

PARENTAL EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR OF FEMALE ADOLESCENTS IN EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the impaired sexual behaviour of adolescent females as a result of parental insecure attachment. Drawing from John Bowlby's attachment theory which guides this study, research determined that the type of emotional attachment between adolescent females and their parents/caregivers influence the kind of relationships they (female students) may develop with significant others including romantic partners. The study comprised of twenty Xhosa- speaking female students (aged 16–19 years) from one high school in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. This study followed a qualitative research design and the data was collected by means of focus groups interview. Adolescent females with impaired parent-adolescent attachment experienced negative self-esteem, academic performance and engaged in cohabitation. Based on the findings, this research study recommends parents to provide primary prevention strategies to improve the level of secure emotional attachment with their daughters.

KEYWORDS: Parent-adolescent attachment, communication, self-esteem, poverty.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional period when individuals' biological, cognitive, psychological and social characteristics rapidly develop to maturity. According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, adolescence is a time when individuals often begin to explore and navigate romantic and intimate relationships with others and during this period majority of female adolescents struggle with identity formation and often ask themselves "*Who am I?*" (Pastorino & Doyle-Portillo, 2011; Koepke & Denissen 2012). During adolescence, attachment-related behaviour is reconstructed since the

adolescents become less dependent on parents in terms of sex-communication and more focused on peer relationships (Rawatlal, Kliewer, & Pillay, 2015). The higher the degree of attachment insecurity toward an adolescent female, the more likely an adolescent would exhibit negative behaviour, such as coercive sexual behaviour and antisocial behaviour (Kumpfer, Whiteside, Greener, & Allen, 2010). Given that insecure – avoidant attachment and insecure – ambivalent attachment, are indicative of poor primary parent-adolescent interaction and predispose negative psychological and behavioural consequences (Weiten, 2016) teenage girls are prone to fall pregnant (Connolly, Heifetz, & Bohr, 2012), drop out of school (Holborn & Eddy 2011), have multiple sexual partners and abuse alcohol and drugs, to fill the emotional void created by emotionally uninvolved and absent parents (Kheswa & Pitso 2014). Literature documented that adolescent females who report lower levels of self-worth engage in riskier sexual behaviour than their peers with higher levels of self-worth to cope with isolation, loneliness and peer rejection (Ryckman, 2008).

Understanding how hegemonic forms of masculinity promote social inequalities and patriarchal attitudes toward women in many parts of the world (Bhana & Anderson, 2013) emotionally insecure adolescent males tend to lack power to negotiate safe sex with their sexual partners (Jewkes & Morrell 2010). In Uganda, 15% of female adolescents reported being forced to perform sexual activities against their will (Marston, Beguy, Kabiru & Cleland, 2013). In South Africa, it is difficult to determine the prevalence of cohabitation because statistics do not provide conclusive evidence of this trend, given that information relating to the number of cohabiting couples has been inferred from statistics relating to marriage, divorce, remarriage and illegitimate births (Hosegood, McGrath, & Moultrie, 2009). Furthermore, Amato and Kane (2011) hypothesized that unstable family structures and poor parenting practices predict deviant peers associations, teenage dating and teenage cohabitation. Thus, the current study investigates emotional attachment and its impact on the sexual behaviour of female adolescents in Raymond Mhlaba Municipality, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attachment

