

# Peer-Group Influence and Family Standard of Living as Correlates of Prostitution Tendencies Among University Undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.

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## Abstract

The study was designed to investigate peer-group influence and family standard of living as correlates of prostitution tendencies among university undergraduates in south east, Nigeria. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The design of the study was correlational survey. The sample consisted of 1,983 university undergraduates from two federal and three state universities in south east, Nigeria. The instrument used for the study were questionnaire titled Peer-Group Influence and Family Standard of Living as Correlates of Prostitution Tendencies Questionnaire (PGIFSLCPTQ) and Focus Group Discussions Guide (FGDs) which were validated by experts and used for data collection. The data collected were analysed using Pearson correlation coefficient and t-test. Qualitative analytical procedure known as content analysis was employed to analyse the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The major findings of the study include: there is positive correlation between peer-group influence and prostitution tendencies of university undergraduates; University undergraduates from families of low standard of living have more tendencies for prostitution than those in high standard of living. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made among which is that: Sex education should be introduced and emphasised in the curriculum programme of tertiary institutions.

**Keywords:** Peer-group influence, family standard of living, prostitution tendencies, university undergraduates

## 1. Introduction

Prostitution is well known in many cultures of the world and has continued to grow in modern societies. It is gradually being accepted even with its immoral undertone in many countries of the world. Prostitution according to Scott and Marshall (2005) is the provision of sexual favours for financial reward. They went on to say that prostitution may be heterosexual or homosexual activity; but historically most prostitution has been females with males as clients. Prostitution is defined by Strong, Devault, Sayad and Yarber (2005) as the exchange of sexual behaviours such as intercourse, fellatio (the sexual stimulation of a man's genitals using the tongue and lips), anal intercourse, and obscene insults, for money and/or goods. They are of the view that both men and women, including transvestites and transsexuals, work as prostitutes. They agree with Scott and Marshall that the most common form of prostitution is women selling sex to men. Supporting the above definitions, the West Africa Project to Combat AIDS (WAPCAS) (2005) defined a prostitute as one who for one reason or the other engages in sex regularly as economic activity to earn a living.

According to Ojo (2007) prostitution is the act of performing or offering or agreeing to perform a sex act for hire; engaging in or agreeing or offering to engage in sexual conduct with other persons under a fee arrangement with that person or any other person. It includes also any lewd act between persons for money or other considerations. For the purpose of this article, prostitution is seen as the exchange of sexual services for money. It may be men, women or children, and the buyer of prostitute's services is usually a man and in very rare cases a woman.

Zatz (1997) opined that the definition of prostitution is as contested as its legal and moral status. Alexander (1987) is of the view that even though it is quite common to talk glibly of prostitution as the world's oldest profession existing universally across time and place, but such talk obscures the differences in social and cultural context. Differences in economic organization, normative sexual practices, and relationship between economic practices and identity are the factors that shape the significance and structure of prostitution within any particular historical space. For example, Bullough and Bullough (1996) asserted that throughout its long history, prostitution has always been controversial. This is evident by the wide spread tolerance interspersed with periodic condemnation, and attempt to abolish it. The ambivalent attitudes towards prostitution have been part of the feminist discussion of prostitutes since attempting to first understand this social phenomenon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the last three decades, however, there have been more studies investigating the extent, nature, causes and possible solutions for prostitution due in part to the massive campaign about AIDS, the growing number of countries that are reviewing legislation and reforming laws governing prostitution, and the interest in the topic brought about by feminist oriented scholars who have been encouraging a better understanding of prostitution (Bullough and Bullough 1996). In line with the above view, Campbell (1991) and Outwater et al. (2001) have in

their studies recognized female sex workers as a very high at-risk group for HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases.

In Nigeria, sex work is illegal and shrouded in moral ambiguity. Although no part of the Nigerian law recognizes it as an acceptable occupation, it is somehow tolerated and a larger number of Nigerian women and girls make a living by selling sex. The moral ambiguity surrounding sex work is, however, not peculiar to Nigeria. As a result of global changes in customs and morality, social attitudes toward prostitution have been changed considerably in many parts of the world (Izugbara 2010) according to Nowalk (1999) many married women and single girls in Poland work the streets with the consent of their husbands, parents or boyfriends. He further observed that between 80% to 50% of Polish men and women respectively approve of sex work as an acceptable occupation.

