



Teachers' Causal Attributions in Controlling Premarital Sex among Adolescents in Secondary Schools in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors TW and JD designed the study and reviewed the manuscript, while author LM carried out data collection, analysis and wrote the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aim: Teachers play a key role in modifying learners' involvement in premarital sex. Their success depends on where they lay blame for this behavior. The objective of this study was to establish teachers' causal attributions in controlling adolescents' initiation into premarital sex.

Methodology: A sample of 364 teachers (103 males, 261 females) was drawn from a population of 1,824 secondary school teachers. In addition to this, a questionnaire was used to collect data which was analyzed using descriptive statistics and results presented in pie charts and bar charts.

Results: The respondents made the following causal attributions towards adolescents' initiation into premarital sex: Personality factors 46.84% (immorality 18.93%, indiscipline 17.80%, irresponsibility 16.67%, avoid consequences 14.97%, lack of self-control 14.41%, curiosity 12.71% and ignorance 4.52%.); Peer-Related Factors 16.94% (peer pressure 89.08% and peer gangs 10.92%); School Factors 16.26% (lack of sex education 78.31% and lack of guidance and counseling 21.69%); Family Factors 10.22% (lack of parental guidance 96.19% and family conflicts 3.8%) and Social-economic factors (Media 66%, societal moral decay 14%, early exposure to sex 13% and poverty 7%).

Conclusion: Teachers make varying causal attributions towards adolescent initiation into marital sex behavior. The causal attributions were analyzed under personality, peer related, school, family and socio-economic factors. The findings form a basis for understanding teachers' ability to control adolescent premarital sex behaviors. To facilitate teachers' control over adolescents' early sex initiation, teachers understanding of their style of attribution should be addressed.

Keywords: Adolescence; teachers' causal attributions; premarital sex initiation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Initiation into premarital sex has been reported in a number of institutions of higher learning worldwide. In a survey by Center for Disease Control Prevention [1] in United States, it was reported that 30% of the youth surveyed had had sexual relations during the previous 3 months. In Kenya, Aseda [2] noted that the reality of Aids and early pregnancy demands that students get condoms. This was in reaction to a Kenyan bill on issuing of condoms to school going children due to the rising cases of sexual involvement among learners. Lawrence, Ikamari and Towett [3] concluded that female adolescents had early onset of sexual activity and use of contraceptives. In another study by Lubanga [4] on teenage pregnancy, it was reported that 39 teenage girls had been forced to terminate their studies after they were found pregnant. He concluded that school girls' pregnancy was on the rise. It is a behavior that has negative outcomes that affect the student's health and life in general [5]. Casual sexual activity among adolescents contributes to development of psychosocial difficulties like lowered self-esteem, increases in depressive symptoms and inhibited interpersonal/relationship-building skills [6,7]. Consequently, it is essential that teachers control these behaviors to facilitate good academic performance and a healthy psychological well-being both in and out of school.

Teachers' causal attributions for initiation into early sex among adolescent learners may influence the teachers' ability to control them. Teachers' causal attributions are explanations that teachers give after observing learner behaviors. Teachers' responses to these behaviors are highly influenced by the explanations they assign them. Studies by Mavtopoulou and Padeliadu [8] and Poulon and Norwich [9] suggest that attributions have significant implications for teachers' perception of their own responsibility for students' performance as well as their subsequent behavior towards students. Teachers may either make internal or

external attributions. When they make internal attributions, they assign blame to something within the student. When they make external attributions, they blame other factors for instance, peer pressure and family factors. Whether the teachers make internal or external attributions may influence their ability and willingness to help the student. To determine whether teachers are in control of premarital sex among learners, it is important to establish their causal attributions towards this behavior. The current study examined this based on the theory of attribution by Weiner [10].

Various studies and media reports have cited a number of causal attributions for youth involvement in sex. Okong'o [11] noted, in a study in Nyanza County, that majority of victims of HIV/AIDS are students. He attributed this to the failure of parents to highlight the dangers of the scourge to their children. In Mombasa, a Briton was arrested in the company of two secondary school girls and charged with prostitution with the underage girls [12]. A week later, six girls were found pregnant in a school in Kilifi [13]. It was concluded that school girls' pregnancy was on the rise. The causal attribution in these studies are from the general population. There is need to examine the reasons that teachers give towards these behaviors. This is in the view that teachers play a significant role in modifying adolescent behavior. They develop policies, rules and practices that guide acceptable behavior in schools. They also deal with routine discipline, offer guidance and provide mentorship. Their attributions may influence these roles. There is therefore, a need to establish whether teachers are in control, by examining their causal attributions. This area has been under-investigated. To fill the gap, this study was directed towards establishing teachers' causal attributions in controlling premarital sex initiation among adolescents' in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. This is crucial in studying, understanding and successfully controlling premarital sex behavior among learners.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Theory of Attribution by Weiner [10] which focuses on enhancing people's understanding of the causes of their behavior and that of others. He proposes that people assign the behavior they observe to something about the actor (internal attributions) or other factors (external attributions). The style of attribution may influence the response of the observer towards the actor. When teachers encounter cases where adolescent learners are involved in sexual relationships, they blame the students or other factors such as home environment. When they blame the students, they may feel obliged to help the students out of the behavior while if they blame other factors such as lack of parental guidance, they may feel helpless and therefore do little towards helping the student. This may lead to the behavior getting out of control.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1 Research Design

