

PEER INFLUENCE AS A CORRELATE OF ADOLESCENT STUDENTS' SEXUAL ACTIVITIES IN ILORIN METROPOLIS, KWARA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study determined the interplay of relationship between peer pressure and sexual activities of in-school adolescents and moderating variables of gender, educational level and religion. The research is an empirical study which adopted the descriptive survey of correlation type. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 400 respondents that participated in the study while a questionnaire type of instrument titled "Peer Influence and Sexual Activities Questionnaire (PIASAQ)" was used to collect the required data. Having been subjected to the test retest method of obtaining the psychometric property, the instrument possessed a reliability coefficient at 0.85, which was adequate. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation and t-test statistics were used to analyse the data collect at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed that there is significant relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents and respondents were significantly different in the relationship between peer influence and sexual activities based on gender and educational level but similar on the basis of religion. It was recommended among others that guidance counsellors and school authorities should identify early enough the various school-going adolescent groups, monitor and give them sex education in order to prevent them from deviant sexual activities such as genital manipulation and watching pornographic movies.

KEYWORDS: Peer Influence, School-going Adolescents, Sexual Activities, Genital manipulation.

Background to the Study

Adolescence is the transitional period of physical and psychological development between childhood and adulthood. It is a developmental period that begins with the transition from childhood and involves primary changes in pubertal/sexual maturation, physical appearance and reasoning ability (Berger, 2001). Since an adolescent is a person that is in the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, the individual at this period is neither regarded as a child nor an adult, which depicts the exhibition of peculiar characteristics. Thus, adolescence is one of the most fascinating and complex transition periods in the life span of an individual. It is a time of accelerated change, second only to that of infancy; a time of expanding horizon, self-realization and emerging independence; a time of change and transition from childhood to adulthood (Adegoke 2012). Serious biological, physiological, behavioural and social transformation take place in the life of young boys and girls during these years that roughly correspond with the secondary school period and sometimes the first few years of tertiary education. In these often crises years, a young person could pass through various experiences in growth and ecstasy, as well as doubt and confusion. At this age some adolescents are much more concerned about their prospects and future as they take on protracted search for the way to fulfilled adult life and could be more influenced by friends, schoolmates and peers in general.

The word adolescence is derived from the Latin word "adolescere," which means "to grow into maturity" (Adegoke, 2012); it refers to that period which marks the transition from childhood to maturity. It is a transitional period of life accompanied by series of changes and runs between childhood and adulthood, a period called "teenage". This is placed roughly between the ages of eleven and twenty-one years. An adolescent therefore is a person in the second decade of his/her life. Adegoke (2012) categorised adolescence period into three stages. First stage is the early adolescence, and it coincides roughly with the junior secondary school years marked by rapid physical and intellectual growth, confusion and a feeling of insecurity, as the person begins to develop sexual characteristics. The second stage; the middle adolescence, coincides roughly with senior secondary school age. Primarily, the person seeks self-reliance and psychological independence from the parents; becomes comfortably involved in expanding peer relationship; achieves the capacity for intimate friendship; and learns to handle heterosexual relationships. The third stage, which is the late adolescence, usually begins as the child enters a higher institution or is already there or is learning a trade. At this point it is expected that the young person may have formed a reasonably clear and consistent sense of personal identity and is committed to some fairly definite social roles, value system and life goals. Whichever stage it may be, the pertinent issue is that there is the propensity for

the adolescents to actively engage in sexual activities particular as a response to biological developmental drives and increase in social orientation.

Self exploration and a heightened sense of autonomy are important competences as adolescents develop values outside of their parents and begin to redefine and renegotiate roles across numerous contexts such as home, school and work. Moreover, a "storm and stress" period resulting in the increase in personal, social and academic pressures often emerges. (Casey, 2010). There are undeniable physical, social and interpersonal changes during this period that challenges the structure and integrity of important relationships perhaps, most notably, the parents-adolescent relationship. In addition to this, Erickson's psychosocial interpretation of adolescent identity noted that early adolescence is a time of heightened conflict, though most conflicts involve everyday events of family life which emanates from the desire for autonomy and increased peer relationship (Adegoke, 2012). The demand for increased autonomy is due to physical changes at puberty, cognitive development (that is, increase idealism and logical reasoning and social changes) independence and identity. Parents and adolescents become more physically and psychologically distant from each other during adolescence. This normal distancing manifests in decreased emotional closeness and warmth and increased parent-adolescent conflict and disagreement, which provides a gateway for an unprecedented increase in the amount of time adolescents spend with peers.

