

The Impact of Television Viewing in Influencing Adolescents Sexual Behaviour

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Abstract- This paper examines the impact of television viewing in shaping adolescents sexual behaviour. The paper found that sexual content in the television has a 'profound real-life effect'. This is because Sexual initiation is an important social and health issue and that portrayals of sex on entertainment Television (TV) in Kenya may contribute to precocious adolescent sex. Television viewing can either reinforce norms or offer insights into alternative ways of thinking. The paper sought to investigate TV influence on the sexual behaviour of adolescents by addressing the following three fundamental concerns, (1) how television influences sexual behaviour of adolescents,(2) the extent to which TV viewing may determine the sexual behaviour of adolescents, and (3) the potential dangers associated with exposure to sexual content on TV. The paper found that adolescents often seek sexual information from television content rather than their parents or other adults by being attracted to programs with sexual content. The paper concluded by focusing on the urgent need to address television influence on adolescents sexual behaviour by providing them with critical interpretation and communication skills in multimedia environments.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a stage which human beings face once throughout lifetime. This stage serves as a threshold for many developments: biological, physical, psychological, social, etc. These developments are accompanied by positive or negative behaviours depending on the environment that the child is brought-up. Bandura (1971). **Risky sexual behaviours**, including early sexual debut, unprotected sexual intercourse, and multiple sexual partners, occur in a broader context. The intensity of involvement in sexual risk behaviour ranges from nonsexual relationship to unprotected sexual intercourse with multiple partners and prostitution. (UNAIDS, 2002).

Although risky sexual behaviour does not always indicate a high-risk lifestyle, it may result in other risk behaviours, including substance use, violence involvement, and poor school performance. Adolescents who engage in sexual intercourse at young ages are at higher risk for outcomes that can compromise their health (Ward, 2003). Sexual content in entertainment messages in television strongly correlates with negative adolescent behaviours that result in adolescents pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS. The United Nations (UN) termed Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) as one of the biggest global concern and adopted halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS as one of its MillenniumDevelopment Goals. (UNAIDS, 2002).

Documented evidence have shown that a large number of adolescents begin sexual activity at a very young age in a number of countries (UNAIDS, 2002). In most sub-Saharan African countries, more than 70percent of young women begin sexual activity during adolescent period – this to a large extent is as a result of exposure to media effect.

This paper therefore examines the impact of television viewing in influencing adolescents' sexual behaviour.

1.1 Statement of the problem

A lot of people claim there is no observable impact of television on adolescents, yet parents and teachers have shown much concern about the effect of television on our young people. In the light of which Maduewusi (2005) called for utmost caution in TV programme production. TV has the potentials to generate both positive and negative effects. Dietz and Strasburger (1991). It is therefore unfortunate that great deals of TV content which adolescents have devoted their time to view are sexual. There are so many instances of sexual behaviours in television content ranging from verbal expression, erotic touching to intercourse, masturbation, homosexuality and incest. According to Johnson, Cohen, Smailes, Kasen and brook (1999), the average adolescent spends more time watching television than in the classroom. It is against this background that this paper is trying to identify the impact of television viewing in influencing sexual behavior among adolescents.

1.2 Objectives

Generally the purpose of this paper was to examine *the impact of television viewing in shaping adolescents sexual behavior*. The paper specifically discusses the possible effects of television local music to adolescents sexual behavior , it explores influence of television viewing on sexual behavior among adolescents and finally the paper examines the prevalence and consequences of adolescent's risky sexual behavior.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND (LITERATURE REVIEW)

2.1 Discussion on possible effects of Television Local music to adolescents' sexual behavior.

In social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), young people can learn about sexuality from others depicted in the media. With this in mind, television in Kenya has utilized the use of musicians to advertise the use of contraceptives. What the media fails to do is to remind the youth that these celebrities are mature enough to make proper sex decisions and are probably married (Gakahu,

2005). Young people listen to adverts, but they do not learn about the contexts in which the behaviour depicted occurs.

According to Albert Bandura's cross-species and cultural studies, human sexuality is governed primarily by social conditioning, rather than endocrinal stimulation (Chapin, 2000). The cultivation theorists say that television's consistent images and portrayals construct a specific portrait of reality. Gradually, viewers come to cultivate or adopt attitudes and expectations about the world that coincides with this portrait. In this regard, profane lyrics have an impact on youth's sexual attitude. In a country where parents and schools remain reluctant to discuss sexual topics, adolescents look to the media (television) to find out about the world, in their own language and from their own point of view. They generally accept what they see on the television as real because they have nothing to tell them otherwise. Garner et al. (1998) underscores this observation by stressing that young people are most dependent on the media as a source of information when they lack personal experience and interpersonal advice in the area they are seeking knowledge. The songs in our music industry form a mindset that is later put into action when an opportunity arises. This is in consonant with the theory of modelling, which states that individuals perceive a form of behaviour portrayed by a mass media character. They find this behaviour attractive for imitation in some personal situation. The perceived behaviour is reproduced by individuals when situation arises. Entertainment content depicting sexual norms, stereotypes, double standards and sexual roles may have profound influence on teens' perception about sex, body image and social norms (Ward, 1995). Teens who watch sexual content on the media are more likely to engage in sex and tend to have negative attitudes about being a virgin (Ward, 1995).

