

RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS: A SCHOOL-BASED, CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

Despite increased sexual education, secondary school students in Nigeria are still engaging in risky sexual behavior. This may be due to various social, psychological, and physical factors. The study looked at how family structure, peer pressure, and self-esteem affected the likelihood that adolescents in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, would engage in risky sexual behavior. For this study, a descriptive research design using correlational data was adopted. The study adopted the purposive sampling method in selecting 200 in-school adolescents. Valid and standardized instruments including risky sexual behavior rating scale ($\alpha=0.758$), peer pressure scale ($\alpha=0.714$), self-esteem scale ($\alpha=0.826$) and family structure scale ($\alpha=0.827$) were used for information gathering. Three research questions were raised and answered.

Data collected was analyzed using simple percentages, Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple regression statistical method at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that risky sexual behavior of secondary school students is significantly correlated with peer pressure ($r=.594$; $p<.05$), self-esteem ($r=.605$; $p<.05$), and family structure ($r=.521$; $p<.05$). The value of $R=.783$ and adjusted $R^2=.613$ were observed. The analysis of variance, performed on the multiple regressions, yielded an F-ratio value of 98.056. In terms of the magnitude of contribution, self-esteem made the most significant contribution ($\beta=.509$; $t=8.647$; $p<0.05$) to the prediction, followed by peer pressure ($\beta=.342$; $t=3.545$; $p<0.05$) and family structure ($\beta=.223$; $t=1.348$; $p<0.05$).

Based on these findings, it was concluded, that peer pressure, self-esteem, and family structure influence risky sexual behavior of adolescents. It is therefore recommended, that students' sense of self is very important and should be improved and also that students should be guided, particularly in meeting different categories of people in the school setting, such as peers, teachers, and others with varying degrees of sexual attitudes because it affects the students' sexual behaviors.

Keywords: Family structure, Peer pressure, Self-esteem, Risky sexual behavior.

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1. Introduction

Globally, the war against sexual issues is being waged on many different and multifaceted levels to prevent future generations of adolescents from being at a serious disadvantage. So far, all of these attempts appear unrealistic. The conventional family structure is under attack on the domestic front from many different angles. As a result of pre-industrial society's modernization, many changes in family life have taken place. Because of evolving ideas about how the world ought to function and how people ought to act, the moral authority of the modern family structure has decreased. The conventional family institution is being eroded due to shifting ideas about what constitutes love and the rising acceptance of divorce, premarital cohabitation, one-parent families, and bad parenting. As a result, the family is unable to offer useful remedies to the problem of risky sexual behavior among adolescents. The period of adolescence is unique in every person's life and is identified with many development tasks, such as physiological, anatomical, sexual, and emotional. While many adolescents successfully navigate this stage of development, others encounter

significant stress and begin to exhibit risky behaviors like sexual experimentation, exploration, and promiscuity [1].

According to [2], young people face significant difficulties because of their developing sexuality during adolescence, including learning to deal with sexual behavior and impulses, dealing with sexual opinions, and integrating one's own experiences with sexuality into the development of one's sense of self. The difficulty is made more challenging by the novel pleasure of sexual arousal, the attention, associated with having appealing sexual characteristics, and the increased degree of intimacy and psychological vulnerability, produced by sexual experiences. Over the course of adolescence, both sexual activity and action increase. Adolescents participate in a variety of sexual behaviors, from imagination and self-stimulation to different types of intercourse [3]. According to [1], adolescence is a time when many people start having sexual relationships and others engage in risky sexual conduct that might have fatal consequences. The researchers further stated that unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STD) have increased in frequency because of the rise in adolescent premarital sexual activity and the proliferation of risky sexual behavior. According to their research, many first encountered HIV when they were adolescents; 59 % of males and 41 % of females aged 13 to 20 reported having engaged in premarital sex.