A descriptive survey design was used due to its suitability in collecting data on causal attributions as they cannot be directly observed. The design is also appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth description of the characteristics of a large population as is the case in this study.

2.2 Study Variables

The current study has one dependent variable (early sex initiation) and one independent variable (teachers' causal attributions).

2.3 Participants

The study comprised a sample of 364 teachers (103 males and 261 females) drawn from a population of 1,824 teachers (1,307 females and 517 males) from 78 public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The sampling procedure applied in this study was stratified random sampling. The population of Nairobi secondary school teachers was divided into strata, with an appropriate number of participants from each stratum. The following strata were used: Girls' Boarding, Girls' Day, Boys' Boarding, Boys' Day, Girls' Day/Boarding, Boys' Day/Boarding and Mixed Day. A sample was then drawn from each stratum using simple random sampling. The total

sample constitutes 20% of the teacher population of the study.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

After getting a data collection permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, the researcher visited the schools sampled and issued a letter addressed to the principal requesting to collect data among teachers. The researcher was introduced to an assisting teacher who took her to the staff offices where she gave a brief on the study and what the teachers were required to do. The researcher then issued copies of the questionnaire and collected them after completion. Those who were not able to fill in the questionnaires immediately were requested to hand in the filled in questionnaires to the assisting teacher, from whom the researcher collected the questionnaires at a later date.

2.5 Instrument

A questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was composed of two parts. Part 1 was used to collect demographic data while part 11 measured the teachers' Causal attributions from illustrations of sexual behaviors reported by teachers in other situations. This section had three columns. In one column, the researcher described the sexual behaviors while the respondents stated what they believed was the cause of each of these behaviors in the second column. The third column was used by the researcher to identify whether the cause of behavior identified by the respondent was an internal or external attribution.

2.6 Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher started by identifying the teachers' causal attributions indicated in column one of part 2 of the questionnaire. This was followed by the researcher indicating in column two whether the attribution in column 1 was internal or external. The researcher went further and classified the attributions given into relevant themes for easy analysis. Attributions under each theme were then identified. The data was then coded and entered into the computer SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for analysis. The study generated both qualitative and quantitative data which was used in the discussion of research findings. The researcher

used frequency distribution statistics to analyze causal attributions.

2.7 Logistical and Ethical Considerations

The data collection procedure did not involve any physical or psychological harm to the respondents. Informed consent was sought from the respondents and participation was voluntary.

3. RESULTS

The leading category of factors of teachers' causal attributions for adolescent initiation to premarital sex is personality factors (46.84%) (Fig. 1). These are followed by peer related factors (16.94%), school factors (16.26%), family related factors (10.22) and the least being socio-economic factors (9.737%) - (Fig. 1).

Personality, family, socio-economic, peer and school factors were further analyzed to establish the causes of early sex initiation related to each factor starting with the personality factors. The findings show that among personality factors leading to early sex initiation, immorality had the highest contribution (18.93%) - (Fig. 2). It was

followed by indiscipline (17.80%), irresponsibility (16.68%), avoiding consequences (14.97%), lack of self-control (14.41%), curiosity (12.71%) and ignorance (4.52%) in that order (Fig. 2). Lack of self-control, curiosity and avoiding consequences contributed about two fifths of the personality factors. Among the personality factors leading to early sex initiation, slightly more than a half (53.4%) resulted from immorality, indiscipline and irresponsibility.

The results of this study indicated that lack of guidance is the leading (96.19%) cause of early sex initiation according to the teachers (Fig. 3). Almost nine out of ten teachers consider lack of guidance to be a major cause of early sex initiation among the family factors. An insignificant number (3.8%), consider family conflicts as determinants of early sex initiation (Fig. 3).

Results further revealed that media contributes over two thirds (66%) of the socio-economic causes of early sex initiation (Fig. 4). This is followed by societal moral decay (14%), early exposure to sex (13%) and poverty (7%) which makes the least contribution (Fig. 4).