Emotional attachment is defined as an emotion-laden target-specific bond between a person and a specific object or between two or more people and it is a three dimensional construct comprised of affection, passion and connection (Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005). Attachment can be grouped into three categories; *secure attachment* which is associated with positive relationship outcomes such as stability, satisfaction, self-disclosure, trust and support, *anxious attachment* which is associated with dissatisfaction, conflict, a high breakup rate, and *avoidant or dismissing attachment* which is linked to a lower level of intimacy and self-disclosure and a higher breakup rate (Weiten 2016; Mikulincer & Shaver 2012). Crouter and Booth (2014) found that female adolescents with the capacity for intimacy in romantic relationships were those with secure emotional bonds with caregivers or parents in childhood. In view of this Kumpfer *et al.* (2010) advocated that parents exhibiting open communication and family bonding increase the likelihood for the adolescents to demonstrate coping skills, self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulation of emotions. Personal needs met in a supportive relationship with parents include trust, security (Mikulincer & Shaver 2012) and is associated with friendships that adolescent females have and the positive attributes of the adolescents' close peers (Stone, 2015). Among Chinese, Xia (2011) found that parental attachment contributed towards adolescent females' social, cognitive and mental functioning. McBride (2009) found that sex-education assisted youth to deal with many different emotional, behavioural and mental issues, including sexual empowerment and attachment. However, research found that adolescent females from dysfunctional families and who have low self-esteem often encounter emotional inadequacies and their school enrolment and schooling tend to be negatively associated with the probability of sexual initiation and early childbearing (Kheswa, 2017).

Dysfunctional families and poverty

Family structures which are disorganized in terms of conveying sexual values and instilling self-respect amongst their adolescents owing to divorce, domestic violence, parental substance abuse and poverty have been documented as dysfunctional and having deleterious effects on the adolescents' sexual behaviour (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Meinck, Cluver, Boyes & Mhlongo, 2015). Marston, Beguy, Kabiru and Cleland (2013) documented that in the United States, adolescent females who experienced family dysfunction and emotional deprivation were twice likely than their counterparts from authoritative parent households to initiate sexual intercourse at the early age of 15. Bernat and Zhilina (2010) argued that female adolescents may also be susceptible to human trafficking due to lack of emotional attachment with parents, neglect and experience of poverty at home. Worldwide, UNAIDS (2010) estimated that about 1.9 million children grow up without parents and adolescent females often take the responsibility to head their homes. To bridge the economic gap as a result of orphanhood which might be the result of AIDS related illness of their parents, researchers such as James, Ellis, Schlomer and Garber (2012), Kreppner and Lerner (2013) confirmed that such adolescents experience early sexual activities. In similar vein, Amoetang, Kalule-Sabiti and Arkaah (2014) found that poverty tends to weaken moral values that moderate sexual behaviour, especially among female adolescents who exchange sexual favours with multiple sexual partners and older men for financial gratification regardless of the risks to contract HIV/AIDS. This type of behaviour reminds one of Emersson's (1976) social exchange theory which posits that individuals who receive gifts as rewards from their sexual partners are most likely to sustain such relationships. However, Richter, Mabaso, Ramjith and Norris (2015) noted that adolescent females often become submissive and at times introduced to drug abuse prior engaging in unprotected sex because such relationships promote unequal status between sexual partners and cultural suppression of female sexuality.

Drugs and alcohol abuse

Due to deficient emotional bonds with their parents who might be stressed due to unemployment to meet their children's needs, adolescent females may experience feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, display depressive mood episodes, social withdrawal, suicidal attempts (Burrows, Swart, & Laflamme, 2009) and engage in alcohol and drugs as a coping strategy (Comer 2013). Furthermore, owing to a weak internal locus of control to make informed decision about their future goals, it is common for adolescent females to conform to peer pressure and subsequent alcohol and drug abuse (Kheswa & Shwempe, 2016). In this regard, peer influence is most likely to transmit unclear values and permissive attitudes towards sexuality which, in turn, puts adolescent females in the vulnerable position of unhealthy sexual activities (Sumter, Bokhorst, Steinberg, & Westenberg, 2009). Acknowledging Bandura's social learning theory that it recognizes the influence of peers as agents of emotional, cognitive and relational socialization during adolescence (Mimiaga *et al.* 2013) majority of adolescent females from households characterised by insecure attachment, find nothing wrong in attending pubs with their friends and allow sexual advances made by men especially when they are under the influence of alcohol (Reddy, 2013). In contrast, Ungar, Liebenberg, Dudding, Armstrong and Van de Vijver (2013) found that not all adolescent females from dysfunctional families are susceptible to alcohol and drug abuse. These scholars affirmed that girls whose schools are constructive and provide emotional support, by far, contribute towards their positive self-esteem and resilience. Thus, they manage to complete their formal education and buffer against risk factors such as practising unsafe sex and experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

