

Factors Enhancing the Psychological Well-Being and Positive Sexual Behaviour of South African Adolescent Males

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ABSTRACT This paper reports on the factors enhancing the psychological well-being and positive sexual behaviour of South African adolescent males. The research method for this paper is the systematic review for it provides a logical understanding of literature findings from journal articles, secondary books and doctoral theses to identify gaps of the previous research. This paper is guided by Ryan and Deci's Self-determination Theory and Ryff's six dimensions of psychological well-being, namely; autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Despite myriad of social challenges faced by male youth, this paper found that sex- education, sound teen-parent communication, modelling and church could potentially improve the sexual behaviour and subsequent psychological well- being of adolescent males. Psychological programmes in Black communities and schools should be implemented to encourage adolescent males to lead a positive life style.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, adolescent males engage in risky sexual behaviour (unsafe sex with multiple partners, inconsistent use of condoms, alcohol and drug abuse), which may be attributed to their poor psychological well-being, however, in South Africa, (particularly Black adolescents) the relationship between psychological well-being and sexual behaviour of adolescent males has not been explored. Studies suggest that poor psychological well-being is negatively associated with sexual risky behaviour, for example The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and World Health Organization, UNAIDS/WHO (2008) found that South African adolescents engage in sexual activities by the age of 16, and approximately sixty percent of them practice unsafe sex and reported high levels of alcohol and drug abuse. Marteleto et al. (2016) found that the lack of family support and inadequate protective factors such as the church, distant family members and unavailability of mentors may also contribute to adolescent males' susceptibility to poor psychological well-being. Similarly, in South Africa, Christofides et al. (2014) found that adolescent males, who conform to peer influence, are reared in dysfunctional families or parents undergo-

ing divorce and as a result they make ill-informed choices regarding their sexual behaviours as they strive to boost their self-esteem.

Drawing from the work of Bandura (2004), we try to show that the socially unacceptable behaviour manifested by adolescent males which reflects lack self-efficacy is primarily influenced by absence of the father. When self-efficacy is low, adolescent males feel like they do not have necessary abilities to cope and thus may even resort to maladaptive behaviours. In this regard, Adeboye et al. (2016) argued that adolescent males with low psychological well-being tend to behave impulsively, and engage in risky sexual conduct to derive immediate gratification. In a study in Mthatha surrounding villages in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, on gender based violence, comprised of men aged 15 to 26, Christofides et al. (2014) documented that due to hegemonic masculinity, 39.1 percent of the participants had physically and sexually abused their partners while 24.3 percent had repeatedly assaulted them.

Culturally, traditional male circumcision has been documented to be another influence of adolescent males' sexual behaviour, which, in turn, impacts negatively on their well-being owing to ignorance about HIV transmission. Because of socialization and expression of hege-

monic masculinity, adolescent males from culturally embedded societies, tend to practice unsafe sex and believe that traditional male circumcision will protect them against sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis, gonorrhoea, including HIV/AIDS (Kheswa 2016). In comparison, the South African government and non-government organisations continue ensuring that the condoms are available at the public clinics and encourage condom use through intensive mass media campaign (Russel et al. 2014). According to Nyembezi et al (2014) this can be attributed to the teachings they get while in initiation school that a man is omnipotent and that traditional male circumcision prevents against STIs and HIV/AIDS. Based on these premises, this paper intends to answer the following questions; (i) What are the factors contributing to adolescent males' psychological well-being? (ii) How does psychological well-being impact on adolescent males' sexual behaviour? and (iii) What strategies can be used to improve adolescent males' psychological well-being?

