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Peer Group Influence and Self-Image among Females in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of Peer group on the self-image of females in Okirika Local Government Area of Rivers State. Findings reveal significant associations: external locus of control notably impacts self-image among families, while peer group influences notably affect self-perception among specific demographics, notably females. The socio-demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1. Among the participants 12.5% were 15-18 years of age, 34.0% were 19-22 years of age while 34.0% were 23-26 years and 19.4% are 28 years and above. The study revealed that there is a significant influence of external locus of control on self-image among families in Okirika LGA, as the correlation is significant at 0.01 Pearson chi-square = 57.566, N=144 p-value = 0.01 (p<0.05). The study also revealed that there is a significant relationship between drug abuse and risky sexual behaviors among students of Rivers State University, as the correlation is significant at 0.05 Pearson correlation = -.783, N=144 p-value = 0.033 (p<0.05). These insights underscore the complex interrelationships among socio-demographic factors and self-perception, emphasizing the necessity for tailored interventions, support networks, and educational initiatives to empower individuals in navigating external influences and fostering healthier self-perceptions and behaviours. However, the study's correlation calls for caution in drawing definitive causal conclusions, highlighting the need for further comprehensive research to deepen our understanding of these multifaceted dynamics within this community setting.

Keywords: cultural belief, education, female child, harmful traditional practises & self image,

Introduction

Women continue to encounter numerous barriers that might jeopardize their ability to pursue and complete higher education. It has been generally observed that wherever a child might find him/herself, be it a group, could influence their learning negatively or positively, as the basic human need is to acquire an affiliation to a group in the society. Hence, peer group influence may arise when the female child choose to act or think in ways that she might not ordinarily want to do, an effect that can be ascribed to experiences with family, friends and affiliates. Likewise household discriminatory practices on the girl child can draw attention due to deep-rooted cultural beliefs, values and practices.

Notably, the Okrika women are industrious even though they are subjected to multiple forms of oppression, discrimination and exploitation because of gender bias which is very common in Nigeria where the boy child holds more value than the girl child. It is believed that the male child will take the family name forward while the female child will bear another man's name after marriage. These socializing process observed for boys and girls are designed and rigorously applied to instil a feeling of superiority to the boy child whereas the girls are groomed to accept subjective and inferiority with apathy irrespective of their qualification. Wherefore, the education of the females have no value and so she has no right to property and cannot be given a chieftaincy title or speak in family gathering unless she is permitted to speak in soft tune. It is a cycle of total dependency on the male child as the females in Okrika are nurtured to be good wives, so that they will not bring bad names to the family and most of these practices stem from the European colonization which imposed its own societal norms and customs upon us as a people.

The prevalence and effect of some harmful traditional practices in Okrika have reduced the self esteem and self image of the girl child. With practices like son preference, early or forced marriage where teenage girls from the age of 14 to 17 are fed with local delicacies to make them look plumpy and very attractive in preparation to mark the transition of girlhood into womanhood by taking part in the colourful Iria (fatting room) ceremony; bad up-bring due to single parenting is another factor that can amper quality education for the girl child as they experience deficiency of funds, the female child is given freedom at early age to fend for herself using her natural gift for sexual investment; poor value for education by the parents is characterized by indifference or lack of support as the absence of a nuturing environment can impede cognitive growth, stunting a child's ability to aspire and cause low self esteem; lack of parental care as a result of expensive marriage rites can have a long time effect on the physical and mental wellbeing of the child as the father figure fails to fulfil the stipulated traditional marriage rites on the woman, he will have no attachment with the children because he has no legal right of ownership on them. Therefore the women are left to cater for the children but due to economic factor, the female child is pushed into early prostitution by sleeping with militant, oil bunkers and older men so as to meet up with family demands; all of these violates the rights of the female child and they are forced to generate passion on all sides.

