THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEER PRESSURE AND PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CASE OF KIBABII UNIVERSITY IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The provision of education and training to all Kenyans is fundamental to the success of the Government's overall development strategy. A successful adjustment of students to University environment enables them to complete their studies on time. However, students' failure to adjust to the University environment is still a persistent problem facing education in Kenya. Fear of University students' problem behavior is a constant concern for millions of people all over the world and a big threat to the Kenyan society. University students' involvement in problem behavior has been of concern to parents, lecturers, psychologists and policy makers. A review of studies has established that problem behaviors are occurring frequently in secondary schools and it spills over to the higher institutions of learning globally and in Kenya. The underlying factors that influence students' problem behaviors at the University have not received adequate research. While there have been some studies on deviant behaviors in Kenya's education system, the emphasis has been mainly on problem behavior in secondary schools and not comprehensive coverage of higher education. A comprehensive study of this magnitude, especially on the role of peer pressure therefore became necessary in order to fill the gaps that may have occurred by the emphasis of previous studies being restricted to secondary school's level. Although previous studies have been conducted to understand how these factors influence University students' behavior, little has been done to examine the relationship between peers and problem behaviors among University students. This study therefore sought to fill this gap.

Background

The successful formation and navigation of interpersonal relationships with peers is a process central to adolescent development in all cultures. In European American cultural contexts, an ever increasing amount of each day is spent in the company of peers from 10% as early as two years of age to 40% between the ages of seven and twelve (Donelly, 2010). The credibility, authority, power and influence of peers are greater during adolescence than at any other time in life. This trend continues up to the time in late adolescence when students join Universities and Colleges (Weerman, 2009). According to Chauhan (2010), when children move out of the family to school and the community at large, they begin to form attachments and friendships emerge through play. The author indicates that children begin to think like their friends and begin to see that there are values, and rules besides those set by their parents. Chauhan (2010) found that the peer group has significant effect on the teenager's social development because it sets 'rituals' for acceptable behaviour. Even in late adolescence, adolescents are likely to do the same as their closest friends and will emulate the behaviour or dress of their idols through observation and imitation.

The concept peer pressure refers to the influence exerted by a peer group in encouraging a person to change his or her attitudes, values or behaviour in order to conform to group norms (Weerman, 2009) This occurs when individuals choose to adopt the attitude or behaviours of others because of real or imagined pressure (Meldrum, 2010). According to Chimheng (2010) peer pressure can harm the student learners' sense of reality and logical thinking. During this conformity, one's own moral standards are violated and the peer exerts an important influence in shaping one's behaviour either positively or negatively (Chimhenga, 2010). The attachment to the peer group often overpowers the adolescent learner's individual degree of self-reliance and independence (Bernt, 2011). Shuttle Worth (2011) noted that the Asch experiment was designed to test how peer pressure would influence the judgment and individuality of test subject to conform to the majority. It was found that people frequently followed the majority judgment, even when the majority was wrong. It further noted that people often accept to be influenced just for the desire to achieve a sense of security within a group that is of similar age, culture, religion or educational status. Any unwillingness to be influenced carries with it the risk of social rejection and this is what young people fear most (Shuttle Worth, 2011).

Considerable evidence supports the hypothesis that peer relationships influence the growth of problem behaviour in youths. Developmental research consistently documents the high levels of covariance between peer and youth deviance, even controlling for selection effects (Thorn, Berry & Krohn, 2011). The authors contend that it is becoming clear that one of the major ways that deviant youths become even more deviant is through unrestricted interaction with deviant peers. They go on to say that adolescents sometimes join groups that readily accept them; even if the group is involved in illegal or negative activities. For them, the need for affiliation or closeness is often greater than the need to 'do the right thing'. When adolescents are in a group, if one member of a group engages in problem behaviour, a high probability exists that other members will do the same. During late adolescence, individuals forge their identities and their behaviour patterns through a process of socialization and acceptance by peers.

