

**ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PEER INFLUENCE ON
SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN NSUKKA EDUCATION ZONE,
ENUGU STATE.**

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ABSTRACT: The study investigated the impact of peer **groups** on the sexual behaviours of secondary school adolescents in the Nsukka Education Zone in Enugu State. The design of the study was ex post facto research. The population comprised 11,205 secondary school adolescents in the education zone, while the sample was 230 SS II secondary school adolescents. Three research questions and a hypothesis guided the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Impact of Peer Group on Sexual Behaviour of Secondary School Adolescents (IPGSBSSA)". Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation for research questions and t-test statistics to test the hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that peer group has a great impact on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents. Results also showed that location was impactful on the sexual behaviour of both urban and rural adolescent dwellers, though urban dwellers had a higher mean than their rural counterparts. Among the strategies adopted to reduce the impact of peer groups on the sexual behaviour of both urban and rural dwelling adolescent secondary school students, factors such as promoting positive societal norms and values, older generation as role models, laying emphasis on good virtues, provision of guidance and counselling services for secondary school adolescents were impactful. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents, teachers, and all those interested in the education industry should be responsive in their expected duties of guiding adolescents accordingly. Moreover, there is a need to replicate the study in other education zones and use larger samples to create room for result generalization.

Keywords: Adolescent Sexual Behaviour, Peer Influence, Secondary School Students, Urban-Rural Differences, Guidance and Counselling

INTRODUCTION

Most often, peer group influences greatly contribute to adolescence sexual behaviour. Peer group refers to a group of persons who play together, move together and at times fight each other, may be of the same age and are united by a common interest. They see themselves as equal in status, social standing and other respects in society. According to Nzewunwa (2001), peer groups are individuals who are either equal in age or have about minus or plus one to three years differences.

A child's growth and development is, in most cases, accompanied by steady relationships and friendships with others of the same age or similar age and often the same sex. These steady friends are his peers or peers, and they could have an immense influence on his lifestyle, especially during his adolescence. Behaviours mostly influenced our mode of dressing, language (slang), learning of societal values, learning of anti-social behaviour such as alcoholism and abuse of drugs, and establishing personal identity, among others (Opara, 2004). According to Steinberg and Lawrence (2010), during adolescence, peer groups tend to spend more time with their peers and have less adult supervision, prefer to talk about school and career with their peers and enjoy talking about sex and other interpersonal relationships with their peers. The submissions of the writers above clearly show that peer-positive groups greatly control adolescents' lives, either positively or negatively. Positive connotations include healthy social and emotional growth and academic assistance, among others, while negative impacts may include disobedience, arrogance, truancy and so on. Osakwe (2013) noted that adolescents most often want to socialize as much as possible and have a rapport with peers rather than spending time with their families. According to Onwuka (2011) peer group exposes a child to knowledge he has no access to in the family.

Biologically, adolescence is described as the physical transition from childhood to adulthood marked by the onset of puberty, seen in the ability to think abstractly and multi-dimensionally. It is a period of preparation for adult roles with major pubertal and biological changes such as changes in sex organs, heights, weights and muscle mass. Santrock (2008) defined adolescence as a period of transition between childhood and adulthood that involves biological, cognitive and socio-emotional changes. Emphasising more, Santrock stated that a key task of adolescence is preparation for adulthood.

Though researchers do not agree on the specific age at which adolescence begins and ends, some are of the view that adolescence starts from 10 to 18 years, while others believe that it starts from 11 to 18 years. However, Youth National Policies of Youngsters (2001) defined a specific age range for adolescents from 10 to 19 years. The implication is that in Nigeria, adolescents could be found in secondary schools. A clear distinction between adolescence and adolescence is that while adolescence means growing from childhood to teenage, adolescence means a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. According to Ugwu and Ohuakanwa (2021), adolescence is the time in a person's life when he or she develops from a child into an adult, while adolescence is a young person developing from a child into an adult. On a general note, the adolescence period is characterised by physical, social, mental, psychological, emotional and sexual changes and behaviours in an individual. In fact these changes pose great challenges to many adolescents, among which is sexual behaviours.

In a narrow sense, sexual behaviour refers to a behaviour involving stimulation and excitation of sex organs. In a wider sense, it may imply strategies to find or attract partners and personal interaction between individuals, such as foreplay they choose and approach their sex partners. Kontula and Mannila (2009) defined sexual behaviour as a person's attitude, actions and manners that have to do with sexuality. Relatively, Nnachi (2012) defined sexual behaviour as human acts in relation to sexuality and also a relationship between males and females. The author emphasized that at the age of twelve, sexual experimentation such as breast fondling, kissing and holding hands has already started by some young people, leading to actual sexual activities.

