

**PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF DATING AND PREMARITAL SEXUAL
BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF JOS, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceived influence of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduate students of the University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The increasing prevalence of dating relationships and premarital sexual activities among university students has raised concerns regarding their effects on academic performance, health, and overall well-being. The study aimed to assess students' perceptions of dating, premarital sexual behaviour, factors influencing these behaviours, and their perceived effects. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of undergraduate students of the University of Jos, from which a sample of 200 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Perceived Influence of Dating and Premarital Sexual Behaviour Questionnaire (PLDPSBQ)". The instrument was validated by experts in the Faculty of Education, University of Jos, and its reliability index of 0.82 was established using Cronbach's alpha method. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that dating is widely perceived as a normal aspect of university life and plays a role in students' emotional and social development. However, premarital sexual behaviour was also found to be prevalent among students, influenced by factors such as peer pressure, social media exposure, financial needs and the campus environment. The study further revealed that while dating may provide emotional support, excessive involvement and premarital sexual activities have negative implications, including poor academic performance, exposure to sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, and emotional stress. Based on the findings, the study concluded that dating and premarital sexual behaviours significantly influence undergraduate students' lifestyles and decision-making processes. It is therefore recommended that universities, parents, and religious organizations intensify efforts toward providing proper guidance, counselling services, and comprehensive sexuality education to students.

Keywords:Dating, premarital sexual behaviour, undergraduate students, perception, University of Jos.

Introduction

Dating and premarital sexual behaviours have become salient aspects of social life among undergraduate students in many Nigerian universities, including the University of Jos, Plateau State. Within the university environment, young people at the peak of physical and emotional development increasingly engage in romantic relationships and sexual activities before marriage, influenced by peer pressure, media portrayals, perceived autonomy, and evolving social norms (Onyeonoro, Okafor, Nweke, Aniebue&Nwagbara, 2018; Dankishiya, 2015; Adeyemi, &Ojo, 2017). In this context, dating and premarital sex are no longer purely private matters but phenomena with far-reaching psychosocial, moral, and health implications for students and the broader campus community (Eze, 2020; Dankishiya, 2015).

Existing literature suggests that dating and premarital sexual behaviours can shape students' self-concept, emotional well-being, academic engagement, and future marital expectations. While some studies indicate that moderate, emotionally regulated relationships may provide companionship, emotional support, and social competence, others highlight the risks associated with unguided or risky sexual behaviours, including unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, sexual coercion, and emotional distress. In Plateau State, where strong religious and cultural values often emphasize abstinence before marriage and marital fidelity, the perception of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among University of Jos students may reflect an ongoing negotiation between traditional expectations and contemporary lifestyle practices (Adeyemi, 2017; Fergusson, Boden&Honvood, 2014).

Despite the growing visibility of dating and premarital sexual activities on campus, there is relatively limited empirical evidence on how undergraduate students perceive the influence of these behaviours on their academic performance, emotional wellbeing, interpersonalrelationships, and future marriage prospects. This study therefore investigates the perceived sexual behaviours among undergraduate students of the University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings are expected to inform context-sensitive counselling interventions, sexuality education programmes, and university-based policies aimed at promoting responsible sexual decision-making and holistic student development.

Statement of the Problem

Dating and premarital sexual behaviours are increasingly common among undergraduate students at the University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, occurring within a context of evolving social norm, heightened peer influence, and easy access to sexualized media content. Many students engage in romantic relationships and sexual activities before marriage, often without adequate guidance, accurate sexuality education, or clear understanding of the potential consequences. At the same time, religious and cultural values in Plateau State continue to emphasize chastity, abstinence before marriage, and marital fidelity, creating tension between personal behaviour and societal expectations.

The growing prevalence of these behavioursraises concerns about their impact on students' academic performance, emotional wellbeing, interpersonal relationships, and future marital attitudes. Unregulated dating and premarital sexual activities may expose students to unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, emotional distress, sexual coercion, and social stigma all of which can disrupt academic focus and personal development (Olawade et al., 2023; Odii et al., 2020). However, there is limited empirical evidence on how undergraduate students at the University of Jos perceive the influence of dating and

premarital sexual behaviours on their lives, including how they view the benefits, risks, and moral implications of such behaviours.

