



Peer-Influence and Risky Sexual Behaviors among School Going Adolescent Refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali Refugee Settlements in Western Uganda

Namaganda Zaharah^{1*}, Mugenyi Edison², Deborah Ojiambo³

¹ Department of Counselling and Higher Education, Ohio University, USA

² College of Education, Kampala International University-Kampala, Uganda

³ School of Psychology, Makerere University-Kampala, Uganda

* Corresponding Author: **Namaganda Zaharah**

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behaviours among school-going adolescent refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali refugee settlements in Western Uganda. A total of 136 students (48 males and 88 females) from Senior One to Senior Four were selected using a simple random sampling technique from two secondary schools within the settlements. A correlational research design was employed, and data were collected using structured questionnaires. Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behaviours ($r = .243$, $p < 0.05$). The findings suggest that increased peer influence is associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in risky sexual practices, such as early sexual debut, unprotected sex, and multiple sexual partnerships. The study highlights the critical role of peer dynamics in shaping adolescent behaviour in refugee contexts, where family structures and support systems may be disrupted. These results point to the need for targeted interventions focusing on peer education, life skills training, and family involvement to reduce the impact of negative peer influence on adolescent sexual health.

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Keywords: Peer-Influence, Risky Sexual Behaviors, Adolescents, Refugees, Settlements

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by increased vulnerability to social pressures and experimentation with various behaviours, including those that pose health risks. For adolescents living in refugee settlements, this vulnerability is often heightened by experiences of displacement, disrupted family structures, and limited access to education and psychosocial support (UNHCR, 2020). Among these challenges, peer influence has emerged as a significant factor shaping adolescent behavior, particularly with regard to risky sexual practices. Peer relationships play a central role in adolescent socialization and identity formation. Research suggests that adolescents are highly susceptible to the influence of peers, often engaging in behaviors to gain acceptance or conform to group norms (Carter, McGee, Taylor, & Williams, 2007)^[4]. In refugee contexts, this dynamic is intensified by the shared experiences of trauma, instability, and limited adult supervision. Peer groups may thus become key reference points, influencing decisions around sexual behavior (Abbott & Dalla, 2008)^[1]. In Uganda, which hosts over 1.5 million refugees of whom over 345,000 are adolescents (UNHCR, 2020) evidence shows a growing concern regarding risky sexual behaviors among school-going adolescent refugees. These behaviors include unprotected sex, early sexual debut, multiple sexual partners, and transactional sex, often carried out under the pressure or encouragement of peers (Pelzer, 2010). For instance, Robert and Kristin (2004)^[27] found that a significant proportion of Rwandan, Burundian, and Congolese adolescent refugees in Ugandan camps routinely exchanged sex for basic necessities such as food, shelter, and protection. The refugee

settlements of Kyaka II and Kyangwali in Western Uganda are home to thousands of school-going adolescents who face socio-economic hardships and psychosocial stressors. These environments, while offering education opportunities, also expose adolescents to peer groups that may promote engagement in risky sexual behaviors as a coping mechanism or form of social bonding (Birkenshaw, 2017). Without adequate guidance and intervention, these behaviors increase the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unplanned pregnancies, and other long-term consequences (CDC, 2016). Despite the growing population of adolescent refugees in Uganda, there is limited empirical research on how peer influence shapes their sexual behavior. This study therefore seeks to examine the relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behaviors among school-going adolescent refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali refugee settlements. By focusing on peer dynamics within this vulnerable population, the study aims to generate insights that can inform targeted interventions and policies aimed at promoting sexual health and well-being in refugee contexts.

2. Literature Review

Carol, Zachary, Shari and Cohen (2015) found out that peer influence has a lot of negative influence on migrant adolescents than the positives. Olugbenga, Adebimpe and Abodurin (2009) noted that migration alters existing sexual partnerships, and provide mobile individuals an opportunity to acquire new partners as they move and sleep in groups (Islam & Gagnon, 2016)^[24]. Huang *et al.* (2015)^[23] asserted that migrants are physically separated from their usual social norms and networks so that they may experience social isolation while others might feel emotionally distanced from their partners at home. This makes adolescent refugees more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors than non-migrants. Halpern, Kropp, and Boyer (2014) asserted that migrant adolescents who engage in sexual experimentation are at increased risk for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDs, pregnancy, and abortions. Additionally, teenage mothers suffer a lot of complications during delivery which in most cases result in high morbidity and mortality for both mother and infants (Cherie & Berhane, 2012)^[5].