In Nigeria, prostitution as in other parts of the world has continued to flourish in tertiary institutions. A number of factors have been held accountable for prostitution tendency in university campuses. Uzokwe (2008) has identified some causes of prostitution tendencies as including; Peer-group pressure, bad company, broken homes, unemployment, greed, socio-economic factors among others. Uzokwe, puts the blame for the proliferation of prostitution in the university campuses squarely on parents. According to Uzokwe, some parents of young girls see them come home with multiple and expensive cell phones they did not buy, flashy and expensive clothes they did not purchase even cars. Such parents never ask any questions. Some of these parents gladly receive gifts from their daughters knowing fully well that they do not work. Some never bother to visit the campuses to see where their children live and study. Even if they did, rather than marvel at the expensive furnishings, some parents see it as badge of honour. The author also attributed the rise in prostitution to the influence of modern films, western culture and over ambition. Also most working class parents do not appear to have time to train their children. These being the case, these children choose whatever they feel is right for themselves to the detriment of their own future. In recent times, it has become fashionable for young girls of school age to abandon schools for prostitution in their quest to buy the latest dress or reigning shoes. Some of these girls in the process line up at strategic points of a busy street, hotel lobbies or leisure palour to solicit for customers (Ojo, 2007)

It is pertinent to note that the socio-economic background of the family may be one of the reasons why undergraduates engage in prostitution. Socio-economic background refers to the economic fortunes in terms of income, wealth, social status, among others to which a family is disposed (Okujagu, 1993). Onyia (2002) observed that a family of high income status is likely to adequately provide the needs of a child more than a family of low socio-economic status. It is a known fact that high socio-economic parents are likely to attach greater importance to their children's school requirements than a poor family because they have the financial capability to provide adequately for their children's education. Consequently, a family of high economic status tends to have good library at home and provide the necessary recommended textbooks and school's equipment for their children. Conversely, people from families of low socio-economic background are not adequately provided with the basic necessities of life and these force some of them into prostitution as a way of augmenting their income for the provision of these needs. In relation to the above assertion, John (2003) is of the opinion that economic hardship is one of the major problems most Nigerian parents are facing. According to John, some parents no longer have money to further their children's education. As a result, some girls have been forced to use prostitution to further their education. In the same vein, Bullough and Bullough (1987) are of the opinion that in developing countries, poverty is the main reason for prostitution. Supporting the above view, Bamgbose (2002) also reported that Nigeria has a large number of adolescents living on the streets. Bamgbose is of the view that the causes of adolescent prostitution in Nigeria are largely economic, sociological and socio-economic factors.

Another potent factor that may lead to prostitution is peer group influence. According to Ogbonnaya in Onwuka (2002), the peer group provides a way in which children can become less dependent on family authority. It exposes the child to the knowledge to which he or she has no access in the family. Sometimes, this knowledge concerns taboo subjects like sex which the family may avoid or treat in a formal and unsatisfactory way. For instance peer groups according to Ryan (2001) have effect on the way young people think. In other cases, the knowledge may be about the adolescent tastes in dress, dances, music and behaviour. Otite and Ogionwo (2006) observed that peer group influence has a bearing on prostitution, cultism along with the militarization of the society and loss of cultural value for dignity of human life. Peer pressure is everywhere. In campuses, everyone wants to be like the other. The bad girls that willingly embrace prostitution because of their insatiable need for the good things in life may gradually influence the good ones by seeing them living extravagant lives. Proceedings of the first international workshop on child abuse in Africa, held at Enugu, Nigeria (1986) observed that girls are influenced by their peers to start moving around in bars and meeting men so that they should earn their living in town. During the first days of the newcomers, friends provide all necessary things like food, accommodation and clothing. Her friends may also tell her to get medicine from a healer to attract customers and

also advice her to use “contraceptive”. Furthermore, the excitement of an illegal endeavour, the night life, and the freedom from supervision attract some women and men to prostitution.

The prevalence of youth prostitution has become a serious problem to Universities, the government and society in general. This is because often time these undergraduates leave their hostels and lectures and move to the streets and hotels of Nigerian cities in search of clients. It is generally believed that girls who engage in prostitution not only endanger and destroy their bodies but also spoil the image of the country. It can equally affect the academic performance of these university undergraduates. Consequently, serious questions have been raised as to whether these undergraduates are still the future leaders of this great country, Nigeria. It is, therefore the above situation and its negative consequences for the educational system that has given impetus to the present study which ask: What are the peer group influence and family standard of living that predispose university undergraduates to prostitution tendencies in South East, Nigeria?

