

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Assessment of Psychological Indicators Influencing the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancies among High School Students in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya

Njagi, Idah Ithiru,

Student Researcher, Department of Psychology,
Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Dr. Mokua, Gilbert Maroko

Lecturer, Department of Psychology,
Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to find out the influence of psychological indicators of teenage pregnancies among high school students in Mbeere North Sub County, Embu, Kenya. Psychosocial development theory was used to guide the study. Mixed methods approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research was applied. Target population was 142 individuals, comprising of 47 guidance and counselling teachers, 35 community health and health workers and 60 parents and caregivers. A census was done to include all the 142 individuals in order to increase response rate and statistical power. The study's descriptive and thematic findings showed that peer pressure leads to teenagers' adaptation of behaviours from their peer groups, and fosters social influence, predisposing them to risky sexual activities and subsequent early pregnancies. The inferential findings however indicated that there was no statistically significant influence between peer pressure and teenage pregnancies among high school students. The implications of the study findings are discussed.

Keywords: Peer pressure, peer influence, teenage pregnancies, role modelling, aping others, social conformity

1. Introduction

Teenage pregnancy is termed as the act of a young girl in her teen age, usually from 13 to 19 years becoming pregnant. This usually refers to young girls who are yet to reach legal and acceptable state of adulthood, although this may differ from one country to another. Akella and Jordan (2015) in Albany State University, United States, observed that the phenomenon is slowly becoming a health issue and affecting not only teenage girls but many lives across the world.

While their consequences may vary in terms of impact and magnitude, teen pregnancies stem from various psychological aspects, such as peer pressure, exposure to media, poverty, and social as well as cultural practices. Other factors that may contribute to teenage pregnancies include lack of societal acceptance, cultural behaviors, such as child marriages, lack of information and sex education, violence, harassment and gender inequality among others (Kirchengast, 2016).

According to Erickson's psychosocial development theory, as children approach teenage, especially from the age of 12, they often start experiencing psychological crisis better described as role confusion versus identity (Rageliené, 2016). To adolescents, pregnancy is an unintended experience often linked to personal characteristics such as age, skills and knowledge at first sexual intercourse at a time when there are a lot of misconceptions about contraceptives and sex. Kirchengast (2016) in Austria states that teenage pregnancies come with a host of changes on the lives of the teen mothers, and various health issues related to early motherhood.

Research indicates that developed and developing nations experience varying rates of teenage pregnancies. Globally, estimated 21 million teenagers aged between 15 to 19 years get pregnant annually, while up to 2 million girls below 15 years of age are victims. Notably, 16 million of these teenage pregnancy cases happen in developing countries (WHO, 2020). Countries in the African continent continue to experience high cases of adolescent and teen pregnancies, with prevalence of 18.8%.

In South Africa, Ziyane and Ehlers (2006) found that early pregnancies are linked to high levels of poverty and competition for affection and validation by men. This view is consistent with African culture where boys and men are considered as main decision makers when it comes to sexual matters. However, these factors lead to many negative effects in the lives of the young mothers, deeply affecting their physical and psychological wellbeing.

Adolescent pregnancies are becoming worrisome and have reached alarming rates in Kenya. According to the statistics by WHO (2020), it is estimated that a quarter of Kenyan women often sire children before or when they attain 18 years. In Mbeere area, these cases are attributed to influence of media and exposure to western culture. The erosion of

traditional African values that attached high importance to premarital virginity of women as well as the disapproval of sex before marriage by the society has been weakened and ignored.

The resultant early pregnancies plunge young girls, most of whom are still in school to various psychological problems, such as depression, posttraumatic disorders, anxiety, social stigma and suicidal ideation among others. The present study therefore sought to find out the influence of psychological indicators of teenage pregnancies among high school students in Mbeere North Sub County, Embu, Kenya.

