

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN RELATION TO SELECTED FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MOLO CENTRAL DIVISION, KENYA

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Abstract

The consequences of these risky sexual behaviours are manifested by rise in unintended teenage pregnancies that result in unsafe abortions and school dropout, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The purpose of this study was to investigate on the aspect of gender that contribute to risky sexual behaviours among secondary school students. Gender was used as the basis for comparison on the effect of the factors. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population was 2079 Form Three and Four students in all the 16 secondary schools in Molo Central Division. A stratified random sample of 324 Form Three and Form Four students was selected. Data was collected through administration of a self-scoring student's questionnaire to the selected respondents. The collected data was processed and analyzed using both descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means) and inferential statistics (t-test) with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17 for Windows. Overall, there were significant gender differences in selected factors contributing to risky sexual behaviour. The boys score was significantly higher than that of the girls ($p < 0.05$). This means that the boys were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour than the girls. The study also found out that students were aware of the danger posed by risky sexual behaviour. The study recommends that since boys are likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour more than girls, they should be exposed more to guidance and counselling services to help them be more knowledgeable on the dangers of risky sexual behaviour.

Keywords: Gender, Selected Factors, Risky Sexual Behaviour, Secondary School, Students

I. Introduction

In much recent years, more young people are engaging in premarital sex. The increasing number of HIV infections, teenage pregnancies, abortion, and STDs infections among students evidences this (Mwaniki, 2008). Sexuality is an important factor in adolescence. Throughout these years there is a notable increase in sexual desire among the adolescence (Melgosa, 2003). According to Melgosa (2002), no stage of life is more troubled than the teenage years (13-19) and the adolescence period. It is the transition period where all human doubts, hesitation and uncertainties appear (Melgosa, 2002). The United Nations estimates that about half of the new HIV infections worldwide occur among people aged 15-24 years. In China, more than 60% of all HIV infections are among people aged 15-29 years. Miller and Moore (1990), states that data from national surveys in the United States of America, indicate that by age 15, between a quarter and a third of adolescents have had sex; by age 19, more than 80% of adolescents have had sex and at each age, somewhat more males than females report experiencing intercourse. In another descriptive study of youth risk behaviour in urban and rural secondary school students in El Salvador, sexual intercourse was listed as one of the risk behaviours adolescents indulge in (Adrew and Springer, 2006).

Indulgence in risky sexual behaviour in Kenya coincides with the period of adolescence (Mwangi, 2007). Cases of HIV infections, STDs infections, early pregnancies, and abortion, use of contraceptives amongst secondary school students are all indications of students' indulgence in risky sexual behaviours (Mwololo, 2010). Ndirangu (2002), reported that in Kenya, there has been an increase in early pregnancies amongst secondary school students. From a report quoted in the Standard Newspaper of July 23rd 2008, Centre for the Study of Adolescence shows that eight out of ten boys and girls have had sex before the age of twenty. Barbara, Mensch, Clark, Lloyd, and Erulkar (1999) note that, although an overall decline has occurred in adolescent fertility in Kenya, the proportion of births to teenagers that occur prior to marriage is rising. The challenge secondary schools in Kenya have been facing on risky sexual behaviour among students has not spared secondary schools in Molo central division as is evidenced by a study done by Pulerwitz, Tiffany, Lou, Ann, Tobey, Ochieng, Mwarogo, Karusa and Kunyanga, (2006) in Molo and Naivasha on ABC messages for HIV prevention in Kenya that found out that though a minority, youth in school aged 13-19 reported sexual experience. Specifically, 19 percent of 265 males aged 13–14, 27 percent of 361 males aged 15–19, 4 percent of 338 females aged 13–14, and 10 percent of 337 females aged 15–19 reported sexual experience.. However, apart from the usual concern that is raised about the increasing disciplinary cases, early pregnancies, STDs infections and declining academic achievement among students, few studies have been carried out to find out factors contributing to risky sexual behaviour (sexual intercourse) among secondary school students. Notably, this study will restrict itself to the specific factors which are curiosity, media influence, peer pressure and economic status, comparing their effect by gender.

