



Health and Safety Trepidations of the Emerging Culture of Transactional Hookup in Nigeria

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Abstract. Transactional hookups are among the emerging public health threats worldwide. Its prevalence, particularly in developing nations such as Nigeria, has become a source of concern due to its attendant health and safety implications for the nation's population, predominantly among the young generation. However, the quest for material and non-material rewards linked with the hookup culture fuelled by risk factors such as poverty, peer influence and social media, including personal factors, often reinforces and beclouds participants' judgment of the significant long-term health and safety risks. The aftermath of such behaviour culminates in STIs, emotional and social risk, psychological regrets, and femicide linked with transactional hookup relationships. While it may be entirely impossible to eliminate transactional hookup culture, this paper stressed the need for interventional strategies focused on all-inclusive sexuality education, peer-led enlightenment campaigns, economic empowerment of youths through soft loans and entrepreneurial training, particularly for young women, including leveraging legal and institutional frameworks geared towards taming sexual exploitation and ritual femicide.

Keywords: Health and Safety Trepidations, Emerging Culture, Hookups, Transactional hookups.

1. Introduction

Sexual behaviour typically emerges and becomes more prominent as humans reach puberty and attain sexual maturity. Meston and Buss (2007) noted that humans primarily engage in sexual intimacy for four main reasons: "physical (such as stress reduction, pleasure, physical desirability and attention seeking), goal attainment (such as reproduction, resources, social status,), emotional (such as for love and compassion) and insecurity such as self-esteem boost, duty/pressure" (p.499). The goal attainment rationale entails the use of sex for resources and social status, among others. This social exchange

behaviour has a long-standing history; however, the modus operandi has advanced dramatically in recent decades, with a rapid shift from social contact previously confined to physical contact and negotiation of transactional sex in brothels, lodges/hotels, and nightlife venues to virtual platforms where casual sexual intimacy is solicited and negotiated through keystrokes of smartphones.

Hookup culture is a social atmosphere which supports the propagation of casual sex and uncommitted relationships. Although it is a major social phenomenon, studies have documented regional and national differences in its prevalence. This variation is largely contingent on the countries' economic development. For instance, Krisch et al. (2019) affirmed a higher prevalence of exchanging sex for resources or benefits in less economically advanced countries compared to economically developed nations, where such activities are at their lowest ebb. Moreover, disparity in this exchange has been documented concerning gender; as females demonstrated more inclination to sell sex in poor nations, whereas males were prone to selling sex in economically advanced nations. This observed difference in the pattern of sexual exchanges suggests that young women in developing nations may be tempted by high rates of poverty arising from gender inequalities and limited economic prospects for women and girls (Alliance Reproductive Health Right [ARHR], 2024). This assertion was evident in a survey, which indicated a prevalence of nearly 52% of transactional sex among female adolescents and young women (UNAIDS, 2018). Startlingly, even some married women have been linked to participating in the hookup business, including the sales of nudity for money (Ayodele et al., 2025).

Over the years, intellectuals have elucidated the differences between prostitution and transactional hookups. While both forms of sexual behaviours fall within the purview of commercialised sex, the latter is considered a subtle commercialised sex

characterised by anonymity and attenuated stigma (Ayodele et al., 2025). Since hookups may be indirectly or socially negotiated rather than openly priced. In Nigeria, a lot of transactional hookups usually operate in furtive manners from homes, campuses, through virtual platforms and messaging apps, hence giving room for anonymity and reduced stigma.

The preponderance of transactional hookup culture in modern times has attracted considerable attention from the public, including widely held media outlets, which lament the increasing spate of indulgence of younger generations in casual sex, particularly among tertiary institution students. For instance, a survey highlighted a diminution in the age of first sexual experience, and an increase in the number of sexual partners, including a rise in the frequency of young people participating in premarital sex (Techasrivichien, 2016). This emerging sexual behaviour has been linked to the self-autonomy and negation of social control from families and other social institutions (Caltabiano et al, 2020). Thus, unlike in the past, where young people were prohibited from openly expressing their sexual behaviour due to religious and cultural restrictions, modern-day adolescents and young adults express their sexual behaviours in different ways with minimal consideration of any societal or family perception or consequences.

Historically, hookup dates back to the 1920s, particularly during the era of the automobile and cinema boom, which created opportunities for young adults to experience life outside the home for social activities without parental supervision. It, however, came to the fore during the women's emancipation and birth-control revolutions of the 1960s (Garcia, 2012). Women now develop self-awareness and freedom to explore and assert themselves.

