

Body Image Perception: Predictor of Risky Sexual Behaviour Among Female University Undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Body image perception (BIP) is the interpretation that a person has of his/her physical self, ranging from the shape and colour of hair, head, eyes, nose, lips, teeth, ear, breast, waist, hip, leg, skin and reproductive system functioning and the thoughts and feelings that result from that perception. Current research has focused mostly on age, sex, educational background and socioeconomic factors as contributing to risky sexual behaviour, thereby little is known about the influence of perception of body image on engagement in risky sexual behaviour. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine female university undergraduates' perception of their body image and to investigate the predictive contribution of body image perception on female university undergraduates' engagement in risky sexual behaviour. Female university undergraduates over 1500 in Southwestern Nigeria constitute the sample size of this analytical study, carried out in 2019. The body image perception of individuals was measured by the Body Image Scale and the risky sexual behaviour of selected females was measured using the Youth Risk Behaviour Scale. The mean age of the participants was $23.4 \pm 57.3\%$ were in their sophomore year, and 74.5% practised Christianity. 67.7% of them demonstrated positive body image perception while 32.3% of sampled female university undergraduates demonstrated negative body image perception. Body image perception was found to contribute to risky sexual behaviour. The findings suggest that closer attention should be given to exhibiting positive body image perception which is a strong predictor of risky sexual behaviour.

Keywords: Body Image, Female Undergraduates, Body Image Perception, Sexual Behaviour

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Introduction

Body image portrays the structure, colour and shape of an individual's body component or anatomy. These structures and shapes differ among individuals and are commonly referred to as tall, short, thin and fat/ plump. It can be further categorised into tall and plump, short and plump, tall and thin, and short and thin; the complexion is either dark, brown (chocolate) or light. Body image perception is the interpretation that a person has of their physical self, ranging from the shape and colour of hair, head, eyes, nose, lips, teeth, ear, breast, waist, hip, leg, skin and reproductive system functioning and the thoughts and feelings that result from that perception. The perception one has of its' body may be influenced by a variety of factors which include media, peer pressure, familiar influences, and cultural expectations. This perception may also be due to abnormal body size, physiological variations or abnormalities in the body. For instance, alteration in the secondary sexual characteristics of some females such as a grown-up female without visible breasts, no ova/egg monthly production and release, extreme complexion, and baritone voice, among others, can result in having a positive or negative body image perception.

Thus, positive body image perception is when individuals feel satisfied and accept most aspects of their body structures. A female who has a positive body image perception is likely to be proud of her body despite the projections from social media, environment, culture, religion and family circle (Abamara & Agu, 2014). Such a female appreciates and celebrates the natural shape of her body, and understands that her physical appearance does not determine her value and character. In addition, she is likely to accept and be content with her body's uniqueness. By being confident and comfortable about her body, she is unlikely to be immensely concerned in spending ample time thinking about people's commendation of her look, affection from men, or indulging in risky sexual practices.

On the other hand, negative body image perception is when individuals feel their body structures do not meet the standard of other people's opinions. A female who has a negative perception of her physical appearance will experience dissatisfaction with her body image (Kotanski, Fisher & Gullone; Ugoji, 2014), which may contribute to either accepting themselves or acting in ways to be accepted by society and may result to engaging in risky sexual behaviour.

The structure, shape and colour of the body is a major attention of the bearer from inception which becomes more intense as age increases from childhood to adulthood, with the aged ones not excluded, reflecting in the common saying in Yoruba language that, "*kò sí arúgbó ní Ghana*" (there is no aged in Ghana), purposely to gain attention and commendation either from same or opposite sex. Ironically, children crave to have the adult body physique while adults desire to look younger in size and appearance in a bid to look "catchy". This tussle of attainment of a particular body shape, especially among females, births several behaviours to feel satisfied, accepted or fulfilled.