II. Objective of the Study

To determine gender differences in relation to the selected factors contributing to risky sexual behaviour among secondary school students in Molo Central Division, Molo district.

III. Research Question

Are there gender differences in relation to the selected factors contributing to risky sexual behaviour among secondary students in Molo Central Division, Molo District?

IV. Literature Review

Overview of Factors Contributing to Risky Sexual Behaviour

Human sexual behaviour or different sexual practices encompass a wide range of activities such as strategies to find or attract partners (mating and display behaviour), interactions between individuals, physical or emotional intimacy and sexual contact. Some cultures find only sexual contact within marriage acceptable, however, extramarital sexual activity still takes place within such cultures. Unprotected sex poses a risk in unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Adolescent sexuality refers to sexual feelings, behaviour and development in adolescents and is a stage of human sexuality. Sexuality is a vital aspect of teens' lives. Their cultures norms and mores, their sexual orientation and the issues of social control such as age of consent laws in most cases, influence the sexual behaviour of adolescents.

Adolescents represent an important segment of the society, particularly in the developing countries where they form the bulk of the populations (G.o.K, 2004). Pressures from peers and the media encourage young people to become sexually active as early as ten. Ochieng (1986) observes that there is a clear connection between peer pressure and teenagers experimenting with drugs and sex. Spencer (1997) also observes that adolescents whose friends have engaged in sexual intercourse are more likely to engage in intercourse themselves. Barbara, *et al* (1999) observed that girls are more likely to engage in premarital sex if they attend schools where considerable pressure to have sex is reported. The G.o.K (2004) outlines the following as the causes of pre-marital sex among young people.

- (i) Sexual feelings
- (ii) Myths and misconceptions about sex.
- (iii) Search for intimacy, acceptance and identity.
- (iv) Lack of value based sex education.
- (v) Peer pressure.
- (vi) Curiosity.
- (vii) Fear of rejection by a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- (viii) Economic reasons.
- (ix) Lack of creativity and setting of safe boundaries when dating.
- (x) Lack of role models.
- (xi) Media influences.
- (xii) Psychological reasons- lack of parental love and attention to make the youth look for these psychological needs elsewhere.
- (xiii) Drug abuse and alcoholism.
- (xiv) Break down of traditional values.
- (xv) Lack of life skills- to cope with day-to-day challenges of life, in resulting in an unhealthy self-concept.
- (xvi) Boredom and idleness- poor planning and use of leisure.

Curiosity, peer pressure, media influence and economic status were picked for the study, to determine their influence on risky sexual behaviour to the different gender.

Family context has been shown to have consistent and strong effects on the timing of sexual debut. Adolescents living in single parent families or with stepparents initiate sexual activity earlier than those in two parent families (Wang, 2004). On the other hand, adolescents' feelings of closeness and connectedness to parents, parental disapproval of sex and positive peer influences have been shown to delay sexual activity. Marin (2006) contends that dating and especially early steady dating provides context for many adolescent sexual experiences. In highlighting causes of pre-marital sex among secondary school students, G.o.K (2004), also points out that lack of setting of safe boundaries when dating, young people find themselves in the temptation to engage in pre-marital sexual activity. Wang (2007), also adds that age, education level, family structure, parents discipline and attitudes towards pre-marital sex, parent youth communication on sex related issues and dating are significantly associated with youth pre-marital sex. For male youth, older age, more relaxed parental discipline, higher levels of sex related knowledge, favourable attitudes, communicating with father regarding sex-related matters and dating are associated with pre-marital sex. They found that for female youth, higher education, single parent family, favourable attitudes, communicating with mother regarding sex- related issues and dating were significantly associated with pre-marital sex. Their study therefore shows that parental involvement on matters concerning sex helps to postpone adolescents' sexual activity.

