

## Perceptions of tertiary students on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDS) using condoms -a case study of students of Tamale campus of the University for Development Studies

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### Abstract

**The purpose** of the study was to evaluate tertiary student's sexual behaviour and their knowledge and attitudes towards STDs, among students of University for Development Studies (UDS).

**The research design:** data was collected by using a quantitative survey using self-answered questionnaire, from a sample of one hundred and thirty-four (n=134) out of a total student population of 3,881, using the simple random sampling technique in the data gathering process.

**Results/findings:** out of the sample size of 134 students aged 15-44, 46.3% were males and 53.7% were females. About 24.6%, (n=33) have ever had sex without a condom. The study revealed that 99.3% ever heard of STDs, 85.1% had either below or average knowledge about the causes of STDs, 55.2% had knowledge above average on the prevention of STDs and more than 90% of the student sampled indicated that STDs are very common. Interestingly, 6.7% of the sampled population said STDs are mainly female infections.

**Recommendations:** There is need for wider education at various levels of the educational system on STDs by health care providers, and effective collaboration among health care providers, social activists, NGOs and tertiary students to promote peer education on STDs prevention among students.

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### I. Introduction and background of the study area

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are infections acquired mainly (about 95%) through unprotected hetero or homo sexual activities of persons and include HIV/AIDs, gonorrhoea, syphilis, hepatitis B, among others. STDs are predominant among the youth aged 16-25 years (Ghana Education Service, 2008) who fall within the more sexually active age bracket, of which majority are tertiary students.

The School of Medicine and Health sciences is the Tamale campus and the latest amongst the three campuses of University for Development Studies to be established. It has a total student population of 3,881 who are pursuing various undergraduate and postgraduate programmes from all parts of Ghana and other neighbouring countries.

Due to inadequate hostel facilities on campus, majority of the students stay in rented accommodation within a nearby suburb of Tamale called Dungu.

### II. Problem statement

The increasing prevalence rate of STDs such as HIV/AIDs among the age group of 20-25 years (WHO, 2011) is a threat to future workforce of this nation and therefore calls for proper understanding of factors contributing to this trend. With an increasing number of people living with STDs, tertiary students are categorised as highly vulnerable group for the disease.

Additionally, the use of preventive measures against STDs infection by the youth is said to be significantly low (WHO, 2010). As majority of tertiary students are in this youthful category, it is necessary to know their understanding and knowledge of this menace; and more importantly their attitudes and perception towards STDs in general. Do they have enough information about the way STDs are transmitted, treated, and how those known to be infected are treated by people around them? Again, is STDs viewed as a disease of a given group of people with a particular social class?

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Hence, this study is designed to assess all these factors for a better guidance and planning in curbing the menace among the youth in tertiary schools in Ghana.

**Aims/objectives**

The general aim and purpose of the study was to evaluate tertiary student’s sexual behaviour through their knowledge and attitudes towards STDs. Specifically the study aimed set out to” assess the knowledge level of students about STDs, evaluate their sexual behaviour, assess their perception and attitude towards the use of condoms against STDs.