Body image has been an issue with most individuals especially females, one of which is tagged "body shaming" presently in Nigeria where people are picked on and made jest of about their physical looks by the same or opposite sex. They joke about overweight people in Southwestern Nigeria as *orobo*, fatty bumbum, and *iya panti*. They also do the same to skinny people (*lepa-pressed-thin*, *tirin gbeku- thin dead-dry*), dark people (*dudu-black*, *ojuju-scary shadow*, *blacky*), short people (*kukuru sambe*, *rara- dwarf*), tall people (*opa- rod*, *igala-antelope*, *iroko tree*) and even light people (*afin- albino*, *oyinbo pepe-white*), and so on, in

which the recipient of such appellations may get used to it, die in silence of condemnation or try to dislodge their appellate deformities with other act in order to be accepted or feel happy.

Body image is a phenomenon in traditional Nigerian African culture, and language is the poetic way to locate body image and beauty perceptions within traditional Nigerian African mentality. Female beauty in particular is inscribed in traditional cultural codes about body parts, complexion, overall physiology and aesthetic appearance. This inscription of body and beauty in language manifests in names, nicknames, tags, sayings, riddles and extended aesthetic forms such as poetry, and nuptial songs; in sundry oral expressions and cultural practices.

Amongst the Yoruba, largely located in Southwestern Nigeria but with socio-political and cultural influence in many other parts of the country, body parts such as *eyinjú* (eyeball(s)), *eyín* (tooth/teeth), *omú* (breast(s)) and *ìdí* (buttock(s)) occur frequently as a central focus in traditional description of a female's beauty. Specific aesthetic values are conjoined to the various parts using adjectival modification. For example, from *eyinjú* (eyeball(s)), we have *eléyinjú-ẹgẹ* ("one with delicate/graceful eyeballs"). The body parts are adorned, in language, through figures of speech within the names. The complexion and overall appearance are also rhetorised in the language through diverse names and expressions (Oloruntoba, 2017).

Moreover, some females who might be considered physically beautiful may poise themselves as a sexual tool to explore their beautiful endowment and sexually exploit others too. On the other hand, some so-called unattractive ones, in a bid to be more appreciated and accepted, may succumb to any sexual request, perhaps against their wish, resulting in risky sexual behaviour. The degree to which body image perception is associated with risky sexual behaviour has not been well researched in Southwestern Nigeria but has been theorised as playing a role in risky sexual behaviour according to the problem behaviour theory (Ezenna, Stephen & Mark, 2017). Thus, the perception of females about their body structure is an important consideration when looking at the impact of body image perception on risky sexual behaviour.

Undergraduates can be considered to be free from many restricting rules concerning their conduct and behaviours which could provide greater opportunity for engaging in risky sexual behaviour despite the awareness of some of its consequences.

Risky sexual behaviour is considered to be behaviour which increases the chance of contracting or transmitting diseases or increases the chance of unwanted pregnancies this includes; unprotected sex, multiple sex partners, having sex with someone who injects or has ever injected drugs, engaging in sex on a commercial basis, and early sexual activity especially before age 18. These risky practices may result in increased teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection (STI) acquisition, inclusive of HIV/AIDS (WHO, 2006).

The study by Oluwatosin and Adediwura (2010) showed a high prevalence (60.9%) of risky sexual behaviour among undergraduate students in Southwestern Nigeria. Consequently, Oluwatosin and Adediwura reported a study conducted by Abimbola (2007) which showed that out of 303 adolescents and youths that attended STD clinic in Ile-Ife, 217 (72%) were students and 85% of the studied population practised risky sexual behaviour. This demands continuous investigation of the probable causal factors that contribute to a subsequent increase in risky sexual behaviour among undergraduates.

Statement of the Problem

Risky sexual behaviour is a concern in our society due to progressively increased engagement in risky sexual practices among undergraduates in the past decades (Ahonsi, 2013) linked with an upsurge in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents where females are more infected (Ifeanyi, 2021). Risky sexual behaviour among university undergraduates may be linked to the rise in undergraduates experiencing high levels of sexual health-related problems including unintended pregnancy, reproductive tract infection, for instance, sexually transmitted diseases, human immunodeficiency virus, etc. It may be expected that the aftermath of engaging in risky sexual behaviour such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse-related disorders may even destroy more lives than complications arising from AIDS, heart diseases, wars and accidents. Furthermore, many factors like age, sex, academic level of study and poor parenting styles among others have contributed to students' engagement in risky sexual behaviour according to Oluwatosin and Adediwura (2010), but little information has been provided as to how perceived body image contributes to risky sexual behaviour among female undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria. Therefore, it raises the question, how prevalent are risky sexual behaviours among female undergraduates and what is the predictive contribution of body image perception on risky sexual behaviour of female undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study examined how body image perception contributed to female university undergraduates' engagement in risky sexual behaviour in Southwestern, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives were to:

- (a) identify prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among female university undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria;
- (b) investigate female university undergraduates' perception of their body image in the study area;
- (c) determine predictive contribution of body image perception on female university undergraduates' risky sexual behaviour.