Mburano (2000) reveals that nearly half of the young people surveyed had had sexual intercourse before age sixteen, but only one fourth were using condoms. This further proves that young people indulge in risky sexual behaviour. The research also showed that the age at which first sexual intercourse occurs is correlated with social and cultural factors, while sexual risk behaviours are related both to those factors and to economic factors, to mean that their environment and living conditions are extremely important. The study in addition underscores the importance of the living arrangements of parents and their cohabitation with their young children. In another study in Uganda, it was found that most students' sexual activities occur when parents are away or when the students are staying with relatives. The study also noted that although numbers were small, generally orphans and children living with single parents were more likely to engage in sexual activities (Twa-Twa, 1997). The same study further revealed that non-cohabitation by parents, conjugal instability and non-cohabitation with children might also raise the risk that adolescents engage in sexual activity.

Economic status of the students appears to contribute to risky sexual activity. To satisfy their material needs, students may engage in sexual activity with multiple partners or casual partners or agree to have sex without protection. A study done by Wepukhulu, Mauyo, Poipoi, Achoka, Kafu, and Walaba (2010) on Influence of Socio-Economic Status on Attitudes towards Premarital Sex (PMS) among Secondary School Students in Western Kenya found out that poverty or economic depravity was strongly linked to pre-marital sexual activity among young people especially girls. This is also confirmed by a report done by the Centre for Study of Adolescents in Kenya that more than 56% of secondary school students engage in sex for money (Otieno, 2008). Adolescents become involved in sex for monetary gains (Nduati & Wambui, 1996). In several studies, it has been speculated that girls who are inadequately provided for in terms of basic needs are often exposed to the temptation of seeking financial rewards from young and older men for sexual favours in return (Wepukhulu *et al.*, 2010). In a study done in Malawi, Hettzer (1994) two thirds of 168 female students who reported having sexual intercourse acknowledged accepting money or gifts for sex and half of the 168 indicated they were coerced to sex. In her study, Adolescent Sexuality and HIV/AIDS, Kang'aru (2004) quotes Polman (1994) who observes that unmarried girls become involved in sex for various reasons which include economic needs, pornography, idleness, curiosity, peer pressure, being lured with promises of cosmetics, need to demonstrate love to their boyfriends, lack of parental guidance, unemployment, increase in costs of living among others. Economic gain and sexual coercion underlie many young women's sexual experiences. According to a female study from Zimbabwe, the desire to love and to be loved is one of the principal reasons why girls begin sexual relations. 'You have sex so that you can strengthen your love' (Besset and Shermon, 1994). Nduati *et al.*, (1996) also states that boys have sex to demonstrate their dominance over girls and hence are aggressive in seducing them. Youths also indulge in sex with multiple partners in order to satisfy the sexual desire for change and find it important to experiment with different partners. Some young men want to prove they are real men and feel great and famous by having many partners.

Music being an integral part of adolescents, also contributes to early sex. Sexual themes are common in much of this music and range from romantic and playful to degrading and hostile. Both print and electronic media today portray the sexual act or intercourse as a casual physical and biological act. Sexually explicit lyrics characterize today's pop music (G.o.K, 2004). Listening to music with degrading sexual lyrics is related to advances in a range of

sexual activities among adolescents, whereas this does not seem to be true of other sexual lyrics. Reducing the amount of degrading sexual content in popular music or reducing young peoples' exposure to music with this type of content could help delay the onset of sexual behaviour (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi> accessed November 2009).

Young people say that curiosity and the influence of schoolmates or friends are major reasons for their first sexual intercourse (Mburano 2000). Adolescents are normally curious about how their bodies work and would like to experiment on it (G.o.K, 2004). In an article, in the Standard Newspaper, July 11th 2008, the following were reported as fertile grounds for sexual activities among students:

- (i) Sex orgies at youth parties
- (ii) Promotional events of giant liquor companies that extend late into the night.
- (iii) Parties or school events such as sports, music and drama.
- (iv) Improved communication technology and an explosion of F.M radio stations and T.V channels which have made it possible to access information on a whole range of issues, some which is not fit for consumption by teenagers.

