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PEER INFLUENCES TO RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS AMONG OUT-OF-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN KAMULI MUNICIPALITY

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Abstract

Introduction: Adolescents engage in different deviant behaviours including gambling, alcohol and substance abuse, violence acts and sexual behaviours. These sexual behaviours have lasting reproductive health challenges, increased risks of acquiring sexually transmitted infections (including HIV), teenage pregnancies and death among adolescents which contribute to the burdens of public health care.

Purpose: To identify risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents and peer influences to out-of-school adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviours in Kamuli Municipality.

Methods: The study was conducted in Kamuli Municipality (Southern and Northern Division) among out-of-school adolescents. The study adopted phenomenological study design and purposive sampling adopted as sampling procedures for the study. Sample size included five (5) Focus group discussions, twenty (20) In-depth interviews and three (3) Key informant interviews upon which saturation was attained. Study respondents comprised of out-of-school adolescents between 10 and 19 years of age living within Kamuli Municipality; not in school and did not complete primary or secondary education levels. The study comprised of sixty-seven (67) respondents (forty-four (44) respondents that participated in the focus group discussions; twenty (20) respondents that participated in in-depth interviews and three (3) key informant interviews).

Results: Study findings identified involvement in sexual relations with boyfriends and girlfriends; sexual affairs with older persons (referred to as sugar mummies and sugar daddy); involvement in multiple sexual relations; transactional sex and early sexual debut as risky sexual behaviours among



out-of-school adolescents. In terms of socio-economic factors for out-of-school adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviours, respondents mentioned poverty at home and lack of basic necessities as key factors increasing vulnerability to engage in risky sexual behaviours. Peer influence to engage in risky sexual behaviours ranged from misleading influence from friends, desire to please friends, peer pressure and bad company; which all in different ways mounted pressure to engage in different risky behaviours.

Conclusions: Study findings confirmed the existence of risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents (including early sexual debut, multiple sexual partners and sex with older sexual partners). Out-of-school adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviours is strongly influenced by their close associate peers and friends; coupled with the prevailing circumstances at the time of exposure.

Keywords: Peer influences, Risky sexual behaviours, Early sexual debut, Adolescents

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Adolescence is a formative phase of life during which new patterns of growth, development, and behaviours emerge (Azzopardi, et al., 2019); a period marking the transition from childhood to adulthood (Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015); a transitional stage of physical, psychological [and emotional] human development that occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood (Moghaddam, et al., 2016). African adolescents, especially those in urban centers, live in the era of what some authors refer to as the new media ecology, which provides an opportunity for learning both good and dangerous contents that could be detrimental to adolescents' socio-sexual development (Abdullahi & Abdulquadri, 2018). Adolescents engage in risky deviant behaviors such as substance use, violence perpetration, and unsafe sexual practices is common (Asrese & Mekonnen, 2018). The period is associated with increased risk-taking behaviours (Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015) and increased autonomy characterized by peer influence (Hatchette, et al., 2008). In Uganda, adolescents engage in different deviant behaviours including gambling, alcohol and substance abuse, violence acts, sexual behaviours and unethical behaviour. Young men engage in deviant behaviours including gambling, drinking, taking drugs, having promiscuous sexual relationships, being violent, being idle and sometimes stealing (Bernays, et al., 2018). Female adolescents are less likely to engage in sexual intercourse compared to their male counterparts but more prone to consequences of early sexual intercourse before marriage, including higher HIV prevalence (Bukenya, et al., 2020). Risky sexual behaviors and reproductive health problems have long lasting consequences during their adulthood (Denno, et al., 2015). Premarital sexual behaviours lead to several health problems i.e. sexually transmitted infections (STIs), human immune



virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), unwanted pregnancies (especially teenage pregnancy), unsafe abortions, emotional disturbances, baby dumping and maternal deaths (Shrestha, 2019).

Adolescent risky sexual behaviours are influenced by a number of factors; Poverty contributed immensely to adolescent sexual risk behaviour in situations adolescents are not well taken care of financially, they may be lured to take a sexual risk in order to achieve their desired level of comfort (Anyanwu, et al., 2020); Personal desire to satisfy their curiosity intrinsically influenced in school and out-of-school adolescents to engage in sexual intercourse (Adongo, 2018); and Cultural practices contributed to risky sexual behaviours that predispose adolescent orphans and non-orphans to teenage pregnancy and STI/HIV infection (Juma, et al., 2014). Other factors that influence adolescent risky sexual behaviours include adolescent age, area of residency (rural or urban), smoking, drunkenness, substance use, and family connectedness (Afriyie & Essilfie, 2019).

Peer influence was considered the most important factor that influenced sexual risk-taking behaviour; part of being accepted by peers was to emulate their behaviour; in this instance, sexual behaviour was perceived as an official group membership 'stamp' (Ngidi, et al., 2016). Peer pressure was given as reason for engaging in sex, friends initiate sex to show that they were matured and catching up with what friends were doing (Envuladu, et al., 2017). Adolescents with strong ties to peers are more likely to engage in lifetime sex (risky sexual behaviour) compared to their counterparts with weak ties (Amoateng, et al., 2014).