**III. Materials and methods**

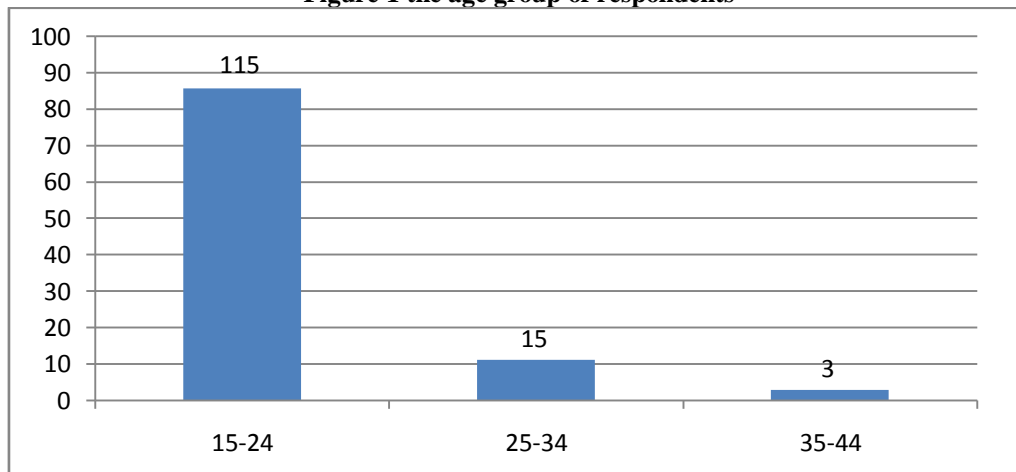
One hundred and thirty four (134) students of the School of Medicine and Health Sciences of UDS were used. A cross sectional survey was used in the data gathering process. Permission to conduct the survey was granted in accordance with the requirements of the University ethical standards. The sample comprised 150 students, of which 16 students did not respond, thus bringing the sample to 134, (62 males and 72 females). The questionnaires were distributed by the researchers to the students at random. A self-administered, English language questionnaire in the English language comprising mainly multiple-choice items was developed for the students using a random sampling technique.

The data gathered was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 12) and checks performed to ensure accuracy. Frequencies were assessed for each question to verify that responses were within the defined range of possible values. Incorrect entries were examined and verified against the original questionnaires. In addition all missing responses were recorded and checked against the original questionnaire.

**IV. Results**

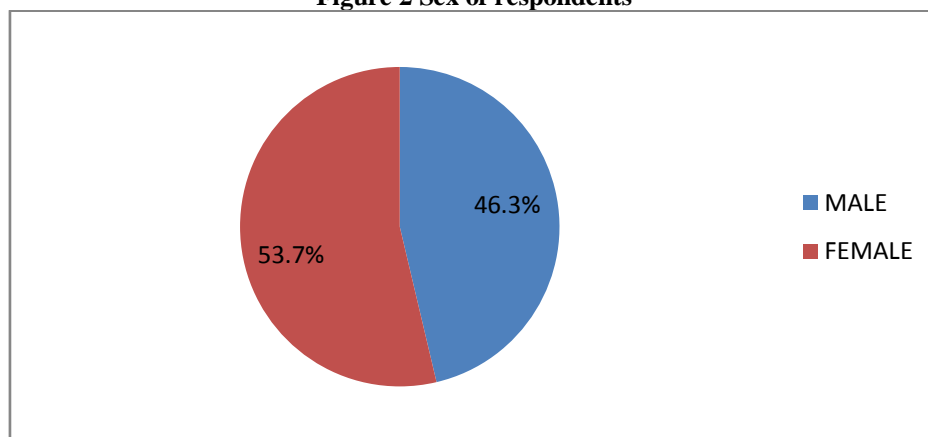
Demographic data

**Figure 1 the age group of respondents**



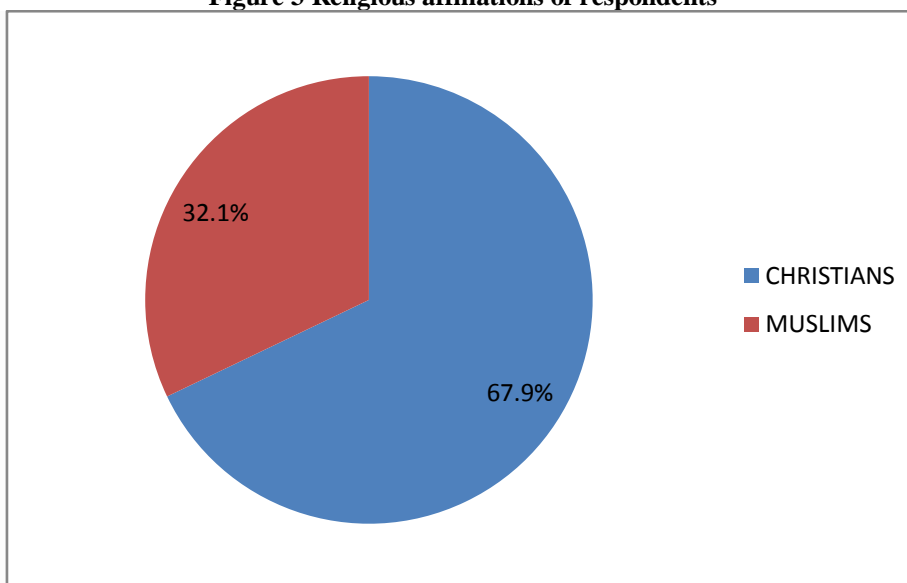
This distribution clearly shows that most of the students in the tertiary institution are in their adolescent and early adulthood.

