CORRELATION BETWEEN PEER INFLUENCE AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the correlation between peer influence and sexual behaviour of secondary school students using Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State as case study. A sample of 100 adolescents drawn from JSS 3 – SS 3 classes of four mixed public secondary schools was used. Four research hypotheses were formulated. The findings show that there is correlation between peer group influence and permissive attitude toward sexual practices among secondary schools students. There was no difference in terms of age and sex. Boys tend to be more sexual active than girls, while involvement in sexual activity increased with age. The study established that peers exert great influence on the adolescent through various means. These include exposure to pornographic films, pornographic magazines, romantic novels, and discussion of sexual issues. The study also discusses the dangers of this situation for the adolescents. The study recommends that relevant sexuality and reproductive health information should be provided to adolescents through joint effort by parents, counselors and educators so as to enlighten them on the dangers of pre-marital sex.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Adolescence is a time of transformation in many areas of an individual’s life. The first stage is the early adolescence, which covers the period of 11-14 years. The second is middle adolescence from 15-18 years, and the third is late adolescence, from 18-21 years. In the midst of these rapid physical, emotional, and social changes, youth begin to question adult standards and the need for parental guidance. It is also a time for individuals to make important decisions about their commitment to academics, family, and perhaps sexual behaviour. For many youth, adolescence marks the onset of sexual activity and experimentation. Although this is a normal transition, sexual activity during adolescence can serve as a risk factor for an array of problematic behaviors. Perhaps most obviously, it can have immediate health consequences such as
sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy (AHI, 2003). Research has also noted a linkage between risky sexual behavior and other deleterious outcomes such as delinquency (Armour & Haynie, 2006) and sexual victimization.

In Nigeria, variables like peer influence, family history, parental education and type of parental care affect sexual behaviour of in-school adolescents. If teens feel parental support, feel a connection to good peers, and are aptly supervised by good teachers, they are less likely to have early sexual exposure and become pregnant. If parents model sexual risk taking behaviour, such as early child bearing, or permissive attitude towards pre-marital sex, adolescents from such environment could engage in early sexual intercourse. Another family influence on adolescent sexual behaviour can be genetic or biological variables. Hormonal level and the timing of puberty, which can affect sexual behaviour, are partially hereditary. If a mother is young at her first
intercourse, it is more likely that both son and daughter will have sex before age 14 (Abu and Akerele, 2006).

It is well documented that peers exert influence on an adolescent’s sexual behavior (Bearman & Brückner, 1999 and Hampton et al., 2005). In light of this fact, it is surprising that researchers have, for the most part, ignored how peers influence adolescent sexual behavior. This is unfortunate because a linkage or correlation between two variables (i.e. a respondent’s involvement in sexual activity and peer involvement in sexual activity) does not necessarily represent a causal relationship, nor does it illuminate the mechanisms at work (Wikström, 2006). It is therefore imperative for research to examine the sources of peer influence in order to determine exactly how peer influence operates among teenagers. In doing so, this study can take guidance from extant literature and overcome important limitations that have hampered previous work.
According to Castrogiovanni (2002), a peer group is
defined as a small group of similarly aged, fairly close friends,
sharing the same activities. In general, peer groups or cliques
have two to twelve members, with an average of five or six.
Peer groups provide a sense of security and they help
adolescents to build a sense of identity. Adolescents ask
questions relating to social identity theory such as, “Who am
I?” and “What do I want out of life?” Feeling part of a group, be
it the stereotypical jocks, goths, or punks, allows adolescents to
feel like they are on the way to answering some of these
questions. Given that adolescents spend twice as much time
with peers as with parents or other adults, it is important to
study the influence or pressures that peers place on each other.

Two of the primary theories associated with peer
influence, Differential Association Theory (Sutherland &
Cressey, 1960) and Social Learning Theory (Akers, 1998)
acknowledge that peer influence is partially dependent upon
the intensity and frequency of peer associations. However, extant literature also largely ignores the intensity or frequency of peer interactions, which may condition peer influence. This is potentially problematic in the study of peer influence on sexual behavior because sharing sexual attitudes or behaviors may require higher levels of intimacy when compared to attitudes or behaviors in other dimensions.

