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**The Influence of Peer Pressure and Parent-Child Communication on Initiation of Teenage Sexual Activity among Secondary School Students in Benue State**

By

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**ABSTRACT**

*This is a correlation research to find out the effects of peer pressure and parent-child communication on teenage sexual initiation among in-school adolescents in Benue State. Stratified random sampling was used to select 151 males and 166 females, totalling 317 adolescents from secondary schools in Benue state. A self-administered questionnaire tagged Teenage Sexual Activity Initiation Scale (TSAI) was used to collect data from the study sample. The scale had a reliability coefficient of 0.62. The mean age of the students was 16 years. The findings showed that there were positive significant relationships between peer pressure and initiation of sexual activity.*

*The study has implication for family life education. Programmes should be planned to delay early initiation of sexual activity. Abstinence education should be encouraged in the schools.*

**KEY WORDS:** Peer Pressure, Parent-child communication, Teenage sexual activity

## **INTRODUCTION**

Life is lived in stages and moves from childhood to old age passing through adolescence, adulthood, middle age and old age. Each stage is unique with special characteristics. Adolescence is a special and unique stage of life in which the adolescent child develops secondary sexual characteristics and develops natural desire to engage in sexual activity. Parents, guardians from the traditional point of view will appreciate that adolescents should delay sexual activities until they are fully grown because of reproductive consequences of early sexual exposures. Various authors have defined the period of adolescence. Falaye (2001) described the period of adolescence as a period of rapid changes, which are physical, emotional and social.

In Nigeria, about 34.9% of adolescents aged between 15 – 19 years are sexually active (Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey, NDHS, 1999). These adolescents are exposed to reproductive health problems such as sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy with poor obstetric outcomes. Onifade (1999) identified that unguided adolescent sexual activities have manifested in severe negative reproductive health outcomes such as sexually transmitted infections STIs, unwanted pregnancies, abortions and school drop-outs. Some of these adolescents are not sufficiently knowledgeable regarding the consequences of early sexual initiation (Asuzu and Nwagwu, 2005).

These problems are further intensified by social change, modernization as well as new technological and communication revolutions surrounding the adolescent today. Such influences as television, the music industry, internet searching, social network, fashion etc, are attractive to the adolescents. These adolescents are exposed not only to STI and HIV but also to drugs, juvenile delinquencies and peer pressure, and the accompanying consequences of psychological disturbances that would further exacerbate adolescent morbidity.

The effects of these changes in adolescents, if not properly handled, can predispose to problems such as early initiation of sexual activity among them. This early initiation of sexual intercourse could result to unintended pregnancy and its consequent abortion and poor obstetric outcome vesico-vaginal fistula, even death during delivery, sexually transmitted infections including human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome among this age group. Frenchard and Dishion (2003) identified characteristics that predicted adolescent engagement in their first intercourse such as puberty status, delinquency, substance use and deviant peer involvement. This paper is aimed at assessing the influence of peer pressure and parent-child communication of initiation of teenage sexual activity among adolescents.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescence is a period of rapid development in various dimensions of life such as physical, social, psychological and sexual dimensions. They are very vulnerable to risky behaviours which have lifelong health consequences. Early sexual initiation may lead to unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV. Upchurch (1998) stated that in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, the initiation of sexual

activity is important, it increases the risk of premarital pregnancy and STI's among the teenagers.

