

PEER INFLUENCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE OF ADOLESCENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA.

AKPAN, IMAOBONG D.

Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling
Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, Uyo.
imadavo@yahoo.com

&

UDOM, INWANG E.

Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling
Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, Uyo.
iwangudom@gmail.com

&

USOROH, COMFORT I.

comfortusoroh@yahoo.com
Department of Agriculture & Home Economics Education
Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, Uyo.

Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate peer influence and conflict resolution of secondary school adolescents in Akwa Ibom State. Three null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A survey research design was adopted for the study. A sample size of 337 adolescents students in Senior Secondary II were drawn from a population of 33,807 using stratified random sampling technique from 14 Secondary schools within the study area. A researcher-developed questionnaire was used to elicit information from respondents. The instrument had 20 items and was rated on a 4 point scale. The instrument was validated by three experts in cognate disciplines all in University of Uyo. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.96 ascertained the suitability of the instrument for use. Data was analyzed using independent t-test analysis. Findings portrayed that peer sub-cultures, group size and social freedom all had significant influence on conflict resolution among adolescents in the study area. Conclusion and recommendations were made based on the findings which includes among others provision of guidance counselors in public schools, creating awareness on acceptable peer sub-cultures, encouraging unity, love, cooperation and loyalty within peer groups irrespective of size, and emphasizing the ills of undue enjoyment of social liberties and freedom among adolescents.

Keywords: Peer Influence, Conflict Resolution, Peaceful Co-existence, Adolescents, Akwa Ibom State.

Introduction

Living in the society involves social interaction between individuals or groups of individuals in order to make life meaningful. Successful social interaction requires that individuals in any social setting foster mature sense of inter-relationship and interdependency among themselves. Creating a deep sense of mutual understanding and cooperation can enhance peaceful co-existence with minimized level of conflicts. People can work together as a team based on their central interest. Such a team or group could be seen as social affiliation of two or more freely interacting individuals who share collective norms and goals and have a common interest and identity. Individual behavior is often portrayed to be influenced by the presence of others.

No social group is hitch-free of conflict. There must be some elements of disagreements or conflicts among members. Conflict therefore is an inevitable part of any human relationship (Olson and De-Frain, 2005; Usoroh and Akpan, 2013). Schmid (2000) regards conflict as competition between two or more parties, with each party aiming at gaining advantage of some kind, like interest, values, needs, power, resources amongst others. Ekong (2003) viewed conflict as a form of social interaction in which the actors seek to obtain scarce reward by eliminating or weakening other contenders. This may take the form of a physical fight, threats or legislation. Interpersonal conflicts exist whenever two or more people disagree over values, needs etc. Ability to manage/resolve conflict when it occurs using globally acceptable patterns makes for peaceful coexistence (Weifen, Lloyd, Dunn and Hammer, 2009).

Conflict is a condition that threatens peace and security among individuals or groups of individuals. People often disagree in order to agree, hence, resolution of conflict results in peace. These two conditions become a global imperative due to the mere fact that they relate to other social conditions that define and shape human behaviours. Whenever conflicts occur, relationships are affected, peace and harmony is broken which calls for resolution of conflict. Conflict resolution is therefore the process of ending a disagreement between two or more people in a constructive manner in order to promote peaceful co-existence for all parties involved (Usoroh and Akpan, 2013). In addition, Miller (2003) sees conflict resolution as a variety of approaches aimed at termination disputes through constructive resolution of problems, distinct from its management which may lead to the escalation of conflict. Best (2009) asserted that resolving conflict by peaceful, non-violent method has been around for a long time. This is therefore preference for peaceful settlement of disputes along the lines prescribed by any institution and values of the society. Conflict resolution includes a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management of transformation (Abbas, 2018). The period of adolescence is an important phase of development and occupies a focal point in human growth and development (Akpan and Obinaju, 2007). Adolescents are the expected future leaders, whose social inputs often reflects in daily and future life events. Further predictions in the social trends are, in most cases, based on the behavioural patterns as well as the expected roles to be played by adolescents. Santrock (2005) observed that there are usually two main groups in adolescence –cliques and crowds. Cliques are small groups of two to about twelve members while crowd is a larger group structure. According to Ukpong (2003), adolescents organize themselves into social groups of equal status or equal standards. Members behave the way

their mates do through imitation. This is done through social interaction in group, usually with their peer. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer influence as they look to their peers to understand social norms, align their behavior overtime with the norms of their group or the group they want to belong to (Andrews, Foulkes, Blackmoore, 2020).

