

The Influence of Demographic Factors on Peer Pressure among Secondary School Adolescents in Nyahururu Laikipia County

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Abstract

This study investigated whether demographic factors that included age, class and gender do influence peer pressure among adolescents. The study employed survey research design. The study targeted 13 secondary schools with a population of 2855 students of Nyahururu, Laikipia County. Stratified sampling was used to select 10 schools for the study. The sample comprised 320 students and 10 teacher-counselors. Two questionnaires were used to collect data from students and teacher-counselors. Data was analyzed using statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages were employed. The study established that demographic factors do influence peer pressure among secondary school adolescents. The study recommends training of teacher-counselors on how to deal with demographic factors that influence peer pressure among secondary school adolescents.

Keywords: Peer Pressure, Adolescent, Guidance and Counseling, Demographic Factors, Nyahururu, Laikipia County.

1.0 The Background and Literature Review

Human growth and development is characterized by stages and one of these is the adolescence. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016), the adolescence is the period that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10-19 years. Pickard, (2015) posits that adolescence covers the period between 13-19 years of age but can start as early as 9 to 12 years. Adolescence is the transitional period of physical and psychological development between childhood and maturity. It is a crucial period as adolescents can be easily swayed by their close relationships (Boundless Psychology, 2015).

1.1 Early Stages of Adolescents.

According to Hall, (1904) adolescence is a period of storm and stress, while Freud and Erickson viewed adolescence as a time of turmoil and stress (Pierno, 2002). Erikson, (1968) presented it as a time of identity crisis, when the adolescent works to form his or her own identity. Both Freud and Erikson aid the researcher in establishing that adolescent seeks to form his/her identity by associating with a peer group. Adolescents are keen on new experiences as they search for an identity with peers and independence from their parents. During early period, adolescents exhibit heightened self consciousness, greater instability of self-image and a reduction of favorable opinions of self. These disturbances become less intense in the late adolescence. On the other hand, peers' opinions of oneself appear to become more important as the adolescent advances in age. According to Jessor & Jessor, (1977), an opinion of peers for some surpasses the opinion of parents. Therefore the adolescent seems to value the peers' views more than the parental guidance. Brown (2004) citing Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) states that the adolescents become ideally emotionally autonomous before he or she is ready.

2.0 Peer Pressure

Peer pressure on the other hand is defined as when people of the same age (peer group) encourage or implore one to do something or to keep from doing something else, whether an individual wants to do it or not (Ryan, 2002; Boundless Psychology, 2015). According to Burns & Darling, (2002), the more subtle form of peer pressure is known as peer influence which involves changing ones' behaviour to meet the perceived expectations of others. It is the influence and demands that come from association, connection or attachment of an adolescent to a group of other adolescents. The group may be formal or informal but members exhibit similar attitudes, behaviours, likes and dislikes. All children experience peer pressure and give in to it at one time or another. Peer pressure is part of almost all children's lives (Kessler, 2015).

2.1 Acceptance into groups

According to Cavior and Dokecki (1973) as mentioned in Newman and Newman (1997), popularity and acceptance into a group in high school may be based on one or more of the following factors: good looks, athletic ability, social class, academic performance, future goals, affiliation to religious, racial or ethnic group, sexual orientation, special talents, involvement in drugs and substance abuse, or deviant behaviour such as delinquency. Although the criteria for membership may not be publicly articulated, peer groups tend to include

or exclude members according to consistent standards. For example, physical attractiveness is a powerful force in determining popularity; very attractive physical appearance may be a primary determinant of social acceptance, while unattractive physical appearance may lead to rejection of an adolescent by a peer group.

2.2 Deviant Peer Role

Kiesher, Cadinu, Poulin and Bucci (2002) argue that adolescents who bond with deviant peers play a significant role in delinquency. Those adolescents who become involved in delinquent peer groups tend to have a very difficult time in school and do not perform well academically. Such peer groups engage in deviant behaviours like school fires, strikes and peddling drugs. On the other hand, Warren (2004) quoting Berndt, 1992, Brown 1999 Furman & Simon, 1998; states that peer influence on adolescence is bidirectional. For example, a deviant peer may pressure a non-deviant peer to become more deviant; but a non-deviant peer may exert positive influence on a deviant peer and make him/her to become less deviant (Quoting Capaldi, et al 2001; Hartup 1996). Thus peer influence during adolescence can be both positive and negative.

