

# EFFECT OF PARENTS' INFLUENCE ON SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS, NYAHURURU DIVISION, LAIKIPIA COUNTY, KENYA

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**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 are yet to adopt safe sexual behaviors. This has raised questions about the effects of parents on sexual behaviors among adolescent students. This study sought to investigate the effects parents' influence on the sexual behaviors among students in secondary schools in Nyahururu Division, Laikipia County. This study adopted an *ex post facto* research design. A random sample, of 338 respondents, was chosen from the seven randomly selected schools. Data was collected through administration of a structured questionnaire to the selected respondents. The collected data was then processed and analyzed descriptively using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17 for Windows. The content validity of the research instrument was established by ascertaining that it contained information that answered the research objectives. The instrument was piloted to ensure reliability and it gave a reliability coefficient of 0.82. The study finding indicated that most parents encouraged their adolescent children to have good sexual behaviors. They, however, lacked effective communication skills to pass their good intentions to their adolescent children and thus making their discussions on sexual matters boring and uninteresting. The study recommends the need for parents to adopt effective communication skills that could enable them pass their good sexual intentions to their adolescent children.

**Keywords:** Parental Influence, Sexual behaviors, Sexual problems, Adolescent, Sex related information, Parent.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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. The adolescents' sexuality is greatly influenced either positively or negatively by the attitudes of their parents. 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. The seriousness of adolescents' sexuality is best understood if looked against the backdrop of adolescents' attitudes and practices. There has been a drastic change in adolescents' attitudes and practices towards sex. This is because more significant percentages of adolescents are engaging in premarital sexual intercourse than they did in the past. 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 (NASCOP, 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 parent 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 Kenyan 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. There was an increase in the drop-out rate among secondary school girls in Nyahururu Division due to unwanted pregnancies.

Many parents now anticipate their children's adolescence with apprehension. They construe the teenage years as something to be confronted rather than shared, endured rather than enjoyed - a recipe for a self-fulfilling prophecy. Parental anxieties may be on the possible loss of the closeness, affection and parental authority, which they see as essential in their relationship with their children. In the Western societies it may be a common parental attribution that adolescence is marked by challenges to adult authority, conflict between parents and adolescents is not so generally anticipated in such societies where filial piety and respect are encouraged (Houghughy & Long, 2004).

**The Purpose of the study was:**

The study sought to investigate the effect of parents' influence on the sexual behavior among students in Secondary Schools in Nyahururu Division, Laikipia County.

**The objective of the study was:**

To determine the effects of parental influence on the sexual behaviors among students in secondary schools in Nyahururu Division, Laikipia county.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Ormond (2004) parents can influence adolescents' sexual behaviors in four ways. Firstly, parental attitudes regarding adolescents' sexual behavior may influence adolescents' attitudes towards sexual behavior. Secondly, the marital and child bearing behavior of parents may influence the adolescents sexual behaviors. These include experiences with divorce, remarriage; living arrangements and apparent behaviors toward the opposite sex may provide role models for young people. Thirdly, the religious environment of the home may affect adolescents' attitudes to sex and likely experience of sexual guilt. Finally, the educational and work experiences of the parents may influence the sexual attitudes of the adolescents. This may be by presenting opportunities for sexual experience while the parents are away from home. Moore and Rosenthal (2001) postulates that parents are not the only role models available to adolescents. They have around them many models of adult lifestyles in which diverse patterns of sexual expression are practiced. Such diverse patterns range through stable monogamous marriages, divorce and re-coupling, single parenting, lifestyles characterized by frequent partner changing and homosexual couples. These days an adolescent may watch a parent or another adult agonizes about dating and sexual conduct just like their peers. The messages sent by the adult to the adolescents about sex are rather different than it was in the past and further confuses the adolescents on which sexual behavior is appropriate.

According to Moore, Rosenthal and Buzwel (2001) sexual discussion was much more common between mothers and daughters than between either parent with their sons. However, despite the lack of overt communication about sex, sons were more likely than daughters to perceive liberal parental attitudes towards sex. According to Darling, Hicks, and Sigh (2000) the major parental communications about sex reflected these cautionary sentiments. In their study, they found that both boys and girls heard more of the cautionary messages than the positive one. However, the difference was greater for females than for males as parental messages are considerably straighter forward for males but more complexes for females. Darling (2000) reported that the more the talk between parents and adolescents the lower the rate of adolescent sexual behavior. The negative messages conveyed by those parents who were reluctant to talk was associated with earlier and more frequent sexual behavior among adolescents. Males and females reported hearing essentially the same double messages but the order of their importance was different for girls than for boys with girls receiving the more negative messages.

Moore *et al* (2001) researched the assertion that parental communication and monitoring would discourage premarital sexual activity. However, they found this not to be the case for 15 and 16 year old adolescents. There was only one exception; that of those parents who held traditional attitudes towards sex and had communicated these to their daughters.

Since their attitudes had apparently influenced their children's sexual behavior. In this case their daughters were less likely to have had sexual intercourse. There is evidence of the socialization process putting a halt on female sexuality with parent's rare discussions on sex with their children consisting of most part of warnings to their daughters. The possibility that there are many misperceptions and miscommunications between parents and their adolescent children on sex is hard to ignore.

