

UNMET NEED OF ADOLESCENT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (ASRH) IN EDO STATE: A CALL TO COMMUNITY LEADERS FOR IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

A SNAP-SHOT OF ASRH SITUATION IN EDO STATE

Edo State, one of the 36 states of the Nigerian federation, is home to about three million people with an estimated statistics of about 33% of adolescents and young adults aged 10 – 24 years and male/female ratio of nearly 1:1 (National Population Census, 2006). Although mainly rural and one of the poorest and least industrialized areas in Nigeria, the state has one of the highest levels of literacy in the country. Young people in Edo State face several reproductive health (RH) vulnerabilities. Many educated youths are under- or unemployed (Youth Reproductive Health Policy; Country Brief Series, Volume 2; 2004).

Adolescence is recognized as the stage of life in which individuals establish their own identities and prepare to become adults. For many young people in Edo State in the recent times, the notion of adolescence as a time of self development under safe and healthy conditions has become a mirage. The hope of good virtues and values has been dashed, as millions live in abject poverty or other unpleasant or difficult circumstances, with little access to knowledge and resources.

In the recent times in Nigeria, adolescents have become a focal point of discussions of sexuality and reproductive health matters because they belong to a most active segment of the entire population. In particular, adolescents in Edo State are among the age group having the highest HIV/AIDS infection prevalence rate in the country. Annually, a large percentage of young girls face unintended and early pregnancy, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Edo State has 6.2% prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS among the antenatal clinic attendees compared to 4.6% national prevalence. Edo State has some of the country's highest rates of commercial sex, international sex trafficking and risky sexual behaviour. This makes HIV/AIDS the most ASRH challenge in the state today. There is therefore the need to rise up and check this ugly and unpleasant situation, which is becoming incessant and alarming, so as to rescue and protect these young and unbudded lives in Edo State.

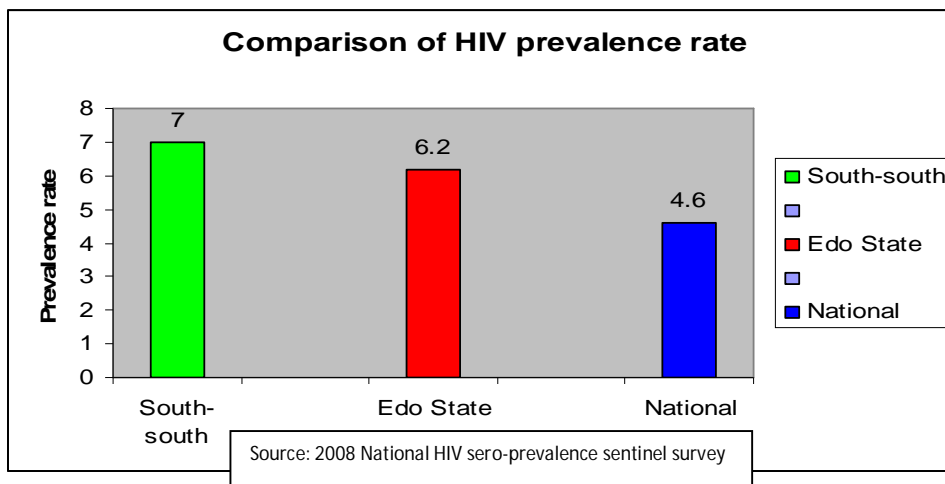
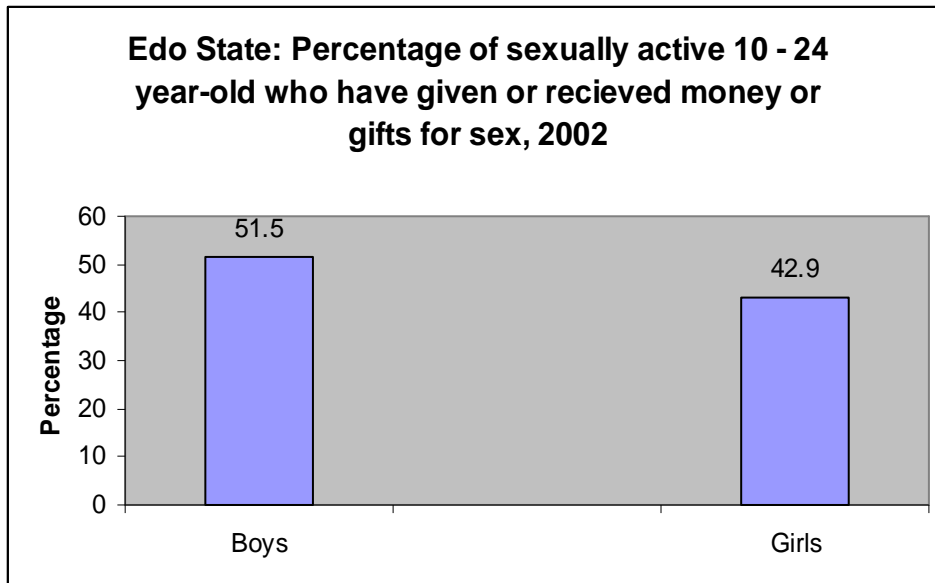
Despite various existing policies in the health sector that are relevant to sexual and reproductive health; and selfless effort to develop the Young Adults and Adolescents Sexual and Reproductive Health (YAARH) strategic plan as a critical intervention, Edo State still experience a set-back in ASRH development. This could be attributed to eroding African traditions, cultures, norms and values that promote moderation, self-control, decency and moral.