1.2 Study Area

In Uganda, young people (including adolescents) face various sexual and reproductive health risks, especially those living in urban slums (Renzaho, et al., 2017). Common risky sexual behaviours among adolescents include early sexual debut associated with unprotected sexual intercourse and multiple sexual partners (Koletić, et al., 2019); Other risky sexual behaviours include; high sex-partner turnover; sex with high risk groups like commercial sex workers and unprotected casual sex (Enahoro, et al., 2015); unprotected sex, taking alcohol or drugs before sexual intercourse, forced or coerced sexual intercourse for reward (Hoque, 2011).

Adolescent school dropout is associated with sexual risk behaviours including multiple partnerships, older partner age, unprotected sex, transactional sex and higher HIV prevalence (Rosenberg, et al., 2015). The term "out-of-school adolescent" is used to define adolescents 10-19 years of age, that dropped out of schools, those that have never attended school and those that are not engaged in non-formal school programs (MO, et al., 2017). Formal educational attainment is a significant determinant to reducing risky sexual behavior (Maonga, et al., 2018). Schools can play an important role in adolescents' identity development (Verhoeven, et al., 2019); an environment of socialization and learning for adolescents (Silva & Bazon, 2018).



Some study findings indicated that, adolescents who initiated sex at age 15 or older were less likely to engage in high-risk sexual behaviours illustrates the importance of keeping adolescents in school since evidence shows that in-school adolescents tend to delay sexual initiation and engage in less risky sexual behaviours (Ssebunya, et al., 2019). According to Uganda's 2016 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), the median age at first intercourse among women aged 20-49 years was 17.1 years (at adolescence); of which 18% had their first sex before 15 years of age and 62% by 18 years (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2018). One in four adolescent girls aged 15-19 years is either pregnant or has already delivered; and teenage pregnancy is perpetuated by early sexual debut, sexual coercion and gender inequality (National Population Council, 2019).

In Wakiso District of Uganda, in-school and out of school adolescents expressed HIV/STIs, unwanted pregnancies, sexual advances for the females from adult males and fellow male adolescents, defilement and rape as important health problems faced by adolescents (Atuyambe, et al., 2015). In central Uganda, adolescents [AGYW] described risks associated with transactional sex (and other risky sexual behaviours) to include reputational harm, exposure to unwanted pregnancy, HIV and STIs, and sexual violence (Kyegombe, et al., 2020).

Other research findings conducted in Uganda recommended that risky sexual behaviours, like early sexual debut, multiple sexual partners, consuming alcohol during sex and not using condoms during sex are the most influencing factors for the high rate of prevalence of HIV and STIs in Uganda (Patra, 2016). In Uganda, it was reported that 25% of adolescent girls (15–19 years) become pregnant, with this being more common in rural (27%) than urban areas (19%). In the Busoga region of Eastern Uganda, 21% of the adolescents aged 15–19 years have begun child bearing and making it a significant public health concern (Nabugoomu, et al., 2018).

1.3 Secondary Objective

The secondary objective of the study was to identify risky sexual behaviours and peer influences to engagement in risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents in Kamuli Municipality

1.4 Primary Objectives

The primary objectives of the study included;

1. To identify risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents in Kamuli Municipality
2. To examine socio-economic circumstances that contribute to risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents in Kamuli Municipality
3. To explore peer influence to engagement in risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents in Kamuli Municipality

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE



2.1 Risky Sexual Behaviours among Out-of-School Adolescents

Adolescents get involved in different sexual behaviour as part of growth experimentation to prove themselves as adults. Sexual behavior encompasses all activities which gratify an individual's sexual needs (Chawla & Sarkar, 2019); adolescent sexual behavior is influenced by a complex set of interactions of biology and genetics, individual perceptions, personality characteristics, and socio-cultural norms and values (Sieving, et al., 2002).

Risky sexual behaviours range from engaging with large number of sexual partners, to involvement in risky sexual activities and sexual intercourse under the influence of substances such as cocaine or alcohol (Wagenaar, et al., 2018); premarital sex, multiple sexual partners (Alamrew, et al., 2013); unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse (Amare, et al., 2019). Other risky sexual behaviours include early sexual intercourse, engaging in sex with older partners and sex with non-regular partners such as commercial sex workers (Dingeta, et al., 2012); sexual intercourse with commercial sex workers and bartering sex for money, goods or other favors (Fetene & Mekonnen, 2018); forced or coerced sexual intercourse and sexual intercourse for reward (Oluwatoyin & Modupe, 2014); sex with a partner who has other partners or more than one partner at a time (Omeje, et al., 2013). Other practices categorized under risky sexual behaviours include engaging in sexual activity at a young age, sexual relationship with a casual partner, or having multiple sexual partners (Kerpelman, et al., 2016; sex while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Kebede, et al., 2018); sexual intercourse with commercial sex workers and low practice of utilization of condoms (Belay, et al., 2016).