METHODOLOGY

This research paper adopted the systematic review as the suitable research methodology because it involves a detailed plan, aimed at dropping prejudice by grouping, evaluating and linking all significant studies on a particular topic or theme (Uman 2011). In contrast to the empirical studies which necessitate participation of the subjects, the systematic review investigates literature from the books, internet sources and dissertations to get an overview thereby explicating and making interpretations about the phenomena. In this regard, the researchers' views may be substantial following an in-depth explanation and description of the evaluation of the past research.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by positive psychology model which is based on the notion that human beings seek balanced cognitive, emotional and spiritual domains which are functional rather than to be pathologized. According to Snyder et al. (2014) positive psychology offers a greater look at the other side; that which is good and strong within a cultural context, along with normative ways to nurture and sustain this

inclusive approach. Drawing from Ryan and Deci's (2006) self-determination theory, parental autonomy support and parental monitoring, contribute towards early adolescents' psychological well-being outcomes and cultural values. Self-determination theory argues that humans have three basic needs; autonomy, to feel competent and to feel socially and emotionally connected to others. These needs are distinctive, irrespective of one's cultural or social circumstances, and when fulfilled are linked to self-directed engagement in the environment, and maxim social and emotional functioning (Ryan and Deci 2006).

Autonomy

Autonomy as an aspect of psychological well-being, relates more to qualities such as self-determination, individuality, and the regulation of behaviour from within (Ryff and Singer 2013). Drawing from a classical theory by Abram Maslow (1950) independent adolescent males act from their ego needs, value the options of others but have self-confidence in their own ideas even if their ideas are different to those of the majority. Because they are focused, they are able to counterattack social pressures, successfully regulate their behaviour within personal standards as compared to those who have low autonomy, who, often depend on judgments of others to make important decisions and conform to social pressures (Ryff and Singer 2013). In a recent study conducted in a rural township of Moutse in Pretoria, South Africa, Slabbert et al. (2015) found that, of the 309 male adolescents aged 15-18, 62.8 percent of them reported engaging in risky sexual behaviour because it was deemed 'manly' by others around them. These results mean that the majority of the participants were not autonomous and complied to the views of others in relation to sexual behaviour and thus may score low in their psychological well-being.

Personal Growth

A body of literature indicates that the link between adolescent males' sexual activity, personal growth and knowledge about the sexual feelings and behaviours, is pivotal for understanding adolescent males' psychological well-being (Ryckman 2008; Theron et al. 2011). Personal growth is closely associated with devel-

oping a sense of highest potential, self-knowledge and achievement of personal success (Corey and Corey 2013). Jung (1939) coined the term individuation to demonstrate personal growth which is basically the mindful consciousness of one's true self and the process of forming a stable personality in order for one to achieve personal growth. In a study on high school adolescent sexuality and positive well-being, Vrangalova and Savin-Williams (2011) found that 73.2 percent of adolescent males who were less sexually active than their peer group reported higher levels of personal growth which was evident in their school performance, social competence, delay in experiencing sexual encounters before the normative age of 16 as compared to their deindividuated counterparts. In contrast, adolescent males with poor personal growth are most likely to have multiple sexual partners and often use social networks such as Facebook, Mxit and Whatsapp to get sexual partners. In a Facebook surveillance, Marshall (2012) found that 82 percent of adolescent males reported greater current distress over the breakup with the ex-partner, negative feelings, sexual desire and lower personal growth.

Positive Relationships

Rowe et al. (2013) proposed that adolescent males, who form positive relations which are unique and meaningful with others, tend to develop optimally in other areas of their lives such as in emotional and intellectual aspects. This type friendship maximises their psychological well-being as they seldom engage in risky behaviour because they embody the character strengths such as courage, humanity, justice, temperance, wisdom and transcendence (Wisner and Starzec 2016). Because emotional and social maturity are intertwined, Roffey (2011) found that once an adolescent reaches personal growth, there should be overt signs of positive psychological well-being (for example compassion and respect) to get along with friends with whom they share the same interests and outlook on life. According to Levesque (2012) the expectations are that since it is important for adolescent males to spend more time with friends and to bond over shared experiences, they should radiate positive energy, unlike when they lack empathy in relation to others, they are most likely to show negative behaviours, such as hos-

tility, criticism and multiple sexual partners which in has negative impacts on their psychological well-being (Compton and Hoffman 2012; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky 2012). Finally, Woodhouse et al. (2012) noted that social behaviours may contribute to poor relationships by making social interactions and friendships less important to one's life as socially withdrawn adolescents may be associated with loneliness, shyness and depression.

