

Gender Differences in Manifestation of University Students' Problem Behaviours: A Case of Kibabii University, Kenya

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Abstract: In the recent past, universities have witnessed violent protests and destruction of property including those of the community, risky sexual behaviour which has ended in many female students becoming pregnant and careless drinking by students in the villages surrounding the universities. Kibabii University like any other in Kenya has depression such symptoms in students which has occasioned students committing suicide. All these types of behaviour have been of concern to parents, lecturers, counselors, the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders. The study concluded that there is a structural gender variation differences emerging in terms of both externalized problem behaviors and internalized problem behaviors.

Key words: Gender; Manifestation; Problem behavior.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender substitute is a structure of social practice that establishes relations of power, attitudes, and hierarchies, not only among people, but also among groups and institutions which would simply overcome the analysis or individual perception of being male or female (Brisbane, 2010). Studies done on young adults indicate that there are gender differences in the manifestation of problem behaviour and these differences are more significant during adolescence than at any other stage in development (Bansel, 2010). The author states that boys are more likely to exhibit externalized problem behaviours while girls are more likely to exhibit internalized problem behaviours. Whereas females are less likely than male to engage in serious forms of violence, boys carry weapons and engage in physical fighting at rate double than that of girls (Aloka & Bujuwoye, 2013). The authors say that girls who fight and who engage in cruel behaviours are most likely to direct anger towards themselves rather than towards others. Such self-directed anger may be manifested in the form of self-injuries behaviour.

There have been questions as to whether problem behaviours manifests similarly in male and female youths (Berkout, Yong, & Gross, 2011). Previous studies have shown conduct disorder to be more prevalent among male than female youths (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). However, some have questioned whether this is an artifact of the process used to generate and validate the diagnostic criteria, which has relied largely on samples of male youths (Moffitt et al., 2008). Relatedly, some researchers have suggested that there may be

gender-specific symptoms of problem behaviour, hypothesizing that attempts to harm others (to aggress) would focus on social issues most salient in their gender peer groups (Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003). They suggest that for males, the key concern of childhood and adolescence is a physical dominance, therefore boys with problem behaviour engage in physical aggression. For female youths, however, the focus is on the formation of close relationships. As a result they hypothesize that attempts to harm others will manifest as relational aggression such as attempts to damage interpersonal relationships (Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003).

It has been suggested that symptoms such as risky sexual behaviour may be female-specific symptoms of problem behaviour. For instance, there is evidence that females with problem behaviour are more likely to have comorbid externalizing and internalizing disorders (versus males who generally display heightened rate of externalizing problem behaviours alone (Keenan, Loeber, & Green, 1999). In turn, research has shown that youth with comorbid externalizing and internalizing problem behaviours are at risk for behaviours such as having multiple sexual partners (Dishion, 2000) possibly because these youths are seeking to dampen their negative emotional experiences through risky but pleasurable experience (Dishion, 2000). Thus, it has been hypothesized that female youth with problem behaviour will participate in more sexual risky behaviours (Berkout et al., 2011). A recent review found that females with problem behaviours were approximately 4.7 times more likely to have a history of sexual abuse than their male peers (Manghio, 2014), and childhood sexual abuse is often associated with later sexual risk behaviour (Senn, Carey, & Vanabl, 2008).

From the studies carried out in South Africa, female students in the university, are more prone to the consequences of sexual activities than males (O'Sullivan, Harrison, Morrell, Monroe-Wise & Kubeka 2006), but the gender differences in sexual activities on Campuses are not very clear. Students in Universities are exposed to various internal and external pressures for the first time, which can be effective in their tendency towards drugs. It can be stated that most University Campuses struggle with containing and controlling alcohol consumption by their students since the age at which students first enter such institutions is an age of freedom and experimentation where young people have the opportunity to

test the limits previously set by parents and schools. Reasons for gender differences in the abuse of legal and illegal drugs are due to many factors such as women frequently reporting legal and illegal drug use in a coping mechanism to deal with problems whereas men display more positive attitudes towards illicit drug use. For example, the nature of the relationship between the individual and his/ her social environment may be particularly relevant to the phenomenon of college drinking, as college years are typically a time of increased alcohol consumption as well as increased social interaction. It is therefore important to study gender differences regarding legal and illegal drug consumption in order to allow more efficacious preventive strategies and treatment for men and women.