Risky sexual behaviours increase the likelihood of adverse sexual and reproductive health consequences such as unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS (Belay, et al., 2017). Sexual activities among adolescents pose a risk to sexually transmitted infection (STI) and unintended pregnancies (Lodz, et al., 2019); increase the chance of contracting or transmitting disease or increase the chance of occurrence of unwanted pregnancy (Henok, et al., 2015) and could result in varying problems ranging from unwanted pregnancy and death (Ugoji, 2014). Other consequences include unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, mental illness, suicide, abortion, and academic withdrawal or dismissal (Amare, et al., 2019).

Adolescents (youth) who begin early sexual activity are more likely to practice risky sexual behaviours, multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex, risk for sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, unwanted and teenage pregnancies and unsafe abortions (Durowade, et al., 2017). Early sexual debut among young women and men is associated with sexual and reproductive health risks including multiple partners, sex under the influence of alcohol or drugs, unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV (Richter, et al., 2015); unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and future risky sexual behaviour (Odimegwu, et al., 2017); unsafe abortion, early



childbirth, and psychosocial problems (Kassahun, et al., 2019). Early initiation of sex exposes young people (including adolescents) to many sexual and reproductive health problems, including multiple sexual partners and incorrect or inconsistent condom use (Kassahun, et al., 2019); increased vulnerability to pregnancy complications, HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases (Yaya & Bishwajit, 2018); and increased chances of having several partners before marriage increases (Mamo, et al., 2016).

Risky sexual behaviour involves the number and types of partnerships, sexual acts, and sexual orientation (Odimegwu & Somefun, 2017). Most adolescents have limited commitment to sexual relations and are more likely to have sex with multiple partners compared adults (Yan, et al., 2009). Having sex with multiple partners without the use condom is one of the risk factors in HIV transmission and many studies have documented high prevalence of HIV infection among people with multiple partners (Kyilleh, et al., 2018).

Adolescents engaged in unprotected sexual practices as a way of testing their fertility, assurance of love, bait for marriage and for livelihood; Condoms were believed to inhibit the pleasure in sex and since many engaged in sex for pleasure, the use of a condom was also regarded as impracticable, coupled with inconvenience or challenges involved in getting condoms (Kyilleh, et al., 2018).

Common examples of high-risk sexual behaviors include unprotected intercourse without condom use, unprotected mouth-to-genital contact, starting sexual activity at a young age, having multiple sex partners, having a high-risk partner (one who has multiple sex partners or other risk factors), and having unprotected anal sex or a partner who does (Alimoradi, et al., 2017).

In a study conducted among unmarried adolescents in Tanzania, the greatest known risky sexual practices associated with increased HIV incidence include unprotected penetrative sex, multiple sexual partners and young age at first sex (Kazaura & Masatu, 2009).

2.2: Socio-Economic Circumstances to Risky Sexual Behaviours

Several factors have been associated with risky sexual behaviours of such as, alcohol consumption, low economic status, low educational background, unemployment, cultural practices and parental guidance. Several intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivate adolescents to engage in early sexual intercourse including self-desire to experience sex (satisfy curiosity), social fitness, and economic challenges, broken homes/poor parenting, indecent media content, social/religious ceremonies, and the quest for high academic achievement (Adongo, 2018).

The socio-economic situation influence attitudes toward risky behaviors, such as binge drinking, which in turn is associated with sexual risky behaviors especially in adolescent males. Understanding the socio-economic circumstances that influence sexual behaviours of adolescent is vital in de-



signing and implementing tailored sexual risk reduction interventions (Asrese & Mekonnen, 2018).

In previous studies, respondents (adolescents) admitted to having sex under the influence of alcohol (Musiime & Mugisha, 2015). Studies have shown that consuming alcohol may lead to sexual risk-taking through the agency of behavioral and biological mechanisms (Choudhry, et al., 2014). Sexual risk behaviours linked to alcohol consumption include early sexual activity, unprotected sexual intercourse, pregnancies and sexual intercourse with multiple partners.

Cultural practices predispose adolescents to risky sexual behaviours that include; adolescents sleeping arrangements, funeral ceremonies, replacing a deceased married daughter with her younger sister in marriage, widow inheritance among boys, early marriage among girls, and preference for boys/sons (Juma, et al., 2014). Adolescent's home environment (unable to provide the adolescent with basic necessities) has tremendous impact on their behaviours and adolescents could be vulnerable to negative peer group pressure (Adimora, et al., 2018). The physical and social environment where adolescents live is an influencing factor to their adoption of reproductive health (Triyanto, et al., 2019).

Parental discussions and guidance influence the rate at which adolescents engage in risk sexual behaviours. Most parent-adolescent sexual discussions are centered on physical changes, personal hygiene, abstinence, abortion, saying "no" to forced sex and discussions on sexuality issues related to prevention from premarital sex, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (Baku, et al., 2018).

Previous research findings associated peer pressure, alcohol use, educational status, and current living conditions to risky sexual behaviors (Ermed, et al., 2019).

