

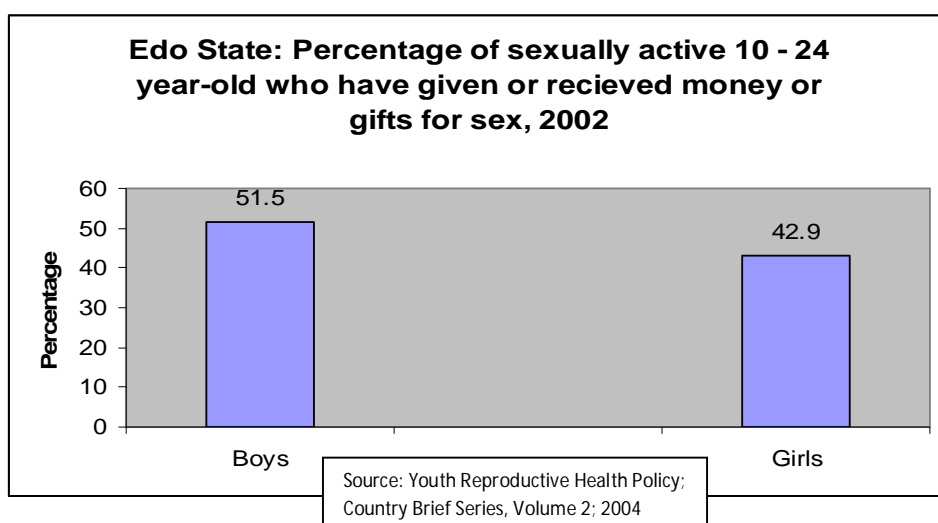
## UNMET NEED OF ADOLESCENT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (ASRH) IN EDO STATE: A CALL TO THE MEDIA FOR IMMEDIATE INTERVENTIONS

### A SNAP-SHOT OF ASRH SITUATION IN EDO STATE

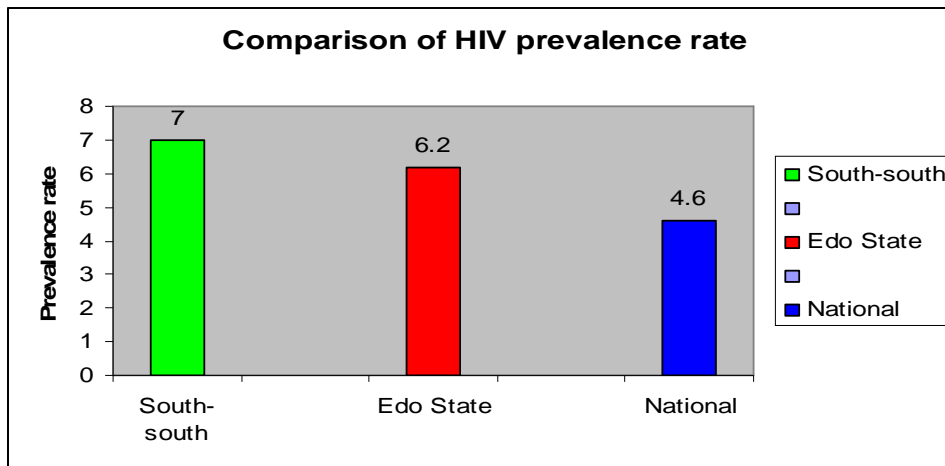
Edo State, one of the 36 states of the Nigerian federation, is home to about three million people with an estimated statistics of about 33% of adolescents and young adults aged 10 – 24 years and male/female ratio of nearly 1:1 (National Population Census, 2006). Although mainly rural and one of the poorest and least industrialized areas in Nigeria, the states 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).

Edo State belongs to the southern regions where marriage in adolescents and young women is becoming less common; hence, sexual experience among never-married is becoming more prevalent. Available report shows highest prevalent rate (39%) of young women in the South-south who never married and had ever had sex. As a result, many youths are extremely exposed to early and risky sexual habits (Meeting Young Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs in Nigeria, 2009).

Contraceptive use in Edo State is low for both married and unmarried youths, resulting in high rates of early and unwanted pregnancy. The majority of these teenagers performed abortions under unsanitary conditions which might lead to infertility, morbidity and/or mortality. Other sexual and reproductive health problems prominent include sexual abuse, female genital cutting and HIV/AIDS 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. A lot of young women in Edo State experience unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortions. This makes HIV/AIDS the most ASRH challenge in the state today.



## Comparison of HIV prevalence among the antenatal clinic attendees



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.

Available reports show that YAARH strategic plan was not fully implemented as expected due to little or no political will and commitment. Definite programs focused on improving the sexual and reproductive health of young adults are non-existing. Government-owned health facilities are still far from being youth friendly and a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum is not yet inculcated into the educational system.

### 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 caused 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 lose 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 Edo State will have if the **Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health** issues are not rescued **NOW!**

## **ACTIONS TO TAKE**

More critical interventions to address adolescent sexual and reproductive health need to be undertaken as part of State developmental priorities. The Media is a veritable tool not only in sensitizing the general public but also in influencing policy makers to take action on issues of national concern. Therefore, the media has a role for setting the promotion of adolescent sexual and reproductive health as an agenda for public discourse by:

- **Advocating for increase budgetary allocation** for adolescent sexual and reproductive health in accordance with the Abuja Declaration that prescribes a 15% of total national budget to the health sector; 10% of which must be allocated to reproductive health, adolescent health inclusive
- **Advocate** for the provision of youth friendly adolescent sexual and reproductive health services at all levels towards achieving MDG 5 “Improve maternal health” particularly target 5b, “Achieve universal access to reproductive health”
- **Advocate** for the employment, deployment and motivation of trained health service providers to meet recommended WHO standard at all levels.
- **Advocate** for enactment and promote the enforcement of legislation to limit socio – cultural and gender based practices that affect adolescent health
- **Promote** Public-Private Partnership for adolescent sexual and reproductive health care
- **Promote** community support systems that empower women and promote their health.
- **Create airtime for young adults to engage in meaningful entertainment and educative reproductive health issues.**

These can be done through features, interviews, editorials, news stories, documentaries, investigative journalism and other relevant activities.

**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!**