Generally, the study aimed at investigating peer-group influence and family standard of living as correlates of prostitution tendencies among university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to: ascertain the relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of university undergraduates. ascertain the influence of standard of living on prostitution tendencies of university undergraduates.

## 2. Research Questions

The following two research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates?
2. What is the influence of standard of living on prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates?

The following two null hypotheses were formulated and tested.

H<sub>01</sub> There is no significant relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates

H<sub>02</sub> There is no significant mean difference between prostitution tendencies and standard of living of university undergraduates.

## 3. Methodology

The correlational survey research design was adopted for the study. It is a design that seeks to establish what relationship exists between two or more variables being investigated. Usually, such studies indicate the direction and magnitude of the relationship between the variables (Nworgu, 2006). The study was carried out in South East geo-political zones of Nigeria, made up of five states namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. This geo-political zone is Igbo speaking area. There are a total of nine Universities (4 Federal and 5 states) in the zone. These universities include: The Federal University of Agriculture, Umudike; Federal University of Technology (FUTO), Owerri; Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Awka and University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) for the Federal Universities. The state universities include: Abia State University, Uturu; Anambra State University of Science and Technology, Uli; Ebonyi State University, Abakiliki; Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani and Imo State University, Owerri. The universities in these areas share similar features in culture, politics, socio development and education. This is one of the reasons why the researchers selected the area for this study.

The population of the study was 30,816 made up of all the final year undergraduates from Federal and State universities in South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria. It comprised of 16, 672 males and 14, 104 females. The sample of the study consisted of 1983 respondents. To compose this sample, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, the universities were stratified into Federal and State Universities. Then proportionate sampling technique was applied to select 50% from each of the stratum (from four Federal Universities, two were selected and from five state universities three were selected). To arrive at the subject for the study, the respondents (students) in each of the universities were stratified into male and female and a proportionate sample of 10% was used to select the subjects from the selected universities based on the strata (male and female). The choice of 10% was based on the premise that if the population is about a few thousands, a sampling size of 10% would be accepted (Nwanna, 1981). Also, a Focus Group Discussions (FGSS) was conducted using 10 students drawn from University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

The researchers designed structured questionnaire with 20 items, titled Peer-Group Influence and Family Standard of Living as Correlates of Prostitution Tendencies Questionnaire (PGIFSLCPTQ) and Focus Group Discussions Guide (FGDs) were used to collect the data for the study. The PGIFSLCPTQ has three sections. Section A contained the demographic information of the respondents, while Section B addressed the relationship between peer-group influence and prostitution tendencies among University undergraduates, then Section C sought information on the family standard of living and prostitution tendencies among University undergraduates. The response format for Section B and C was a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The Focus Group Discussions Guide had eight questions

and was made for the discussants.

To determine the face validity of the PGIFSLCPTQ and FGDs, initial copies of the instruments with purposes, research questions, hypotheses and the questions for Focus Group Discussions were given to five experts. One of the experts was in Measurement and Evaluation, one in Sociology of Education, one in Educational Administration and Planning and two in Guidance and Counselling. They were specifically requested to assess the adequacy of the items in getting the required information, the quality of its language and the logicity of its arrangement. They made very useful inputs that guided the final production of the instrument.

In order to determine the reliability of the instrument, the PGIFSLCPTQ was trial-tested on 30 final year undergraduate students in Kogi State University comprising 15 males and 15 females. This University is outside the study area. Cronbach Alpha method was adopted to estimate the internal consistency coefficient of the questionnaire PGIFSLCPTQ. This is based on the recommendation of Borg and Gall (1983), on using the Cronbach Alpha for instruments likely to yield multiple scored responses and having different sections that require section by section reliability. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient values obtained were .82 for PGIFSLCPTQ as a whole, .83 for Section B, and .81 for Section C which were considered to be sufficiently high to confirm the reliability of the instrument.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse the data gathered for the study. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to answer the two research questions while the two hypotheses were tested using t-test of relationship between two variables.

Qualitative analytical procedure known as content analysis was employed to analyse the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). All the statements made by discussants were adequately interpreted. The transcripts were studied, extracted and used as excerpts.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1 Research Question 1

What is the relationship between Peer-group and prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates?