2.3 Peer influence to engagement in risky sexual behaviours

Peers are individuals with whom a teenager identifies, some of whom are usually but not always of the same age group (Rukundo, 2012). Peers can influence everything from what an adolescent chooses to wear up to adolescent engagement in drug related or other delinquent behaviours (Achilike, 2017). Adolescents tend to form friendships with same-age peers and in turn these peer friends influence adolescents' behaviors and beliefs (Shin, 2017). Adolescents who believe that their friends are sexually active are more likely to have initiated sex and have more partners compared to the youths who perceived that their friends are not sexually active (Omolola, et al., 2018).

Peer groups are among the most influential aspects of adolescent development (Lajom, et al., 2009). Peer groups serve as an avenue for teaching members (Adolescents) gender role socialization in which group members learn about sex differences, social and cultural expectations (Achilike, 2017). Close friends are the most proximal and influential peer group. Establishing a close relationship with one friend and belonging to a peer group is important for adolescents (Simons-Morton & Farhat, 2010).



Peer groups influence adolescents to doing things that may not fit with one's sense of right or wrong (Filade, et al., 2019). If the peer group is engaged in risky sexual behaviours, in many times the individuals will be influenced to engage in such risky sexual behaviours. This is the case with out-of-school adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviours. The negative influence of the peer group is more connected to the involvement in risk behaviours including involvement of other risky sexual practices, whilst the positive influence is more connected with protective behaviours. Peer groups are social groups that consist of people of the same age and have similar interests and usually equal in terms of the education and social class; in this situation, peer norms and peer influences are central in adolescents' development of health-related behaviors (Peçi, 2017). Peer norms influence intentions to have sex, early sexual debut, and subsequent sexual behavior; peers may influence adolescent sexual behavior through direct modeling of sexual behavior and the adolescent's perception of peer attitudes toward sex (Sneed, et al., 2015).

Peer influence refers to the practice of adopting a particular type of behavior, dress or attitude in order to be accepted as the part of a group of one's equals or peers; peer influence is more complex than adult perception of negative influence forcing adolescents to reject their family values or engage in high risk behaviors (Khan, et al., 2015). Peer influence encompasses a range of behaviors including peer pressure, modeling of desirable behavior, and creating opportunities for behavior that would not happen in solitude, all of which can both positively and negatively influence behavior (Suleiman & Deardorff, 2015). Peer influences plays significant roles during adolescence with peers having a profound effect on each other and may encourage experimentation of risky behaviors when there is normative pressure to do so (Huang, et al., 2014). Peer influence can also be considered as an outcome of socialization in which peers influence the nature of behaviours among individuals (Foo, et al., 2012). Peer influence during adolescence takes place via peer socialization or peer affiliation, which consists of an adolescent accepting or changing his or her behavior due to perceived peer norms or peer pressure (Defoe, et al., 2018). Much as peer influence is instrumental towards adolescent engagement in risky sexual practices, some youth perceive risky behavior among peers but remain resilient to peer pressure (Widman, et al., 2016). In regard to decisions, peers influence adolescent decision making even when the peer is anonymous and not physically present (Albert, et al., 2013). Many studies have confirmed that the presence of peers influence risky behaviors among adolescence (Ciranka & Bos, 2019). The influence of peers extends beyond merely being present as active agents, peers exert social influence on risk taking, expressing either support or opposition for these behaviors (Lloyd & Döring, 2019). Adolescent affiliation to peer groups is often exploited and used to promote negative sexual norms (Selikow, et al., 2009). Peers influence the appropriateness and desirability of dating matter and take into account when to start a romantic relationship, provide information about various aspects of romantic involvement, potential dating activities and how



to handle the relations with best friends and the romantic partner (Zantvliet, et al., 2018). Other studies have associated early sexual debut to peer influence among other things; peer influence was one of the factors associated to initiating sexual activity among teenagers (Donenberg, et al., 2003); bad peer groups, enticement with gifts and poverty have been cited as the leading cause of teenage pregnancy (Manzi, et al., 2018) and peer influence identified in Zimbabwe as a factor leading to teenage pregnancies (Mutanana & Mutara, 2015).