Self-image can be defined as a person's perception of themselves, including their physical appearance, personality, and characteristics (Morin & Racy, 2021). It is the way in which an individual views and evaluates themselves, and it can be influenced by various factors such as culture, family, friends, and personal experiences (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Self-image is how individuals perceive themselves, and how they see themselves physically and mentally. This factor plays a crucial role in everyone's life. When it comes to the meaning of self-image for females, it holds a valuable essence about the way she see herself. A positive self-image about yourself is crucial to feeling confident and capable.

Peer group is another variable that the researcher used in this research. For women, these peer group structures are also adaptive, as there are significant and immediate benefits in having a network of supportive friendships. In the ancestral environment, a female who maintained close friendships with other females would have increased her genetic fitness by attaining kin altruism and alloparenting of her own offspring from her female allies. Reciprocity (i.e., mutually beneficial exchanges), therefore, is an important characteristic of enduring female friendships.

Statement of the problem

Vast research has investigated how people respond to negative information about the self (e.g., Brown & Dutton, 1995). Common responses to such threats include making external attributions for failure (e.g., Millimet& Gardner, 1972; Shrauger & Lund, 1975), focusing on perceived positive characteristics (e.g., Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995), engaging in risky behaviors (e.g., Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1993), and perusing compensatory consumption (e.g., Gronmo, 1988; Woodruffe, 1997). The common ground of these responses to threat consists of having short-term consequences. In the long term, however, these strategies are not guaranteed to produce positive feelings.

We have known for some time that peers exert considerable influence over deviant and antisocial behaviour. New evidence unpacking the aetiology of problem behaviour indicates that delinquency spreads among affiliates in a peer network, independent of substance use (Haynie, 2014; McMillan, 2018). Genetically informed research indicates that although adolescent substance use and gambling have a significant, overlapping genetic component, nonshared environmental contributions were equally substantial, highlighting the important role that peers play in the self development of females in Okrika and different form of problem behaviour (Vitaro, 2014).

Another reason for carrying out this research, is to provide more recent findings and add to the already existing body of knowledge concerning peer group influence and self image among females. This is because most of the self image researches found were done long time ago. The aim of the study is to ascertain peer group influence on self image and the research question is stated below:

1. To what extent will peer group influence the self image of females in Okrika Local Government Area of River State?

Significance of the Study

The present study will be of great gain to individuals, teachers, parents, guardians, psychologist. The study will provide groundwork for the better understanding of self and how external factors influence self. This knowledge will help educators, parents, and all interested persons to be able to design interventions to aid adolescents in resisting negative self image, and negative peer group influence. This study seeks to also encourage individuals to conduct more research in this area as well as others with respect to the Nigerian population.

Literature Review

Theory of Learned Helplessness for Peer Group Influence

The theory of learned helplessness was conceptualized and developed by American psychologist Martin E.P. Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania in the late 1960s and ’70s.

Learned helplessness has since become a basic principle of behavioural theory, demonstrating that prior learning can result in a drastic change in behaviour and seeking to explain why individuals may accept and remain passive in negative situations despite their clear ability to change them. In his book Helplessness (1975), Seligman argued that, as a result of these negative expectations, other consequences may accompany the inability or unwillingness to act, including low self-esteem, chronic failure, sadness, and physical illness. The theory of learned helplessness also has been applied to many conditions and behaviours, including clinical depression, aging, domestic violence, poverty, discrimination, parenting, academic achievement, drug abuse, and alcoholism. Critics, however, have argued that a variety of

different conclusions can be drawn from Seligman's experiments and therefore broad generalizations, most frequently found in the areas of clinical depression and academic achievement, are unwarranted. For example, the application of the theory to clinical depression is viewed as an oversimplification of the illness that fails to account for the complex cognitive processes involved in its etiology, severity, and manifestation.

Conceptual Review

Self Image

Self-image is important because it can have a significant impact on an individual's self-esteem and self-worth (Baumeister, 1989). It can also influence an individual's behavior and decision-making, as well as their relationships with others

Self-Image Issues

Self-image issues refer to negative or distorted perceptions that an individual has of themselves, including their physical appearance, personality, and characteristics. These issues can manifest in a variety of ways, such as low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and negative body image (Baumeister., 1989).