Ideally, students should be able to make informed, responsible sexual decisions that protect their health, dignity, and future relationships, supported by appropriate counselling, sexuality education, and supportive institutional policies. Yet, current support systems on campus, such as counselling units, chaplaincy services, and peer-education programmes, often appear fragmented or under-utilized, and students' voices regarding their lived experiences and perceptions remain under-documented. This gap in knowledge means that interventions are frequently designed without adequate understanding of students' own interpretations of the influence of dating and premarital sexual behaviours.

Therefore, the problem is that, despite the evident prevalence and potential consequences of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduate students at the University of Jos, there is limited evidence on how these students perceive the influence of such behaviours on their academic performance, emotional wellbeing, interpersonal relationships, and future marital expectations. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the perceived influence of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduate students of the University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, in order to inform context-relevant counselling, sexuality education, and university-based policies.

Literature Review

Dating refers to socially accepted romantic interaction between individuals who have emotionally and sometimes sexually involved, often with the intention of exploring compatibility for future relationships or marriage. Among undergraduate students, dating is considered a normal part of social development and interpersonal relationships (Amoateng&Kalulesabiti, 2016). University environments provide students with increased independence and opportunities for interaction, which often encourage dating relationships may contribute positively to emotional development and social skills. However, studies have shown that dating may also expose students to risky behaviours such as sexual experimentation and reduced academic focus (Omoniyi, 2018). Premarital sex denotes sexual intercourse between individuals who are not legally married, and it is increasingly common among adolescents and young adults in many African universities. In Nigeria, premarital sex has been framed as a growing social and health concern, especially among tertiary-institution students who are more exposed to peer influence, media, and urban lifestyles.

Studies in Nigerian universities indicate that a substantial proportion of undergraduates engage in premarital sexual activities, often with multiple partners and limited use of protective measures. A survey of students in a Nigerian tertiary institution reported that about 73.7% of sexually active respondents engaged in premarital sex for pleasure, with many reporting multiple sexual partners within a year, which the authors classified as high-risk sexual behaviour. Another study on sexual behaviour patterns among Nigerian university students similarly found that premarital intercourse is widespread, with peer pressure, media exposure, and economic hardship identified as key drivers. These findings suggest that dating and premarital sex are not marginal practices but relatively common experiences among Nigerian undergraduates (Odii et al., 2020; Okah et. al., 2023).

Research suggests that dating and premarital sexual behaviours can influence students' academic performance, although the nature of the influence varies. A study among secondary school students in Kogi State reported that early initiation of sexual intercourse correlates with poor academic performance and increases the likelihood of school dropout, implying that intense romantic/sexual involvement may divert attention from academic responsibilities. Similarly, a study on premarital affairs and academic performance in a Nigerian tertiary institution found that premarital relationships were associated with reduced study time, poor concentration, and lower grades, largely due to the emotional and time demands of such relationships. These studies collectively indicate that when dating and premarital sex are unregulated or emotionally demanding, they can negatively affect time management, focus, and academic outcomes among students.

Beyond academics, dating and premarital sexual behaviours also shape students' emotional wellbeing and interpersonal relationships. Emotional distress, anxiety and depression have been linked to conflict-ridden relationships, sexual coercion, unintended pregnancies, and break-up experiences among university students. In some cases, students who regret or feel guilty about premarital sexual experiences report lowered self-esteem and social isolation, especially in contexts where religious and cultural norms strongly condemn such behaviours (Ajzen, 1991). At the same time, positive, supportive relationships can enhance feelings of belonging, self-worth, and social adjustment, underscoring the dual potential of dating and premarital sex to either support or undermine psychological health. In Nigeria, where social support from family, peers, and peers-in-campus is often limited or inadequate, students may be particularly vulnerable to negative emotional outcomes linked to relationship and sexual experiences (Amaoteng&Kalule-Sabiti, 2016;Omoniyi, 2018).