Peer are individuals, either children or adolescents who are about the same age or maturity level. A peer group is seen as both a social group (a group with two or more people who interact with one another, share similar characteristics and collectively have a sense of unity) and a primary group (a small social group/small scale society) whose members share close, personal and enduring relationship (Santrock, 2005). Peer group members have a great concern for one another, share in activities and culture, have similar interests, age, background or social status. The members of this group are likely to influence the person's beliefs and behavior. Peer group teach their members about rules and expectations that will guide behaviours with others later in life (Akpan, 2002). Peer group therefore exerts great influence on adolescents, and to a great extent, detect the tone of interaction within the group.

Generally, when adolescents tend to be tired of the pressure of their parents and the community, they sometimes evade the pressing norms by looking for social groups usually their peers – who can accommodate their individual peculiarities. Such relationships are often of mutual help to members, and often members work as a team in order to resolve conflict among themselves. Peers and peer group are therefore seen as global concepts, and they assist in understanding peer influences (Santrock, 2005).

Peer influence could be seen as the extent to which peers exert influence on attitudes, thoughts and actions of an individual (Makgosa and Mohube, 2007). Akpan and Nkan (2013) also affirmed in that peer influence affects various aspects of everyone's life including clothing choice. Boundless (2016) observes that generally, groups can be categorized in various ways such as number of people present within the group e.g. dyad, triad etc; activities that members are involved in and the degree of freedom accorded to members among others. In the same way, this study assessed peer influence through peer sub-culture, group size and peer social freedom.

Peer group come in sizes. Some may be large while some are small. Peer group size may influence the activities of such groups. Effiong (1999) in a study on the relationship between peer group size and resolution of quarrels among secondary schools students in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State confirmed that peer group size influenced resolution of quarrels among secondary school students in the study area, with large group size being more powerful than small groups based on number. In a related study, Forsyth (2009) confirmed that committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communication information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group and engaging in collective negotiation.

Peer culture is defined as a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values and concerns that children and youths produce and share with peers (Carsaro, 2015); children and youths produce and participate in series of peer cultures that are influenced by various social circumstances and settings. Investigating the significant roles of peer leadership, love for music, films and movies, as well as night strolling on young adolescents, Okon (2002)

confirmed a significant difference in the leadership roles of lovers of the various activities on conflict resolution among peers. France (2007) disclosed that peer sub-culture promotes a new source of values and reduces the value for the norms which were established by the parents. Bad habits such as drinking, sexual harassment and examination malpractices amongst others are instrumental to the unique loyalty and unity among peers which support peaceful co-existence as well as enhance resolution of conflict.

The concept of social freedom refers to relation of interaction between persons or groups, that one leaves another free to act in certain ways, provided there are no social rules that place limitations in the area (Gale, 2008). Social freedom therefore refers to the necessary limits of individual freedom arising out of the conditions of our social life. Insko (2002) indicated that peer social freedom sometimes are the products of social popularity as the social freedom of peers from high socio-economic background seem to increase above others. These group of students are sometimes extravagant, unsubmissive, disrespectful to elders and notorious. Adolescents in secondary schools seem to enjoy high levels of social freedom especially when they are out of their parents' control.

This study hinges on three theories – Feldman, Massalla and Derdikman – Eron (2010); Hall (1903) and Parson (1942). Feldman, Massalla and Derdikman – Eron (2010) theory of socialization proposes that children's ability to handle conflict is learned at home through mechanisms of participation and observation as they participate in parent-child conflict, as well as observe conflicts between parents. Deductively, therefore, children learn through participation and observation how to resolve conflicts based on experiences from their home background.

Hall (1903) has been credited with the discovery of adolescence, as well as the founding father of all psychological theories of youth. The concept of adolescence as a period of "storm and stress" as the adolescent makes his/her transition to adulthood originated from Hall who saw this as a natural occurrence. France (2007) in his comment on Hall's work pointed out that the scientific evidence of "storm and stress" strengthens the belief in the universalism of the problematic nature of youth transition during adolescence. In line with this, globally, peer relationships during adolescence are full of conflicts as the individual struggles with the task of establishing a sense of identity. This affects the peace and security of peer group members which may result in fights/gang wars and ultimate threat to peaceful co-existence. Conflict resolution therefore becomes a necessary activity in peer relationship, with peer influence determining the success or failure of the outcome.

The Functionalist theory by Parsons (1942) sees youth as a social institution, like a body part with a critical role to play in keeping the society functioning (France, 2007). Functionalist arguments signify that children in all societies have to be socialized into adult roles through being taught the values and morals of their respective societies. Where families fail to perform this function, identity crises is created for the adolescent and problems of adjustment which can result in threat to global peace and security. Parson (1964) observed that the only solution for young people was to turn to their peer group for help. Parsons further advanced that peer culture functions in easing the tension related to transition from the security of the family in childhood to adult roles. Peer influences seem to be therefore influential in ensuring peace and security of adolescents in conflicts thus fostering peaceful co-existence.

