

Sexual Aggression among African Adolescent Males in South African Context

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ABSTRACT This paper reports on sexual aggression among African adolescent males in South African context. Literature findings demonstrated that cultural belief system, family structures and gangsterism exert enormous influence on sexual behavior of adolescent males. Various books, journal articles, dissertations and internet sources were explored. Grounded in multiple theories such as Bandura's social learning theory and Emerson's social exchange, the aim of this paper is to investigate the factors which propel male youth to engage in sexual aggressive behavior and recommends context-based approaches to equip cultural indoctrinated African adolescents against sexual ill-health. This paper also contends that the power of modelling and growing up in disorganized communities fraught with alcohol and drug abuse lead to irresponsible manhood amongst many adolescent males. To ameliorate sexual aggressive behavior of African adolescent males, parents should proactively work alongside the church, school and traditional leaders responsible for male circumcisions in designing psycho-educational programs.

INTRODUCTION

In various provinces of South Africa, that is, Western Cape (Russell et al. 2014), Eastern Cape (Manu et al. 2017), KwaZulu-Natal (Cluver et al. 2016), Limpopo (Monepya 2017) and North West (Freeks 2017) sexual aggression among adolescent males has escalated and it has become increasingly socially acceptable as research shows that boys as young as 13 year old, have long been taking substances such as alcohol, have been involved in gang-rape and impregnated someone. As a result, owing to poor parent-child open communication about sexuality, especially in culturally embedded communities, majority of adolescent males become inadequately equipped against sexually transmitted infections, including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Such high rates of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS by more than fifty percent among adolescents are exacerbated by sexually violent behavior of adolescent males based on various factors such as cultural norms, parenting styles, dysfunctional families, poverty, self-esteem, gangsterism, sexual exchange and modeling (Baumeister and Bushman 2011; Peterson et al. 2010; Smit 2010).

Owing to prolonged separation between fathers and their sons due to seeking jobs in other provinces, Freeks (2017) found that an alarming

proportion of adolescent males become rapists at an early age as way to displace their anger by not having received emotional support and nurturance. Jewkes et al. (2011) found 27.6 percent of males to have once raped acquaintances, strangers or intimate partners or got involved in gang-rape. Gangsterism as a sub-culture augments sexual victimization and perpetration among adolescents through preserving group cohesion, envisioned activities, endorsement of hegemonic masculinity (Brown 2012) and sustains sexual objectification of women which deters women from engaging into sex willingly (Bank 2011; Kheswa and Notole 2014a). In many instances, group cohesions and sexual objectifications warrant platforms for corrective rape and molestation of vulnerable individuals. To support this, Jewkes and Morrell (2012) found that adolescent males who rape contributed more than 19.6 percent to the total number of men who are HIV positive and were involved in gang-rape. Such socially unacceptable behaviors are influenced by hegemonic masculinity and males supremacy endorsed by cultural belief systems. Thus, this paper seeks to examine the role of culture and other aligned factors to sexual behavior of male adolescents and deliberate as part of extensive efforts to understand the root cause of sexual aggression in the South African context.

Problem Statement

South Africa as a diversified and multi-cultural country faces a challenge of adolescent males engaging in aggressive sexual behaviours. Being sexually violent results in male adolescents being jailed for rape, sexual harassment stigmatized as criminals and eventually become socially neglected (Phaswana et al. 2010; Stevens and Cloete 2010). The majority of adolescent males as young as twelve years is sexually active and tends to disregard the consequences of unsafe sex, especially when their social context is marred with a lack of good role models, inconsistent parental supervision and support, and deviant peers (Jansen et al. 2012). Bernstein and Penner (2012) argued that by being left unchecked by parents, adolescent males tend to access sexual content by means of pornography and engage in aggressive sexual behaviour as compared to those who do not have access to pornography. Drawing from social exchange and gender-strain theories, adolescent males engage in sexual relationships with numerous sexual partners to prove their masculinity and sexual prowess, leaving women with less autonomy to make informed decisions about condom use since they are being compensated to meet their needs (example, cellphones, clothes, school fees) (Kalichman et al. 2005). Furthermore, once African adolescent males have undergone traditional circumcision, majority are more inclined to drink alcohol and have multiple sexual partners as a sign of maturity (Kang'ethe and Nomngcoyiya 2016; Mhlahlo 2009; Ntombana 2010).