Although exposure to sexual content may not guarantee that viewers will take irresponsible steps in their own lives, this exposure may help shape viewers' attitudes and expectations about sexual relationships.

2.2 Television Influence on adolescents Sexual Behaviour

Adolescence and early adulthood can be viewed as a time of adjustment and is often characterized by turmoil resulting from issues regarding identity and sexual identity and orientation. The period of adolescence is described as a trying moment for many parents because the period is characterised with a lot of experiments and role modelling by adolescence. It is also at this stage that individuals begin to consider which sexual behaviours are enjoyable, moral and appropriate for their age group (Fay & Yanoff, 2000). Many adolescents become active sexually during this period and 46% or so of high school students in America and other advanced countries of the world have had sexual intercourse (LeVay & Valente, 2003).

Sexuality is a developmental milestone of adolescence with which each generation struggle. Sexuality encompasses behavioural component with boundaries of sexual activity moving in an increasingly permissive direction. Perceptions appear to be constant through the ages while only the circumstances change (Jones & Boonstra, 2005). According to Szabo (2006), an emphasis on individual freedom and rights-driven culture in societies may be influential in this apparent permissiveness. A number of factors which include media and the internet, urbanisation, electronic communication (gsm), peer

influence and the breakdown of traditional parental and community structures also play a part (Hall & Sherry, 2004; Szabo, 2006), but of recent, the media and especially the television has played and is still playing a tremendous role in influencing adolescents sexuality and sexual behaviours.

The sexual content in television can affect any age group, adolescents may be particularly vulnerable (Ward, 2003) since they are still in the impressionable developmental stages and are attempting to establish their own identity. Adolescents may be exposed to sexual contents in the media because they are still at their developmental stages and hence cannot decipher good from bad media programming. Analysis of television media content in America indicate that, on average, adolescent viewers see 143 (Ward & Friedman, 2006) incidents of sexual behaviour on network television at the most important times each week, with portrayals of three to four times as many sexual activities occurring between unmarried partners as between spouses. As much as 80% of all movies shown on television stations have sexual content (Chunovic, 2000). Therefore, an analysis of television media content also shows that sexual messages on television are almost universally presented in a positive light, with little discussion of the potential risks of unprotected sexual intercourse and few portrayals of adverse consequences (Anderson, 2004).

Television sexual content has a "profound real-life effect". (Ward, 2003) Mass media can either reinforce norms or offer insights into alternative ways of thinking. Teens often seek social and sexual information from the television rather than their parents or other adults. These teens may be attracted to programs with sexual content. Recently, Music Television (MTV) has been discovered to barrages young people with sexual messages. From the beginning, MTV transformed music into television programming by using fast-paced visuals to grab the attention of a very specific youthful audience – a new generation that had been raised with television and had different ways of processing information (Sherman & Etling, 2001). For example, in order to make the aural and visual elements fit together, music video producers and directors, rather than entertainers and writers, control visual images that may have nothing to do with the musicians' or artists' original concepts.

MTV uses sexual images of women through "short, sharp, shots of intense visual pleasure" to encourage viewers to watch closely and stay focused so that they do not miss anything. They further depict women in violent scenes and showing women giving ambiguous sexual signals. Even when lyrics are sexually inclined, visual images in such videos are usually sexual. This is as a result of the selling potentiality of sex in media contents. (Sherman & Etling, 2001).

2.3 Prevalence and Consequences of Adolescent's Risky Sexual Behaviour

Major socio-economic changes including a trend towards large schooling, a shift away from subsistence farming towards employment in industry and informal economies, increasing urbanization, constant media viewing, a decline in the importance of the family and a parallel increase in that of peers in shaping young people's life styles have all been associated with the emergence of adolescence as a distinct stage in life. While some of these trends may well be described global, their

manifestations in changing sexual norms and behaviours are by no means uniform. Traditional agricultural economies, family structures and religious belief systems that deny adolescents the freedom to meet their peers and engage in premarital sexual activity persist in many places, especially adolescent girls. There are therefore many exceptions to the general rule that due to increasing gap between age at sexual maturity and age at marriage, premarital sexual activity among adolescents has become more frequent (Blum & Mmari, 2005).