Causes of poor self-image

Self-image issues can be caused by a variety of factors, such as past traumas or abuse, negative societal messages and cultural expectations, and negative influences from family and friends. These issues can also be perpetuated by unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as avoidance or self-destructive behaviors (Beck, 1967).

Self-image issues can have serious consequences for an individual's mental health and overall well-being (Taylor & Brown, 1988). It is important for individuals who are struggling with self-image issues to seek support and seek professional help if necessary in order to address and resolve these issues.

Self-Image Disorder

Self-image disorder, also known as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), is a mental health disorder characterized by a preoccupation with perceived defects or flaws in one's appearance that are not observable to others, or that are significantly exaggerated (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Individuals with body dysmorphic disorder may spend excessive amounts of time examining their appearance in mirrors or other reflective surfaces, or may engage in repetitive behaviors such as skin picking or hair pulling. These behaviors can cause significant distress and can interfere with an individual's daily functioning and quality of life (Phillips, 2005).

Body dysmorphic disorder is thought to be caused by a combination of genetic, environmental, and cognitive factors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is important for individuals with body dysmorphic disorder to seek treatment, which may include cognitive-behavioral therapy, medication, or a combination of both (Phillips, 2005).

According to a study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (Baumeister et al., 1989), positive self-image is associated with higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, and it can lead to better outcomes in life such as success in school, work, and relationships. It is important for individuals to strive for a positive self-image in order to improve their mental health and overall well-being (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Over the course of evolutionary history, experiences that satisfied the human need to form close relationships also encouraged a predisposition for adaptive algorithms that address different relationship functions. These algorithms serve as the foundation for deep level cognitive structures that organize relationships into distinct natural categories that reflect social interaction domains (Sedikides., 1993). The social category of close peer relationships encompasses communal-sharing relationships built on equal reward distribution and a shared identity. Reciprocity-based relationships can be transitory, meaning that individuals need ready strategies to identify new relationships. How better to recognize a partner capable of equal contribution and effort than one who shares similar attributes?

Theoretical Framework

Erik Erikson's theory on psychosocial development

This study anchors on Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. According to Erikson (1950), every human being goes through a developmental crisis at each stage of his/her life. Erikson came up with 8 stages at which we face a developmental crisis. His second stage, autonomy versus shame and doubt, occurs between the ages of 18 months and approximately age 2 or 3, and at this stage, the child struggles with autonomy and guilt. Erikson explained autonomy as a sense of independence. If the child is successful in this stage, he achieves a sense of autonomy; he believes he has control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Failure leads to a feeling of doubt in one's abilities and competence. Erikson proposes that parents allow their children at this stage to explore the limits of their abilities within an encouraging environment, which is tolerant of failure. The aim is to be "self-controlled without a loss of self-esteem". If the child feels encouraged and supported in his independence, he becomes confident and hopeful as well as secured in his abilities to survive in the world.

According to Erikson, this occurs between the ages of 3 to 5. At this stage, children assess themselves more frequently. In this time, the primary feature involves the child regularly interacting with other children at school. Play s

Empirical Review

Self-image is important because it can have a significant impact on an individual's self-esteem and self-worth (Baumeister, 1989). It can also influence an individual's behavior and decision-making, as well as their relationships with others.

According to a review published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (Baumeister, 1989), people with a positive self-image tend to have higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, and they are generally more successful in life. On the other hand, those with a negative self-image may struggle with low self-esteem and may be more prone to anxiety and depression (Beck, 1967).

In addition, research has shown that self-image can play a role in an individual's overall well-being and happiness (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Therefore, it is important for individuals to strive for a healthy and balanced self-image in order to improve their mental health and quality of life.