2. Materials and Methods

The study used mixed methods approach and adopted concurrent triangulation design, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative components of data. The approach was preferred due to its usefulness in strengthening the findings by expanding and complementing the weaknesses of one set of data with the strengths of the other. The study's independent variable was peer pressure, measured through the domains of peer influence, role modelling, aping others, desire to fit in and social conformity.

Teenage pregnancies formed the study's dependent variable. The study targeted 142 individuals. Based on the small number of target population, census was done to include the entire population as participants in order to increase study's response rate and statistical power. Questionnaires were used to obtain quantitative data from guidance and counselling teachers, while interviews were used for gathering qualitative data from parents, health workers and community health workers.

3. Results and Discussion

The questionnaires were administered to 47 guidance and counselling teachers. Out of those distributed to the respondents, 45 forms were successfully retrieved, having been fully responded to. This implies that the response rate was 96% of the total number of guidance and counselling teachers. On the part of the interview schedules, the researcher successfully managed to engage 55 out of 60 intended parents and caregivers, representing a rate of 92% and 32 out of the scheduled 35 health and community health workers, translating to a rate of 91%.

The study sought to investigate how peer pressure influences teenage pregnancies among high school students. Data was analyzed and results presented as shown in Table 1

Peer Pressure	Teenage Pregnancy					
	Low Pregnancy		High Pregnancy		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		%
Peer influence	8	17.8	37	82.2	45	100
Role modelling	12	26.7	33	73.3	45	100
Aping others	22	48.9	23	51.1	45	100
Desire to fit in	7	15.6	38	84.4	45	100
Social conformity	6	13.3	39	86.7	45	100
Total					45	100

Table 1: Descriptive Findings of Influence of Peer Pressure on Teenage Pregnancies

Source: Researcher, 2021

Table 1 shows that 17.8% of guidance and counselling teachers associated peer influence with low levels of teenage pregnancies, while 82.2% of them associated it with high levels of teenage pregnancies among high school students. The results indicate that majority of the participants linked peer influence to high teenage pregnancy rate among high school students. The results are consistent with Siniša (2018), in a Europe based study that found peer influence to have been among the leading factors for teenage girls becoming young mothers.

The results further indicate that 26.7% of guidance and counselling teachers sampled rated role modelling as having low influence on prevalence of teenage pregnancy, compared to 73.3% who associated it with high cases of teenage pregnancy among high school students. The results imply that majority of the participants linked role modelling to high cases of teenage pregnancies among high school students. This corroborates the findings by Thobejane (2017) in a study carried out in rural areas in South Africa that role modelling played a major role on prevalence of teenage pregnancies.

The results further show that 48.9% of guidance and counselling teachers associated aping others with low cases of teenage pregnancy, while 51.1% associated it with high cases of teenage pregnancy among high school students. The results indicate that a simple majority of the participants view the element of aping others as having high influence on prevalence of teenage pregnancies among high school students.

Further 15.6% of the participants linked desire to fit in to low cases of teenage pregnancies, while 84.4% rated it highly on influencing teenage pregnancies among high school students. The results are consistent with Hendrick et al. (2016) that influence by the desire for association exposes young people to risky sexual activities.

Lastly, 13.3% of the participants rated social conformity as having low influence on prevalence of teenage pregnancies, while 86.7% of them associated it with high cases of teenage pregnancy among high school students.

The thematic findings also indicated that peer pressure influences teenage pregnancies among high school students. the findings showed that peer pressure holds considerable influence to sway the perceptions of teenagers regarding sexuality making them to desire to fit in, and conform to behaviours that seem acceptable to their friends or the

groups they belong in. This includes engaging in risky behaviours including dangerous sexual activities with members of the opposite sex.