Adolescence is a major transitional stage during which a progressive disengagement from the family is combined with the desire to test one's independence, partly through risky conduct which often takes the form of risky sexual behavior (Crone & Dahl, 2012)^[15]. Peers play a significant role in influencing adolescent risky behaviors (Crosnoe & McNeely, 2008; Gardner & Steinberg, 2005)^[16]. Peer influence involves peers explicitly influencing the attitudes or behaviors of others through overt methods (e.g., coercion, bullying, teasing or explicit suggestion) (Brown *et al.*, 2008). As young people enter adolescence, one of their primary tasks is to gain knowledge and experience to help them navigate the complexities of human social interactions (Peper & Dahl, 2013). To facilitate this, adolescents increase the amount of time that they spend with their peers, undergo critical social transformations to become more socially engaged in frequent social comparisons with the peers around them (Crone & Dahl, 2012)^[15]. Peers during adolescence are the preferential sources of information about sexuality. Adolescents' perception of the behavior and attitudes of their peers about sexual behaviors was an important normative predictor of intention with regard to the beginning of sexual relations and engaging in sexuality including oral sex

(Sieving *et al.*, 2006).

According to Furman and Simon (2008), many adolescents spend increasingly more time with romantic partners and received majority of their social support within these relationships. The likelihood of having romantic relationship increased linearly with age and by mid adolescence, most individuals had been involved in at least one romantic relationship (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009)^[9]. These first romantic relationships serve as the primary context for young people to explore their sexual identity and gain sexual experience (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Furman, Ho, & Low, 2007). In a study done by Guttmacher Institute (2014), 56% males and 70% female adolescents report that their first experience of sexual intercourse occurred within the context of a romantic relationship. Romantic relationships offer adolescents an opportunity to engage in and reflect on the outcomes of sexual behavior as well as to clarify personal sexual desires and values (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). As young people navigate romantic and sexual relationships, they gain experience, knowledge and skills that will shape sexual behavior.

Close friends, romantic peers, and broader peer contexts have been found to influence adolescent sexual behavior and decisions to engage in sexual relationships (Ali & Dwyer, 2011). Potard *et al.* (2008) conducted a study and found out that 42% of most of the non-sexually active youth reported feeling pressure from romantic partners or platonic peers to become sexually active. Generally, having sexually active platonic peers was found to lead to more positive attitudes towards sexual activity, earlier sexual debut, increased sexual activity and an increased number of sexual partners (Ali & Dwyer, 2011; Furman *et al.*, 2007). Peer pressure appears to mediate the relationship between risky sexual behavior and individual differences (e.g. self-regulation and sensation seeking) (Crockett *et al.*, 2006)^[14]. Negative peer pressure in early adolescence, regardless of whether the pressure was related to sexual behavior, predicted an increase in adolescent sexual behavior across genders (Crockett *et al.*, 2006)^[14].

Mazengai and Worku, (2009) found out that peer norms influence sexual initiation through subsequent sexual behaviors such as, early sexual initiation, multiple partners' sexual relationships, low use of condom, and sex in exchange for money. According to Enrich *et al.* (2006), adolescents who perceive their friends engaged in sexual practices were more likely to adopt those same behaviors. The adolescents' perception that their peers were sexually active or have liberal sexual attitudes appeared to be a predictor of the commencement of sexual activity. That led to a six times greater probability of having sexual experience (Hanish *et al.*, 2005). Peers had an influence on tobacco, alcohol and drug consumption as well as on aggressive conduct, delinquency and vandalism (Sullivan *et al.*, 2012). That was true for the influence of peers on sexuality, notably sexual norms. Peers during adolescence were the preferential sources of information about sexuality (Cherie & Berhane, 2012)^[5]. Adolescents' perception of their peers about sexual behaviors was an important normative predictor of intention with regard to the beginning of sexual relations and engaging in sexuality.