Further, adolescents in Nigeria are at the receiving end as far as risky sexual behavior is concerned despite increased sexual education, and this issue is caused by a variety of social, psychological, and physical factors. These adolescents are more likely to engage in sexual activity and develop mental traits that increase their risk of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), premarital partnerships, teenage pregnancies, abortion, maintaining various sexual partners, engaging in casual relationships, sexual exploitation and unsafe and unprotected relationships – these are issues, connected to risky sexual behavior [4]. The report of the World Health Organization (WHO) on adolescents in Nigeria revealed that 72 % of deaths among teenage women were caused by illicit abortions, while gonorrhoea affects 24 % of females and 55 % of males aged 15 to 19 respectively. They demonstrated how alarmingly common risky sexual behavior is in Nigeria and draw this to the attention of the concerned stakeholder [5].

Several factors present in the home, school, government, society, and the individuals themselves influence adolescents' risky sexual behavior. Many parents force their children, especially the female ones, to work as hawkers at markets, streets, and car parks. While some parents discourage their teens into early sexual intercourse, they abandon their responsibilities toward them, such as monitoring, mentoring, and communication and expose these adolescents to sexual harassment from older men by doing this. Peer influence and pressure have also contributed to this issue. The school setting and the curriculum, which do not address sexual activity, are likely to contribute to risky sexual behavior. Associating with deviant peer groups is one such influence. The negative attitudes that school staff members have about female students might act as a cause for young people's risky sexual behavior, among others. To find potential answers, it is critical to investigate this issue concerning adolescents in contemporary culture. This study, therefore, examined how family structure, self-esteem, and peer pressure affect adolescents' propensity for risky sexual behavior.

Family structure and risky sexual behavior

According to [6], the median age at first marriage in Nigeria is 16.6 years (ranging from 13.6 in the Northwest to 21.3 in the Southwest, according to the 2021 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey). Young people in Nigeria engage in early sexual activity and early marriages which have negative effects, such as unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV/AIDS. In a 2007 study by [7] that used data from more than 19,000 adolescents in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Uganda, and Malawi, family structure was shown to significantly affect young adolescents' risky sexual behavior, particularly among females. The study also found that the poor are affected the most because they cannot access services. In a study to ascertain the connection between family structure and risky sexual behaviors, [8] discovered that vulnerable teenagers are most likely to exhibit irresponsible sexual behavior. According to their findings, teenagers who feel insufficient, who lack proper educational and socio-economic options, and who

feel the need to display something tangible to their peers are at risk for engaging in reckless sexual behavior.

The rise in teenage girls' risky sexual behaviors was investigated by [9]; the findings reported that out of the 100 mothers investigated, African American mothers living in poor family structures and having lower levels of education were the major causes of risky sexual behavior among these female adolescents compared to the Caucasian mothers. Also, one study [10] discovered that living in low-income families and having mothers who started having children early were connected to adolescent girls engaging in risky sexual activities at a young age.

Self-esteem and risky sexual behavior

Self-esteem plays an important role in adolescents' development of psychological and mental health and peer relation, all of which are major indices of sexuality. Adolescents' high levels of self-esteem are a reflection of their healthy interactions with their peers and adults. Although the benefits of self-esteem have been thoroughly documented in the literature, there are still gaps in our understanding of how risky sexual behavior and self-esteem are related. Poor self-esteem has been linked to a rise in risky behaviors like sexual promiscuity, poor health, and deviant social behavior [11]. Also, young adolescents with low self-esteem tend to increase their sexual behavior with age and have a larger probability of externalizing difficulties, according to research on (antisocial and risky sexual behaviors) [12]. Adolescents who reported having high self-esteem are less likely to indulge in risky sexual behaviors, commit suicide or suffer from mental illness [13]. Self-esteem acted as a control to their participation in high-risk behavior; adolescents who had strong and healthy parental bonds tended to have high levels of self-esteem and had lower risks of harming themselves or others. According to additional studies, adolescents who had poor parental and educational attachment were more likely to experience depression and other physical and mental health issues like risky sexual behavior [14, 15].

