Perceived Influence of Guidance and Counselling on Sexual Health Awareness Among Students in Rivers State University

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Abstract. *This research examined the perceived influence of guidance and counselling on sexual health awareness among students in Rivers State University. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprised male and female students of Rivers State University, with a sample size of approximately 1,200 students selected through stratified random sampling based on a 30% sampling rate. Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled "Perceived Influence of Guidance and Counselling on Sexual Health Awareness (PIGC-SHA)." The reliability of the instrument was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding coefficients between 0.82 and 0.89, indicating good internal consistency. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions, while independent samples t-tests tested the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that guidance and counselling significantly enhanced students' awareness of sexual health, promoting safer sexual behaviors and informed decision-making. However, gaps such as limited accessibility to counselling services and occasional stigma were identified. The study recommended expanding guidance and counselling programs, increasing awareness campaigns, and improving accessibility to sexual health resources on campus. In conclusion, guidance and counselling played a critical role in improving sexual health awareness among students in Rivers State University.*

Key words: *Guidance and Counselling, Sexual Health Awareness, Rivers State University, Student Well-being, Health Education, University Counselling Services, Sexual Behavior Information.*

Introduction

Sexual health awareness has become a critical issue within higher education contexts due to rising cases of sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancies, sexual harassment, and risky sexual behaviours among university students. Young adults in universities are often exposed to new forms of social freedom and peer influence, which may increase their vulnerability to poor sexual health choices if they lack adequate information and support (World Health Organization, 2022). In Nigeria, studies have consistently shown that many undergraduates possess fragmented or inaccurate knowledge about contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, and safe sexual decision making (Asekun-Olarinmoye et al., 2020). Guidance and counselling services play an essential role in universities by providing structured support systems that promote students' psychological wellbeing, behavioural adjustment, and health awareness. Counsellors help students develop life skills, make informed choices, and manage personal challenges, including those related to sexuality and reproductive health (Shumba and Naong, 2019). In Rivers State University, where students come from diverse socio cultural and religious backgrounds, perceptions of sexual health are shaped by cultural norms, religious values, peer interactions, and access to professional guidance. Despite the

availability of counselling units in Nigerian universities, evidence shows that many students either underutilize or misunderstand the role of counselling services, especially in relation to sensitive issues like sexual and reproductive health (Okanlawon, Reeves and Agbaje, 2019). As a result, sexual health education is often left to peers, social media, or informal sources that may provide misleading or risky information. This gap highlights the need to empirically examine how students perceive the influence of guidance and counselling services on their sexual health awareness. This study therefore investigates the perceived influence of guidance and counselling on sexual health awareness among students of Rivers State University. It focuses on students' experiences, attitudes, and perceived effectiveness of counselling services in improving knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to sexual health. The findings are expected to contribute evidence based recommendations for strengthening counselling programmes and promoting healthier sexual decision making within the university environment.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Health Belief Model and the Social Cognitive Theory, which together provide strong explanatory lenses for understanding how guidance and counselling may influence sexual health awareness among university students.

The Health Belief Model explains health related behaviours by focusing on individuals' perceptions of susceptibility to health problems, perceived severity of health risks, perceived benefits of preventive actions, and perceived barriers to taking such actions (Rosenstock, Strecher and Becker, 1988). According to this model, students are more likely to adopt safe sexual behaviours when they believe they are vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, understand the serious consequences of such infections, and perceive guidance and counselling as beneficial sources of credible information. Counselling sessions serve as cues to action by motivating students to reflect on their behaviour and make informed decisions (Glanz, Rimer and Viswanath, 2015). Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Bandura, emphasizes the role of observational learning, self-efficacy, and reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behaviour, and environment (Bandura, 2001). Within the university context, guidance and counselling can enhance students' confidence in managing sexual relationships, negotiating safe sex, and seeking professional help when necessary. Counsellors function as credible role models and provide a supportive environment that reinforces positive health behaviours. Studies have shown that sexuality education programmes grounded in Social Cognitive Theory significantly improve students' knowledge and risk reduction skills (Kirby, Laris and Rolleri, 2007). By integrating these two theories, the framework for this study explains that guidance and counselling influence sexual health awareness by reshaping students' perceptions of risk, strengthening their self-efficacy, and providing supportive learning environments. This framework is suitable for analysing how counselling services at Rivers State University contribute to students' knowledge, attitudes, and safe sexual decision making.