Research Questions

The following questions were answered in this study:

- i. How prevalent is risky sexual behaviour among female university undergraduates?
- ii. What is the level of perception of university undergraduate females about their body image in Southwestern, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

- (i) There is no significant predictive contribution of body image perception on female university undergraduates' risky sexual behaviour.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. The study made use of quantitative approach which was descriptive survey.

The population for this study comprised 156,935 female university undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria (Nigeria University System Statistical Digest, 2017). Southwestern Nigeria is one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. The zone is made up of six states which are Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo States. Six federal universities, eight state universities and twenty-seven private universities were in Southwestern Nigeria at the time this study was carried out.

The sample for the study comprised 1,527 female undergraduates and was selected using the multistage sampling technique. The sample size was considered appropriate and adequate for the study given the sample size formula developed by Barlett., Kotrlik, Haggins (2001) which specified a minimum of 1,527 at 95% level of confidence relative to the population of female university undergraduates which is 156,935. From the six states in Southwestern Nigeria, three states were selected using random sampling technique. Three universities were purposively selected from each of the selected states based on the type of university (Federal, State and Private universities) making a total of nine universities. Furthermore, two faculties were selected from each of the universities using simple random sampling technique, giving a total of 18 faculties. Finally, 85 female undergraduates were selected from each faculty in the university using convenience sampling technique.

Research Instruments

In carrying out this study, one adapted research instrument namely; Female Undergraduates' Body Image Perception on Risky Sexual Behaviour (FUBIPRSB) was used to collect data. The instrument is a combination of different questionnaires packed together as one and was used to collect data.

Techniques for Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics. The demographic variables were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, and percentage while the contribution of the dependent variable (risky sexual behaviour) on the independent variable (body image perception) was analysed using linear regression analysis. The reliability coefficient for each of the sections was greater than the critical value at 0.05 level of significance (0.639, 0.790, 0.792) and so is acceptable.

Results

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How prevalent is risky sexual behaviour among female university undergraduates?

To measure the most prevalent risky sexual behaviour, the resulting scores of respondents to the risky sexual behaviour section were added up and subjected to descriptive statistics through the use of frequency counts and percentages. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Prevalence of Risky Sexual Behaviour Among Female University Undergraduates

S/N	Risky Sexual Behaviour Inventory	Percentile	Responses
		Yes	No
1.	Sexual intercourse without using condom	188 (12.8%)	1306 (87.2%)
2.	Having more than one sexual partner	203 (13.8%)	1291 (86.2%)
3.	Use of drugs to enhance sexual activity	156 (10.6%)	1338 (83.1%)
4.	Early sexual debut	333 (22.6%)	1161 (77.4%)
5.	Sexual partner using condom during engaging in sexual activity	435 (29.5%)	1059 (63.4%)
6.	Compulsion to engage in any form of sexual activity	417 (28.3%)	1077 (71.7%)
7.	Sexual partner use of drugs for enhancing sexual activity	179 (12.2%)	1315 (87.8%)
8.	Mouth to genital (private part) sexual activity without using protective/condom	556 (37.7%)	938 (62.3%)
9.	Sexual partner with multiple sexual partners	147 (10.0%)	1347 (90.0%)
10.	Engagement in sexual activity in exchange for money	87 (5.9%)	1407 (94.1%)

Table 1 shows the general statistical analysis of the most prevalent risky sexual behaviour female undergraduates engage in. 37.7% of the respondents attested to having engaged in mouth-to-genital sexual activity without using protective which is most prevalent, 28.3% of female undergraduates were compelled to engage in sexual activity against their wish and 22.6% of them started having sex at an early age.