CONSEQUENCES OF ASRH IN EDO STATE

Annually, the high morbidity and mortality rates as a result of several illegal and induced abortions performed under unhealthy conditions by majority of teenage girls in the state have adverse effects on the economy of Edo State and future generation population.

With the already high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate, high rate of illegal abortion, commercial sex and international sex trafficking activities, the whole state is at risk of becoming

infected with the deadly virus, high infertility and maternal mortality rates in the nearest future if adequate steps are not taken. Large funds that would have been used for the growth and development of the state economies will then be diverted to treating the infected masses when prevention would have cost less.



Increased morbidity and mortality rate from the HIV/AIDS virus will also be an added burden to the people affected by AIDS and threat to the future population of the state, if not intervened. More children, who might have lost one or both parents to the HIV/AIDS virus, will take to the streets for survival thereby increasing the vulnerability rate of young people in the state. More street children will automatically culminate into increased rate in violence and crime in the state.

When the security of a state is uncertain, it will have a negative effect on the economic development of the state because investors may loss their investment and new investors will be discouraged from coming in.

Therefore, it will be needless to say what the adverse implications of increased unemployment and poverty rates in the state will have if the **Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health** issues are not promoted **NOW!**

ACTIONS TO TAKE

Traditional/Community leaders have been noted to be in the fore front for positive action on issues that affect the well being of their people. Promoting adolescent sexual and reproductive health would therefore require action to:

- **Advocate** for the increase commitment of financial resources to adolescents sexual and reproductive health care service delivery including the employment and deployment of trained health service providers
- **Address** socio – cultural and gender based practices that negatively affect achieving MDG 5 “Improve maternal health” particularly target 5b, “Achieve universal access to reproductive health”
- **Provide** leadership for the strengthening of community support systems that empower and promote adolescents sexual and reproductive health
- **Strengthen** traditional virtues that promote abstinence and discourage infidelity
- **Mobilize** community members against **child marriage**
- **Encourage** families to imbibe morals, norms and values that discourage promiscuity and prostitutions
- **Facilitate** adoption of positive sexual and reproductive health education among adolescents
- **Mobilize** community members to actively participate in decisions and actions to promote the health of adolescent girls and women.
- **Advocate** for the provision of youth-friendly adolescent sexual and reproductive health services; and
- **Monitor** the health services provided in their communities to ensure they are responsive to the need of community members

Youths are the **future leaders**; your **urgent response** to address the unmet ASRH need of this **most vulnerable group** in our society is a **task that must be done!**