A Literature Review on Adolescent Sexuality in Relation to the Context of Peers

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PURPOSE

Adolescent sexuality is a solid foundation of adult sexual outcomes. As such this paper intends to examine adolescent sexuality in relation to peers as well as investigate relevant theoretical approaches and research findings to understanding adolescent sexuality. To achieve these two aims the paper addresses the following questions: What theories are used to explain development of adolescent sexuality? Which theory is the best and why? What factors create prominence in the issue of adolescent sexuality? What are the problems faced by adolescents in relation to developing sexuality? Are there specific problems for boys/girls? How are the problems of adolescent sexuality connected to peer relations? What roles do peers play in developing sexuality? How is research examining adolescent sexuality in relation to peers? What are the main findings? What is the implication of these findings in working with adolescents? Are there any programs in schools and/or communities addressing adolescent sexuality? What are the strengths and limitations of adolescent sexuality programs?

DESCRIPTION OF ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY

Adolescent sexuality is a typical aspect of adolescent development. This is because all human beings go through this stage of development. Sexuality is pivotal in human being (Tolman & McClell and, 2011) as such adolescent sexuality is a critical component of positive sexual development (Bulat, Ajdukovic, & Ajdukovic, 2016). Advancement of positive sexual mindsets, actions, associations, and healthy adult sexual outcomes are entirely grounded in adolescence (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Therefore, during this period adolescent sunder stand and build intimacy, desires, and sexual connections (Widman, Choukas-Bradley, Helms, & Prinstein, 2016).

Adolescent sexuality includes various activities. According to Arnett (2012) the common ones are kissing, caressing, reciprocal stimulation of the genitals, masturbation, oral sex, and sexual intercourse. In addition, Arnett (2012) classifies heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual as the major sexual positionings. However, due to homophobia adolescents who are homosexual and bisexual conceal their sexual character (Arnett, 2012).

WHAT THEORIES ARE USED TO EXPLAIN DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY?

Both deficit-based theories and positive sexuality development approaches are used to explain development of adolescent sexuality. Some of the deficit-based theories include Sigmund Freud's theory of psychosexual development, and Erik Erikson's biological and sexual aspects for a personal identity. These deficit-based

theories provide inadequate information on adolescent sexual development. For example, the psycho sexual development model merely explains oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages as the milestone phases of psycho sexual growth (Kar, Choudhury, & Singh, 2015). Sigmund Freud further expounds that throughout adolescence a person's need for affection and sexual intercourse increases. These models downplay comprehensive sexuality development. As such deficit-based theories frame adolescent sexuality as risky.

On the other hand, positive sexuality development approaches incorporate the evolving nature, multiplicity, inclusiveness and intricacy of adolescent sexuality. For example, positive sexuality framework acknowledges that adolescents have a variety of individual assets which create distinctive and complex sexualities (Williams, Thomas, Prior, & Walters, 2015). Also, the framework embraces various modes of learning, considers ethical issues, encourages honesty interactions, recognizes distinct complications linked with sexuality, promotes peace-making, and is applicable aroud different stages and forms of social arrangement (Williams, Thomas, Prior, & Walters, 2015). In addition, the framework suggests that an evolving phenomenon entails interpretation of the assets of sexuality development embedded in the adolescent years (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Such a framework is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory which appreciates the importance of the interaction among the systems in the development of adolescent sexuality.

WHICH THEORY IS THE BEST AND WHY?

There is no single theory which is best to explaining adolescent sexuality due to the complexity of the issue. Nevertheless, this paper suggests a combination of positive youth development approach, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the positive sexuality framework as the basis for understanding development of adolescent sexuality. Such a combination can be valuable in realising and investigating entirety of adolescent sexuality.

WHAT FACTORS CREATE PROMINENCE IN THE ISSUE OF ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY?

