

Peer Influence on Aggressive Behaviour of Adolescents in Secondary Schools in Bungoma County

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Abstract : *The study sought to examine the extent to which adolescent students' peers influence aggressive behaviour among students in Bungoma County. The sample size for this study was 467. The student sample of 379 was drawn from (form two) student population of 30,000. The school sample of 22 was sampled from a population of 220 schools. The principal and teacher counsellor samples of 22 respectively, were drawn from a population of 220 and the selection were proportionate to the 22 schools. The form two students were purposively selected. Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling were used to sample schools and students respectively. The study used questionnaires to collect data. The instruments were pretested in 3 of the 22 schools. Pearson Correlation Statistics were used to test the significance of the stated hypotheses at $\alpha = .05$. The t- Test was used to test the difference in expression of aggression between boys and girls. ANOVA was used to compare the means. Descriptive statistics such as: means, frequencies and percentages were used to describe data collected. All analyses were aided by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.*

Keywords: *Adolescent; Aggressive Behaviour; Peer Influence*

I. Introduction

Exposure to violence is a widespread phenomenon according to a study of a United States sample, which indicates that around one third of all children are victims of some form of violence and approximately 90% witness violence at least once during their lifetimes. The credibility, authority, power and influence of peers are greater during adolescence than at any other time in life (Weerman, 2010). According to Chauhan (2010) when children move out of the family to school and the community at large, they begin to form attachments and friendships emerge through play. At this stage, children begin to think like their friends and begin to see that there are values, opinions and rules besides those that are set by their parents. Chauhan (2010) found that the peer group has significant influence on the teenagers' social development because it sets "rituals" for acceptable behaviour. Adolescents are likely to do the same as their closest friends and will emulate the behaviour or the dress of their idols through observation and imitation. The concept peer pressure refers to the influence exerted by a peer group in encouraging a person to change his or her attitudes, values or behaviour in order to conform to group norms (Weerman, 2009). The attachment to the peer group often overpowers the adolescent learner's individual degree of self-reliance and independence (Bernt, 2011). It is in peer groups that young people feel accepted and feel free to speak of things important to them and the groups provide the opportunity for learning specific skills that may not be available in other social relationships (Dewey, 2008).

II. Study objective

To determine peer influence on aggressive behaviour of adolescents in secondary schools In Bungoma County

III. Literature

A classical experiment by Solomon Asch explains how a group of individuals can influence somebody in making a decision. Suhttle Worth (2011) noted that the Asch experiment was designed to test how peer pressure would influence the judgment and individuality of test subject to conform to the majority. It was found out that people frequently followed the majority judgement, even when the majority was wrong. It was further noted that people often accept to be influenced just for the desire to achieve a sense of security within a group that is of similar age culture, religion or educational status. Any unwillingness to be influenced carries with it the risk of social rejection and this is what young people fear most (Suhttle Worth, 2011). Steinberg and Chung (2006) in their study found out that there was a link between peer group and aggressive behaviours. They

established that children begin to depend on their peers for acceptance rather than their parents during adolescence. In addition, peer pressure becomes harder to resist at this stage such that the opinions of peers often matter more than those of parents. Rugg (2013) and Scott (2008) pointed out that when adolescents formed relationships with people who displayed aggressive behaviours, they were likely to take part in the behaviours themselves. This was supported by Erickson (1963) that the resolution of adolescent developmental crisis depends on the interactions between the individual and whether support is provided by the environment. Therefore, if the significant person is practicing aggressive behaviours, the adolescent may engage in the same behaviour. However, Landau (2012) stressed that if adolescents spent time with deviant peers who consumed drugs, do not attend school regularly and are physically aggressive, then the adolescents were more likely to engage in aggressive behaviours as well.

Buseini (2012) explained that a sense of belonging is assumed to be a basic psychological need which will make students adapt to goals set by their peers. It is not surprising that an adolescent would conform to peers because of the acceptance and the sense of belonging they got from the group (Santrock, 2007). The studies by Buseini (2012) and Santrock (2007) indicated that, adolescents' affiliation to deviant peers represented the strongest predictor of deviant behaviour. The studies focused on all adolescents and yet students had different characteristics at various levels of development. Therefore, the current study focused on adolescents in secondary schools in order to compare the results. It is interesting to note that identification based on a group, students' opinion and participation within the group influenced fights and destruction of property. It is also important to note these were some of the variables being investigated in this study. Therefore, the current study built on these studies, and it was also necessary to compare the findings since the studies were conducted in different countries. Considerable evidence supports the hypothesis that peer relationships influence the growth of problem behaviour in youths. Development Research consistently documents the high levels of covariance between peer and youth deviance, even controlling for selection effects (Thorn Berry & Krohn, 2011). The authors contend that it is becoming clear that one of the major ways that deviant youth become even more deviant is through unrestricted interaction with deviant peers. They go on to say that adolescents sometimes join groups that readily accept them; even if the group is involved in illegal or negative activities. For them, the need for affiliation or closeness is often greater than the need to "do the right thing." When adolescents are in a group, if one member of a group engages in problem behaviour, a high probability exists that other members will do the same.

