

SELF ESTEEM AND PEER INFLUENCE AS PREDICTORS OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AMONG YOUNG ADULTS OF METHODIST CHURCH NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined predictive impact of self-esteem and peer influence on the quality of romantic relationship among young adults in Methodist Church Nigeria, Onitsha Diocese, Anambra State. It adopted an ex post facto design in exploring the correlational impact of self-esteem and peer influence on romantic relationship. The target population comprise of 3,706 young adults (2,038 female and 1668 male) from which 300 young adults (135 males and 165 females) were randomly selected as sample in the study. The age of the young adults range between 18 and 30 and their mean age was obtained as 22.7 years. Three validated instruments: Self-Esteem Scale (SES), Rosenberg, (1965); Peer Influence Scale (PIS), Armsden, Greenberg, and Mitchell (1991); and Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECRS) Fraley, Waller, & Brennan (2000); were used in collecting data for the study. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression Analysis were used in analyzing data obtained. The result shows that there is significant relationship between romantic relationship quality and peer influence ($r = .214$; $P < 0.05$); and romantic relationship quality and self-esteem ($r = -.200$; $P < 0.05$). Further analysis showed joint predictive influence of both variables on romantic relationship with adjusted R^2 obtained as 8%. Peer influence predicted the criterion more of two the two variables, peer influence (Beta = .214; $t = 3.863$; $P < 0.05$) and closely followed by self-esteem (Beta = -.200; $t = -3.609$; $P < 0.05$). The study raised implication of the need for clergymen to acquire counseling skills in addition to their biblical training. It was recommended that individual and group counselling should be organized by church to help young adults develop skills for healthy relationships.

Key Words; *Self Esteem, Peer Influence, Romantic Relationship*

Introduction

Sexuality and romantic interests is an important characteristic of the stage of young adulthood. The tendency to explore love and romantic options, discover the type of person they would like to marry, and to gain relationship experience before settling on someone to partner with permanently is a critical developmental aspect of young adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Much like adolescence, forming romantic relationships, especially those of love, intimacy, compassion, appreciation, and affinity is underscored as characteristic of young adult sexual behaviour; however, unlike adolescents, they tend to explore other options in romance and seek to gain relationship experience during this period (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). It is simply said that the increased closeness, relationships can start and end repeatedly. This tendency for start and end is tied to the need for romantic partners learning to know each other much more deeply than in more casual relationships; and needing to learn how to approach and resolve disagreements (Tuval-Mashiach & Shulman, 2006). For instance, However, sometimes, this stage leaves many young adults with sour taste as the tendency to explore

romantic relationships increased their vulnerability to dangers in unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections due to lack of experience and education (Shulman and Connolly, 2013; Wildsmith, Manlove, Steward-Streng, and Cook, 2016).

The Nigerian context painted a dismal picture of quality of romantic relationship especially among adolescents and young adults. Several studies in parts of the country have reported high sexual activity with low marital outcome among young adults (Okpani and Okpani, 2000 in Azuike and Nwabueze, 2013). In most cases, the dyadic relationship as it is touted as a familiarity phase of young adulthood, culminated unwarranted multiple sexual encounters than sowing the seed for healthy marriages as most experts would suggest. Due to influence of westernisation – with its impact on the nature of post-secondary years as well as delay of marriage - sexual practices seem much accepted as a way of life among young adults (Feyisetan and Pebley, 1989). According to a study, it was estimated that about 20% of women were sexual active by the age of 15; and 1 out of 3 adolescents and young adults with sexual knowledge have more than one sexual partner (Azuike and Nwabueze, 2013). Church is not excluded from the blame too. Most often than none, churches openly criticized sexual talks and education leaving young adults and adolescents to their exploratory whim; and therefore become information seekers of various sources relative to dating and sexual decision-making. This seems problematic given that churches, through its own religious activities that encourage dyadic relationships and marriage fail adequately to prepare young adults for quality marital life despite it (church), being an important place for meeting potential partners (Wilcox and Wolfinger, 2007).