Several factors create prominence in adolescent sexuality because it is multidimensional and occurs in a socio-ecological system. Such systems include social contacts with peers and family, sociocultural and sociopolitical organizations regulating education, access to information as well health care (Ott, 2010). This agrees with Kar, Choudhury & Singh (2015) that sexuality issues are intricate since several factors such as physical appearance, mental, social, cultural norms, and experience have a bearing. One such factor is parental influence which plays a significant role in adolescent sexual socialisation. Parents and parental figures facilitate in shaping adolescents' opinions, positions and anticipations about sex (Thorsen, 2018). As such parental supervision and attachment either promote or inhibit adolescents' engagement in sexual behaviours (Childs & Sullivan, 2013).

Again, contemporary youths have access to a diverse sexual information through media. Examples of these media include television, internet, chat lines, books, and magazines. The ordinary form of getting sexual information is sexting and/or cybersex. This entail sex changing sexual text messages and naked pictures through cellular smart phones (Fortenberry, 2013). Not withstanding the recreational purpose of both sexting and cybersex, youths display risk for misuse such as pornography utilisation (Ballester-Arnal, Gil-Llario, Gimenez-Garcia, Castro-Calvo, & Cardenas-Lopez, 2017). Adolescents who use pornography may cultivate idealistic sexual opinions and values (Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012).

In addition, adolescent sexuality development is mutually affected by an explicit culture and an exact ecological condition (Ntsayagae, et al., 2008). For example, the HIV pandemic in the Sub-Saharan Africa influences adolescent sexuality development. To confirm this, Chiweshe & Chiweshe (2017) state that HIV

pandemic is a genuine threat among youths in Sub-Saharan Africa due to unprotected sexual intercourse.

Cultural influence is dependent on the cultural norms practised. According to Arnett (2012), there are three cultural norms which have diverse effects on adolescent sexuality. The first is restrictive culture which assigns tough prohibitions on adolescents' sexual intercourse before marriage and is customarily applied more on girls than boys. For example, in most parts of Indian society sex before marriage is forbidden, although the media suggests disregarding abstinence from sex (Joshi, 2010).

The next custom is semi-restrictive culture which has prohibitions, but they are not powerfully applied and are easily defeated, still, if pregnancy fallouts from premarital sex, the adolescents are required to marry. For example, in Malawi sex before marriage is culturally an abomination but practices on the ground entertain it. Practices such as arranging sexual provocative traditional dances overnight which lead to premarital sex behaviours and unwanted pregnancies eventually forced teen marriages.

The other model is permissive culture which promotes adolescent sexuality from childhood andregards sexuality of youth as anextension of the sex play in childhood. Permissive culture is often practiced in the Western cultures.

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS FACED BY ADOLESCENTS IN RELATION TO DEVELOPING SEXUALITY?

There are several challenges related to adolescent sexuality development. This is because adolescence is a period of exploration which includes involvement in sexual risks. For instance, several authors such as Widman, Choukas-Bradley, Helms, &Prinstein (2016) and Fortenberry (2013) agree that one of the major problems is engagement in unprotected sexual intercourse which leads to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Unintended pregnancy consequently leads to school dropout which further results into poor educational and employment success (Childs & Sullivan, 2013). Also, unintended pregnancy result into early parenthood (Fortenberry, 2013). In cases where adolescents are forced to marry unintended pregnancy may lead to early marriages.

Sexually transmitted infections including HIV infection and AIDSis a matter of critical concern. For example, in the Sub-Saharan Africa half of all HIV infections happen in adolescents (Chiweshe & Chiweshe, 2017). In Malawi the overall HIV prevalence for adolescents aged between 15 and 19 years was estimated at 2.1 percent (Rashid & Mwale, 2016). Such an occurrence has economic implications particularly in poor resourced countries like Malawi.

Another problem is exposure to pornography due to sexual inquisitiveness during adolescence. Such practices result into indulging in sexual deeds which consequently lead to increased susceptibility for sexual abuse (Kar, Choudhury, & Singh, 2015). In addition, exposure to pornography results into impractical sexual opinions and values (Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012).Adolescents face sexuality problems because they assume that their peers are involving in analogous behaviour, though, not all youth are similarly vulnerable to these peer influence consequences (Widman, Choukas-Bradley, Helms, & Prinstein, 2016). In addition, Rashid & Mwale (2016) argue that absence of pertinent information and access to services contribute to adolescent sexuality challenges.