Also, a person's knowledge and attitude about themselves make up their self-esteem. The impression that a person has of themselves and the traits and qualities that they use to characterize themselves go a long way in determining their involvement in risky sexual behavior. The importance of self-esteem comes from its significant role in personality development. The theory holds that higher self-esteem will function as a protective factor, reducing risky sexual conduct, lowering drug use motivation, and boosting drug resistance [16]. High levels of self-esteem are required to manage social and peer pressures, familial challenges, and decisions that have an impact on adolescents' development and health throughout this fragile period [17]. Also, adolescents who have high levels of self-esteem are more likely to experience better mental health.

Importantly, the researchers noted that previous research that examined the relationship between adolescents' sexual health behaviors and self-esteem frequently lack a precise operational definition of self-esteem. Much of the research, conducted to date on self-esteem and teenage behavior, has used a global self-esteem scale. Not much research has examined area-specific self-esteem concerning adolescent risk-taking behavior. According to a replication study using self-esteem assessments [18], some other characteristics may influence global self-esteem. Examining area-specific self-esteem has been found to offer advantages in other research as well. According to a study on adolescent self-esteem, to get results that accurately gauge the influence of region-specific self-esteem on adolescent behaviors, it will be necessary to dissect the concept of global self-esteem and apply it to numerous domains [19]. The researchers, therefore, found that understanding adolescents' notions of self and risky behaviors has benefited from area-specific self-esteem research that has explored self-esteem within particular contexts like peers, school, and home.

Peer pressure and risky sexual behavior

Peer pressure has been described as a hallmark of the adolescent experience and has grown to be a significant factor in how adolescents behave. Regarding fashion, taste, appearance, ideology, and values, peer conformity is very pronounced among adolescents. Peer pressure is frequently linked to instances of adolescent risk-taking behavior (such as delinquency, drug abuse, and sexual

behavior), as these activities frequently take place in the company of peers. It has been found, that an adolescent's affiliation with friends who engage in risky sexual behavior is a strong predictor of their sexuality [11, 20]. Peer pressure influences the method, by which secondary school students' peers or playmates influence their attitudes or beliefs about sexuality in the classroom. According to [21], adolescent sexual activity is directly impacted by the amount of peer pressure, as more peer association enhanced the likelihood of having sexual experience as opposed to having no experience. In a similar vein, they discovered that as peer pressure levels rose, so did the prevalence of risky sexual behavior.

Also, teenagers who talked about more sexual subjects with their friends were more likely to have had sexual experiences. Peers in adolescence have a significant impact on many facets of their lives. Peer interactions are essential for the growth of social awareness and intimacy. Peer influence in adolescence, though, can have both beneficial and harmful effects. [22] discovered that teenagers were more likely to engage in high-risk sexual activity. He also discovered that being in a delinquent peer group, which he described as using drugs, drinking, or getting into trouble, increased the likelihood that an adolescent would have sexual experience as opposed to inexperience. In the same study, it was found, that adolescents with sexual experience exhibited higher levels of negative peer characteristics than adolescents with little or no sexual experience. Problematic behavior and substance abuse among peers also increased the likelihood that adolescents would not use condoms. Adolescent risky sexual behavior is influenced by peers, who also provide the environment for sex to occur. The acceptance of sexual activity is influenced by the same sex; friends who have had successful sexual relationships might act as role models for dangerous sexual behavior [23]. Although previous studies have shown the effects of some other factors like gender, social support, and age on sexual risk-taking behavior [24], the gap in risky sexual behavior research lies in the lack of emphasis on the indirect effects of dispositional factors (family structure, socio-economic status, peer pressure, and self-esteem) influencing sexual risk-taking behavior among secondary school adolescents. Yet, with the stigma, attached to such behaviors and their negative effects on social lives and health, risky sexual behavior is increasingly common among young people in Nigeria. Therefore, research in this direction is timely.

