

Relationship between Sources of Sexual information and Sexual Behaviour among Students in Public Secondary School Laikipia West Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Adolescents in the world today have varied sources of sexual information at their disposal. In spite of, the availability of various sources of information about sexuality and reproduction, the adolescents are yet to adopt socially acceptable and safe sexual behaviors both at home and in learning institutions. This raises questions about the relationship between sources of sexual information and sexual behaviors among adolescents. This study sought to investigate whether the relationship between sources of sexual information and sexual behaviours was statistically significant among students in public secondary schools in Laikipia West Sub-County. The study adopted an ex post facto research design. The accessible population for this study was 3998. The researcher selected a random sample, of 338 respondents, from the 7 selected schools. Data was collected through the administration of a questionnaire. The data collected was processed and analyzed descriptively using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17. The content validity of the research instrument was established. Piloting was done on 10 respondents from 2 schools that are in the neighbouring Nyahururu Sub-county and it gave a reliability coefficient of .82 which is above .70 acceptable for social sciences. The study findings indicate that adolescents' sexuality is greatly related either positively or negatively to the sources of sexual information available in the environment that students live in. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) should consider introducing sex education in secondary schools in the country so as to assist in making available censored sexual information. Such a move would go a long way in inculcating both life skills and assertive skills among both male and female students so as to facilitate decision making techniques which would enable students make informed and appropriate decisions that affects their sexual lives.

Key words

Behaviour Modification, Sexuality, Sexual Information, Adolescence and Sexual Behaviour

I. Introduction

The complex nature of adolescents' sexuality is like an evolving complex kaleidoscope jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces, the clues, the questions and struggles, explorations and the answers may change shape and color before a full pattern is formed (Sugar, 1990). The adolescents' sexuality is greatly influenced either positively or negatively by the sources of sexual information in the environment that they are in. It is also to a larger extent affected by the influence of their peers who by the virtue of their proximity to the adolescent greatly influence the course taken by one's sexual behavior. The seriousness of adolescents' sexuality is best understood if looked against the backdrop of adolescents' attitudes and practices. There has been a drastic change in adolescents' attitudes and practices towards sex. This is because more significant percentages of adolescents are engaging in premarital sexual intercourse than they did in the past. Statistics show that 65% of the youth get sexually active at the age of 11 while 63% of students have sex before they complete secondary school (Population Reference Bureau, 2001). The implications of this is new HIV/AIDS infections occur among the age bracket 15-24 years (NASCO, 1997) and 5000 girls die yearly while securing abortion (Ministry of Health Report, 2005).

As these devastating consequences of uninformed and irresponsible sexual behavior continue to take its toll on adolescents, there is probably no better intervention than to create an insight into the relationship between sources of sexual information and the adopted sexual behavior of the adolescent. The insight would be on creating an awareness of the movers and shakers involved in the formation of sexual behavior by adolescents. According to a study by Infotrak Research Consulting Ltd (YouthNet, 2007) group sex was gaining popularity among secondary school students.

The study found that 3% of females interviewed in Kenyan urban centers had engaged in-group sex. The interviewees were in the age bracket between 15-20 years, which is the same age bracket for majority of secondary school girls in Laikipia County. A survey commissioned by Oakland Media Services (Healthy Relationships, 2007) found that more than half of the girls lost their virginity before the age of 16. About 8% of females interviewed by the Population Services International Programme (Ministry of Health Report, 2006) said they had experienced lesbian affair and that group sex was common to them. There was an increase in the drop-out rate among public secondary school girls in Laikipia West Sub-County due to unwanted pregnancies.

Perhaps no single sexual behavior by adolescents' years has as dramatic or widespread effects as the realization of sexuality. In part, this is because of physical changes, development of secondary sexual characteristics and an increase in sex drive. This may be a resultant of social factors such as peer and parent influences, pressures involved in dating and cultural stereotypes involving adolescents and sexuality. Many parents now anticipate their children's adolescence with apprehension. So ingrained are the stereotypes in the media of alienated 'changelings' or horror stories on the approaching rebellious stage of development. They construe the teenage years as something to be confronted rather than shared, endured rather than enjoyed, indeed, a recipe for a self-fulfilling prophecy. Parental anxieties may be on the possible loss of the closeness, affection and parental authority, which they see as essential in their relationship with their children. In the Western societies it may be a common parental attribution that adolescence is marked by challenges to adult authority, conflict between parents and adolescents is not so generally anticipated in such societies where filial piety and respect are encouraged

(Houghghi & Long, 2004).