Purpose in Life

A purposeful life symbolizes a powerful source of long term motivation as according to Botha and Booysen (2014) when adolescent males identify their purpose in life, they are able to connect that purpose to their academic experience and minimise chances of getting involved in risky sexual behaviours. The need to gauge and re-evaluate one's own internal and external life experiences often drives adolescent males to search for an accurate self and may inspire an exploration of possible sources of meaning and purposeful life (Kheswa 2016). Those who score high on purpose set goals in life and have a sense of direction, feel that there is meaning to present and past life, hold beliefs that give life purpose and have long-term goals aims, while those who score low, view life pessimistically with few and unrealistic goals to accomplish in life (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Steger et al. (2012) purported that, for the successful achievement of purpose in life, envisages adolescent males to create a broad image of the world around them and assimilate many and contrary information generated by different sources in their environment.

In a recent study on multiple partners in South Africa, Zuma et al. (2010) revealed that 38 percent of the youth indicated that they currently have multiple sexual partners and males (15-19 year olds) were eight-times more likely than females to have concurrent sexual partners which might compromise their health and expose them to being infected with sexually transmitted diseases. The odds of adolescent males having many girlfriends and practicing unsafe sex signify a life with diminished purpose (Rowe et al. 2013; Salmon et al. 2016; Steger et al. 2012). This highlights an important aspect of adolescent males' psychological well-being. These findings can be better explained by the postulations made by Haimi and Lerner 2016 and Hill et al.

(2013), when they asserted that factors such as developmental level of adolescent and their relationships with peers and family members as well as career orientation, determine greatly how much meaning they would derive in life.

Self-acceptance

According to Tipping (2011) becoming aware and acknowledging one's behaviour, habits and one's personality, and not being afraid to look at oneself as they are, is an important step to self-acceptance while Hayes and Ciarrochi (2015) viewed accepting oneself as the key towards realization of one's good qualities without feelings of guilt, lack of self-esteem and unhappiness. Drawing from the work of Rogers (1974), an adolescent with self-acceptance does not live with regrets and feel shy to reflect on their past with hope. These youth tend to carry a positive attitude toward the self, and feel positive about past life (Ryff and Keyes 1995).

In an Australian study of high school adolescent males' risky sexual behaviour, Agius et al. (2013) found that there was a high prevalence of 67.3 percent of adolescent males who engaged in risky sexual behaviour with many sexual partners and drank alcohol excessively as 50 percent of them attributed their behaviour to their life's discontentment and wished they had a different construction of life. Clearly, self-acceptance was minimal; hence they put their lives in danger by engaging in anti-social behaviours. The above findings of the problem are explicitly explained by Ryff and Keyes (2005) who argued that low scorers of self-acceptance have feelings of dissatisfaction with self, are disappointed by what they had done in the past and wish to be different than what they really were.

Contextual Factors Which Impact Psychological Well-being and Sexual Behaviour of Adolescent Males

There are various factors that contribute to adolescent males' psychological well-being and sexual behaviour, such as interpersonal skills; parenting styles, religiosity, schools and cultural beliefs, and involvement in sport.

Interpersonal Factors

Interpersonal relationships exist between two or more people who interact and fulfil one or

more physical or emotional needs (Tipping 2011). For adolescent males, challenges in life may feel less discouraging to those with close interpersonal relationships and may provide a sense of safety and security that lessens probabilities of engaging in risky sexual conduct and promote good psychological well-being. However, the above is not always the case, as adolescent males sometimes find themselves in bad interpersonal relationships.

Parenting Styles

Widman et al. (2016) purported that authoritative parenting style is democratic, where parents are attentive, forgiving, guide their children to behave properly and have a set of rules to live by. This parenting style is marked by trust, secure attachment and the granting of appropriate autonomy to the child. Such parents include their children in decision making as a result these children develop self-confidence and self-discipline (Chen et al. 2016). However, little communication between child and parents marked by emphasis on compliance, conformity, parental control and respect for authority, leads to lack of autonomy and irresponsibility (Koen et al. 2013). Kazembe and Neema (2016) argue that parents in poorer contexts, across the globe have been found to provide less emotional support and involvement in their children's upbringing. In other words, they may be less nurturing and aloof in many aspects of their children's lives.