ARE THERE SPECIFIC SEXUALITY ISSUES FOR BOYS/GIRLS?

Some variations have been noticed in the degree of vulnerability between boys and girls. For example, de Boer, Peeters, & Koning (2017) demonstrate that boys seem to be more vulnerable to sexual risk behaviours due to peer influence. This is probably because boys' initial sexual experiences are largely surrounded by

passionate affairs, as well as peer, family and social circumstances (Ott, 2010). Additionally, fixed gender roles presume boys to be sexually vigorous, domineering, and initiate sexual actions while girls are imagined to be sexually responsive, compliant, and inactive (Emmerink, Vanwesen beeck, van den Eijnden, & ter Bogt, 2016).

Such gendered expectancies are related to increased threat for sexual cruelty, sexually transmitted infections, and untimely fatherhood (Ott, 2010).Also, inequity sexual categorisation results into rapid growing rate of HIV among youthful females in contrast to males (Ntsayagae, et al., 2008). Again, the gendered beliefs generate double standard of sexual actions between boys andgirls. For instance, girls' sexual conduct is usually regarded negatively while similar behaviour in boys is tolerated (Bulat, Ajdukovic, & Ajdukovic, 2016). Such standards lead to boys' more liberal sexual opinions and actions than girls (Joshi, 2010).

However, some studies demonstrate that girls from under privileged societies are more vulnerable to peer pressure than boys. This is because such girls desire material goods (Grant, 2012). For example, in Malawi underprivileged girls are more vulnerable because receiving money and gifts from boys and men is normal in sexual relations. This is confirmed by Rashid &Mwale (2016) who observes that youthfulfe males engage in multiple sexual relationships as away of obtaining material and monetary profits.

HOW ARE THE PROBLEMS OF ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY CONNECTED TO PEER RELATIONS?

Sexuality problems are connected to peer relations because adolescents are connected to peers through diverse ways. For instance, adolescents connect through peer recognition, peer friendships, and peer groups (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Friends are an essential component in adolescents' identity formation. This is because peers offer attachment, a sense of belonging, acceptance, acknowledgement of self- worth, emotional safety, a source of status and reputation, and a platform for incorporation into broader social community (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Hence, adolescent peer groups act as a source of social encouragement and/or as an inducement towards risky sexual behaviour (Childs & Sullivan, 2013). Therefore, peer connections provide a fertile setting for the social is ation of sexual actions (Choukas-Bradley, Giletta, Cohen, & Printstein, 2015).

WHAT ROLES DO PEERS PLAY IN DEVELOPING SEXUALITY?

Since friendships are a vital tool for socialisation then peer relationships contribute towards adolescent sexuality development. Many studies have shown that the existence of peers have a bearing on adolescents' behavioural decisions (de Boer, Peeters, & Koning, 2017). As such peer encouragement is one of the dependable aspects that influence adolescents' behaviour (Widman, Choukas-Bradley, Helms, & Prinstein, 2016). Peer socialisation comprises adolescents' acclimatisation to social standards, devotion to peer support, and adoption of peers' esteemed behaviours (Choukas-Bradley, Giletta, Cohen, & Printstein, 2015). As such sexual behaviour intensifies throughout adolescence because the youth have a growing impetus to attract peers and accomplish social status as well as identity (de Boer, Peeters, & Koning, 2017). This is because adolescents perceive successful implementation of peer-endorsed actions as satisfying (Carroll, Houghton, Durkin, & Hattie, 2009).