Aside from research evidence, the researchers observed that young secondary school adolescents, both urban and rural, are associated with a high increase in sexual matter, which equally shaped their sexual behaviour. According to Nnachi (2011), some features that contribute to sexual behaviour for both males and females include – stories about sex-related films and photographs, indecent dressing and sexual gestures made by the opposite sex. Once any of these features is made, there could be physical motivation towards sexual satisfaction. By implication, these activities portray sexual behaviour as different ways individuals express their sexuality publicly or privately, which also include holding hands, touching and others.

Frankly, the sexual behaviour of adolescents these days has become a serious matter of discussion and a great concern to society. As Nwokeocha (2009) noted, in many localities of Africa in those good old days, parents gave good attention to their young ones. There was a high sense of decency in sexual behaviour and associated expressions. For instance, a boy can hardly tell a girl that he loves her. Then also, expressions of sexual behaviour such as kissing, holding hands, fondling and so on were seriously frowned upon by society.

Peer group pressure is more critical during the developmental years of childhood and adolescence. As Steinberg and Laurence (2010) opined, during adolescence, peer groups face dramatic changes as adolescents tend to spend more time with their peers and have less adult supervision. They prefer talking about school and careers with their parents but enjoy talking about sex and other interpersonal relationships with their peers. Adolescents are in most cases obedient to their group by adhering strictly to the rules and regulations of the group for acceptance.

Adolescents' sexual behaviour may be influenced by location. Location generally is a place or site occupied, which can be rural or urban. In the context of this study, location means where adolescents are found; it refers to urban and rural areas where most of our adolescents are residing. In this context, the urban area is a developed place or location where adolescents who have access to modern facilities are living, while a rural location reversely is a less developed place where adolescents who have less access to modern facilities are living.

The worries of the researchers is that in Nsukka Education Zone in Enugu State, peer group pressure pushes the secondary school adolescents, whether in the urban or rural schools to be open and permissive in their behaviour towards pre-marital relationships and sex, with this exposure adolescents may become less interested in academic pursuit and pay more attention to sexual behaviour that manifests in hugging, kissing, romancing, and watching pornographic movies. These according to Nzegbulam (2021), may lead to problems such as school dropout and other anti-social acts like smoking and truancy. In recognition of these societal problems, it becomes important to carry out a study on the impact of peer groups on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State.

Statement of the Problem

According to literature and observations, secondary school adolescents in the Nsukka Education Zone were engaged in sexual behaviour due to a lack of knowledge of what healthy relationships entail. As a result, these adolescents whether in urban or rural schools, were open, pushed and

permissive in their behaviour towards pre-marital sex. Due to this exposure too, these adolescents may lose interest in academic pursuits and develop more interest in sexual behaviours that showcase themselves in kissing, romancing, hugging and watching pornographic pictures. These may also lead to other social and health problems such as school dropout, accidental marriage, emotional instability, feelings of personal inadequacy, sexual intercourse at a tender age, indecent dressing, smoking, truancy, prostitution and so on.

Incidentally, most of the literature reviewed, even though it implicated pressure from peer ground as being responsible for adolescents' litany of sexual behaviours such as romancing, hugging, and nocturnal dating, among others, few cut across the Nsukka Educational Zone in Enugu State. Only personal observations and assumptions by the researchers, which have not been subjected to empirical testing, are not enough to draw a conclusion. In this regard, it is greatly important to work on the impact of peer pressure on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents in the Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu Zone, thus the problem of this study.

Purpose of the Study

Generally, the purpose of the study was to find out the impact of peer groups on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents in Nsukka Education Zone in Enugu State. In specific terms, the study determined the:

1. Impact of peer group on sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents.
2. Impact of location on sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents.
3. Measures adopted to reduce the impact of peer groups on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents in Nsukka Education Zone.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study.

1. What is the impact of peer groups on the sexual behaviour of secondary adolescents in the Nsukka Education Zone?
2. What is the impact of locations on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents in the Nsukka Education Zone?
3. What measures could be adopted to reduce the impact of peer groups on the sexual behaviours of secondary school adolescents

Hypothesis

One hypothesis tested at a 0.05 level of significance guided this study.

Locations of secondary school adolescents in the Nsukka education zone will not have any significant impact on their sexual behaviour.