Undoubtedly, adolescence can be traumatic for some individuals especially those from homes of authoritarian parents. However, despite its difficulties it is negotiated successfully by most adolescents who have authoritative as opposed to authoritarian or permissive parents. There is essentially continuity of personality from childhood through adolescence on to adulthood. Nevertheless, many of the physical and psychological changes that are features of adolescence, notably as young people establish their sense of identity are dramatic enough. An understanding of these processes is of benefit to adolescents who are in transition from childhood to adulthood and to their parents (Herbert, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

It is an established fact that, irresponsible sexual behavior among adolescents has given rise to a worrying trend in increasing unexpected pregnancies, abortion and its concomitant trauma, sexually transmitted infections and more worrying increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS among the school going age. There is a general agreement that sources of sexual information influence greatly the formation of sexual behavior among others through their social proximity to the adolescents. What is not known is whether the sources of sexual information are related to sexual behaviors among students in Laikipia West Sub-county and this was the knowledge gap that this study sought to fill.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to investigate the relationship between sources of sexual information and sexual behaviors among students in public secondary schools in Laikipia West Sub-county.

The objective of the study

The objective of the study was to establish the relationship between sources of sexual information and students' sexual behaviors in public secondary schools.

Research hypothesis

The study sought to provide answer to the hypothesis:

Sources of sexual information have no statistically significant relationship with students' sexual behaviors in public secondary school in Laikipia West Sub-county.

Significance of the Study

Our society today is faced with the problem of an ever rising implication of negative sexual behavior. Consequently, there is the need to form and model socially acceptable sexual behavior in the society. In addition, such a step was a necessity and a wish for many stakeholders in education sector. It was expected that the outcome of this study would serve an assessment role in the evaluation of the contributions by sources of sexual information in the child's adopted sexual behavior. This would assist parents, teachers, guardians, and the government in giving contributions to curriculum implementers to determine the changes that are required in the school syllabus in an endeavour to impart acceptable sexual behaviours. This would ultimately stem acquisition of unacceptable sexual behaviors.

II. Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

Bandura (2001) opines that the presence of models play significant role in developing adolescents' sexual behaviors. He postulates that

human behavior can be explained partially through the process of imitation and observation learning. The process of learning can be explained using a four process involving attention, which requires one to be attentive in order to learn; retention, which is influenced by what is learned, the individual must recall the activities learnt; reproduction, which involves converting symbolic representation into appropriate activities; and motivation which refers to the incentive to initiate behavior. Bandura (2001) makes a distinction between learning through observation -vicarious acquisition-and the actual imitation of what one has learnt. One can learn by watching others without necessarily imitating the behavior they have seen. Therefore adolescents who may observe a model perform a certain behavior may not demonstrate that behavior until some later time when they have a reason for doing so. The media also influences behavior in that adolescents are exposed to pornographic programmes and other unedited information which encourages them to engage in negative sexual behaviors. In our society today adolescents have around them countless number of models whom they do imitate. The adolescents may learn unacceptable sexual behaviors from such models. According to Bandura an adolescent may develop positive sexual behavior by imitating a model that displays the same.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Purposive sampling was used in this study in selecting 7 schools out of 114 to include one extra-county and six county schools with the highest student population. This ensured that both extra-county and county schools were represented in the study. The student population in the 7 schools formed the sampling frame and sample of 338 respondents was selected.

Instrumentation

Primary data was collected through administration of a structured questionnaire to the selected respondents. The questionnaire gathered information on age and gender. The questionnaire also solicited for information on influence of sources of sexual information. The instrument was piloted and it gave a .82 correlation coefficient. This was above the .70 correlation coefficient which is acceptable for social sciences.

III. Results Discussion

The strong desire of many adolescents to be like their admired age-mates and part of a group can lead them to engage in the sexual behavior. They may also express the sexual attitudes, which they perceive as characteristic of a particular "hero" or group. Research on sources of sex information for adolescents' shows overwhelmingly that peers are a major influence in this area while parents play a minor role in the provision of sex information (Davis & Hams, 1982; Libby & Carlson, 1973; Miller, 1976; Shipman, 1968; Cohen & Kissinger, 2000).