Furthermore, according to Sanders et al. (2017) uninvolved parents abandon their children's basic needs, show little interaction and emotional connectedness. Adolescent males reared in these types of families tend to be delinquent, depressed and rebellious. In an evaluation, Kheswa and Tikimana (2015) reported that African adolescent males owing to culture, they tend to have poor communication with parents about sexual matters and owing to poor communication, parents tend not to engage their sons and this leaves them with vague injunctions rather than information. This type of parenting style makes adolescent males to see for themselves what they want to do, even if it is destructive to the self. Kheswa (2016) posited that more risky sexual behaviour is one possible outcome of majority of adolescent males having poor psychological well-being. These findings are in accordance with Rossow et al. (2015) who

found that growing up in dysfunctional families such as uninvolved parents and parents who abuse alcohol and drugs, aggravated the psychological well-being of male youth.

Religiosity and Cultural Beliefs

Koenig (2013) viewed a religion as a philosophy based on spiritual beliefs. It aims to decree a norm that would help to heal the spiritual side of the individual and eventually permeate into the dynamics of life as it provides a endorsement for the principles of morality such as justice, righteousness, honesty, goodness, brotherliness and acceptance. Osafo et al. (2014) argued that these are the qualities without which, not only adolescent males' life will lose direction, but it is possible to be turned into a chaos. Arguably, it is probable to acquire these moral and social qualities without following religious doctrines. But in the absence of firm religious beliefs, these principles appear to lose their meaning and become a series of mere untying recommendations (Segev et al. 2012). In a South African study on adolescents' perceptions of religion in Soweto, Brittian et al. (2013) reported that 70 percent of the participants who were rooted in some form of religion engaged in socially approved behaviour and prolonged engagement in sexual activities because their religion provided them with support, moral responsibility, stimulated healthy development, and connections between Christian beliefs and African traditional practices.

While there is great diversity between religious traditions in the use and structure of organized religious communities, it is common for groups of some sort to regularly gather for the purposes of worship and mutual spiritual support. According to Hayward and Krause (2014) these congregations influence adolescent males' psychological well-being directly by providing access to formal and informal social networks and in the process making them unconsciously comply with group religious practices. Thus, religious adolescent males are likely to employ pro-social behaviour, which, in turn, supports growth of their psychological well-being. On the other hand, those who are not religious tend to score lower on psychological well-being as they engage in multiple risky behaviours. Rasic et al. (2011) support this assertion as they found that adolescent males who reported low religiosity

were vulnerable to be at risk of unsafe sexual practices and psychological distress as compared to those who valued religion as important.

Even though religion is key to promoting psychological well-being among adolescent males, Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi (2014) argued that the lowest self-actualisers are those adolescents who are highly religious due to the dogmatism portrayed by religious leaders towards the adherents of that particular religious institution.

Interwoven to religiosity is culture. In a study on condom use in the Eastern Cape Province among adolescent males among the Xhosa culture, Nyembezi et al. (2014) found that about 49 percent did not use condoms while 35.1 percent indicated to have tested for HIV. Of those who tested for HIV, forty-six percent reported never practiced safe sex. Drawing from the Theory of Planned Behaviour, adolescent males' intentions are predicted by attitudes of those around them, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Barker and White 2010). In this regard, it is evident that their attitude is shaped by culture and fear of being '*less of a man*' to avoid being labelled, is likely to compromise their sexual health because they may practice unsafe sex. Therefore, it is crucial that young people may be equipped in being autonomous upon graduating from mountain schools "*entabeni*" because HIV/AIDS is incurable.

On the other hand, those with higher self-esteem have productive coping strategies, positive self-concept, condom self-efficacy, leadership qualities, enhanced drive and a positive emotional state, as such, they rarely engage in risky sexual behaviours because of their sound psychological well-being (Rink et al. 2014). For example a study on the prevalence of adolescent males' self-esteem in the Eastern Cape Province, Nduna et al. (2013) reported that adolescent males with a significantly higher self-esteem were able to resist peer pressure, were autonomous and 62.3 percent had a committed relation with only one sexual partner.

