

EFFECTS OF PEER INFLUENCE ON SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NYAHURURU SUBCOUNTY, LAIKIPIA COUNTY, KENYA

AUTHOR: MR. ESHPHAN KINGORI.

Email: keshphan@gmail.com

Tel: +254726810342

P.O.BOX 83 -20300, NYAHURURU KENYA

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR : DR. KINGORI I.W.

AFFILIATION: DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, COUNSELLING AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS.

LAIKIPIA UNIVERSITY

P.O.BOX 1100-20300 NYAHURURU, KENYA.

TEL: +254722463087

Email: kinis@yahoo.com

P.O. BOX 1100-20300 NYAHURURU, KENYA.

ABSTRACT

Increased sexual liberty and early initiation of adolescents into sexual activities have led to irresponsible and risky sexual behaviors among the adolescents. However, regardless of the availability of various sources of information about sexuality and reproduction, the adolescents were yet to adopt safe sexual behaviors. This has raised questions about the effects of peers on sexual behaviors among adolescent students. This study sought to investigate the effects of peers influence on the sexual behaviors among students in public secondary schools in Nyahururu Sub-County, Laikipia County. This study adopted an *ex post facto* research design. The target population included 4003 students from 14 secondary schools in the Sub-County. A random sample, of 338 respondents, was chosen from 7 schools in the Sub-county. Data was collected through a questionnaire. The collected data was then processed and analyzed descriptively using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17 for Windows. The study findings indicated that peers had a great influence on the sexual behaviors and activities of the adolescents. The study recommends the need to encourage and train students peer educators in reproductive health education. This would utilize their influence and instill good and safe sexual behaviors among adolescents. The content validity of the research instrument was established through piloting as it gave a reliability coefficient of 0.82 after computing the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha.

Key words: Sexuality, Peer influence, Influence, Sexual behavior, Secondary School

INTRODUCTION

Paunchaud (2000) postulated that sex is the greatest troublesome question when the subject of adolescence is discussed. He further added that sexuality is one of the key issues of adolescent development. It is clear that sexuality related issues in general and sexual issues in particular consume the thoughts of adolescents as they anticipate and worry about their development and behavior. Likewise the sexual behavior of the adolescents is a constant source of concern for parents who are interested in their children's well being and sexuality. Sugar (1990) articulated that the complex nature of adolescents' sexuality is like an evolving complex kaleidoscope jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces, the clues, the questions and struggles, explorations and the answers may change shape and color before a full pattern is formed. It is also to a larger extent affected by the influence of their peers who by the virtue of their proximity to the adolescent greatly influence the course taken by one's sexual behavior. Statistics show that 65% of the youth get sexually active at the age of 11 while 63% of students have sex before they complete secondary school (Population Reference Bureau, 2001). The implications of this is new HIV/AIDS infections occur among the age bracket 15-24 years (NASCO, 1997) and 5000 girls die yearly while securing abortion (Ministry of Health Report, 2005).

As these devastating consequences of uninformed and irresponsible sexual behavior continue to take its toll on adolescents, there is probably no better intervention than to create an insight into the effect of peer influence on the adopted sexual behavior of the adolescent. The insight would be on creating an awareness of the movers and shakers involved in the formation of sexual behavior by adolescents. According to a study by Infotrak Research Consulting Ltd (YouthNet, 2007) group sex was gaining popularity among secondary school students. The study found that 3% of females interviewed in Kenyans urban centers had engaged in-group sex. The interviewees were in the age bracket between 15-20 years, which is the same age bracket for majority of secondary school girls in Nyahururu Division. A survey commissioned by Oakland Media Services ('Healthy relationships,' 2007) found that more than half of the girls lost their virginity before the age of 16. About 8% of females interviewed by the Population Services International Programme (Ministry of Health Report, 2006) said they had experienced lesbian affair and that group sex was common to them.