Records show that a dramatic increase in the rape rate has occurred in the world generally over the last several decades, during which time there has also been a great proliferation of pornography (Ndicho, 2008). Psychologists say the use of sexual images is a powerful tool in the hands of some people including paedophiles to arouse the interests of those they target for sex. Ndicho (2008) says that many young people may want to imitate what they see in pornography and some do actually imitate it within a few days of viewing it. Aware of this, sex pests are using pornography to lure girls and boys into sex. They indulge in sex to experiment the presentations they see in magazines, on video and what they have surfed in the pornographic sites in the Internet (Okwemba, 2009). From the newspaper's investigations, pornography, obscenity and casual sex are on increase in Kenyan schools abetted by a permissive society and carefree sections of the media and in boys' boarding schools, pornographic magazines are being blamed for rising cases of homosexuality (Okwemba, 2009). Pornography, in today's world therefore could be a major factor contributing to risky sexual behaviour. And as Makewa (2008), confirms, effect of pornography on the youth is negative. Their sexual appetites are greatly aroused and continued use of pornographic materials will lead the youth to high levels of sexual excitement, leading to premarital sex with all its complications.

In one of the British newspaper 'Independent on Sunday' 16th January 1994, admitted that sex dominates the late twentieth-century media. Newspaper reports, television series, modern novels and advertisements all present powerful ideas and confusing images of what is acceptable and what is desirable. Melgosa (2001) aptly puts it that the media is very explicit when referring to sexuality and eroticism. A great amount of information, which seldom takes into account the quality, and authenticity of its contents, is now more easily available to children and teenagers. Literature, press, radio and T.V are new highways of information and advertising, continuously use sex as an attraction to keep the consumers' attention.

Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg, (1989), as quoted by Spencer (1997) states that sex hormones especially testosterone, activates sexual arousal. Thus the pubertal surge of hormones directly activates sexual arousal at least among boys. For some adolescents, sexual intercourse is perceived as the natural outgrowth of love. Adolescents may consider intercourse as a sign of

maturity, a way for girls to reward a boyfriend for remaining loyal, or a means of punishing parents (Spencer 1997). Some factors have also been seen to delay or cause adolescents not indulge in premarital sex. Some studies have shown that some young people abstain from premarital sex for religious or moral reasons. Family influences and religious values are important determinants of adolescents' sexual experience. Some adolescents abstain for fear of being caught, fear of pregnancy, or fear of disease.

V. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population was 2079 Form Three and Four students in all the 16 secondary schools in Molo Central Division. A stratified random sample of 324 Form Three and Form Four students was selected. Data was collected through administration of a self-scoring student's questionnaire to the selected respondents. The collected data was processed and analyzed using both descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means) and inferential statistics (t-test) with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17 for Windows.

VI. Findings

Risky Sexual Behaviours and Students' Gender

This objective sought to establish gender differences in relation to the selected factors (curiosity, peer pressure, media and economic status) on risky sexual behaviour. The objective was based on the assumption that there could be gender differences in relation to some factors contributing to risky sexual behaviours. A score of 10 practices was calculated to indicate risky sexual behaviour (engaging in a practice was given a value of 1 and not engaging was given zero). A high score indicated that the behaviour was more risky as compared with lower score. These results are summarised in table 1.

Table 1:
Risky Sexual Behaviour Score for different Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	142	3.7817	1.79880	.15095
Female	175	2.7657	1.66677	.12600

$t = 5.208, d.f = 315, p = 0.000$

Table 1 shows that the boys mean score was 3.78 ± 0.15 and the girls score was 2.76 ± 0.13 . The boys score was significantly higher than that of the girls ($p < 0.05$). This means that the boys were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour than the girls. This agrees with findings in the United States that by age 19, more than 80% of adolescents have had sex and at each age, somewhat more males than females report experiencing intercourse (Miller et al., 1990).

