

Influence of Permissive Parenting on Sexual Behaviour of Adolescents in Secondary Schools in Nakuru East Subcounty, Kenya

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Abstract: Secondary schools in Nakuru East Sub-County are struggling with a variety of behavioral issues most notably and teenage sex. Literature from around the globe suggests that such behavioral problems among adolescent can be associated with the style of parenting. However, no studies have been conducted to examine how parenting style relate to the behaviors of adolescent in secondary schools. It is not clear whether the behavioral issues experienced in the secondary schools within the study area can be attributed to the style of parenting. This study sought to address this gap in knowledge by examining the relationship between permissive parenting and the sexual behaviors of adolescents in secondary schools in the Sub-County. The study was guided by the Baumrind Theory of Parenting Styles and employed a cross-sectional survey design. Questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 155 students out of which 101 were duly completed and returned to the researcher. The questionnaire contained both open-ended and close-ended questions. The validity of the instrument was assessed by subjecting the instrument to scrutiny by university faculty members while reliability was assessed by conducting a pilot study and analyzing the data using the Cronbach alpha method. The respondents were selected from the population of 18,600 students in 31 secondary schools within the Sub-County using the stratified random sampling methods. The five wards within the Sub-County and the students' grades were used as strata. Responses to the close-ended questions were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The study found that negative sexual behavior such pornography and substance use are highly prevalent among students within the study area with 44.6% and 42.6% admitting to have engaged in these practices respectively at some point in their lives. Permissive parenting was found to have a statistically significant relationship with these behaviors. Permissive parenting had a positive and statistically significant relationship with the students' sexual behavior. The study recommends that the government and other stakeholder fast track the introduction of sexual and reproductive health education in schools. The government and other stakeholder should also regulate the access and use of internet and mobile phone. There is also a need to investigate and promote aspects of permissive parenting that act as protective factors against negative sexual behaviors among adolescents.

Keywords: Parenting styles, sexual behavior, adolescents, permissive parenting.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents have a vital role in society. What they do and what they accomplish has a profound effect not only on their future but the future of the whole society [1]. Young people are the hope and future of a nation. However, adolescents are confronted by behavioral challenges that threaten their health, education, and overall development. This is because adolescence is a vulnerable stage where individuals undergo physiological and psychological changes that tend to influence their behavior [2]. Guiding these children behaviors at this stage is critical to the development of the society. Behavioral problem include but not limited to substance abuse, violence, teenage sex, deceitfulness and theft, aggressiveness and

violence, and destruction of property. A study by Mayabi [3] revealed a prevalence of adolescent sexual activity of 28.8% among males and 14.6 among females. Findings showed that secondary school students were engaging in sexual activities at very young age, with multiple partners, and the majority did not use contraceptives. A majority of secondary school students are in a delicate stage where they are transitioning from childhood to adulthood. Individuals at this stage experience major biological, social, cognitive, and emotional changes [4]. These changes tend to increase tension, escalate curiosity and the urge for new experiences. The changes encourage impulse and aggressive behaviors due to raging hormones,

create new influence that contradict parents' values, and heighten the sense of rebellion and defiance.

Evidence from around the globe show that parenting approach has a significant influence on how adolescents handle changes that comes with this developmental stage. Parenting is the process of educating and raising a child with the aim of preparing him or her to achieve full potential as a human being [5]. It entails taking care and supporting the child until he or she develops the physical, mental, intellectual, social, and emotional capability to take care of the self. Individuals perform their parenting responsibilities in different manner. Diana Baumrind grouped the parenting styles into three major categories; (1) authoritarian, (2) authoritative, and (3) permissive. Authoritarian parenting is characterized by a high degree of parental control and a low level of parental warmth. Parents employing this style are strict disciplinarians who enforce stringent rule using punitive strategies [6]. Authoritative parenting is characterized by moderate levels of parental control and parental warmth. Parents employing this style give their child some room to make decision but maintain some limits. They are often willing to negotiate with their children on some issues. Permissive parenting is characterized by a high level of parental warmth and little parental control [7]. Parents exercising this style give a lot of freedom to their children and grant these children most of the things they demand.