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this essay are outlined as follows;

- (i) To investigate the social factors that perpetuates sexual aggressive behaviour among adolescent males.
- (ii) To explore the extent to which the cultural values and attitudes held by adolescent males contribute towards sexual aggression.
- (iii) To determine how sexual aggression contributes towards HIV/AIDS transmission.
- (iv) To analyse the consequences of sexual aggressive behaviour among adolescent males based on the findings of the study.

- (v) To suggest significant procedures to curb sexual aggression among African adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

This paper studied previous research in an attempt to investigate the underlying causes of sexual aggressive behaviour among South African adolescent males. This paper as it takes the essay route in elucidating the factors and effects thereof, its objectives include investigating relevant literature regarding the phenomenon so as to minimize biasness (Mallett et al. 2012). Compared to empirical study, essay articles analyse literature from internet sources, academic journals and books to get an overview and make inferences about the phenomenon at hand. Various scholars believe that reviewing of literature must be directed towards contributing to a clearer understanding of the nature and significance of the problem identified (De Vos et al. 2011; Gravetter and Forzano 2016; Mallett et al. 2012). In this regard, the researchers' interpretations or arguments may become important following a comprehensive interpretation of the evaluation of the previous literature.

OBSERVATIONS

Majority of adolescent males once they have reached puberty, they tend to develop relationships outside the family circles. In the process of exploring their sexual identity, values and attitudes, some fail to resist peer pressure and end up engaged in risk sexual behaviour. An overwhelming agreement among researchers (Baumeister and Bushman 2011; Meinck et al. 2015) emphasized that dysfunctional families and modelling after deviant peers and adults from one's community, often propels young males to practice unsafe sex with multiple sexual partners, drink alcohol, smoke marijuana and belong to gangsters (Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya 2014). Those with low self-esteem, apart from being truant at school, they engage in criminal activities especially if reared in uninvolved parents households or live with foster parents. Owing to lack of constant monitoring and guidance in such family settings, an alarming proportion has been reported to make ill-informed decisions regarding sexuality (Frantz et al. 2015; Kidman and Palermo, 2016). Other observations

from the literature recorded that pornography viewing fuels sexual aggression (Kheswa and Notole 2014b) thus adolescent males see nothing wrong in violating the rights of women because in the movies, women are being objectified.

Literature Review

In the next paragraphs, definition of terms which are central to the subject will be discussed. Furthermore, the factors associated with sexual aggression amongst adolescent males as well as literature findings will be elucidated.

Definition of Terms

Adolescence

Adolescence is a term derived from the Latin word '*adolescere*' which means to mature. Jansen et al. (2012) referred to adolescence as the stage between 13 and 18 years of age in which the adolescents go through significant physiological, emotional and psychological changes. Drawing from the psychoanalytic approach by Sigmund Freud, approximately at age 15, adolescent males experience the genital stage - a time of growth spurt or puberty (that is, sexual hormones become intense, penis gets enlarged) and aggressive impulses resurface as well as an interest in girls increases (Bernstein and Penner 2012; Swartz et al. 2011). During this stage of stress and turmoil, majority of adolescent males seemed to be triggered especially when they have never been equipped in the development of decision-making skills, emotional stability, ideal-self and sex-education (Schultz and Schultz 2015).