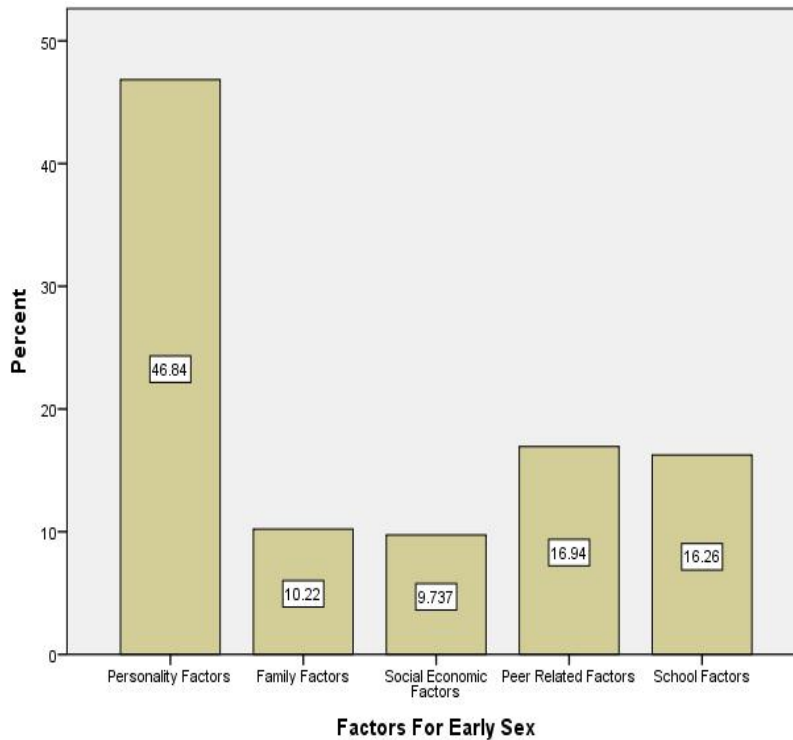


Fig. 1. Reasons for early sex initiation

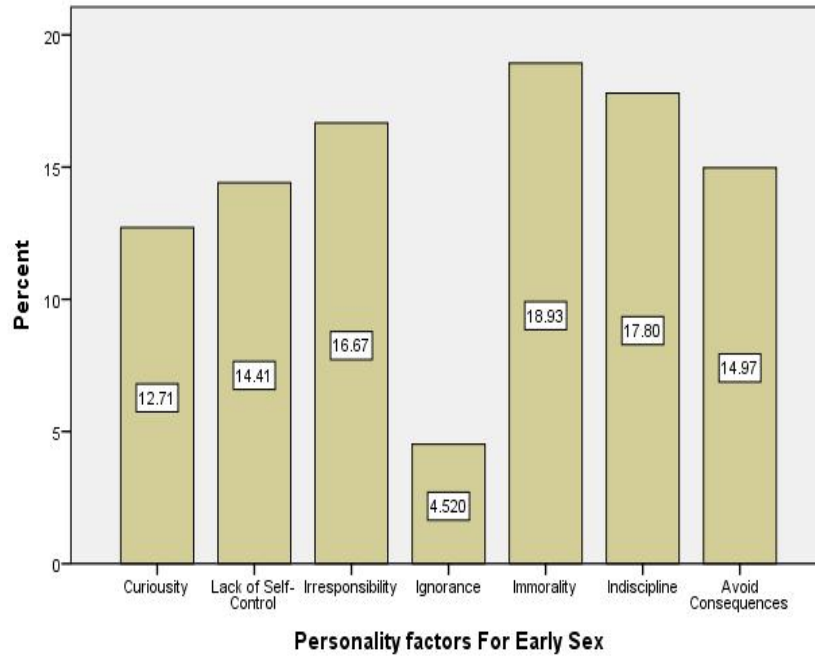


Fig. 2. Personality factors for early sex

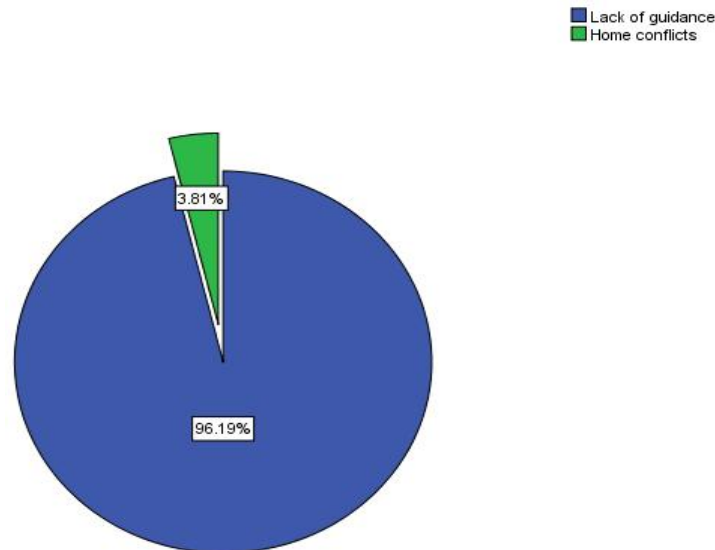


Fig. 3. Family factors for early sex initiation

Further, results indicated that among the peer related factors, peer pressure is the leading (89.09%) cause of early sex initiation with almost nine out of ten cases (Fig. 5).

The study further revealed that, lack of sex education contributes slightly more than three quarters (78.31%) of the school related factors (Fig. 6). Lack of guidance and counseling

contributes about a quarter (21.69%) of the causes (Fig. 6).

4. DISCUSSION

This study revealed that the leading category of factors contributing to early sex initiation is personality. The leading personality factors are immorality and indiscipline. This implies that

students' maladaptive behavior heavily contributed to involvement to early sex. This is in agreement with results by Donenberg et al. [14]. However, they identified the need for intimacy, achievement motivation and anxiety as the personality factors that influence involvement in sexual activities. The differences could be as a result of the differences in respondents. Students would be motivated to give causes that make them seem like they have no control while teachers are more open.

The results of the current study suggest that the teachers are aware of the students' involvement in immoral behavior which they are highly exposed to as a result of exposure to pornography and other sexual related activities. Curiosity and avoiding consequences contributed to about two fifths of the cases. Ignorance was considered the least implying that teachers are aware that their students have sufficient information regarding the negative effects of involvement in early sex.