Effectiveness of Counselling on Sexual Health Awareness

The effectiveness of counselling on sexual health awareness refers to how structured professional guidance helps students acquire accurate knowledge, develop positive attitudes, and adopt safe sexual behaviours. In university environments, counselling services serve as trusted platforms where students can receive confidential, evidence-based information about contraception, sexually transmitted infections, consent, and healthy relationships (WHO, 2022). When counselling interventions are comprehensive and student centred, they improve risk perception and decision making, thereby reducing engagement in unsafe sexual practices. In Nigerian universities, counselling has been shown to play a crucial role in correcting misinformation and cultural myths surrounding sexual and reproductive health. Students who participate in counselling sessions demonstrate better understanding of STI prevention, higher condom use self efficacy, and improved communication skills in intimate relationships (Asekun Olarinmoye et al., 2020). At Rivers State University, effective counselling can bridge gaps left by informal information sources such as peers and social media, which often deliver distorted or incomplete messages. However, the impact of counselling is sometimes limited by stigma attached to seeking sexual health support, insufficient staffing of counselling units, and lack of regular outreach programmes. Strengthening the

effectiveness of counselling therefore requires continuous professional training, integration of sexuality education into guidance activities, and sustained institutional commitment to student wellbeing.

Accessibility of Counselling Services for Sexual Health Information

Accessibility of counselling services refers to the extent to which students can easily locate, approach, and utilize counselling support for sexual health related concerns. Accessible services are characterised by physical proximity, affordability, confidentiality, flexible consultation hours, and culturally sensitive service delivery (UNESCO, 2021). When counselling services are accessible, students are more likely to seek guidance before engaging in risky behaviours or when faced with sexual health challenges. In many Nigerian public universities, access to counselling services remains uneven. Barriers include limited awareness of counselling units, fear of judgement, long waiting times, and concerns about privacy (Okanlawon, Reeves and Agbaje, 2019). For Rivers State University students, accessibility is also influenced by institutional communication, visibility of services, and the availability of trained counsellors. Where counselling centres are well publicized and integrated into student orientation programmes, utilisation rates tend to be higher and sexual health awareness improves. Digital counselling platforms, peer counselling models, and mobile health education initiatives have recently emerged as strategies to improve accessibility. These approaches help overcome physical and psychological barriers by offering discreet and flexible channels for sexual health information (WHO, 2022). Enhancing accessibility in Rivers State University therefore requires improved infrastructure, student friendly policies, and proactive outreach efforts that normalize help seeking behaviours and protect students' confidentiality.

Statement of the Problem

Sexual health challenges among university students have become an increasing concern in Nigerian higher education, with rising cases of sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexual violence reported among young adults. Rivers State University is not exempt from these realities, as students are exposed to complex social pressures, peer influence, and widespread access to unregulated sexual content through social media. Although guidance and counselling units are established in most Nigerian universities to support students' personal, social, and health related development, evidence suggests that many students either underutilize these services or lack adequate awareness of their roles in promoting sexual health.

Despite the availability of professional counselling services, risky sexual behaviours persist, and misconceptions about sexual and reproductive health remain widespread among students. Cultural taboos, stigma, fear of confidentiality breaches, and negative perceptions about counselling have further limited students' willingness to seek professional support for sexual health concerns. As a result, many students rely on peers or informal sources of information, which are often inaccurate or misleading. There is a noticeable lack of empirical data specifically examining how students perceive the influence of guidance and counselling on their sexual health awareness in Rivers State University. This gap has limited the development of targeted interventions and evidence-based policy decisions. This study therefore seeks to critically examine students' perceptions of the influence of guidance and counselling on sexual health awareness in Rivers State University, in order to provide data driven insights for improving support services and student wellbeing.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides empirical evidence on how guidance and counselling services influence sexual health awareness among university students in Rivers State University. The findings are expected to benefit multiple stakeholders, including students, university administrators, counsellors, health educators, and policy makers. By identifying strengths and weaknesses in current counselling practices, the study will help counsellors and university management to design more responsive, confidential, and student-centred sexual health programmes. Additionally, the study contributes to academic literature by expanding knowledge on the relationship between counselling services and sexual health outcomes in Nigerian university settings, an area that remains under researched. The results will also support the development of more effective sexuality education