The objective of this study was based on the premise that sources of information affect the sexual behaviors of adolescent students in Laikipia West Sub-county. The objective arose from the assumption that the source of information about sexuality and reproduction influences the sexual behaviors of the adolescents and the extent to which they can be changed. Adolescents who have access to reliable and credible sources of information are more likely to adopt safe sexual behaviors, and vice versa. In most cases, adolescents utilize different sources of information about specific aspects of their sexuality and reproduction. However, the major source includes parents, peers and own experience.

In this study, the respondents were asked about their sources of information on a number sexuality and reproduction aspects. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of the major sources of information about these aspects among the adolescents.

Table 1 : Source of information on sexuality and reproduction among adolescents

Aspects of sexuality and reproduction						
Source	Contraceptive use	Homosexuality	Premarital sex	Kissing	Masturbation	Petting
Peers	74.8	59.9	80.1	83.4	54.6	60.3
Parents	12.8	35.3	14.2	8.9	8.9	24.9
Own experience	12.4	4.7	5.7	7.7	46.5	14.8

Table 1 indicates that the major source of information on various aspects of sexuality and reproduction was peers. This suggests that peers had a strong influence on the sexual behaviors of the adolescents. The adolescents valued and recognized information from their peers whom they assumed to understand their situations better. They used the information from peers to guide in decision making on matters pertaining to their sexuality and reproduction. The adolescent related well to people of similar age, interest and backgrounds in providing sex information. This was attributed to the fact that peers were also in the same human development stage and therefore provided information from a more practical point of view, albeit doubts about its reliability. The peers influence adolescents' beliefs and attitudes, and regulate their behavior, including sexual behaviors. In a way peers determined the sexual behaviors of the adolescents and whether one could engage in a given sexual activity or not. With majority of the adolescents depending on their peers for sex information, caution should be taken about the reliability and credibility of the information by the recipient adolescents. Parents played a minor role in the provision of sex information among the respondents. While supporting peers as the major source of sex information, Santrock (2000); Lewis and Lewis (2004) observed that adolescents accept peer attitudes about sexuality as reflected in peer behavior, which they use as model for their own sexual behavior or they can be actively proselytized through discussion, questioning, teasing, dares, shaming and the like.

Santrock (1996) opines that peers seemed the greatest source of sexually related information. Among the parents the mother played a leading role in the provision of sexual information. The role of the media both print and electronic contributed significantly in availing sexually related information to the young adolescents. This ranged from kissing, ejaculation, masturbation, contraception and abortion. The individual's own experience only contributed significantly in petting and kissing and almost failed to contribute in significantly in abortion, STI 's and conception.

Given the importance of parents (in this case availing sources of sexually related information) in influencing the sexual behaviors of their adolescent children, the study also sought to establish

the assessment of the adolescents of their discussions with the parents. In this study, the respondents rated the discussions with their parents as either boring or informative/interesting. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of the respondents and their assessment of the discussions with parents.

Table 2 : Parental discussion helps in resolving sexual problems

	Frequency	Percent
Boring	169	50.1
Informative	168	49.9
Total	337	100.0

Table 2 indicates that 50.1 percent of the respondents considered their discussions with parents on sexual matters as boring. This suggests that the respondents were less interested in their discussions with their parents on sexual matters. This may be attributed to the age difference where majority of the adolescents consider their parents to be out of touch with reality, and especially on sexual matters. Some of the parents may have not been able to initiate mutual discussion and dialogue with their adolescent children. Such parents give cautionary and negative messages to adolescents about sex without creating an effective communication mechanism. This was likely to make adolescents seek information about sex from other sources other than their parents.

The remaining 49.9 percent of the respondents found their discussions with parents on sexual matters informative. This suggests that the parents had balanced, mutual and well informed discussions with their adolescent children. The parents considered the views of their adolescent children in the discussions and were not necessary giving negative and cautionary sentiments about sex. While supporting informative discussions between parents and their adolescent children, Darling (2000) argued that the more open and balanced the communication between parents and adolescents about sex, the lower the rate of adolescent sexual behavior.

