

Factors which Predispose Learners to Engage into Risky Sexual Practices in Ward Secondary Schools in Morogoro Municipality - Tanzania

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Abstract: *The study investigated factors which predispose learners to engage into risky sexual practices in ward Secondary Schools in Morogoro Municipality –Tanzania. There was limited empirical evidence on the factors contributing to risky sexual practices this prompted the researcher to focus on it. The study employed descriptive research design with a mixed methods approach whereby the sample of 74 respondents comprising 40 students, 16 teachers, 4WEOs, 4head of schools and 10 parents from ward secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality was drawn from the target population of 90 people. Purposive sampling technique and simple random technique were used in this study. Purposive sampling was used in selecting head of the schools and WEOs, while simple random technique was used in selecting students and parents. Interview, focus group discussion and questionnaire were used as tools for collecting primary data while documentary review was used to collect secondary data. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 and content analysis. The findings of the study revealed that, poor economic situation, lack of education about sex, the use of alcohol, the influence of electronic media, music night ceremonies like vigodolo, peer pressure have influenced learners to engage into risky sexual practices in Morogoro Municipality. Therefore, by addressing this issue comprehensively, Tanzanian society can protect the well - being and future prospects of learners in the country.*

Keywords: Learners, Sexual practices and Risky sexual practices

1. Introduction

According to Desale (2016) Risky sexual practices are any sexual activity that increases the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STI) and unintended pregnancy, which includes having sex with multiple sexual partners, early initiation of sexual intercourse under the age of 18, and not using or inconsistent use of a condom Tilahun et al, (2020). The largest relative increase occurred among those 15 years of age from 4.6% in 2009 to 23% in 2010. In 2010, more than 8, 000 girls dropped out of school due to pregnancy, including about 1, 760 girls in primary school and over 6, 300 in secondary school (Songa, 2012). In 2012, 75% of learners reported have had sex with two or more partners, and 45% reported have had four or more partners Okello et al (2014). A study by Mbelwa and Isangula (2012) noted that out of 400 schoolgirls who were sexually active 200 schoolgirls dropped out of school because of pregnancy in Luweero district. Moreover, the prevalence of HIV and other STDs among learners is higher in Sub - Saharan Africa than in other parts of the world (UNAIDS, 2004).

The government of Tanzania has implemented various initiatives in the realm of sexual and reproductive health targeted at young individuals. These initiatives encompass media campaigns, peer education and outreach programs, youth development initiatives, as well as community health facilities. These programs are not limited to the formal education system but extend into informal settings as well. Additionally, several partners, such as The African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), the African Youth Alliance, and religious institutions, play an active role in providing resources and support to promote healthy behavior among youth. Their aim is to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unintended pregnancies among this demographic.

Despite all the available programs that are aimed at preventing risk sexual practice among the learners, but there is still a high number of secondary school learners engaging into risky sex. Therefore, the current study intended to investigate factors which predispose learners to engage into risky sexual practice in ward secondary school in Morogoro municipality.

2. General Objective

This study investigated factors which predispose learners to engage into risky sexual practices in ward Secondary Schools in Morogoro municipality–Tanzania.

3. Methodology and Research design

This study employed mixed approaches which are quantitative and qualitative approach, whereby the researcher used interview, focus group discussion and questionnaire as tools of data collection. The sample of 74 people comprising students 40 as main respondents, teachers 16, head teachers 4, WEOs 4 and parents from ward secondary schools in Morogoro municipality.

4. Study Findings

4.1 Lack of Comprehensive Sex Education and Reproductive Health

According to Mlingi et al (2018) the absence of comprehensive sexual education programs in schools is another factor contributing to learners engaging into risky sexual practices. Studies have highlighted the limited knowledge among learners about sexual health, contraceptive methods, and STI prevention (Shao et al., 2020). Insufficient information and misconceptions about

sexual health increase the likelihood of engaging in unprotected sex and other risky behaviors.

One respondent asserted that adolescence they find themselves in a situation where they are less likely to be consulted by parents or teachers and even if they are mentored by teachers or their parents use secret methods to meet their needs. They go on saying that, being a teenager when entering into a romantic relationship with boys it becomes difficult to leave it. So, this leads them to fail to control themselves and find themselves pregnant.