In their study involving 420 families in Thailand, Rhucharoenpornpanich *et al.*, [8] found that greater parental monitoring and parental closeness was associated with low level of sexual and delinquent behaviors among adolescents. In Sweden, Berge *et al.*, [9] found that uninvolved parenting was associated with a rise in substance abuse problems among junior high school students while authoritative parenting was associated with less frequent cases of substance abuse. In the United States, Rosen, Cheever, and Carrier [10] found that teenagers whose parents' did set limits and monitor their online behavior were more likely to view pornography pages and be subjected to sexual solicitation. In Pakistan, Rizvi and Najam [11] found that authoritative parenting was significantly associated with lower levels of emotional and behavioral problems while permissive and authoritarian parenting were associated with high levels of different behavioral and emotional problems. In Nigeria, Mbua and Adigeb [12] found that parenting styles had a significant influence on adolescents' behavior. The ANOVA analysis revealed that the level of indiscipline was highest in the group of adolescence whose parents exhibited the authoritarian style of parenting. In South Africa, Roman, Makwakwa, and Lacante [13] found that children of permissive parents were more likely to have high self-esteem but are more susceptible to substance abuse and other behavioral problems.

In Kenya, the topic of parenting style and its influence on adolescent behaviors has not been adequately explored. Most studies on this area have not focused on the parenting styles as categorized by Baumrind. For instance, Okigbo *et al.*, [14] investigated how parental factors influence indulgence in sexual intercourse among adolescents in Nairobi. This study did not use Baumrind parenting styles but rather assessed three parenting factors; monitoring, control and discipline. Results displayed that only communication with mothers predicted first sexual intercourse among adolescent boys and only communication with father predicted first sexual intercourse among adolescent girls. Although the study by Gitonga [15] captured the parenting typologies envisioned in Baumrind's theory, it did not examine their impact on adolescents' behavior but instead interrogated how the parenting styles shape the students' self-esteem. The study by Odongo, Aloka, and Raburu [16] also utilized the Baumrind parenting style but linked it with the academic performance of students rather than behavioral outcomes. Findings exhibited that the parenting styles predicted 63% of variation in the students' academic performance. Only the study by Changalwa *et al.*, [17] scrutinized the association between parenting style and the behavior of students. However, this study focused on alcohol abuse and was conducted among college students in Kaimosi Teacher Training College where majority of the students are past the adolescent stage. .

In Nakuru East Sub County, teenage sex is a major problem in this area. A study by Pauline, Migosi, Mwanja [18] reported that 53.5% of the students in Nakuru Municipality had knowledge of a fellow students engaged in sexual activities. In October 2017, the Department of Reproductive Health in Nakuru County launched a training program to curb teenage pregnancy in Nakuru Municipality [19]. According to the Department, Nakuru East has 701 while Nakuru West has 931 annual cases of teenage pregnancies that have contributed to school dropouts in the area. Unfortunately, no study has been conducted to examine parenting style in the specific context of Nakuru East Sub-county and how it influences the behaviors of secondary school students. It is this light that the current study sought to investigate the influence of permissive parenting on the sexual behavior of adolescent in secondary schools within the sub-county.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Diana Baumrind Theory of Parenting Styles. The theory was developed following Baumrind [20] study that examined a cohort 110 children with three different behavioral patterns through parent interviews and home observations. The theory identifies three styles of parenting: (1) authoritarian, (2) authoritative, and (3) permissive. The three parenting styles differ in terms of level of parental warmth (responsiveness) and parental control

(demandingness). The authoritarian style, characterized by low warmth and high level of control, was linked to withdrawn and disconnected child behavior [7]. The authoritative style, typified by high level of both warmth and control, corresponded to self-reliance and assertive child behavior. The permissive style, marked by high level of warmth and low control, was associated with low self-reliance and low self-control [21].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescence is the developmental period that marks a person's transition from childhood to adulthood [2]. In most individuals, this transition occurs between the ages of 12 and 18 years. According to Jaworska and MacQueen [22], adolescence occurs together with puberty, which is a biological phenomenon associated with maturation of the physical body. Unlike puberty that only refers to the biological aspects, the concept of adolescence also incorporates changes that occur at the cognitive, psychological, and social levels. The adolescence period is also characterized by major changes in the behavior of the child. One of the most notable behavior changes is the increase in risk-taking behavior [23]. Compared to younger children and adults, adolescents have a greater propensity for engaging in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, reckless driving, and unprotected sex.