According to a study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (Baumeister, 1989), negative self-image can be associated with negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and unhealthy coping mechanisms (Beck, 1967). It is important for individuals with a negative self-image to seek support and seek professional help if necessary in order to address and resolve these issues (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

According to a study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (Baumeister, 1989), positive self-image is associated with higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, and it can lead to better outcomes in life such as success in school, work, and relationships. It is important for individuals to strive for a positive self-image in order to improve their mental health and overall well-being (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Social media has the potential to affect self-image in both positive and negative ways. On the positive side, social media can provide a platform for individuals to connect with others, share their interests and accomplishments, and receive support and validation from their peers (Vogel. 2014).

However, research has also shown that social media can have negative effects on self-image, particularly for those who use it excessively or who compare themselves unfavorably to others (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019). Additionally, research has shown that social media can contribute to the development of body dissatisfaction and negative body image, particularly for women (Vogel, 2014).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, experts encouraged social distancing as a way to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. Itani and Hollebeek (2021) found that an internal locus of control positively correlated with a willingness to social distance, showing that if individuals believed that their own behavior had a positive outcome on their health, they were more willing to comply with recommendations.

Globally, 5.1% of women and 3.6% of men experience depression, and 4.6% of women and 2.6% of men experience anxiety disorders (World Health Organization, 2017).

Churchill, Munyanyi, Prakash, and Smyth (2020) examined longitudinal data of these gender disparities in mental health and found an intriguing outcome. The researchers examined the scores of over 20,000 Australians on measures of mental health and locus of control.

They showed a significant gender gap in mental health, consistent with the World Health Organization findings. They also showed that women were more likely to have an external locus of control than men. Finally, through regression analysis, they could demonstrate that a unit increase toward internal locus of control would have a more significant effect on this gender gap than any other variable, including employment and marriage status.

Locus of control has been shown to be a key factor in pro-environmental behaviour (Peyton & Miller, 1980). Chiang, Fang, Kaplan, and Ng (2019) took this finding a step further and examined the relationship between environmental actions, locus of control, and emotional stability. They found that the personality factor of emotional stability positively influenced pro-environmental behaviour. They also showed through structural equation modelling that emotional stability may be a mediator between an internal locus of control and pro-environmental behaviour.

High levels of patience and calm (positive levels of emotional stability) may lead to a greater level of internal locus of control and feelings of hopefulness toward helping the planet.

Gender and Peer Pressure

Several studies indicate gender differences in the extent to which adolescents are affected by peer pressure. In a retrospective study [16] to determine the pressure peers exerted in various aspects of high school and how said pressure influences teenager’s attitudes and behaviors. In 297 college undergraduates, found that about 33% of the students experienced peer pressure

and identified it as one of the hardest things they had to face. Besides finding that peer pressure was most influential for females, realized the participants answered were not in harmony as to which areas peer pressure was strongest. [5,18,16] study involving 620 participants (46% females and 54% males) showed that conventional peer characteristics strongly influence intrinsic motivation. According to them, "conventional peer characteristics refer to behaviors that are considered positive or socially acceptable". For example, an adolescent will have a strong intrinsic motivation to smoke, practice unsafe sexual activity, cheat during an exam if his/her friends endorse such behaviours.