Telzer, Fuligni, Lieberman, Miernicki, & Galván (2014) conducted a study and found out that, adolescents were in the process of developing their own identities and establishing complex social network shifts from the family to the social environments. This broad environmental scope targets

variables such as peers, neighborhoods, and school conditions. During adolescence, peers become a crucial source of modeling, reinforcement, and support concerning their own behavior, value and beliefs system (Future of Sex Education Initiative, 2012). Therefore, peers' behaviors and attitudes were related to adolescent sexual risk behavior especially those adolescents whose peers were sexually active were more likely to be sexually active themselves (Crosnoe & McNeely, 2008) [16]. Moreover, signs of sexual risky behaviors (SRB) among adolescents' peer groups (e.g. early pregnancy, inconsistent condom use, multiple partners) were related to increased adolescent sexual risk (Hand & Furman, 2009).

According to Braun-Courville and Rojas (2009), sexual development of the youth has increased by 22.9% in refugee societies. This is due to the increased access to various media by the youth leading to higher consumption of television programs and information. Smith (2009) stated that one area of life in which the decline of traditional values is obvious is in the area of sexuality through acceptance of premarital sex in loving relationships with their peers. Jones and Espey (2008) asserted that the trend is gradually changing and the incidence of student-adolescents' or youths' engaging in sexual relationships with their peers is high and may constitute to problems including social, health and academic. Students' sexual activity has resulted into increased cases of unplanned pregnancies, poor academic performance, and eventually school dropouts in refugee settings (Miyakado, 2013).

Chick and Reyna (2012) found out that adolescence is the time of greatest risk taking across the lifespan. While understanding or even over-estimating the likelihood that an action will result in harm, adolescents may place higher value on the benefits that might come from taking a particular risk (Arisukwu, 2013). Adolescents are more responsive to the rewards of risk (such as peer approval) and may be less sensitive to feeling the ill effects of substance use (such as hangovers) yet they are still developing the capacities for judgment and self-control (IOM & NRC, 2011).

According to Ogungbamila (2013), cohabitation among adolescents of opposite sex is a predisposing factor to the initiation of sexual activities. Cohabitation results in two independent people almost like room-mates, who are sexually involved, instead of being committed to one another for the rest of their lives (Rena, 2013). Cohabiting students will often engage in unprotected sex which could result to sexually transmitted infections and the much-dreaded HIV/AIDS diseases (Ogunsola, 2011). Arisukwu (2013) noted that cohabitation has serious health effects on the female students who may indulge in the use of oral contraceptive in order to avoid unwanted pregnancy which may truncate their educational aspirations. Should pregnancy occur, such female students are more likely to seek abortion as an alternative (Arisukwu, 2013). This has serious health challenges for such students who may visit quack doctors and medical practitioners without adequate experiences and qualifications.

According to Hardcastle (2012), peer pressure is the influence on an individual who gets encouraged to follow others by changing their attitudes, values or behavior to conform with those of the influencing group or individual either positively or negatively. A peer could be any one you look up to in behavior or someone who you would think is equal to your age or ability (Hardcastle, 2012). On the other

hand, the term pressure implies the process that influence people to do something that they might not otherwise choose to do (Muratore, 2008). Wang, Chunling and Yujie (2012) found out that adolescent influence begins at an early age and increases through the teenage years. Kellie (2013) noted that it is natural, healthy and important for adolescent to have and rely on friends as they grow and mature due to the fact that their communication patterns are initially affected by their experiences within the family of origin. However, upon reaching adolescence and young adulthood, peers have increasing influence on their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Wang, Chunling & Yujie, 2012). Similarly, as adolescents develop greater autonomy from their family of origin, peer influence becomes even more important. Powell and Segrin (2009) asserted that adolescents are particularly susceptible to influence from their friends because of the considerable attitudinal and behavioral similarity between them and their friends.