2.3 Peer Friendship

Peers tend to associate with those similar to themselves. Whether it is gender, age, socio economic status, ethnicity or interests, teens tend to gravitate towards those similar to them. Peer friendships provide social support for dealing with challenges experienced by adolescents, enable them to learn social norms, and practice autonomy (deGuzman, 2007). Warren (2004) posits that teens often choose friends who are similar to them, hence the need to consider the role of peer selection when examining peer influence, for the two are difficult to separate

2.4 Resistance of Peer Pressure

According to Scholastic (2008), peer pressure or peer influence or social influence means adopting a particular type of behaviour, dress or attitude in order to be accepted as part of a group of one's equals (peers). As one becomes more independent, one's peers play a great role in one's life. For instance during emotional situations it becomes hard to resist peer influence. Thus it has become pressure and one may be compelled to do what one is not comfortable with.

2.5 Implicit and Explicit of Peer Pressure

Farr (2015) citing Laursen posits that peer pressure is not just essentially influence but is implicit and explicit. An adolescent may want to fit in a peer group and make friends but he or she may be put off by one's personality trait such as being obese. The peer members may make fun of him or her being obese, so the adolescent will try to reduce weight in order to minimize the ridicule and be accepted in the peer group. This is explicit peer pressure. On the other hand the affected adolescent could feel that since all the peers are slim, he or she should just reduce weight so as to fit in the group. This is implicit peer pressure. However it is difficult to tell which is which so peer pressure is simply the influence to behave differently.

2.6 Importance of Peers

The heightened importance of peer influence is a hall mark of adolescent psychological functioning (Steinberg and Monahan, 2007) citing Brown 2004. Studies of homophily (tendency to affiliate with like-minded friends) during adolescence reveal that they do influence each other and effects are stronger during adolescence than in adulthood. Adolescents tend to form groups with adoption of styles, values and interests of friends thus forming a social landscape in attempt to foster solidarity and uniformity within the group to maintain group identity that distinguishes them from other students.

On the other hand, the heightened significance of peer influence in adolescence is mainly due to changes in individual's susceptibility to peer pressure. The importance of peers makes the adolescents change their behaviour in order to fit in. They are concerned more about what their friends think of them, hence likely to go with the crowd to avoid rejection (Steinberg et al, 2007) Citing Brown et al. 1986. Warren (2004) found that lack of self-worth, autonomy and having strong attachments to friends are determining factors on how teens are influenced by their peers. Forsyth (2009) posits that individuals with moderate to high self-esteem are less susceptible peer pressure than individuals with low self-esteem.

Gasa (2005) cites Harilal (1996) who defines conformity as the tendency to change one's behaviour, beliefs, opinions or actions to correspond with the norms expressed by other people due to implicit or explicit social pressure. Other researchers such as Black (2002) found that most adolescents conform to peer pressure about fairly insignificant factors like music, clothing, hairstyles but when it comes to vital issues like moral values, parents still remain more influential than the peer group. However as Mukama 2011 points out, during adolescence, young people separate themselves from their parents to join their agemates.

From the foregoing background it is evident that peer pressure is influenced by many factors. The study

therefore sought to assess how demographic factors such as age, gender and class influence peer pressure among secondary school adolescents in Nyahururu, Laikipia County.

2.7 Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

Freud believed that adolescence is fraught with internal struggle. He viewed the pre-adolescent "Latency" period as a time when the child develops a balance between the ego and the id. Upon entering the "genital" phase of adolescence, the child is bombarded with instinctual impulses that disrupt this balance. The ego is torn between the strong impulses of the id and the restrictions of the super ego. This conflict makes the adolescence a time of tremendous stress and turmoil (Pierno, 2002). Therefore the study sought to establish whether this stress and turmoil makes the adolescent seek help from his/her peers.

3.0 Demographic factors

This section reviews demographic factors that influence peer pressure, that is, age, class and gender.