Collins (1991) asked parents of 16-year-old adolescents for estimate about the level of sexual activity among adolescents generally. The parents responded that there was an increased level of actual sex among adolescents. The same parents were later asked about their beliefs on their own teenager's sexual activities but they were far more conservative in their estimates. In other words parents found it hard to believe that their own children might have experienced intercourse. However, they recognized that teenagers of the same age were often sexually active. Moreover, parents held more optimistic beliefs than adolescents' teachers on the adolescent use of condom.. Parents are thus supposed to tread the fine line between respecting an adolescent's privacy and providing information and value framework. This assists adolescents in decision-making thus enabling them make sensible and well informed decisions on their sexual behavior.

### III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was a survey research, which adopted an *ex post facto* design.

This study investigated the effect of the independent variable (effects of parental influence) on the dependent variable (students' sexual behavior).

#### Sampling Procedure and Sample size

Purposive sampling was used in this study in selecting seven schools out of 14. The student population in the seven schools formed the sampling frame.

#### Instrumentation

Primary data was collected through administration of a structured questionnaire to the selected respondents. The questionnaire gathered information on age, gender and information on effects parental influences on the sexual behavior. The content validity of the instrument was established in order to make sure that it reflected the content of the concepts adolescence and sexual behaviors. Piloting also assisted the researcher in testing the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for the instrument was computed in order to establish the internal reliability; a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of the study sought to determine the effects of parental influence on the sexual behaviors of students in secondary schools in Nyahururu Division. The objective was based on the fact that parents play a very important role in influencing socialization, behaviors and attitudes of their children. Their role is very crucial especially during the adolescence stage where they are expected to provide guidance to their children on how they could manage the challenges associated with it. In this study, the respondents were asked whether their parents discouraged them to have sex. Figure 2 highlights the distribution of their responses.

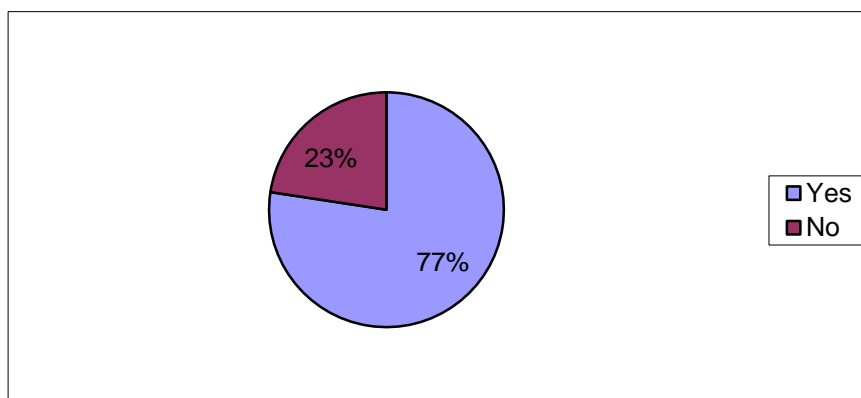


Fig. 2: Parents discouraging adolescents to have sex

Figure 2 indicates that 77 percent (261) of the respondents were discouraged by their parents to have sex, while 22 percent (76) were not. This suggests that most of the parents of the adolescents were against their children engaging in sex at an early age. This might be attributed to the parents' knowledge and awareness of the risks involved in early sexual activities by their children. At adolescence stage, the adolescents still have inadequate information about their sexuality and reproduction and are not well informed about the consequences of early and premarital sex. These findings supports Transgrud (1998); Senderowitz (1997) who observed that majority of the adolescents are less informed, less experienced and less confident about sexuality and reproductive matters. They add that adolescents: lack life building skills, negotiation skills, value clarification, refusal skills, decision-making and goal setting. All intended to enable them cope with challenges of growing up, self-management and other transitions. Given this situation, Thornton and Camburn (2001) add that parents have a great influence on their adolescent children's sexual behavior. They influence them on a variety of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. How parents translate their own feelings about sexuality into messages they give their children can influence their sexual behavior.

In discouraging the adolescents from engaging in sex, parents use a number of strategies, including discussions with their children about the consequences of early sexual activities. The discussions are aimed at creating awareness about the adolescence stage and how to overcome the associated challenges. The respondents were therefore asked whether discussions with their parents could help them in resolving their sexual problems. Table 1 summarizes their responses.

**Table 1: Parental discussion helps in resolving sexual problems**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	239	70.9
No	98	29.1
Total	337	100.0

Table 1 shows that 70.9 percent of the respondents could resolve their sexual problems through their discussions with parents. The remaining 29.1 percent did not consider discussions with parents to be capable of resolving their sexual problems. This suggests that majority of the adolescents considered their parents to be capable of resolving their sexual problems. This could be attributed to parental wisdom and experience with sexuality and reproductive issues. Such adolescents were likely to resolve their sexual problems if there was an ample atmosphere for discussion with their parents.

### **Summary and Finding**

The following finding was established:

Majority of the adolescent students were discouraged by their parents to have sex and discussions with parents could resolve their sexual problems. Slightly more than half of them considered their discussions with parents on sexual matters as boring and were not comfortable in sharing sex-related information with their parents.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Most parents encouraged their adolescent children to have good sexual behaviors. However, they lacked behaviours. However, they lacked effective communication skills to pass their good intentions to their adolescent children and thus making their discussions on sexual matters boring and uninteresting.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATION**

The study makes the following recommendation: There is need for parents to adopt effective communication skills that could enable them pass their good sexual intentions to their adolescent children.

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