Peers also help friends to manage and assess unstable relationship practices (Christopher, McKenney, & Poulsen, 2016). For instance, peers assess each other's sexual standards, views, and actions, hence peer sexual experience is important in adolescents' sexual decision making (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). However, Chouksa-Bradley, Giletta, Cohen, & Printstein (2015) display that peer socialisation process can be successfully utilised to advance adaptive skills and behaviours for the accomplishment of adolescent

sexuality health outcomes.

HOW IS RESEARCH EXAMINING ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY IN RELATION TO PEERS?

Studies look at adolescent sexuality in relation to peers as ranging from deficit, sex-negative approach to comprehensive, positive adolescent sexuality approach (Arbeit, 2014). This is consistent with the presentation by Ott (2010) as changing from a risk-based paradigm to a more progressive approach of adolescent sexuality. An example of this shift is moving from Sigmund Freud's psychosexual development theory and Erik Erikson's biological and sexual aspects. These two approaches did not include complex realities of adolescent sexuality development. It is stated by Tolman & McClelland (2011) that adolescent sexuality has previously been associated with risk though it is a usual and expected phase of adolescent development.

The risk-based approach views adolescent sexuality as offensive. For example, based on this approach Zimbabweans socially constructed an opinion that sex is meant for adults as such adolescent sex should not be entertained because it is risky for society (Chiweshe & Chiweshe, 2017). Such a belief leads to negativity around adolescent sexuality which might label peers as facilitators for sexual risk behaviour.

However, there are individual diversities in vulnerability to the peer norms because some adolescents stay resilient to peer pressure (Widman, Choukas-Bradley, Helms, & Prinstein, 2016). These resilient peers can successfully disseminate messages of hope to their friends (de Boer, Peeters, & Koning, 2017). In addition, Choukas-Bradley, Giletta, Cohen, & Prinstein (2015) point out that failure to effectively capture the function of peers in positive adolescent sexuality development is due to exclusive concentration on adverse influences. Also, Arbeit (2014) believes that adolescent sexuality development should be considered as a practice concerned with strengths as well as risks.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN FINDINGS?

The main findings in adolescent sexuality studies are mixed because the studies look at both merits and demerits of adolescent sexuality. This is because the development of adolescent sexuality is affected by numerous aspects which might lead the youth to diverse experiences (Kar, Choudhury, & Singh, 2015). One of the findings is based on health behaviour theory and social cognitive theory. The findings demonstrate that perceived peer norms on decision making are pertinent for sexual risk behaviour because they engage interactive practices which are significant to peer effect processes (Widman, Choukas-Bradley, Helms, & Prinstein, 2016). In the same study it is found that boys are significantly more vulnerable to social pressure regarding sexual behavior than girls. This is consistent with findings from Childs & Sullivan (2013) who demonstrate that not all adolescents are uniformly at risk for participating in problem behaviour because individual and social-environmental differences account for different problem behaviour patterns. This demonstrates that there is diversity and plasticity of adolescents' sexual developmental pathways (Arbeit, 2014).

Again, some findings are based on the evolutionary developmental psychology theory. The findings show that peers can play an efficient function in circulating messages by considering the useful role of peer status attainment (de Boer, Peeters, & Koning, 2017). This is because youths value their peculiar language when tackling challenges connected to sexual behaviour (Undie, Crichton, & Zulu, 2007). The findings are consistent with positive youth development studies on peer effect which indicate that peers may affect adolescents toward positive outcomes (Choukas-Bradley, Giletta, Cohen, & Printstein, 2015).Achievement of such outcomes are based vital elements such as sexual self-hood, sexual negotiation, and sexual enablement (Arbeit, 2014) as well as dimensions of positive sexuality framework.

WHAT IS THE IMPLICATION OF THESE FINDINGS IN WORKING WITH ADOLESCENTS?

The findings imply that researchers and practitioners should take a comprehensive positive sexual development approach when tackling the issue of adolescent sexuality. Positive adolescent sexual approach helps practitioners to discover the positive capacity in youths' sexual opinions, thoughts, associations, and actions as well as understanding the challenges surrounding sexuality (Arbeit, 2014).