3.1 Age

According to Forsyth (2009), a variety of factors have been linked with likelihood to conform to peer pressure and one of them is age. Forsyth posits that conformity increases with age until adulthood when people show more independence in decision making. A study done by Steinberg and Monahan (2007) showed that resistance to peer influence increased linearly during adolescence and particularly between ages 14 and 18. Therefore it was expected that increasing age would be associated with increasing levels of resistance to peer influence. For deviant, anti-social peer influence, a curvilinear relationship between age and susceptibility was found to be strongest during mid-adolescence. They concluded that mid-adolescents are more susceptible to peer influence than younger (10-14 years old) or older 18-30 years old) adolescents. From age 12, the importance of parents decreased all the more while peers took the center stage in the life of the adolescents. Resistance to peer influence is likely to grow between age 14 and 18 than before or after. This is consistent with the literature on adolescent psychosocial development in several aspects. It has been suggested that the increased orientation to peers in early adolescence may be a correlate of adolescents' developing emotional autonomy from parents and dependence on parents is replaced by dependence on peers. Between ages 10 and 14, adolescents express strivings for emotional autonomy most strongly. They try to develop individuation from parents at the onset of adolescent period and a sense of identity at its conclusion (Steinberg and Monahan, 2007).

3.2 Class

Cabezas (2010) cites Ding & Lehrer (2004) who define peer effects in education field as each student influencing his/her classmates not only through knowledge spillovers but also in how he/she affects classroom standards. Peer effects can affect student achievement through different channels, so the definition of peer effects has been one of the main difficulties in the empirical and theoretical studies in education. The main assumption is that students do not only learn from teachers but also from class-and-school-mates too. Peer effects may include a direct and indirect channel (Cabezas citing Schneewe's and Winter-Ebmer 2007. Direct channel is where students teach one another in groups and discussions in class. Students also affect each other indirectly through knowledge spillovers, casuals discussions or when students ability or socioeconomic background influence classroom standards (Cabezas citing Wilkinson et al 2003). Moreover peers may influence classroom atmospheres, classroom disruption and level of violence (Cabezas citing Lavy & Schlosser, 2007) and consequently affecting student learning process.

3.3 Gender

An assessment of how much pressure peers exerted in numerous areas of high school life and how this pressure influenced teenagers attitudes and behaviours found that one third of both genders identified peer pressure as one of the hardest things they had to face as teenagers. Generally peer pressure appeared stronger for females than males and the genders disagreed about areas in which pressure was strongest (Brown, 1982). Therefore gender is a factor influencing peer pressure among teenagers.

According to Howard (2004), research found that 14 and 15 year old boys, especially those from higher social classes, strongly focused on peer groups while girls of the same age had a stronger preference for dyadic friendships. Boys have more freedom of movement in peer groups than do girls, hence found frequently with their peer groups in public. Girls are more likely to hang out their homes. Howard seems to point out that there is a difference in gender influence on peer pressure, whereby boys tend to give in to peer pressure than girls. Raising Children Network posit that boys are more likely to give in to peer influence than girls hence corroborating Howard's findings.

4.0 Research Methodology

The researcher chose survey research design which involves description of the phenomenon under study. According to Posinasetti, (2014), and Kowalozukl (2008), a descriptive study is one in which information is collected without changing the environment. It is used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomenon, to describe what exists with respect to variables or conditions in a situation. Since the events have already taken place, or existed, the researcher just selects the relevant variables for analysis of their relationships (Best and Khan 1993).

4.1 Target Population

The study involved all the 13 secondary schools in Nyahururu, Laikipia County with a student population of 2855, who were targeted.

4.2 Sampling Design and Procedure

Out of the 13 Secondary Schools, 10 were selected to participate in the actual study. Stratified random sampling was used in selecting schools. Stratified sampling was used so that the research could capture all the types of schools in Nyahururu. The schools were first stratified on the basis of the type with two strata, namely County and District schools. One school was randomly selected from the two County schools. Nine schools out of the eleven district schools were selected using the random sampling technique. The researcher wrote the names of the 11 district schools on different pieces of paper. The papers were then folded and put in a container. After this, nine papers were drawn at random. The schools whose names appeared on the papers were included in the study. Random sampling gave all the schools an equal chance of being selected, thus making the sample more representative. The 10 sample schools accounted for 77% of the total 13 schools which the researcher considered adequate. The researcher randomly selected 8 students from form one, two, three and four from the 10 schools, giving a total of 32 students per school. Therefore the total sample was 320 students. Ten teacher-counselors, one from each sample school, were selected to participate in the study.