Sexual activities as a concept refer to sexual acts and sexual behaviours and individual's attitudes and behaviour on sex-related matters. This includes individual exhibiting sexual acts such as masturbation, kissing, or sexual intercourse and other sexual behaviours such as dressing in certain way, sexual identity and sexual orientation (Akinade & Sulaiman, 2005). According to Oniye (2004), sexual activity is concerned with the influence of sex on an individual's emotional life and personality and it involves vital issues like the sexual impulses and the use of sex as an expression of love. According to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, adolescents' sexual activities significantly start at the genital stage, which is marked by the onset of puberty and involves the subordination of all sources of sexual feeling or preliminary or auxiliary acts, or in some ways repressed or diverted (Lemma, 2007). Puberty brings a greater increase of libido in boys, but in girls there is an increase in repression, especially with regard to clitoral sexuality. The onset of menarche and puberty, along with the overcoming of incestuous object-choice comes the breaking away from parental authority. Sexual activity is often a vital aspect of adolescents' life style and this can take the form of masturbation, sex with a partner of same or opposite sex, fondling with the genital, body caressing of the opposite sex, kissing, sexual fetishism, oral or anal sex, engaging in pornography and so on. Adegoke (2012) inferred that all theories of adolescent development give sexual activities a central

place in negotiating the transition from childhood to adulthood. This suggests that for adolescents who are in the process of forging a satisfying and satisfactory sense of their own identity and their place in the world, dealing with sex-related matters is a crucial part of their development. The sexual activities of adolescents are, in most cases, influenced by their culture's norms and their sexual orientation, and the issues of social control particularly peer-group interference and age of consent laws. Sexual activities of the adolescent in general are associated with various risks, including unwanted pregnancy, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, low academic performance and low interest in school activities. It has been established that people aged 15 to 24 (adolescents) account for approximately half of all new HIV/AIDS infection world wide (Adegoke, 2013). This unfortunate situation was attributed to the fact that adolescents are not fully mature to understand the dangers inherent in indiscriminate sexual activities coupled with insufficient information about sex from the older persons and most importantly the pressure from their peers.

Peer influence is the force that friends, observers or individuals exert, that encourages others to change their attitude, values or behaviour, in order to conform and be accepted. It is also the social pressure of one's peer group, which influences one to take certain action, adopt certain values or otherwise in order to be accepted by the group. Peer conformity in adolescence is pronounced with respect to style, taste, appearance, ideology, and values. Although it can also have positive effects when youths are pressured by their peers toward positive behaviour such as volunteering for charity or excelling in academics, Chalder, Elgari and Bennett (2005) contended that the peer group influence is a key determinant in alcohol consumption and this influence is often enhanced by the drinking behaviour of the individuals in peer groups themselves. However, it is good to note that the type of peer group one joins will determine the kind of influence one will get. Steinberg and Silk (1986) found that as young people grow; they begin to surrender to the influences of their peers as they shed off their parental orientation and replace it with dependence on their peers. Friends may encourage their peers to engage in undesirable acts like fighting, alcohol drinking, and particularly sexual promiscuity.

Adolescents are often vulnerable to peer influence because their social life matters a great deal, in that they want to fit in or conform to their group and a majority of them wish to fit in regardless of whatever it takes but just for their group to like them and approve of their behaviour. More so, the curiosity of the adolescents allows for them to be pressured into trying something new just to be accepted. The syndrome "*everyone is doing it*" may influence some of these growing young ones to leave their better judgment or their common sense behind and subscribe to peer's influence. A close observation would reveal a preponderance of adolescents engaging in deviant sexual behaviour and a host of

other delinquent behaviour in schools. Amongst adolescent's negative sexual activities are involvement in erotic acts that interfere with their academic activities such as pornography viewing, premarital sex (with the dire consequence of teenage pregnancy and abortion) sexual harassment and many more.