Teenagers may look at the opposite sex for validation and approval of the changes their bodies are undergoing which may make them to establish a relationship between the opposite sex. Adegoke (2003) is of the opinion that sexual expression allows unique exposure which may result in both positive and negative consequences. According to the Freudian theory, adolescence is the genital stage of development. A period marked by the development of secondary sex characteristics. Initiation of genital sexual activity may arise during this time of pubertal development. The libido resurfaces after being dormant and it is localized in the genital area. According to McCandless theory of adolescent behaviour and development, the adolescents have to learn socially acceptable ways of reducing sex drive or they would get into troubles such as premarital sex, drug abuse, unwanted pregnancy and contraction of infections such as STI/HIV/AIDS. Socially acceptable ways could be learnt through their families. All these consequences of uncontrolled sexual drive could result in death. Bandura (1977) stated that human development is a life long process of socialization in which modeling and reinforcement of behaviour shape biological drives which are likely to heighten adolescent sexual drives and make them become genitally active. Adolescents observe and imitate the behaviour of others through modeling, their parents, peers and teachers. Through reinforcement they learn that rewarded behaviours are approved while punished behaviours are disapproved. Media display of sexual promiscuity and sexual drive appears to be widely celebrated and reinforced over the internet and by adolescent peers who least suspect any adverse consequences of their predisposition.

Initiation of teenage sexual activity is associated with lack of fertility awareness, which may lead to unplanned pregnancies,

STI/HIV/AIDS. This is influenced by social, psychological and biological factors. Adolescents who have positive relationship with their parents or are seriously engaged in the other areas of their growth and development are less likely to initiate sexual intercourse early. Adolescents who engage in other risky behaviors such as use of alcohol and drugs and are overly engaged in internet pornography are more likely to initiate genital sexual intercourse early. Teenagers with high spiritual beliefs and hold in high esteem moral values are less likely to initiate sexual intercourse early (WHO/FCH/CAH, 2002).

Hamburg (1980) identified teenage early sexual initiation as problematic for multiple reasons many of which occur because of difficulties young people experience taking healthy decisions. Miller, Christopher and King (1993) stated that they engage in sexual behaviours more frequently and with more partners, thereby significantly increasing their risk of untimely pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Capaldi, Crosby and Stoolmiller (1996) found that involvement with deviant peers emerged as a predictor of timing of initiation of intercourse.

There are various types of teenage sexual activities, which range from unprotected sex to oral and anal sex. Jinadu and Odesanni (1993) reported in their study that 80% of their subjects were found to be sexually active, with more than half reporting to be sexually active. (Woolf, Jones and Lawrence 1996) opined that the adolescents in their study view multiple sexual partners as an achievement rather than a health risk. Saba (1995) who conducted his study in Minna also identified that secondary school students in Minna engage in early sexual relations and had many sexual partners. Toroitich – Ruto, 1997 identified in his study that very early sexual debut was initiated through coercion or force. This sort of behaviour could result in genital lesion, sores, and HIV/AIDS. Afeynadu and Goparaju 2003 reported that 14% of males and 13% of females reported that their first sexual initiation



was a stranger with the JSS students engaging more in casual sex. Hawkes and Santhya (2001) identified that sexual mixing among teenagers is a situation whereby partners are characterized by wide age gap. According to (Gredson, Nyamukapa, Garnett, Mason, Zhuwau, Careal, Chandiwana, Anderson, 2002), older age of sexual partner was associated with increased risk of HIV-1 infection in men and women.

There are many factors influencing this behaviour evidenced by researchers' findings of many authors such as poverty (Stroiber & Good, 1998), delinquency (Elliot & Morse, 1989) drug use, (Rosenbaum & Kandel, 1990), low parental monitoring, (Biglan, Metzer, Wirt, Ary Noel & Ochs, 1990) and poor child-parent communication, (Black, Ricardo & Stanton, 1997; Jaccardi, Dittus & Gordon, 1998).

Peer pressure arises from an individual's need to have approval and acceptance of his or her equals. It is a behavioural pattern that begins in childhood and continues into adulthood. The interaction among peers is direct and much more powerful than the influence of teachers and other authority figures. It may have effect on children with low self-esteem. According to Sann-Williams and Berndt (1989), peers serve as credible sources of information, role models of new social behaviours, sources of social reinforcement and bridges to alternative lifestyles. These close and supportive friendships appear to have beneficial effects. However, adolescents with greater peer than parental identification are more prone to deviant and health - comprising behaviours, (Jesser & Jesser, 1977). Teenage suicide, juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol use and premarital pregnancies and STIs are attributed to negative peer pressure (Brofenbrenner, 1994).