Table 2: Level of Risky Sexual Behaviour Among Female Undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria

Risky sexual behaviour	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	726	48.6
Moderate	333	22.3
Low	435	29.1
Total	494	100.0

Table 2 shows the result of the level of risky sexual behaviour among female undergraduates in southwestern Nigeria. Out of one thousand four hundred and ninety-four (1,494), seven hundred and twenty-six (726) engaged in risky sexual behaviour. Also, three hundred and thirty-three of the sample indicated moderate engagement in risky sexual behaviour which also represents 22.3% of the sample for the study and four hundred and Thirty-five (435) which represents 29.1% of the total sample indicated low engagement in risky sexual behaviour. From this result, it was found that there is high level of engagement in risky sexual behaviour among female university undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is the level of perception of female university undergraduates about their body image in Southwestern, Nigeria?

Table 3: Perception of Body Image Among Female University Undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria

Body Image Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Negative	482	32.3
Positive	1012	67.7
Total	1494	100.0

Table 3 shows the result of the level of perception of body image among female undergraduate students in southwestern Nigeria. It was observed from the table, that 482 (32.3%) of the respondents projected negative body image perception while 1012 (67.7%) of them projected positive body image perception. From this result, it was found that the level of body image perception is mostly positive.

Research Hypotheses

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant predictive contribution of body image perception on female university undergraduates' risky sexual behaviour.

To test this hypothesis, the scores obtained for each respondent on body image perception and risky sexual behaviour were computed and represented respondents' measure of body image perception and risky sexual behaviour. These were later subjected to regression analysis using body image perception as the independent variable and risky sexual behaviour as the dependent variable. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Model Summary of the Predictive Contribution of Body Image Perception on Female University Undergraduates Engagement in Risky Sexual Behaviour

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	0.053 ^a	0.003	0.002	1.43369	4.196	0.041 ^b

a. Predictor: (Constant), Body Image Perception

Table 4 shows the model summary of the predictive contribution of body image perception on female undergraduate engagement in risky sexual behaviour among female undergraduate students of southwestern Nigeria. The table also showed that the R-square value in the test was 0.003 and adjusted R-square was 0.002. This may be interpreted to mean that body image perception exerts a maximum and minimum of 0.3% and 0.2% of the variance observed on risky sexual behaviour and f-value obtained in test of the model for significance was 4.196 at $p = 0.041$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that the model is significant. This may be interpreted to mean that body image perception significantly influences risky sexual behaviour among female undergraduates in southwestern universities. To find the direction of the contribution, the coefficient table attached to the linear regression analysis is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Coefficient of Predictive Contribution of Body Image Perception on Female University Undergraduates' Engagement in Risky Sexual Behaviour.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	13.731	0.436		31.492	0.000
	Body Image	-0.028	0.014	-0.053	-2.049	0.041
a. Dependent Variable: Risky Sexual Behaviour						

Table 5 shows the direction of the contribution of body image perception on risky sexual behaviour of female university undergraduates in southwestern Nigeria. It shows that body image perception contributed to risky sexual behaviour among the respondents as the B-value obtained is -0.028 with a t-value of -2.049 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. This means that body image perception negatively contributed to risky sexual behaviour among the respondents (B = -0.028). This implies that the more positive perception of the respondent's body image, the lesser their involvement in risky sexual behaviour.

Conclusion

Risky sexual behaviour among female university undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria is on the increase. The study concluded that female university undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria engage in risky sexual behaviour as a result of body image perception.

Recommendations

From the findings and conclusion of this study, various recommendations were proposed to further enhance and assist female undergraduates to channel their body image in more productive activities. Therefore, this study should be applied in various educational institutions. These recommendations are given thus:

1. University Stakeholders should create a platform for cordial and healthy relationships among sexes to enhance open communication about sexual needs.
2. Religious activities should be encouraged and strengthened within universities and outside.
3. Universities authorities within and outside should discourage night party attendance among undergraduates by encouraging more recreational activities with the help of their leaders.
4. Female undergraduates should be encouraged to occasionally attend the sexual and reproductive health centres for check-ups.
5. Awareness creation on condom use and risky sexual behaviour and its consequences should be done through the available media of communication and comprehensive education on sexual and reproductive health issues should be included in the existing curriculum for university undergraduates.

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