



Alcohol and Drug Abuse as Ecological Predictors of Risk Taking Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County, Kenya

Joseph Theuri¹ and David Nzioka²

¹Atlantic International University; ² Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology, Kenya

ABSTRACT

This article is on alcohol and drug abuse as predictors of risk taking behaviour among secondary school students in Kajiado North Sub-County. The area has numerous drug and alcohol ecological factors that could influence the behaviour of adolescents. Since the area is home to a lot of the working population of the adjacent Nairobi City County, people from various backgrounds have immigrated there. As such, the societal values held by the inhabitants of the area are not easy to define. In this context, adolescents are prone to indulge in drug and alcohol abuse that could impact their lives negatively. This is particularly so since it alcohol and drug abuse encourages unprotected sex among students and by extension abortion, gang behaviour as students look for money to sustain the risky behaviours among others. The arguments of this article are guided by the ecological Systems Theory. Information is obtained from a descriptive survey of 267 students and 15 principals that was undertaken in 2017. The sample was obtained using stratified proportionate sampling and total population sampling techniques in the 15 public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-County. Data from students was collected using questionnaires while the principals were interviewed. The findings show that alcohol and drug abuse risk-taking behaviour in adolescents are higher in the wake of poor family stability, negative peer influence, breakdown of societal values and weak government measures. As such, it is recommended that it is important to ensure that cohesiveness in the families is encouraged so as to reduce alcohol and drug abuse behaviours among students. Teachers should also be at the forefront for checking alcohol and drug abuse in schools so as to protect the spread of risky taking behaviours among peers. Members of the society who sell alcohol to students should be identified and punished as per the existing law. The government should strengthen its programs (in schools and in the mass media) to guide students on the dangers associated with alcohol and drug abuse among students. This article is organized into Introduction, Literature Review and discussions.

Keywords: Alcohol Abuse, Drug Abuse, Risk Taking Behaviour, Secondary School Students; Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are growing in ecologies characterized with fast modernization and vague boundaries among societies. In this context, adolescents are exposed to immense social problems. These social problems such as risky behaviour pose serious health issues that warrant special attention (Kauppi, 2015). Theorists such as the Bronfenbrenner (1993) posit that the ecology in which an adolescent grows will affect his/her behaviour. Tendencies for ADA in the School, home and society environment the propensity of an adolescent to take to risk taking behaviours and vice versa.

Kajiado North Sub-County is faced with immense alcohol abuse that could influence the behaviour of adolescents. People from various backgrounds have immigrated into the area, resulting in the societal values in the area not being easy to define (UNICEF, 2012). Obare, Odwe and Birungi (2016) report high level of breakdown of societal values and high level of ADA in urban areas of Kajiado County, with 60% of girls in the county being victims of early sexual debut. Extant literature shows that ADA amongst peer group pressure could influence risk taking behaviour among adolescents. Most of the existing studies on ADA and its relationship with risk taking behaviour rely on desk review of existing literature. Few of these studies, except those by Kyalo (2010) and Wango (2006) use the descriptive survey design as the study that was undertaken by the researcher. Furthermore, the fact none of the previous studies focused on Kajiado North Sub-County meant that the findings obtained could exactly relate to the study undertaken by the researcher.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory (EST) was advanced by Bronfenbrenner (1979). In the work titled, “the Ecology of Human Development (1979), he argues that “the properties of the person and of the environment, the structure of the developmental settings, and the processes that take place within and between them must be viewed as interdependent and analyzed in systems terms”.

Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1993) shows five systems that influence the development of a person. These include the microsystem where by the person is exposed to a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations in one on one setting. These include home and school. The second system is the mesosystem. This incorporates linkages occurring between numerous settings where the developing person is located such as home and school.

The third system is the exosystem. This includes one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant. In these settings, events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person. These could be the parental workplace whereby an individual can be affected by the context in which the parent works through acquired values among others.

The last system is the macrosystem. This includes influences from culture, subculture and other extended social structure” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The last system is the chronosystem. In this one, the development of a person is affected by affected over time by numerous influences that occur at school, home or in the country at large.

The critiques of this theory posit that the person has to remain in the ecology continuously so as to be influenced by all the systems effectively. If the person relocates to a faraway place or another country, the systems change; leading to different development patterns (Feldman, 2003).

In this current study, EST is relevant since the ecology in which an adolescent grows will affect his/her behaviour. This includes school, home, national policies and peers among others. If there are ADA behaviours in the environment, the propensity of the student to adopt risk taking behaviours is increased and vice versa.

2.1.2 Problem Behavior Theory

The Problem Behavior Theory (PBT) was advanced by Jessor in 1977 (Jessor, 1977). The theory explains the adaptations to unconventional behaviour among adolescents (risk behaviours as in this study). The theory has been used to explain why students all over the world take to risk-taking behaviours such as substance use, fighting, alcohol and drug abuse among others (Ma & Shive, 2000).