Most teachers asserted that the lack of access to education on sexual and reproductive health and rights can result in a range of harmful practices such as unwanted pregnancies and high levels of gender - based violence which have an enormous adverse effect on sustainable development. The education system is failing students regarding practicing safe sex in the real world. Research shows that when sex education is comprehensive, students feel more informed, make safer choices and have healthier outcomes resulting in fewer unplanned pregnancies and more protection against sexually transmitted diseases and infections. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that insufficient sexual education within schools and communities further hinder learners' understanding and utilization of preventive measures.

4.2 Electronic Media and Sexual Activity

According to (Connel, 2009) adolescents use electronic media in large numbers and are therefore uniquely positioned to be particularly vulnerable to its effects. They usually use Television, Radio, the Internet and Social Networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter. Over half of all Internet - using teens are content creators who create websites or blogs, share original media such as photos and porn videos, or remix content into new creations. The availability of information about sex and erotica are now commonplace in media and pop - culture, which was not true for previous generations, and these influences can be considered to be disadvantageous to the sexual development of young people (Marx, *et al.*2018).

Most teachers asserted that the freedom of students to use the computers, phones, and other electronic devices of their parents, friends, and other community members has greatly weakened our children's moral behavior and encouraged them to engage in risky sexual practice. Many of these devices come pre - installed with software that is detrimental to children's welfare especially when children use Google to search porn videos.

Another respondent echoed that they want to experience what they see on media rather than what they learn about sexuality. Many learners want to do the things they see on TV and phones and have sex. It emerged from the study that, school students' tendency of watching media with unwanted themes has much to do with their sexual decision making, unless of course, that program was to significantly alter aspirations that a child was living within. This finding is congruent with the study by in the U. S conducted by Moreno and Parks (2009) on reducing at - risk adolescent's display of risk behavior on a social networking web site

found that, adolescents who perceived sex to be normative based on others Facebook profiles were more likely to report an interest in initiating sex.

Dowdell et al (2011) in their study among American teenagers of the effects of sexting on adolescent initial sex experience and consequences such as HIV, STIs and teenage pregnancy, emphasize that sexting does not typically represent a random or anonymous event; rather it usually takes place in the context of existing offline relationships. He also argues that in most cases of sexting, the sexual photos were intended to be viewed by only a romantic partner, such as boyfriend or girlfriend. The study of Granello (1997) has shown that the influence of the mass media on the adolescent is more than that of the peer group and the school. Because they tend to see most of the things they view as realistic and attainable, adolescent girls are more likely to imitate or emulate the images portrayed in the media.

4.3 Peer pressure

Peer pressure plays a crucial role in shaping the sexual behaviors of individuals, especially during adolescence and young adulthood. Peers have a powerful influence on one's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, including those related to sex. The desire to fit in, gain acceptance, and avoid social exclusion can lead individuals to engage in risky sexual practices they might otherwise avoid. Learners may feel pressure to conform to certain sexual behaviors or expectations influenced by their peers or broader societal norms. This pressure can lead to engaging in risky sexual practices without proper consideration of consequences. Teachers revealed that most of time adolescent girls spend with their friends out of both family and school and there they learn a lot of bad practices including sexual practice, from one another, which they consider themselves as modern ones; consequently, they found themselves in the trap of unwanted pregnancy. Another respondent asserted that the greater influence to engage into risky sexual practices are friends because it's like when they trust their friends so much in things that shouldn't even trust them with. Especially here in their school, people make others feel like abnormal if they are not having sex for some reason.

The study findings illustrate some common ways in which individuals may use peer pressure on others to engage into risky sexual practices. It's important to remember that surrendering to peer pressure can have serious consequences, and individuals should prioritize their own comfort, safety, and well - being when making decisions regarding their sexual health. This is confirmed by the finding of Ramathuba (2013) on a quantitative study conducted to explore secondary school girls' the knowledge, attitudes and behavior regarding emergency contraception, teenage pregnancy and sexuality among secondary school, girls confirmed peer pressure as one of the factors influencing them to engage in sexual activity which led them to get pregnancy.