Risky behavior among adolescents has also been observed in studies conducted in the context of developing countries. For instance, Qidwai *et al.*, [24] found various behavioral and lifestyle issues among adolescents in Kalachi in Pakistan. About 35% were current cigarette smokers while 7% were chewing paan, 58.9% were getting less than the required eight hours of sleep per day, and 47.9% had sedentary lifestyles. Substance abuse was more common among males than females while lack of adequate sleep was associated with mental health problems. In Jamaica, Ishida, Stupp, and McDonald [25] found that 54% of males and 32% of female adolescents (15-19 years) had sexual intercourse, out of which, 52% of males and 12% of females had more than one sexual partners. Only 46% of males and 49% of females who had sexual intercourse reported using condoms.

In Kenya, Mayabi [3] found that 28.8% of males and 14.6% of female adolescents in secondary schools had indulged in sexual intercourse. Although this study provides facts regarding the prevalence of sexual behavior among adolescents in the country, it does not address the current research issues as it fails to link this behavior with parenting typology. However, Mayabi [3] linked adolescent sexual activities to other factors such as gender, school location, and school type. The sexual behavior of adolescents has also been associated with biological processes. For instance, Vigil *et al.*, [26] links this behavior with hormones such as adrenal steroids and gonadal whose levels tend to increase during puberty. These hormones play a critical

role in the physical maturation of the adolescent. Other behaviors that are commonly associated with autonomy development include refinement of gender roles, reduction of dependency in adults, integration of intimate and sexual behavior, experimentation with body, and experimentation with substance [27]. At the adolescent stage, children realize that parents are not perfect and begin to seek role models in other people.

A good number of studies have linked permissive parenting with negative behavioral outcomes. For instance, Newman *et al.*, [28] found that adolescents with permissive parents were more likely to engage in violent conduct. In this study, African American adolescents of between 11 and 14 years were questioned about their mothers' parenting styles and asked to describe how they would react to hypothetical scenarios that might elicit violent reactions. Adolescents whose parents' descriptions matched those of permissive parents showed the highest likelihoods of responding violently to the scenarios presented. Davita [29] also found that permissive parenting was associated with greater relational aggression among adolescents. This association is explained by the fact that children of permissive parents tend to have little behavioral control; hence, they easily resort to violence at the slightest provocation. On the other hand, Rothrauf, Cooney, and An [30] found that children of permissive parents had high self-esteem and were more resourceful than kids whose parents were authoritarian and uninvolved. Although self-esteem does not fit the definition of behavior, it is one of the factors that have a significant impact on adolescent behavior [31]. The study by Karmakar and Ghosh [32] also found a positive and significant relationship between permissive parenting and altruistic behavior among adolescents in India. Altruism is a positive behavior as it enables adolescents to create successful social relationships. As highlighted in these studies, there is no consistent position regarding the influence of permissive parenting on behavior. Similarly, none of these studies have linked permissive parenting to sexual behavior.

In addition, the majority of these studies have been conducted in outside Africa. Mawusi [33] noted that there are fundamental differences between the European-American culture and the traditional African culture. While the role of parenting in European-American culture is largely left to the biological parents of the child, the traditional African culture accords this responsibility to the entire community. This means that any member of the community can discipline the child when he or she violates societal rules. Dixon, Graber, and Gunn [34] argue that the African culture places high value on obeying and respecting not only parents, but also elder members of the family and community. It encourages children to show honor and high esteem to people in authority. Children are discouraged from talking back to adults unless when asked to respond to an issue. Another cultural practice that is typical in the

African culture is the right of passage [33]. In most African societies, children have to undergo some form of ritual such as circumcision to make their transition from childhood to adulthood. These rituals are often used as platforms for instilling values and preparing the children to be responsible members of the community.