Adolescent sexual behaviour is influenced by a complex set of interactions of biology and genetics, individual perceptions, personality characteristics, media influence and socio-cultural norms and values. Adolescents on the verge of their first sexual experience tend to be quite young, and their limited knowledge and experience make them less confident and skilled at all planning ahead and taking the measures needed to avoid unsafe sex. Moreover, their young independence from their parents makes adolescents more susceptible to peer-pressures and norms, especially at younger ages. This issue is compounded through the influence the media plays in young peoples' lives. Sexual behaviour is strongly manipulated by culture, *and television is an important part of an adolescent's culture (Ward, 2003).*

Sexual initiation among adolescents and young adults in Sub-Saharan Africa starts early and more males than females are sexually active before marriage; this difference is gradually disappearing. Early sexual debut has also been associated with greater risk of infection because of added opportunities for more sexual encounters, multiple partners, and high-risk partners (Blum & Mmari, 2005).

In addition, sexual activity among female adolescents has resulted in unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortions, which pose serious health and social problems. In many sub-Saharan African countries, a girl must leave school if she is getting pregnant and abortion tends to be most common among young unmarried women.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper was based on literature review related to the following specific objectives: To find out the possible effects of Television local music to adolescents sexual behavior; to determine television influence on adolescents sexual behavior; to explore the consequences of adolescents risky sexual behavior. Literature of journals were reviewed. Some of the journals include: The Journal of Education and Practice ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online) Vol 3, No 7, 2012; Journal Media and Communication Studies. Vol. 2(7), pp. 154-158, ISSN 2141 – 2545 August 2010; Nigerian Journal of Social Studies and Civic Education Vol. 4, Issue 1, pp 135-ISSN: 2315-6813 147, June, 2013

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper has made the following conclusions based on the reviewed literature:

Adolescents are the wheels of change than other segments of the population. Hence, the future fate of the society depends on

the demographic and reproductive health of this segment of the population; hence they have to be free of risky sexual behaviour.

Television viewing does have an impact on adolescents' sexual behaviour and it can alter the sexual behaviour of most adolescents for example watching sex on TV may predict and/or hasten adolescent sexual initiation. Reducing the amount of sexual content in entertainment programming, reducing adolescent exposure to this content, and/or increasing references to and depictions of possible negative consequences of sexual activity could appreciably delay the initiation of early sex debut. Alternatively, parents may be able to reduce the effects of sexual content by watching TV with their teenage children and discussing their own beliefs about sexual issues.

There is need for the education of students, parents, media organisations, government and the entire society on the negative effects TV has on adolescents sexual behaviour. This awareness will help in understanding of the problems as it affects the adolescents.

V. RECOMMENDATION

- Parents should assist their children to become 'media literate' by discussing Television Content so that they can differentiate reality and fiction. This will go a long way to prevent the adolescents from becoming passive victims of TV content.
- There should be reduced amount of sexual content in entertainment programmes. Reducing adolescent's exposure to this content has the possibility of reducing sexual indulgence when they include depiction of sexual risk (such as the possibility of contracting sexually transmitted diseases or becoming pregnant). Abstinence or the need for sexual safety should be depicted. Writers and directors in terms of programming should portray realistic highlights of both positive and negative effects of the programmes.
- Reduced exposure to positive portrayal of sex TV will delay and even decrease adolescent's sexual activities.
- The school guidance and counseling units should hold workshops and seminars for the adolescents explaining the pros and cons of certain sexual behaviours they imitate from the TV programmes they view. The introduction of dress code in most institutions of higher learning should be encouraged by all.
- Further research on Television viewing influence is necessary in order to enhance our understanding of communication systems in society.
- Parents have irreplaceable role in paving the way on how to help their children by teaching them the necessary skills and responsibility for maintaining and protecting their sexual health; to do this, parents should assess their level of knowledge related to reproductive health and acquire the necessary knowledge to provide accurate and current information.
- Adolescents should be equipped with the necessary communication skills about sexuality issues in particular; concerned bodies especially those working

on adolescents, should help both parents and adolescents in providing the necessary knowledge and skills. In order to protect adolescents from risky sexual behaviour, school clubs should recruit, train, promote peer educators and pave the way for peer discussion. So that adolescents freely discuss with their peers and might solve their negative sexual behaviours instead of allowing the media to influence them and shape their attitudes and behaviours.

Other important steps you can take to curb or mitigate adolescents exposure to sexual content on television include:

- Parents Watching TV with their adolescent children and discussing their beliefs about sex and about the sexual behaviors portrayed on TV.
- Developing TV-watching guidelines for adolescents and enforcing them.
- Limiting the amount of time children watch TV. Instead, one can use family movie reviews to rent movies with appropriate content.
- Encourage and reward adolescents for reading instead of watching TV.
- Encouraging adolescents to find and develop non-television related hobbies and interests.

By taking these simple steps, one can help to ensure that adolescents' attitudes and beliefs about sex more closely monitored and that their sexual initiation is delayed.

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