Students have been observed to engage in stealing, using special slangs, cheating in examination among other social vices, as well as developing suspicious dress code which can cause conflicts. Similarly, small and large group members often accuse each other during football matches, manual labour and election of new prefects and during inter-house sports due to partiality, suppression and domination. Senior and junior levels of students jealously despise each other, and often accuse themselves falsely. These complaints have been re-echoed in educational seminars, workshops, conferences and in Parent Teachers' Association meetings with the aim of finding a lasting solution to these problems. Surprisingly, these same peers continue moving together amicably which indicates that they have resolved their conflicts.

In view of the above observations, the researchers deemed it necessary to investigate the influence of peer (sub-culture, group size and social freedom) on conflict resolution among adolescents in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses: Three null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Peer sub-culture has no significant influence on conflict resolution among adolescents in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State;
2. Peer group size has no significant influence on conflict resolution among adolescents in secondary schools in the study area;
3. Peer social freedom has no significant influence on conflict resolution among adolescents in secondary schools in the study area.

Methodology

Design of the Study: Survey research designed was adopted for the study which employed the self-report method by the respondents through questionnaire. This type of design allows for inferences through samples and generalization drawn from the population that would have been too large, and expensive to study as a whole.

Population/Sample/Sampling Technique: The population for the study comprised of 33,807 Senior Secondary II (SS2) students from 236 public schools within the State. A sample size of 337 students was drawn from the population indication 10% of the population, from three schools each within the three senatorial districts in the State using stratified random sampling technique.

Instrument for Data Collection: A researcher-developed instrument tagged "Peer Influence and Conflict Resolution Questionnaire" (PICRQ) was used for data collection. The instrument consisted of five sections and 22 items. Four items each on the conflicts related to peer sub-culture, peer group size and peer social freedom and ten items on conflict resolution. A four point scale indicating Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) was adopted for the study.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument: The items on the questionnaire were subjected to validation by three experts in Psychology and Measurement, all in University of Uyo. The contributions of these experts were fully integrated in the final copy of the instrument and

used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through test-retest using Cronbach Alpha statistical analysis which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.92. The value obtained proved the instrument reliable for use for the study.

Data Collection/Analysis: The copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the students in the participating schools by the researchers and trained research assistants in the schools' assembly halls. Instructions were given to the respondents on how to respond to the items on the questionnaire, which were all collected on the spot. The dependent t-test analysis was used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Peer sub-culture has no significant influence on conflict resolution of adolescents in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 1: Dependent t-test analysis of the influence of peer sub-culture on conflict resolution

Variables	n	X	SD	Calculated t
Peer Sub-Culture	337	12.86	2.02	82.46*
Conflict Resolution		31.37	4.31	

*Significant at 0.05, df = 336, critical t = 1.96

The result as presented in Table 1, shows that the calculated t-value of 82.46 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance, with 336 degree of freedom. This result indicates a significant influence of peer sub-culture on conflict resolution among adolescents in the secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 2: Peer group size has no significant influence on conflict resolution of adolescents in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 2: Dependent t-test analysis of the influence of peer group size on conflict resolution

Variables	n	X	SD	Calculated t
Peer group size	337	12.88	2.40	81.98*
Conflict Resolution		31.37	4.31	

*Significant at 0.05, df = 336, critical t = 1.96

Table 2, presents the result of the analysis of the influence of peer group size on conflict resolution. The calculated t-value of 81.98 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance, with 336 degree of freedom. This result portrays a significant influence of peer group size on conflict resolution of adolescents in the study area.

Hypothesis 3: Peer social freedom has no significant influence on conflict resolution of adolescents in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: Dependent t-test analysis of the influence of peer social freedom on conflict resolution

Variables	n	X	SD	Calculated t
Peer social freedom	337	13.07	2.33	88.25*
Conflict Resolution		31.37	4.31	

*Significant at 0.05, df = 336, critical t = 1.96

Table 3 presents the result of the analysis of the influence of peer social freedom on conflict resolution. The calculated t-value of 88.25 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance, with 336 degree of freedom. This implies that peer social freedom has a significant influence on conflict resolution of adolescents in the study area.

Discussion of Findings

The result of findings portrayed that there is a significant influence of peer sub-culture on conflict resolution among adolescents in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This result is in accordance with the findings of Okon (2002) and France (2007) who all confirmed that peer sub-culture influences various activities of peers including conflict resolution. It was also found in the study that peer group size has a significant influence on conflict resolution among adolescents in secondary schools. This result is in line with the findings of Effiong (1999) and Forsyth (2009). Effiong observed a significant relationship between peer group size and resolution of quarrels among secondary school students while Forsyth confirmed that committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts through collective negotiation.

This infers that the size of groups, especially a large group size will be more effective in conflict resolution based on membership cooperation, experiences as well as the power in collective negotiation.