In addition, the African culture is more patriarchal in nature where the mother is viewed as the caregivers while the father as the breadwinner [34]. Consequently, mothers are more likely to be highly involved with their children while fathers are more likely to be detached. Authority is also hierarchical in the traditional African setting which is bestowed first to the father [5]. Consequently, African fathers are more likely to be authoritarian than mothers. The traditional African culture also tends to give boys more freedom than girls. The moral and sexual degradation of girls is given greater attention in the tradition African setting. Corporal punishments such as sparking and whipping of

children are also prevalent in the traditional African culture. These differences raise questions regarding the effect of Baumrind’s parenting typologies on adolescent behavioral outcomes within the African context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the cross-sectional survey design. The target population comprised of all the 18,600 adolescent secondary students (12-18 years) in Nakuru East Sub-County. The Taro Yamane Formula was used to calculate the appropriate sample size, which was determined to be 155 students. The 155 respondents were selected using the stratified random sampling method. This method entailed stratifying the population in terms of administrative ward and the students grades. One school was selected from each of the five wards in the county and respondents selected from each grade within the school. The sampling plan is presented in Table-1:

Table-1: Sampling Plan

| Ward | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Total |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Kivumbini | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 31 |
| Flamingo | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 31 |
| Nakuru East | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 31 |
| Menengai | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 31 |
| Biashara | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 31 |
| Total | 35 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 155 |

Instrumentation

Data was collected using questionnaires. The independent variable was permissive parenting. A likert-type scale comprising of statement such as ‘whenever my parents tell me to do something, they expect me to do it immediately without asking any questions’ was used to measure the level of permissiveness. The scale comprised a total of seven items (statements) which were rated on a five point scale (1=strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree). A total score for the permissiveness was obtained by summing up the rate assigned on each item. Thus, the lowest total score was 7 while the highest was 35. Scores of 7-16 were categorized as low permissiveness, scores of 17 to 26 were categorized as moderate permissiveness, and scores of between 27 and 35 were classified as high permissiveness. The dependent variable of the study was sexual measured in terms of whether the student has ever engaged in sexual activities such as watching pornography, masturbation, sexual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex, lesbianism, homosexuality. The validity of the questionnaire was enhanced by subjecting it to scrutiny by faculty university supervisors and other faculty members. A pilot study was also conducted to examine and improve the reliability of the questionnaire. Data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Questionnaire Completion Rate

All the 155 questionnaires that were distributed were returned to the researcher. However, after the cleaning/ screening exercise, only 101 questionnaires were deemed fit to be included in the analysis. The remaining 54 questionnaire had a lot of questions left blank (missing data) and errors. The 54 questionnaires were randomly distributed across the five wards/ schools; hence, their exclusion did not increase the risk of sampling bias. The 101 questionnaires included in the study mark a questionnaire completion rate of 65%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda [35], a response rate of 50% is adequate, 60% is good, and 70% and above is excellent.

Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Out of the 101 respondents 57 (56.4%) were male while 44 (43.6%) were female. The majority of the respondents (89, 88.1%) were between 15-18 years. All grades in the current secondary school system were represented in the sample. Form 2 and 3 had almost equal representation of 29.7% and 28.7% respectively. There were relatively fewer Form 1 students accounting for 22.8% of the sample. Form 4 students had the least representation of 18.8%; however, their number was sufficient to provide an accurate view of all the grades. The study also examined the respondents’ family structures. The majority of the respondents (56.4%)

were living with both parents. About 22.8% of the sampled students indicated that they were living in a single parent household with the mother only. About 6.9% of the students said that they were living with their father only while 13.9% said that they were living with relatives.

Sexual Behavior of Adolescents in the Secondary Schools

To examine the sexual behavior of the students, the respondents were presented with a list of sexual practices and asked to indicate the practices that they consider inappropriate for teenagers in secondary schools. These practices include pornography, sexual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex, masturbation, lesbianism, and homosexuality.

