic stance that some deep-rooted socio-cultural and gender norms shaped age-disparate sexual relationships in Nigeria. The study revealed nuanced scripts on older men and women dominance in age-disparate sexual relationships. Also, intergenerational sexual relationships were blamed for negative sexual, social and health outcomes, such as sexually transmitted infections, money rituals and inordinate disillusionment to build social networks with the crème de la crème in the society. All these gendered norms and socio-cultural issues provided insightful information and enhanced understanding of contemporary issues that shape age-disparate sexual relationships in Nigeria.

Policy Implications

Interventions should consider reducing male dominance in sexual relationships. In order to address risky sexual behaviour of emerging adults, targeted interventions should empower the girl-child to reduce transactional sex with older men. Also, programme managers and policy makers should factor gender and socio-cultural norms into interventions across the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria. In order to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal on health for all, comprehensive sex education for parents and public awareness programmes on condom promotion should be strengthened. Government should create employment opportunities for the critical mass of unemployed graduates and the uneducated.

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