Sexual Aggression

Aggression is defined as an act in which one intentionally harms other individuals who appear to be vulnerable (Steinberg et al. 2011). Kheswa and Notole (2014a) understand aggression as mentality of hatred that could possibly lead to sexual threatening behaviour or victimization for the perpetrator's sexual gratification. It involves using violence, threats and deception without the consent of the victim (Van De Craen et al. 2012). Sexual aggression is perpetuated by cultural beliefs and economic conditions

which promote patriarchal attitudes towards women (Swartz et al. 2011).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is underpinned by social learning theory and social exchange theory. Social context variables which include family structure, parenting style, or peer engagements may contribute towards aggressive sexual behaviour of adolescents. According to Holborn and Eddy (2011), there is growing evidence that different behavioural problems of adolescents are inter-related. For instance, intake of drugs and alcohol and engagement in risky sexual behaviour are exacerbated by dysfunctional neighbourhood (Koen et al. 2013). When adolescents grow up in an environment dominated by risk factors it makes them easily vulnerable to abusing alcohol which can increase sexually active adolescent's probability of initiating sexual activity and adopting aggressive behaviour. For example, Meinck et al. (2015) found that when father figures embrace supremacy, it becomes easy for their adolescent to copy from them especially adolescent males as they are curious in trying new things. In addition, when the society lacks positive role models and is characterized by parental neglect, behavioural problems such as hostility and antisocial behaviour among youth will leave young people with no choice but to abuse alcohol and practice unsafe sex (Nduna et al. 2013). By social exchange theory, Emerson's (1976) asserted that adolescent males may maintain sexual relationships or have multiple sexual partners owing to their affordability and provision of gifts such as money and jewellery.

Factors Associated with Sexual Aggression among African Adolescent Males

Parenting Styles

According to Jansen et al. (2012) aggressive sexual behaviour is narrowly rooted from parenting styles and the family settings. Adolescent males from uninvolved parent households tend to have low self-esteem, poor self-regulation, become incapable of forming secure attachments and behave impulsively because their parents are unresponsive and inattentive of their emotional needs as compared to authoritative parents who monitor the whereabouts of their chil-

dren, provide warmth and unconditional support (Bernstein 2016; Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo 2011).

In comparison, permissive parents are submissive and too lenient in terms of instilling morality and internalization from an early age and as a result their children grow up displaying what psychoanalytical theory by Sigmund Freud refers to as *anal-expulsive personality* (personality characterized by risky-sexual behavior and rebelliousness) (Bhana 2013; Engler 2014). Due to lack of warmth, unresponsiveness and inattentive parents, adolescents may behave impulsively to compensate their parental negligence (Jansen et al. 2012). This draws an indication that some parents do not monitor the whereabouts and are emotionally unsupportive to their children. As a result such children may rely on their friends for sexual guidance, which makes it possible to learn aggressive and risky sexual behaviors. However, adolescent males reared in families whose parents are authoritative may also be vulnerable to the influence of mass media and get exposed to drugs and alcohol especially if their socio-economic status is favorable. This paper further argues that adolescent males may have financial means to buy beverages and hide them during school social events such as Beauty Pageants because the educators seemed not to monitor what they carry in their bags. In this regard, they may as well sexually coerce girls and lose temper when rejected while proposing for romantic relationships.

Dysfunctional Families

Many societies in South Africa are made up of dysfunctional families due to fractured family ties and poverty which may lead to migration (Koen et al. 2013). As a result of those family dysfunctional factors, forty-three percent of South African adolescents are raised by single parents and twenty-three percent live without both biological parents (Holborn and Eddy 2011). Thus, the possible behavioural outcomes for male adolescents from such families may include impaired emotional well-being which may encompass lack of emotional support and lowered self-esteem (Engler 2014; Lalor and McElvane 2010), educational difficulties that may result in school dropout (Salami 2010), drug and alcohol excessive use leading to violence and risky sexual behaviors (Barnes et al. 2012).

It is interesting to note that even in families that are dysfunctional (that is, single or both parents drink alcohol, experience financial hardships, divorce and domestic violence) adolescent males may struggle to demonstrate resilience and sense of coherence (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo 2011). Instead, adolescent males may mask their emotional inadequacies and stress by resorting to anti-social behavior (for example, smoke dagga, drink alcohol, skip classes), disregard authority figures such as educators and eventually contract STIs subsequent to sexual aggression and early forced sexual debut (Holborn and Eddy 2011; Jansen et al. 2012; Louw and Louw 2014).