Table1: Pearson correlation coefficient (r) for the relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates

		Tendency	Peer Group
<b>Tendency</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.738
	N	1983	1983
<b>Peer Group</b>	Pearson Correlation	.738	1
	N	1983	1983

Table 1 shows that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) for the relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates is 0.738. This implies that the relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates is positive and high, meaning the more inclination to peer group, the higher the prostitution tendencies.

H<sub>01</sub>

There is no significant relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of university undergraduates.

Table 2: t-test of relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates using stepwise method

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
<b>(Constant)</b>	-0.41	.05		-8.17	.000
<b>Peer Group</b>	0.92	.02	.74	48.64	.000

Table 2 shows the transformation of correlation coefficient to t-test in order to test for significance of relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates using stepwise method. The t-value is 48.64 and it is significant at (p=0.000). This implies that the t-values is also significant at 0.05, that is (0.000<p<0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not accepted. Hence, there is a significant relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates.

##### 4.2 Research Question 2

What is the influence of standard of living on prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of University Undergraduates' Prostitution Tendencies on influence of Standard of Living.

Standard of Living	N	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low Standard of Living	1006	50.73	3.99	0.90
High Standard of Living	977	49.27	2.93	0.70
<b>Total</b>	1983			

Table 3 shows that 1006 representing 50.73% university undergraduates with low standard of living have mean of 3.99 and standard deviation of 0.90 while 977 representing 49.27% university undergraduates in high standard of living have mean 2.93 with standard deviation of 0.7. This implies that the University undergraduates in low standard of living have more tendencies for prostitution than those in high standard of living.

$H_{02}$

There is no significant mean difference between prostitution tendencies and standard of living of University undergraduates.

Table 4: t-test of significant difference between the mean of prostitution tendencies and standard of living of University undergraduates of low and high standard of living.

Standard of Living	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	T	sig
Low Standard of Living	1006	3.99	.90	1981	1.83	0.07
High Standard of Living	977	2.93	.70			

Table 4 shows the mean, standard deviation and t-test for significant difference between the mean of prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates of low and high standard of living. The t-value is not significant at ( $p=0.07$ ). This equally implies that the t-value is not significant at 0.05, that is  $0.05 < p < 0.07$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Hence, there is no significant difference between the mean of prostitution tendencies of University undergraduates of low and high standard of living.

## 5. Discussion of Results

This section discusses the result of this study in line with the findings as reported above. The discussion is done in accordance with the main issues addressed in the study namely peer-group influence as correlates of prostitution tendencies and influence of standard of living on prostitution tendencies of university undergraduates.

### 5.1 Peer-group as correlates of prostitution tendencies among University undergraduates.

The results indicate positive correlation between peer-group and prostitution tendencies of university undergraduates ( $r = 0.74$ ). This simply means that the more inclination to wrong peer-group, the higher the prostitution tendencies. This result is line with the report of the FGDs which the researcher conducted with some undergraduates. The report shows that peer-groups do influence undergraduates in the way in which they think, behave and act. For instance, some discussants narrated a story about a girl who was a virgin when she got into school and saw how her friends were living. She came into the school as a good girl after her first year, second year; she had joined the gang of bad girls. According to the discussants:

*Peer-group always influences. If you have a friend that goes to church everyday, you will be influenced positively. But if your friend does bad things, you will definitely be influenced negatively. My friend said lets go digging. What is digging? I asked. He said to me just hold ₦300. We divided our money and we dug. Night parties are different from birthday parties. Your friend will not allow you to wear decent clothes for night parties, they will force you to take alcohol and be intoxicated and you will do it. Peer group has the highest influence on students' involvement in prostitution. They get information about sex from their friends through discussion in the room, lecture room, walkway or any way...." They do this by trying to meet up; do what others do; wear the type of clothe they wear; try to be like others in order to feel respected....*