The theory is based on the assumption that behaviour is guided by the interaction of three systems: legal norms in the society; value system of the individual and; the relationships that one sustains in his or her environment.

The societal as well as governmental legal systems and how they are enforced will influence the problem behaviour of an individual. An individual will also act based on what he or she perceives as peer, societal and family expectations for achievements. Lastly, an individual will act based on the influence of the relationships they have. If the social relationships of an individual tolerate a particular behaviour, the individual is also likely to tolerate it and vice versa.

This theory relates to this current study. It can be conceptualized that the society in which an adolescent grows in will influence their risk taking behaviour. If adolescents are in an environment where there is ADA, they are likely to adopt the same behaviour. Furthermore, the relationships of the adolescent and what they tolerate will also determine the extent to which they will engage in problem and risk-taking behaviour.

Maina (2015) shows that pressures exerted on the officers were often checked by the need to maintain family and the need to put up with the demands of life. These findings show the important influence of family on the decisions undertaken by individuals.

Boyer (2006) argues that peer involvement in risk-taking is the most important predictor of adolescent risk-taking. In environments where peer group influence is not checked by parental intervention (Wood, et al. 2004) through guidance, adolescents form strong peer relationships that contribute to increased risk-taking behaviour among such peers. Evidently, parental involvement determines the kind of relationships that their children form and sustain.

Allen et al. (2012) undertook a study titled “Predictors of susceptibility to peer influence regarding substance use in adolescence”. They found out that APA among peers are key predictors of the likelihood of substance abuse. According to the study, peer substance use was significantly related to change in the abuse of the same substance by adolescents in their group. The study however found out substance abuse among adolescents was also influenced by social and environmental factors-factors that are not the focus of this current study.



Boyer (2006) undertook a desk review on the development of risk-taking. The findings obtained show that teenagers are a reflection of the behaviour of the social relationships they make. Teenagers who form relations with deviant colleagues are more likely to adopt various forms of deviant behaviour. Unmediated by parents, peers with APA abuse tend to develop high risk-taking appetites predispose teenagers to more likelihood to engage in risk-taking behaviour.

2.2 Empirical Review

The fact that the world is faced with fast modernization and vague boundaries among societies leads to immense social problem among adolescents. These social problems, some of which include alcohol and drug abuse (hereinafter abbreviated as ADA) pose serious health issues that warrant special attention (Ochieng, 2013). In the United States of America, adolescent indulgence in ADA and other risk behaviour play crucial roles in eroding families, troubling societies and challenging social services (Sinha, Cnaan & Gelles, 2007). As such, the factors in the environment that contribute to such behaviour continue to draw attention to scholarship the world over.

Risk taking behaviour (RTB) is the tendency to engage in behaviour that has the potential to be harmful or dangerous (Ochieng, 2013). As adolescents approach 14 years, they get into a special developmental stage. Herein, they are prone to the highest risk for a myriad of social problems. In this stage, most adolescents are prone to fall prey to dangerous activities including but not limited to ADA, casual sex, gang behaviour, stealing, unwarranted physical fights among others as pointed out by Kauppi (2015).

The fact that ADA is a global phenomenon has attracted a lot of attention to scholarship everywhere (Nonnah, 2003; Casey, Getz & Galvin, 2008; Kauppi, 2015; Boyer, 2006; Wolfe, Jaffe & Crooks, 2006 among others). The environmental contexts in which adolescents find themselves differ from country to country and continent to continent. All in all, no country is exempt from ADA and other risk taking behaviour among adolescents. This comes at immense costs. In Malaysia, Hidayah, et al. (2003) point out that the government commits a lot of financial resources to check risky behaviour among teenagers; often with meagre results. This behaviour affects the psychological well-being of teenagers drastically. The effects are often felt well into adulthood.

Adolescents are growing in ecologies characterized with fast modernization and vague boundaries among societies. In this context, adolescents are exposed to immense social problems. These social problems such as risky behaviour pose serious health issues that warrant special attention (Kauppi, 2015). Theorists such as the Bronfenbrenner (1993) posit that the ecology in which an adolescent grows will affect his/her behaviour. Tendencies for ADA in the School, home and society environment the propensity of an adolescent to take to risk taking behaviours and vice versa.

Extant literature shows that ADA amongst peer group pressure could influence risk taking behaviour among adolescents. Most of the existing studies on ADA and its relationship with risk taking behaviour rely on desk review of existing literature. Few of these studies, except those by Kyalo (2010) and Wango (2006) use the descriptive survey design as the study that was undertaken by the researcher. Furthermore, the fact none of the previous studies focused on Kajiado North Sub-County meant that the findings obtained could exactly relate to the study undertaken by the researcher. In Nigeria, one of the leading factors of risky taking behaviour among adolescents is the family ecology they come from (Ogidefa, 2008). Ogidefa argues that if adolescents grow up in an environment which is replete with ADA tendencies, their likelihood to engage in dangerous behaviour such as widespread ADA themselves, deviant behaviour and alcohol abuse among others. The problem is aggravated by the inability of the society from which a child comes from to enforce the stipulated corrective measures for adolescents who engage in certain behaviour.