In many communities, adolescents tend to seek comfort among peers and intend to do what their peer does without knowing if it is good or bad for them. In some instances, adolescents are pressurized to engage in sexual relationships through peer approvals and recommendations. According to Matos, et al. (2012), peers have a direct influence in adolescents' risk behaviours. Deviant peers have repeatedly been identified as a crucial risk factor for engaging in delinquent acts (Azade Azad). Close friends, romantic peers, and broader peer contexts have been found to influence adolescent sexual behavior and adolescents' decisions to engage in romantic and sexual relationships (Suleiman & Deardorff, 2015). Adolescents spending considerable time with peers are more likely to engage in early sexual intercourse compared adolescents under parental control and supervision (Silva, et al., 2016). Social relationships may motivate adolescents to engage in risky behaviors as a way to gain acceptance from peers (Arbel, et al., 2018). According to Handebo, et al., 2018, considerable youths [Adolescents] were engaged in risky sexual activity at an early age including multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex and increased number of sexual partners partly due to high peer connectedness. Sexual permissiveness of peers was associated with high frequency of risky sexual practices among adolescents (Potard, et al., 2008). Adolescent engagements in risky sexual behaviours are not only influenced by peers with whom engage in sexual activities, but also by friends who either promote or discourage such risky sexual behaviours. In a study conducted among Rwandan young people on sexuality findings indicated that, young people (adolescents) felt the need to belong to a group and were concerned about group loyalty, approval of their friends and peers was important and as a consequence young people engaged in sexual intercourse as a result of pressure from their peers (Michielsen, et al., 2014). Peer influence identified in Zimbabwe as a factor leading to teenage pregnancies (Mutanana & Mutara, 2015). In Tanzania, adolescent family characteristics, peer pressure, alcohol use, parental and peer communication had greater influence in early sexual debut among adolescents (Mmbaga, et al., 2012). Other previous studies in Tanzania confirmed the existence of high sexual intercourse, risky sexual behaviour and early sexual debut among secondary school students (13-19 years); peer pressure and "just for fun" highlighted as the main reasons for student [Adolescent] engagement in risky sexual behaviour (Laddunuri, 2013).



1. METHODS

3.1 Study Design

The study used a phenomenological study design aimed at exploring risky sexual behaviours and peer influence to risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents (10-19 years) in Kamuli Municipality. Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Neubauer, et al., 2019).



3.2 Study Population

Study population comprised of out-of-school adolescents between 10 and 19 years of age living within Kamuli Municipality

3.3 Study Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

3.3.1 Inclusion Criteria

Selection of study participants was guided by the following inclusion criteria:

1. Adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years;
2. Adolescents out of school and did not complete primary or secondary school levels;
3. Adolescents living in Kamuli Municipality.

3.3.2 Exclusion Criteria

Selection of study participants was guided by the following exclusion criteria:

1. Children below 10 years of age and adults above 19 years of age not included in the study;
2. Adolescents between 10 and 19 years in school or completed secondary education not included in the study;
3. Adolescents between 10 and 19 years, not in school and not living in Kamuli Municipality were not included in the study;

3.4 Sample Size Determination

Sample size determined with saturation after five (5) Focus group discussions with forty-four (44) respondents; twenty (20) In-depth interviews with twenty (20) respondents and three (3) Key informant interviews.

3.5 Study Variables

Study variables included risky sexual behaviours and peer influence among out-of-school adolescents within Kamuli Municipality.

3.6 Data Collection Tools

The study used Focus group discussions; In-depth interviews and Key informant interviews as the most appropriate data collection methods for the study. Focus group discussion guides, In-depth interview guides and Key informant guides designed and pre-tested with semi-structured open-ended questions as data collection tools.

3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation

Transcriptions from audio-records and field notes were prepared and analyzed for presentation as study findings. Data analysis process involved steps including; Data transcription; Data Cleaning; Data immersion; Data coding and categories; and Generating themes in preparation for data presentation. Data analysis processes highlighted below;



Data transcription: Responses from focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews were audio-recorded alongside field notes written to accompany the recordings. The audio-recorded sound bites were translated into English and manually transcribed into text format as Microsoft Word documents. All transcriptions were reviewed by an independent experienced qualitative researcher for consistency, in which he listened to the recorded voices and compared the voices with the transcripts.

Data Cleaning: Data cleaning involved listening to the audio-recordings while comparing with the transcriptions to collect any spelling errors; insert notations for pauses, laughter, looks of discomfort; insert any punctuation, such as commas and full stops (periods).

Data coding and categories: In the study, initial coding, examined all transcripts line-by-line to identify sexual behaviours mentioned by respondents, circumstances relating to respondent involvement in sexual behaviours and peer influence to sexual behaviours. From each information segment 'codes' were assigned explaining and summarizing respondent responses into one word/sentence related to the study. A 'code book' was developed with all assigned codes and their meaning in relation to the study.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues in research were well taken care of including but not limited to ethical approval, consent and confidentiality.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Socio-Demographic characteristics of Respondents

In terms of gender, 39 (58%) of the respondents were female and 28 (42%) of the respondents were male. Respondent's age ranged from 14 years to 19 years of age; with eight (8) respondents having 14 years of age; six (6) respondents with 15 years; sixteen (16) respondents with 16 years; fifteen (15) respondents with 17 years; twelve (12) respondents with 18 years and ten (10) respondents with 19 years. Majority of the respondents were between 16 and 18 years of age.

4.2 Risky Sexual Behaviours among Out-of-School Adolescents

To identify risky sexual behaviours among respondents, responses were categorized into out-of-school adolescent free-time activities and how such activities relate to sexual behaviours, common sexual behaviours mentioned among out-of-school adolescents.

Theme 1: Adolescent Sexual Activities During their Free Time

Responses mentioned on free time activities included visiting friends and relatives; going to town; looking for business; socializing with friends and peers; playing football and other sports; betting games as a business for money and other respondents mentioned visiting boyfriends and girlfriends.