Table-2: Practices that Respondents' considered inappropriate for Teenagers

| Sexual Practice | % of who said Yes | % of who said No |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Pornography | 74.3 | 25.7 |
| Sexual intercourse with opposite sex | 65.3 | 34.7 |
| Masturbation | 67.3 | 32.7 |
| Lesbianism | 68.3 | 31.7 |
| Homosexuality | 71.3 | 28.7 |
| None of the above | 16.8 | 83.2 |

The highest number of students (74.3%) considered pornography to be an inappropriate practice. About 71.3% of the students also considered homosexuality an inappropriate practice. About 68.3% and 67.3% respectively considered lesbianism and masturbation to be inappropriate practices. This is a point of concern as it suggests that over 30% of the students would consider engaging in these practices. Similarly, 65.3% of the respondents considered having

sexual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex to be inappropriate for teenagers suggesting that over 34% of the student would consider engaging in this practice. Of most concern is that there were 17 students who felt that none of these practices is inappropriate. This implies that they would consider engaging in most of these practices. As a follow-up, respondents were asked to mention any of the five practices that they have ever indulged in. Results are presented in Figure-1:

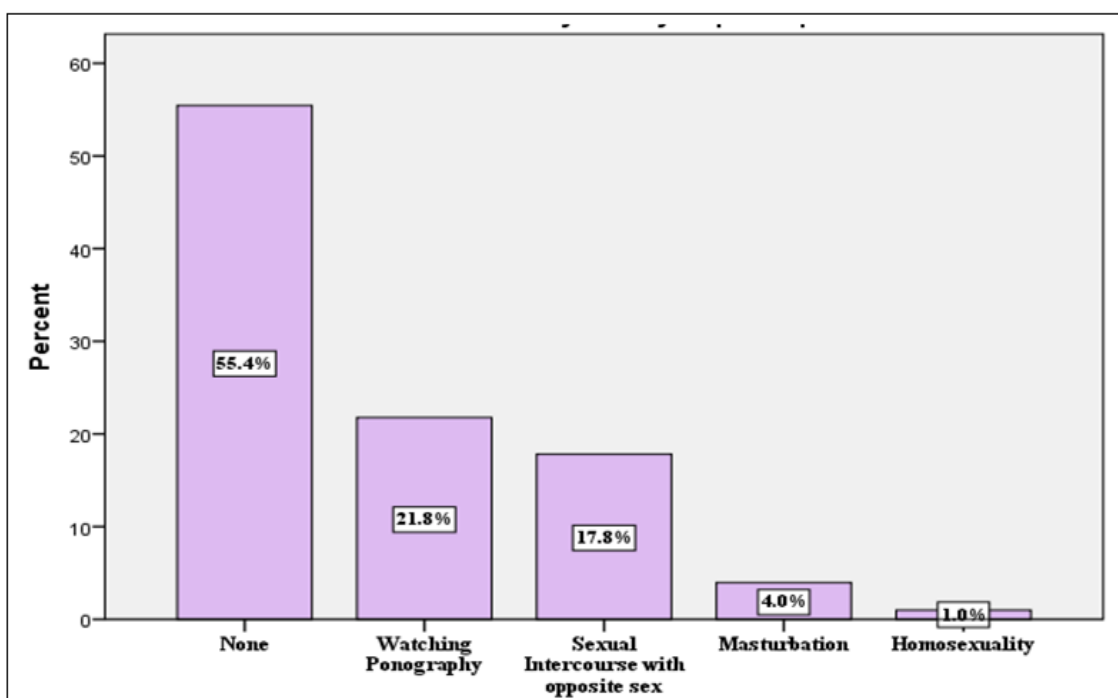


Fig-1: Sexual Practices that Respondents have ever Indulged

About 55.4% of the respondents said that they have never engaged in any of the sexual practices. This implies that the remaining 44.6% have indulged in one or more of these practices. The percentage could be higher given that the sensitive nature of this issue might

have prompted a good number of students not to provide accurate information on this issue. The most commonly indulged practice was watching pornography with 21.8% of the respondents reporting to have indulged in this practice as one point in their lives. This