Longitudinal studies of delinquent behaviours (Seattle Social Development Study, Thorn Berry, 2011) have consistently shown that gang members although they constitute a small portion of these samples (range 14-30) account for a disproportionately large share of the criminal behaviour reported (range 68-90). The finding that affiliation with deviant peers is associated with growth in delinquent behaviour is one of the most robust findings in the literature on juvenile delinquents (Elliot & Menerd, 2011). Research findings by Whitmore (2011) in the University of Virginia indicated that peer relations somewhat predicted violent behaviour including drug use, anti-social behaviour, violent offences and early high risk sexual behaviour. Deviant behaviour affiliation is a stronger predictor of delinquent behaviour than variables such as family, school and community characteristics. Adolescents who are exposed to and associate with anti-social peers learn to participate in anti-social behaviour through the process of vicarious learning and principles of reinforcement (Whitmore, 2011). These research findings support the findings of Bandura (1973) which stated that adolescents are likely to do the same as their closest friends and will emulate the behaviour of their 'idol' through observation and imitation. Peer group therefore provides a powerful opportunity for the formation of identity. According to Bandura peers may illicit or may serve as role models to other children who have a predisposition to act aggressively. He says that aggressive children are often friends of other oppositional, aggressive children.

Whitmore (2011) says it is possible that children and teenagers learn aggression from their peers. Peers may illicit aggression, or may serve as role models to other children who have a predisposition to act aggressively. Moreover peers may reinforce aggressive behaviour through their interaction. As Whitmore (2011) puts it, children learn much of their behaviour patterns from modelling the behaviour of others they see around. They model the aggressive behaviour to which they are exposed and successfully defend themselves with aggressive counteracts. Most adolescents conform because they are afraid of being rejected by their peers. They become engaged in inappropriate behaviour so as to gain acceptance and approval of the group. These groups can be deviant groups consisting of antisocial youth gangs. The conversations and actions they experience with other members strengthen their attitudes and reinforce antisocial inclinations (Suhttle Worth, 2011). As Donnelly (2010) concurs, there is much pressure to conform to group norms. Strict normative codes often exist in peer groups, with those who deviate from these norms being rejected by other members of the group.

Many children who are aggressive as young children continue to be aggressive because their aggression was rewarded by their peers as valuable. Countering aggression with aggression may also be praised and valued in certain groups; this encourages individuals to be aggressive and reinforces such behaviour (Estel, Farmer, Irvin, & Boudah, 2009). Research conducted by Thorn Berry & Krohn (2010) in USA, indicated that association with anti- social peers was related to the emergence of anti- social behaviour at adolescence among youths who had not previously exhibited behaviour problems. Conflictual peer relationships, may eventually promote alliances among aggressive youngsters who can work together to harass and bully others (Jones, Manstead & Livingstone, 2009). Longitudinal data (Vishala, 2010) shows that one's individual rate of violence, increases after entry into a gang and only drops when leaving the gang. The author states that adolescent misconduct most often occur in groups. Adolescents who are exposed to and associate with anti- social peers learn to participate in anti- social behaviour through the process of vicarious learning and principles of reinforcement (Buddy, 2012). According to the author negative peer influence contribute a lot to increased use of substance and aggression.

Farmer (2010) sampled students (1,060) from schools in Australia. His findings indicated that 60% of adolescents were aggressive in school. School bullying occurred in the presence of the peer group. Peers act as assistants to the bully by looking out or reinforcing or encouraging the bully. The study further found that the more cohesive the peer group is, the greater the influence on its members; these peers pose an influence that is a common source for negative activities for students like experiment action with drugs, drinking, vandalism and stealing. According to the author children found in secondary schools are nearly of the same age and therefore tend to form groups according to their interests and needs. The school assembles together large numbers of at-risk youth, and so it can become breeding grounds for the development of criminal offending, especially where there is little adult supervision. He says that many students form groups with the same behavioural problems and have a significant influence on their performance and play a large role in shaping both their appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. Peer groups may form a culture within the school and can result in forming of anti-social groups. Particularly at risk are children who exhibit verbally and physically aggressive behaviours.