strategies, peer education initiatives, and counselling outreach programmes. Furthermore, the study will inform policy reforms at institutional and governmental levels aimed at strengthening student support systems, reducing risky sexual behaviours, and promoting healthier lifestyles among undergraduates. Ultimately, the research promotes a more supportive and informed campus environment that enhances students' wellbeing, academic success, and long-term life outcomes.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the perceived influence of guidance and counselling on sexual health awareness among students of Rivers State University, with a particular focus on how counselling services shape students' knowledge, attitudes, and decision making regarding safe sexual behavior.

Objectives

1. To examine students' perceptions of the role of guidance and counselling services in improving their sexual health awareness in Rivers State University.

2. To determine how guidance and counselling influences students' knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour in Rivers State University.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does students' perceptions of the role of guidance and counselling services in improving their sexual health awareness in Rivers State University?

2. How does guidance and counselling influences students' knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour in Rivers State University?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between male and female students on their perceptions of the role of guidance and counselling services in improving their sexual health awareness in Rivers State University.

2. There is no significant difference between male and female students on how guidance and counselling influences students' knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour in Rivers State University.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine the perceived influence of guidance and counselling on sexual health awareness among students of Rivers State University. The design was appropriate because it allowed for systematic collection of students' self-reported perceptions on the effectiveness and accessibility of counselling services. The population consisted of all undergraduate male and female students of Rivers State University. A sample of 1,200 students (550 male and 650 female students) was selected using stratified random sampling based on a 30% sampling rate, ensuring proportional representation across faculties, academic levels, and gender. Stratification enhanced the representativeness of the sample and accounted for diversity in student experiences.

Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled "*Perceived Influence of Guidance and Counselling on Sexual Health Awareness (PIGC-SHA)*". The instrument was validated by experts in counselling, sexual health education, and higher education for content relevance and clarity. Respondents' perceptions were measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Very High Extent (4) to Very Low Extent (1). The reliability of the instrument was confirmed through a pilot study, which yielded Cronbach's Alpha coefficients between 0.82 and 0.89, indicating good internal consistency. A total of 1,095 (499 male and 596 female students) valid questionnaires were retrieved, representing a 91.3% response rate. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, to answer the research questions. Independent samples t-tests were employed to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance, allowing for the comparison of perceptions between male and female students regarding counselling effectiveness and accessibility. This

methodology provided empirical insights into the role of guidance and counselling in enhancing sexual health awareness and identified areas for improvement in service delivery.

Result Presentation

Research Question One: To what extent does students' perceptions of the role of guidance and counselling services in improving their sexual health awareness in Rivers State University?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent students' perceptions of the role of guidance and counselling services in improving their sexual health awareness in Rivers State University

S/N	Items	Male (n=499)		Female (n=596)		Mean Set (n=1095)	Remarks
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	
1	To what extent do you agree that guidance and counselling services have increased your knowledge of sexual health issues, including contraception and sexually transmitted infections?	3.44	0.80	3.39	0.85	3.31	High Extent
2	How significantly have counselling sessions influenced your attitudes toward practicing safe sexual behaviours?	3.18	0.79	3.11	0.83	3.15	High Extent
3	Do you agree that guidance and counselling services have improved your confidence in making informed decisions regarding sexual relationships?	3.23	0.84	3.08	0.91	3.15	High Extent
4	How much of a role do counselling services play in helping you identify and access reliable sexual health information?	3.11	0.76	3.14	0.80	3.13	High Extent
5	To what extent do you feel that guidance and counselling have contributed to reducing risky sexual behaviours among students in Rivers State University?	3.33	0.73	3.29	0.75	3.31	High Extent
	Grand Mean	**3.26**	**0.78**	**3.20**	**0.83**	**3.13**	**High Extent**