4.4 Traditional ceremonies (Vigodolo)

According to Muula et al (2018) Cultural norms and traditional beliefs surrounding sexuality can also influence learners' behaviors. One respondent in the interview pinpointed that most students like to go to the night music (vigodolo) as their traditional ceremony, but surroundings of music are not favorable to them because even the style of dancing is not good. Some of people dance naked so that some of students are convinced to dance the same way.

Factors such as increased alcohol or substance use, and a relaxed atmosphere can potentially contribute to a greater likelihood of engaging in risky sexual practices for some individuals. Also, the presence of sexualized music, suggestive dancing, or a permissive cultural environment could potentially influence some students' attitudes and behaviors.

This finding is congruent with the study by Mzeri and Wandela (2022) which revealed the night Music ceremonies have been mentioned as great threat to development of teenagers while they are in school. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that tradition ceremonies and practices are among the factors that have predisposed learners to engage into risky sexual practices in ward secondary schools in Morogoro municipality.

4.5 Gender Inequality and Power Dynamics

In many societies, gender norms and expectations dictate different sexual behaviors for men and women. These norms often grant men more sexual autonomy and encourage multiple sexual partners, while placing restrictions on women's sexual behavior and emphasizing their role as gatekeepers of sexuality. These unequal expectations contribute to risky sexual practices by creating an environment where men may engage in unprotected sex or have multiple partners, while women may face barriers in negotiating condom use or practicing safer sex.

One respondent asserted that most of girls in ward secondary schools getting involved with older men who provide them with money, expensive gifts, and a lavish lifestyle. These relationships often involve engaging in sexual activities, and the girls may not prioritize their sexual health or negotiate the use of protection.

This finding is congruent with the study by Kapinga et al. (2019) which revealed that female learner faced additional vulnerabilities due to traditional gender norms and power imbalances. Gender - based violence, unequal power relations, were identified as factors exacerbating the risks faced by female learners engaging in sexual activities. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that gender inequality and power dynamics are among the factors that have predisposed learners to engage into risky sexual practices in ward secondary schools in Morogoro municipality

4.6 Parental values and communication with children

Poor parent child communication regarding sex education matters is one of the factors that predispose learners to

engage into risky sexual practice and this makes them prone to unintended pregnancy and likely to contract STDs.

During interview one respondent stated that communication between parents and their children about sexual issues may reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancy as well as sexual diseases like HIV/AIDs and other STDs. Children should be aware on the consequences of engaging in risky sexual practices.

This finding is in tandem with the study by Nzama (2004) on the effects of teenage pregnancy on the school life of adolescent girls. The study revealed that most girls receive little or no support from their parents, often with no communication with their parents regarding sexual issues. In addition, Mothiba and Maputle (2012) a study revealed that, many young people perceived it as a cultural taboo to discuss sex with their parents. Although sex topics were found to be a taboo by many participants, the discussion of the topic with parents was cited as being significant in influencing the sexual practices of students that could lead to unwanted pregnancy.

5. Summary of the Study

The findings revealed that a majority of students who were engaging into risky sexual practices consequently led to unintended pregnancies and sexual transmitted infections. The explored factors for students to engage into risky sexual practices in ward secondary schools include: peer pressure, traditional ceremonies, Gender Inequality and Power Dynamics, and Electronic Media and Sexual Activity. The study underscored the importance of involving parents, teachers, healthcare professionals, and community organizations in collaborative efforts to mitigate risky sexual practices. By providing comprehensive education, access to resources, and fostering supportive environments, students can be empowered to make informed decisions, prioritize their sexual health, and reduce the potential harms associated with risky sexual practices.

6. Conclusion

Regarding factors which predispose learners to engage into risky sexual practices in ward secondary schools in Morogoro municipality it can be concluded that there are various factors that contribute to risky sexual practices among learners in Morogoro municipality. These include; Lack of comprehensive sex education and reproductive health, electronic media, peer pressure, traditional ceremonies (vigodolo), gender inequality and power dynamics. Suffice to say that these factors for learners to engage into risky sexual practices may not be exclusive to Morogoro municipality, as can be observed in other districts in Tanzania as well as other parts of the world. Therefore, By understanding the contributing factors and implementing culturally appropriate interventions, policymakers, educators, and healthcare professionals can work together to promote safe and responsible sexual behaviors among learners. By addressing this issue comprehensively, Tanzanian society can protect the well - being and future prospects of learners in the country.

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