On the other hand, Ryckman (2008) is of the view that sexual victimization could be attributed to families and societies which lack good role models. Adolescent males reared by single-parents or in broken families, may experience reduced contact with people whom they may have established positive bonds and role modeling, and by so doing may perhaps provide discontinuous behavioral supervision (Fagan and Wright 2012). Drawing from social disorganization theory, adolescent males learn to become aggressive towards others when nurtured in an environment dominated by anti-social role models (Adamson and Johnson 2013). Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo (2011) are of the view that male adolescents nurtured in families with deficiency in parental warmth and positive communication may experience deindividuation as compared to adolescents raised in fully functioning families.

Culture

Culture is defined as a set of permanent denotations, customs, beliefs, values (Weiten 2010), unwritten laws and practices shared by a collective group of people that enable them to understand the society they reside-in and possibly transferred from one generation to the next (Visser and Moleko 2012). Socialized to be sexually aggressive, majority of adolescent males reared in communities (for example, Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa), that are embedded in cultural practices such as polygamy, *ukuthwala* (abduction) and traditional male circumcision (Kang'ethe and Nomngcoyiya 2016) tend to put their lives at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (for example, gonorrhoea, syphilis) by sexually coercing women and children

through practicing unsafe sex (Van DeCraen et al. 2012; Jewkes and Morrell 2012; Kheswa and Hoho 2014).

Thirteen years ago, Simbayi et al. (2004) attested that sexual debut among boys have been influenced by unruly traditional circumcision schools as in Mankweng, Limpopo Province, South Africa. Ragnarsson et al. (2008) found that boys aged 12-14 years, constructed their sexual identity and practiced unsafe sex because they were told that real sex is enjoyable when the foreskin is cut. As a result, owing to culture, male adolescents attain supremacy and tend to be in control of women's sexual practice through aggression and force, leaving women incapable of exercising their sexual rights (Gavey 2013; Meinck et al. 2015; Olayanju et al. 2013; Ramathuba 2012).

Finally, these patriarchal practices are unacceptable and contradictory to human rights as enshrined in the constitution of the republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa 1996) because they are frequently imposed by means of aggression and coercion (Brown 2012; Gómez-Olivé et al. 2013). In terms of Section 15(2) and 16(2) of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, to have sex with a minor (12-16 years old) despite being consensual is classified as a rape. However, despite these amendments, sexual aggression continues to pose a vigorous threat to well-being of African adolescents. In this regard, it is clear that South African male adolescents embracing cultural belief system such as male supremacy are more likely to force their sexual partners into sex. In the same vein, it is humiliating to find that in the townships such as Evaton, Bophelong and Sebokeng in the Vaal – Triangle, Gauteng Province, some adolescent males who had undergone traditional circumcision belong to gangs, rape, rob and brutally kill people. The question that arises from such behavior is: Does traditional male circumcision still have the significance if the initiated men become unruly and violate the rights of others?

Poverty

Impoverished communities are often highly populated, characterized by inadequate recreational facilities, scarce resource and lack of good role models. Such communities warrant antisocial behaviours. Poverty as a prominent factor

could lead to fractured family ties prompted from migration of parent(s) in search for jobs, leaving adolescents unattended, and with feelings of neglect (Holborn and Eddy 2011; Koen et al. 2013). According to Khumalo et al. (2012) urbanization aggravated by poverty is strongly associated with routine life changes especially for adolescents who may have relocated with their parents. Distorted attachment resulting from lengthy periods of absent parents is anticipated to be toxic in adolescents' self-esteem, leaving such adolescents with trust issues, struggling to bond and form intimate relationships (Walker-Williams et al. 2012). In support of this, Jewkes et al. (2013) found that inequitable sexual ideals of maleness such as numerous sexual partners that serve to prove male sexual competency through sexual violence and coercion was highlighted as the common practice among male adolescents who spend most of their time without parental supervision. Due to stressful circumstances emanating from poverty that adolescent male find themselves in, adolescent male resort to being drugs users, gamblers and join delinquent gangs who all are believed to endorse the perception of male dominance over women, and in turn exacerbate barriers to safe sexual intercourse (Jewkes et al. 2013).