finding is consistent with Asatsa *et al.*, [36] who found that pornography has become prevalent among Kenyan adolescent due to proliferation of mobile phones and availability of cheap internet. About 17.8% of the respondents admitted that they have had sexual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex at some point in their lives. This proportion is lower as compared to statistics from African Institute for Development Policy [37], which indicates that 50% of males in Nakuru County have sexual encounter before the age of 17 years while 50% of girls engage in sexual intercourse before the age of 19 years. The low proportion is probably due to the sensitive nature of the issue that may have compelled a good number of students not to provide accurate information. The disparity could also be due to the difference in population of the two studies. The African Institute for Development Policy targeted all teenagers while the current study only targets those who are still schooling. It is probable that education and the school environment could have acted as protective factors against teenage sex.

Only 4 (4%) respondents reported to have ever engaged in masturbation. This proportion is not congruent with findings of other studies such as Asatsa *et al.*, [36] who found that increased access to mobile phone had contributed to a spike in masturbation among teenagers as these phones expose the teenagers to sexually stimulating content such as pornography and sexting. It is probable that a lot more students are

engaging in this practice but failed to disclose due to the sensitive nature of this issue. Only 1 (1%) respondent reported to have engaged in homosexuality while none reported engaging in lesbianism. Studies on homosexuality in Kenyan have not yielded consistent results. For instance, Njeri [38] found that the majority of students in Githunguri Sub-County were of the opinion that homosexuality is an offense that should never be accepted and that perpetrators should be punished. This attitude is also highlighted in the current study where 71.3% of the respondents considered homosexuality to be an inappropriate sexual behavior. In the study by Mucherah *et al.*, [39], 41% of the sampled students claimed that homosexuality is prevalent in schools. However, 61% of these students believe that homosexuality is practiced in single-sex boarding schools while our sample mainly comprised of public day schools.

Influence of Permissive Parenting on Adolescents' Sexual Behavior

The third objective was to assess the influence of permissive parenting on the adolescents' sexual behavior. Consequently, the study had to first establish the level of permissiveness of the respondents' parents. As illustrated in Figure 4, the majority of the respondents (61.4%) rated their parents' level of permissiveness as moderate. About 29.7% of the respondents regarded their parents as having high level of permissiveness while 8.9% valued their parents' level of permissiveness as low.