The way students experience dating and premarital sex can shape their future marital expectations and attitude. Some studies indicate that repeated premarital relationships and early sexual initiation may desensitize young adults to the seriousness of marital commitment, leading to relatively permissive views about infidelity, divorce, and cohabitation. Conversely, students who experience strong conflict, betrayal, or repeated breakup in premarital relationships may develop cautious or even negative views toward marriage, sometimes reporting fear of commitment or low trust in potential partners. In the Nigerian context, where family and religious institutions emphasize marital permanence and fidelity, students' premarital sexual experiences may create tension between their lived realities and the moral expectations they have internalized, influencing how they perceive and prepare for future marriage (Ferguson et al., 2014; Onyeonoro et al., 2018).

Although existing studies in Nigeria document the prevalence, causes, and academic and health implications of premarital sex among tertiary-institution students, there is relatively limited work that focuses explicitly on perceived influence. That is, how students themselves interpret the effects of dating and premarital sexual behaviours on their academic life, emotional wellbeing, relationships, and future marriage. Most prior research tends to emphasize objective outcomes (example, grades, pregnancy rates, HIV risk) rather than subjective perceptions, and few studies have focused specifically on the University of Jos or similar Plateau-State-based contexts. This gap leaves counselors, educators, and university policymakers without rich, locally grounded understanding of how students make sense of their sexual and relational experiences. The present study therefore seeks to fill this gap by

investigating the perceived influence of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduate students of the University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, with a view to informing sexuality education, counselling services, and campus-based interventions that promote healthier and more responsible relationship choices.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study, to:

1. investigate the nature and patterns of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduate students of the University of Jos;
2. explore students' perceptions of the influence of dating and premarital sexual behaviours on their academic performance;
3. identify factors influencing dating and premarital sexual behaviours among the undergraduate students;
4. assess the perceived effects of dating and premarital sexual behaviours on the students;

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered during the course of the study:

1. What are the nature and patterns of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among the undergraduate students of the University of Jos?
2. What factors influence dating and premarital sexual behaviours among the students?
3. What are the perceived effects of dating and premarital sexual behaviours on students?
4. To what extent do dating and premarital sexual behaviours influence students' lives?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to explore the perceived influence of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduate students of the University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The survey design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data on students' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions regarding dating and premarital sexual behaviours within a relatively large and diverse student population.

The population of the study comprised all undergraduate students of the University of Jos registered for the 2024/2025 academic session. The sample consisted of 200 undergraduate students drawn from different faculties and levels of study. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across faculties (example Arts, Social Sciences, Education and Natural Sciences), while simple random sampling was employed within each stratum to select individual respondents. This sampling strategy enhanced the likelihood that the sample accurately reflected the diversity of views and experiences on campus.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Perceived Influence of Dating and Premarital Sexual Behaviour Questionnaire (PIDPSBQ)". The instrument was divided into two sections: Section A: Demographic Information (age, gender, level). Section B: Items measuring: Perceptions of dating and premarital sexual behaviours, factors influencing behaviour, effects on academic, social, and emotional life. The questionnaire

adopted a 4 point scale (example, strongly agree to strongly disagree) for perceptual items, while close-ended items were used for behavioural and demographic questions. The instrument was subjected to content validation by three experts in counselling, educational psychology and research, measurement and evaluation, who reviewed the clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness of the items. A pilot study was conducted with 30 students outside the main sample to refine ambiguous items and to estimate reliability using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded an acceptable internal consistency coefficient of 0.

After obtaining ethical approval and necessary permissions from the University of Jos, the researchers and trained research assistants administered the questionnaire to selected students during designated class periods. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The questionnaires were collected immediately after completion to minimize loss or non-response.

The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics of men and standard deviation, to summarize students' demographic characteristics, patterns of dating and premarital sexual behaviours, and their perceived influence. Qualitative responses from open-ended items were thematically analyzed to deepen understanding of students' personal perceptions and experiences.

Results

Research Question One: What are the nature and patterns of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among the undergraduate students of the University of Jos?