In Kenya, Kabiru and Orpinas (2008) in a study on the central role played by families in controlling adolescent sexual behaviour shows that the emotional environment in which an adolescent grows is linked to their sexual behaviour. Adolescents living with parents are less likely to have early sexual debut than those living away from parents (Kabiru & Orpinas, 2008). It is thus clear that breakdown in family structure plays a pivotal role in encouraging adolescents' involvement in risky sexual behaviour.

Peer groups have also been seen as major predictors of the risk taking behaviour among adolescents. Allen, Chango, Szwedo, Schad and Marston (2012) posit that adolescents are subject to influence by the social relationships they make. Families, and most importantly peers, play a critical role in shaping the behaviour of adolescents. Although peer relationships play important roles in safeguarding teenagers from negative outcomes such as depression, they may also lead to the adoption of risk-taking behaviour in peer groups that have members with high risk-taking appetites such as ADA. Brown (2004) argues that peers affect the decision making process of adolescents either directly or indirectly. The risk-taking behaviour of a peer can be imitated indirectly by others in the peer groups. Peers also indirectly influence the modeling of various decision making and goal setting styles of adolescents. On the



other hand, peers affect the decision making processes of their colleagues directly by giving advice. If the youth associate with colleagues with ADA behaviours, they will definitely end up abusing the same behaviours themselves.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data was collected in a descriptive survey of 267 students and 15 principals in 2017. The sample was obtained using stratified proportionate sampling and total population sampling techniques in the 15 public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-County. Data from students was collected using questionnaires while the principals were interviewed. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in data analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

When presented with the statement, “some of my peers take alcohol and other substances and encourage me to do the same”. The students agreed to a little extent (mean of 2.2). This shows that although some students do not agree that most of their peers took alcohol and other substances, it is evident that there were some peers who were doing so. This is shown by the fact that the highest score given was 5 (agreement to a very great extent). This could place some negative influence on others as pointed out by Naidoo et al. (2015) who are of the view that the many teenagers get into unexpected negative behaviours due to influence from peers. In this case ADA among peers pushes an adolescent in that social group to adopt the same behaviour.

When presented with the statement, “there is a lot of alcohol and substance abuse in the community and one is not discouraged from taking it”, the students agreed to a little extent (mean of 2.0). These findings show that even if there was a lot of alcohol and substance abuse in the community, students were discouraged from taking it to a great extent. These findings concur with those of Kyalo (2010) who argues that ADA among students in high schools is intertwined with societal tolerance and that the level to which the society condemns the practice of availing such drugs to students would check the abuse of such drugs among students.

The students agreed to a moderate extent (mean of 2.9) that “there are instances of sexual relationships between adults and school going children in the society”. This is much more when such adolescents are in an environment with ADA as shown by the previous findings. The prevalence of this behaviour means that the society contributed to students’ propensity to engage in risk taking behaviour. These findings echo the report by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2015) that points out that societal values determine the kind of behaviour adopted by people. This further supports the report that 15% of women aged 20 to 49 had their first sexual relations by age 15, 50% by age 18, and 71% by age 20 (KNBS 2015).

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The findings show there are various risky behaviours among students. Some of these include smoking and taking hard drugs such as bhang. Sometimes, there are cases of sexual relationships among students and instances of gang behaviour during school holidays. Often, some students go to discos where they are exposed to alcohol and unprotected sex. Such unprotected sex often leads to cases of unwanted pregnancies and abortion among some students. These findings show that risk taking behaviour was prevalent among students in the sub-county.

5.2 Recommendations

Peers play a crucial role in determining the likelihood of adolescents to engage in risk-taking behaviour and vice versa. Teachers should be at the forefront for checking negative behaviours in schools so as to protect the spread of such behaviours among peers. Parents should also ensure that their child receive the right advice on choosing friends and on dealing negative influences from their colleagues at school. It is thus necessary to constantly review the behaviour of adolescents so as to guide them appropriately in case of negative behavioural changes.

There should be mechanisms in the society to guide adolescents. Schools, parents’ associations, religious bodies, school counsellors, chaplains and civil society organizations should endeavour to put a strong defence against ADA and the negative influences that beset children. In this regard, counselling centres should be put in place in the society to engage adolescents in life education and other activities such as games so as to divert them from idleness during school holidays and weekends. This would go on to keep them from risky taking behaviours. Members of the



society who engage in sexual relationships with students and those who sell alcohol or drugs to students should be identified and punished as per the existing law.