Again, those working with adolescents should consider the influence of peers by supporting group compositions and behavioural approaches that empower youths to gain status for prosocial actions (de Boer, Peeters, & Koning, 2017). This is because high-status peers help other adolescents to conform more powerfully to the prosocial standards (Choukas-Bradley, Giletta, Cohen, & Printstein, 2015).

Furthermore, practitioners working with adolescents need to understand that several factors contribute towards adolescents' sexual self-hood, sexual negotiation and sexual enablement. For instance, Arbeit (2014) points out that sexual self-hood is shaped by desire, self-values and self-identity; sexual negotiation involves valuing own and others' sexual selfhood. In addition, sexual enablement denotes that adolescents should appreciate, resist, and redesign the social and past structures of authority that restrain and enable their sexuality in a compound and dynamic system. When dealing with adolescents' sexuality history should embrace broad range of circumstantial components such as relationship properties, family practices, values of the adolescent, and his/her family, and peers (Ott, 2010). These individual and social-environmental differences necessitate diverse tactics across adolescents' subclasses (Childs & Sullivan, 2013).

ARE THERE ANY PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS/COMMUNITIES ADDRESSING ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY?

Although sexuality education is considered as one of the ways of addressing the issue of adolescent sexuality, it is difficult to introduce such programs in some cultures. For example, in Zimbabwe there is extensive belief grounded on cultural and religious norms that sex is for adults which has infused to the education system such that parents have been focused on rejecting comprehensive sexuality education (Chiweshe & Chiweshe, 2017).

However, in some Sub-Saharan African countries schools have programs addressing adolescent sexuality. For example, in Malawi sex education is integrated in the curriculum, radios, televisions and many other avenues to help schooling and non-schooling adolescents to acquire pertinent information although youths still participate in risky sexual behaviors (Rashid & Mwale, 2016). In western cultures such as the United States of America adolescent sexuality is already part of the school curriculum. However, it is noted that in the United States the programs focus on risk prevention other than tackling elements linked to positive courting relations, interactive violence, gender roles and non-heterosexual positions (Schmidt, Wandersman, & Hills, 2015).

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY PROGRAMS?

Adolescent sexuality programs have registered an excellentadoption of a holistic approach. For instance, comprehensive sexuality education is intended to empower youths beyond avoidance of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (Aham-Chiabuotu & Aja, 2017). According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, such a holistic approach facilitates examination of sexual developmental requirements and associated challenges.

However, there are also some limitations surrounding adolescent sexuality programs. One such limitation is the programs' failure to uphold cultural diversities. The promotion of comprehensive sexual education by Western donors in 'resource-poor' countries is culturally insensitive (Roodsaz, 2018). For example, Roodsaz (2018) state that in Bangladeshi rights-based approach employed in comprehensive sexual education is culturally insensitive because of its irreligious normativity. Also, Chiweshe & Chiweshe (2017) demonstrate that in Zimbabwe parents have refused comprehensive sexuality education based on cultural and religious beliefs. Also, Rashid & Mwale (2016) show that in Malawi some cultural dynamics negate the function of sex and sexuality education among adolescents. Because of this insensitivity there is a discrepancy between adolescent' knowledge and actions (Rashid & Mwale, 2016).

In the United States adolescent sexuality programs face the challenge of unsatisfactory integration of a comprehensive definition of sexuality education. This is evident in limited content being offered to adolescents (Schmidt, Wandersman, & Hills, 2015).A similar observation is made in Nigeria which demonstrates that comprehensive sexuality education in schools is typically moralistic and cognitive with narrow adaptation of interactive practices (Aham-Chiabuotu & Aja, 2017). The inadequacy could be because of various interpretations of comprehensive sexuality education and the inconsistencies between model and practice (Roodsaz, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the paper suggests that to enable the youth to make informed decisions about sexuality, adolescent sexuality programs should focus on positive sexuality development approaches which embrace comprehensive ecological systems as key influencing factors of adolescent sexuality development.

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