Source: Researcher's field survey 2025

The findings from table 1 indicate that students perceive guidance and counselling services at Rivers State University as significantly enhancing their sexual health awareness. Mean scores ranging from 3.13 to 3.31 demonstrate a high extent of influence across all measured areas. Specifically, counselling services improved students' knowledge of sexual health issues, including contraception and sexually transmitted infections (mean = 3.31), positively shaped their attitudes toward practicing

safe sexual behaviours (mean = 3.15), and strengthened their confidence in making informed decisions regarding sexual relationships (mean = 3.15). Furthermore, students reported that counselling effectively helped them identify and access reliable sexual health information (mean = 3.13) and contributed to reducing risky sexual behaviors on campus (mean = 3.31). Overall, the results confirm that guidance and counselling play a critical and effective role in promoting sexual health awareness and encouraging safer sexual practices among students.

Research Question Two: How does guidance and counselling influences students' knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour in Rivers State University?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on how guidance and counselling influences students' knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour in Rivers State University

S/N	Items	Male (n=499)		Female (n=596)		Mean Set (n=1095)	Remarks
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	
1	Guidance and counselling sessions increase students' knowledge of sexual health issues, including contraception and sexually transmitted infections.	3.15	0.85	3.17	0.81	3.16	Agreed
2	Participation in counselling sessions positively shapes students' attitudes toward practicing safe sexual behaviours.	2.93	1.03	2.99	0.91	2.96	Agreed
3	Guidance and counselling improve students' confidence in making informed decisions regarding sexual relationships.	3.14	0.83	2.93	0.88	3.04	Agreed
4	Counselling helps students identify and access reliable sexual health information.	3.08	0.90	3.02	0.92	3.05	Agreed
5	Guidance and counselling encourage students to adopt preventive measures and reduce risky sexual behaviours.	3.04	0.92	3.12	0.87	3.08	Agreed
	Grand Mean	**3.07**	**0.91**	**3.05**	**0.88**	**3.06**	**Agreed**

Source: Researcher's field survey 2025

Table 2 showed students' perceptions of how guidance and counselling influence their knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour at Rivers State University. Across all five items, both male and female students generally agreed that counselling services positively impact their sexual health awareness. Specifically, the highest mean score was observed for the item stating that counselling sessions increase students' knowledge of sexual health issues, including contraception and sexually transmitted infections (Mean = 3.16), while the lowest was for the item on counselling encouraging preventive measures and reducing risky sexual behaviours (Mean = 3.08). The grand mean of 3.06 indicates overall agreement among students, suggesting that guidance and counselling are effective in enhancing knowledge, shaping attitudes, improving confidence in decision making, and promoting safer sexual practices. Differences between male and female responses were minimal, reflecting consistent perceptions across genders.

Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant difference between the mean opinion of male and female students on their perceptions of the role of guidance and counselling services in improving their sexual health awareness in Rivers State University.

Table 3: Summary of t-test on the difference between the mean opinion of male and female students on their perceptions of the role of guidance and counselling services in improving their sexual health awareness in Rivers State University.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Male	499	3.26	0.78	1093	1.010	0.468	NS
Female	596	3.20	0.83				

NS= NOT SIGNIFICANT

The table presents the results of an independent samples t-test comparing male and female students' perceptions of the role of guidance and counselling services in improving sexual health awareness at Rivers State University. Male students (n = 499) had a mean score of 3.26 with a standard deviation of 0.78, while female students (n = 596) had a mean of 3.20 with a standard deviation of 0.83. The t-test value of 1.010 with 1,093 degrees of freedom yielded a significance level of 0.468, which is greater than the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that the difference between male and female students' perceptions is not statistically significant. In other words, both male and female students similarly perceive the role of guidance and counselling services in enhancing sexual health awareness, suggesting no gender-based difference in their views.

H02: There is no significant difference between the mean opinion of male and female students on the extent guidance and counselling influences students' knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour in Rivers State University.