**Figure 2 Sex of respondents**



Majority of the respondents were females (72 representing 53.7%) and males (62 representing 46.3%)

**Figure 3 Religious affiliations of respondents**



Most of the respondents interviewed are religiously affiliated to Christianity (n=91 representing 67.9%) and Muslim (n=43 representing 32.1%).

**Assessment of knowledge level**

**Table 1 Distribution of respondents who ever heard of STDs**

OPTIONS	FREQUENCES	PERCENTAGE
YES	133	99.3%
NO	1	0.7%
TOTAL	134	100%

From the table above, almost all the respondents have ever heard of the term STDs (n=133, 99.3%). This shows that at least respondents have some information about STDs. Majority said their source of information was through radio/television, public lectures, friends and families and from the hospital. Table 2 below presents a summary of the sources where respondents had their information about STDs

**Table 2 Distribution of source of information about STDs**

SOURCE	FRIQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Radio/Television	65	48.5
Hospital	10	7.5
Family/ Friends	19	14.2
Public lecture	40	29.9

**Causes of STDs**

Under the assessment of the knowledge level of respondents about the causative organisms of STDs, three correct causes were listed for respondents to tick those they think are correct. We assessed them by grading the number of correct answer they had into “below average”, “average” and “above average”.

- Virus
- Bacteria
- Parasite

A student who ticks only one of the above is graded as below average, one who ticks two is average and one who ticks all the three is above average in terms of knowledge about the causes of STDs.

**Table 3 Distribution of knowledge on causative organisms of STDs**

SCORE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES (%)
BELOW AVERAGE	75	56
AVERAGE	43	32.1
ABOVE AVERAGE	16	11.9

From the Table above, (n=75, 56%) ticked only one among the causative organisms listed and for that matter they were graded as having knowledge below average. (n=43, 32.1%) have average knowledge about the causes of STDs and (n=16, 11.9%) have knowledge above average relating to the causes of STDs.

The findings of this study indicated that knowledge about the causes of STDs were very poor among tertiary students. 85.1% of the tertiary students had either below or average knowledge about the causes of STDs.

**Preventive measures of STDs**

Under the assessment of the knowledge level of respondents about the preventive measures of STDs, three correct measures were listed for respondents to tick those they think are correct. We assessed them by grading the number of correct answers they had into the categories: “below average”, “average” and “above average”.

**Table 4 Distribution of preventive measures of STDS**

SCORE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES (%)
BELOW AVERAGE	12	9.0
AVERAGE	48	35.8
ABOVE AVERAGE	74	55.2

From Table 4 above, (n=12, 9.0%) ticked only one among the preventive measures listed and for that matter they were graded as having knowledge below average. (n=48, 35.8%) have average knowledge about the preventive measures of STDs and (n=74, 55.2%) have knowledge above average relating to the prevention of STDs.

The findings indicated that knowledge about the prevention of STDs were averagely good among tertiary students. Only 9.0% of the tertiary students had little knowledge about the prevention of STDs.

**Table 5 Distribution of number of sex partners**

Category	Frequency	percentage
Single sex partner	37	27.6%
Multiple sex partners	17	12.7%
Do not have sex partner	80	59.7%
Total respondents	134	100%

Under the assessment of practice and attitude, respondents were asked to indicate the number of sex partners they have had in the last 12 months. This was put under three (3) categories; single sex partner (n=37, 27.6%), multiple sex partners (n=17, 12.7%) and those who do not have sex partners (n=80, 59.7%). 12.7% of tertiary students have multiple sexual partners. The table 5 above summarized this information.