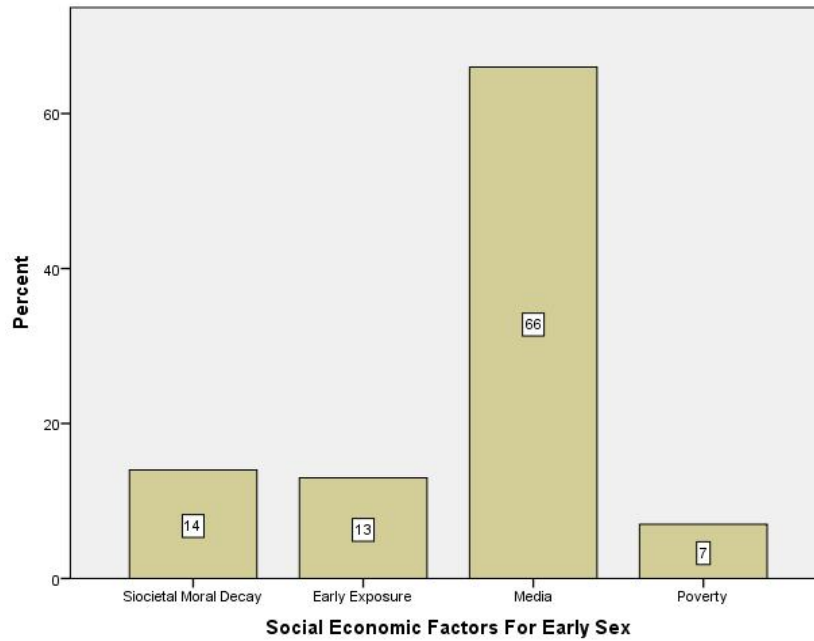


Fig. 4. Socio-economic factors for early sex initiation

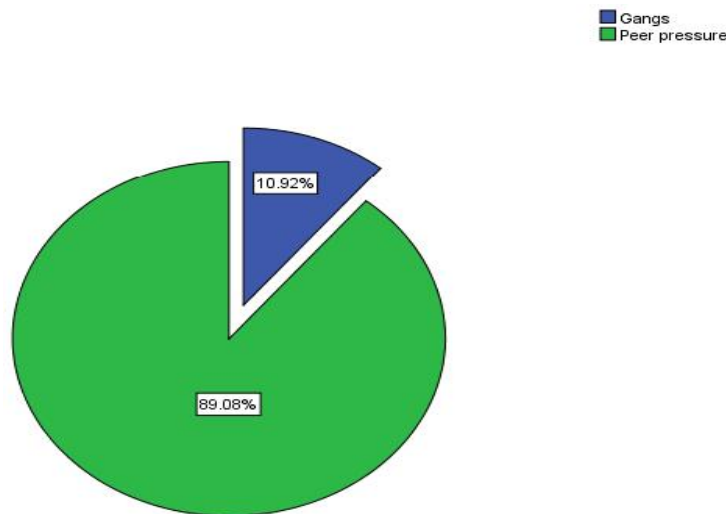


Fig. 5. Peer related factors for early sex initiation

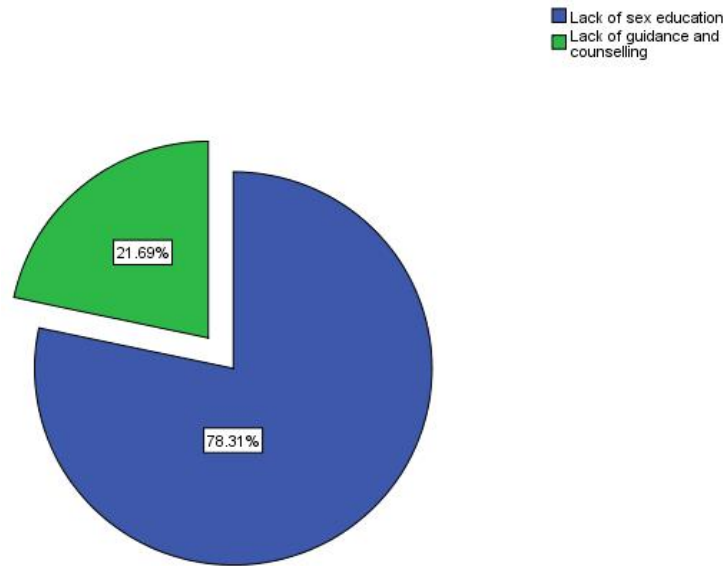


Fig. 6. School-related factors for early sex initiation

On family factors leading to early sex initiation, lack of guidance is the leading cause followed by family conflicts. This is supported by other related studies in which researchers reported that parental indifferences, family conflict and divorce factors influenced adolescents' sexual behavior [13,15,16]. Similarly, Donenberget al., [14] found out that parental hostile control influences involvement in sexual relationships. This implies that teachers consider the role of parents very essential in determining the behavior of adolescent learners and especially when it comes to sex related issues. The results suggest that teachers feel that the parents could be too busy to guide their children. This is true in an urban setting like Nairobi County where both parents are most of the times busy trying to earn a living.

On socio-economic factors affecting early sex initiation, majority of the teachers cite media as the main socio-economic cause of early sex initiation among adolescents. Results confirm reports by Egbochuku [15] who notes that exposure to pornographic films as a major factor influencing adolescents' sexual attitudes. This is true as urban adolescents are exposed to media influence at home, in the neighborhood and in school. This could explain why the media is the leading cause of early sex initiation.

On peer related factors for early sex initiation, pressure as the leading cause of early sex initiation among the peer related causes at

89.08%. This concurs with a report by Egbochuku [17] who noted that peer pressure impacted on adolescent sexual attitude. This agrees with the perception that at adolescence peers strongly influence an adolescent's behavior. Peer gangs have a minimal influence at 10.92%. It seems that gangs may be involved in other problem behaviors and rarely involve themselves in sexual matters. After all, peers are in most cases of a similar gender and this minimizes the chances of getting attracted to sexual issues.

Majority of the teachers indicated that lack of sex education is the major cause of early sex initiation among adolescent learners followed by lack of guidance and counseling. This may imply that the teachers recognize the positive impact of guidance and counseling in schools. These results concur with those of Esero [16] who found that sex education reduced at-risk sexual behavior in adolescents. Lack of guidance and counseling could mean that the Kenyan school curriculum does not provide for a specific programme on sex education and that the available counseling teachers are either conservative about dealing with sex related issues or lack the expertise to deal with them. It could also imply that the Kenyan teachers do not feel well prepared to deal with sex related cases among students. By blaming lack of guidance for adolescent learners' involvement in early sex, it may imply that most of the teachers have left this issue to members of the guidance and

counseling departments in school since it is an embarrassing area to handle.

5. CONCLUSION

Teachers make both internal and external attributions towards early sex initiation behaviours among adolescent learners. In addition to this, teachers should be equipped with knowledge and skills that enhance their ability to understand the causes of learner involvement in early sex initiation. Teachers should be facilitated to understand the influence of their causal attributions on their ability to handle adolescent involvement in sexual behaviors. Further to this, a study should be done to establish teachers' causal attributions for other categories of problem behavior. Finally, the current study should be replicated among teachers in other levels of learning institutions.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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