Sedikides, Oliver and Campbell, (1994) argues that research attention has only focused on the effects of social exchange variables on romantic relationship, its development, satisfaction, and dissolution, while little is discussed about the personal meanings and beliefs that individuals have about these exchange especially in relation to the precarious stage of young adulthood. The most serious costs of romantic involvement for young adult as pointed by Sedikides, Oliver and Campbell, (1994), include stress and worry about the relationship, increased dependence on the partner, fights, time and effort investment, and feeling worse about the self. The far reaching effect has been underpinned in health and mental wellness of many young adults. There is no doubt that unplanned pregnancy and parenthood are rampant than were recorded in the past. More so, cohabitation as an option in young adulthood raises an important challenge since equality (fairness of decision making) between lovers means highly reduced contraceptive that could lead to unplanned pregnancy and other challenging health issues in Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) (Wildsmith, Manlove, Steward-Streng, and Cook, 2013). Moreover, the alarming rate of divorce among newly married couples poses challenge as to how and why such unexpected outcome; despite observed preparedness of the young lovers. This issue might be pointing to the quality of the romantic relationship where vital aspect of emotional connection is lost in the course exploration of potential partners.

A significant and consistent psychological factor identified with quality of romantic relationship among young adults is self-esteem. Self-esteem is a psychological construct that explains

individual's perception or subjective appraisal (positive) of one self (Rosenborg, 1965). High self-esteem consists of an individual respecting himself and considering himself worthy and low self-esteem has less individual respect and considers him or herself unworthy. Thus, self-esteem permeates through initiation and maintaining quality dating or romantic relationship. Individuals with high self-esteem do not only choose their partners at high point of self-evaluation and good decision-making, but might be able to maintain strong bond throughout romantic periods and eventually lead to healthy marriage. However, individuals with low self-esteem might choose their partner in despair; and ultimate break-up due to low self-esteem that could strengthen the bond and poor decision-making. Moreover, low self-esteem individuals have poorer mental and physical health, worse economic prospects, and higher levels of criminal behaviour, compared with high self-esteem individuals and all these are significant in sowing a healthy seed for marriage (Trzesniewski, Brent Donnellan, Moffitt, Robins, Poulton, & Caspi, 2006).

An important social factor underscored on quality of romantic relationship among young adults is peer relationship. Peer influence may be defined as the insistence and encouragement of the same age group individuals to make or force the individual to do something (Santor, Messervey & Kusumakar, 2000). Young adults respond to their peers with cooperation and sensitivity (Rubin, Murkowski & Parker, 2006). As a result, they are often admired by their peers and are considered fun to hang out with, kind and trustworthy (Lease, Musgrove & Axelrod, 2002; Rubin et al. 2006). Thus, they elicit positive interactions, which may contribute to their confidence in affectively regulating themselves and having peers there to support them. Young adults may actively recruit or engage their friends to boost romantic relationship or to cheer them up (Savin and Diamond, 2000). Sometimes friends repeatedly discuss the problems they are experiencing (Rose, 2002). Such co-rumination often entails mutually encouraging each other to discuss problems, speculating about problems, and focusing on the negative feelings of problems.

The study therefore undertook to look into factors on quality of romantic relationship through the lenses of self-esteem and peer pressure as both have been dominant in the body of literatures on the subject.

Statement of the Problem

Low quality of romantic relationship has been pointed as a causative factor for the spate of stress, illicit sexual activities, physical aggression, substance abuse and poor academic achievement among young adults (Karney, Beckett, Collins and Shaw, 2007). Moreover, the impact of the Church in building new homes and fostering marital stability has been underwhelming due to their own denial of realities regarding sexual matters. Due to the import and or increased queue for social media, internets and other sexuality platforms among young adolescents, quality of romantic relationship has significantly been distorted while society moral gatekeeper such as Church has failed to evolve to the dynamics of courtship and romantic relationships among the teeming young adult church goer. The consequences have so far been witnessed in the increasing rate of unplanned pregnancy, poor

marital life, divorce and other marital complication, as it is fast becoming a significant social issue in Nigeria today.

Experts on the subject of human life span development have underscored the impact of psycho-social factors on the quality of romantic relationship. Notable among these factors are the influential roles of self-esteem and peer influence. The idea is to replicate these factors and much importantly as they are placed side by side to unravel their dynamics of the determination of quality of romantic relationship among young adults within the, Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Onitsha, Anambra State.

Objective of the study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the predictive influence of self-esteem and peer influence on romantic relationship quality among the young adults in Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Onitsha. Specific objectives of the study included to:

- Examine the relationship between the independent variables (self-esteem and peer influence) and romantic relationship quality.
- investigate the joint effects of the independent variables on the prediction of the dependent variable (romantic relationship quality)
- examine the relative contribution of each of the independent variables to the prediction of the dependent variable

Research Questions

The following questions were raised for answers to be provided:

- What are the relationships between the independent variables (self-esteem and peer influence) and Romantic Relationship Quality?
- What are the joint effects of the independent variables (self-esteem and peer influence) on the prediction of the dependent variable?
- What is the relative contribution of each of the independent variables (self-esteem and peer influence) to predict dependent variable?