The results were further subjected to one-way ANOVA in order to compare the ratings on the influence of peer pressure and teenage pregnancies among high school students. The results are as presented in Table 2

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.876	3	.292	1.007	.399
Within Groups	11.883	41	.290		
Total	12.759	44			

Table 2: ANOVA test for Peer Pressure and Teenage Pregnancies

The inferential findings in Table 2 indicate that there was no significant influence between peer pressure and teenage pregnancies at the $p < .05$ [$3, 41$] = 1.007, $p = 0.399$. Thus, the null hypothesis advanced as: There is no statistically significant influence between peer pressure and teenage pregnancies among high school students in Mbeere North Sub County, Embu, Kenya was not rejected. The results indicate that while there may be influence between peer pressure and teenage pregnancies among high school students, such influence is not significant, implying that the evidence was not adequate to detect the influence.

Further, the prevalence of teenage pregnancies among high school students may as well be influenced by other underlying issues apart from peer pressure. The results support the findings by Dickins et al. (2012), in United Kingdom, who found that dealing with simple correlates of teenage pregnancies such as being swayed by others may not resolve the problem if other issues affecting young people, such as poverty are not addressed.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the study's descriptive and thematic findings, it is evident that peer pressure leads to teenagers' adaptation of behaviours from their peer groups, and fosters social influence, predisposing them to risky sexual activities, subsequently resulting in high prevalence of early pregnancies. The sub-indicators of peer pressure, which include peer influence, role modelling, aping others, desire to fit in, and pressure for social conformity were found to influence teenage pregnancies by eliciting the desire for motherhood, fostering negative behaviours, and desire to engage in risky sexual behaviours.

The study's inferential outcomes, however revealed that there was no statistically significant influence between peer pressure and teenage pregnancies among high school students. While descriptive and thematic findings pointed to the influence between peer pressure and teenage pregnancies, it was inferred that the results lacked enough statistical power to detect the influence. Based on the findings, policy makers in the Ministry of Education should embark on anchorage of reforms aimed at fostering conducive and positive school environment for enhanced students' mental wellbeing.

Educational trainers should introduce more relevant courses, continuing education and workshops for equipping guidance and counselling teachers with skills that can help girls and other high school students with age appropriate teachings regarding healthy relationships. Since the study found that there was no statistically significant influence between peer pressure and teenage pregnancies, further research with a higher population may be required to assess the influence of other psychological indicators on teenage pregnancies.

5. References

- i. Akella, D. & Jordan, M. (2015). Impact of Social and Cultural Factors on Teen Pregnancy. *Journal of Health Disparities and Research*. 8(1), 41-62.
- ii. Dickins, T. E., Johns, S. E., & Chipman, A. (2012). Teenage pregnancy in the United Kingdom: A behavioral ecological perspective. *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology*, 6(3), 344-359. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0099247>
- iii. Hendrick, C., Cance, J., & Maslowsky, J. (2016). Peer and Individual Risk Factors in Adolescence Explaining the Relationship between Girls' Pubertal Timing and Teenage Childbearing. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 45(5), 916-927. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0413-6>
- iv. Kirchengast, S. (October 26th 2016). Teenage Pregnancies: A Worldwide Social and Medical Problem, An Analysis of Contemporary Social Welfare Issues, Rosario Laratta, Intech Open, DOI: 10.5772/65462. Available from: <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/52475>
- v. Ragelienė T. (2016). Links of Adolescents Identity Development and Relationship with Peers: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry = Journal de l'Académie canadienne de psychiatrie de l'enfant et de l'adolescent*, 25(2), 97-105.
- vi. Siniša, F. (2018). Adolescent pregnancy is a serious social problem. *Journal of Gynecological Research and Obstetrics*4(1): 006-009.
- vii. Thobejane, T. (2015). Factors Contributing to Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa: The Case of Matjitjileng Village. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, 6(2), 273-277.
- viii. WHO, (2020). Adolescent Pregnancy, World Health Organization. Accessed Online: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>

- ix. Ziyane, I. & Ehlers, V. (2006). Swazi Youths, Attitudes and Perceptions concerning adolescent pregnancies and contraception. *Health SA Verpleging* 11 (1), 31-42.