

UNMET NEED OF ADOLESCENT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (ASRH) IN EDO STATE: A CALL TO POLICY-MAKERS FOR IMMEDIATE INTERVENTIONS

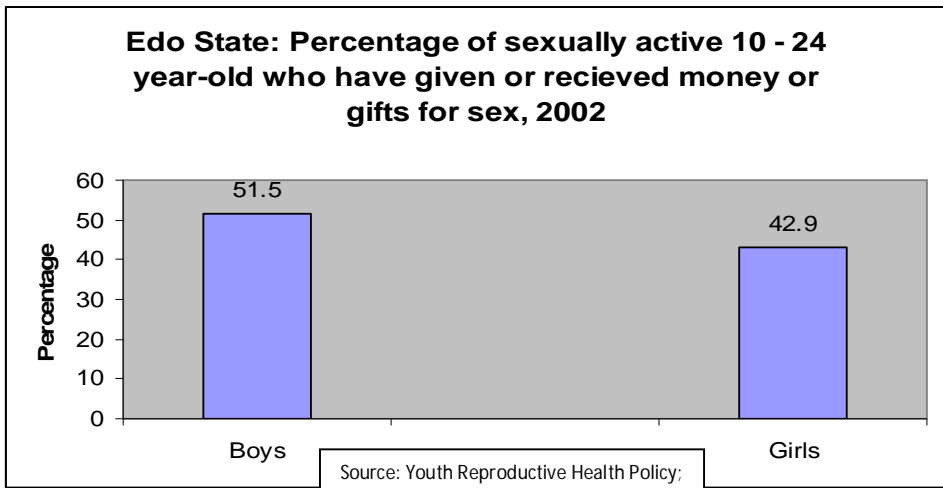
A SNAP-SHOT OF ASRH SITUATION IN EDO STATE

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).

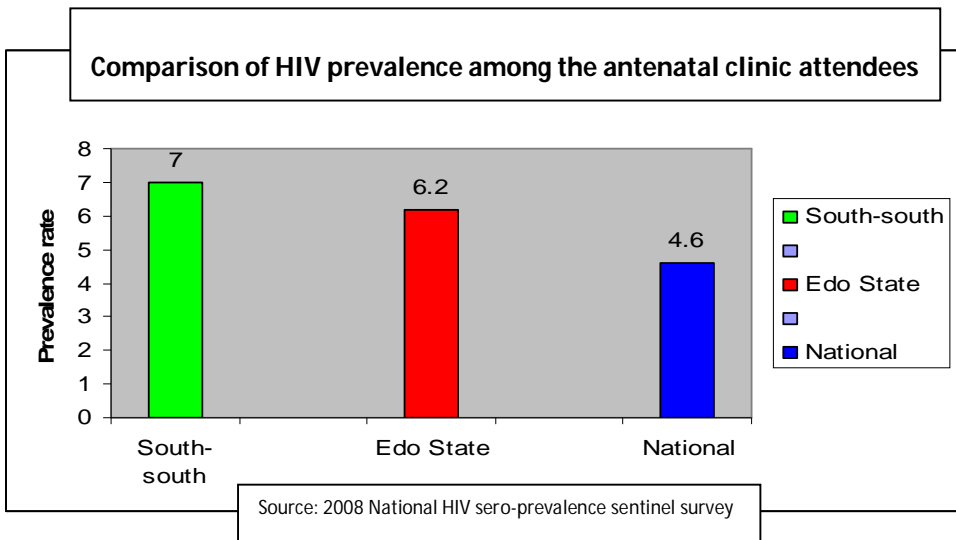
Edo State belongs to the southern regions where marriage in adolescents and young women is becoming less common; hence, sexual experience among never-married is becoming more prevalent. Available report shows highest prevalent rate (39%) of young women in the South-south who never married and had ever 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.

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 (2004 – 2009) 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.



Source: Youth Reproductive Health Policy; Country Brief Series, Volume 2; 2004



Source: 2008 National HIV sero-prevalence sentinel survey

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

As distinguished Decision-Makers in Edo State, more critical interventions need to be undertaken as part of State Developmental priorities:

- **Increase political will and commitments** towards achieving MDG 5 “Improve maternal health” particularly target 5b, “Achieve universal access to reproductive health” in Edo State
- **Review and implement** YAARH strategic plan developed in 2004 for the state
- **Increase budgetary allocation** for Adolescents Sexual and Reproductive health in Edo State
- **Strengthen and expand** Adolescents Sexual and Reproductive Health to strike balance in interventions between urban and rural areas in Edo State
- **Develop strategies** in the areas of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, prevention, treatment, care and support and impact mitigation
- **Design a definite intervention** focusing on the complex issues of the marginalized groups (youths, women and children)
- **Adopt and integrate** sexual and reproductive health education in school curriculum with emphasis on youths to avert related consequences such as new HIV infections
- **Intensify efforts** to improve quality of comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support services; and
- **Support relevant ASRH researches** to identify appropriate intervention strategies and adopt best practices.
- **Implement the “act right” rule in schools to check the way young adult dress so as to prevent sexual crimes such as rape.**

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!**