METHODS

The design of this study was an Ex-post facto research design. In ex-post facto design, the scientist (researcher) does not have direct control of independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred and they are inherently not manipulated. Here the independent variable or variables have already occurred, and the researcher only observes the dependent variable (the outcome). Ali (2006) stated that in this type of research, the researcher has no control over independent variables such as age, location and the like. This design is appropriate for this study because peer group and locations were the major (independent) variables which are already naturally classified and cannot be manipulated by the researchers. The population of the study comprised 11,205 secondary school adolescents in the Education Zone as sourced from the statistical records of the Post Primary School Management Board (PPSMB) Nsukka Education Zone (2022/2023) academic session. The sample consisted of 230 SS II adolescent students randomly selected from the three local government areas (Nsukka, Igbo-Etiti and Uzo-Uwani), which made up the Education Zone under study. Using simple random sampling, all the adolescents in the three local governments were given equal opportunity to be chosen. The instrument for the study was a researchers' structured questionnaire titled "Impact of Peer Group on Sexual Behaviour of Secondary School Adolescents Questionnaire (IPGSBSSAQ). The instrument was a 21-item questionnaire made up of four-point rating scale responses of strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) and divided into clusters of three. It was validated by three experts, one in measurement and evaluation and two in educational psychology of the School of Education of the Enugu State College of Education Technical, Enugu. Reliability of the instrument was carried out in the Obollo-Afor Education Zone, a zone different from the Education Zone under study, using 20 adolescents randomly picked 5 from each of the four local governments in the Education Zone. After testing, the reliability indices for the three clusters were 0.89, 0.95, and 0.91, respectively, with an overall reliability index of 0.90. Copies of the questionnaire were self-administered by the researchers. Later, the 230 copies administered were accurately retrieved and subjected to analysis.

Mean and Standard deviation were used to analyse research questions, while an independent t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 and above was acceptable, while below 2.50 was deemed unacceptable.

RESULTS

Research Question I

What is the impact of peer groups on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on adolescents' response on impact of peer group on sexual behaviour.

S/N	Item statement	N	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard deviation (SD)	Results
1	During breaks, I join my friends to visit others of the opposite sex	230	3.40	.63	Accepted
2	Sex-provoking text messages from my friends captivate me.	230	3.43	.62	Accepted
3	Accepting gifts from my friends lures me to their advances.	230	3.21	.70	Accepted
4	I desire such dresses because my friends wear hot dresses such as leggings and spaghetti.	230	2.90	.82	Accepted
5	When my friends discuss their sexual experiences, I enjoy listening to them.	230	2.97	.78	Accepted
6	When my body touches a sensitive part of my male friends, I feel uncomfortable.	230	2.92	.81	Accepted
7	Usually, I do not like moving with friends who keep bad company.	230	2.83	.90	Accepted
	Cluster Means (\bar{x})	230	3.09	.42	Accepted

Key: A mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as acceptable, while below 2.50 was deemed unacceptable.

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of students' responses on the impact of peer groups on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents. On the tables, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively had mean ratings of 3.40, 3.43, 3.21, 3.90, 3.97, 3.92 and 3.83. This analysis shows that items 1 – 7 had mean ratings above the 2.50 benchmark for decision rule. By implication, results show that peer group has a great impact on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents in the Nsukka Education Zone.

Research Question 2

What is the impact of location on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of the responses of secondary school adolescents on impact of location on sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents.

S/N	Item statement	Location	N	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard deviation (SD)	Decision
8	Development of breast in females provokes eventual sexual behaviour.	Urban	108	3.01	.87	Accepted

		Rural	122	2.59	.84	Accepted
9	Beat of orgasm is ignited by kissing, leading to sexual arousal.	Urban	108	3.22	.74	Accepted
		Rural	122	3.02	.75	Accepted
10	Confrontation with idle talks of a sexual nature instigates sexual reaction.	Urban	108	3.22	.63	Accepted
		Rural	122	3.19	.65	Accepted
11	Tricked into attending parties whose activities are characterized by sexist behaviour.	Urban	108	3.07	.78	Accepted
		Rural	122	3.06	.74	Accepted
12	Lured to sexual reaction through exposure to pornographic pictures.	Urban	108	3.14	.82	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.90	.80	Accepted
13	Making unwelcome sexual jokes about adolescents body shape and appearance.	Urban	108	3.07	.88	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.81	.75	Accepted
14	Adolescents attracted looking at breast and buttocks of female folk of opposite sex.	Urban	108	3.06	.85	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.75	.86	Accepted
	Cluster Mean	Urban	108	3.11	.49	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.90	.44	Accepted

Results in Table 2 show the mean and standard deviation of secondary school adolescents on the impact of location (urban and rural) on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents. Analysis shows that the mean response on all the item statements is above 2.50 of the criterion mean. The overall mean responses of both the urban and rural dwellers were 3.11 and 2.90, respectively. This indicates that the urban secondary school adolescents had a higher mean

response than their rural counterparts. However, implication-wise, location is impactful on the sexual behaviour of both urban and rural adolescent secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone.

Research Question 3

What measures could be adopted to reduce the impact of peer groups on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents?