In a UK survey involving ten Universities, it was reported that 61% of male students and 48% of female students exceed the safe drinking limits (Webb, Ashton, Kelly & Kamai, 1996). In the US, National Surveys repeated four times between 1993 and 2001 revealed that more than 40% of college students binge drink (Wechsler & Nelson, 2008). In a study of alcohol consumption by Dayster University (2017) it was revealed that male students at 70% drunk alcohol compared to female students at 42%.

Notably, anxiety and depression cause difficulties across social, occupational and every day functioning (Castle, Kulkarni, & Abel, 2006) and have been linked with physical disease, relationship difficulties and reduced concentration (Nutt, 2004). These negative effects are important when considering counseling services and treatments because anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness (WHO, 2000). Anxiety and depression among students in the University has also been shown to adversely influence their academic performance and contribute to learning difficulties (Dyrbye, Thomas & Shanafelt, 2006), therefore potentially compounding the stress experienced. Kitzrow (2003) noted that 28% of first year students reported being overwhelmed and 8% were depressed, and also commented that those mental health problems could affect the interpersonal relationships and academic performance of the distressed student. McLennan (1992) reported that Australia University students have higher levels of anxiety and depression than the general community, and Tanaka and Huba (1987) noted that the pressures of University study are at least particularly responsible for this.

University students' violent protests are also an important issue to many stakeholders including the student community, the University administration, the society at large and the Government (Kiboiy, 2013). According to this study, unrest and protests from students leads to pre- mature closure of Universities. These protests also hurt the business and other communities operating or living around Universities. Rioting students often engage in wanton destruction of businesses and property sometimes resulting even in loss of lives. For example, riots by University of Nairobi students in Kenya always spills over into the streets of Nairobi occasioning

stoning of vehicles and breaking and looting of business premises.

Studies done on University students indicate that there are gender differences in the manifestation of violent behaviour and these differences are more significant during adolescence and also spills to young adult age than any other stage in development (Bansel, 2010). The author states that males are more likely to exhibit physically aggressive behaviours, while girls are more likely to exhibit relationally aggressive behaviours. Whereas females are less likely than male to engage in serious forms of violence, males carry weapons and engage in physical fighting at rate double than that of females (Aloka & Bujuwoye, 2013). The authors say the females who engage in cruel and destructive behaviours are most likely to direct anger towards themselves rather than towards others. According to Meinchenbaum (2011) male University students commit the majority of violent crimes with a prevalence ratio in comparison to females because male students have higher drug use than female students. A study conducted by Vassalo (2011) on Australian University students found that a proportion of males who reported aggressive behaviour of physical nature were higher than those of females. Other findings of the study were that expression of anger was the same between sexes but females used more obliging, avoidance and compromise methods.

According to Aloka and Bujuwoye (2013), despite the growing amount of research over recent decades, contradictory findings on sex differences in male- female violent behaviour continue to be published. This formed the basis of this study as it aimed at establishing if there was a gender difference in terms of manifestation of problem behaviors among University students in Kenya and specifically Kibabii University in Kenya.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted correlational research design with mixed approaches. According to Mugenda (2008) a correlational research design is a study that describes the degree to which the variables are related. The study was conducted in Bungoma County where Kibabii University is located. This University is one of the Universities that has experienced a lot of problems with the conduct of students. The target population of this study was 9,000 students in Kibabii University. The population consists of 5,800 male students and 4200 female students (Office of Academic Registrar, 2020). The population under study is 1,200 first year students aged 18 to 21 years. The age coincides with late adolescence and early adulthood which is characteristic of the stage of confusion, search for identity as opined by Erik Erikson. First years are more likely than any other groups of University students to engage in problem behaviours. A considerable high proportion of problem behaviours experienced by this University come from first years, hence the choice of this group of students.

In this study, both probability and non- probability sampling was used to select the study sample. Non- probability method was used to select Kibabii University because this University has a record of problem behaviours though it is a new University. Purposive sampling was used to select first year students. To select the participants in the study, random sampling was used to select them. The sample size of the students in first year who were selected for the current study was determined using a formula that was developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The study employed questionnaire and interview schedule in data collection. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data analysis.