**Table 6 Distribution of sex without condom use**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
YES	33	24.6%
NO	77	57.5%
NEVER HAD SEX	24	17.9%
TOTAL RESPONSE	134	100%

Respondents were asked if they have ever had sex without the use of a condom. This was discussed under three categories; “YES” (n=33, 24.6%) “NO” (n=77, 57.5%) and “HAVE NEVER HAD SEX” (n=24, 17.9%). This clearly shows that 24.6% of tertiary students still indulge in risky sexual behaviours without using condoms as protective measure against sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

**Table 7 Distribution of how often condom is used**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Always	25	18.7%
Only at the beginning of a relationship	4	3.0%
Sometimes	6	4.5%
Only when I don't know my partner well	11	8.2%
Never	34	25.4%
Missing system	54	40.3%

In an attempt to know the attitude of students toward the use of condoms and the risk of contracting STDs without the use of condoms, They were asked to tick options provided for them as to whether they use condoms always, sometimes, only at the beginning of a relationship, only when the partner is not well known or never use condom at all. Data presented in the table above showed that only 18.7% of the study population use condoms always and 25.4% never used condom when having sex. Majority of the respondents (40.3%) failed to declare their stands with regard to condom use.

**Table 8 Distribution of risk of getting STDs**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	23	17.2%
NO	96	71.6%
MISSING	15	11.2%

An attempt was made to draw a relationship between poor attitude towards condom use and risk of contacting STDs. The table above showed that 71.6% of the respondents indicated not at risk of acquiring STDs. 17.2% of the respondents are at risk of contracting the infection.

**Table 9 Distribution of category of people respondents will confide in if infected with STDS**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Mother	17	12.7%
Father	6	4.5%
Sex partner	29	21.1%
Health worker	57	42.5%
No one	25	18.7%

Respondents were asked about who they will confide in if infected with STDs? Majority (42.5%) indicated that they will consult a health worker, followed by 21.6% who will discuss it with their partners. However, 18.7% of respondents indicated that they will keep the problem to themselves.

**Table10 Distribution of choice of treatment**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Hospital	119	88.8%
Drug store	4	3%
Traditional healers	7	5.2%
Live without treatment	4	3%

Table 10 above presents a summary of where to seek treatment when infected with STDs. Results showed that 88.8% of respondents will seek treatment at the hospital. 5.2% said they will seek treatment from the traditional healers while 3% prefers going the drug stores for treatment. 3% said they will live without treatment.

**Table 11 Distribution of stigmatizing those infected with STDs**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	6	4.5%
Disagree	124	92.5%
Missing	4	3%

The table 11 above indicates that 92.5% of respondents disagree with the stigmatisation of those who are infected with STDs. those who agrees with the statement are 4.5% and those who did not declare their stands are 3%.

**Table 12 distribution of STDS patients involved in indiscriminate sex**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
AGREE	31	23.1%
DISAGREE	98	73.1%
MISSING	5	3.8%

Table 12 above indicates that majority (73.1%) did not agree to the statement that those infected with STDs are involved in indiscriminate sex. 23.1% support the statement that those who are infected with STDs are involved in indiscriminate sex.

**Table13 Distribution of what to do if a friend is infected with STDs**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Support him/her to get treatment	126	94.1%
Abandon to deal with his/her problem	1	0.7%
Let everyone know his/her condition	2	1.5%
Not answered	5	3.7%

Table13 above seek to find out respondents attitude toward friends who are infected with STDs. Majority 94.1% indicated that they will support their friends to get treatment. Those who think of letting every-one know about their friends condition are 1.5% and 0.7% of the respondents said they will abandon their friends to deal with their own problem. 3.7% of the respondents did not answer this question.