There are several variables that may influence adolescents' sexual activities such as school type, family background, and media to mention a few. However, this study was designed to investigate peer influence as a correlate of school-going adolescents' sexual activities in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. The locale was considered appropriate because it is the state capital with characteristic features of a cosmopolitan city where many factors that could promote sexual activities of the school-going adolescents may be significantly present. In addition, as of 2015, Kwara state accounted for 42,000 out of 3.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria while Ilorin was considered having the highest prevalence rate in the state (Olesin, 2015): a situation that may suggest a high rate of sexual activities especially among adolescents in Ilorin metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

Peer influence is one of the most dangerous factors which to a large extent determine various ways the adolescents involve in some deviant behaviours in the society. More often than not, adolescents make decisions on certain scenarios solely as a result of other people's (most especially friends) opinion, regardless of the consequences that might follow. The National Coalition Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (2007) found that consumption of alcohol was steadily gaining prominence especially among the youths of school going age particularly because of peer influence. Kimberly (2002), in a study on the role of peer influence across risk behaviours, observed that if friends do not engage in activities like alcohol consumption, teenagers might be less likely to engage in them. Adolescents are solely influenced by the term called "peer influence" a propelling factor among young boys and girls which predisposes them to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in particular (Steinberg & Silk, 2007). Evidence from HIV prevalence rate revealed that adolescents account for approximately half of all new infections (Adegoke, 2013). Ajiboye (2006) pointed out that Ilorin has the 2nd highest HIV prevalence trend in Kwara state with with 3.7% rate in 2001 Sero-Prevalence Survey, whereas adolescents are usually the most infected: probably as a result of their deviant sexual activities. Besides, Azeez (2015) reported that the sexual activities of students in Offa as a result of coercion by friends have become alarming because it not only endangers their health but also affects their academic activities. Thus, similar occurrences may be found in other cosmopolitan cities. The present study therefore investigated relationship between

peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State.

Research Questions

Is there any relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents in Ilorin metropolis based on gender.
2. There is no significant relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents in Ilorin metropolis based on educational level.
3. There is no significant relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents in Ilorin metropolis based on religion.

Purpose of the Study

The study was purposed to investigate the relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State. In addition, the study sought to find out the influence of moderating variables of gender, educational level and religion.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey method of correlation type. A correlation design is appropriate for measuring such complexities of the pattern of relationships that exist among measured variables (Stanger, 2004). The method enabled the researchers to establish the relationship that exists between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents. The purposive sampling technique was used to select four schools in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State: two tertiary institutions and two secondary schools. A total of 400 respondents who are between the ages 12 and 23 years old was purposively sampled. The study adopted ages 12 to 23 as being the adolescence period for school-going boys and girls. The instrument used to collect the required data was a questionnaire titled "Peer Influence and Sexual Activities Questionnaire (PIASAQ)". It has two sections (A and B): Section A contains personal information while B contains 15 items on influence of peer influence on sexual activities of school-going adolescents. The questionnaire is patterned in the modified Four-Point Likert format of *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* with scores ranging from 4 to 1 respectively. Thus, the highest possible score a respondent can obtain is 60 while the least is 15. The frequency

counts, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and t-test statistics were used to analyse the data. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents based on Gender, Educational Level and Religion

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Male	200	50.0
Female	200	50.0
Total	400	100.0
Educational Level		
Tertiary	200	50.0
Secondary School	200	50.0
Total	400	100.0
Religion		
Christianity	182	45.5
Islam	218	54.5
Total	400	100.0

The Table shows equal distribution of respondents based on gender and institution type but a slight variation on the basis of religion.

Research Question: *Is there any relationship between peer influence and sexuality of school-going adolescents?*

Table 2: Relationship between Peer influence and In-School Adolescents' Sexual Activities

Correlation	Mean	SD	df	Cal. R	Crit. R
Peer influence	39.86	10.85	398	0.51*	0.19
Sexual Activities	33.34	8.11			

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

The result in Table 2 indicates that the calculated r is 0.51 while the critical r is 0.19. Since the calculated r is greater than the critical r , there exists a relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents, in answer to the research question.

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant difference in the relationship between peer pressure and sexual activities of school-going adolescents based on gender.*

Table 3: The t-test on relationship between peer influence and sexual activities based on Gender

Gender	N	X	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Gender	200	54.16	10.04			
Female	200	56.38	12.17	398	3.46*	1.96

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

The result in Table 3 reveals that the hypothesis was not accepted because the t-calculated value (3.46) is greater than the t-critical value (1.96), hence there is significant difference in the relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents based on gender; the sexual activities of females is more influenced by peers than males since the mean score of the former (56.38) is greater than the latter (54.16).

