
Peer Group Influence and Criminality in Rivers State

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Abstract: *This study investigated the influence of peer pressure on youth criminality in Rivers States. The study examines 1268 youths which are employed, unemployed and student (secondary and tertiary). The youths also include both sex, male and female and they were selected using the random sampling technique. The selected samples were analysed using both the descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The five point Likert average was employed for the analysis of the mean whereas the chi-square statistics were used for the inferential statistical analysis. Results from the analysis revealed that there is a statistical significant relationship between peer pressure and the various social criminal vices in Rivers State and that peer groups have stronger influence on criminal related activities in Rivers State. Also, it was uncovered that majority of the respondent believe that peer group pressure influences youths behavior in Rivers State since the computed mean was greater than the criteria mean and finally the study shows that peer group pressure is what motivated youths into criminality in Rivers State. Base on the findings the study suggested among others that the management of the youth (secondary school students) should be the joint responsibility of parents, teachers, school administrators and the society at large.*

Keywords: *peer group, peer influence, crime, Rivers State, Nigeria*

1. INTRODUCTION

Young people break away from their families and try different roles and situations to figure out who they are and where they fit into the society. They spend more time with their friends and less time with their families. This is normal, healthy stage of development, but the growing distance between parents and their children and the increasing importance of friends can be a source of conflict and anger within the family. The desire to feel accepted and to fit in is one of the strongest forces in young persons; this can lead them to do things that they know are wrong, dangerous, or risky. On the positive side, the pressure to keep up with the peer group can also inspire them to achieve goals that they might never aim for on their own. In other words, young people prefer to be in the company of other young people, who offer mutual support in contrast to their parents, who they perceive as authoritarian. Perhaps this is why the issue of peer pressure is of great interest to the psychological and sociological fields of study.

Omoegun (1995) posited that young people have the tendency to want to associate with members of their own age group. As a result of this company with friends, the decision of the friend influences their decisions or behaviours. Youths' experience some physical and physiological changes during the period of development that cause them to encounter numerous risks in their daily lives. The quest for peer acceptance is manifested in the way they dress, speak, walk and in their general interests so that they can fit in with the group. Therefore, peers are often publicly blamed for the onset of risk behaviours ranging from substance use to teen pregnancy (Oetting & Beauvais, 1987). Recent work has also supported and extended this position, showing that friends play an important role in both harmful and positive activities (Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion & McCord, 2004), and that peer pressure predisposes adolescents to many forms of deviance, including alcoholism, gangsterism, robbery and violent secret cult activities (Oni, 2006, 2007). This implies that, although youths' acquire information regarding risk behaviours from parents, teachers, and the media, peers play a crucial role in youthful development by shaping their normative beliefs and interpretations of information regarding risk activities (Cassimejee, 1998; Duck, 1995; Conger & Petersen, 1994). In essence, peer norms help determine whether certain behaviour is hip, safe and desirable. Given the foregoing, it can be expected that some of the social vices that are found in Nigerian senior secondary schools and in society in general are the result of peer group influence on youths. This study was therefore designed to assess empirically the influence of peer group on criminality in Rivers state. Apart from the introduction the paper is divided into four parts. Part two discusses the literatures reviewed. Part three discusses the methods of the analysis. Part four gives the empirical results and the discussion of the findings while the last sections proffers policy recommendations and also concluded the study.