Table 1: Nature and Patterns of Dating and Premarital Sexual Behaviours among the Undergraduate Students

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	N	Mean	Std.	Decision
1.	Dating is a normal part of university life.	49	103	48		200	3.00	.698	Agree
2.	Dating helps students develop emotionally.	39	109	52		200	2.93	.673	Agree
3.	Dating improves social interaction among students.	47	100	53		200	2.97	.708	Agree
4.	Dating distracts students from academic work.	36	110	54		200	2.91	.666	Agree
5.	Students feel pressured to date in the university.	42	100	58		200	2.92	.704	Agree
6.	Dating relationships are necessary for companionship.	56	91	58		200	2.98	.740	Agree
7.	Premarital sex is common among undergraduate	39	104	57		200	2.91	.689	Agree

	students.								
8.	Premarital sex is acceptable among students.	32	105	63		200	2.85	.673	Agree
9.	Cultural values discourage premarital sex.	38	106	56		200	2.91	.681	Agree
10.	Religious beliefs influence students' sexual behaviour.	56	91	58		200	2.98	.740	Agree
11.	Premarital sex is a personal choice.	43	90	67		200	2.88	.734	Agree
12.	Students engage in premarital sex due to curiosity.	41	112	47		200	2.97	.664	Agree

Table 1 shows the result of nature and pattern of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among the undergraduate students of the University of Jos. From the result, all the items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that students agreed to all the items.

Research Question Two: What factors influence dating and premarital sexual behaviours among the undergraduate students of the University of Jos?

Table 2: Students' Perceptions of the Factors Influencing Dating and Premarital Sexual Behaviours among Undergraduate Students University of Jos

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	N	Mean	Std.	Decision
13.	Peer pressure influences students' dating behaviour.	42	107	51		200	2.96	.682	Agree
14.	Social media encourages sexual relationships.	38	95	67		200	2.85	.712	Agree
15.	Financial needs lead students into relationships.	42	91	67		200	2.88	.729	Agree
16.	Lack of parental supervision influences behaviour.	48	99	53		200	2.98	.712	Agree
17.	Campus environment promotes dating and sexual activity.	47	99	54		200	2.97	.712	Agree

18.	Exposure to movies/music influences sexual behaviour.	43	90	67	200	2.88	.734	Agree
Grand Mean						2.9		Agree

Table 2 reveals the result of students' perceptions of the factors influencing dating and premarital sexual behaviours among the undergraduate students of the University of Jos. All the items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that all the listed factors items were perceived to have influence on the students' dating and premarital sexual behaviours since the grand mean is above the criterion mean.

Research Question Three: What are the perceived effects of dating and premarital sexual behaviours on students?

Table 3: Perceived Effects of Dating and Premarital Sexual Behaviours on Students

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	N	Mean	Std.	Decision
19.	Dating negatively affects academic performance.	49	103	48		200	3.00	.698	Agree
20.	Premarital sex exposes students to health risks.	39	109	52		200	2.93	.673	Agree
21.	Dating can provide emotional support.	47	100	53		200	2.97	.708	Agree
22.	Premarital sex can lead to unwanted pregnancy.	36	110	54		200	2.91	.666	Agree
23.	Relationship issues can cause emotional stress.	42	100	58		200	2.92	.704	Agree
24.	Dating improves students' well-being.	56	91	58		200	2.98	.740	Agree
Grand Mean							2.95		Agree

Table 3 indicates the perceived effects of dating and premarital sexual behaviours on the students. All the items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.5 indicating that students agreed to all the listed factors as the perceived effects of dating and premarital sexual behaviours of the students. Since the grand mean of 2.95 is above the criterion mean, it means that the aforementioned are the perceived effects of dating and premarital sexual behaviours on students.

Research Question Four: To what extent do dating and premarital sexual behaviours influence students' lives?

Table 4: Perceived Influence of Dating and Premarital Sexual Behaviours on Students' Lives

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	N	Mean	Std.	Decision
25.	Dating influences students' lifestyle choices.	39	104	57		200	2.91	.698	Agree
26.	Premarital sex affects students' future goals.	32	105	63		200	2.85	.673	Agree
27.	Students are aware of risks but still engage in such behaviours.	38	106	56		200	2.91	.681	Agree
28.	University authorities should address these behaviours.	43	90	67		200	2.88	.734	Agree
29.	More education on sexual behaviour is needed.	41	112	47		200	2.97	.664	Agree
30.	Dating and premarital sex influence students' decision-making.	42	100	58		200	2.92	.704	Agree
Grand Mean							3.63		Agree

Table 4 shows the result on the perceived influence of dating and premarital sexual behaviours on students' lives. From the result, all the items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that students agreed to all the listed items. Since the grand mean of 3.63 is above the criterion mean, it means that all the listed items are the influence of dating and premarital sexual behaviours on students' lives.