Parent-child communication is a very important attribute of parenting. Steinberg (1989) stated that adolescents appear to thrive developmentally when the family environment is

characterized by warm relationship in which individuals are permitted to express their opinions and assert their individuality and where mature behaviour is expected. The absence of child – parent communication results in negative and overriding peer influences to engage in health depleting behaviour. According to Adegoke (2003), one of the primary interpersonal variables associated with adolescent sexual activity initiation is the communication and closeness in child – parent relationship. A close child – parent relationship encourages teenagers and pre – adolescents to turn to their parents instead of others for guidance. McWhirther, McWhither, McWhither, McWhither, (1998). They noted that communication between child – parent about sex, sexual issues, sexual feelings and behaviours can significantly help teenagers to practice responsible sexual behaviour.

Futhermore, such communication desensitizes the topic of sex. Families with poor interpersonal relationships, ineffective communication and limited problem solving skills may inadvertently encourage their teens to turn elsewhere for guidance and nurturing relationship. Promiscuity may be an outcome of families with strife and bitterness. Parents can influence adolescents' sexual behaviour through effective communication where the adolescents are respected. Thornton and Canborn (1987) identified that parents often find initiating and sustaining discussions about sexuality with their teenagers often difficult. These parents felt that they lack knowledge and are embarrassed by the topic and often have misconceptions about their adolescent behaviours. There is paucity of material as effect of parent – child communication in initiation sex especially in the developing countries. Fatusi and Blum (2008) identified in their study that personal attitude in males and high level of religiosity in females result in lower sexual initiation among adolescents in Nigeria.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study was to determine to what extent psychosocial factors such as peer pressure and parent-child communication may influence initiation of teenage sexual activity among adolescents.

## **HYPOTHESES**

1. There will be no significant relationship between peer pressure and initiation of teenage sexual activity.
2. There will be no significant relationship between child-parent communication and initiation of teenage sexual activity.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

This is a descriptive analytical study aimed at identifying the factors affecting teenage initiation of sexual activity.

### **POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

The population consists of all secondary school students from two local government areas in Benue State (Makurdi South and Gboko local government area). The sample of subjects for the study was 317 in-school adolescents who were enrolled from eight secondary schools by stratified random process. Four secondary schools each, from Makurdi South bank and Gboko local government were considered. These subjects comprised of 166 females (52.4%) while males were 151 being 47.6%. Their age ranged between 11 – 21 years, with a mean age of 16.

### **INSTRUMENTATION**

The instrument used for this study was a self-administered questionnaire titled 'Teenage sexual Activity Initiation Scale' (TSAI). It is made up of three sections A, B, C: Section A consists of demographic information.

Section B measured peer pressure and initiation into sexual activities by in-school adolescents. Section C was developed to capture level of communication of sexual issues between child and parent. The instrument sections B and C have a total of 35 items with response format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with a reliability coefficient alpha of 0.62.

### PROCEDURE

Data was obtained using the TSAI scale within two weeks interval with the assistance of principals and vice-principals of the schools that participated in the study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Out of the 342 questionnaires distributed, 317 questionnaires were retrieved. This indicates a response rate of 92.7%.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involved the use of Pearson product moment correlation to find out the existing relationship between peer pressure and parent – child communication and initiation of Teenage Sexual Activity.

### RESULT

Two factors were addressed in the study. One of the factors is the relationship between peer pressure and initiation of teenage sexual activity.