As College students develop greater autonomy from their family of origin, becomes even more important. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to influence from their friends because of the considerable attitudinal and behavioural similarity between them and their friends (Powell& Segrin, 2009). Peer pressure is commonly associated with episodes of adolescent risk taking behaviour (such as deliquency, drug abuse and sexual behaviours) because these behaviours commonly occur in the company of peers. It can also have positive effects when youths are pressurized by the peers towards positive behaviour such as excelling in academic work (Kellie, 2013). However peers can also have a negative influence when they encourage their friends to engage in risky behaviours like sex, alcohol and drug intake. Majority of adolescents with substance abuse problems began using drug or alcohol as a result of peer pressure. Peers have an influence on tobacco, alcohol and drug consumption, as well as aggressive conduct, delinquency and vandalism.

According to the study by Rolison and Scherman (2006), it is indicated that peers influence both the long and short term risky behaviour of late adolescents. This is also true for the influence of peers on sexuality, notably sex norms. Peers are during adolescence the preferential sources of information about sexuality. The perception of their peers on the subject of sexual behaviours is an important normative predictor of intention with regard to the beginning of sexual relations and engaging in sexuality (26, 27) including oral sex (28). However, peers can also have a positive influence by enticing youths to apply contraceptive measures and to use condoms for protection against STI's. Peer pressure to engage in adult like activities can encourage adolescents to engage in var-

ious levels of sexual experimentation (Ohigbenga, Adebimpe & Abodurin, 2009). Adolescents who engage in sexual experimentation are at increased risk for STI's, pregnancy & abortion. Peer pressure can make University students to be involved in risky sexual behaviour like gang rape and so on.

In a study carried out by Awoke, Mekonnen, & Fantahun in Ethiopia (2007), it was found that peer pressure has a lot of influence on sexual practices among University students. The students are exposed to a variety of sexual behaviours such as early sexual initiation, multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex, having sexual intercourse with the same sex, having sex with older partners such as commercial sex workers etc. The increased number of students in the University, the lack of facilities for sexual and reproductive health services might worsen risky sexual behaviours (Alemrewn & Azage, 2013, Dingeta, Imaledo, 2012). In another study conducted among Mizan- Tepi University regular students in South West Ethiopia (Andualem, Kassa, Lenda (2015) it was revealed that peer pressure exerted influence on the way students conducted their sexual activities. The results showed that 93% had good knowledge towards risky sexual behaviour and condom utilization. About 59.8% and 96.4% of the participants know about ways of transmission of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS respectively. Among the study participants, 41.9% ever had sexual intercourse, of those 60.5% ever had used condom. Most (66%) started sexual intercourse before joining the University, 27% had sexual intercourse with commercial sex workers and 19 with casual partners. They concluded that risky sexual behaviour such as having multiple sexual partners and unsafe sexual practice with non-regular partners exists.

In a study conducted by Mutungi in Kenya (2007) a sample of 1917 Moi University students was used. The results revealed that 71% of males and 47.6% of females reported having had sex. Of these 76% reported ever using a condom: Only 18% of males and 14% of females reported using a condom every time they had sex in the last month, 89% of students reported thinking they were at risk for HIV/AIDS, but only 28% of subjects had been tested for HIV. The study also indicated that of those who said they had had sex, had been introduced to it by their friends. According to the researchers, sexual activity on campus is high and many students consider themselves at risk. Conversely, consistent condom use and rates of voluntary counseling and testing are low.

Peer relations are consistently linked to alcohol use in College students. According to social learning theory, quality of peer relationships may influence personal alcohol use. The initiation (Lo & Globetti, 1993) or increase (Baer, Kivlhan, & Marlatt, 1995; Leibsohoan, 1994) of alcohol use often occurs during the College years. Individuals entering College show marked increases in alcohol and drug use, compared to those that live at home or get jobs following graduation from high school (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 2000). Around the world, alcohol use by College students is consistently a source of concern. Although a variety of factors influence College student drinking, peer influence has emerged as one of the most powerful predictors of the initiation (Lo & Globetti, 1993) and maintainance (Baer, 1995 & Wood, 2001) of drinking in the College setting.