Statement of the Problem

The increase in irresponsible sexual behavior among adolescents has given rise to a worrying trend in increasing unexpected pregnancies, abortion and its concomitant trauma, sexually transmitted infections and more worrying increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS among the school going age. There is a general agreement that peers influence greatly the formation of sexual behavior among others through their social proximity to the adolescents. What is not known is whether these influences have an effect on the sexual behavior among students and this was the concern of the study. Establishing this was necessary in determining the role of peers in the development of an individual adolescent's sexual behavior.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to investigate the effect of peers influence on the sexual behavior among students in Secondary Schools in Nyahururu Sub-County, Laikipia County.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was: To determine the effects of peer influence on the sexual behaviors of students in secondary schools.

Research Questions

The study sought to provide answers to this research question: What are the effects of peer influence on the sexual behaviors of students in

Significance of the Study

At no other time in history, had the implications of negative sexual behavior been so adversely felt in our society than it is now. The need to shape and develop socially acceptable sexual behavior was thus necessary and a wish for many stakeholders in education sector. It was expected that the outcome of this study would serve an assessment role in the evaluation of the contributions by peers and parents in the child's adopted sexual behavior. This would assist parents, teachers, guardians, and the government in giving contributions to determine the changes that are required in the school syllabus. This would stem acquisition of unacceptable sexual behaviors. This would assist in communicating to the adolescents' message targeting positive sexual behavior. The study would also shed new light on the effect of peers and parents influence on sexual behaviors among secondary school students. This study would serve as a basis for further research in future.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focused on investigating the effects of peers influence on the sexual behavior among students in Secondary Schools in Nyahururu Sub-County, Laikipia County. The Sub-County was chosen as a research site because secondary school students in the area, like in all other parts of the country, were in their adolescence stage and engaged in sexual behaviors that were risky to their young lives

The main limitation of the study was: As a result of the sensitivity and interest of the subject, some of the respondents were initially hesitant to respond to some items in the questionnaire thinking that they could reveal their sexual behaviors and affect their reputation in the school. However, the researcher assured them of the confidentiality of the information given and the motive of the study.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed Freud's psychosexual theory of development. According to Freud (1966), a person goes through five stages of psychosexual development and at each stage of development we experience pleasure in one part of the body more than in others. He noted that the experiences of the phallic stage that is Oedipal and Electra complexes are relived during adolescence stage of 13-18 years. He therefore postulated that the adult personality is determined by the way conflict between early sources of pleasure, the mouth, the anus and then the genitals and the demands of reality are resolved. He concludes that an individual may become fixated at a particular stage of development. According to Freud (1966) the genital stage is a time of sexual awakening. As the child grows the source of sexual pleasure becomes someone outside the family, mostly a person of the opposite sex. However, unresolved conflicts with parents re-emerge during adolescence since parents and adolescents are constantly at odds. If these conflicts are resolved he says the individual is capable of developing love relationships and functioning independently as an adult. During adolescence adult sexuality asserts itself. Freud viewed the genital stage as a time in which the libido, hidden during latency phase, reappears. The physical drives are strong and cannot be easily repressed. Therefore adolescents turn their attention to heterosexual relationship (Freud, 1966).

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework was based on the Freud's psychosexual theory of development. It shows the relationship between independent variable, extraneous variables and dependent variable. The illustration in Figure 1 is a pictorial presentation of the interaction between variables. The

conceptual framework was based on the premises that a relationship existed between the input variable which was the effects of peer influence as depicted using the directional arrows. The presentation shows sexual behavior as being attributed to effect of peer influence.