However, in comparison, majority of adolescents in urban areas have access to better quality education in model-C schools, with a plenty of extra cash that increases the likelihood of using drugs and joining delinquent gangs (Khumalo et al. 2012). Kheswa and Notole (2014b) found that such adolescent males tend to prey on women who are vulnerable because of their impoverished background. Drawing from social exchange and gender-strain theories, adolescent males engage into transactional sex with numerous sexual partners to prove their manhood and sexual prowess, leaving women with less autonomy to make informed decisions about condom use since they are being compensated to meet their needs (example, cellphones, clothes, school fees) (Kalichman et al. 2005).

Self-esteem

Adolescent males with low self-esteem and sense of powerlessness do not only experience depressive feelings, but in the acquisition process of those intrusive thoughts, a sense of antagonism including sexual hostility get intensi-

fied (Rossow et al. 2015). Drawing from person-centered theory pioneered by Carl Rogers (1974) adolescent males with low self-esteem often experience negative emotions, become passive and struggle to assert themselves (Singh and Steyn 2014). Such youth's sense of powerlessness tend to erode their self-regulation and result in diminished academic performance and heightened distress that may arouse negative attitude towards learning (Dogan et al. 2013).

In comparison, adolescent males with positive self-esteem were found to be more resistant to peer pressure, held more equitable gender attitudes and sexual values and displayed high self-efficacy as compared to their counter parts with negative self-esteem (Engler 2014; Gómez-Olivé et al. 2013; Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya 2014). Because they are happy and optimistic they tend to accomplish their life satisfying objective and less likely to engage in antagonistic behavior including sexual aggression, unlike their counterparts who may resort to sexual victimization to calm their stress (Salami 2010).

Consequences of Aggressive Sexual Behavior among Adolescent Males

The consequences of aggressive sexual behavior among adolescents are strongly associated with traumatic sexual experiences and negative psychological, social and sexual-health related effects for both the victim of sexual coercion and perpetrator. These effects may include psychological disorders (extreme anger, fear, guilty feelings and depression), contraction of STIs/HIV, sexual dysfunction and teenage fatherhood (Bernstein and Penner 2012). The main reason for such unwanted feelings is that, sexual coercion is strongly linked to lower or non-condom use, which not only yields to sexual infections, but genital injuries as well. Those genital injuries exacerbated by infrequent use of condom and forceful sex could result in miscarriages and unsafe abortions for females, while other sexual infections for men could result in penis amputation (Nyembezi et al. 2012). HIV/AIDS as a sexual transmitted disease is transmitted during unsafe sex. Literature revealed that the majority of sexual aggressive adolescent males do not use condom (Holborn and Eddy 2011; Jewkes et al. 2011).

Failure of societal preventive measures, punishment had to be imposed to offenders and in

South Africa imprisonment is a legal form of punishment (Stevens and Cloete 2010). The fundamental belief of the contemporary South African penitentiaries is to restructure the adolescent detainee's behaviour (Act No. 200 of 1993) and also prepare them to participate in an acceptable manner in their societies after being released (Singh and Steyn 2014). Reviewed literature revealed that unemployment is higher among black South Africans. Study conducted at Umsobomvu depicts that sixty-eight percent of the youth with age-range from 18-35 never had a job (Baumeister and Bushman 2011; Holborn and Eddy 2011). Beside lack of skills caused by imprisonment (Giddens 2013) South African youth especially adolescent males commit crime at an early age which lead them to have criminal record and hinders them from acquiring job (Jansen et al. 2012).

According to Steinberg et al. (2011) symptoms for traumatized adolescents have unpleasant effects that comprises of intrusive thoughts and flash backs, nightmares, social withdrawal and problem with emotional control. Subsequent to that, suicide and suicide attempts are gradually increasing resulting from escalation in psychological discomfort caused by accelerated incidence of sexual aggression. Suicide rates are high in anomic (normless) societies as compared to societies that set clear standards to obtain acceptable societal goals (Giddens 2013). Suicide constitutes approximately ten percent of unnatural deaths, while thirty percent of adolescent's suicidal propensity emanated from sexually persecuted, sexual offending and imprisonment. Therefore, depressed and abused adolescents find themselves in circumstances where there is no answer, consequently suicide ideations emerge and possible resort to suicide (Louw and Louw 2014).