"[...] we visit friends to pass time and not all friends are bad and many of them are girls not boys." FGD- 04-11



Majority of the respondents mentioned visiting friends as one way of leaving home to avoid boredom at home and not being in school.

"[...] if you are not in school and not employed, you spend most of your time at home doing nothing. To avoid boredom, you are forced to look for friends and spend time with friends. This is not the case if you are going to school because you will have homework and other school-related things to do" **R- 2019-06**

Respondents activities in their free time directly connected them to friends and increased risk for engagement in sexual behaviours. These responses were connected to friends and peer influence.

"[...] not every day, but most of us move to town and sometime we even go to disco at night...even these girls they are not saying the truth but we meet them in town and sometimes at night stay" **FGD- 04-02**

Theme 2: Sexual Behaviours among Out-of-School Adolescent

Responses on likely sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents included; involvement in sexual relations with boyfriends and girlfriends; sexual affairs with older persons (referred to as sugar mummies and sugar daddy); involvement in multiple sexual relations; transactional sex and early sexual debut.

"[...] some girls sleep with old men with money in exchange for money, perfumes and other good gifts." **R- 2019-08**

"[...] sex with many girls especially the prostitutes; not using condoms and old women are some of the common sexual practices here" **R- 2019-17**

Respondents referred to multiple sexual relations with slangs like Panadol, side chicks, side dish & fitting while transactional sex was mostly referred to with slangs like prostitution, sex for something, friends with benefits, using what you have to survival, benefiting of being a girl.

"[...] sometimes you meet a man with money at the club and you end-up having sex with him as a side person, this does not mean he is your husband." **R-2019-06**

Adolescent engagement in sexual practices was confirmed by the key informants who stressed the existence of bars as a major risk factor for adolescents to get involved in such sexual acts;

"[...] in this Northern Division, there are many bars and lodges so most youth with money you find them in these bars buying alcohol in sachets and buying girls. Most of these girls you see selling small items on the streets end up with men in the evening" **Key informant respondent**



Theme 3: Early Sexual Debut among Out-of-school Adolescent

Majority of the respondents had their first sexual debut before the age of 18 years.

"[...] i got a girlfriend when I was 14 years because my friends had girlfriends, however, I first had sex when I was 16 years with the same girl" R- 2019-05

"[...] my first sex was at 17 with a different person and I used to watch romantic series, talk about love and sex stuff with my friends and all this influenced me to start thinking about sex issues" R- 2019-17

However, respondents attributed to early sexual debut to peer friends and temptations in exchange for exchange for basic necessities, luxury and money at the time. Others respondents considered poverty, misleading information and admiration to fit in peer groups.

"[...] i used to admire my friends who used to have sex with men in exchange for eats and other good things. I could also admire the situation and so when I got the opportunity, I used it" R- 2019-19

"[...] first time to have sex, it was just playing because .. your mind has it and when you go to play you also practice" R- 2019-04

Some respondents attributed early sexual debut to the poverty and the living conditions within their homes.

"[...] living conditions at home, there were no basic needs. I was operating a shop and accepted sexual relations with one of the customers at the shop. we were in Kamuli and my aunt had a shop so I saw he was among those who used to come and buy from us(customers)" R- 2019-01

"[...] i had dropped out of school and they brought me a man and I went for marriage and divorced when I was four months pregnant but I didn't give birth to the baby" R- 2019-05

4.3 Socio-Economic Circumstances to Risky Sexual Behaviours

Socio-economic circumstances among respondents contributed to engagement in risky sexual behaviours. Respondents cited different circumstances that increased their vulnerability to engage in such risky sexual behaviours including poverty at home, lack of basic necessities, alcohol abuse and personal desires for sex.

Theme 1: Poverty and the lack of basic necessities



In regard to social-economic challenges, respondents mentioned poverty at home and lack of basic necessities as key factors increasing vulnerability to engage in risky sexual behaviours. Poverty and the living conditions at home influenced their sexual decisions.

“[...] sometimes the situation at home can force you to do many bad things. If your mother is poor you will need a man to survive in this community” R- 2019-03

Apart from the general poverty at home, respondents considered the lack of basic necessities to forcing girls into relationships for survival while adolescent boys considered personal desires for sex and luxury.

“[...] if a girl has stopped schooling and she does not work, how do you expect her to get personal needs. If parents who failed to keep her in school don't expect them to start providing money for necessities” FGD- 02-08

Theme 2: Alcohol abuse to engage in sexual affairs

Respondents linked usage of alcohol to confidence building for sexual advancements. Many adolescent boys use alcohol to build confidence to approach girls while many adolescent girls have used alcohol to give them confidence and status.

“[...] many shy boys use alcohol to gain confidence to approach girls” R- 2019-13

Some respondents admitted to have used alcohol for pleasure and engagement in sexual affairs without fear. From the discussion, it was alleged that boys and girls were on many occasions under the influence of alcohol as they engaged in sexual affairs.