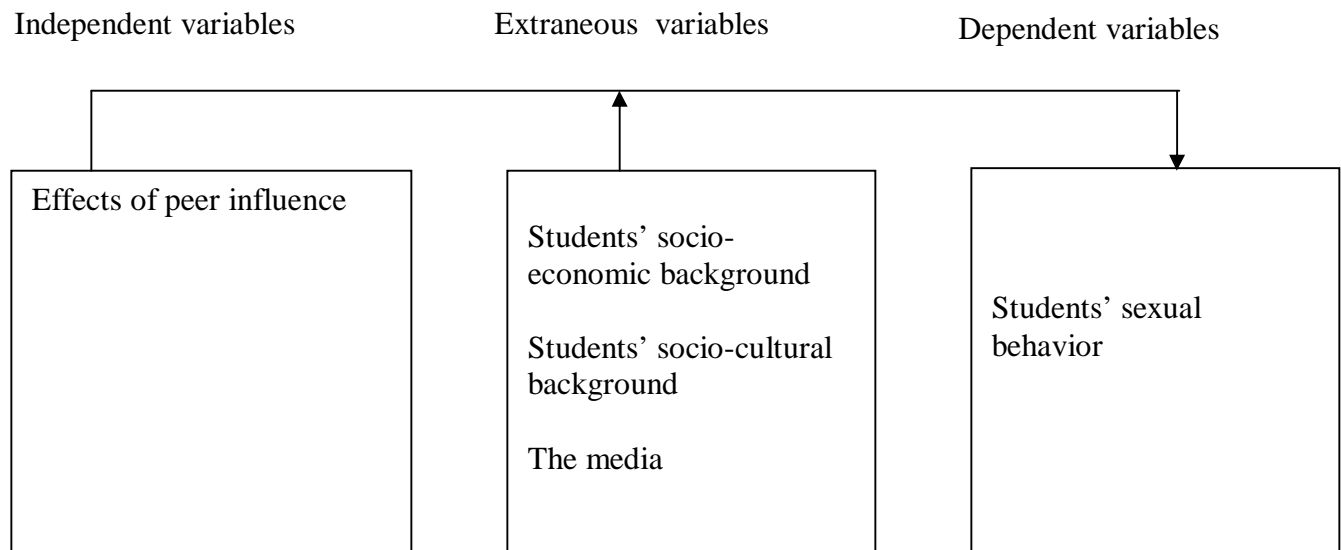


Fig. 1: Determinants of adolescent students' sexual behaviors

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Simple random sampling was used to select the 338 students (171 male and 167 female students) this formed the sample size for this study.

Instrumentation

Data was collected through administration of a structured questionnaire to the 338 respondents. The questionnaire gathered information on age, gender and on effects of peer influence on the sexual behavior. The content validity of the research instrument was then established in order to make sure that it reflected the content of the concepts adolescence and sexual behaviors. Piloting was done to allow the researcher make modifications on various items in order to rephrase clarify and clear up any ambiguities in the questionnaire. The piloting also assisted the researcher in testing the reliability of the instrument for the computed Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha of the instrument was 0.82 which was assumed to reflect the internal reliability of the instrument.

RESULTS DISCUSSION

Effect of Peer Influence on Sexual Behaviors

The study sought to determine the effects of peer influence on the sexual behaviors of students in secondary schools in Nyahururu Sub-County. The objective arose from the fact that adolescence stage is a biological stage characterized by changes in sexuality and reproductive system of the body. During this stage, adolescents experience intense sexual desires and anxieties and are very much influenced by their peers to engage in sexual activities. All this happens when majority of them generally lack cognitive and emotional maturity, information and resources to protect

themselves from exploitation, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections/diseases. Therefore, peer influence greatly determines whether one will develop safe (good) sexual behavior or risky (bad) sexual behavior. In the study, the respondents were asked whether their peers encouraged them to engage in premarital sex. Figure 2 summarizes the distribution of their responses.

