

Relationship between Partying Culture and Risk-Taking Behaviors among Senior School Students in Igembe South Sub-County, Meru County Kenya

Judy Kinanu., David Kipkorir Kiptui

Department of Social Sciences -Tharaka University

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ABSTRACT

Partying culture among senior school students is increasing in many communities. It exposes young people to environments where substance use, unprotected sexual activity, and violence may be normalized. Such exposure may negatively affect senior school students' health, academic performance, and social development. In Igembe South Sub-County, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders have raised concerns about students' increasing involvement in partying-related activities. Despite these concerns, limited empirical research has documented how partying culture relates to risk-taking behaviors among senior school students in this area. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to examine the relationship between partying culture and risk-taking behaviors among senior school students in Igembe South Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya. The study was guided by problem-behavior theory by Jessor and Jessor (1977). The study adopted a quantitative research approach using a descriptive correlational research design. The target population was 24,000, while the accessible population of 2400 which was 10% of the target population. Simple random sampling was employed in 10 schools comprising of grade 10, form 3 and 4 to select a sample of 343. Data was collected using self-administered structured questionnaires from learners in grade 10, form 3, and form 4. A pilot study was conducted in two secondary schools outside the study area with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.862 which was considered acceptable. Validity was ensured through expert review and content validation. Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 31.0. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, mean and standard deviation was used to summarize data, while inferential statistics, using the Pearson coefficient, was used to test relationships between variables at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed an $r = 0.0441$ and std error of 0.6052 P value ≤ 0.001 . For the nature of partying culture Beta of 0.384 P value ≤ 0.001 . On contextual risk exposure $F(3.167)$ P value ≤ 0.001 and on gender differences T -test was -12.514, P value of ≤ 0.003 which was significant in risk-taking behaviours, whereas the prevalence of partying culture did not have a statistically significant influence. T -test = 8.62 $\geq$ at sig. 0.001. The study concludes that the social and contextual conditions surrounding partying culture, rather than participation frequency alone, are important in shaping risk-taking behaviours among senior school students. The study recommended strengthening school-based guidance and counselling, peer-support programmes, parental supervision, and gender-sensitive community interventions to reduce contextual risks and peer pressures associated with partying culture.

INTRODUCTION

Risk-taking behaviors among adolescents affect their physical health, psychological well-being, academic achievement, and social relationships. These behaviours may include substance abuse, involvement in alcohol drinking, tobacco, and illicit drugs; early sexual debut and unprotected sexual practices, school truancy and absenteeism; and violence manifested through aggression, bullying, and physical confrontations (WHO, 2021). As adolescents increasingly participate in social and recreational activities, the social environments in which these interactions occur become an important determinant of their behavioral choices. One such social environment is partying culture, which has emerged as an influential social context that may expose senior school students to circumstances that encourage engagement in various risk-taking behaviors.

According to the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD, 2024), many adolescents participate in a variety of social gatherings, including birthday celebrations, house parties, graduation parties, holiday festivities, music events, and other recreational activities that provide opportunities for social interaction. The nature of these parties varies considerably in terms of the level of adult supervision, the availability and use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances during the social gathering, and the extent of peer interaction and influence. In many developed countries, adolescents frequently attend social events with limited parental or adult supervision, increasing their exposure to alcohol, drugs, and other risky situations (WHO, 2024). ESPAD (2024) further reports that a substantial proportion of European adolescents participate in such social gatherings, with many reporting alcohol consumption and experimentation with other substances during parties. These findings suggest that the nature of partying culture, particularly the types of parties attended, the level of adult supervision, substance availability, and peer relationships, may influence adolescents' engagement in risk-taking behaviors. The widespread use of social media platforms has further facilitated the organization and promotion of parties, making social gatherings more accessible and attractive to young people.