A study done in Zimbabwe showed that the desire to love and to be loved was one of the principal reasons why girls began sexual relations (Besset & Shermon, 1994). Nduati and Wambui (1996) also found that boys have sex to demonstrate their dominance over girls and hence are aggressive in seducing them. A study done in Malawi by Hettzer (1994) found that two thirds of 168 female students who reported having sexual intercourse acknowledged accepting money or gifts for sex and half of 168 indicated they were coerced to sex.

The factors used to calculate the risky sexual behaviour score were: peer pressure, indulging in risky sexual behaviour for sexual favours, sexual intercourse to raise money for a school trip, coming across pornographic materials, pornographic materials influencing sexual intercourse, curiosity, ignorance, prove ones love and having a boy/girlfriend because everyone else has. These factors are discussed below:

More boys than girls would be willing to listen to a friend and try out sex (peer pressure). Of those who would listen to a friend and try sex 74.2% were boys and 25.8% were girls. There was a great gender difference. The results implied that boys are easily pressurised by their peers into engaging in premarital sex. Table 2 shows respondents' gender and trying out sex because of a friend.

Table 2:
Percentages on Gender differences in relation to Peer Pressure Factor

Gender		Would you listen a friend and try out sex		Total
		no	yes	
Male	F	119	23	142
	%	41.9%	74.2%	45.1%
Female	F	165	8	173
	%	58.1%	25.8%	54.9%
Total	F	284	31	315
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Of the students who would be willing to engage in sex if someone was willing to pay the school fees (economic reasons), 63.6% were boys and 36.4% were girls. The outcome indicated that a large percentage of boys compared to girls would engage in sex for monetary gains. This further implied that boys are easy prey to sex pests who lure girls and boys to sex using money. Table 3 shows the respondents' gender and sexual intercourse for favours.

Table 3:
Percentages on Gender differences in relation to Economic Status Factor

Gender		If someone offered to pay school fees for sex		Total
		No	Yes	
Male	F	128	14	142
	%	43.7%	63.6%	45.1%
Female	F	165	8	173
	%	56.3%	36.4%	54.9%
Total	F	293	22	315
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In responding to the question whether one would have sexual intercourse with someone to help raise money for a school trip, 72.2% males and 27.8% females had said yes. The outcome showed a gender difference in relation to the factor indulging in sexual intercourse to raise money for a school trip. This could mean that the boys' love for school trips could push them to risky sexual behaviour just to satisfy their need for a trip. Table 4 shows respondents' gender and indulging in risky sexual behaviour to raise money for a school trip.

Table 4:
Percentages for Respondents' Gender and Intercourse to raise Money for a trip

Gender		If someone offered money for a trip for sex		Total
		no	yes	
Male	F	129	13	142
	%	43.3%	72.2%	44.9%
Female	F	169	5	174
	%	56.7%	27.8%	55.1%
Total	F	298	18	316
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When asked whether they would indulge in sexual intercourse to satisfy what they had heard about sex (media influence) 75.6% males and 24.4% females said they would. This indicated a gender difference in relation to the media influence factor. Table 5 shows the respondents' gender and sex in order to satisfy what one has heard.

Table 5:
Percentages on Gender differences in relation to Media Influence Factor

Gender		I would indulge in sex in order to satisfy what I have heard		Total
		no	yes	
Male	F	103	34	137
	%	39.5%	75.6%	44.8%
Female	F	158	11	169
	%	60.5%	24.4%	55.2%
Total	F	261	45	306
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In relation to coming across pornographic materials, the researcher found that there was a slight gender difference. More boys (51.6%) than girls (48.4%) had come across pornographic literature. This implies that a large proportion of both boys and girls have access to pornography. This could explain the increase in premarital sex as it is observed that sex pests are using pornography to lure girls and boys into sex (Sunday Nation September 6th 2009). Table 6 shows respondents' gender and coming across pornographic material

Table 6:
Percentages on Gender differences in relation to Coming across Pornographic Materials