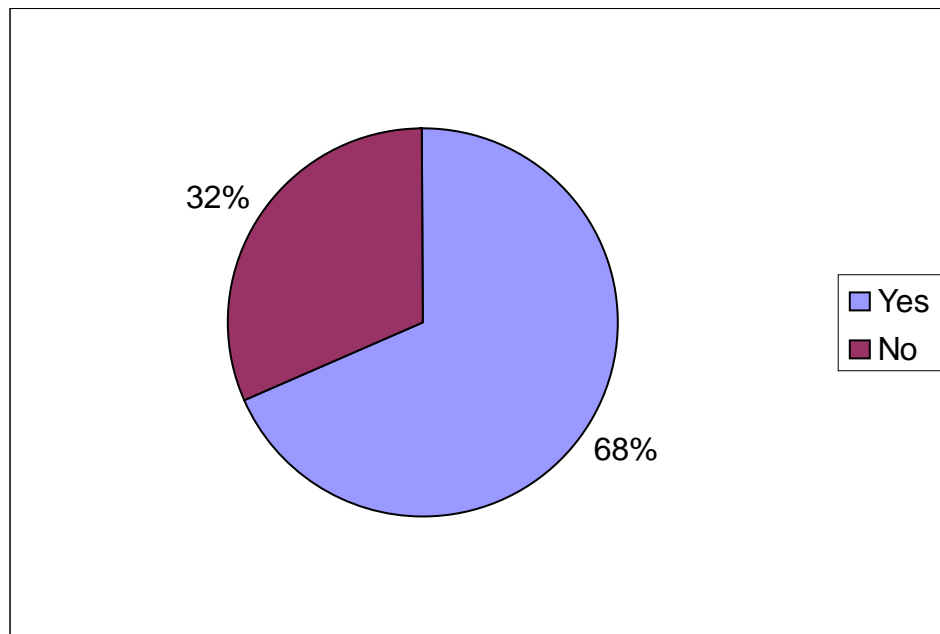


Fig. 2: Peer encouragement to engage in premarital sex

Figure 2 indicates that 68 percent (230) of the respondents were encouraged by their peers to engage in premarital sex. The remaining 32 percent (107) had not been encouraged by their peers to engage in sex. This suggests that majority of the respondent adolescents and their peers were sexually active and were ready to engage in sex. This was likely to be dangerous as majority of the adolescents engage in sexual activities without being aware of the associated consequences of their actions. This is more so given the level and prevalence rate of HIV / AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections/diseases among the adolescents. This was in line with the views of YouthNet (2000) which indicates that adolescent relate well to people of similar age, interest and backgrounds. Peer influence is an important determinant of early sexual initiation. Both boys and girls adolescents face pressure from peers to initiate sex in order to prove their womanhood/manhood. Houfferth and Hayes (2003); Lewis and Lewis (2004) observed peer influence is a strong determinant of adolescents' sexual decision. Adolescents obtain information about sex from their peers, which may serve to guide in decision-making about sex. This information is not always accurate as reflected in long standing adolescents' myths on fertility. They also accept peer attitudes about sexuality as reflected in peer behavior, which they may use as model for their own sexual behavior or they can be actively proselytized through discussion, questioning, teasing, dares, shaming among other. Muthoni (1987) noted that at the adolescent stage, youth experience secondary sexual characteristics. These are observed in their sexual development such as trying to satisfy sexual pleasure leading to pre-marital sex. This may give rise to teenage pregnancy, STDs and abortion. FPAK (1997) indicated that the adolescents have inadequate information about their sexuality. They are not well informed about the consequences of early and premarital sex and are therefore incapable of managing their own sexuality. They often rely on peers for information, which is often unreliable and misleading.

Premarital Sex

In connection with engagement in premarital sex, the respondents were asked whether their peers had encouraged them to date and kiss. Dating and kissing are two most influential factors that lead to actual engagement in sex. Table 1 highlights the distribution of adolescents encouraged by their peers to engage in dating and kissing.