New evidence on the Scope of Peer Influence

Historically, research on peer influence has focused on maladaptive behaviour. The tendency to focus on problems reinforced views of peers as a nefarious force. Research during the past decade has prompted scholars to revisit this bias. If the function of peer influence is to promote compatibility that reduces the risk of friendship loss and group exclusion, then it follows that influence should not be limited to a narrow range of behaviours but should instead apply to any domain that could threaten satisfaction and cohesion. Compelling new evidence indicates that peer influence is not limited to problem behaviours. Nowhere has progress been more evident than in the area of school adjustment. Results from longitudinal social network analyses indicate that peers exert a positive influence over school grades (Duxbury &Haynie, 2020; Gremmen, 2017). New research sheds light on peer influence over health-related behaviours. Network studies confirm that adolescent friends become more similar over time in physical activity (de la Haye, 2011; Long et al., 2017) and body weight (Simpkins et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2015). Friends influence self-injury behaviours (Prinstein, 2010). Over time, adolescent friends become more similar in terms of their sexual experiences (Prinstein, 2003; Trinh et al., 2019). Adolescent alcohol and drug use are clearly shaped by friends (Allen, 2020; Hiatt, 2017) and peer group affiliates (Burk et al., 2012; Osgood, 2013). Cigarette smoking similarity, however, is more complicated. Peers may play a role in the adoption of the habit (McMillan, 2018), but they do not determine the rate at which an adolescent smokes (DeLay, 2013; Mathys, 2013), presumably because addictive behaviours are driven by endogenous motives.

Peer influence shapes affective experiences. Negative affect can spread between friends through co-rumination, a form of disclosure that involves rehashing problems, mutual encouragement of problem talk, and dwelling on negative affect (Rose, 2014). Genetically informed studies emphasize its non-shared environmental effects, underscoring the notion that co-rumination is a dyadic phenomenon, constructed by friends (Dirghangi et al., 2015). Depressive symptoms spread between friends (Giletta, 2011) and affiliates in a peer network (Cheadle &Goosby, 2012; van Zalk, 2010), and co-rumination is an important vehicle of transmission (Schwartz-Mette & Rose, 2012). Importantly, heightened affect similarity is not a product of contagion (symptoms spread from the more depressed to the less depressed) but rather convergence (symptoms decline among the most depressed and increase among the least depressed) (Kiuru, 2012). Peers shape positive affect too. Self-reports of happiness spread through convergence (van Workum, 2013). Adolescents with friends who were above average on happiness became happier, whereas adolescents with friends who were below average on happiness became less happy.

We have known for some time that peers exert considerable influence over deviant and antisocial behavior. Confidence in these conclusions is bolstered by recent research deploying sophisticated methodological procedures that both eliminate confounds and rule out alternative explanations. Early research tended to aggregate different forms of problem behaviour. New evidence unpacking the aetiology of problem behaviour indicates that delinquency spreads among affiliates in a peer network, independent of substance use (Haynie, 2014; McMillan,

2018). Genetically informed research indicates that although adolescent substance use and gambling have a significant, overlapping genetic component, nonshared environmental contributions were equally substantial, highlighting the important role that peers play in the development of each form of problem behaviour (Vitaro, 2014).

This present study however, intends to shed light with evidence of the relationship between peer group influence and self image.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a significant influence of peer group on self image among females in Okrika Local Government Area.

Research Design

The cross-sectional survey research design was used to identify external locus of control and peer group influence as predictors of self image.

Study Area/Population of the Study

The target population for this study will be females in Okrika Local Government Area. Okrika Local Government Area is situated in the South eastern part of Rivers State, within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Okrikans are of the Ijaw tribe surrounded by creeks and rivers, contributing to its rich aquatic biodiversity. They are predominantly fishers, traders and craft men. The sample size consisted of a total of 200 females. The sampling technique employed the convenient sampling technique. For this study, primary source of data collection will be employed and about 144 were returned.

Instruments

The study research instruments include:

Section A: Demographic Information Data: This was used to collect demographic information of respondents such as their age, state of origin, religious affiliation and educational qualification.

Section B: Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965) is a 10 item scale that measures feelings about the self. All items are answered using a 4-point likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Section C: Peer Group Influence Scale is a 25-item sub-scale of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)was developed by Armsden & Greenberg (1987)

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale demonstrates a Guttman scale coefficient of .92. Using the Cronbach Alpha equation to test for reliability.

The reliability coefficient for the25-item peer influence sub-scale was .81. Using the Cronbach's alpha model, the reliability coefficient for the IPPA was calculated between 0.87 and 0.93(Armsden & Greenberg (1987).