The government should strengthen its programs (in schools and in the mass media) that guide students. There should be more funding for radio and television broadcasts that guide adolescents on the dangers of alcohol, drug abuse and risky sexual behaviour. The government should also strengthen its training of principals and teachers on ways of dealing with risk taking behaviour among students. More guidance and counselling teachers should be employed so as to deal with the increasing needs for guiding students in the right direction. The government should also review its curriculum constantly so as to ensure that subjects on risk-taking behaviour remain relevant and that they are constantly strengthened.

REFERENCES

- Allen, J. P., Chango, J., Szewedo, D., Schad, M., & Marston, E. (2012). Predictors of susceptibility to peer influence regarding substance use in adolescence. *Child Development*, 83(1), 337-350.
- Boyer, T.W. (2006). The development of risk-taking: A multi-perspective review. *Developmental Review*, 26(3), 291-345.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1993). The ecology of cognitive development: Research models and fugitive findings. In R.H. Wozniak & R.W. Fischer (Eds.), *Development in context: Acting and thinking in specific environments* (3-44). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Brown, B. (2004). *Adolescents' relationships with peers*. *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (2nd ed.) Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Budeba, P., & Neema, T. (2014). Effects of students' relationship on Academics Performance among Secondary School Students in Tanzania. *Academic Research International*, 5(4).
- Casey B.J., Getz S., & Galvan A. (2008). The adolescent brain. *Developmental Review*, 28 (1): 62– 77. doi:10.1016/j.dr.2007.08.003.
- Feldman, D. H. (2003). A developmental, evolutionary perspective on giftedness. In J. H. Borland (Ed.), *Rethinking gifted education* (9-33). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hidayah, N. I., Hanafiah, M.S., Idris, M. N., Rosnah, S., Ibrahim, M. N., & Nonnah, D. (2003). Risk taking behaviour among adolescent in Johor Bahru and its associated factor. *Journal of Community Health*, 9, 12–1.
- Jessor, R. (1998). *New perspectives on adolescent risk behaviour* (Ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press, xii-564.
- Jessor, R., & Jessor, S. L. (1977). *Problem behaviour and psychosocial development: A longitudinal study of youth*. New York: Academic Press.
- Kabiru, C. W., & Orpinas, P. (2008). Factors associated with sexual activity among high-school students in Nairobi, Kenya. *Journal of Adolescence*, 20, 1-17.
- Kauppi, S. (2015). *Behaviour change and communication: a descriptive literature review of behaviour change and communication in sub-Saharan countries*. Master's Thesis. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences.
- KNBS (2015). *Demographic and health survey 2014*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Kyalo, M.P. (2010). Perception of public secondary school students on drugs and substance abuse in Murang'a County, *Sacha Journals*, 6 (5).
- Larson, R., & Wilson, S. (2004). "Adolescence across place and time: Globalization and the changing pathways to adulthood". In R. Lerner and L. Steinberg. *Handbook of adolescent psychology*. New York: Wiley.
- Larson, R., Eccles, J. & Gootman, J. A. (2004). Features of positive developmental settings. *The Prevention Researcher*, 11(2), 8-13.
- Ma, G. X., & Shive, S. (2000). A comparative analysis of perceived risks and substance use among ethnic groups. *Addictive Behaviors*, 25, 361-371
- Maina, E.W. (2015). *The effects of peer pressure: a case study of the public service: Nairobi County*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of Nairobi.
- Naidoo, P., Chirinda, W., McHunu, G., Swartz, S., & Anderson, J. (2015). Social and structural factors associated with vulnerability to HIV Infection among young adults in South Africa. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 20(3), 369-379.



- Ogidefa, O. (2008). *Cultism in Educational Institutions in Nigeria Causes, Possible Solutions and Counseling Implications*. Devifinder. Available on January 18, 2017 from: www.devifinder.com
- Population Council (2015a). *Health and life skills curriculum for the Adolescent Girls Initiative–Kenya (AGI–K)*. New York: Population Council. [www. popcouncil.org](http://www.popcouncil.org): http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2015PGY_AGI-K_HealthLifeCurriculum_Wajir.pdf.
- Sinha, J. W., Cnaan, R. A., & Gelles, R. W. (2007). *Adolescent risk behaviours and religion: findings from a national study*. University of Pennsylvania.
- Wango, G. (2006). *Policy and practice in guidance and counseling in secondary schools in Kenya*. University of Birmingham, United Kingdom.
- Wolfe, D. A., Jaffe, P. G., & Crooks, C. V. (2006). *Adolescent risk behaviours: Why teens experiment and strategies to keep them safe*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Wood, M. D., Read, J. P., Mitchell, R. E., & Brand, N. H. (2004). Do parents still matter? parent and peer influences on alcohol involvement among recent high school graduates. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviours*, 18, 19-30.