Table 1

Peer encouragement of dating and kissing

Response	Dating		Kissing	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	263	78.0	259	76.9
No	74	22.0	78	23.1
Total	337	100.0	337	100.0

Table 1 show that 78.0 percent and 76.9 percent of the adolescents were encouraged by their peers to date and kiss members of the opposite sex, respectively. This suggests that majority of the respondents were encouraged by their peers to engage in activities that were more likely to make them vulnerable to premarital sex. The prominence of these activities among the adolescents is believed to be the precursor to sexual relationships and eventual sex with members of the opposite sex. In the modern society, dating and kissing among the adolescents have been perpetrated by change in social and economic characteristics in the world. The adolescents have changed their sexual lifestyles and are more exposed to incidence of explicit sexual expressions. The findings are in line with observation by Elkind (2001) that the changing trends towards liberalized sexual norms are becoming increasingly acceptable in the society. Explicit sexual language and expressions are becoming acceptable in the society, and especially among the adolescents. Sachs (2000) adds that adolescents are socialized into a world which exposes them to explicit sexual displays. Peer influence is also about identity and fitting in a group. In adolescence stage, the adolescents struggle to identify themselves and fit in their peer groups. As a result of the sexual relationships and activities that occur during this stage, there is always some social competition among the adolescents themselves. This is usually in terms of the number of sexual partners and engagement in actual sex (Paunchaud, 2000). In the study, the respondents were asked about their identification with peers in respect to sexual partners that they had. Their responses are summarized in Figure 3.

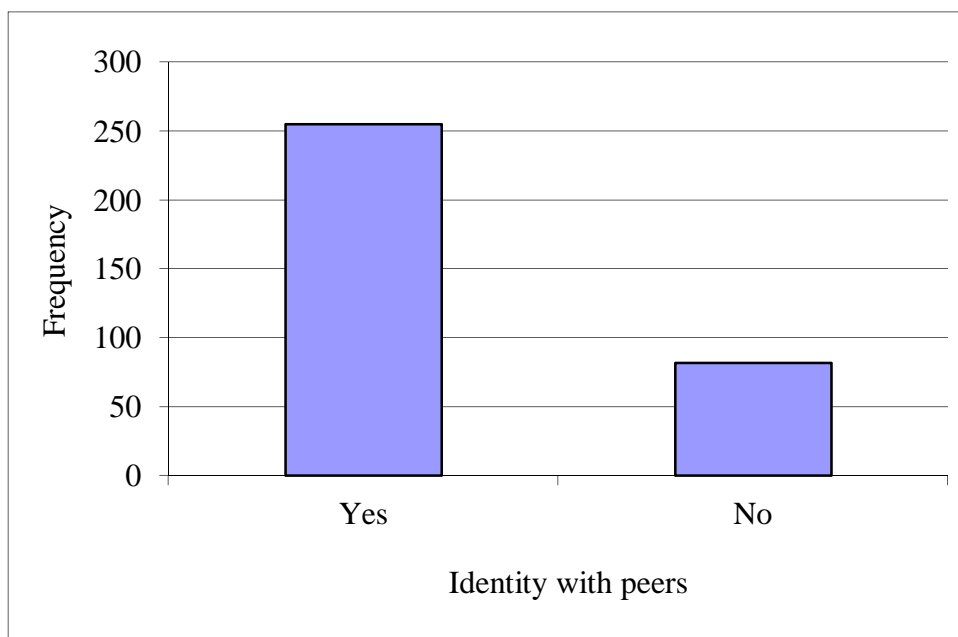


Fig. 3: Identification with peers in terms of sexual partners

Figure 3 shows that 255 which was (75.7 %) of the respondents liked being identified with their peers in respect to the sexual partners that they had. This suggests that the respondents either associated with peers who had similar number of sexual partners or sought to be identified with peers who had the number of sexual partners that they admired. This indicates that majority of the adolescents sought to be identified with peers who were sexually active. This boosts their social self-esteem and self-concept. These findings are in line with Mutie and Ndambuki (1999) that young people listen more carefully to people who are like themselves. Peers help in forming opinion about themselves and obtaining a more realistic gauge of their abilities. Adolescents are motivated by comparing themselves to their peers and friends. The influence of these peers and friends strongly determines their self-esteem and self-concept. Berger (2000) adds that in the onset of adolescence, there is an increase of peer influence that affects the shaping of goals and goal-oriented behaviors. During this time, the adolescents begin to spend less amount of time with their families and more time with their peers. The satisfaction with these peer relationships is important to the development of a good self-esteem and self-concept.