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section entails the analysis which involves the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics was used to analyzed respondents' socio-demographic data while the inferential statistic was used to test the hypotheses in the study.

Table 1: Respondents' Socio-demographics (N = 144)

	Age	Frequency	Percent
	15-18	18	12.5
	19-22	49	34.0
	23-26	49	34.0
	27 and above	28	19.4
	Total	144	100.0

Table 1 presents the socio-demographics of the participants. Of these, 12.5% were 15-18 years of age, 34.0% were 19-22 years of age, 34.0% were 23-26 years of age, and 19.4% were 28 years of age and above.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Correlation Table, Showing the correlation between peer group influence and self image among females in Okirika LGA.

		Peer group influence	Self image
Peer Group influence	Pearson Correlation	1	-.178*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.033
	N	144	144
Self image	Pearson Correlation	-.178*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033	
	N	144	144

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

The Pearson correlation in Table 2 above revealed that there is a significant influence of **peer** group on the self image **of females in Okrika,** and is significant at 0.05 Pearson correlation = -.783, N=144 p-value = 0.033 ($p<0.05$). Therefore, we accept the hypothesis.

Conclusion

The study illuminates significant associations between various factors and self-image among individuals in Okirika LGA. Findings underscore the impact of external locus of control and peer group influence on self-image, particularly among specific demographic groups. Ultimately, this study lays a foundation for exploring and addressing factors influencing self-image within this context, paving the way for more targeted interventions and holistic approaches toward enhancing individual well-being.

Summary of the Findings

The analysis investigated the influence of Peer group on the self-image among individuals in Okirika LGA. Findings revealed significant influences: peer group influence affected self-image among females, in Okrika. Additionally, substance abuse was linked to sexual behavior among female students at Rivers State University.

Limitations of the Study

The study's limitations encompassed aspects such as a possibly restricted sample size and potential biases in the sampling method, which might limit the findings' broader applicability. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data could introduce biases, while the correlational nature of the study prevents definitive causal conclusions. The study might have overlooked other influential factors impacting self-image and behavioural aspects, and the tools used for measurement might have limitations in accuracy and consistency. Moreover, contextual and temporal constraints could restrict the generalizability of findings beyond the specific setting and time frame of the study.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, here are some recommendations:

Intervention Programs: Develop targeted intervention programs aimed at enhancing self-image among individuals in Okirika LGA. These programs could incorporate elements addressing external locus of control, peer group influences, and substance abuse, tailored to the specific demographics identified in the study.

Education and Awareness: Launch awareness campaigns within the community and educational institutions to educate individuals about the impact of external factors on self-image. Empower them to recognize and navigate these influences positively.

Support Networks: Establish support networks or counseling services within educational institutions or community centers to assist individuals, particularly those vulnerable to negative self-image due to external influences or substance abuse.

Further Research: Conduct further in-depth research encompassing a wider array of variables, including cultural, mental health, and environmental factors, to better understand the multifaceted nature of self-image in this context.

Skill Development Programs: Implement skill-building workshops or initiatives that foster resilience, self-esteem, and positive self-perception among individuals, especially targeting the identified demographic groups susceptible to external influences.

Policy Recommendations: Advocate for policies or guidelines that address substance abuse and promote healthy peer group dynamics, aiming to create a more supportive environment conducive to positive self-image.

Longitudinal Studies: Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in self-image over time and explore the long-term effects of interventions or external influences on individuals' self-perception.

Implementing these recommendations could contribute to fostering a more positive self-image among females in Okirika LGA, promoting overall well-being and personal development within the community.

Implications of the Findings

The study's outcomes imply a need for tailored interventions addressing peer influences to bolster positive self-image among specific demographic groups in Okirika LGA. Addressing substance abuse issues becomes crucial in mitigating its impact on self-perception and behavior, particularly among female students. These findings underline the necessity for

comprehensive support systems and educational programs to empower individuals in navigating external influences, fostering healthier self-perceptions and behaviors.

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