2. THE LITERATURES

In Eric-Erikson's theory of "Identity vs. Identity Confusion," young people are viewed as a developmental stage in which individuals are more susceptible to peer pressure due to the shift in emotional dependence from parents to peers (Wall, Power & Arbona, 1993; Berk, 2004). "Peer pressure" can be described as the influence exerted by a peer group in encouraging a person to change his or her attitudes, values, or behaviours to conform to the group. A person affected by peer pressure may or may not want to belong to these groups. They may also recognise dissociative groups that they do not wish to belong to, and therefore adopt behaviours in opposition to those of the group (Adams, 1996). In the same vein, according to Harris (1998), peer pressure can cause people to do things they would not normally do, e.g., take drugs, smoke, date, marry, have a job, have children and buy expensive items. Research has shown that over the last 50 years peer influence/pressure has emerged as the main source of values and behavioural influence for youths, replacing the influence of adults especially parent. Along with this new trend has come a rise in antisocial behaviour (Neufeld & Mate, 2005). Although the level of deviance varies between peer groups, the negative actions of one member of a group will increase the probability of other members taking part in similar behaviours. Affiliation with deviant peers predicts delinquent behaviour more strongly than community, school, or family characteristics (Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion & McCord, 2005). Additionally, while pressure from peer groups is undoubtedly influential, most youths choose friends that share common views about behaviours such as drinking or drug use. Pruitt Year stated that "the 'good kid' who falls in with the bad crowd is the exception, not the rule." Youth peer pressure is particularly common because most youths are forced to spend large amounts of time in fixed groups (schools and subgroups within them) regardless of their opinion of those groups (Ungar, 2004). However, youth peer pressure can also have positive effects. For example, if one is involved with a group of people who are ambitious and working to succeed, one might feel pressured to follow suit to avoid feeling excluded from the group. It is commonly believed that socially accepted children fare best in high school. It is expected that people who are considered popular will have the most resources, the most opportunities and the most positive experiences. Much of the time this is true; however, research shows that being in the popular crowd may also be a risk factor for mild to moderate deviant behaviour (Peel, 1993). This is also in agreement with the view of Omoegun (1995), that popular adolescents are the most socialised into their peer groups and are therefore vulnerable to peer pressures regarding substance use and some other deviant behaviours.

Adams (1996) argued that people are more likely to be heavily influenced by their peers and less likely to make decisions for themselves if they have low self-esteem, experiences problems in their family such as divorce, alcoholism, drug addiction, or unemployment, or belong to families where there is little support or communication, or strongly identify with only one ethnic group, feel distant from school and community activities, and are afraid of not belonging or fitting in. Because of this, the young person comes to ponder questions such as "who am I," "where am I," and "what am I doing here?" In seeking answers to these puzzling questions, he then begins to identify with his/her age mates. Thus, a phase of peer group pressure has begun, as the desire for separation from parents and association with peers. This makes young people to practice the behaviours of their age mates, not those desired by their parents. In explaining this situation, Onwuamanam (1998) argued that parents are largely responsible for lapses in adolescent behavior because they are expected to serve as role models and pay attention to their children's development to inculcate an appropriate sense of discipline. In support of this view, Oloko (1996) noted that some deviant children from reputable homes engage in the behaviour of selling their parents' belongings. This was attributed to the bad company kept by those youths.

Empirical Review

Franklin, Bouffard & Pratt (2012) investigated sexual assault on the college campus: fraternity affiliation, male peer support, and low self-control in northwestern public university Arizon state of the United State of America. They used a Voluntary and anonymous self-administered survey questionnaires to obtained 304 sample size of male student. The Likert point averages were used to code the responses from the respondent. The coded response were analyzed using bivariate models and a statistical analyses based on theoretically-specified models, the result shows that fraternity men were significantly more likely to report sexual assault as compared to their counterparts, providing preliminary support for the role of all-male peer groups in facilitating woman abuse. Furthermore, fraternity men were significantly more likely to receive informational support from their friends to use adverse and

abusive tactics to gain sexual access. In addition, fraternity men reported receiving significantly greater levels of peer pressure from their friends to have sex.

Oshodi, Aina & Onajole (2010) observed the Substance use among secondary school students in an urban setting in Nigeria: prevalence and associated factors as major risk behaviour among youth. The study used a cross-sectional and descriptive study method to analyse selected secondary school students in Lagos. Analysis of the data was conducted using EPI-info version 5. The results shows that the prevalence rates for lifetime use of the substances varied from 3.8% (n=14) for Heroin and Cocaine to 85.7% (n=344) for psycho stimulants; and for current use varying from 2% (n=8) to 56.5% (n= 213). For the so called "gateway drugs": alcohol and tobacco, their lifetime use prevalence rates were 9.2% (n=34) and 5.2% (n=19) while the lifetime use prevalence rate for cannabis was 4.4% (n=16). In terms of gender, the prevalence rates for males were generally higher than for their female counterparts except for antibiotics, analgesics, heroin and cocaine. Reasons for using substances included relief from stress, 43.5% (n=175), self-medication to treat illness, 23.8% (n=96), and to stay awake at night to study, 14.9% (n=60). Thus, the substance used was found to be prevalent among students in this study involving over-the-counter and socially acceptable substances as well as the abuse of illicit substances. It is advocated that there is a need to review existing health educational programmes.