Unwanted pregnancy and risk sexual behaviour

According to Kheswa (2017) dysfunctional families breed risk sexual behaviour and unwanted pregnancies owing to lack of secure attachment between parents and their adolescent females. Owing to lack of sex-education, Kheswa and Shwempe (2016) in their qualitative study found African adolescent females to be more vulnerable to contracting sexually transmitted infections because they

lived as child-headed families and parents were unemployed. Another factor that is brought by Alleyne-Green, Grinnell-Davis, Clark and Cryer-Coupet (2015) regarding adolescent females' unclear sexual values is found to be absent fathers who live separately from their homes due to divorce or employment. Ungar and his colleagues (2013) mentioned that adolescent females from such households usually experience greater behavioural problems including risky sexual behaviours than their peers from two-parent households. In a school-based survey conducted by Kharsany et al., (2012) in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, HIV prevalence among girls was 19.7 percent. In a study conducted in Capricorn District in Limpopo Province, South Africa, by Mothiba and Maputle (2012) 40 percent of female adolescents who fell pregnant were only dependent on a single mother's income, 16 percent solely on child support grant and 20 percent on the father's income. Cohen and Manning (2010) found that the underlying reason of their pregnancies could be attributable to cohabitation as 30 percent of young women had cohabited by age 20 while 20 percent had by age 18.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted several theoretical models such as the romantic attachment theory by Mary Ainsworth (1978), John Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory and development-contextual theory by Bronfenbrenner (1986) as they provide an understanding of how attachment influences an individual's upbringing from an early age. The view of the developmental-contextual theory is based on Bronfenbrenner's ideas that romantic relationships are shaped by processes in the family and the peer group, as well as by cultural beliefs about the nature of love, the correct age at which to begin dating and the roles that females should play in romantic relationships (Underwood & Rosen 2011). Research indicated that as adolescent females join socially with groups of mixed gender peers, the possibility of romantic relationships is increased by exposure to potential romantic partners as well as by observation of peer models of romantic cross-gender interactions (Schultz & Schultz 2013; Sumter *et al.* 2009). Based on these premises, this paper intends to answer the following questions: (i) How does parental emotional

attachment impact on the adolescent females' sexual behaviour? (ii)
What are the psychological effects associated with poor parental
emotional bonding?

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual design was followed to explore how emotional attachment with parents or caregivers has impacted on the twenty adolescent females' sexual behaviour. Qualitative research is an approach for explaining and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013; Babbie, 2010). The goals of qualitative research include identification of central themes that explain why and how a particular phenomenon operates as it does in a particular context. The sample comprised of twenty Xhosa- speaking female participants (aged 16-19 years) from one high school in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. A stratified sampling method was opted based on homogeneity (i.e. culture, race) to represent each grade. Furthermore, the Department of Psychology, University of Fort Hare has as an ongoing community project to empower adolescent females about their human rights and sexuality. Upon being granted the permission to conduct the study by the school principal, a female researcher requested the designated Life-Orientation (LO) educator to provide a list of female learners in Grade 10 and 11, who have reported sexual encounters. The LO educator did not become part in identifying the participants, however, she had informed the learners about the research project during lessons.

Data Collection

Data was collected on the same day by means of two focus groups consisted of ten participants, which lasted for an hour, each. The first focus group interviews were facilitated among the Grade 10s whose age ranged from 16 to 18 while the second focus group interview of Grade 11s was facilitated on the same day, after two hours. The reason for conducting two separate focus group interviews was largely due to the same grades of the participants. As suggested by Creswell (2013), the researchers opted for these focus groups because they offer participants an opportunity to be as open and honest as

possible when describing their feelings and experiences. Furthermore, through the use of communication skills such as reflection, questioning, nodding, clarification and maintaining eye contact Babbie, (2010), the researchers facilitated the discussion with ease. Finally, owing to manageable groups, it was easy to interact with the participants and probe them for clarity until the themes were identified.