These studies have addressed the role of peers in adolescent deviant behaviours in general. The present study focused on adolescents in secondary schools. The study also specified deviant behaviour as aggression among adolescents in school. The studies were conducted in different countries with different cultures however, the findings gave a better understanding of the relationship between peers and aggressive behaviour which the present study sought to establish. The studies also focused mainly on the influence of peers on deviant behaviour leaving out other factors like family, school and the neighbourhood which are variables in the present study. Kimberly (2012) asserts that more exposure to deviant peers increases the opportunity for peer influence to operate. Popular adolescents are more strongly associated with their peer groups in which they move together. Research conducted in South Africa (Kimberly, 2012) to determine the extent of aggressive behaviour exhibited by secondary school learners found that the more negative the influence of peers, the more aggressive the adolescents. In the author's study (2012) in Kwa Zulu, Natal on the role of peer influence across risk behaviours, the findings were that if friends do not engage in activities like aggression, teens might be less likely to engage in it. The author concluded that peer influence is a key determinant in causing aggression and this influence could be enhanced by the rough behaviour of the individuals in peer groups themselves.

Okorodudu (2010) conducted a study in River State, Nigeria to determine factors that are responsible for aggressive behaviours among secondary school students. His findings indicated that, as young people grow; they begin to surrender to the influence of their peers as they shed off their parental orientation and replace it with dependence on their peers. In the process, friends encourage their peers to engage in undesirable acts like fighting, alcohol consumption, sexual promiscuity and destruction of property. The study further found that whenever incidents of violence are witnessed in school, a group of youths' team up to engage in criminal activities. He concluded that peer groups do not only provide positive settings but peer pressure can also lead to norms of risky behaviour and irresponsibility. Children who form friendships with anti- social peers appear to be at weighted risk for later anti-social behaviour. For example through modelling adolescents learn aggression to which they are exposed and successfully defend themselves with aggressive counteracts. The author says that adolescents find it acceptable to be identified with an aggressive group to find status, value and reassurance that the perceptions and attitudes they have are right. Studies conducted in Kenya Mwaniki and Nyaga (2014) indicate that family and peers contribute to aggressive behaviour. According to these authors adolescents give in to a peer pressure because they do not want to be made fun of and they want to try new things which are done among the peer group members. These decisions can make the adolescents to abandon their better judgement. This sample was drawn from Kenya secondary schools. The current study built on this study in order to compare the findings given that the locations are in Kenya. In Kenya, Muchiri (2012) investigated the relationship between parental nurturance and adolescent problem behaviours in secondary schools in selected Counties in Kenya. The researcher sampled 714 participants. One of his findings indicated that peer influence was a factor in students' externalizing problem behaviour in school.

Maupeu (2008) found that aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Kenya was on the increase. Crimes of arson and other destructive ones are normally carried out by a group of students who are associated with cases of indiscipline in the school. For example in Narok, a group of students burnt a dormitory, destroying property worth two million (Nyangweso, Daily Nation, 24th July, 2014). A group of form three students bullied a form one piercing his eye at Terige High School (Mwendwa, Standard Newspaper, 29th July, 2014). According to the reporter, a team of students went out to drink before coming to engage in these acts. Still in Kenya teachers write statements on students' reports like 'he' is capable of better work if he changes his friends' or poor work due to bad company. All the studies mentioned focus majorly on negative peer influence on adolescents. Peer pressure as presented by empirical researchers can have positive effects on adolescents. For examples adolescents may choose friends who have characteristics or talents that they admire, which motivate them to achieve and act as their friends act. For example in Canada, 80% of graduates from high school had friends who believed in completing high school (Steven, 2010).

The literature on peer influence on adolescent aggression gives an understanding that there is a link between exposure to peer influence and student aggression in school. It has been stated that peer interaction, acceptance or rejection is a central determinant of aggression. If adolescents are rejected by their peer groups, they may follow unfavourable routes so as to gain acceptance. Their behaviour may be changed and they might become argumentative, disruptive and aggressive in the school. The sources of this aggression are majorly student indiscipline, harsh school rules and discipline by teachers, family backgrounds, the community, drugs and bad living conditions in school. The present study addressed these causal factors.