There is evidence to suggest that certain behaviors are precursors to actual sexual activity. These behaviors will be referred to as pre-sexual activities. Pre-sexual activity is defined as actions that precede actual sexual activity such as sexual intercourse. These activities include, but are not limited to, (1) adolescents spending time alone with a boy or girl they like, (2) dating (unsupervised social outing), (3) kissing on the mouth, and (4) having a boyfriend or girlfriend. Studies have shown that having a boyfriend or girlfriend increases the likelihood that older adolescents will engage in sexual activity (Bruckner
& Bearman, 2003; Cooksey, Mott & Nuebauer, 2002; Manning &
Giordano, 2001). In this study the assumption will be made that
“having a boyfriend or girlfriend” and “kissing on the mouth
with someone you really like” suggests the initiation of pre-
sexual activities in young adolescents. This assumption is made
because of the link that has been established between having a
boyfriend/girlfriend and youth becoming sexually active
(Bruckner & Bearman, 2003). Having a boyfriend/girlfriend,
while socially acceptable, afford adolescents opportunities to
engage in pre-sexual and sexual activities and may motivate
them to become sexually active. Therefore, an adolescent who
has a boyfriend or girlfriend is more likely to kiss on the mouth.

As already eluded to, peers can also provide many
positive elements in an adolescent’s life. It is important,
however, to remember that peer influence can potentially have
a deadly impact or other various negative effects. It is vital for
education-related professionals to understand the complex
aspects of peer influence in order to stop these negative effects before they occur.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Hill (1983) suggests that expressing sexual feelings and enjoying physical contact with others is one of the key developmental issues of adolescence. This developmental task carries with it a great deal of risks (Irwin, 1989). The implication of this is that there is tendency for increase in the rate of adolescent rape and pregnancy and also contracting of infections and HIV/AIDS apart from other sexual behaviours. Unfortunately, few studies are dedicated to examine the correlation between peer pressure and sexual behaviour of adolescents, which this study intends to cover.
1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the correlation between peer pressure and sexual behaviour of adolescents in secondary schools. This general aim is expressed in the following specific objectives which are to:

1. Examine the nature of adolescents’ sexual behaviour.;
2. Discuss how peers exert influence on adolescents’ sexual behaviour through pornographic materials;
3. Investigate factors responsible for peer influence on pre-sexual activities of adolescent sexual behavior
4. Analyse what peers represent in risky sexual behaviour among adolescents
1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed by this study:

i. To what degree do peers affect adolescents’ sexual behaviour?

ii. Is there any correlation between peers’ use of pornographic materials and sexual behaviour of adolescents?

iii. Is there any relationship between pre-sexual activities of adolescents and their use of pornographic materials?

iv. Does peers sexual perceptions represent good image for adolescents’ sexual behaviour?

v. Does gender of adolescents determine their sexual behaviour?
1.5 Research Hypotheses

Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between peers and adolescents’ sexual behaviour

Ho₂ There is no significant relationship between pre-sexual activities of adolescents and their use of pornographic materials

Ho₃ There is no significant relationship between perceptions of peers toward sex and adolescents sexual behaviour

Ho₄ There is no significant relationship between gender of adolescents and their sexual behaviour

1.6 Significance of the Study

There are both practical and theoretical reasons for conducting this study. From a practical perspective, understanding the factors that place adolescents at risk for early initiation of sexual activity and the ability to predict and understand motivational influences on behavior will provide information that is valuable in the development of pregnancy and STD
prevention programs. On a theoretical level, this study will have a significant influence on the knowledge base regarding the characteristics of young adolescents and intentions of sexual behavior currently absent from the literature. Information gained from this study will go a long way in helping to complete the understanding of adolescent sexual risk-taking.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study centers on the correlation between peer influence and sexual behaviour among in-school adolescents using Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. It is aimed at all secondary school students in Ijebu-Ode Local Government but due to time, money and other factors it will be limited to only four schools in using Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State.
1.8 Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations inherent in this study. The findings, interpretations, and subsequent discussion derived from this study are considered with the knowledge of the limitations described here. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions, some students may not be comfortable responding accurately. Rates of sexual intercourse may therefore be difficult to establish because of response bias. Moreover, the study used a subgroup of students who are in-school. These students may be different from the general population of adolescents in Nigeria who are out-of-school. This may limit the generalization of the study.
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