Research question

The aim of this research was to examine how family structure, self-esteem, and peer pressure affect adolescents' tendency for risky sexual behavior and to give recommendations on the way out.

The following research questions guided the study.

I. What is the pattern of relationship between the independent variables (family structure, self-esteem, and peer pressure) and risky sexual behavior of in-school adolescents?

II. What is the combined effect of independent variables (family structure, self-esteem, and peer pressure) on risky sexual behavior of in-school adolescents?

III. What is the relative effect of independent variables (family structure, self-esteem, and peer pressure) on risky sexual behavior of in-school adolescents?

2. Materials and Methods

The study was carried out between July, 2022 and March, 2023.

Design

This study used survey research design as its methodology.

Population

All adolescent students in Ibadan, Oyo State's capital, make up the study's population. The population consists of secondary school adolescents from both public and private colleges.

Sample and sampling techniques

The multi-stage sampling technique was employed in this investigation. Five Local Government Areas in Ibadan were chosen using the basic random sampling technique. Each respondent had a fair probability of being chosen using this type of sampling technique. For the study, a random sample of 200 students from five secondary schools, including two private and three public institutions, was used. Forty students were chosen at random from each school, resulting in a total of 200 students or respondents for the study.

Ethics Statement

The University Research Ethics Committee of Ibadan, Nigeria examined, authorized and provided the ethical approval for the conduct of the current study (REC/CHDS/23/02/05), provided the ethical approval for the conduct of the current study (REC/CHDS/23/07/018). The legal guardian/next of kin of the participants gave their written informed consent to take part in this study.

Instrumentation

Data gathering involved the use of a structured questionnaire. There were two sections to the questionnaire (A and B). The respondents' demographic data was collected in Section A, including age, sex, religion, and parental education level, which were some of these demographic traits. The other three standardized tests that were employed in the study were included in Section B. These are risky sexual behavior ($\alpha=0.758$), peer pressure ($\alpha=0.714$), self-esteem ($\alpha=0.826$), and family structure ($\alpha=0.827$) scales.

Data analysis

Simple percentages, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and multiple regression statistical methods were used to examine the study's data at the 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results

Demographic data

Table 1 indicates that 49.5 % of the respondents were below 12 years, 45.0 % were between 13–15 years and 5.5 % were above 15 years old.

Table 1

Respondents' distribution based on age range

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 12 Years	99	49.5
13–15 Years	90	45.0
Above 15 Years	11	5.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 2 shows that 43.5 % of the respondents were male, while 56.5 % were female.

Table 2

Respondents' distribution based on their gender.

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	87	43.5
Female	113	56.5
Total	200	100.0

In **Table 3**, 51.5 % of the respondents were from nuclear families, 47.5 % were from extended families and 1.0 percent were undecided.

Table 3

Family structure distribution among the respondents

Family structure	Frequency	Percentage
Nuclear	103	51.5
Extended	95	47.5
Others	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

Research question one

What is the pattern of relationship between the independent variables (family structure, self-esteem, and peer pressure) and risky sexual behavior of in-school adolescents?

Table 4 lists the study variables' descriptive statistics and cross-correlations. According to **Table 4**, there is a strong relationship between secondary school students' risky sexual behavior and peer pressure ($r=0.594$; $p<0.05$), self-esteem ($r=0.605$; $p<0.05$), and family structure ($r=0.521$; $p<0.05$). Significant correlations between the independent variables were also present.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations among the variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Risky sexual behavior	200	39.38	12.03	1.00			
Peer pressure	200	46.32	12.99	0.594**	1.00		
Self-esteem	200	36.89	10.03	0.605**	.632**	1.00	
Family structure	200	54.02	9.56	0.521**	.544**	.515**	1.00

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Research question two

What is the joint effect of the independent variables (family structure, self-esteem, and peer pressure) on risky sexual behavior of in-school adolescents?