Oni (2010) investigated peer group pressure as a determinant of adolescents' social adjustment in Nigerian schools, with a focus on the Ikeja Local Government Area of Lagos State. The study tested two hypotheses using a random sample of one hundred and twenty adolescents from four secondary schools in Port Harcourt. The instrument for data collections was a self-designed questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using an independent t-test and a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The results of the analysis showed that peer group pressure among adolescents is related to their social adjustment and that the gender of the adolescents affects their social adjustment as well.

Evelyn & Ngozi (2015) examined environmental violence, family upbringing; peer group influence as correlates of destructive tendencies among adolescents. Three research questions and three hypotheses were tested. The research hypotheses and questionnaires were answered using a survey and adopted expo facto design method of analysis. 400 respondents were randomly selected from diploma students of the Institute of Education, Delta State University, Abraka. The indicators of the study are Environmental violence, family upbringing, peer group influence and destructive tendencies among adolescents inventory. Regression statistical tool was used to analyze the data. The results showed that environmental violence, family upbringing is significantly related to destructive tendencies among adolescents while peer group pressure does not encourage it.

Esiri (2016) examined the Influence of Peer Pressure on Criminal Behaviour of youths in Nigeria. The study particularly investigated peer pressure in adolescent and how it may influence or create the leverage to non-conformity to societal norms and laws. The study used the framework of social learning and the social control theories and uncovered that the major features of the peer pressure process are identified as group dynamics, delinquent peer subculture, peer approval of delinquent behaviour and sanctions for non-conformity which include ridicule, mockery, ostracism and even mayhem or assault in some cases. Also, the study highlights acceptance and rejection as key concepts that determine the sway or glaciation of adolescents to deviant and criminal behaviour. Finally, it concludes that peer pressure exists for conformity and in delinquent subculture.

Omboto, et al (2012) studied the factors among youth imprisoned at Kamiti Youth Corrective Training centre (Y.C.T.C) which is the only penal institution for young male offenders aged 17 – 21 years in Kenya. The study involved 55 inmates selected by simple random sampling method from a sample frame of 120 inmates. Out of the 55 respondents 31 were aged 17 years while the remaining 24 were aged between 18 and 21 years. The data was collected by the use of questionnaires and personal interviews. The need to pay more attention to the crime that involve the young people is further supported by the crime reports which indicate that a higher number of juveniles and the youth have been involved in various crimes both in society and in learning institutions where unrests and riots are common.

3. METHODOLOGY

Accurate information about what youths do in situations is provided by observation and participation. The researcher's observation on the effect of peer group pressure on criminality in Rivers State was made possible

because of his experience within the Port Harcourt metropolitan. The researcher carried out a survey on the effect of peer group pressure on criminality in Rivers State; to facilitate the process, questionnaires was distributed to selected group of people living in the areas chosen. The questionnaires was administered in two areas of Port Harcourt metropolitan, Port Harcourt Town (Borkiri area, mile 3 and Transamadi/Aboloma axis) and Obio/Akpo area because these areas accounted for the largest percentage of commercial activities in Rivers State, hence, attracting the largest numbers of crime cases.

Table 1: Data Collected and Descriptions

Questionnaires		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Returned	1268	92.02
	Not Returned	110	7.98
	Total	1378	100.0

Source: Researcher Computation, 2019

The questionnaires which were correctly filled and returned by the youths of Port Harcourt Metropolitans are 1268, constituting 92 percent, while 8 percent were not returned.