Finally, the study also revealed that peer social freedom has a significant influence on conflict resolution among adolescents in secondary schools. This findings throws more weight on related studies of France (2007) who indicated that peers enjoy engaging in numerous negative activities, and Insko (2002) who confirmed that peers social freedom sometimes are the products of social popularity. Earlier studies by Makgosa et.al., and Akpan et al., also confirm that peers exert influence on the attitudes, thought and actions of individuals (which include conflict resolution) peer social freedom as an index of peer influence invariably is bound to influence conflict resolution among adolescents in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that sub-culture, group size and social freedom as indices of peer influence significantly influence conflict resolution among adolescents in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. However, for sustainable peace and security in the State, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Educational authorities should provide adequate numbers and competent guidance counsellors in secondary schools in order to create awareness on unacceptable peer sub-culture.
2. Guidance counsellors and principals of schools should encourage love, unity, cooperation and loyalty within peer groups irrespective of their size.
3. Secondary school personnel and parents should create awareness among adolescents in secondary schools on the ills of undue enjoyment of social liberties and freedom among themselves.

References

- Abbas, A. I. (2018). Peace and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: An Imperative Tool for Countering Violent Extremism. A Conference paper: Peace Building, Security, Sustainable Development and the Reconstruction of North Eastern Nigeria at Federal University, Kashere.
- Akpan, I. D. (2002). Peer Relationship and Cognitive Development in middle childhood, the Nigerian Educational Psychologist, *Journal of the Nigerian Society for Educational Psychology (NISEP)*, 1 (2), 13-23.
- Akpan, I. D. &Obinaju, Q. I. (2007). Adolescents' Sexual and Reproductive Health. *Journal of Research and Development in Education (JORDE)*, 3 (2), 75-84.
- Akpan, I. D. &Nkan, V. V. (2013). Effects of peer on privately consumed clothing items of female students in a Nigerian University. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 17 (4), 4-8.
- Andrews, J. L., Foulkes, L. &Blackmoore, S. (2020). Peer Influence in Adolescence: *Public Health Implications for COVID- 19*, 24 (8) 585 -587.
- Boundless (2016). Effects of Group Size on attitude and Behaviours. "Boundless Sociology". Boundless <https://www.boundless.com/sociology/textbook>. Retrieved 7/2/2016.
- Carsaro, W. A. (2015). Childhood Studies Oxford Bibliographies www.oxfordbibliographies.com. Retrieved 10/3/2016.
- Effiong, D. S. (1999). Student Peers Sub-culture and Conflict Resolution. An *Unpublished M.Ed. Dissertation*, Department of Educational Curriculum, Planning/Management, University of Uyo.
- Ekong E. E. (2003). *An Introduction to Rural Sociology*, (2nd Ed.), Uyo: Dove Educational Publishers
- Feldman, R., Masalla, S., Derdikman-Eron, R. (2010). Conflict Resolution in the Parent Child, Marital and Peer Contexts and Children's Aggression in the Peer Group: A Process-oriented Cultural Perspective. *Developmental Psychology*, 46 (2), 310 -325.
- Forsyth, D. R. (2009). *Group Dynamics*. (5th Ed.), Boston MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning
- France, A. (2007). *Understanding Youth in Late Modernity*. England: McGraw Hill, Open University Press.
- Gala, T. (2008). *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences USA: Macmillan Reference.
- Insko, C. A. (2002). Reducing Inter-group Conflict. *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 19 (1): 53 -70.
- Makgoa, R. &Mohube, K. (2007). Peer Influence on Youth Adults Product purchase Decisions. *African Journal of Business Management*, 26: 64 – 71.
- Miller, C. (2003). *A Glossary of Terms and Concepts in Peace and Conflict Studies* Genera: University of Peace Africa Programme.

- Okon, B. N. (2002). The Nigerian Child: Peer Group quality, Acceptance and Personality Profile. Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, Department of Educational Foundations, University of Uyo.
- Olson, H. D. & De-Frain, J. (2000). Marriage and the Family: Diversity and Strength. Mountain View; CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Pearsons, T. (1942). Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States. *American Sociological Review* 7 (5): 604 -616.
- Santrock, J. W. (2005). *Adolescence*. (10th Ed.), Boston: McGraw Hill
- Usoroh, C. I. & Akpan, I. D. (2013). Dimensions in Family Conflict management and Resolution Strategies. *International Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences (IJFCS)*, (2) 40 -48.
- Ukpong, D. A. (2003). *Essentials of Sociology of Education for Colleges and Universities* Uyo: Assurance Publication Network.
- Weiten, W., Lloyd, M. A., Dunn, B. S. & Elizabeth, Y. M. (2009). *Psychology Applied to Modern Life. Adjustment in the 21st Century*. Wadsworth.