Given the level of peer influence to engage in premarital sex, dating, kissing and number of sexual partners, the study sought to establish whether the adolescents had actually engaged in any sexual activities or not. This was done in order to establish whether the adolescents relied on peer pressure only to engage in sex. Figure 4 highlights the distribution of the 230 respondents encouraged to engage in premarital sex by peers and the 107 who were not, and their actual engagement in sex.

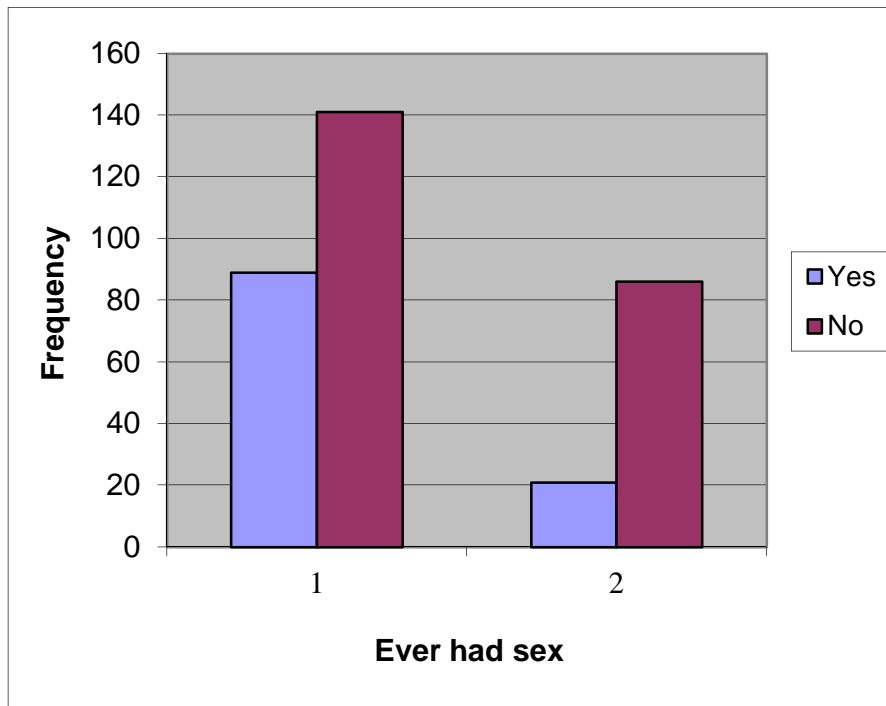


Fig. 4: Adolescent engagement in sex

Figure 4 shows that out of the 230 respondents who were encouraged by their peers to engage in sex, 89 (38.7 %) had ever had sex, while 141 (61.3 %) had not. For the 107 who had not been encouraged to engage in premarital sex by their peers, 21 (19.7 %) had ever had sex, while 86 (80.4 %) had not. In total, 110 (32.6 %) out of 337 respondents had ever had sex. This suggests that a bigger proportion of the adolescents engaged in sex because of peer influence compared to those without such influence. Therefore, peer influence played a big role in influencing adolescents to engage in sex. It can also be observed that because of the intense sexual desires and anxiety at adolescence stage, some adolescents engage in sex on their own accord without peer influence. This support Laura (1996); Muthoni (1987) who argued that adolescence is a very important time for the development of sexuality. Majority of them engage in premarital sex to fulfill their strong physical desires.

In African society, there are some sexual orientations that are abhorred and viewed as immoral and uncultured. People engaged in such sexual orientations are therefore seen as immoral and outcast in the society. Such sexual orientations include masturbation, homosexual and gay relationships. However, as a result of the changing social and economic characteristics due to mass media, information technology, globalization and human rights crusades, these forms of sexual orientations are gaining grounds in African societies from the Western countries, and especially among the adolescents. In this study, the respondents were asked whether their peers had ever encouraged them to engage in masturbation or have homosexual relationships. Table 2 highlights their responses.