World Health Organization report (2024), points out that adolescents attending unsupervised social gatherings are more likely to encounter alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and other psychoactive substances, increasing the likelihood of substance experimentation and abuse. Party environments may also expose adolescents to sexualized situations characterized by early intimate relationships, sexual coercion, or unprotected sexual activity, thereby increasing the risk of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies (UNICEF, 2023). In addition, many adolescents travel to and from parties during late-night hours using motorcycles, private vehicles, or public transport without adequate adult supervision, exposing them to road traffic injuries and other safety risks. Crowded party venues may further expose adolescents to aggressive settings involving bullying, interpersonal conflicts, physical fights, and other forms of violence. Collectively, these contextual risk exposures increase adolescents' vulnerability to substance abuse, sexual engagement, school truancy, and violence, demonstrating that the environments surrounding partying culture can significantly influence senior school students' risk-taking behaviors.

In countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and South Africa, partying culture among adolescents has expanded alongside rapid urbanization, technological advancement, changing family structures, and increased access to digital media. Although many social gatherings are organized to celebrate birthdays, religious festivals, school events, and community ceremonies, they increasingly provide opportunities for adolescents to interact in environments characterized by limited adult supervision, strong peer influence, and easy access to alcohol and other psychoactive substances (UNICEF, 2023). The prevalence of adolescent participation in such gatherings has also increased during weekends, school holidays, and festive seasons, largely driven by peer involvement and the growing use of social media platforms to organize and publicize social events. Consequently, many adolescents are exposed to contextual risks, including substance use, sexualized environments, nighttime travel without adequate supervision, and aggressive social settings that increase their likelihood of engaging in substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, school truancy, and violence. These trends have become a growing concern for governments, educators, and public health practitioners in these countries because of their implications for adolescent health, educational attainment, and social development.

Reports by the National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA, 2022) indicate that many adolescents participate in birthday celebrations, house parties, entertainment events, holiday festivities, and other social gatherings where alcohol and other psychoactive substances may be readily available. The prevalence of attendance at such gatherings has increased in both urban and rural settings, particularly during weekends, school holidays, and festive seasons, with peer groups and social media platforms playing a significant role in mobilizing participation. These party environments often expose adolescents to alcohol and drug use, sexualized situations, nighttime travel without adequate adult supervision, and aggressive social interactions that increase their vulnerability to substance abuse, unsafe sexual engagement, school truancy, and violence. Although studies in Kenya have documented adolescent substance use, peer influence, and other forms of risk-taking behavior, comparatively little attention has been given to partying culture as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing its nature, prevalence, contextual risk exposure, and gender differences among senior school students.

In Meru County, concerns about adolescent participation in partying culture have grown alongside changing socioeconomic conditions and expanding entertainment opportunities. The county has experienced increased urbanization in major trading centres, improved transport networks, widespread access to mobile technologies, and greater use of social media, all of which have enhanced adolescents' access to social gatherings and recreational activities. In Igembe South Sub-County, economic activities such as miraa farming have contributed to the growth of trading centers, entertainment venues, and weekend social events that attract young people from neighboring communities. These developments may increase adolescents' participation in birthday celebrations, house parties, holiday festivities, and other informal gatherings where adult supervision is often limited. Consequently, some senior school students may be exposed to alcohol and other psychoactive substances, sexualized social environments, unsafe nighttime mobility, and aggressive social settings that increase their vulnerability to substance abuse, sexual engagement, school truancy, and violence. Reports by NACADA (2022) continue to highlight adolescent alcohol and substance use as a significant concern in Kenya, underscoring the need to understand how local social environments such as partying culture may contribute to risk-taking behaviors among senior school students.

Statement of the Problem

There has been a noticeable increase in senior school students' involvement in partying culture in Kenya, exposing them to risky behaviors such as substance use, unsafe sexual activity, truancy, and aggression. Approximately 15% of students aged 13–19 engage in alcohol or drug use, with 12% reporting early sexual activity and 8% experiencing absenteeism linked to social gatherings (NACADA report 2022). In Igembe South Sub-County, informal parties during school holidays with minimal supervision may have contributed to truancy, teenage pregnancies, substance abuse, and declining academic performance, driven by socio-economic factors such as miraa farming and limited recreational programs. Although various interventions such as life skills education, parental involvement, community engagement, and policy enforcement have been proposed to reduce risky behaviors among senior school students, their effectiveness within rural and semi-arid areas such as Igembe South Sub-County remains insufficiently explored. Therefore, this study sought to examine the relationship between partying culture and risk - taking behaviours among senior school students with an aim of reducing risk-taking behaviors associated with partying culture.

