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PEER INFLUENCE AND FEMALE ADOLESCENTS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The adolescence stage is a critical period in human psychosocial development, whereby adolescents become more vulnerable to peer influence because it is the time for experimenting with new identities and experiences. This study assessed the degree of peer influence among female adolescents in public secondary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria using a multistage sampling procedure to select 234 female adolescents secondary school students. Data were collected on predisposing factors to peer influence, perception on the effect of peer influence, and degree of peer influence, using a structured questionnaire. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Results showed that 47.0% and 26.1% of the respondents reported that coercion to participate in school activities and peer social status were the major predisposing factors to peer influence among female adolescents. Adjusting into a socially ac-

ceptable lifestyle ($\bar{x} = 2.75$) was the most perceived effect of peer influence. Overall, 54.3% of the respondents indicated that the degree of peer influence was positive. Respondents' perception of peer influence significantly ($p < 0.05$) affect the degree of peer influence experienced ($r = 0.265$). Thus, participation in activities against personal conviction and peer social status could predispose female adolescents to peer influence. Therefore, more persuasive techniques should be used to engage female adolescent in school activities, and peers with high status should be identified and mentored in order to positively influence others.

Keywords: Adolescents, female, peer-influence, secondary-school.

INTRODUCTION

The adolescence stage is a critical period in human psychosocial development, whereby adolescents become more vulnerable to peer influence because it is the time for experimenting with new identities and experi-

ences. Psychosocial development refers to the different stages of human development that are influenced by environmental factors. The adolescence stage which covers age 12-19 years, with its own conflict of identity versus role confusion, is one of the critical

periods of developmental stages after childhood. Hence, personality development is dependent on how individuals overcome these conflicts. In understanding adolescents' psychosocial development, it becomes imperative to address and establish the influence of peer pressure at this developmental stage, which could be either positive or negative. This view is supported by Kelly, Stout, and Slaymaker (2013) who posited that the role of peers is a particularly salient influence in adolescence, making it all the more important to understand peer influence at this developmental stage.

Vast literatures indicate that one of the strongest predictors of adolescents' engagement in deviant or criminal behavior, aggression, health risk behavior (such as substance use, sexual risk behavior, weight-related behavior), and even self-injury, is engagement in similar behaviors among adolescents' peers (Brechtwald and Prinstein, 2011).

However, peer influence is not an inherently negative process; it may also be relevant for understanding the adoption of adaptive behaviors. Processes of peer socialization involve adolescents' attunement to social norms, attention to peer reinforcement, and adoption of peers' valued behaviors. Allen and Antonishak (2008) note that these socialization processes are not necessarily deleterious; in fact, engagement in these processes is "actually very close to what it means to be a well-socialized individual". Engagement of adolescents in peer socialization processes in the context of maladaptive values promotes risk. However, socialization toward adaptive values can be beneficial for youth development. Unfortunately, this has been rarely studied.

It has been proven that peer pressure may lead individuals to behave in a way that they

do not usually do (Stuart, 2001). Adolescents are naïve and easily conform to behavior patterns of their peers.

Peer pressure has emerged as the chief source of values and behavioral influence in adolescence, replacing the influence of adults. Along with this new trend is a rise in antisocial behaviors such as destructive overt acts; physical or verbal aggression, bullying, fighting, threatening, being spiteful, cruel, and rejecting or ostracizing another person, nondestructive overt act; arguing, stubbornness, and having a bad temper with others. Recent work has supported and extended this position, showing that friends play an important role in both harmful and positive activities (Gifford-Smith *et al.*, 2005), and that peer pressure predisposes adolescents to many forms of deviance, including alcoholism, gangsterism, robbery and violent secret cult activities (Oni, 2006).

Usually, focus on peer influence are directed towards maladaptive prosocial behavior and used in a negative context. There are however positive influences adolescents can have on each other, leading to adoption of good behaviors and habits. Thus, peer influence cannot be always termed as bad.

Consequently, it has been established that females are easily influenced by their peers due to emotional connection. For female adolescents, it is believed that subscribing to peer behaviors will increase and sustain their sense of belonging in the peer group, likewise lessen the possibility of social withdrawal. This assertion is supported by Haynie *et al.*, (2014) and Mercken *et al.*, (2010) who posited that emotionally close friendships are likely to make girls more susceptible to influence from their friends' behaviors. Kretschmer *et al.*, (2018) also

opined that as a result of these patterns, female adolescents may feel more pressure to adjust their behaviors so that they are more similar to those of their friends.