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the literature findings that sexual aggressive behavior could be learned as adolescent males with low self-efficacy, fail to resist peer pressure and likely to use alcohol for conformity. By low self-efficacy, in the context of sexual behavior, adolescent males with no future goals may lack the ability to practice safe sex as compared to their counterparts with high self-efficacy. Such youth may portray lack of self-confidence, low assertiveness and refusal

skills when influenced by friends. Thus, they become teenage fathers prematurely and contract STIs. As the literature pointed the significance of emotional support from authoritative parents, however, adolescent males from dysfunctional families often find themselves struggling to maintain positive sexual relationships owing to divorce, raised in families tarnished by low levels of moral precepts, sexual values and attitudes, poverty and domestic violence.

Due to frustration resulting from less parental involvement, it could be speculated that they may belong to deviant peers and gang rape or violate the rights of others. Human behavior or personality being universal as hypothesized by Engler (2014), Hecker and Haer (2015) found similar results among adolescent males who became violent after abusing drugs although they were fearless prior to the intake of drugs, in the Republic of Congo. Could drug abuse in sexual aggressive behaviour by adolescent males and youth offenders be viewed as a catalyst as criminologists do? Drawing from Ajzen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which happens to support intended actions of boys who rape and kill, in the documentary televised by South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) 3 in 2015 on Special Assignment, a group of adolescent males named "Alaska" from initiation schools from the Vaal Triangle mentioned that their actions were inspired by their role models from fictitious movies. During the interview, they told the journalist that they were propelled to be aggressive because they were orphans and living with grandparents, which, in turn, led them to be school dropouts. One major reason to engage in criminal behavior was to be famous for killing.

Furthermore, since adolescent males are being socialized at an early age from all cultures (Birkett and Espelage 2015; Mwambene and Wheal 2015) to be tough when growing up, and adolescent development is assumed to lead to heterosexual behaviour (Moolman 2013), this paper argues that there could be an erosion of the principles of "ubuntu" amongst adolescent males. Ubuntu embodies a socio-cultural framework which promotes humanity and is the gesture of respecting and tolerating other human beings irrespective of their sexual orientation, colour or creed (Bongmba 2016). In this instance, adolescent males may develop homophobic tendencies and discriminate and bully gays and les-

bians in their respective communities, abduct or manipulate their girlfriends into spending time with them over the weekends as an expression of being men. Homophobia refers to dislike or prejudice towards people who engage in same sex (Kheswa 2016; Mwambene and Wheal 2015).

Because most deviant adolescent males tend to belong to gangs, there is a possibility that they may skip classes and defy authority since physical punishment has been outlawed. Therefore, a collective approach from parents, churches, police, business leaders and community, should be robust and effective in reducing the rate at which youth is being destroyed by alcohol and drug abuse. To ensure responsible future adulthood, tavern owners who sell liquor to individuals below age 18, should be fined.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlighted the contextual factors associated with sexual aggressive behavior among African adolescent males. The literature findings demonstrated that in community settings where sexual violence is more apparent, contextual efforts should be made to enrich adolescent resilience against sexual risk behaviors. This may lessen the effects of alcohol use, associating with delinquent peers, joining violent gang and participating in violent and risky behaviors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interventions and preclusions are essential to social challenges that promote factors leading to reckless behaviors such as excessive alcohol and substance use among male adolescents. Globally, schools and relevant stakeholders are failing to protect children through provision of safe places for learning good behavior. Accordingly, it is recommended that the security system in African communities should be strengthened. Prevention of sexual abuse is indispensable and interventions must be directed to children and adolescents, and must address cultural dogmas entrenched to male socialization, male supremacy and power relations, women objectification and effective ways to cope with poverty. Finally, school programs should not only redress negative consequences of violence, but must also prevent violence, promote healthy sexual behaviors and well-being through

creation of recreational facilities, safe and tranquil environment for enriching South African adolescents.

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