According to Halpern, Kropp and Boyer (2014), teens and young adults can be seen doing things to be accepted by their peers. Peer pressure is commonly associated with episodes of adolescent risk taking (such as delinquency, drug abuse, sexual behaviors) because these behaviors commonly occur in the company of peers (Hollander, 2010). It can also have positive effects when youth are pressured by the peers toward positive behavior such as volunteering for charity or excelling in academics (Kellie, 2013). However, peers can also have a negative influence when they encourage each other to skip classes, steal, cheat, use of, drugs or alcohol, or become involve in other risky sexual behaviours (Mugenyi *et al.*, 2023) [25]. The majority of adolescents with substance abuse problems are influenced in various ways to make decisions such as having a boyfriend or girlfriend, loitering in the streets, watching films, and attending parties during school hours (Prinstein, Meade, & Cohen, 2013). Additionally, some youths resort to petty theft alternatives such as tapping, which may eventually escalate into armed robbery (Arief, 2011).

Sieving, Eisenberg, and Pettingell (2011) indicated that peer pressure was observed as a primary contextual factor contributing to adolescent's tendency to make risky decisions. According to Steinberg and Monahan (2007), adolescents gradually discover that others can share their feelings or attitudes or have quite different ones. The perspectives of others will affect how they feel about their own families forming their own family view and of other cultures (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). Therefore, when confronted with other perspectives, they often need to rethink their own viewpoints making it difficult for them to adjust to the idea that other families can function radically differently from their own yet hold many of the same attitudes and beliefs that can be equally nurturing and secure. The peer group serves as a barometer for children examining themselves and their feelings about self and family (Lagana, 2009).

3. Materials and Methods

A correlation study design was used to examine the relationship between peer influence, substance use and risky sexual behaviours. It was chosen based on its strength in determining the existence of a relationship between two or more variables (Creswell, 2013) which was the case with this study. The study also employed a quantitative method where data was collected and managed numerically (Allen, *et al.*

2012)^[3]. The study population comprised of S.1 to S.4 students from two secondary schools in two refugee settlements in Western Uganda that is; Bujubuli secondary school in Kyaka II Kyegegwa district and Kyangwali secondary school in Kyangwali refugee settlement in Kikuube district. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula that calculates a representative sample, from a population of 210, a sample size of 136 respondents was obtained and used in the study. Using a simple random sampling technique, a sample of 34 respondents from each class was selected. The demographic questionnaire included name of the school, class of study, age, sex and religion of the participant (see Appendix B). Peer Pressure Inventory (Clasen & Brown, 1985). A Peer Pressure Inventory (Clasen & Brown, (1985) was used to measure adolescents' peer influence. The scale has 22 items and measured on a five-point scale from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. In Africa, the tool was used among the school going adolescents and the reliability was found to be 0.837 (Palani& Mani, 2016). The tool was pretested in Kampala

with a sample 20 school going adolescent urban refugees and the reliability was found to be 0.704 (refer to results in table 1). Risky sexual behaviors were measured using the Adolescent Sexual Activity Index (ASAI), to measure the interpersonal heterosexual behavior among adolescents (Baru *et al.*, 2020) (see Appendix E). The survey contains 13 items concerning their current and past sexual practices. It contains questions reflecting risky sexual behaviors that were measured using a likert scale method ranging from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. In Ethiopia, the tool was used among young immigrants and the internal reliability measured by Cronbach's alpha was 0.746(Ikeola & Ararso, 2019). The tool was also pretested with a sample of 20 urban school going adolescent refugees in Kampala and the reliability was found at 0.730 (refer to results in table 1). To ensure reliability and validity; the instruments were pretested to a sample of 20 high school going refugee students in Kampala. After the pretest, data was analyzed using SPSS and a reliability test was ran to obtain cronbach's alpha coefficients and the results are as given below;

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for the Scales of the Study Variables

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Peer influence	.704	22
Risky sexual behaviours	.730	13

Table 1 manifests a high reliability of items and all the scales are good measures of the variables based on recommendations by (Cho & Kim, 2015) who indicated that having a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 to 0.80 and above indicates good internal consistency reliability.