At teen age, adolescent girls are expected to have good education and positive parental care in order to help them establish true identity and overcome role confusion. However, with increasing exposure of adolescent girls by their parents to adult roles and probable maladaptive behaviors through after school activities such as child labour, hawking in the motor park, markets and on the streets in most rural and urban areas of the country and Ogun State specifically, the exposure could influence other adolescents in the school, as these exposed teenagers are likely to consciously or unconsciously transfer the maladaptive behaviors to their peers, resulting to a defective psychosocial development among the adolescents' girls. Hence, it becomes consequential to assess peer influence among female secondary schools' adolescents in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Specifically, this study addressed the following objectives:

1. ascertain the prevailing factors that predispose female adolescent to diverse influence of peer pressure;
2. examine the perception of the adolescent on the effects of peer influence; and
3. assess the degree of peer influence on female adolescent psychosocial development.

Hypothesis of the study

H0₁: there is no significant relationship between female adolescents' perception on

peer influence and the degree of peer influence

METHODOLOGY

The population consisted of all female adolescents in public secondary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. A multistage sampling procedure was used to select respondents for the study. Ogun state has four divisions, namely; Remo, Egba, Ijebu and Yewa. The first stage involved random selection of 50% of the divisions to select Remo and Yewa divisions. In the second stage, 40.0% (Sagamu, Yewa North and Yewa South) of the Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from the two divisions. The third stage involved random selection of 20% of the thirty (30) identified public secondary schools in the selected LGAs, giving a total of six secondary schools. In the fourth stage, list of female adolescent students was generated, and consequently, 10% of the list was randomly selected to give a sample size of 234 respondents. A closed and open ended questionnaire was used to collect data from the adolescents.

Data were collected on factors that predispose adolescents to peer influence. A list of possible predisposing factors was provided for the adolescents to choose either Yes or No as applicable. In addition, perception of adolescents on peer influence, and the degree of peer influence on adolescents were measured with a 5 point Likert-type rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree respectively. Data were analysed using descriptive (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Predisposing factors to peer influence

Less than half (47.0%) of the respondents indicated that participation in school programmes against their wish was a major factor that could predispose them to peer influence (Table 1). This indicates that adolescents' reluctance to participate willingly in a programme could be easily influenced by their peers who share the same deviant position.

Similarly, 26.1% of the female adolescents reported that influence by adolescents' peer status also contribute immensely to peer influence in the study area. This implies that adolescents' peers perceived to be popular and much liked could alter or influence female adolescents social and moral behavior. This is in agreement with Sandstrom (2011) who posited that, the high-status peers in adolescents' school contexts may influence other adolescents' behaviors and attitudes.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by factors that predispose adolescent to peer influence (n = 234)

| S/N | Predisposing factors | Frequency* | Percentage |
|-----|---|------------|------------|
| 1 | Unbalanced parenting style | 52 | 22.2 |
| 2 | Access to fund to acquire anti-social materials | 14 | 6.0 |
| 3 | Unrealistic affection for opposite sex | 23 | 9.8 |
| 4 | Exposure to drug and substance use | 15 | 6.4 |
| 5 | Lack of parental care | 29 | 12.4 |
| 6 | Lack of motivation and reward for good performance | 54 | 23.1 |
| 7 | Being a member of school social group | 24 | 10.3 |
| 8 | Influence by adolescents' peer social status | 61 | 26.1 |
| 9 | Lack of concentration during school period due to distraction from peers activities | 38 | 16.2 |
| 10 | Participation in school programs against ones wish | 110 | 47.0 |