Literatures

Romantic Relationship Quality

According to Brehm, (1985), a romantic or intimate relationship is one in which the individual perceives an ongoing, reciprocated, emotional, erotically charged connection with a partner. The definition underpin two important characteristics, first, romantic relationships need not involve sexual behaviour. Here in, romantic relationship is explained in terms of emotional connection which may or may not come with sexual behaviour. Therefore, the definition includes the idea of erotic feelings to distinguish romantic relationships from friendships, but it does not require erotic or sexual behaviors. The second characteristic is explained as one that does not necessary requires that the

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feelings about the relationship or the partner be positive. This means that a distressing or abusive relationship can still be a romantic relationship (Karney, Beckett, Collins and Shaw, 2007).

Reality of Committed Relationship and Romantic Relationship

Shulman and Connolly (2013) opined that in spite of the conceptual inclination to search for continuity in the romantic relationships of young adults, the reality that growing numbers of young people are not in stable and committed relationships cannot be overlooked. Moreover, an increasing number of young adults are involved in casual romantic encounters, and even those who cohabit are less likely to commit than they once were. According to Shulman and Connolly (2013), it would amount to gross misconception to assume that young adulthood, as a stage, encompasses an extended regression with regard to the expected romantic progression as suggested by the romantic stage theories. However, the concept hinge on general representation as vast majority of young adults perceive marriage as an important goal in their life and hope to get married someday (Krane & Cottreau, 1998).

Self Esteem and Romantic Relationship

Self-esteem is a self-evaluated or disposition that a person has which represents their judgments of his or her worthiness (Olsen, Breckler, and Wiggins 2008). The concept of self-esteem reflects a person's overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs (for instance, one can believe he or she is competent or that he or she is worthy) and emotions such as triumph, despair, pride and shame (Hewitt 2009). Study suggests that self-esteem influences whether a person experiences success or failure in many life domains (Kuster et al., 2013), including the domain of romantic relationships (Orth Robins, & Widaman, 2012). This means that self-esteem might also influence the occurrence of events that are linked to success and failure. Several studies have shown that self-esteem prospectively predicts relationship quality and relationship satisfaction (Orth et al., 2012). Additionally, research suggests that couples who experience decreasing relationship satisfaction tend to break-up in the future (Karney & Bradbury, 1997) and that relationship satisfaction is a crucial factor for relationship continuation (Hendrick, 1988). Thus, self-esteem might influence whether individuals experience relationship break-up through its effect on relationship satisfaction and relationship quality.

Peer influence

Peer influence refers to active effort on the part of the peer. Behaviours can range from gestures (e.g., offering a drink, partying) to overt encouragement (e.g., dating, making choice of spouse). Adolescents and young adults may develop their ideas about romantic relationships through their observation of and interaction with peers (Rose and Frieze, 1989). According to Simon, Elder, and Evans, (1992) adolescents' normative beliefs about how one should feel and behave in a romantic relationship develop through repeated discussions with their peers. Some studies also suggest that peers reinforce the importance of romantic relationships, especially among girls (Douvan and Adelson, 1966). The importance of peer influence in forming attitudes about and behaviours toward

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the opposite sex in young adults is another dimension of peer influence to romantic relationship, how young adult perceive approval from peers and families is tied to heightened relationship stability and quality (Cavanagh, 2007).

Methodology

The study adopted an ex post facto design in exploring the correlational impact of self-esteem and peer influence on romantic relationship. The ex post facto was deemed ideal due to the fact that predictors' variables have been established in previous studies and in different clime. The data collected helped to determine the predictive effects of self –esteem and peer influence (independent variables) on romantic relationship quality among the young adults in Methodist Church Secondary Schools, Diocese of Onitsha

Population and Sample

The target population of the study comprised the young adults min Methodist Church Nigeria, Onitsha Diocese. Three circuits were selected through stratified random techniques in the study: Cathedral Circuit, Trinity Circuit, and Nnewi Circuit. In each of these randomly selected circuits, participants were selected through simple random techniques (balloting). Hundred (100) young adults were selected from each of three circuits. A total number of three hundred (300) young adults were selected in all. The sample consisted of 135 males and 165 females, while their age ranged between 18 and 30years the mean age was obtained 22.7 years.

Instrumentations

Three validated instruments were used in the study:

Self-Esteem Scale (SES) was developed by (Rosenborg, 1965). The scale has 10 items of global self-worth and measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be uni-dimensional. All items are answered using a 4-point rating e.g. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself, 0-strongly disagree, 1-Disagree, 2- Agree, 3- Strongly Agree. The coefficient alpha for the scale was recorded as 0.86.