4.3 Research Instrument

The instrument for the study was a questionnaire. The researcher constructed two questionnaires to collect data from the students and teacher- counselors. Mahfuz (2014) citing Mageswara and Gay (1992) states that a descriptive study reports the current status of the phenomena. It describes what exists with respect to variables or conditions in a situation. The researcher used questionnaire to collect data from students and teacher-counselors in regard to demographic factors and their influence on peer pressure. According to Peil (1993), the use of a questionnaire ensures anonymity of the respondents, makes the respondents reflect more on the questions and give more meaningful answers that are more objective than those of interviews. Researchers are also able to collect data from large numbers of people within the shortest period than is possible with the interview method. The study targeted 320 students so the researcher considered a questionnaire to be most appropriate. Adolescents do not like revealing their identity when giving information concerning their personalities. They are resistant concerning sensitive issues like drug and substance abuse. The researcher recognized the need to maintain high level of confidentiality during data collection. Therefore students were not expected to write their names on the questionnaire, thus ensuring anonymity.

4.4 Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis were employed in this study. The collected raw data were first scanned and then coded. The researcher scrutinized the instruments for completeness and adequacy of responses. Any errors, omissions, illegible responses, blankness or irrelevant responses were thus checked. After scanning all the questionnaires, the coding process began, during which categories of responses were identified and classified on a prepared code book according to research objectives for quantitative analysis. The quantitative analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V.22). The researcher employed descriptive statistics including frequency counts and percentages, when analysing data.

5.0 Summary of Findings

The responses made by the students tended to down play the effect of peer pressure on the adolescent but showed the tendency for the adolescents to become independent. However, an overall peer pressure vulnerability score for the students was obtained. The findings indicated that although only a small proportion (26.6%) of the adolescents were highly susceptible to peer pressure, quite a significant number of them were susceptible and those who had low vulnerability levels (57.8%) could become more vulnerable. This is because, as Jessor and Jessor (1977) notes, during early adolescence, persons exhibit heightened self-consciousness, greater instability of self-image, and a reduction of favourable self-opinions, disturbances that for many abate in later adolescence. As adolescents advance in age, peers' opinions of oneself seem to be more important and for some surpasses the

importance of parental opinions.

Kaplan (1996) states that a number of investigators looked at the relationship between peer pressure and age in youths seven to twelve years old and found that yielding onto peer pressure was significantly related to age although not in a straight forward way. In the work cited by Kaplan (1996), children aged between 4 and 9 years chose a relatively low amount of conformity to peer pressure, while those aged between 11 and 13 years showed the most conformity. Kaplan observed that after the age of 13 years, sensitivity to peer pressure gradually decreased.

6.0 Conclusion

Gender do influences peer pressure since slightly more boys than girls had high levels of vulnerability to peer pressure. Slightly more girls than boys had very low levels of vulnerability to peer pressure. Therefore boys are most likely to yield to peer pressure than girls. Teacher-counselors should therefore try to help boys with ways of avoiding negative peer pressure and encourage positive peer pressure.

Peer pressure vulnerability across class of students reveals that form two students had high levels of vulnerability to peer pressure followed by form three, then form four and least form one. Students in form two and three being the most volatile, tend to conform to peer groups which engage in risky behaviours such as smoking, alcohol and drug abuse. These behaviours are very common in secondary schools in the study area, causing indiscipline problems.

7.0 Recommendations

This study recommends that the government should offer training to teacher-counselors on how to deal with peer pressure among the adolescents and the negative influence on their behaviours. The adolescents should be trained to be assertive in order to overcome the challenges of peer pressure. They should be taught the dangers of negative peer influence such as smoking, alcohol, drug and substance abuse which go with peer pressure. Punishment and suspension from school will not help transform the adolescents. They need counseling and guidance from professional counselors. Schools should provide physical facilities such as counseling offices that are properly furnished, and adequate counseling literature to help teacher-counselors become effective. Peer counseling as a way of promoting behaviour change among students should also be revitalised in the schools.

Parents should be sensitized to offer guidance and counseling to their children instead of abandoning this responsibility in the hope that teachers will take care of the children. Parents should raise their children in the knowledge and fear of God. Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it". This will minimise chances of these adolescents yielding to peer pressure in negative ways.

Adolescents should be occupied especially during the holidays in positive and constructive activities such as games, athletics, cleaning up the environment, and church or religious activities like singing or music and drama. These engagements can help divert their attention from negative peer influence. Teacher-counselors can have less teaching load so that they can spend more time counseling and guiding the adolescents.

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