For the discussions between parents and their adolescent children to succeed in changing the sexual behaviors, there is need for mutual trust and confidence between the two parties. This requires the adolescent to feel comfortable in sharing their sex-related information and issues with their parents. The parent, on the other hand, is required to accommodate the feelings of the adolescents and appreciate their stage of development. In this study, the adolescents were asked whether they were comfortable sharing sex related information with their parents.

This is captured in Figure 1.

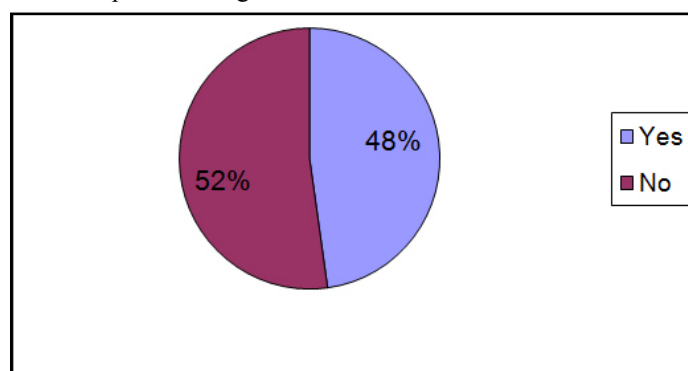


Fig. 1: Adolescent comfort in sharing sex-related information with parents

From Figure 1, it was observed that 52 percent of the respondents were not comfortable in sharing sex-related information with their parents. This suggests lack of trust and confidentiality among the adolescents about the reception of their parents on sex-related information. It also indicates lack of an appropriate approach and environment to discuss sex-related issues between adolescents and their parents. Lack of comfort and trust in sharing sex-related information was bound to make the adolescents seek for alternative sources, which might be unreliable, unhealthy, and socially unacceptable. The parents were also likely to give biased advice, as the adolescents were not freely participating in the discussions and making their contributions and stand known. This might be attributed to their age variations, respect and the sacred nature of sex-related discussions in the society.

The remaining 48 percent of the respondents were comfortable in sharing their sex-related information with their parents. This was likely to encourage effective communication and free and open discussion between parents and their children. Such a scenario could easily and positively change the sexual behavior of the adolescents as their views and opinions are taken on board during the discussion. These findings support Atwarter (1983) who observed that the way parents handle their children's questions about sex help to shape the latter's attitude towards sex. Parents who are embarrassed to talk about sex unknowingly encourage an attitude, secrecy or shame towards adolescent sexuality. Nevertheless, those who are comfortable and open to discuss sex may help adolescent accept their own sexuality more readily. Askew, Chege and Njue (2003); Senderowitz (1997) add that parents are expected to educate their adolescent children about their sexuality and reproductive development. However, in most cases, their capacity to do so in comfortable, open unbiased way is lacking. Majority of the parents give very little information and do not talk freely about sex and mostly seem not to have answers to the questions asked. Most parents feel very uncomfortable when discussing sexual issues with their adolescent children.

There was no major gender difference in the sexual behaviours of male and female adolescents. However, they differed in their interpretation of the reactions of their sexual partners, especially girls, to sexual advances. This study concludes that majority of the respondents were aged 17 yrs and above and they were in middle adolescence which is a developmental stage characterized by intense sexual desires. This was bound to make them have sexual experimentation with members of the opposite gender. Further both gender viewed boy-girl relationship as socially acceptable and normal thus encouraging them to initiate and engage in sexual relationship with members of the opposite gender.

IV. Recommendation

This study recommends that, in light of the available sexual information, adolescents should be treated equally on issues concerning their sexuality and reproduction, regardless of their gender. Secondly, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) should consider introducing sex education in secondary schools so as to assist in availing censored sexual information. Such a move would go a long way in imparting assertive skills among female students so as to facilitate decision making techniques which would enable students make informed and appropriate decisions touching on their sexual lives.

V. Conclusion

Peers had a strong influence on the sexual behaviours of the adolescents through provision of sexual information used in decision making on matters pertaining to their sexuality and reproduction. Peers were a major source of information on various aspects of sexuality and reproduction among the adolescents; therefore, there was a need to tap the potentiality of this resourcefulness to impart life skills such as assertiveness.

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