Hypothesis 2: *There is no significant difference in the relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of adolescents based on educational level.*

Table 4: The t-test on relationship between peer influence and sexual activities based on educational level

Level of Study	N	X	SD	df	* Cal.t-val	Crit. t-val
Tertiary	200	57.14	12.41			
Secondary School	200	45.67	11.96	398	7.31*	1.96

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

The result in Table 4 reveals that the calculated t-value (7.31) is greater than the critical t-value (1.96), hence the hypothesis was not accepted. Thus, there is significant difference in the relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents based on level of study. Sexual activities of students of tertiary institutions ($x=57$) is more influenced than that of secondary-school (mean=45.67).

Hypothesis 3: *There is no significant difference in the relationship between peer influence and sexual activities based on religion.*

Table 5: The t-test on relationship between peer influence and sexual activities based on Religion

Level of Study	N	X	SD	df	Cal. t-val	Crit. t-val
Christianity	182	56.06	12.16	398	0.87	1.96
Islam	218	55.82	12.55			

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

The results in Table 5 indicates that calculated t-value (0.87) is less than the critical t-value (1.96), hence the hypothesis was not accepted; there is no significant difference in the relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents based on religion.

Discussion

This study revealed that there is a relationship between peer influence and sexual activities of school-going adolescents. This suggests that the amount of peer influence accounts for the degree of sexual activities that school-going adolescents involve in. This finding is similar to the earlier study of Kimberly (2002) who found high relationship between pressure and alcohol consumption among young adults. Similarly, the National Coalition Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (2007) found that consumption of alcohol was steadily gaining prominence especially among the youths of school going age because of peer influence. These findings point to the fact that peer influence often has impact on school-going adolescents as it influences their behaviours on different aspects particularly sexuality and drug abuse. Furthermore, it was found that the relationship between peer influence and sexuality of school-going adolescent is different based on gender. This suggests that male and female are the same in the degree of peer influence on their sexuality. It was found that sexuality of female respondents is more influenced by peer than that of males. This disagrees with the findings of Olanrewaju (2015) that both male and female are similar in the way peer influence determines their sexual behaviour. The reason for the result of the present study could be that, females learn more from friends because they keep intact relationship longer than males (Adegoke, 2012).

It was also found that, there is a relationship between peer influence and sexuality of school-going adolescents based on the level of study. This agrees with the earlier findings of Olanrewaju (2015) that in-school adolescents are similar on role of peer influence on their sexual activities. The present study further found that sexuality of school-going adolescent is more exposed to by peer influence. The reason could be that, adolescents (students) in tertiary institution have more freedom to stay and learn from friends (peers) than secondary school students. The former might take advantage of such freedom to influence the sexuality of each other. The relationship between peer influence and sexuality of the respondents is similar based on religion. One may not be surprised

considering the fact that both Christianity and Islam teach similar concepts on sexuality of adolescents, thus the adherents are often likely to be similar in their disposition.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that peer influence exerts significant pressure on sexual activities of school-going adolescents. Thus, while considering issues on sexual behaviour of adolescents one should always factor in peer influence. Also, the sexuality of females is more influenced by peer than that of males. It is therefore important to note that females are more at risk than males. The study equally revealed that sexuality of students of tertiary institutions is more influenced by peer group than those in secondary schools. This suggests that students of post-secondary institutions are more susceptible to engaging in unhealthy sexual behaviour through peer influence.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- ❖ Guidance counsellors should identify early enough the adolescents' peer group and enlighten them on sex education so as to prevent bad influence. In addition, counsellors, in collaboration with the school authorities (tertiary and secondary) should organize periodic seminars, symposia or discussion groups to talk on the dangers inherent in bad influence of peers on individuals' sexual activities;
- ❖ The schools authorities should ensure adequate monitoring of peer groups in school so as to identify the possible negative influence the groups might be exerting on the adolescents' sexual activities and to curb it forthwith; and
- ❖ The parents should ensure adequate monitoring of their children particular the way by which peer group could influence their sexual activities.

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