IV. Research Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design with mixed approaches. Mixed research approach is a form of mixed method design in which the researcher converges or merges qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the researchers typically collected both qualitative and quantitative data at roughly the same time and then interpreted the information in overall results. In this study, both probability and non-probability sampling was used to select the study sample. Non-probability method was used to select Bungoma County because this County has had schools with records of violent behaviours among students. Purposive sampling was used to select form two students enrolled in public secondary schools. Purposive sampling helps to select subjects that possess specific characteristics that were required for this study. And to select the specific sample from the population of form two who took part in the study, simple random sampling was used to select the student respondents. The schools in the population differ by type – boys, girls or mixed schools. In order to ensure that these different categories are adequately represented in the sample, stratified sampling was used. Stratified sampling was used primarily to ensure that different groups in the population were adequately represented in the sample. The procedure ensured that principals and teacher counsellors from all categories of schools were represented. Principals and teacher counsellors were selected proportionately from each stratum by use of simple random sampling technique. Simple random technique ensured that all the principals and teacher counsellors had an equal and independent chance of being selected. Thus the study selected 22 principals and 22 teacher counsellors. Two research instruments were used in this study, namely the questionnaire and structured interview schedule.

V. Results and Discussions

This study obtained information from a total of 467 respondents and thus the following sections present the research results and subsequent discussions.

5.1. Influence of Adolescents' Peers on Aggressive Behaviour

The study sought to establish the extent to which adolescent students' peers influence aggressive behaviour among students in Bungoma County. To achieve this, the respondents were requested to rate on a Five-Point Likert scale their level of agreement with various statements measuring peer influence. The rating were Strongly Disagree with a weight of '1'; Disagree with a rating of '2', Neutral with a weight of '3'; Agree with a weight of '4' and strongly agree with a weight of '5'. Their ratings were used to calculate the weighted averages presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Weighted Averages for Indicators of Peer Pressure

	SA	A	N	D	SD	$\sum f_i$	$\frac{\sum f_i w_i}{\sum f_i}$
I like to please my friends	87	83	70	35	33	308	3.51
I have good relationship with my friends	109	77	45	53	24	308	3.63
My friends like to fight with others	31	53	9	128	87	308	2.39
There is a “we” spirit in my school	65	112	67	35	29	308	3.48
My friends encourage me to do bad things	36	38	27	129	78	308	2.43
My peers respect me and recognize me as important	99	68	92	26	23	308	3.63
Belonging to a group that can fight together when there is a problem in school is good	102	60	58	45	43	308	3.43
I have friends who carry weapons to school	15	48	126	96	23	308	2.79
My friends approve of my violent actions	47	58	85	85	33	308	3.00
My school friends use abusive language in school	88	68	64	45	43	308	3.37
My school friends use drugs /alcohol	13	28	123	51	93	308	2.41
Some of my friends drop out of school because of their aggressive nature	0	9	161	77	61	308	2.38
My school friends have negative attitudes towards education	78	101	65	25	39	308	3.50
Some of my friends are bullies	67	71	100	39	31	308	3.34
Some of my friends rarely do class assignment	60	57	90	58	43	308	3.11

The results of the analysis show that adolescents agreed to propositions that they like to please their friends; they have good relationship with their friends; their peers respect them and recognize them as important and that their school friends have negative attitudes towards education as indicated by weighted averages of 3.51, 3.63 and 3.50 respectively all indicating ‘Agree’ on the scale.

The respondents were uncertain as to whether they have a “we” spirit in my school (3.48); they belong to a group that can fight together when there is a problem in school (3.43); their friends approve of their violent actions (3.00); their school friends use abusive language in school(3.37); some of their friends are bullies (3.34); some of their friends rarely do class assignment (3.11) and that they have friends who carry weapons to school (2.79).

However, 177 students disagreed that they have a “we” spirit in my school compared to 64 who agreed. 162 adolescents disagreed that they belong to a group that can fight together when there is a problem in school compared to 88 who agreed. 156 adolescents disagreed that their school friends use abusive language in school compared to 88 who agreed. 138 adolescents disagreed that some of their friends are bullies compared to 70 who agreed. Finally, 117 adolescents agreed that some of their friends rarely do class assignment compared to 101 who agreed. On the other hand 115 adolescents agreed that they have friends who carry weapons to school compared to 63 who disagreed and 118 of the respondents agreed their friends approve of their violent actions compared to 105 who disagreed.

5.2 Regression Analysis of the Relationship between Peer Pressure and Aggression

To determine the relationship between peer pressure and aggression, a simple linear regression analysis were applied. Peer Pressure was measured using a summated Likert scale of fifteen items. The five-point Likert scale asked respondents to rate their level of agreement to the various statements measuring their peer interactions. Responses were summed up to obtain a single peer pressure index which ranged from 15 (lowest) to 75 (highest). The higher the points, the more the peer pressure index. The mean and standard deviation of the peer pressure indices were computed and are as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation for indexed financial performance

Variable	N	$\sum x_i$	$\frac{\sum X_i}{N}$	Std Deviation
Peer pressure	308	13224	42.9351	15.7535
Valid N (listwise)	308			

As depicted in table peer pressure had a mean index of 42.9351 with the scores deviating by 15.7535 from the

mean score. The above average score suggest that peer pressure was high amongst secondary school students. The results of the model summary shown in Table 4 indicate the correlation between peer pressure and aggression.