Table 5 demonstrates that the independent variables (peer pressure, self-esteem, and family structure) have a significant impact on adolescents' risky sexual behavior when combined. R^2 value was 0.783 while R^2 adjusted value was 0.613. With 61.3 % of the independent factors accounting for students' risky sexual behavior, the analysis of variance, conducted on the multiple regressions, produced an F-ratio value of 98.056, which was significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analysis demonstrating the combined effects of the independent variables on risky sexual behavior among secondary school students

Analysis of variance				
Model	Sum of Square (SS)	DF	Mean Square	F
Regression	31387.703	3	10462.568	
Residual	19846.297	196	106.700	98.056
Total	51234.000	199		

Note: $R=0.783$; $R^2=0.613$; Adjusted $R^2=0.608$; Standard error of estimate= 9.229

Research question three

What is the relative effect of each of the independent variables (family structure, self-esteem, and peer pressure) on risky sexual behavior of in-school adolescents?

Table 6 demonstrates that in Ibadan, Oyo State, the independent factors had a substantial impact on the prediction of students' risky sexual behavior. The largest contribution to the prediction in terms of magnitude was made by self-esteem ($\beta=0.509$; $t=8.647$; $p<0.05$). Peer pressure ($\beta=0.342$; $t=3.545$; $p<0.05$) and family structure ($\beta=0.223$; $t=1.348$; $p<0.05$) were the other significant variables, in that order.

Table 6

Relative Contribution of Independent Variables to the Prediction

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	p
	B	Standard error	Beta			
Constant	1.333	2.929			0.455	0.000
Peer pressure	0.557	0.064	0.342		3.545	0.000
Self-esteem	0.269	0.076	0.509		8.647	0.000
Family structure	0.103	0.074	0.223		1.348	0.002

4. Discussion

The findings indicated that there was a significant relationship between the independent variables (peer pressure, self-esteem, and family structure) and risky sexual behavior among sec-

ondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The study's conclusions are consistent with those of other investigations. For instance, [25] found that adolescents with poor self-esteem frequently concentrate on trying to impress or prove themselves. They frequently doubt their value and generally lack self-confidence, making them more vulnerable to peer pressure to participate in unsafe sex. Teenagers with poor self-esteem also tend to have less social support and are more likely to act out or engage in undesirable behaviors while under stress. Teenagers with low self-esteem may prioritize engaging in sexual behaviors, since doing so is seen as a show of maturity, independence, and autonomy in a society where having sex is valued. [26] in a cross-sectional study found that peer pressure has a significant effect on adolescents' propensity for risky behavior. Their research involved 1,700 students in grades 7 through 11 who were observed to evaluate the impact of close friends on binge drinking and risky sexual behaviors. The research revealed that when both selection effects and parallel occurrences were considered, peer influence was more significant in its contribution to risky sexual behavior.

An investigation by [27] critically examined the development of family structures in the slums and the ensuing deviant behaviors in the inner city of Akure, the capital city of Ondo State, Nigeria. The investigation confirmed that there was a monumental lack in housing quality, while the layout and design of the buildings into spatial units significantly affected the behavior of the residents. The results also showed that the underemployed, unemployed, and miscreants who lived in slum neighborhoods were often socially dissatisfied and participated in a variety of harmful and antisocial behaviors, such as prostitution and home invasion [27]. [28] concluded that adolescents who reported receiving great social support from family and friends are less likely to commit suicide or engage in risky sexual behavior. A strong family structure acted as a deterrent to participation in high-risk behavior.

For the second research question, the findings indicated that the independent variables (peer pressure, self-esteem, and family structure) together have a significant impact on students' risky sexual behavior. The multiple regressions' analysis of variance revealed that 61.3 % of independent factors contributed to students' sexually risky behavior. The findings support other findings, such as those by [29, 12], who revealed that adolescents with low self-esteem tended to act more aggressively as they aged and were more likely to experience externalizing difficulties (i.e., antisocial behavior and sexuality). Adolescents who have strong and healthy family bonds tend to have high levels of self-esteem and have lower risks of harming themselves or committing sexual crimes.