Various scholars have defined hookup from different dimensions; for instance, Garcia (2012) described hookup as short-term sexual activities between two persons who are neither courting nor in an intimate relationship. However, Lewis et al. (2012) view it as sexual activities ranging from kissing to coitus with a partner who is neither committed nor showing any sign of future commitment. In Nigeria, transactional hookups are also known as "runs girls ", which connotes individuals who are involved in casual sexual exchanges for material or non-material resources such as money, gifts, favours, among others. These hookups often engage in casual sex with men (married or unmarried), who are known as Aristos for financial or non-material benefit. A survey reported that 20% of female students participated in no less than one hooking-up experience associated with acceptance of oral-genital contact. At the same

time, one-fourth indulged in not less than a single hookup where oral-genital contact and vaginal sex took place (Fielder et al., 2013).

2. Social Exchange Theory and Transactional Hookup Culture

Homans propounded the Social Exchange Theory in the middle of the 20th century. It was, however, improved through the efforts of other scholars such as Blau, Emerson, Thibaut, and Kelley. The theory posits that social interactions between two or more individuals are based on subjective estimates of anticipated benefits, perceived costs and the availability of other alternatives. Rather than assuming perfect economic rationality, the theory assumes that humans make decisions based on personal appraisals influenced by social norms, expectations, and structural constraints.

The theory was rooted in the core principles of reciprocity, cost-benefit analysis, comparison level, comparison level for alternatives (CL_{alt}), equity, dependence, and rational decision-making in social relationships. From the viewpoint of social exchange theory, transactional hookup practices can be understood as exchanges in which sexual intimacy is provided with the expectancy of some kinds of reward, which can be either material or symbolic. In contrast, the recipient expects sexual satisfaction in return (Ukaegbu et al., 2017). Material rewards in this context consist of tangible resources presented as compensation for sexual intimacy, such as gifts, money, footing bills for meals, house rent, among others. Similarly, symbolic rewards represent intangible benefits associated with emotional, social or psychological satisfaction, such as pleasure derived from sex, feeling loved, companionship, among others. This practice of providing sexual access in exchange for other commodities or benefits reflects reciprocity.

From a cost-benefit perspective, some young women report engaging in transactional hookup relationships, particularly on weekends, to meet financial needs or satisfy material aspirations. This behaviour is centred on the perceived benefits associated with transactional hookups, such as money and the acquisition of luxury items, among other benefits, outweighing the expected costs of the exchanges, such as reputational risk, exposure to sexually transmitted infections, emotional consequences, and physical risks. Emerging evidence has demonstrated that the behaviour is not limited to females, as some young men have been found to participate in similar exchanges of receiving or providing monetary or non-monetary rewards in exchange for sexual intimacy.

The principle of comparison level suggests that individuals tend to evaluate relationship satisfaction against what they believe they merit. However, displeasure may occur when anticipated benefits are withheld or when outcomes of the relationship fall short of expectations. A closely related component is the comparison level for alternatives (CL_{alt}), which holds that social relationships will only thrive if there are no substitutes. In the context of transactional hookups among adolescents or young people, exchange may continue in the absence of feasible economic or relational alternatives. When alternative sources of income or support are scarce, continued participation in such exchanges may appear comparatively advantageous.

Social exchange theory also emphasises equity and dependence. Equity assumes that, in any relationship, fairness is paramount, to the extent that each party perceives a balance between their contributions and outcomes; however, any perceived imbalance can create distress or dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, in contexts characterised by economic inequality and power disparity, exchanges may be fundamentally unequal. Furthermore, the rational decision-making component of Social Exchange Theory suggests that several young women may deliberately participate in transactional hookups despite the awareness of the associated health and safety risks. The perpetuation of such behaviour may be based on the notion that the social relationship requires limited commitment and time investment while offering immediate economic returns (Hunter, 2002; Ayodele et al., 2025). Within broader socio-economic contexts marked by high levels of unemployment, financial hardship, and peer influence witnessed in Nigeria, transactional hookup culture may be interpreted as adaptive strategies within constrained structural environments rather than purely impulsive behaviours.

3. Factors Influencing Transactional Hookup in Nigeria

The prevalence of transactional hookups among young people in Nigeria, particularly students, has been linked to the interplay of multifaceted factors such as economic, social, and personal factors.