**Table14 Distribution of how common STDS are**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	116	86.5%
No	12	9%
Not answered	6	4.5%

Table 14 above presents a summary of response as to whether STDs are common or not. Majority of the respondents 86.5% indicated that STDs are common followed by 9% who thinks that STDs are not common. 4.5% of the respondents did not answer this question.

## **V. Conclusion/recommendation**

The study shows that majority of the respondents were between the ages of 15-24. This phenomenon is common among under graduate students since most of them came straight from SHS.

The results from the study also indicates that majority of students have heard of STDs. Only less than 1% of the studied population never heard of STDs. Respondents also indicated that their source of information was from radio/television (48.5%) followed by public lecture 29.9%, then friends and family (14.2%). The least source of information about STDs was from hospitals (7.5%). This shows that radio and TV can be the best media when giving information about STDs.

The results in this study pointed out that 56% of students in tertiary institutions are graded as having knowledge below average followed 32.1% who have average knowledge then 11.9% who have knowledge above average relating to the causative organisms implicated in STDs.

The findings of this study indicated that knowledge about the prevention of STDs were averagely good (91.0%) among tertiary students. Only 9.0% of the tertiary students had little knowledge about the prevention of STDs.

The results in this study also pointed out that 40.3% of students in the tertiary institution are sexually active with 27.6% having single sex partners and 12.7% are having multiple sex partners . Interestingly, those who do not have sex partners are 59.7%.More so, 25.4% of tertiary students indulge in sex without the use of condom. 18.7% use condom always, 11.2% use condom only at the beginning of a relationship when partner is not well known. 40.3% never declared their stand; possibly they could be among the 59.7% who do not have sex partners.

The results in the study revealed that only 17.2% of respondents indicated they are at risk of acquiring STDs. However, 24.6% of tertiary students indulge in sex without the use of condom. The reason could be that they are faithful to their partners.

Revelation from the study shows that 42.5% indicated that they will consult a health worker, when infected with STDs followed by 21.6% who will discuss it with their partners. However, 18.7% of respondents indicated that they will keep the problem to themselves for fear of being stigmatized.

Another revelation from the study showed that 88.8% of respondents sought treatment at the hospital because they found the health facility safer, reliable and professional in administering care. 5.2% said they will seek treatment from the traditional healers because of privacy, quick and complete cure, while 3% prefers going to the drug stores for treatment because of privacy and good customer care. 3% said they will live without treatment because they prefer to die with the condition than to have it known to others.

The percentage of tertiary students who disagree with stigmatization of those infected with STDs is 92.5% with their reasons being that everybody could be at risk of contracting the disease. Those who agree are 4.5% with their reason being that it is only those who involved in indiscriminate sex could be infected. 3% did not declare their stand.

Results from study indicate that 73.1% did not agree to the statement that those infected with STDs involved in indiscriminate sex with the reason being that the tendency of one partner not being faithful to the other could be the cause. The percentage who supports the statement is 23.1% with their reason being that is a punishment from God.

Another results indicated that 94.1% of tertiary students will support their friends to get treatment. Those who think of letting every-one know about their friend's condition are 1.5% and 0.7% of students will abandon their friends to deal with their own problem. 3.7% of the respondents did not answer this question.

The study shows 86.5% of tertiary students believe that STDs are common, followed by 9% who thinks that STDs are not common. 6% of the respondents did not answer this question.

## **Conclusion**

Data analysed from the study showed that 40.3% of tertiary students are sexually active with 24.6% indulge in sex without the use of condom. It also revealed that only 18.7% use condom always. This is a challenge that calls for greater collaboration among health care providers and tertiary students to ensure that condom usage is increased among students as long as they engage in active sexual relations.

### **Recommendation**

Based on key conclusions that emanated from the study two recommendations are made. First Government stake-holders and NGOs interested in STDs prevention or treatment should always rely on radio or TV as a medium of getting information about STDs to everyone. Secondly, health care providers especially those working in the Reproductive Care Unit should ensure that education on condom use and its application is strengthened. And they should also ensure that condoms are always available, accessible, and affordable. They should also ensure that students are motivated to use them.

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