A well-ventilated office (in the Administration Block) with lights and a round table to accommodate participants was allocated for this purpose. An informed consent in this study was applied by asking the participants to express themselves in any language they would feel most comfortable with and the use of pseudonyms for anonymity and confidentiality.

Data analysis

For the purpose of analysing the collected data, the researchers used Tesch's (2013) method of coding to identify themes. Researchers carefully read the responses several times after transcribing and translated verbatim since some of the participants expressed themselves in IsiXhosa. Themes are defined by Monette, Sullivan, Dejong and Hilton (2013) as the grouping of observations into a limited number of categories. Similar ideas presented by participants were grouped together and identified as codes and further classified as themes (Creswell, 2013). By grouping similar ideas, the researcher attempted to reduce and simplify the data, at the same time retained words spoken by participants and their essential meanings.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Maxwell (2013) asserted that credibility includes activities that increase the probability that credible findings will produce. One of the best ways to establish credibility is through prolonged engagement with the subject matter. Dependability is a criterion met once researchers have demonstrated the credibility of the findings. The question to ask then is this, how dependable are the results? Triangulation of methods has the potential to contribute to the dependability of the findings. There can be no dependability

without credibility. Drawing from the work by Lincoln and Guba (1985) it is important to evaluate the worth of a research study. (Willig, 2013). Dependability is a criterion met once researchers have demonstrated the credibility of the findings. The question to ask then is this, how dependable are the results? Dependability of the current study was established through a rich and detailed description of the research methods. In this study, credibility was attained through the quotations of participants and non-verbal gestures that were recorded. Themes were compared within and across the two focus groups to establish consistency and referred back to the original discussions in order to validate them. Focus group discussions were used to collect data, the items in the interview schedule included questions that were relevant to the goal and objectives of the study and were based on the theoretical frameworks that the study employed. Transferability refers to the probability that the study findings have meaning to others in similar situations. The expectation for determining whether the findings fit or are transferable rests with potential users of the findings and not with the researchers (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2012). In this study, transferability was obtained through the rich and detailed descriptions of data collection and analysis methods during the investigation. The researcher provided a thick description of the nature of the study participants, their lived experiences, and the researcher's observations during the study.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were applied in the study. A written letter requesting permission to conduct research was submitted to the high school principal in Ntselamanzi village, Eastern Cape after the Govan Mbeki Research Development Centre from the University of Fort Hare endorsed the Ethical Clearance. The research took place in October 2016. The researchers clearly explained what the study was about to the female adolescents, who, voluntarily participated and agreed to be tape-recorded. A quiet library was suggested by the principal as a venue to conduct the study. There were no interruptions from the teachers or other learners and the room had enough space and it was well ventilated. The respondents were further assured of

their dignity and anonymity as they were asked not to reveal their names. Afterwards, the information was destroyed.

RESULTS

The categories with sub- themes were identified following Tech's method of qualitative analysis pertaining to the parental emotional attachment and its impact on the adolescent females' sexual behaviour are: parent-adolescent attachment, poverty, risk sexual behaviour, self-esteem and academic performance.

Parent-adolescent attachment

Uninvolved parenting styles

This theme emerged following that majority of respondents stated the kind of relationship they had with their parents. It is clear that the lack of emotional attachment between female adolescents and their parents is very low and in some cases non-existent. For example, in the first focus group interviews, Jabulile (aged 16) and Ntombizodwa (aged, 18) stated the following respectively when asked to relate their relationships with caregivers . *“My parents are strict people so there was not much to share, meaning I am not that close to them”*; *“I hardly speak to her, I have that fear so I prefer to talk to my sisters”*. Khosi, aged 19, who was in the second focus group reiterated that being raised in a nuclear family could be difficult when there is no peace or comfort. This is what she had to say: *“My parents are always fighting and I never got advice pertaining to sex matters, even from my mother except to be yelled at when I perform poorly at school”*