Peer Influence Scale (PIS) was used to measure peer relationship. The scale which was developed by Armsden, Greenberg, and Mitchell (1991) measures individual's perceptions of the positive and negative affective/cognitive dimension of relationships with their close friends. The scale has 25 items. All items are answered using a 5-point rating scale, eg. I like to get my friend's point of view on things I'm concerned about. 1-Almost Never or Never True, 2-Not Very Often True, 3-Sometimes True, 4-Often True, 5-Almost Always or Always True. The reliability measure, as defined by Cronbach value obtained is .92.

Quality of romantic relationship was measured *with Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECRS)*, developed by Fraley, Waller, & Brennan (2000). This scale was administered to assess each individual's romantic relationship quality. The scale measured the attachment-related anxiety and attachment related avoidance that an individual experiences in romantic relationships. The scale has

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36 questions. 18 of the 36 items were used to measure the attachment-related anxiety, while the additional items were used to measure the individual's attachment-related avoidance. Participants were asked to rate how much they agree or disagree with each item on a 5-point scale. Co-efficient alpha for the scale was recorded as .78.

Procedure

Questionnaires were administered on the participants by engaging the services of 300 young adults from 3 circuits in Onitsha Diocese, Methodist Church. Young adults were engaged in each of their circuit that is: Cathedral, Trinity and Nnewi Circuits. The researcher requested for the assistance of the young adults' presidents in each of these circuits with the permission of their young adults' coordinators. They all helped to deliver instructions, and also monitor the test administration in terms of information and material needed.

Method of data analysis

Data collected on the study were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis.

Results

Research Hypothesis One: There will be no significant relationship between peer influence and romantic relationship

Table 1:

The summary table showing significant relationship between socio-economic status and young adults' learning outcomes

Variable	Mean	SD	DF	N	R	P	Remark
Peer Influence	68.9652	7.26098	298	300	.214**	.000	Significant
Romantic Relationship	89.5045	13.49103					

The table 1 above showed that there was significant relationship between peer influence and young adults' romantic relationship ($r = .214$; $P < 0.05$). This means that peer influence has significant influence on young adults' romantic relationship.

Research Hypothesis Two: There will be no significant relationship between self-esteem and romantic relationship

Table 2:

The summary table showing significant relationship between self-esteem and romantic relationship

Variable	Mean	SD	DF	N	R	P	Remark
Self-Esteem	22.8675	2.80170	298	300	-.200**	.000	Significant
Romantic Relationship	89.5045	13.49103					

The table 2 above showed that there was significant negative relationship between self-esteem and young adults' romantic relationship ($r = -.200$; $P < 0.05$). This means that self-esteem has significant influence romantic relationship.

What is the joint effect of peer influence and self-esteem on romantic relationship among young adults?

Table 3:

Summary of Regression for the Joint Contributions of Independent Variables to the prediction of romantic relationship

Model	R	R (adjusted)	R ² (adjusted)	Standard error of estimate	
	.293 ^a	.086	.080	12.94323	
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4693.765	2	2346.882	14.009	.000 ^b
Residual	50090.647	299	167.527		
Total	54784.412	301			

The table 3 above shows that the two independent variables when pulled together have significant effect on the romantic relationship. The value of multiple correlation (R) is obtained as .293; R² as .086 and R² (adjustment) is obtained as .080. The analysis of variance performed on the multiple regressions yielded was significant ($F(2,301) = 14.009$; $p < 0.05$). This shows that the three independent combined together to account for 8% of the variance in romantic relationship among the young adults.

Table 4:

Relative Effect of the Independent Variable to the Prediction of romantic relationship

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	84.105	9.384		8.963	.000
Peer Influence	.397	.103	.214	3.863	.000
Self-Esteem	-.961	.266	-.200	-3.609	.000

The table above shows how each of the two independent variables made significant contribution to the prediction of romantic relationship. As obtained, peer influence made the most significant contribution to the romantic relationship, (Beta= .214; t= 3.863; P<0.05); and then self-esteem, (Beta= -.200; t= -3.609; P<0.05).