Three aspects of the College environment enhance the influence of peers on alcohol use. First, surrounded by peers and often living away from home. College students experience freedom from parental control which is often demonstrated by using alcohol in College (Roche, Watt, (1999) & Maggs, (1997). Secondly, adjustment to College life is a major developmental transition. In this new environment students will establish, test and refine their new psychological identity (Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002). Peer friendships are vital in this process, as they provide first year students with role models and socialization opportunities. As a result, the alcohol- related attitudes and behaviours of peers are consistently related to personal attitudes and behaviours, especially during the first year in the College environment (Karam, 2004). Thirdly, alcohol is part of the College culture, present at most social functions and part of many peer interactions (Gill, 2002, Kypri, 2002, Thombs, 1999 & Webb, 1996). Many students view College as a place to drink excessively before assuming the responsibilities of adulthood (Roche, Watt, 1999, Arnett, 2000). A perception supported by the easy access to alcohol on campus (Maggs, 1997). In addition, the majority of College of College peers drink more and are more approving of alcohol use than are the students, parents and heavy drinking peaks during the College years (Bartholow, Sher, Krull, 2003). Thus, the students' exposure to alcohol and peer influence in College has been called 'Windows of vulnerability' (Lau, Quadrel, Hartman, 2004)

Influence of peers in the University has certain aspects that support it. The College is an ideal environment in which to study peer influence on alcohol use. First there is a pronounced shift in influence from parents to peers during College. Both peers and family influence alcohol use over the child's course of development (Whie, Bata & Johnson, 1991). As adolescents get older, they spend less time with their parents and more time with friends (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984), resisting the attempts of parents to control the selection and association of these friends (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Peers become increasingly important and are relatively independent of parental oversight or control (Brown, Dolcini & Leventhal, 1997). This process intensifies in College. Matriculating students seek to establish a peer network that can be a source of support and intimacy (Paul & Kelleher, 1995) and assist the transition to College by providing role models and social opportunities (Hays &Oxley, 1986). Using alcohol frequently facilitates the adoption of a new College student identity as well as serving as markers of freedom from parental control (Maggs, 1997). Secondly, the prevalence of alcohol- based social opportunities on campus contributes to the potency of peer influence on individual attitudes and behaviours. Alcohol is a prominent part of the College culture present at most social functions and part of many peer interac-

tions (Thombs, 1999)

Most students begin drinking alcohol by the time they arrive at College (Johnston et al., 2000) and many view College as a place to drink excessively in a time limited fashion, before assuming the responsibilities of adulthood. Because peers are the most salient social referents in the College environment (Perkins, 202), they are potent influence on alcohol use. Most new acquaintances at College will be drinkers: recent research indicating that four out of five College students drink (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000). In addition, College peers tend to be more approving of alcohol use (Johnson, 1989). Peers therefore play a considerable role in the development and maintenance of alcohol use in College students. To develop a peer network on campus, students immerse themselves in the social environment (Martin & Hoffmen, 1993).

The prevalence of alcohol use on campus makes it likely that students will encounter peer-drinking levels and alcohol related attitudes unlike anything encountered before (Schulenberg, Bacma, O'Mally, & Johnson, 2001). Exposure to such drinking often leads to increased alcohol use. Students residing in places where 'heavy drinking is approved and where alcoholic beverages and the places to consume them are readily available will drink relatively heavy on the average''. (Schall, Kemeny, & Maltzman, 1992). Thus alcohol related attitudes and behaviours of peers are consistently related to personal attitudes and behaviours (Brennan, Walfish, &AuBuchon, 1986. A recent European study on the characteristics of binge drinkers concluded that males were more likely to binge drink and that peer pressure was one of the strongest influencing factors (Kuntsche et al., 2004). Research has identified social context of drinking and peer influence as a risk factor for problematic student drinking (Ham and Hope, 2003). It can be summed by saying that there is ample evidence that demonstrates that interpersonal processes strongly influence College students' drinking. The peer environment contributes to high risk alcohol use by way of direct influences, modeling and perceived norms.

Research findings by Whitmore (2011) in the University of Virginia indicated that peer relations somewhat predicted violent behaviour and vandalism including drug use, anti- social behaviour, violent offences and early high risk sexual behaviour. Deviant behaviour affiliation is a stronger predictor of delinquent behaviour than variables such as family, school and community characteristics. Students in their late adolescence who who are exposed to and associate with anti- social peers learn to participate in anti- social behaviour through the process of vicarious learning and principles of reinforcement . Whitmore's research findings support the findings of Bandura (1973) which stated that adolescents are likely to do the same as their closest friends and will emulate the behaviour of their ' idol' through observation and imitation. According to Bandura peers may illicit or may serve as role models to the others who have a predisposition to act violently. Many youths who are violent continue to be violent because their violence was rewarded by their peers as valuable. According to one's individual Vishala (2010), the misconduct of youths often occur in groups. For example in Kenya University students hold violent protests and destroy and vandalize property as a group (Kiboiy, 2014).