“[...] most youth [adolescents] play sex when they are drunk because they are addicted to small tot-packs of alcohol (alcohol sold in buvera)” R- 2019-08

Discussions were held to understand how adolescents learnt the habit of drinking alcohol and the impact of alcohol to their lives. To some adolescents the habit of drinking alcohol was learnt from their friends and peers.

“[...] I drink alcohol with my friends just to pass time.” R- 2019-02

“[...] if he does not have money to pay my fees but has money for beers what do you think” R- 2019-09

4.4 Peer influence to engagement in risky sexual behaviours

Peer influence to engage in risky sexual behaviours ranged from misleading influence from friends, desire to please friends, peer pressure and bad



company; which all in different ways mounted pressure to engage in different risky behaviours.

Theme 1: Peer Pressure and Adolescent Sexual Relations

Respondents attributed engagement in sexual relations to pressure from peers and friends as expressed below;

"[...] I was just lured into having sex by my friends were also doing the same" R- 2019-03

"[...] if friends did not influence me, I would have started sex at 20 years and my fellow youths reduced it to four years" R- 2019-06

"[...] I was influenced by my friends and after I had sex at 14 years" R- 2019-17

In response to peer admiration and influence, some respondents expressed that;

"[...] I admired my friends and wished to try. My friends would always showoff with girls, tell you stories about care and gifts received from friends" R- 2019-02

"[...] some of the stories told by friends about their relationships make you admire to have a boyfriend; Some friends came with gifts and perfumes from boyfriends, some girls never lack necessities" FGD- 02-05

Respondents considered peer pressure and the need to fit among friends, as leading factors to out-of-school adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviours

"[...] some girls follow bad example from friends and sleep with these old men.....for example girls at Jane's Saloon (real name of the Saloon withheld) if you go their most of the talks are about old men in town with money" FGD- 05-03

"[...] these girls who do sex for money have no age limit for as long as the person has money....if your friends are doing the same business you will learn from them" FGD- 05-09

However, other respondents down played peer pressure and attributed engagement in risky sexual behaviours to personal desires and influence from the sexual partners. As an adolescent you make your own decisions, depending on where you grow-up and what you want in life, friends cannot all the time decide what you should be doing.

"[...] the decision to get a girl is yours but sometimes you can see from others friends who have many girls" R- 2019-06



“[...] friends don’t force relationships unless you also accept” R-2019-11

“[...] friends cannot make for you a decision.....those girls who say friends mislead them are just not serious unless if the girl does not know what they want.” R- 2019-20

Theme 2: Misleading influence from friends and peers

Majority of the respondents attributed their early engagement in sexual affairs to peers and friends. This was expressed in different ways including peer admiration (especially those that had sexual partners); peers connecting them to sexual partners and desire to fit in peer groups as expressed below;

“[...] my friends would always showoff with girls, tell you stories about care and gifts received from friends” R- 2019-02

“[...] some of the stories told by friends about their relationships make you admire to have a boyfriend; Some friends came with gifts and perfumes from boyfriends, some girls never lack necessities” FGD- 02-05

Some respondents revealed direct peer connection to sexual partners;

“[...] my friend Sarah brought the man and told me I have to love him.” R- 2019-04

Theme 3: Bad company and the need to fit in peer groups

Respondents mentioned bad company and the need to fit within peer groups as a contributing factor to risky sexual behaviours. Some respondents considered this common and attributed it to desire for material support from men among girls and boys being “womanizers”.

“[...] group influence and wanting to seek bravely and pride from the group for being above the group” R-2019-02

“[...] if you are in bad company where girls are prostitutes and have many boyfriends” R-2019-13

“[...] sometimes we do what we see from our friends and that is how we are influenced” R-2019-17

Key informant respondents confirmed bad company, irresponsible parenting and unlimited exposure were highlighted as influences to out-of-school adolescents to engage in risky sexual practices. One of the key informant respondents was very critical on the bad company and peer groups which provide misleading information and bad role model to adolescents, as a result many of them have ended-up in hospital beds infected with HIV.

“[...] some peer groups are bad influence – encouraging each other to engage in sexual behaviours, stealing and many other



*bad influences. Rumor-mongering, girls also sit and decide in their groups”- **Key informant respondent***

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Risky Sexual Activities among Out-of-School Adolescents

To identify sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents, respondents mentioned their free-time activities and how these activities linked them to sexual behaviours. Out-of-school adolescent free-time activities included visiting friends and peers away from home, moving about in towns and socializing with friends which provided increased risk and open opportunities to engage in sexual behaviour. This confirmed that out-of-school adolescents use their free-time created as a result of not being in school to socialize with friends and peers. From such socializations, out-of-school adolescents ended up in sexual relationships and other risky sexual practices. These findings indicate increased sexual temptations and exposure compared to their counterparts in school. Other previous study findings demonstrated that adolescents who spend unsupervised time with peers are more likely to engage in sexual intercourse. Unsupervised leisure time with peers was identified as a factor to early sexual debut among adolescents (Silva, et al., 2016).