Orphanhood

It was clear from the responses from both focus groups that when adolescent females are raised by relatives that they are susceptible to experience early sexual debut. Three respondents mentioned orphanhood as one of the factors that have impacted on their sexual behaviour. The extracts below attest to that;

“There is no strong relationship because I wasn't raised by her. I lost my mother when I was 10 years old and I had to relocate from Umtata to come and stay with my aunt”[Manana, Aged 18, Focus Group 2,]

“ I would not say that utatumncinci wami (my uncle) gives me love because even before my mother died, he was always staying at the mine ” [Phindile, Aged, 19, Focus Group 2]

However, Nompilo (aged 17) from the first focus group highlighted that her educators provide emotional support that enables her not to feel unwanted as her single mother died when she was 15 years old. She expressed the following:

“I got emotional support from my educators during morning devotions although it is difficult because after our mother passed on, I have to look after my two younger brothers and to survive, I should at times be with my boyfriends because they buy us food. ”

Absent fathers

The participants expressed absent fathers as another reason for their sexual behaviour. They mentioned that they stay apart with their biological fathers due to working far away and being raised by their grandparents. In the case here, they confirm their sexual prowess.

“We do not have a strong relationship with my dad, we do talk but maybe after 2 months. He does not sleep at home and uhlal ’eshushu (he is always drunk)” [Mbuyi, Grade 10, Aged 17]

“My father and I have no bond. He does not know me and everytime he is at home from Johannesburg, he spends time with his girlfriend while I look after my old grandmother and she is sick” [Focus Group 2, Duduzile, Aged, 11]

Communication on sexual issues

It was evident from the responses that there is a communication-gap between adolescents and their parents with regard to sexual issues as parents do not act responsibly in educating or equipping their daughters about sex. The adolescent females cited the following when responding to the question: **“What advice do your parents give around sexuality?”**

“ They don’t, we never talk about my dating” [Mathomba, Aged, 17, FG1]

“We don’t talk about such, I think they assume that I have a boyfriend otherwise they never ask anything regarding boyfriends and I never bring it on our discussions” [Asive, Aged, 18, FG1]

“My mother does not talk to me at all about sexual matters”
[Nontsizi, Aged 18, FG1]

“My parents are not involved in my sexual matters as they don’t even know whether I am dating or not” [Khosi, Aged,19, FG2]

“They never involved me because they are very strict, private, cultural and they never spoke about things like that. They just told me that if I ever had a boyfriend they would kick me out of the house” [Ntombizodwa, Aged 18, FG1]

Poverty

This theme relates to socio-economic status of the adolescent females’ families or households.

Poor socio-economic status

The participants pointed clearly that owing to poverty and lack of attachment with their caregivers, they could not resist being resilient, thus, they engaged in sexual behaviour.

“ I sometimes leave home to stay with my boyfriend because of the financial circumstances of my family. He is the only person, whom, I can count on” [Thuli, Aged 18, FG2].

Nompilo with tears in her eyes, was forthright and said *“...being poor has led me to have sex with older men because they give me money to support my younger brothers”*.

Risk sexual behaviour

Unclear sexual values

It is evident that the sequels of lack of parental emotional support on their adolescent females, account for unclear sexual values and permissive attitude towards premarital sex. To cover the emotional inadequacy, adolescent females expressed their comfort in staying with their boyfriends. In responding to the question: **“How do you deal with stress associated with lack of parental emotional support?”**, the respondents narrated the following;

“ I normally visit my boyfriend and stay for some weeks because he truly cares about me”[Ntombi, Aged 18, FG2]

“My boyfriend makes me forget all my problems and spends for me”[Zanemvula, Aged 18, FG1]

Despite being raised by strict parents, Ntombizodwa also demonstrated unclear sexual values by stating that she had to lie to be with her boyfriend, whom, she met on social media. They extract

below illustrates what could be perceived as the consequences of authoritarian parenting style:

“Because my parents always threaten me instead of educating me about sex and showing me love, I lied to them that there was an excursion for the Grade 10s. I spent two days in East London at the hotel with the man I met on Facebook.”