Okorodudu (2010) conducted a study in River State Nigeria to determine factors that are responsible for aggressive behaviour among secondary school students. His findings indicated that as youths grow, they surrender to the influence of their peers as they shed off their parental orientation and replace it with dependence on their peers. In the process friends encourage their peers to engage in undesirable activities like violence and destruction of property. The study further found that whenever incidents of violence are witnessed in College a group of youths team up to engage in criminal activities. He concluded that peer groups do not only provide positive settings but peer pressure can also lead to norms of risky behaviour and irresponsibility. These findings can be generalized to the situation in Kenya though the present study focused on first year University students as opposed to the study that was conducted in secondary schools. Early in the year 2020, University of Nairobi students protested against the killing of their peer by security guards. The protest turned violent where students burnt University structures and destroyed property worth millions of shillings. In Kenya, Muchiri (2012) investigated the relationship between parental nurturance and adolescent problem behaviours in secondary schools in selected Counties. One of his findings indicated that peer influence was a factor in students' externalizing problem behaviour in secondary schools.

All the studies mentioned focus majorly on negative peer influence on adolescents. Peer pressure as presented by empirical researchers can have positive effects on adolescents. The literature on peer influence on youths' problem behaviours gives an understanding that there is a link between exposure to peer influence and students' problem behaviour. It has been stated that peer interaction, acceptance or rejection is a central determinant of problem behaviour.

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. For example, in the recent past the University has witnessed violent protests and destruction of property including those of the community, risky sexual behaviour which has ended in many female students becoming pregnant & careless drinking by students in the villages surrounding the University. The University like any other in Kenya has depression symptoms in stu-

dents 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 target population of this study was 9,000 students in Kibabii University. The population consist of 5, 8000 male students and 4200 females 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.

Results

As already indicated, the main objective of the study was to determine the relationship between peer pressure and problem behavior among university students. Data was analyzed and results presented as follows.

Level of Peer Pressure

The study participants were required to indicate the level of peer pressure they were undergoing while at the university. The study responses were presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Peer Pressure

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Low	60	35.3
	Moderate	15	8.8
	High	95	55.9
	Total	170	100.0

Table 1 indicates that 60 (35.3%) of the students had low level of peer pressure, 15 (8.8%) respondents showed that they were experiencing moderate level of peer pressure while majority, 95 (55.9%) of the respondents agreed that indeed they were experiencing high level of peer pressure. This indicates that majority of the respondents (64.7%) of the respondents have experienced peer pressure. The implication is that peer pressure is real in the university.

Problem behavior

The study also sought to find out certain behavioral problems among the respondents within the university. The study findings are tabulated in the table 2 below.

Table 2: Problem behavior

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Carelessness	15	8.8
	Drug and substance abuse	23	13.5
	Agitation	110	64.7
	Anger and defiant behaviors	12	7.1
	Withdrawal from daily life	10	5.9
	Total	170	100.0

Table 2 shows that 15 (8.8%) of the respondents agreed to being in careless behaviors within the university, another 23 (13.5%) of the respondents confirmed that they were involved in drug and substance abuse while majority of the respondents 110 (64.7%) agreed that they are involved in agitation behaviors within the university. Also, 12 (7.1%) of the respondents agreed that have experienced anger and defiant behaviors within the university while only 10 (5.9%) of the respondents have experienced withdrawal from daily life behaviors within the university. This is an indication that behavior problems among the students is a rampant thing.

The participants' behavioral problems were measured by participants' average score on five (5) items that asked about problem behavior within the university. The item(s) response consisted of a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The results are presented in table 3 below.