Table 2**Peer encouragement of masturbation and homosexual relationships**

Response	Masturbation		Homosexual relationships	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	79	23.4	61	18.1
No	258	76.6	276	81.9
Total	337	100.0	337	100.0

Table 2 indicates that 23.4 percent and 18.1 percent of the respondents were encouraged by their peers to engage in masturbation and homosexual relationships, respectively. This suggests that even though there are many sexual desires, anxieties and experimentations during adolescence stage, majority of the respondents and their peers were not involved in masturbation and homosexual relationships. This might be attributed to African socialization and culture, which still view the two sexual orientations as immoral.

However, their beliefs and attitudes towards these orientations are more likely to be threatened by mass media and the ever-growing crusades in the Western countries advocating for recognition of both lesbianism and gayism.

CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study was: Majority of the adolescent students were encouraged by their peers to engage in premarital sex, date and kiss members of the opposite sex. They also liked being identified with their peers in respect to the sexual partners that they had. However, only a small proportion had ever had sex and was encouraged by their peers to engage in masturbation and homosexual relationships.

The study makes the following conclusion:

The study makes this conclusion Peers had a great influence on the sexual behaviours and activities of the adolescents.

Recommendation

In the view of the above conclusions, this study makes the following recommendation: There is need to encourage and train peer educators in reproductive health education in order to utilize their influence to instill good and safe sexual behaviours among adolescents.

Suggestions for Further Research

The study suggests the following areas for further research

- (i) Further research should be done in other areas to verify the findings of this study.
- (ii) The role of reproductive health education in influencing sexual behaviors' of adolescent students.
- (iii) Challenges facing adolescents in accessing reproductive health education.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1977). *A Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N .J: Prentice-Hall.
- Darling, C. A. & Hicks, M. W. (1982). *Parental Influence on Adolescent Sexuality*:
- Elkind, D. (1981). *Developmental Psychology*. New York: Addison Wesley.
- Erickson, E. (1965). *The Challenge of Youth*, New York: Doubleday.
- F.P.A.K. (1997). *Reproductive Health client management Guidelines. FPAK Prime Publication*.
Nairobi: Government Printer
- Freud, A. (1966). *Instinctual Anxiety during publicity: The writing of Ann Freud: The ego and its mechanisms of defense*. New York: International University Press.
- Hoghughi, M. & Long, N. (2004). *Parenting: A handbook of parenting theory and research for practice*. New Delhi: Sage publications.
Implications for Parents as Educators. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*
- Kathuri, J. N. & Pals, A. D. (1993). *Introduction to Educational Research*. Egerton University:
Educational Media centre.
- Lewis, D. O. & Lewis, M. A. (1984). Peer Pressure and Risk Taking Behaviour in Children
American Journal of Public Health 74: 580-4.
- Lewis, M. & Brooks -Gunn, J. (1979). *Social Cognition and the Acquisition of the Self*. New York:
Plenum.
- Lewis, M. I. & Butler, R. N. (1976). *Love and Sex after Sixty. A Guide For Men and Womenfor their Years*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Mugenda, M. O. & Mugenda, G. A. (1999). *Research methods, Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Nairobi: Acts press.
- Muthoni, P. (1987). *Youth today and tomorrow: A guide to Family life Education/or youth*. Nairobi:
Kenya Episcopal Conference.
- Mutie, E. & Ndambuki, P. (1999). *Guidance and counseling/or schools and Colleges*.
Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Nassiuma, K. (2000). *Survey Sampling: Theory and method*. Nairobi: Nairobi University
Press
- Paunchaud, C. Sigh, S. F & Jacqueline, D. (2000). *Sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents in developed countries*. New York: Wiley.
- Sugar, M. (1990). *A typical Adolescents life experiences*. California: Brooks Publishing Company.
- Y outhNet. (1998). *Reaching young men with reproductive heath programme*. Family Health
International.