This finding is not in doubt given the fact that the peer group serves as an information bureau to the child and teaches sex roles and sexual matters to members of the groups. This finding tends to corroborate Elechi and Ogbondan (2006) who reported that the peer group teaches the child sex rules which are not learnt in the home. Also Otite and Ogionwo (2006) observed that peer-group influence has a bearing on prostitution, cultism along with the militarization of the society and loss of cultural value for the dignity of human life. Peer groups

according to Ryan (2001) have effects on the way people think and behave. In a study, Evans, Oates and Schab (1992) found out that peer group had effect on whether teenage pregnancy would occur or not. Furthermore, Ogbonnaya in Onwuka (2002) notes that peer-group provides a way in which children can become less dependent of family authority. It exposes the child to knowledge to which the child has no access in the home. Such knowledge concerns taboo like sex which the family may avoid or treat in a formal and unsatisfactory way. Peer group is everywhere in campuses as everyone wants to be like the other. The bad girls that willingly embrace prostitution, because of their insatiable need for the good things in life, may gradually influence the good ones by interacting with them and seeing those living extravagant lives.

A corresponding hypothesis raised to further address the research question however showed that there was significant relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies of university undergraduates. This means that members of a peer-group influenced one another and this influence, when it is negative leads them into vices like prostitution, cultism, rape and many others.

#### *5.2 Influence of standard of living on prostitution tendencies of undergraduates.*

This study revealed that university undergraduates from low standard of living have greater prostitution tendencies than those from high standard of living. The standard deviation of the respondents from low standard of living is slightly higher compared to those from high standard of living. This indicates that there is slight variation in the opinion of the respondents from low standard of living than those from high standard of living. This finding is in line with the report of the FGDs which revealed that in most cases, poor parents would be thanking God that there is somebody who is providing for their child's needs. Hence a girl from a poor home whose parents do not take care of her needs would find an alternative ways of meeting up with her financial needs outside therefore taking to prostitution as an alternative. This finding agrees with the statement of Okujagu (2003) who states that socio-economic status of an individual would predispose him or her to prostitution. Onyia (2002) also observes that family of high income status is likely to adequately provide the needs of the children more than a family of low economic status. Those with low socio-economic status, Onyia stressed, have poor or low standard of living and so their children or wards are more liable to indulge in prostitution than those of high socio-economic status. In line with the above finding, John (2003) is of the opinion that economic hardship is one of the major problems most Nigerian parents face. To this effect, some parents are highly incapacitated financially and can no longer provide for their children's education. As a result, some of these girls are forced to use prostitution as the only viable option to complete their education.

A corresponding hypothesis raised to further address the research question however showed that there was no significant difference between the mean of prostitution tendencies of university undergraduates of low and high standard of living. This means that both university undergraduates of high and low standard of living are prone to prostitution. In some situation, some children especially those from high standard of living may go into prostitution not necessarily for financial gains but to satisfy their sexual urge.

## **6. Conclusion**

Drawing from the result of the study, one can conclude that there is relationship between peer-group influence and prostitution tendencies among university undergraduates. It is therefore imperative that parents should learn not to shy away from discussing sexual matters with their children so that these children will not seek such information from unauthorised sources which may be misleading thereby exposing them to prostitution tendencies. More so, the study reveals that the relationship between peer group and prostitution tendencies is positive and high. It is therefore necessary for university undergraduates to be mindful of the kind of friends they mingle or interact with in order not to be influenced by those who indulge in sexual activities because of their insatiable need for the good things in life.

The study also indicates that both University undergraduates of high and low standard of living are prone to prostitution. In some situation some children especially those from high standard of living may go into prostitution not necessarily for financial gains but to satisfy their sexual urge. Low standard of living has more tendencies for prostitution than those in high standard of living. It is important that parents should give their children proper upbringing and necessary financial provisions so that they will not look for alternative ways to make up for their shortfalls and hence be predisposed to prostitution tendencies. Families should place a lot of premium on morality, honour and character. They should take time to bequeath same to their wards during their formative years. In this case, parents or adults around the children should monitor the type of peer or friends their children keep or check the type of attitude being exhibited by them before their children because adults are seen by children as social pillars and so should be taught the right values, morals, attitudes and behaviours of life. Parents should be mindful of the type of films children watch and the type of adults that interact with the children in order not to expose the children to dangers of deviant behaviours such as stealing, cultism and prostitution among others.

## 7. Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of this study:

- Universities should organize seminars and symposium for the students where the issues relating to prostitution can be discussed.
- Sex education should be introduced and emphasised in the curriculum programme of tertiary institutions.
- Federal, State and Local Governments and other stakeholders should award scholarship and bursaries to indigent students as this may discourage them from indulging in prostitution.

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