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of adolescents' responses on the measure to be adopted to reduce the impact of peer group on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents

S/N	Item statement	Location	N	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard deviation (SD)	Decision
15	Enhancing accepted societal norms and through teaching	Urban	108	3.31	.82	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.83		Accepted
16	Older generations, e.g. parents, to be role models to students.	Urban	108	3.12	.80	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.79		Accepted
17	Teaching sex education in our secondary schools to assist students developing the habit of self-control as regards sexual matters.	Urban	108	3.21	.82	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.82	.87	Accepted
18	With sex education, standard techniques for maintaining good relationships between males and females will be established.	Urban	108	3.04	.80	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.84	.90	Accepted
19	Laying emphasis for cultivation of virtues for sound moral development.	Urban	108	3.12	.85	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.77	.87	

20	Provision of guidance and counselling services in schools to discourage adolescents with regards to negative sexual behaviour.	Urban	108	3.01	.76	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.78	.85	Accepted
21	Use of incentives on well-behaved adolescents as regards sexual behaviour	Urban	108	2.99	.91	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.72	.92	Accepted
	Cluster Mean	Urban	108	3.12	.55	Accepted
		Rural	122	2.79	.57	Accepted

Table 3 reveals that items 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 have respective mean responses above the 2.50 bench mark for acceptance of response and below 2.50 for rejection. Again, the overall cluster mean of 3.12 and 2.79 for urban and rural adolescents, respectively, indicates that all seven item measures could be adopted to reduce the impact of peer group on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents in urban and rural areas.

Hypothesis:

The location of secondary school adolescents in the Nsukka Education Zone will not have any significant impact on their sexual behaviour.

Table 4: t-test analysis of the impact of location on secondary school adolescents' sexual behaviour.

Location	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Df	t-cal	Sig. (2-tailed)
Urban	108	3.11	.49	228	3.403	.001
Rural	122	2.90	.44			

Analysis of data in table 4 shows that the associated probability with the calculated t (3.403) is 0.001. And since the probability value of 0.001 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is not accepted. The implication is that location as a factor has a significant impact on sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents though in favour of urban dwellers.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A result of the study indicated that peer group has l behaviour of secondary school adolescents in Nsukka Education Zone in Enugu State. This is because most of the secondary school adolescents' concord that the majority of the manifestations of sexual behaviours are due to their association with peers. In line with this finding, Mbakwem, Nzegbulem and Isiozor (2018) found that external

behavioural problems which occur during infancy and adolescence, such as substance use and violence, may continue throughout adulthood. However, peer groups, on the other hand, according to Glaser, Shelton and Bree (2010), may provide easy access, encouragement and an appropriate social setting for consumption. So, by implication, peer groups may serve as a model greatly impactful on the behaviour and attitudes of secondary school adolescents.

Results also showed that location (urban or rural) has a great impact on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents. Revelation however, showed that location has a significant impact on the sexual behaviour of adolescents in favour of urban secondary school adolescents since they had higher mean responses than their rural counterparts. This finding agrees with the discovery of Yusuf (2010), who stated that secondary school adolescents in urban schools are prone to sexual manifestation due to the exposure to corrupting materials like phones and videos. By implication, the closeness in rural areas with parents may be a barrier to negative peer influence on sexual behaviour. In other words, communicating family rules and parental style may be inversely related to sexual behaviours during adolescence. Nzegbulem (2021) reported that parental monitoring and communication with children protected adolescents of both genders from being involved in risky sexual behaviour.

Result also revealed that measures to be adopted to reduce impact of peer group on sexual behaviour of adolescents include: - enhancing positive societal norms and values, older generations being good role models to the younger generation, the teaching of sex education in secondary schools, emphasis on good virtues, provision of guidance and counselling services to secondary school adolescents and providing incentives to well-behaved adolescents. These findings agree with Nnachi (2011) who confirmed that parental monitoring was a very important factor in reducing risk behaviour. Also, Solanke (2016) and Nwokeocha (2009), in their separate studies, found a positive impact on adolescents' behaviour associated with parental monitoring.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From this investigated study, it was drawn that peer group has a great impact on the sexual behaviour of secondary school adolescents in Nsukka Education Zone in Enugu State. It was also found that location is a significant factor in the sexual behaviour of in-school adolescents. Also, parental monitoring and communication, to a great extent, help in reducing sexual behaviour manifestations by secondary school adolescents.

By implication, parents, teachers, school administrators and others interested in education industry should wake up in their duties of proper upbringing of younger generation so as to avoid the exigencies of risk sexual manifestations by our adolescents. This implies that there should be adequate healthy monitoring and communication by older generation on the younger generation in our society.

In terms of limitations, the study used a questionnaire to gather information from the respondents, and there may have been instances of response falsification, which could limit the generalization of the results. Again, the sample used may not have been adequate representation of the entire population thereby limiting generalization of the results also.

Based on the results and limitations, it was recommended that apart from parents and teachers being responsive in their duties of proper upbringing of young ones, a similar study should be carried out in another Education Zone and with a larger sample that may not have much limitation on result generalisation.

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