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between contextual risk exposure within partying culture and risk-taking behaviors among senior school students in Igembe South Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contextual risk exposure within partying culture is shaped by the nature of party organization, the level of adult supervision, peer interactions, and the physical environment in which parties occur. According to the Problem Behavior Theory, adolescents' behaviors are influenced by the interaction between individual characteristics and environmental contexts, making party settings important environments for understanding adolescent risk-taking.

Simons-Morton et al. (2022) conducted a longitudinal study among adolescents in the United States to examine the influence of social contexts on adolescent risk-taking behaviors. Using repeated behavioral assessments and multilevel statistical analysis, the study found that adolescents were significantly more likely to engage in substance use, aggression, and other risky behaviors when surrounded by peers who modeled or approved such behaviors. The researchers concluded that contextual factors within social gatherings were stronger predictors of adolescent risk-taking than individual characteristics alone. The current study addresses this contextual gap by examining multiple contextual risk exposures within partying culture among senior school students in Igembe South Sub-County.

White et al. (2022) conducted a school-based cross-sectional study among secondary school students to investigate the relationship between substance availability and adolescent substance use during social gatherings. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using logistic regression techniques. The findings revealed that adolescents attending parties where alcohol and drugs were readily

available were significantly more likely to initiate alcohol consumption and experiment with other psychoactive substances than those attending substance-free gatherings. Nevertheless, the study concentrated primarily on substance exposure and did not investigate other contextual risks associated with partying culture. Moreover, the study was conducted outside the Kenyan rural context, limiting its applicability to communities such as Igembe South.

UNFPA report (2022) synthesized evidence from adolescent reproductive health programs conducted across low- and middle-income countries to examine environmental factors associated with adolescent sexual risks. The report established that adolescents attending poorly supervised social gatherings were more likely to experience early sexual initiation, unprotected sexual intercourse, unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections. The report further observed that inadequate access to sexual and reproductive health information increased adolescents' vulnerability within socially permissive environments. However, the report focused largely on sexual health outcomes and did not examine how exposure to sexualized environments interacts with other contextual risks such as substance use and peer influence. The present study therefore investigates these contextual risk factors simultaneously within partying culture.

Omondi and Were (2024) conducted a descriptive survey involving 384 secondary school students in Kenya to investigate environmental factors associated with adolescent aggression during social gatherings. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and focus group discussion guides and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that overcrowded venues, loud music, alcohol consumption, and peer provocation significantly increased verbal conflicts, physical fights, and aggressive behaviors among adolescents.

UNICEF (2023) examined adolescent safety within community environments in several developing countries through education and child protection programs. The report established that adolescents who travelled to and from social gatherings during late-night hours without adequate adult supervision faced increased risks of road traffic injuries, physical violence, exploitation, and other forms of harm. Poor transport infrastructure and inadequate community protection mechanisms further increased adolescents' vulnerability in rural areas.

The reviewed studies demonstrates that contextual risk exposure within partying culture significantly contributes to adolescents' engagement in substance abuse, sexual engagement, school truancy, and violence. Evidence consistently shows that exposure to alcohol and other psychoactive substances, sexualized environments, risky mobility, and aggressive social settings increases adolescents' vulnerability to multiple risk-taking behaviors. However, most previous studies have examined these contextual risks independently or within urban and international settings. Few studies have investigated contextual risk exposure as a multidimensional construct within partying culture, particularly among senior school students in rural Kenya. Furthermore, limited empirical evidence exists on how exposure to substances, sexualized environments, risky mobility, and aggressive settings collectively influence multiple risk-taking behaviors in rural communities such as Igembe South Sub-County. The present study addressed these empirical, conceptual, contextual, and methodological gaps by examining the relationship between contextual risk exposure within partying culture and risk-taking behaviors among senior school students in Igembe South Sub-County, Meru County.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive correlational design. Descriptive survey research design is appropriate for collecting information on existing conditions, opinions, attitudes, and practices without manipulating the study variables. The correlational component was used to determine the relationships between the independent variables; characteristics, prevalence, and contextual risk exposure of partying culture, as well as intervention measures, and the dependent variable, risk-taking behaviors among adolescents (Creswell and Creswell 2022).