Table 2 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Details	Classifications	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Males	914	72.08	72.08
	Females	354	27.92	100.0
Age	13-17	213	16.80	16.80
	18-30	882	69.56	86.36
	31-above	173	13.64	100.0
Marital Status	Married	492	38.78	61.22
	Single	776	61.22	100.0
Qualifications	B.Sc/HND	407	32.11	32.11
	Master's Degree	23	1.78	33.89
	Other Degrees	838	66.11	100.0
Employment Status	Fully employed	373	29.39	26.83
	Student	474	37.38	60.03
	None	421	33.23	100

We obtained information on this work via questionnaires, the study equally conducted “interviews”. Each of the selected respondents for the bi-directional conversation was interviewed for about 5-10 minutes.

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents, table 4.2 reveals that 914 representing 72.08% of the respondents were males while 354 (27.92%) were females. The tables also showed that respondents between the ages of 13-17, 18-30 and 31 and above were 16.80%, 69.56% and 13.64% respectively. We notice that persons within the age of 18-30 dominated the responses in Port Harcourt metropolitan. A good number of the sampled respondents were not married 61.22%. 38.78% was married. Singles includes persons out of marriage and persons not married at all; also we notice that some of the singles are parent that gave birth out of wedlock.

The tables shows that 32.11% of the respondent holds a first degree or Higher Diploma, 1.78% hold a Master's degree or Post Graduate Diploma, and 66.11% have Senior Secondary School Certificates (SSCE), National Diploma (ND/NCE) and Vocational /technical school degree.

The table also indicates that 29.39% of the respondents are fully employed either in a government setting or private firms or business owners, 37.38% are students in the high schools, polytechnics or the universities and 33.23 % are idle.

Analytical Technique

The data for the analysis were sourced primarily through well-structured questionnaires, interviews, and observations and analyzed with the aid of descriptive and inferential analytical tools. The Likert’s mean criterion and the Chi-square technique were used to determine the objectives of the study

Chi-Square χ^2

The computed χ^2 is for the test of the hypotheses in a given level of significance and degrees of freedom.

The formula for Chi-square (χ^2)

$$\chi^2 = \sum \left\{ \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e} \right\}$$

χ^2 = Chi-square value

F_o = Observe frequency

F_e = Expected frequency.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 4: Response to Questionnaire by the 1268 respondent

S/N	AIM	Questions	SAD 5	AD 4	UD 3	DA 2	SD 1	Total	Mean
	Empirically examine the influence of peer group on criminality in Rivers state	Does peer group pressure influences the behavior of youths in Rivers State	422	547	133	80	86	1268	3.90
		To what extent does peer pressure correlate with criminality	368	451	331	21	97	1268	3.77
		Does peer group pressure motivates youths into criminality	387	474	234	31	142	1268	3.74

Source: Researcher Field Report, 2019.

The researcher made use of chi-square test or goodness of fit test. Cower & Foreman, (2009) defined chi-square as any statistical hypothesis testing in which the sampling distribution of the test statistic is a chi-squared distribution when the null hypothesis is true, or any in which this is statistically true, meaning that be made to approximate a chi-squared distribution. The following steps should be followed when using chi-square test. These include:

Determining the degree of freedom (DF)

$$DF = (R-1)(C-1)$$

Where:

R = Row and C = Column

Determine a relative standard to serve as the basis for accepting or rejecting the hypothesis. For project work in the management & social sciences, the relative standard is 5% which is used as the minimum standard for accepting or rejecting the null and alternate hypothesis respectively.

$$\text{Expected frequency} = \frac{\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total}}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

Decision Rule: At 0.05% level of significance and degree of freedom, the study will fail to reject the null hypothesis (**H_o**) and reject the alternate hypothesis (**H₁**) if the calculated Chi-square value is greater than the tabulated value, otherwise accept, **H_o** and reject **H₁**.