Common risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents included early sexual debut, sexual relations with older persons, multiple sexual relations, transactional sex, unstable sexual partners and unprotected sexual intercourse as common sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents. The World Health Organization attributes sexual risky behavior among adolescents, as the leading cause of Uganda’s abortion rates, which are higher than 18% in East African region and ranks at 13th in the world. The situation in Kamuli Municipality is comparable to Amhara Region (Ethiopia) where many youths are involved in risky sexual behaviors like early sexual initiation, having multiple sexual partners, inconsistency use of condom, and having sex with high risk partner (CSWs) and the main reason given for early sexual initiation included peer pressure followed by personal desire (Kassa, et al., 2016). Risky sexual behaviours increase the risk of adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV which can result in adolescent morbidity and mortality.

Age of sexual initiation is considered one of the contributing factors to other risky sexual behaviours. The findings on early sexual debut in this study were consistent previous research studies that revealed the correlation between early sexual debut and multiple sexual relations. Majority of respondents that had early sexual debut (sexual debut at age 16 years and below) were more likely to engage in multiple sexual partners (Khangalani, et al., 2010).

5.2 Socio-Economic Circumstances to Risky Sexual Behaviours

Prevailing socio-economic circumstances were considered a key factor coupled with peer influence to kindle engagement in risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents. Respondents attributed their involvement



in such risky sexual behaviours to survival due to challenging socio-economic circumstances including poverty at home, lack of basic necessities, personal desires for sex and alcohol abuse. This coincides with previous research findings conducted in Uganda and Tanzania among Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) who considered provision of gifts and money as synonymous with “care” and emotional support, particularly where they experienced stress and anxiety in trying to meet their needs and hence sexual involvement with older men who could provide such emotional support (Wamoyi, et al., 2018). Majority of school drop-out adolescents (especially girls) look at marriage as their next option after school has failed. As a result, engagement in risky sexual behaviours is seen as an opportunity by out-of-school adolescents to find potential husbands and sexual partners who could support them financial as compared to the young boys with no money. In western Uganda, poverty was identified as a major factor behind the motivation of girls to engage in early sex, cross-generational sex with older men and/or with multiple partners (Ninsiima, et al., 2020). The study finding coincide with other research findings that emphasized social-economic hardships and poverty as key factor to adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviours; Lack of household economic resources was frequently linked to adolescent girls’ engagement in transactional sex (Ridgeway, et al., 2020).

5.3 Peer Influence to engagement in Risky Sexual Behaviours

Peer influence to out-of-school adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviours ranged from misleading information from friends, desire to please friends, peer pressure and bad company; which all in different ways mounted pressure to engage in different risky behaviours. This was in agreement with many research findings that emphasized the peers influence each other to be engaged into risky sexual behaviours (Kumasa, 2015). Previous research findings, cited peer influence as the most important factor to sexual risk-taking behaviour; as a means of gaining entry and certification into a social peer group (Ngidi, et al., 2016).

In Southeast Nigeria, adolescents (particularly out-of-school adolescents) frequently received sexual reproductive health (SRH) information from friends and peers; however, peers lack appropriate knowledge, but only provide information based on their individual experiences (Agu, et al., 2020). Other previous research findings conducted among youths (adolescents) in school indicated pressure from peer groups to involve in the sexual activities; with respondents explaining that peers can influence each other on the sexual behavior, especially peers of similar age group could influence each other towards their own behavior (Tolera, et al., 2019). However, other research findings revealed inconsistent association between peer exposures and sexual behaviour among young people in sub-Saharan Africa (Fearon, et al., 2015).



6. CONCLUSION

Study findings confirmed the existence of risky sexual behaviours among out-of-school adolescents (including early sexual debut, multiple sexual partners and sex with older sexual partners). Out-of-school adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviours is strongly influenced by their close associate peers and friends; coupled with the prevailing circumstances at the time of exposure.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on study findings, the following recommendations are proposed to government and parents/caretakers;

1. Despite not being in school, parents need to engage out-of-school adolescents with other activities that could reduce their free time to engage in risky sexual behaviours. Proposed interventions include engagement of out-of-school adolescents in non-formal skilling interventions, form meaningful groups like myooga initiative fund.
2. Address the social-economic hardships, poverty and parental neglect among out-of-school adolescents as a strategy to mitigate temptations and circumstances leading to adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviours. This can be through alternative skills educational opportunities created for out-of-school adolescents as strategies to improve the economic livelihood and avenues to spend the excess created time due to school drop-out.
3. Influence adolescent selection of positive peers and good company to avoid misleading peers. Most out-of-school adolescents spend much of their time with friends and peers. School time is replaced with interactions with peers and friends, with whom they engage in different risky sexual behaviours during their time not in school. Therefore, association with positive peers and good company will lead to reduced temptations to engage in risky sexual behaviours.
4. Despite being out-of-school, parental/guardian monitoring is a significant factor to reducing adolescent involvement in risky sexual behaviours. Closer family relationships and greater parental involvement are associated with a number of low-risk sexual practices such as lower exposure to risky situations

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9. DECLARATION

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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