Table 3: Participants behavioral problems

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Peer pressure among university students influences the nature of behaviors adopted by the students.	F	18	8	51	78	15	170
	%	10.6	4.7	30	45.9	8.8	100
Students with low self-esteem are more likely to fall for peer pressure	F	7	8	90	50	15	170
	%	4.1	4.7	52.9	29.4	8.8	100
Peer pressure leads to inflated self-esteem or overconfidence	F	7	43	6	5	109	170
	%	4.1	25.3	3.5	2.9	64.1	100
Peer pressure leads to obsessive thoughts	F	18	57	51	29	15	170
	%	10.6	33.5	30	17.1	8.8	100
Peer pressure among university students creates environment for poor judgment	F	7	32	55	61	15	170
	%	4.1	18.8	32.4	35.9	8.8	100

Table 3 indicates that 18(10.6%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 8(4.7%) disagreed, 51(30%) were neutral, majority which is 78(45.9%) agreed and lastly 15(8.8%) strongly agreed that peer pressure among university students influences the nature of behaviors adopted by the students.Another 7(4.1%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that students with low self-esteem are more likely to fall for peer pressure with only 8(4.7%) disagreeing with the statement. Majority of the respondents however were neutral about the statement with 90(52.9%) of them although 50(29.4%) agreed and 15(8.8%) strongly agreed that indeed students with low self-esteem are more likely to fall for peer pressure.

The statement on peer pressure leads to inflated self-esteem or overconfidence had 7(4.1%) of the respondents strongly disagreeing with it, 43(25.3%) disagreeing and 6(3.5%) being neutral on the statement. However, 5(2.9%) agreed and majority 109(64.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement.Also, 18(10.6%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and 57(33.5%) disagreed that peer pressure leads to obsessive thoughts with 51(30%) of the respondents returning a neutral verdict. Similarly, 29(17.1%) and 15(8.8%) of the respondents agreed and strongly disagreed respectively with the statement. Lastly, peer pressure among university students creates environment for poor judgment statement was strongly disagreed on by 7(4.1%) of the respondents while 32(18.8%) disagreed, 55(32.4%) were neutral about the statement, 61(35.9%) agreed with 15(8.8%) of the respondents strongly agreeing.

Apart from the descriptive statistics, correlation analysis results and chi square tests determining if there is a relationship between peer pressure and problem behaviors were done and results presented as follows.

Table 4: Problem behavior verses peer pressure cross tabulation

Crosstab

			Peer pressure			Total
			Low	Moderate	High	
Problem Behaviour	Disagreed	Count	11	9	7	27
		% of Total	6.5%	5.3%	4.1%	15.9%
	Modarate	Count	7	7	65	79
		% of Total	4.1%	4.1%	38.2%	46.5%
	Agreed	Count	42	7	15	64
		% of Total	24.7%	4.1%	8.8%	37.6%
Total		Count	60	23	87	170
		% of Total	35.3%	13.5%	51.2%	100.0%

From table 4, out of 27(15.9%) who disagreed, 11(6.5%) indicated low, 9(4.1%) indicated moderate and 7(4.1%) indicated high to peer pressure as a cause of behavior. Out of 79(46.5%) who were moderate, 7(4.1%) indicated low and moderate respectively and 65(38.2%) indicated high to peer pressure as a cause of behavior. Lastly out of 64(37.6%) who agreed, 42(24.7%) indicated low, 7(4.1%) indicated moderate and 15(8.8%) indicated high to peer pressure as a cause of behavior. From the data in table 4, a chi square test was carried out and the results presented in table 5.

Table 5: Chi square test of the relationship between problem behaviors and peer pressure

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	69.885[a]	4	.000

Likelihood Ratio	72.015	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.905	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	170		

a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.65.

Table 5 shows a chi-square test to establish if there is any association between peer pressure and behavior. From the table, a chi-square value of 69.885 and a p value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 indicating that there is significant association between peer pressure and problem behaviors.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Basing on the results provided, the study concluded that at the university level, peer pressure played a great role in shaping of problem behaviors. Further, it was also concluded that behavior problems among the students is a rampant thing and that there is significant association between peer pressure and problem behaviors among university students. Therefore, the study recommends that behaviorparents and the university must offer guidance to students at their early life in the university in order for them to cope with peer pressure upon admission to the university.

Acknowledgment

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