The study was conducted in Igembe South Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya, within public secondary schools. The sub-county is predominantly rural, with a few semi-urban centers, and is characterized by growing socioeconomic activities, particularly miraa farming. These conditions have contributed to increased autonomy among adolescents, greater participation in informal social gatherings, and limited access to structured recreational facilities.

The target population comprised 24,000 Grade 10, Form 3, and Form 4 students enrolled in 25 public senior schools in Igembe South Sub-County, Meru County. Purposive sampling was used to select ten public senior schools from a target of 25 senior schools. These selected schools have relatively large student enrolment, are geographically distributed across the Sub-County, and are accessible to the researcher. The sample size was determined from the accessible population using Israel's (2013) formula for finite populations.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

n = required sample size

N = Target population, N = 2,400

e = level of precision (0.05)

$$n = \frac{2400}{1 + 2400(0.05)^2} \text{ Since}$$

$$n = \frac{2400}{1 + 2400(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{2400}{1 + 6}$$

$$n = \frac{2400}{7}$$

$$n = 343$$

Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on partying culture and risk-taking behaviors among Grade 10, Form 3, and Form 4 students. Questionnaires are appropriate for this study because they allow data collection from many respondents in a short time while providing standardized responses, reducing interviewer bias and allowing respondents to provide independent answers (Creswell and Creswell, 2021; Kothari, 2022). This study also incorporated a pilot study to assess the clarity, appropriateness, validity, and reliability of the research instruments before the main data collection was undertaken. A total of 10% was used for piloting. Findings from the pilot study indicated a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.82 which was considered sufficient enough. Thereafter, the study questionnaires were administered and filled out by the adolescents. Data collection was carried out after obtaining ethical clearance from the Tharaka University Ethics Review Committee and a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), as well as necessary permissions from the Ministry of Education, the Sub-County Director of Education, and the respective school administrations. Students were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and told that participation was voluntary. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to maintain data integrity.

Findings

Response Rate

The response rate obtained from the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Response Rate

Category	Issued	Returned	Response Rate (%)
Students	343	310	90.38
Total	343	310	90.38

Note. Field survey data (2026).

Contextual Risk Exposure within Partying Culture and Risk-Taking Behaviours among Senior School Students

The study sought to establish whether contextual risk exposure within partying culture significantly influenced risk-taking behaviours among senior school students in Igembe South Sub-County. Contextual risk exposure was measured using indicators relating to exposure to alcohol and other substances, sexualized environments, risky mobility, aggressive behaviours, and peer relationships that encourage risky behaviours. Risk-taking behaviours were measured using the composite score for substance abuse, sexual engagement, school truancy, and violence.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted, with contextual risk exposure within partying culture (CPC) as the independent variable and risk-taking behaviours (RTB) as the dependent variable.

The regression model was specified as:

$$RTB = \beta_0 + \beta_1CPC + \varepsilon$$

Where: RTB = Risk-taking behaviours

- CPC = Contextual risk exposure within partying culture
- β_0 = Constant
- β_1 = Regression coefficient
- ε = Error term

Table 2 Model Summary for the Relationship between Contextual Risk Exposure within Partying Culture and Risk-Taking Behaviours

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.541	.293	.291	.56704

Predictor: Contextual Risk Exposure within Partying Culture (CPC) Dependent Variable: Risk-Taking Behaviours (RTB)

The results in Table 2 indicate a moderate positive relationship between contextual risk exposure within partying culture and risk-taking behaviours, as shown by $R = .541$. The R Square value of .293 indicates that contextual risk exposure within partying culture. The Adjusted R Square of .291 indicates that, after adjustment, contextual risk exposure explained approximately 29.1% of the variation in risk-taking behaviours. The findings therefore suggest that contextual conditions surrounding partying culture made a substantial contribution to explaining differences in risk-taking behaviours among the students.