III. RESULTS

The aim of this study was to establish whether there is a difference in the manifestation of problem behaviors based on gender in universities in Kenya, a case of Kibabii University.

Internalized Problem behaviors among University Students

The study sought to establish the internalized problem behavior exhibited by the university students. The common internalized problem behaviors exhibited by the university students were found to be social withdrawals, feelings of loneliness or guilt, unexplained physical symptoms, feeling unloved and sadness, nervousness and irritability and fearfulness. From the sample, 24.1% of the students reported to experience social withdrawal while 26.1% of them reported to experience feelings of loneliness or guilt. The study further noted that 15.2% of the students reported to have experienced feeling unloved and sadness, 18.2% of the students stated that they experience nervousness and irritability while the remaining 16.4% of them stated that they experience fearfulness. The experience of various internalized behaviors among students was varied according to each behavior as per the gender of the students. The findings of the study further showed that more male students at 57.1% experienced social withdrawals compared to female students at 42.9% and therefore an indication that more male students tend to withdraw from their social groups when under stress compared to females. It also means that majority of male students are unlikely to share their problems with others compared to female students.

More female students reported that they develop feeling of loneliness or guilt compared to the male students with 53.1% of them female students having reported to feel loneliness and guilt compared to 46.9% of the male students. Further, 49.2% of the female students reported feeling unloved and sadness while 50.8% of the male students reported to feel the same. The research also noted that 53.2% of the female students reported to experience nervousness and irritability while 46.8% of the students who are male reported to experience nervousness and irritability. Another 56.3% of the female students experienced fearfulness while 43.7% male students reported to have fear in them. These results are exemplified in table 1.

Table 1: Internalized Problem behaviors among University Students

Internalized behavior problem	N= 120		Male		Female	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Social withdrawal	41	24.1	23	57.1	18	42.9
Feelings of loneliness or guilt	44	26.1	21	46.9	23	53.1
Feeling unloved and sadness	26	15.2	13	50.8	14	49.2
Nervousness and irritability	31	18.2	15	46.8	16	53.2
Fearfulness	28	16.5	12	43.7	16	56.3
Total	170	100				

Externalized Problem behaviors among University Students

The main externalized problem behaviors exhibited by university students included physical aggression, risky sexual practices, destruction of property, expression of symptoms of depression and alcohol and drug abuse. The study established that 26.1% of the students expressed physical aggression, 24.8% were engaged in risky sexual practices while another 28.2% of the students got involved in destruction or property. Also, 12.2% of the students expressed symptoms of depression while 8.7% got involved in alcohol and drug abuse. Of the students who expressed physical aggression, 62.3% of them were male while female students accounted for 37.7% and therefore an indication of more physical aggression among male university students. Out of the students who were involved in risky sexual behaviors, 59.1% of them were male while female students accounted for 40.9%. Among students who exhibited destruction of property, 48.8% were female while 51.2% were male while symptoms of depression were experienced among 57.1% of the female students compared to 42.9% among the male students. Alcohol and drug abuse were also found to affect 48.6% of the female students and 51.4% of the male students. These results have been illustrated in table 2.

Table 2: Externalized Problem behaviors among University Students

Externalized behavior problem	N=		Male		Female	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Physical aggression	44	26.1	27	62.3	17	37.7
Risky sexual practices	42	24.8	17	40.9	25	59.1
Destruction of property.	48	28.2	26	51.2	22	48.8
Expression of symptoms of Depression	21	12.2	9	42.9	12	57.1
Alcohol and drug abuse	15	8.7	8	51.4	7	48.6
Total	170	100				

IV. CONCLUSION

The major internalized problem behaviors exhibited by university students include social withdrawal, feelings of loneliness, feeling of being unloved and sadness, nervousness and irritability and fearfulness. Social withdrawal is more

prevalent among male students compared to female students while feeling of loneliness was more common among female students compared to male students. There is a near gender balance in feeling of nervousness and irritability while more female students feel more fearful compared to male students.

The major externalized problem behaviors among university students include physical aggression, risky sexual behaviors, destruction of property, expression of symptoms of depression an alcohol and drug abuse. Physical aggression in was found to be higher among male students while risky sexual practices was higher among female students. Male students were found to be more pre-disposed to destruction of property compares to female students while female students were to be more susceptible to depression. Alcoholism and drug abuse were also common among male students.

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