Sexually transmitted infections

While being probed on the issues of not sleeping at home to alleviate stress, four participants mentioned the risk of contracting sexual transmitted infections. For example, Duduzile was quoted as follows: *“Once I have prepared something to eat for my grandmother on Friday and Saturday nights, I go to the tavern and come home the next morning. I do this because I engage in sex with different men for money”*. Gloria, aged, 16, from the first focus group, told the researchers that she once contracted gonorrhoea owing to having unprotected sex with a neighbour who often provided her with security since she stays in a drug-friendly environment. When asked to indicate whether their sexual partners use condoms, Linda, aged 17, who was in the second focus group, mentioned that their sexual partners tend to view them as being unfaithful and that contributes towards not negotiating safe sex. In the same vein, Nonhlanhla, aged 19, highlighted that they are prone to be physically abused when raising the risk of STIs and unplanned pregnancies. She quoted one of her boyfriends saying *“ungandixelel’ ukunya ngoba ndikuph’imali ”* That is, [Don’t tell me shit because I do care for you, financially].

Self-esteem

Compliant personality

This theme emerged from the findings which revealed that the participants experienced a low self-esteem although some participants demonstrated self-confidence and emotional fulfilment. The statements below provide evidence that due to insecure attachment from their parents or caregivers, feelings of devaluing oneself are inevitable.

“I would call my boyfriend to post my pictures on his Whatsapp Status and to state that I am special” [Ntombi]

“One of my ex-boyfriends, told me to honour our appointments irrespective that I should prepare myself for the exams ”[Nonhlanhla]

Self-reliance

However, Nomasonto, aged 17, from the first focus group interview, cautioned other participants to have a purpose in life although they come from families which are inadequate in secure attachment. *“ I am emotionally independent to my partner because I cope very well without him and I do not need his comfort when I am going through a rough patch”*. Manana, who is an orphan emphasized self-respect and resisting peer pressure even if it is difficult at times. She narrated as follows;

“ I try to be not emotionally independent on him because I create my self-esteem, worth and happiness for myself. I am not the product of others’ opinion”

Academic performance

Contrary to what the majority of literature documented, there was no link between sexual activity and the academic performance of adolescent females at school, whose parents do not have an emotional connectedness with. For example, many participants in their responses to the question: **“How does lack of parental emotional support on sexual matters impact on your academic performance”** ?, they expressed resilience and internal locus of control.

“ I don’t see any effects because I know how to allocate time for my studies and my activities”[Manana]

“It hasn’t affected my studies because I’m still doing well on my academics, the thing is I know what I want and I believe I must not ever let anything disturb my studies” [Siphesethu, Aged, 17, FG 2]

“ It has never impacted on my academic performance. I do whatever it takes to make sure that my academics are outstanding” [Mbuyi]

“I am doing very well at school and it has it has no impact on me because I tell myself the only way for me to have all I need in life is to focus on my academics, I can’t afford to fail because of a boyfriend”[Nontsizi]

Absenteeism

However, Ntombi, Phindile (aged 19) and Nobantu (aged 18) admitted to have repeated the grades due high rate of absenteeism from school. Nonhlanhla also attributed her skipping of classes to physical abuse by her ex- boyfriends, thus she was still in Grade 11. She even raised her fears should she open a case to the police because even in the community she is perceived as sexually immoral. *“ I had to remain home for a period of 5 weeks treating my bruises because one of my boyfriends physically abused me to an extent that I had to stop coming to school. Although my friends advised me to lay a charge against him, I feared for my life because he was a gangster”*

DISCUSSION

It is evident from these findings that the lack of emotional connectedness between the female adolescent correspond with a study conducted by Mikulincer and Shaver (2012) who found that avoidant or dismissing attachment is associated with a lower level of intimacy and self-disclosure. Brook, Lee, Finch and Brown (2012) stressed that such relationships that are characterised by little affection and interaction. In this regard, adolescent females with vulnerable personality tend to conform to delinquent peers and engage in sexual promiscuity. Drawing from the early works of John Bowlby on attachment, could neglect from childhood be the description of impaired emotional well-being because the participants often prefer to talk to their friends or relatives about personal matters, including sexuality? Therefore, it could be speculated that uninvolved parents increase the likelihood of adolescent female engaging in risky and casual sexual behaviours and the inability to form secure and “safe” sexual relationships.