Discussion

In line with the objective of the study, significant relationship between self-esteem and quality of romantic relationship was established. This finding corroborated other positions e.g Orth Robins, & Widaman, (2012); Erol & Orth,(2014). Orth Robins, & Widaman, (2012) positioned that self-esteem influences a person experience of success or failure in many life domains that also include the domain of romantic relationships. Erol & Orth, (2014) see a relational impact of self-esteem as both a function and outcome and it therefore determine the amount of satisfaction one has in a relationship. The importance of self-esteem has been stressed across several issues that involve critical decision-making. Dating and relationship is a behaviour that is defined by individual positive evaluation. A low self-esteem might affect an individual choice-making as well as reduce individual capabilities to interact effectively in a dyadic condition. On the other hand, a high self-esteem means that individual has a better self-evaluation that could facilitate effective decision and choice-making.

The relationship between peer influence and quality of romantic relationship was also established. The finding of the study found supports in Santor, Messervey & Kusumakar, (2000); Rose, (2002);Rubin, Murkowski & Parker, (2006). Savin and Diamond, (2000) reported that young adults actively recruit or engage their friends to boost romantic relationship or to cheer them up. In the same vein, Rubin, Murkowski & Parker, (2006) insisted that young adults respond to their peers with cooperation and sensitivity. Friendship has been underpinned as an important factor in young adults' sexuality. Peers provide opportunities to meet and interact with romantic partners, and how to initiate and recover from such relationships, and to learn from one's romantic experiences.

An important social factor underscored on quality of romantic relationship among young adults is peer relationship. Peer influence may be defined as the insistence and encouragement of the same age group individuals to make or force the individual to do something (Santor, Messervey &

Kusumakar, 2000). Young adults tend to be sensitive to their peers' opinion, as a result of this, they make decisions that are agreeable to clique and this also extend to romantic relationship or sexual decision-making. Thus, they elicit positive interactions, which may contribute to their confidence in affectively regulating themselves and having peers there to support them. Young adults may actively recruit or engage their friends to boost romantic relationship or to cheer them up (Savin and Diamond, 2000). Sometimes friends repeatedly discuss the problems they are experiencing (Rose, 2002). Such co-rumination often entails mutually encouraging each other to discuss problems, speculating about problems, and focusing on the negative feelings of problems.

The joint effect of peer influence and self-esteem on the romantic relationship quality of young adults as it constituted the interest of the study was found significant. The result showed that the independent variables when pulled together have significant effect on the romantic relationship among the young adults. The R-Square(adjusted) was obtained .080. The analysis of variance performed on the multiple regressions was significant. This shows that the combined independent variables accounted for 8% of the total variance in the criterion. Both self-esteem and peer influence were established as a predictor of romantic relationship quality. The predictive influence of the variable is in line with the work of (Knee, Bush, Cook and Canevello, 2008; Leary, & Baumeister 2000; Erol & Orth, 2014; Karney, 2009; Cabeldue and Boswell, 2012) whose studies underline the significant influence of psycho-social factors such as self-esteem and peer influence.

The third question which sought to obtain the relative effect of each of the independent variables on romantic relationship quality of the young adults of Onitsha Diocese, Methodist Church Nigeria, the result shows that the two of the independent variables, had relationship with the romantic relationship of Methodist young adults. Peer influence independently predicted quality romantic relationship. The finding buttressed the study of Cavanagh, (2004); Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, and Kiessinger, (2001). Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, and Kiessinger, (2001), observed that adolescents who describe their friendships as close and supportive tend to describe their current and subsequent romantic relationships in similar terms. Cavanagh, (2004) concluded that interpersonal problems in peer groups are associated with greater likelihood of initiating sexual intercourse, thus supporting the idea that peer relationships presage a new experience of intimacy for adolescents and that young adults who believed that aggression was more common in the relationships of their peers engaged in more aggression in their own relationships. On the other hand, self-esteem was also a potent predictor of romantic relationship quality. This finding echoes MacDonald, Marshall, Gere and Shimotomai(2014) submission when they submitted that the positive relationship between self-esteem and value placed on a romantic relationship was mediated by both reflected appraisals and approval from a partner's family.

Implication of the study

The study raises implication for young adults, Church and Counselling psychologist. Young adults need to develop strong bond and emotional connection to a partner and desist from multiple

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relationships. They have to imbibe healthy lifestyle through through avoidance of illicit sexual affairs.

Churches have to go beyond their comfort zones in establishing their position on dating and romantic relationship as they have been doing for married individuals. Clergymen need further training to bolster their counseling skills and deliverance of healthy sexual life talks. Effective Skill-Building Programs need to be organized, as this can help young adults develop skills for healthy relationships.

Counselling psychologists have to look into the occurrence of several factors that have been highlighted to improve the romantic relationship quality of the young adults and use them as a basis to develop a template, model and map to exercise significant control over it when need arises.

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