**Table 1:** Relationship between peer pressure and initiation of Teenage Sexual Activity

Variables	X	SD	N	r	P	Remarks
Peer pressure	28.27	6.91	317	.228	.000	Significant
Initiation of TSA	29.13	5.11				

In testing the hypothesis, it was observed that a significant association exists between peer pressure and teenage sexual activity. The subjects mean scores were correlated. Initiation of TSA = 29.13 and peer pressure = 28.27. The standard deviations were 6.91 and 5.11 respectively. When the data was subjected to Pearson Correlation Statistics, a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.228\* ( $P < 0.001$ ) was derived. The hypothesis was therefore rejected.

The second hypothesis stated that there will be no significant relationship between child-parent communication and initiation of teenage sexual activity. Table two shows the result.

**Table 2:**

Variable	X	SD	N	r	P	Remarks
Child-parent communication	28.95	6.18	317	.366**	.000	Significant
Initiation of TSA	29.13	6.91				

Table 2: revealed a significant association between T.S.A and child-parent communication. The subjects mean score were correlated. Mean score of T.S.A = 29.13 and parent - child communication = 28.95. The standard deviations were 6.91 and 6.81 respectively. The application of Pearson Correlation,  $r = .336^{**}$ ,  $P < .05$

The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. It was therefore identified that peer pressure and parent - child communication have significant relationship with initiation of teenage sexual activity.

## **DISCUSSION**

The result of this study revealed that peer pressure and parent-child communication has significant relationships with initiation of teenage sexual activity. There was relationship between peer pressure and initiation of teenage sexual activity. It means that Nigerian adolescents initiate sexual activity majorly due to negative peer influences. This findings is consistent with the result of previous studies such as Capadi, Crosby and Stoolmiller, 1996; Biglan, Metzger, Wirt, Dry, Noel and Ochs, 1990 and Newcomb, Huba and Bentler, 1986 that peer pressure is associated with initiation of teenage sexual activity. Furthermore, involvement with negative peer pressure exposes the young adolescents to a social group in which general deviancy including having a permissive attitude towards early sexual behaviour is encouraged. Dishion and Peterson, (1997) revealed in their study that the participants influence each other through a mutual process that leads to increased tolerance of general rule breaking and sexual experimentation.

Peer pressure results in experimentation with psychoactive drugs and alcohol, under the influence of the above factors the adolescents could initiate sexual activity (Family life, 1995). The findings of the study are consistent with prior studies.

The findings of Apektan, (1988) corroborates the findings of this study that adolescent's sexual activities are also influenced by having sex as a qualification for acceptance into peer groups, to establish dominance, exert power, and as a result of coercion. This is also in agreement with the findings of French and Dishion, (2003) that negative peer involvement is highly associated with early sexual intercourse.

A significant relationship was found between child-parent communication and initiation of teenage sexual activity revealed a relationship. It means poor communication between parents and their adolescents will predispose them to initiating sexual activity

due to inappropriate information. Asuzu, & Nwagu, (2005), reveal that, adolescents would prefer their parents to communicate with them issues concerning sex and family life education. Also, Steinberg (1989) found that poor communication and late supervision between parents and adolescents make them susceptible to peer influence which predisposes them to health, compromising behaviours.

Furthermore, Adegoke (2003) identified that one of the primary interpersonal variables associated with adolescent sexual activity is communication and closeness in child- parent relationship. A close child-parent relationship encourages teenagers and pre-adolescents to turn to their parents instead of others for guidance.

#### **IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY**

The implication of this study is that parents should develop adequate parenting skills to be able to nurture their children through the different stages of developmental milestone especially at adolescence stage. Foundation for this nurturing must be laid at the infancy and early childhood stage of life. This foundation is laid at the early childhood stage. Counseling and Educational psychologists should acquire adequate communication skills necessary for guiding the adolescents.

Furthermore, marriage should be properly entered into by intending couples and they should be exposed to pre-marriage counselling programme before the marriage is enacted. During that period they will be exposed to the task of parenting which is one of the major responsibilities of family life, moreover, parents and other care-givers need to develop friendly and warm environment to thrive with adolescents.

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