Table4.4: shows the Observed and Expected Frequencies on the assessment of peer group influence and criminality in Rivers State

Questions	SAD	AD	UD	DA	SD	Total
Q1	422 (391.33)	547 (490.67)	133 (232.67)	80 (44)	86 (108.33)	1268
Q2	368 (391.33)	451 (490.67)	331(232.67)	21(44)	97(108.33)	1268
Q3	387 (391.33)	474 (490.67)	234 (232.67)	31(44)	142 (108.33)	1268
Total	1177	1472	698	132	325	3804
$X^2_{0.05}$	df = 8					22.0
X^2_{cal}						159.90

Source: Researcher Field Report, 2019 The expected frequencies (f_{eij}) are in brackets. We calculate the degree of freedom and expected frequencies using the formulas:

$$df = (Rows - 1)(Column - 1) \text{ and } f_{eij} = \frac{Row\ Total \times Column\ Total}{Grand\ Total} \text{ respectively.}$$

Hypothesis testing

The test for hypothesis is done with the help of the results in table4.4.

H₀₁: there is no significant relationship between peer group influence and criminality in Rivers State;

H_{a1}: there is a significant relationship between peer group influence and criminality in Rivers State;

The calculated chi-square (X^2_{cal}) values from table4.4 is 159.9 (i. e., $X^2_{cal} = \sum \frac{(f_{oij} - f_{eij})^2}{f_{eij}} = 159.9$) with the degree of freedom (df) of 8 the critical value or table value is 22.0.

Table4.4 shows that $X^2_{cal} > X^2_{tab}$, (X^2_{cal} . 159 is greater than X^2_{tab} . 22.0) thus, we reject the null hypothesis (H_{01}) and accept our alternative hypothesis (H_{a1}) and conclude that there is a significant relationship between peer group influence and criminality in Rivers State.

The response from the respondents were analysed using the likert 5 point averages. The results are summarized on Table 4.3. The criteria mean for the five point Likert average is 2.5. We compared the computed mean to the criteria mean as shown on table4.3 above.

The mean of the first question ‘Does peer group pressure influences the behavior of youths in Rivers State’ shows that majority of the respondent are in favor of the fact that peer group pressure influences youths behavior in Rivers State since the computed mean was greater than the criteria mean of 2.5 (i.e., 3.90 > 2.5).

The mean of the second question ‘To what extent does peer pressure correlate with criminality’ shows that majority of the respondent are in favor of the fact that there is a higher correlation relationship between peer pressure correlate with criminality in Rivers State since the computed mean was greater than the criteria mean of 2.5 (i.e., 3.77 > 2.5).

The study equally found that majority of the respondents believe that peer group pressure is what motivated youths into criminality in Rivers State. This conclusion was reached because the calculated mean values of all the responses using the likert five point score was greater than 2.5 which is the criteria mean.

The chi-Square (X^2) statistics was used to test for the reliability of the mean or the decision gotten from the Likert result. It was shown that there is a significant relationship between peer group and criminality in Rivers State. The responses from the respondents indicate that what lead most youth in Rivers State into committing crimes, among others, are the influences of peer groups or peer pressure. Most of the respondents argued that it was peers that introduced them to crime induce objects like taking of hard drugs, smoking and belonging to secret cults. These have induced them to commit crime and criminal related matters. Thus the buttress that peers is what makes them to be involved in various social vises, such as cult group clashes, political thuggery, militancy, etc.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Scholars have observed that peer group pressure plays a vital role in the lives and social adjustment of youths and their tendency to associate with members of their age group. As a result of this association, the decisions of the age group influence the decisions of the individual who belongs to that group. Therefore, youths practice the behaviours of their age mates, rather than those advocated by their parents and guidance, so it is imperative for parents and guidance to observe the kind of company their children keep. Other studies have found that the main values of the peer culture are social participation, group loyalty and individual achievement. Based on peer relationships, members of a group are influenced to do something they would not have attempted on their own, or prevented from doing something they might have wanted to do. It is the type of group that youth belongs to that determines his/her social position. Most of the crimes committed and deviant behaviours displayed by the youth in our society result from peer influence because the youths want to live up to group expectations or follow a particular fashion. Therefore, parents should serve as role models and be watchful of the types of friends kept by their children.

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusions reached above, this study offers the following recommendations:

1. Parents should serve as role models for their children to emulate.
2. Parents should be watchful of the types of friends kept by their children.
3. The parent-child relationship should be cordial enough to permit children to discuss their problems with their parents.
4. The management of the youth (secondary school students) should be the joint responsibility of parents, teachers, school administrators and the society at large.

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