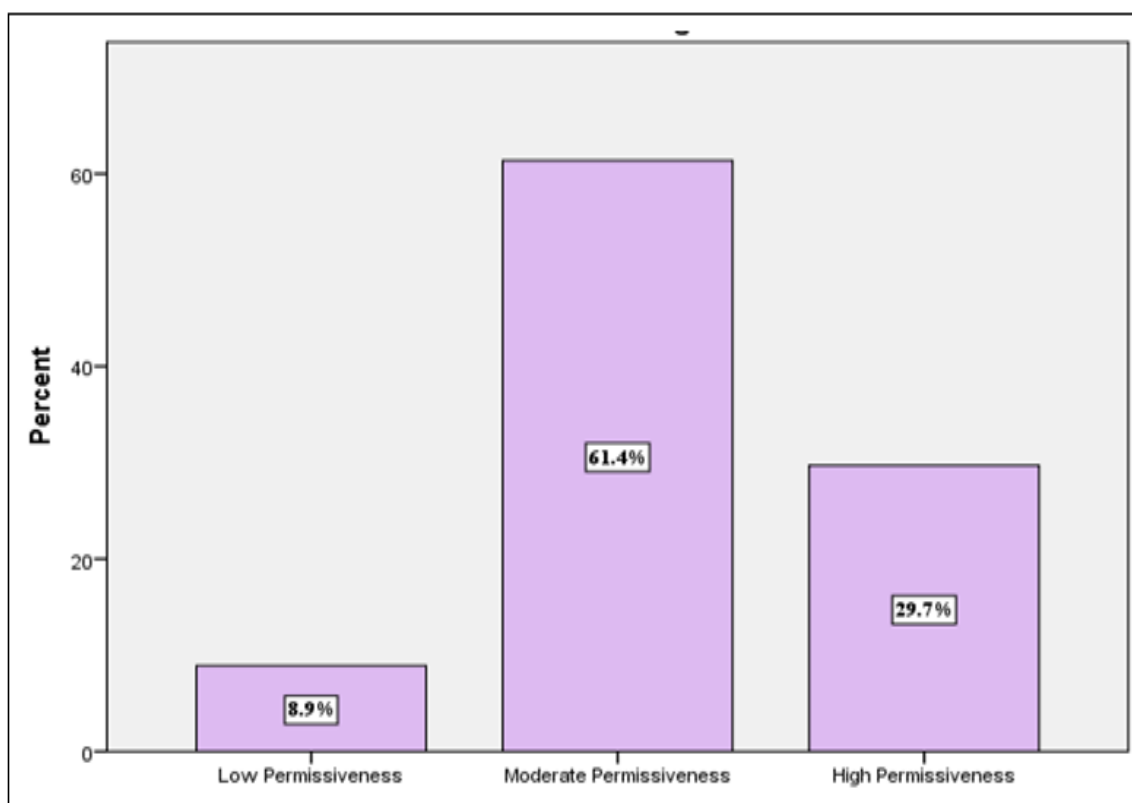


Fig-4: Distribution of Respondents across Parent Permissiveness Categories

To establish the influence of permissive parenting on the sexual behavior of adolescent students, the two categories of sexual engagement were cross-

tabulated against the three parent permissiveness categories. Results are presented in Table-3:

Table-3: Cross-Tabulation of Sexual Engagement and Parent Permissiveness Level

| Percent Distribution of Respondents according to: | | Whether they have ever engaged in any sexual behavior | | Total |
|---|-------------------------|---|-------|-------|
| | | Yes | No | |
| Permissiveness Categories | Low Permissiveness | 66.7% | 33.3% | 9 |
| | Moderate Permissiveness | 50.0% | 50.0% | 62 |
| | High Permissiveness | 26.7% | 73.3% | 30 |
| Total | | 44.6% | 55.4% | 101 |

Pearson Chi-Square value= 6.411, Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) = .041

As Table-3 exemplifies, the proportion of students who have ever engaged in sexual behaviors discussed within the low permissiveness category is 66.7%. This proportion declines to 50.0% in the moderate permissiveness category and falls further to 26.7% in the high permissiveness category. There is a clear trend in the distribution of respondents who have engaged in sexual behavior across the three categories of parental permissiveness. It seems that the proportion of students who have engaged in sexual activities is declining as the level of parental permissiveness increase. The chi-square test determined that the differences observed in the students who have engaged in sexual behavior across the three parental permissiveness categories is statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance ($X^2= 6.411, p=.041$). This leads to the conclusion that permissive parenting has a positive and statistically significant influence on the sexual behavioral outcomes of adolescent students in Nakuru East Sub-county

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the study was to investigate the influence of permissive parenting on the sexual behaviors of adolescent secondary school students in Nakuru East Sub-County. The study has established that negative sexual behaviors are prevalent among secondary school students in the study area with the most prevalent behavior being pornography. The study has also found that a significant number of students (17.8%) are engaging in sexual intercourse with members of the opposite sex. Based on the findings, the study concludes that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between permissive parenting and the sexual behaviors of students in secondary schools in Nakuru East Sub-county. This implies that an increase in parental permissiveness is likely to discourage negative sexual behaviors such as pornography and sexual intercourse with members of the opposite sex. There is a need for the government and other stakeholders to enhance the regulation of internet to ensure that pornographic and other sexually explicit content are not accessible to students and other adolescent. Parents and teachers also need to regulate

access to mobile phones which are the devices used by the teenagers to access pornography. There is also a need to introduce sexual and reproductive health education in Kenyan schools particularly the secondary schools. Providing sexuality education will ensure that the teenagers understand and avoid the risks involved. Parents should be encouraged to spend more time with and be responsive to their children’s need as the study shows that this approach tend to discourage negative sexual behaviors. Future studies should focus on investigating aspects of permissive parenting that act as protective factors against negative sexual behaviors.

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