3.1 Economic factor

The prevailing economic hardship in Nigeria has been adduced as a risk factor for transactional hookup behaviour among young people, particularly students. Women who engage in transactional hookups do so as a means of coping with the economic realities of the nation. A study among undergraduate students in South Western Nigeria noted that economic challenges strongly predicted

transactional sex involvement (Michael et al., 2025). A similar experience was evident in Ayodele et al. (2025), who assert that some young women in the federal capital territory and environs facing economic difficulties regularly resort to sex as an adaptive measure. Thus, suggesting the influence of class differences in the motivation for transactional hookup behaviour. For instance, while transactional hookups among young people from affluent homes are associated with the expectation of meeting a partner and the re-enactment of individuality and women's liberation, those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are attracted to the behaviour as a result of poverty, friends and the stereotyped gender expectation (Mensa, 2020). According to Ige and Solanke (2021), undergraduates from wealthy, nuclear families had lower odds of engaging in hookups. Conversely, females from low-income families are more inclined to transactional hookups as a means of surviving the challenges of city life. Consequently, confirming poverty as a major push for transactional hookups (Ishaya & Ogunode, 2021). In addition, poverty attenuates the capacity of some parents to control their young ones because they lack the wherewithal to cater for their family's needs.

3.2 Social Factors

Social factors such as pressure from friends, social media influence, and cultural expectations have been acknowledged as key factors enabling transactional hookup behaviour among young people. Peer pressure, for instance, remains one of the major predictors of risky sexual behaviour among youth, as well as the propensity to take part in hookup activities. In contrast to older generations, some adolescents and young adults of this generation now see transactional hookups as social norms within their cohort. As a result, participate in such behaviour as a means of conforming and gaining social validation within the circle of peers (Zhao et al., 2023). A survey among students in tertiary institutions revealed that some students are enlisted into transactional hookups through friends who connect them with hookup agencies through social media apps (Ayodele et al., 2025).

Correspondingly, research has indicated that the use of social media among young people has transformed the perception of relationships and sexuality. Hence, Azzaakiyyah (2023) noted that social media is a veritable instrument which drives social relationships in contemporary societies. While the use of digital platforms has enhanced positive connections among humans globally, surpassing geographical borders, it has also been known to facilitate hookup culture through social/matchmaking applications such as Tinder, Hinge, and Bumble (Ament, 2021). These platforms

often promote and reinforce transactional hookup behaviours among young people. Disturbingly, this has supported the propagation of sham relationships and sexual victimisation (Hobbs, 2017). Thus, dating apps have been found to facilitate the propensity to have three or more sexual partners, including non-protective sex (Dai, 2023). As a result, Young et al. (2013) concluded in a study that social media facilitates the chances of exchanging sex for money, food and accommodation.

Furthermore, societal pressure from family and attempts to keep up with friends, such as buying the latest iPhones and fashion items, among other things, often push adolescents and young adults to lead a false lifestyle. Consequently, many young women, in a bid to navigate this social pressure and feelings of inadequacy, take part in transactional hookups.

3.3 Individual Factor

Individual factors such as previous sexual experience, attitudes and motivation, and self-esteem have been found to facilitate hookup behaviour. According to Fielder and Carey (2010), students who had previously engaged in hookups before entering college had a higher propensity to participate in oral and penetrative hookup behaviour in college. Such pleasure-seeking behaviour and individual disposition towards sex may attract adolescents and young adults into hookups. For males, hooking up is perceived as a stress buster and a way to enhance self-esteem, while for both genders, it may be a channel for finding a future partner (Zhao et al., 2023). Furthermore, alcohol use and other psychoactive substances such as marijuana have been strongly linked to selling sex for survival and the greater chances of engaging in unsafe sexual behaviour, such as not using a condom during coitus, thus increasing the likelihood of sexually transmitted infections (Oppong, 2014).

4. Health and Safety Risks of Transactional Hookups

Sexual activity is an important human function with temporary and lasting socio-emotional and physical benefits (Gianotten, 2021). Sexual health involves developing a positive and friendly attitude towards sexuality and sexual relationships where both parties enjoy pleasant and harmless sexual experiences devoid of any form of extortion, discrimination, and violence (World Health Organisation, 2026). While engaging in Hookup activities may produce feelings of elation associated with novel experiences of emotional and sexual satisfaction, including monetary return or social validation (Lewis et al., 2012), a growing body of studies has stressed that participating in transactional hookups is laden with

numerous health and safety risks. These risks include physical, emotional, psychological, and social stigma.