Data was entered into the Statistical Packages for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 22 (IBM, 2015). Then the data was descriptively analyzed and summarized into frequencies and percentages to determine the socio-demographic features of the participants. The hypothesis stated that, there is a significant relationship between peer influence and risky

sexual behaviors among school going adolescent refugees. This was tested using Pearson correlation coefficient analysis.

4. Results and findings

Demographic Information

Respondents were asked about their demographic information and this included their gender, age, class, sex, religion and name of school. Below are the results of their responses presented in frequencies and percentage.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic information

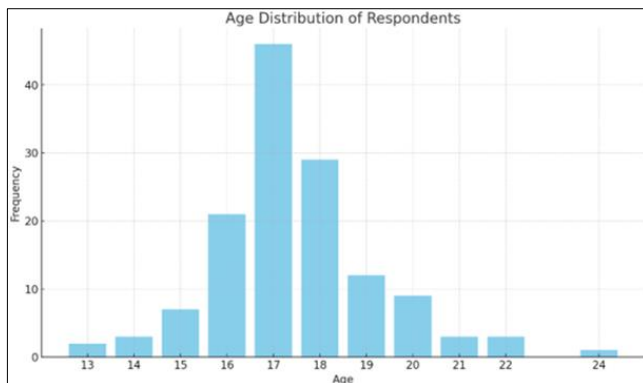
	Item	Frequency (n=136)	Percentage (%)
1.	Age of respondents	13	2
		14	2
		15	5
		16	15
		17	34
		18	21
		19	9
		20	7
		21	2
		22	2
	Total	136	100
2.	Class of respondents	S.1	9
		S.2	11
		S.3	15
		S.4	65
	Total	136	100.0
3.	Sex of respondents	Males	35.8
		Females	64.2
	Total	136	100.0
4.	School of the respondents	Kyangwali secondary school	28.9
		Bujubuli secondary school	71.1
	Total	136	100.0
5.	Religion of respondents	Catholic	30.9
		Protestant	32.4

		Moslem	27	19.9
		Others	23	16.9
	Total		136	100.0

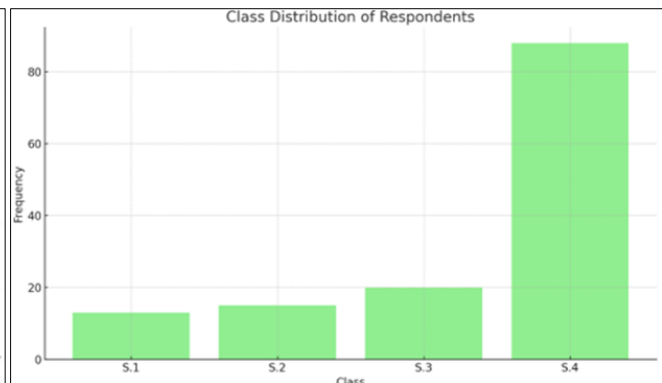
Field data

Majority of the participants in the study were females and these made up 64.7% (88/136) while the male respondents made 35.3% (48/136). Results from table 2 also indicate that majority of the respondents 34% were aged 17 years from senior four represented by 65% of the sample. It was still

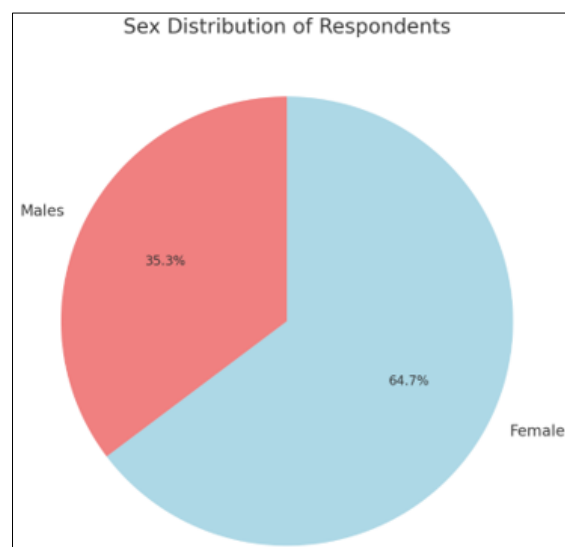
observed that majority of the respondents were from Bujubuli secondary school with 71.1% and 28.9% were from Kyangwali secondary school. Results also showed that majority of the respondents were Protestants represented with 32.4% of the sample.