The findings of the current study with regard to sex education corresponds with a study conducted by Ayalew, Mengistie and Semahegn (2014) which is based on the evidence that parent-child sexual communication in Sub-Saharan Africa is low across countries. It is therefore imperative that interventions at primary levels be facilitated because when sexual activities begin at an early age for adolescent females, sexual risk behaviours including intimate partner violence and unplanned pregnancies are inevitable. To support this, DePalma and Francis (2014) contended that if adolescents had sex

education from their parents they would preserve their virginity, understand the dangers of early sexual activity until they were older, rather than to stay in abusive relationships and sacrificed their future with older men. Furthermore, a study conducted by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) which stipulates that self-harm is more prevalent in females than males. Also, the study conducted by O'Conner, Mikulincer and Shaver (2012) supports the idea that adolescent and family adversity, maladaptive parenting and parental divorce are associated with self-harm in adolescence as they result in the disruption of emotional ties between the parent and the adolescent. The above mentioned responses characterize individuals suffering from borderline personality disorder, recurring suicidal behaviours or threats and self-harming behaviour (e.g. drugs and alcohol) owing to abandonment. In this study, some participants demonstrated a need for affection, admiration by requesting their sexual partners to post them on social media, which could be the sign of emotional inadequacy. Theoretically, instability and the lack of emotional ties between the parent and the children may result in the adolescents cohabitating at an early age (Cohen & Manning 2010) higher levels of depressive and generalized anxiety symptoms (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). No wonder, some of the participants left their homes to stay with their boyfriends to feel wanted and accepted. In other words, it is clear that when adolescent females are not supported emotionally at homes, chances of being victims of sexual abuse are high. In this study, adolescent females emerged as defenceless and hopeless when insulted by their sexual partners. Could this be due to the learned behaviour from hostile environments where adolescent females witnessed domestic violence between parents?

However, the adolescent females in this study mentioned that they are emotionally independent of their sexual partners although they derive pleasure and financial assistance. Furthermore, they mentioned self-reliance which could be the result of role models in the community or at schools. The implications of these findings could be attributable to various factors such as media influence, societal norms and peer pressure because there African soopies or dramas on DSTV Channels portray how women economically survive by having multiple sexual

partners. It is also not clear why these adolescent females claimed that they have a positive self-esteem yet they do not show secure attachment despite adversity of their family financial status. According to Koen (2009) secure attachment in adolescent females has the propensity in youth to exemplify leadership qualities, social well-being and competence, as reflected in characteristics of self-esteem, emotional adjustment, and physical health.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this research study concludes that all adolescent females who experienced insecure emotional attachment, who partook in this study, are predisposed to risky sexual behaviour (e.g. substance abuse, multiple sexual partners) owing to lack of sex-education from parents. It is important to note that when the family structure is not robust to buffer against risk behaviours, adolescent females become impulsive and think irrationally. Therefore, empowerment (e.g. sex- education and positive communication) at school and community level should be encouraged since adolescents' frontal lobes are still not fully developed to discern reality from fiction. The reason to call for empowerment it is because majority of female youth from poverty –stricken backgrounds lack resilience and sense of autonomy to complete their studies, hence they cohabitate.

RECOMMENDATION

In view of these findings, this study suggests that implementation of the empowerment programmes to equip adolescent females with human rights, psychological well-being and clear values on sexuality to cope with emotional inadequacy that comes as a result of poor socio-economic status. Furthermore, in rural settings, the government should create recreational facilities and youth centres that will be geared towards providing an on-going life- coaching to prevent adolescents in general, who may feel powerless and helpless in coping with peer pressure, dysfunctional families and subsequent risky sexual behaviour as a result of emotional inadequacy.

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