4.1 Physical Health Risks

Transactional hookups have been associated with high chances of unwanted pregnancy and susceptibility to sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The predisposition to STIs has been linked with inconsistent condom use and lack of concern for exposure, particularly sexual intimacy involving oral sex (Napper et al., 2016; Downing, Matibag, & Geisinger, 2009). For instance, the prevalence of HIV was more than twice as high for men having sex with men who regularly sold sex compared to those who neither sold nor bought sex (Berg et al., 2019). At the same time, about half of the females participating in exchanging sex for resources or other benefits have more chances of having HIV as a result of risky behaviours with numerous partners, violence, alcohol consumption, and unreliable condom use (UNAIDS, 2018). Similarly, sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis, gonorrhoea, and Chlamydia have been found to individually correlate with selling sex. Although some women who engage in transactional hookups may have a positive disposition towards condom use, the desire to charge a higher fee, win the client's confidence or use the act to trap the clientele may hinder its use (Mwapu et al., 2016). This behaviour may consequently increase the chances of contracting STIs.

4.2 Physical Harm and Personal Safety

In contemporary times, there has been a widespread increase in the reported cases of ritual-related killings in some parts of Nigeria. Largely, most victims of this heinous crime are young women. Estimates revealed that about 10 girls aged 18–32 are victims of ritual killings due to clandestine hook-up networks (Oduntola, 2024). Similarly, a recent survey in Nigeria noted that some men in connivance with traditional doctors usually target women for money-making ritual activities while the victims are in search of love, work, money, among others (Ogbo, 2024). These men often exploit this secret affair as a means of obtaining the vital parts of their victim's body, such as the vulva, breast, eye, head, palms, among others, in isolated spots. Most times, these ritualists usually accomplish their mission upon the invitation of hookup girls using social media platforms and making juicy promises which serve as bait, making it difficult for the hookup girls to decline. At the same time, the awareness of the physical harm associated with hooking up has led to some clients fortifying themselves with various charms, such as waist bracelets, incisions, among others. The efficacy of

such charms is questionable, as many young female hookups have fallen prey to ritual activities in the line of their hookup duty.

4.3 Emotional and Psychological Risks

Engaging in transactional hookups can generate emotional and psychological risks, especially when either party in the hookup senses an emotional or power imbalance. Emotional risks include reduced self-worth and low self-esteem, emotional attachment and disappointment, guilt, shame, and regret, among others. Psychological risks include anxiety, identity conflicts and depression. Although both men and women experience emotional and psychological risks associated with transactional hookups, studies indicate that women generally experience more emotional and psychological risks compared to men. For instance, women have been found to experience regrets arising from partner pressure, particularly when it culminates in sexual intercourse, coupled with the societal prejudice towards women's casual sex, which can result in feelings of shame and loss of self-respect (Oswalt et al., 2005; Uecker, 2017).

4.4 Social Stigma

Transactional hookups often face societal rebuff and are viewed as lazy. This societal perception of sexual behaviour is based on cultural expectations rooted in morality. Consequently, hookups may experience loss of reputation, reduced employment prospects, and future relationship problems (Purity & Katukah, 2025).

5. Conclusion

Transactional hookup culture is a growing public health concern worldwide. The conceptualisation of hookup culture through social exchange theoretical perspectives demonstrated that the prevalence of transactional hookups is fuelled by the interplay of multi-layered factors, including economic hardships, peer pressure, individual factors, and the increased use of social media platforms. Therefore, individuals' decision to engage in transactional hookup relationships is based on subjective evaluations of the rewards, perceived costs, satisfaction benchmarks, perceived alternatives, and equity. However, the obsession with maximising rewards often blurs perceptions of the lasting risks, including health risks, physical harm, emotional pain, and social risks.

It is acknowledged that eliminating hookup culture in Nigeria may not be practically possible; however, there is an urgent need for intervention measures to mitigate the core risk factors. Therefore, a concerted approach towards designing educational

programmes, facilitating a peer-centred educational approach, promoting the economic empowerment of young people, particularly women, and strengthening policies and the institutional framework will assist in mitigating this public health challenge.

6. Recommendations

The federal government, in collaboration with states and local governments, should introduce empowerment programs for Nigerian youth, particularly young adolescents and young adults, through soft loans and skill training.

The National Orientation Agency and the Ministry of Women's Affairs should design a public awareness campaign, specifically targeted at enlightening adolescents and young adults, especially women, about the dangers of transactional hookup culture.

Females should desist from clandestine hookups with strangers, particularly those met online without their friends' or relatives' knowledge of the destination.

The government should ensure adequate implementation of comprehensive sexuality and digital safety education in the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions.

The government should ensure the speedy dispensation of justice on cases linked to ritual killings, kidnappings, and organ harvesting.

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