Constructive Schools

School connectedness contributes to the development of academic outcomes and has also shown substantial protective role in adolescents' psychological well-being and risky sexual behaviours (Lundeen et al. 2016). According to

Govender et al. (2013) improved psychological well-being with lower suicidal ideation is also associated with school connectedness. A common factor advancing suicidal and self-destructive behaviour is the lack of acceptance of self, caused by conflicting parenting styles characterized by inadequate open communication (Weybright et al. 2017). Mtshali (2014) reported that the profile of youth not in school in Gauteng make up fifteen percent or 70 000 of their age group. Of this cohort, twenty-two percent were in Metsweding; twenty-one percent hailed from the West Rand; seventeen percent from Sedi-beng; fourteen percent from Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni while fifteen percent was from Pretoria. Possibly, this illustrates the lack of support from the schooling system which has contributed to the low psychological these adolescents have that led them to drop out of school prematurely. Notole and Kheswa (2014) postulated that high academic stress, crime and sexual violence are the results of lack of psychological well-being. In a related study of Cape Town adolescent dropouts, it was found that dropout rates were higher among adolescent males and made up to 61.1 percent Black students dropouts made 60.6 percent and students aged 14 years or older made 64.9 percent (Wegner et al. 2008). Their in-attendance of school has a propensity of leading them to have low psychological well-being and as a result lead purposeless lives characterised by risky sexual behaviour, substance abuse and criminal activity (Govender et al. 2013).

However, when schools are constructive, Macnab (2013) opines that they should employ effective processes that combine true-life learning which introduce learners to healthy practices and behaviours within a stimulating environment. Furthermore, learner should be exposed to individual and group activities using a range of expressions such as confidence, social responsibility and social capital. In a study by Bachman et al. (2012) on psychological well-being of orphaned adolescents in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, a comparison was done between the psychological well-being of those who attend school and those who do not. Of the 157 of those who went to school, 59.4 percent reported having a positive psychological well-being because of the support they receive from school. Whereas of the 107 orphaned adolescents 76.8 percent scored low on psychological well-being. From these results, it is clear that the impor-

tance of constructive schools can never be over-emphasised.

Involvement in Sport

It is widely assumed that adolescents who develop mastery or expertise in sporting skills stand a good chance to lead demonstrate feelings of autonomy and efficiency in many aspects of their lives (Eime et al. 2013) and these are associated with the promotion of psychological well-being (Ryff 1989). Holt (2016) argued that belonging to sport as a young person provides opportunities for them to engage in valuable and positive relationships with adults, which is vital when such opportunities are not available at home. Theokas (2009) puts an emphasis that the amount of time adolescent males spend on sporting activities each week is particularly important to receive positive developmental outcomes such as thinking constructively and overcoming boredom than when not participating in sport. With greater time commitment, adolescent males develop better mastery of skills and superior knowledge of tactics and strategy (Holt 2016; Theokas 2009). This, in turn, is positively associated with positive self-esteem because they do not idle and are less prone to risky sexual activities.

A study conducted by Slater and Tiggemann (2014) demonstrated that dance, football, rugby and other challenging physical activities are typically dominant ways that equip adolescent males to learn to be self-disciplined. Through regular training, these activities, when appropriately presented, they teach adolescent males to exert themselves and develop an ideal self. On the contrary, adolescent males who experience failure in sport may develop a negative view of themselves and that may lead to them having a poorer psychological well-being. Drawing from the attribution theory, Buss (1978) stressed that adolescent males who fail in sport may interpret failure at a completion to an internal cause that is global, stable and uncontrollable such as lack of talent, in that instance, the adolescent is more likely to experience shame, helplessness and give up. Hayward and Krause (2014) asserted that global self-esteem of adolescent males may fluctuate (that is, decrease when experiencing life challenges or increase when they succeed in confronting the developmental challenges of maturation and environmental changes). In many

instances, when they fail in sport, they feel like their attempts are in vain and thus tend to behave in anti-socially and start engaging in risk taking behaviour as a reaction to the failures on the pitch. In their study on psychological well-being after failure in sport, Birkeland et al. (2012) documented that approximately 61.3 percent of the adolescent males who partook on the study reported that sport made them feel inferior and inadequate and that contributing to their poorer psychological well-being. This illustrates that sport's contribution to the generally poorer psychological well-being on some adolescent males.