Gender		Coming across pornographic materials		Total
		No	Yes	
Male	F	8	132	140
	%	14.8%	51.6%	45.2%
Female	F	46	124	170
	%	85.2%	48.4%	54.8%
Total	F	54	256	310
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When asked whether it was very true that every time they got pornographic materials it gave them the urge to indulge in sexual intercourse, 52.8% males and 47.2% females had agreed. The percentages for both boys and girls were relatively high. This confirmed the findings by Makewa, (2008) that effect of pornography on the youth is negative and greatly arouses sexual excitement leading to premarital sex. Table 7 shows the respondents' gender and sexual urge as a result of viewing pornographic materials.

Table 7:
Percentages on Gender differences in relation to viewing Pornographic Materials

Gender		pornographic materials gave me the urge to indulge in sex			Total
		Very true	Not true	I don't know	
male	F	105	34	0	139
	%	52.8%	31.5%	.0%	45.1%
female	F	94	74	1	169
	%	47.2%	68.5%	100.0%	54.9%
Total	F	199	108	1	308
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

On the curiosity factor, more males (65.9%) than girls (34.1%) had ever wanted to have sex just to find out how it feels. This showed a gender difference. The findings therefore showed that curiosity is a leading factor pushing the boys into their first sexual intercourse. Table 8 shows respondents' gender and engaging in sex to know how it feels.

Table 8:
Percentages on Gender differences in relation to Curiosity Factor

Gender		Have you ever wanted to have sex just to have know how it feels			Total
		No	Yes	Not sure	
Male	F	25	116	0	141
	%	18.4%	65.9%	.0%	45.0%
Female	F	111	60	1	172
	%	81.6%	34.1%	100.0%	55.0%
Total	F	136	176	1	313
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

On ignorance, more girls than boys did not know whether sex proved one an adult after circumcision. On the other hand, 74.1% of the boys believe that sex after circumcision proved one an adult as compared with 25.9% of the girls. Therefore, a large percentage of boys (74.1%) engaged in premarital sex with the false belief (misconception) that sex after circumcision proved one an adult. Table 9 shows the respondents' gender and sex after circumcision.

Table 9:
Percentages on Gender differences in relation to Ignorance Factor

Gender		Does sex prove one an adult after circumcision			Total
		No	Yes	I don't know	
Male	F	92	20	29	141
	%	50.0%	74.1%	27.9%	44.8%
Female	F	92	7	75	174
	%	50.0%	25.9%	72.1%	55.2%
Total	F	184	27	104	315
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

More males (73.6%) than females (26.4%) had agreed that having sexual intercourse with a boy/girlfriend was proof enough one loved them. The findings clearly showed a relationship between students' gender and the factor engaging in sex to prove ones love. A large percentage (73.6%) of boys engaged in sex to prove ones love to a girlfriend. Table 10 shows the respondents' gender and sexual intercourse with a boy/girl friend to prove ones love.

Table 10:
Percentages on Gender differences in relation to Intercourse to prove ones love

Gender		Does sex prove love to a girl /boy friend		Total
		no	yes	
Male	F	102	39	141
	%	38.9%	73.6%	44.8%
Female	F	160	14	174
	%	61.1%	26.4%	55.2%
Total	F	262	53	315
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The study generally found out that there was a gender difference in relation to some selected factors contributing to risky sexual behaviour. The study outcome showed that boys were affected more by peer pressure and curiosity than the girls and exposure to pornography (media influence) affects both sexes almost with equal measure. Boys were also found more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour than the girls.

VII. Conclusion

Boys engage in pre-marital sex more than girls. The factors peer pressure; economic status and curiosity play a great role in pushing boys to sexual intercourse as compared to girls, while the factor exposure to pornographic material (media influence) influence both boys and girls to sexual intercourse with almost equal measure.

VIII. Recommendation

Since boys are likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour more than girls, they should be exposed more to guidance and counselling services to help them be more knowledgeable on the dangers involved

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