Source: Field survey, 2019 *Multiple response

Respondents' Perception on the Effect of Peer Influence

The respondents perceived peer influence as a reason for exhibiting fake lifestyle to be socially acceptable ($\bar{x} = 2.75$), severed relationship with their parents ($\bar{x} = 2.72$), misled into taking wrong decisions about their development ($\bar{x} = 2.67$) but enhances their

socialization ($\bar{x} = 2.62$) as shown in Table 2. This implies that the female adolescents in the study area identified with their friends and tend to behave in ways that will make them acceptable. This is in accordance with Kretschmer *et al.*, (2018) who posited that female adolescents are easily influenced to adjust their behaviors so that they are more similar to those of their friends.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by perception of the effect of peer influence (n = 234)

| Perception of the effects of peer influence | Mean | Standard deviation |
|---|------|--------------------|
| I feel that peer influence have a negative effect on my relationship with my parents | 2.72 | 1.50 |
| Parental advice are not taken seriously due to peer influence | 2.39 | 1.35 |
| Adolescent under the influence of peer are often misled into taking wrong decisions about their personal developments | 2.67 | 1.44 |
| Due to peer influence, female adolescents can easily be exposed to social vices | 2.56 | 1.55 |
| Trust maintenance from parent to child is no longer intact due to peer influence | 2.60 | 1.56 |
| Peer influence can make female adolescents susceptible to under age sex and abortion | 2.27 | 1.44 |
| Peer influence have misled most female adolescent to practicing lesbianism | 2.49 | 1.58 |
| Peer influence has led to the increase in fake lifestyle in order to feel socially acceptable | 2.75 | 1.56 |
| Peer influence enhances socialisation process of female adolescents | 2.62 | 1.49 |
| Peer influence can motivate me to become better in life | 2.48 | 1.45 |
| Exposure among peers has been the reason for rude and wayward behavior at home | 2.44 | 1.53 |
| I do not trust my peers' advice due to fear of being misled into delinquency | 2.26 | 1.48 |

Source: Field survey, 2019

Peer influence on female adolescents

The most common peer influence prevalent among the respondents were: saying nasty things when angry (\bar{x} =2.37), telling lies (\bar{x} =2.18) and violent behavior (\bar{x} =2.09) as revealed in Table 3. This implies that peers influence is a key determinant of adolescents' involvement in deviant behaviours. This is supported by Brechwald *et al.*, (2011)

who reported that adolescents' engagement in deviant behavior is influenced by peers.

Overall, 54.3% of the respondents indicated that the degree of peer influence in the study area was slightly positive (Table 4). This shows that in spite of the tendencies of some of the female adolescents to be influenced negatively, they are likely to tilt towards positive influence than the negative.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by degree of peer influence (n = 234)

| S/N | Peer influence | Mean | Standard deviation |
|-----|---|------|--------------------|
| 1 | Displaying violent behavior towards school mates when in disagreement | 2.09 | 1.32 |
| 2 | Loss of identity due to overreliance peers | 1.58 | 0.91 |
| 3 | The urge for sexual intercourse | 1.57 | 0.92 |
| 4 | Use of drug and substance abuse | 1.55 | 0.89 |
| 5 | Steal from home or school | 1.51 | 0.85 |
| 6 | Improve concentration on school activities | 1.59 | 0.94 |
| 7 | Bully other school mates | 1.68 | 1.00 |
| 8 | Pretend to be sick to stay away from school | 1.74 | 1.07 |
| 9 | Say nasty things when angry | 2.37 | 1.42 |
| 10 | Tell lies | 2.18 | 1.31 |

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 4: Categorization of respondents' level of the degree of peer influence (n = 234)

| Level of peer influence | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Positive (below mean) | 127 | 54.3 |
| Negative (Mean and above) | 107 | 45.7 |

Source: Field survey, 2019 Mean = 17.85 Standard deviation = 7.90

Hypothesis Testing

There was a significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between female adolescents' perception and the degree of peer influence in the study area ($r = 0.265$) in Table 5. This sug-

gests that female adolescents' normative believe or how they perceive peer influence will affect their susceptibility to peer influence either negatively or positively.

Table 5: PPMC analysis of respondent's perception on peer influence and degree of peer influence

| Variable | r-value | p-value | Decision |
|------------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Perception | 0.265 | 0.001 | Significant |

Significant at $p < 0.05$

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that coercion of female adolescents to engage in extra school activities and influence of peer status could predispose female adolescents to peer pressure. More prominent among the female adolescent was the tendency to display desire to feel important in their peer groups and enjoy social acceptance, and thus establish identity. However, perception of peer influence could affect the degree of peer influence experienced by the female adolescents.

The study therefore, recommends that more persuasive techniques should be used to engage the female adolescent in extra activities, and peers with high positive status should be identified and mentored in order to positively influence others. This will consequently, enhance the social development of female adolescent in the study area through establishment of identity and surmounting the problems of role confusion.

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