DISCUSSION

Adolescent males whose primary caregivers and environmental surroundings stimulate their cognitive abilities and emotionally support them, tend to perform better at school and demonstrate self-actualization as opposed to their counterparts lacking in secure attachment with the caregivers. Owing to open communication about many aspects of life such as sexuality, careers and social responsiveness with parents, it is clear that such youth become prosocial, assertive and display autonomy. In their sexual relationships, they practice safe sex and respect their girlfriends as they uphold to the moral precepts learnt from their authoritative parents and positive role models. Because they have future goals, majority of them often overcome conformity to peer pressure by participating in sports, thus, they do not take alcohol nor risk their lives by practicing unsafe sex. This study aligns with the findings by Skrove et al (2013) in European that adolescent males who engaged in sports reported happiness and personal growth as opposed to those who were depressed and suicidal. In other words, it could be assumed that they spend their time wisely, study in groups during vacations, and attend extra lessons to be better equipped for the final examinations especially when they are in Grade 12 or Matric.

Another important characteristic that differentiates adolescent males with sense of autonomy and purpose in life, from peers with low self-esteem, it is resilience. Resilience could be described as a positive adaptation to a challenging situation (Woollett et al. 2016) and be strengthened by one's sense of purpose, cognitive capacity and supportive environmental surroundings such as the school, parents and con-

structive peers in navigating unfavourable circumstances (Amzel et al. 2013). Rather than to drop out of school prematurely because of unstable family life such as divorce between parents, poverty and domestic violence (Lundeen et al. 2016) impoverished community (Kazembe and Neema 2016) and misleading teaching from unscrupulous mentors while undergoing traditional male circumcision (Nyembezi 2014), they prefer to attend church and belong to activities that edify their spiritual well-being. Furthermore, they are most likely to live in peace with significant others, forgive and respect their parents regardless of their drinking problems and accept their circumstances. Because they prefer not to ruminate about their past, their personality reminds one of the Big 5 Factor Model by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae (2010) which explains the qualities of conscientious and agreeable individuals. According to McCrae and Costa, adolescent males who are conscientious may exemplify self-discipline, determination and will to succeed than their mates who score low on this dimension. On the other hand, adolescent males who are high on the *Agreeableness* dimension tend to be helpful, cooperative, trusting and sympathetic. In other words, such adolescent males may be kept in any setting that calls for teamwork because they do not give up easily and often look for opportunities to enhance their friendship with others. To overcome their fragmented family circumstances, during school holidays, they may look for casual jobs such as gardening or working as waiters at the restaurants.

As purported by Ryff (1989), it is therefore necessary for parents or caregivers, educators and community leaders to foster a culture of learning and unity for adolescent males so that they do not become statistics of criminal behaviour because when not made realize of their sense of their self-worth, they resort to substance abuse and become teenage fathers. Once their mental health diminishes (Kheswa 2016) and plunge into poverty and state of helplessness, they become victims of drug lords and become susceptible to STIs.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the literature findings, it is clear that the protective factors such constructive schools, good role models in the community and

authoritative parenting style may be attributable to positive sexual health among African adolescent males and their psychological well-being. Finally, this study highlighted that the connection between intrapersonal and interpersonal factors such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and quality peers contribute towards shaping the sexual identity of male youth to be monogamous in their romantic relationships, develop sexual values and be emotionally intelligent against deviance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The psychological well-being in adolescent males has not been exhaustively explored in South Africa, so it still needs further exploration. Though risky sexual behaviour on adolescent males has relatively been studied but the relationship between the sexual behaviour and the psychological well-being is also an unexplored possible study area in South Africa. It is recommended that it should also be done in townships and urban settings to bring solution to the plight faced by African adolescent males such as gender-based violence and risk sexual behaviour owing to poor self-concept, human relations and lack of purpose in life.

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