Graph 1: Age distribution of respondents



Graph 2: Class distribution of respondents



Graph 3: Sex distribution of respondents

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Analysis for Peer influence and Risky Sexual Behaviors

		1	2
1. Peer Influence	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	105	
2. Risky Sexual Behaviors	Pearson Correlation	.243*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	
	N	97	97

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Indicates that peer influence and risky sexual behaviors are significantly related ($r = .243$, $p > 0.05$). The alternative hypothesis that there is a positive significant relationship is retained and it is concluded that there is a positive significant relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behavior among school going adolescent refugees. This implies that when adolescents' refugees peer influence is high, it causes them to engage in risky sexual behaviors.

5. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Objective three sought to examine the relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behaviors among the school going adolescent refugees. It was hypothesized that there was a significant correlation between peer influence and risky sexual behaviors among the school going adolescent refugees. Following data analysis, the results revealed that there was a significant relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behaviors. This means that as peer influence

increases, risky sexual behaviors also increase. Adolescents are susceptible to influence from their friends because of the considerable attitudinal and behavioral similarity between them and their friends. The findings of the study are in line with the findings of Carol, Zachary, Shari and Cohen (2015) who found out that peer influence has a lot of negative influence on migrant adolescents than the positives. Olugbenga, Adebimpe and Abodurin (2009) also noted that migration alters existing sexual partnerships, and provide mobile individuals an opportunity to acquire new partners as they move and sleep in groups (Islam & Gagnon, 2016) ^[24]. Huang *et al.* (2015) ^[23] also asserted that migrants are physically separated from their usual social norms and networks so that they may experience social isolation while others might feel emotionally distanced from their partners at home. This makes adolescent refugees more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors than non-migrants. Halpern, Kropp, and Boyer (2014) added that migrant adolescents who engage in sexual experimentation are at increased risk for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDs, pregnancy, and abortions. Similarly, teenage mothers suffer a lot of complications during delivery which in most cases result in high morbidity and mortality for both mothers and infants (Amsale & Yemane, 2012). The findings of the study that there was a significant relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behaviors are in line with the findings of Hardcastle (2012) who reported about peer pressure as the influence on an individual who gets encouraged to follow others by changing their attitudes, values or behavior to conform with those of the influencing group or individual either positively or negatively. Kellie (2013) found out that it is natural, healthy and important for school going adolescents to have and rely on friends as they grow and mature due to the fact that their communication patterns are initially affected by the disruption of their families of origin during migration. However, upon reaching adolescence and young adulthood, peers have increasing influence on their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Wang, Chunling, & Yujie, 2012). As adolescents develop greater autonomy from their family of origin, peer influence becomes even more important due to the considerable attitudinal and behavioral similarity between them and their friends, thus involvement in the same risky sexual behaviors (Wang, Chunling & Yujie, 2012). Halpern, Kropp and Boyer (2014) found out that some unaccompanied teens and young adults who separated from their families during migration can be seen doing things in order to be accepted by their peers and get a sense of belonging which is in line with the study findings. Peer pressure is commonly associated with episodes of adolescent risk taking (such as delinquency, substance use, sexual behaviors) because these behaviors commonly occur in the company of peers (Hollander, 2010). It can also have positive effects when youth are pressured by the peers towards positive behavior such as volunteering for charity or excelling in academics (Kellie, 2013). However, peers can also have a negative influence when they encourage each other to skip classes, steal, cheat, use of, drugs or alcohol, or become involved in other risky sexual behaviors. Prinstein, Meade and Cohen (2013) also found out that the majority of adolescents with substance use problems are influenced in various ways to make decisions to have a boyfriend /girlfriend, indulge into loitering about in the streets, watching films and attending parties during school hours, tapping as alternative to stealing which may eventually

graduate into armed robbery (Arief, 2011). However, the study findings are not consistent with those of Chick and Reyna (2012) who noted that adolescence is the time of greatest risk taking across the lifespan. Adolescents place higher value on the benefits that might come from taking a particular risk while understanding or even over-estimating the likelihood that an action will result in harm (Arisukwu, 2013). School going adolescent refugees are more responsive to the rewards of a risk and may be less sensitive to feeling the ill effects of substance use (such as hangovers) yet they are still developing the capacities for judgment and self-control (IOM & NRC, 2011). Therefore, adolescents are driven to engage in risky sexual behaviors in favor of getting positive rewards without thinking of the likely consequences.

6. Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behaviors among school-going adolescent refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali refugee settlements in Western Uganda. The findings revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between peer influence and risky sexual behaviors, indicating that as peer influence increases, so does the likelihood of adolescents engaging in such behaviors. The majority of respondents were female, aged 17, and in Senior Four, with most attending Bujubuli Secondary School. The results underscore the pivotal role peers play in shaping adolescents' decisions regarding sexual behavior, particularly in refugee contexts where family structures and traditional support systems are often disrupted. These findings are consistent with existing literature that highlights how social dislocation, emotional isolation, and the desire for peer acceptance make adolescent refugees more susceptible to risky behaviors. Additionally, Mwenyango and Palattiyil (2019) indicated that adolescent refugees face added challenges due to displacement, stigma and discrimination, disruption of family and social structures, gender imbalances between men and women, violence and mental health challenges, which expose them to peer groups from which they learn to engage in risky activities such as substance use. For example, some unaccompanied adolescents and those separated from their families during transition start experimenting with substances such as alcohol, tobacco to get a sense of belonging from their peers (UNHCR, 2019). The study concludes that peer influence is a significant factor in the sexual behavior patterns of adolescent refugees and must be acknowledged in understanding the broader challenges they face.

7. Recommendations`

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

The Ministry of Education and Sports, in collaboration with humanitarian organizations, should conduct sensitization campaigns in secondary schools located in refugee settlements. These campaigns should focus on the dangers of peer pressure and its strong association with risky sexual behaviors among adolescents. Programs should promote the development of protective factors within family, school, and community environments.

Adolescent refugees should be provided with age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education that emphasizes the consequences of risky sexual behaviors and the influence of peer groups. Empowering adolescents with knowledge will help reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS,

early pregnancies, and other sexual health risks.

Parents and guardians should be supported to engage more actively in their children's lives, especially during adolescence when peer influence becomes more dominant. Parenting programs should promote open communication, emotional support, and guidance to counteract the negative impact of peer pressure on behavior.

Given the significant relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behaviors established in this study, there is a need for standardized screening and assessment tools in schools to identify adolescents who may be at high risk. This will allow for timely and targeted interventions.

Stakeholders including parents, teachers, school administrators, and policymakers should collaborate to design and implement prevention programs aimed at promoting healthy peer relationships. Social skills training, life skills development, and psychosocial support can help adolescents make informed decisions and resist negative peer pressure.

Health and education sectors should conduct regular school-based assessments of adolescent behavior in refugee settings to monitor trends and inform future policies and interventions.

8. Further Research

Future researchers should explore the underlying causes and long-term effects of peer influence on adolescent behaviour, particularly in refugee contexts where youth face unique social and psychological challenges.

There is a need to study the role of parenting styles and parent-child relationships in moderating the effects of peer influence on adolescent refugees. Understanding these dynamics can inform more effective family-based interventions.

Broader studies should be conducted across multiple refugee settlements and among different age groups to improve the generalizability of findings and develop a national picture of peer-related risks among adolescent refugees.

9. Limitation

This study was geographically limited to Kyaka II and Kyangwali refugee settlements in Western Uganda and focused specifically on school-going adolescent refugees. As such, the findings may not fully represent adolescents who are out of school or those residing in other refugee settlements across the country.

10. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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12. About the Author(s)

1. Namaganda Zaharah, - PhD scholar, Ohio University-USA
2. Mugenyi Edison - Kampala International University-Uganda

3. Deborah Ojiambo - School of Psychology, Makerere University-Kampala Uganda

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