According to additional studies, adolescents who had poor family and educational structures were more likely to experience depression and other physical and mental health issues. Family structure accounted for sexual permissiveness because it measured family structure (wealth) indirectly through household amenities and lacked information on money and gifts, given or received during sexual interactions [15]. [30] also researched to examine the effect of male adolescents' dependence on male peers on sexual involvement, and the findings showed that male adolescents' dependence on male peers was a strong predictor of their sexual activities. The study also looked at the impact of female adolescents' dependence on male peers on sexual involvement. It found that female adolescents who were more dependent on their male peers and less involved with their families were more likely to be sexually involved.

The findings indicated in the third research question that the independent variables significantly contributed to the prediction of students' risky sexual behavior. Self-esteem was the factor that contributed the most to the projection in terms of magnitude, following family structure and peer pressure. Also, [13] and [31] discovered that the favorable impacts of self-esteem have been demonstrated to extend to regions beyond familiar attachments, supporting this finding. Adolescents in middle and junior high schools who had strong self-esteem were less likely to consume alcohol and engage in sexual risks. The results also support other research. For instance, [32], in a recent review of genetic studies on behavior, looked at social influences on adolescent sexual behavior and came to the conclusion that 50 % of the variable in adolescent personality is hereditary in origin, with the remaining 50 % predominantly reflecting peer influence. More influential than broad friendship networks, casual friends, or friends in general, peers are one of the most potent influences.

Also, one study [33] discovered that living in a low-income family and having a mother who started having children early were connected to adolescent girls engaging in risky sexual activity at a young age. Using quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, [11, 34] conducted a study to identify the elements that influenced young female Nigerians' decision to work in the sex industry in Lagos. The findings showed that the majority of the females in the sex industry (89.1 %) were young adults under the age of 22, with a median age of 17 to 20 and a mean age of 18.8 years. This is according to statistics on the current ages of sampled commercial sex workers. According to elicited data on current marital status, single females make up the majority (73.1 %) in the sex industry. Furthermore, statistics on parental family structure showed that the bulk of them (74.4 %) came from low-income households. Peer influence (50.9 %) and family structure (35.0 %) were two notable elements, identified in the study as contributing to the respondents' participation in transactional sex.

Limitations of the Study

– During this work, the researcher finds it difficult particularly at the initial stage to gain the attention of the school principals and heads.

– Also, the students' attitudes toward supplying correct and adequate information concerning the items in the questionnaire is also a factor in this research

Recommendations

– It is advised that parents and guardians should receive training to help overcome the cultural obstacles that prevent them from teaching their children about sex at a young age.

– There is a need for a push toward increased community mobilization to raise awareness of the necessity of including sex education in school curricula.

– Peer educators should be trained to dispel common myths about sexuality considering the significant influence that peers have on adolescents.

– There is a need for successful health education initiatives, aimed at educating adolescents on sexual concerns, promoting abstinence, and encouraging risk-reducing behaviors.

Prospects for further research. Based on the findings and experiences, got in the course of this study, the researcher suggests that further research should be undertaken on a wider geographical area with an expanded methodology embracing both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

5. Conclusion

This study showed that family structure, self-esteem, peer pressure, and risky sexual behavior among students have a predictive and favorable association. Yet, the outcome shows that self-esteem emerged as the most powerful predictor of risky sexual conduct, followed by peer pressure and family structure. It demonstrates how crucial it is for adolescents to enhance their sense of self and how they interact with a variety of peer groups, teachers, and other individuals with varying levels of sexual attitudes from various households, all of whom serve as determinants of risky sexual activities.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this paper, as well as the published research results, including the financial aspects of conducting the research, obtaining and using its results, as well as any non-financial personal relationships.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on reasonable request.

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