The study further sought ANOVA results of students response on contextual risk factors.

Table 3 ANOVA for the Regression Model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	41.022	1	41.022	127.581	<.001
Residual	99.034	308	.322		
Total	140.057	309			

Dependent Variable: Risk-Taking Behaviours Predictor: Contextual Risk Exposure within Partying Culture

The ANOVA results show that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 308) = 127.581$, $p < .001$. Since the significance value was less than .05, the regression model significantly predicted risk-taking behaviours among senior school students. This finding indicates that contextual risk exposure within partying culture had a statistically significant relationship with risk-taking behaviours. Therefore, the regression model provided sufficient evidence that differences in contextual exposure were associated with differences in students' risk-taking behaviours.

Regression Coefficients for the Relationship between Contextual Risk Exposure within Partying Culture and Risk-Taking Behaviours was established in this study. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Contextual risk factors within Partying Culture.

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	1.675	.134	—	12.514	<.001
Contextual Risk Exposure (CPC)	.532	.047	.541	11.295	<.001

Dependent Variable: Risk-Taking Behaviours

The results in Table 4 indicate that contextual risk exposure within partying culture had a positive and statistically significant effect on risk-taking behaviours ($B = .532$, $\beta = .541$, $t = 11.295$, $p < .001$). The positive unstandardized coefficient of .532 indicates that a one-unit increase in contextual risk exposure was associated with a 0.532-unit increase in the risk-taking behaviours score. The standardized beta coefficient of .541 further indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between contextual risk exposure and risk-taking behaviours.

This means that as students' exposure to contextual risks within partying environments increased, their level of risk-taking behaviours also increased. The findings demonstrate that contextual risk exposure within partying culture significantly influenced risk-taking behaviours among senior school students. The finding is consistent with Simons-Morton et al. (2022), who established that adolescents were more likely to engage in substance use, aggression, and other risky behaviours when surrounded by peers who modelled or approved such behaviours. The present study similarly found that contextual exposure within partying environments was significantly associated with risk-taking behaviours. The findings therefore suggest that adolescent behaviour is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the social environment in which young people interact. The current findings further indicate that risky mobility forms part of a wider contextual environment that may contribute to adolescent vulnerability. Therefore, risk exposure may occur not only within the party venue but also during movement to and from social gatherings. The findings further agree with Omondi and Were (2024), who established that overcrowded venues, loud music, alcohol consumption, and peer provocation increased conflicts, physical fights, and aggressive behaviours among adolescents. The significant positive relationship identified in the present study reinforces the argument that poorly controlled social environments can increase the likelihood of adolescent risk-taking behaviours. The results also support Steinberg (2022), who observed that adolescents are particularly susceptible to environmental and peer

influences because of their ongoing neurological, emotional, and social development. Repeated exposure to environments where substance use, aggression, sexualized behaviour, or other forms of risk-taking are normalized may gradually increase adolescents' tolerance and willingness to engage in such behaviours. In testing the Hypothesis, the regression results showed that the model was statistically significant, $F(1, 308) = 127.581$, $p < .001$. In addition, contextual risk exposure had a statistically significant positive regression coefficient, $\beta = .541$, $t = 11.295$, $p < .001$. Since the p-value was less than the significance level of .05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, the study concluded that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between contextual risk exposure within partying culture and risk-taking behaviours among senior school students in Igembe South Sub-County, Meru County.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that contextual risk exposure within partying culture is a strong predictor of risk-taking behaviours, as peer pressure, unsafe environments, and social conditions significantly increase students' vulnerability to substance abuse, truancy, aggression, and sexual risk-taking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools should monitor student participation in social gatherings and strengthen collaboration with parents to manage the consequences of partying culture among students.

Schools, parents, and community stakeholders should work together to reduce contextual risk exposure in partying environments by ensuring safer and more supervised social settings for students.

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