Discussion

The study revealed that dating is a common social experience among undergraduate students and is largely perceived as a normal part of campus life. Many respondents indicated that dating provides emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging. This aligns with earlier studies which suggest that young adults engage in dating relationships as part of their psychosocial development and identity formation (Fatusi & Blum, 2008). However, the findings also showed that dating relationships often create pressure to engage in premarital sexual activities, especially where emotional attachment and peer expectations are strong. This finding is also consistent with recent literature indicating that dating and intimate relationships form a significant aspect of youth development and social interaction in Nigerian universities (Odii et al., 2020; Olawade et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the study found that premarital sexual behaviour is prevalent among undergraduates, with varying perceptions regarding its acceptability. This is in agreement with the studies of Eze (2020); Dankishoiya (2015). Some students viewed it as a personal

choice and an expression of love, while others considered it morally inappropriate but still engaged in it due to peer influence, curiosity, and exposure to media. This supports the assertion of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour, which posits that behaviour is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control.

Another important finding is that peer pressure and social environment significantly influence students' sexual decisions. Many respondents reported that friends and campus culture play a major role in shaping their attitudes toward dating and sexual behaviour. This corroborates findings from Bamidele, Abodunrin and Adebimpe (2019), who emphasized the strong role of peer norms in adolescent and youth sexual behaviour.

The study also revealed that engagement in premarital sexual activities is associated with several perceived consequences including emotional distress, regret, unwanted pregnancies, and exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Despite awareness of these risks, some students still engage in such behaviours, suggesting a gap between knowledge and practice. This is consistent with Omoniyi (2018), who noted that awareness alone does not necessarily translate into safe behavioural choices.

Overall, the findings indicate that while dating is widely accepted among undergraduates, it significantly influences premarital sexual behaviour through emotional, social, and environmental factors. This is in agreement with studies such as Fatusi and Blum (2008); Okah et al. (2023) who identified several determinants of premarital sexual behaviour among undergraduates to include socio-economic status, peer group influence, inadequate sexual education, and the increasing role of social media. The interplay of peer influence, personal attitudes, and cultural expectations shapes students' decisions, often leading to risky outcomes despite awareness of potential consequences. The finding also aligns with research which found that social and environmental contexts significantly shape risky sexual behaviours among Nigerian undergraduates (Odii et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The study has shown that dating and premarital sexual behaviours are relatively common among undergraduate students of the University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. These behaviours are perceived to exert both positive and negative influences on their lives. Many students reported that dating provides companionship, emotional support, and social satisfaction. The students also acknowledged that intense or poorly regulated relationships can distract from academic work, lead to emotional distress, and generate conflict in other relationships. Premarital sexual activities were often linked to pleasure and intimacy, yet some students associated them with guilt, anxiety, fear of unintended pregnancy, and worry about sexually transmitted infections, especially when protective measures were not consistently used.

Students' perceptions further revealed that their experiences with dating and premarital sex shape how they view future marriage, with some feeling more cautious about commitment while others hold relatively permissive attitudes towards infidelity and divorce. The findings indicate that, although many students do not equate premarital sex with marital failure the absence of adequate sexuality education and counselling leaves them vulnerable to risky decisions and emotional consequences. Overall, this study underscores that the influence of dating and premarital sexual behaviours among University of Jos undergraduates

is multidimensional, affecting academic engagement, emotional wellbeing, interpersonal relationships, and future marital expectations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The University of Jos should institutionalize regular, evidence-based sexuality-education programmes that address safe sex, consent, emotional regulation, and healthy relationship skills.
2. The University counselling units should intensify efforts to reach students through peer-counselling, drop-in clinics, and anonymous helplines, specifically addressing issues related to dating, premarital sex, unintended pregnancy, and relationship conflict.
3. The University should collaborate with parents, religious bodies, and community organizations to promote consistent messages about responsible sexual behaviour, abstinence where appropriate, and the importance of delaying sexual activity until marriage for those who choose that path.
4. The University should review and update its policies on relationship and sexual health, including clear guidelines on consent, sexual harassment, and support for students who experience relationship-related trauma or unwanted pregnancy.

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