Table 3: Model Summary for Influence of Peer Pressure on Aggression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.760 ^a	.578	.577	13.45331

a. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Pressure

The results show a correlation coefficient of 0.760 which indicates a strong relationship between peer pressure and aggressive behaviours. A coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.578$ indicates that 57.8% of the variation in aggressive behaviour for the sample of 308 students can be explained by the changes in peer pressure while 42.2% is explained by other factors. In assessing whether peer pressure can significantly predict the level of aggressive behaviour of students, the F-statistic from the ANOVA table was used and the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 4: Summary ANOVA (N=308)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	75833.014	1	75833.014	418.987	.000 ^b
	Residual	55383.412	306	180.992		
	Total	131216.425	307			

a. Dependent Variable: Aggression

b. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Pressure

The results of the analysis reports the summary ANOVA table and F statistic, which reveals that the independent variable (peer pressure) can significantly predict the aggressive behaviours of students ($F_{(1,306)} = 418.987, p < 0.05$). This indicates that peer pressure contributes to the variance in aggressive behaviours among learners. The F value also shows that the simple regression model is statistically significant.

In assessing the significance of the regression coefficients in the model, the t-test for regression coefficients was used. The unstandardized regression coefficients and t-test values are presented in Table 6.

Table 5: Coefficientsof influence of Peer Pressure on Aggression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	51.448	2.229		23.085	.000
	Peer Pressure	.998	.049	.760	20.469	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Aggression

The regression model is therefore:

$$Aggression = 51.488 + 0.998 *Peer\ pressure$$

The model indicates that there is a positive relationship between aggressive behaviours and peer pressure/interaction. The higher the peer pressure/interaction, the higher the aggressive behaviour amongst students. To test whether there is a significant relationship between peer pressure and aggressive behaviour amongst secondary school students, the t-test was used and the following hypothesis was tested.

H_0 There is no significant relationship between adolescent student’s peers and aggressive behaviour among secondary school students.

The results show that the t-test values for the peer pressure coefficient is significant at 0.05 level of significance ($t_{(1,306)} = 20.469, p < 0.05$) hence the study rejects the null hypothesis and concludes that the predictor variable peer pressure was making a significant contribution to the aggressive behaviour of students in secondary schools. Likewise, the constant of the regression model is significant at 0.05 level of significance ($t_{(1,306)} = 23.085, p < 0.05$).

This proves students are influenced by their friends to be aggressive. Even Robbins (2000) and Hartup and Steven (1999) confirm that adolescents learn much of their behaviour patterns from modelling the behaviour of others, especially their age group. The study findings are similar to findings by Steinberg and Chung (2007) who indicated that affiliation to deviant peers represents the strongest predictor of aggressive behaviours. Likewise, Weerman (2009) found that peer groups do not only provide positive settings but also lead to norms of risky behaviour and irresponsibility. The study findings also corroborate findings by Meldrum (2009) and

Debopriya(2011) who established that children and teenagers learn aggression from their peers. These findings are also strongly grounded in the Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1973) who propagated the principle of 'modelling'.

VI. Conclusions

The study established that peer pressure influence was high amongst secondary school students. A coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.578$ indicates that 57.8% of aggressive behaviour was as a result of peer pressure. This indicates that peer pressure significantly contributes to the variance in aggressive behaviour among learners. There is a positive relationship between aggressive behaviours and peer pressure/interaction. This proves that students are influenced by their friends to be aggressive. It was established that adolescents learn much of their behaviour patterns from modelling the behaviour of others, especially their age group.

VII. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, this paper recommends the following;

- i. The study established that most students freely share their problems with their peers in school. For this reason, peer counselling training in schools should be provided to all students.
- ii. Behaviour is dynamic among developing adolescents. Based on this, teacher counsellors need to attend seminars and workshops regularly. This will provide the opportunity for teachers to share their experiences and share current research in counselling.

VIII. Acknowledgments

Many thanks go to reviewers of this paper for taking their precious time to give the study the most valuable critique it needed and revising the final manuscript. The authors would also like to thank the participants for contributing their ideas and sacrificing their valuable time during data collection. Support from Kabarak University is also appreciated.

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