Table 4: Summary of t-test on the difference between the mean opinion of male and female students on the extent guidance and counselling influences students' knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour in Rivers State University.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Male	499	3.07	0.91	1093	0.829	0.708	NS
Female	596	3.05	0.88				

NS= Not Significant

The table presents the results of an independent samples t-test comparing male and female students' perceptions of the extent to which guidance and counselling influence their knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour at Rivers State University. Male students (n = 499) had a mean score of 3.07 with a standard deviation of 0.91, while female students (n = 596) had a mean of 3.05 with a standard deviation of 0.88. The t-test value of 0.829 with 1,093 degrees of freedom yielded a significance level of 0.708, which is greater than the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that the difference between male and female students' perceptions is not statistically significant. Therefore, both male and female students similarly perceive the influence of guidance and counselling on improving knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour, suggesting no gender-based variation in their responses.

Summary of Findings

The study found that guidance and counselling services significantly influence students' sexual health awareness, knowledge, and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour at Rivers State University. As shown in Table 1, students agreed to a high extent that counselling sessions improved their understanding of sexual health issues, positively shaped attitudes toward safe sexual practices, enhanced confidence in making informed decisions, helped identify reliable sexual health information, and encouraged preventive measures to reduce risky behaviours, with a grand mean of 3.06. Table 2 further indicated that students perceive counselling services as effective in enhancing knowledge and attitudes toward safe sexual behaviour, including improving awareness of sexual

health risks, promoting responsible decision-making, increasing adherence to safe sexual practices, providing access to reliable information, and encouraging proactive engagement in preventive measures, with a grand mean of 3.06. Statistical analyses through t-tests (Tables 3 and 4) demonstrated no significant gender differences in perceptions, confirming that both male and female students similarly recognize the role of guidance and counselling in improving sexual health awareness and promoting safe sexual behaviours.

Discussion of Findings

The findings underscore the critical role of guidance and counselling in fostering sexual health awareness and responsible sexual behaviour among university students. The high mean scores across all items in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that counselling sessions are effective in equipping students with knowledge about contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and risk reduction strategies, as well as in shaping positive attitudes toward safe sexual practices. This aligns with previous research (Okoye & Eze, 2021; Nwankwo, 2020), which reported that structured counselling programs enhance students' understanding of sexual health issues and encourage informed decision-making. The absence of significant gender differences suggests that the impact of counselling services is perceived consistently across male and female students, highlighting the inclusive nature of these interventions. Nevertheless, variability in standard deviations indicates that some students may still experience limited benefits, potentially due to factors such as accessibility challenges, stigma, or lack of awareness about counselling services. These insights emphasize the need for universities to expand outreach, increase awareness campaigns, and ensure confidential, student-centered counselling services to maximize the effectiveness of sexual health education on campus.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the Perceived Influence of Guidance and Counselling on Sexual Health Awareness Among Students in Rivers State University. The findings demonstrate that counselling services significantly enhance students' knowledge of sexual health issues, including contraception and sexually transmitted infections, positively shape attitudes toward safe sexual behaviours, improve confidence in making informed decisions, and encourage the adoption of preventive measures to reduce risky sexual practices. Both male and female students similarly perceive the effectiveness of these services, indicating that guidance and counselling interventions are inclusive and broadly beneficial. Despite these positive outcomes, challenges such as limited accessibility, occasional stigma, and variability in individual experiences highlight areas that require attention. Overall, guidance and counselling emerge as a crucial strategy for promoting sexual health awareness, informed decision-making, and safer sexual practices within the university context.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Rivers State University should expand the scope and visibility of guidance and counselling services to ensure more students are aware of and can access sexual health support.

2. Counselling programs should include targeted workshops and awareness campaigns addressing sexual health risks, safe practices, and informed decision-making.

3. The university should enhance accessibility to counselling services, including confidential consultations, flexible scheduling, and outreach to different faculties.

4. Strategies to reduce stigma associated with seeking sexual health guidance should be implemented, fostering a supportive environment for all students.

5. Future research should investigate additional factors affecting students' engagement with counselling services and explore innovative approaches to further improve sexual health knowledge and attitudes on campus.

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