A review of peer influence and teenagers' antisocial behaviours in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The psychosocial determinants and processes that influence and underscore teenagers' risk taking and antisocial behaviours and the role peer influence plays as a contributive factor are well documented. Behaviourists, social-psychologists, and other scholars have posited competing perspectives on the subject and agreed that peer influence, often negative, occurs in natural settings among teenagers. None of these studies have properly synthesized the results of available literature in the subject area. This study synthesizes and interprets peer influence and how it occurs and leads to behaviour challenges for teenagers in Africa. A behavioural framework is proposed. The framework (first of its kind) took into consideration behavioural variables that potentially account for the onset and continuation of peer influence. Literature over the past 25 years until March 31, 2022, were searched. The search included studies of teenagers 10 to 19 years of age. Thirty-one out of 49 independent studies were selected. Eleven of the studies were exclude because the majority of their participants were children, less than 10 years of age. The twenty remaining relevant independent studies are this review's sample. The article focuses mainly on teenagers in Africa but draws a few studies from other countries. It concluded that given that prevention of peer contact, communication and subsequent influences are impossible, the challenge becomes one of promoting the social-structural predictors of positive peer influences while impeding the social-structural predictors of negative peer influences.

KEY TERMS: *antisocial behaviour; delinquency; intervention; peer influence; teenagers*

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INTRODUCTION

Peer influence occurs in peer group settings including intervention or treatment facilities, schools, and recreational and leisure programs for teenagers. It is hypothesized that negative peer influence informs teenagers' antisocial and criminal behaviours. Peer group membership potentially leads to peer influence (negative or positive) and possible antisocial behaviours. However, information about how exactly peer influence starts and persists is lacking in existing literature. Both males and females can behave antisocially although more males may have antisocial behaviours than females and teenagers are relatively more antisocial than younger children. The article synthesis and analyzes available extant literature about peer influence, how it starts, increases and leads to teenagers'/youth antisocial and criminal behaviours. The paper first discusses what happens in any environment where teenagers are grouped for any purpose. There is a method, finding and discussion sections. Based on available literature, a model is proposed to help better understand peer influence phenomenon.

BACKGROUND

Placing well-behaved teenagers and deviant ones in the same setting has been observed to produce negative peer influences (Ikediashi *et al.*, 2015). Concerns, oppositions, and criticisms have been raised against congregating youth in places such as youth group homes without effective supervision and proper adult monitoring as it results in negative peer influence and subsequent antisocial and criminal behaviours most of the time (Chigbu *et al.*, 2021; Wakoli *et al.*, 2016). Developmental studies have discussed social settings or contexts where children/teenagers interact and how contexts may influence their growth and behaviours. Dishion & Skaggs (2000) suggested that treatment programs for teenagers who are behaviourally challenged must focus, first and foremost, on the peer context. The number of delinquent or otherwise behaviourally challenged teenagers versus non-delinquents in a group determines, in part, the probability of interpersonal interactions and so the possibilities of peers influencing each other, positively or negatively. In effect, group constellation matters (Ikediashi *et al.*, 2015; Nnam, 2017). For example, a group with a number of delinquent teenagers against only one non-delinquent teen would more likely negatively affect the non-delinquent and better-behaved group member.

In their investigation of peer influence and substance use in South Korea, Kim *et al.* (2010) agreed that such analysis cannot be completed without using social bond theory variables such as bonding or attachment. The writers concluded that peer influence just like parental influence, may result in substance misuse and abuse if the influence or the bond is with negative individual. Using regression analysis, Ozbay & Ozcan (2006) tested social bond theory on youth delinquency in Turkey. They found that in Turkey, just like many Western Societies, social bond theory plays vital role in explaining teenagers' delinquent acts as bonding with deviant individuals or societies leads to negative peer influence and subsequently to negative behaviours. Also, drug abuse concerns were investigated among students in Kenya. The study was guided and directed by social bond and social learning theories using descriptive and ex-post factor approaches. The writers found that students who use and abuse drugs seemed to lack knowledge about their effects and wrongly rely on peers for such information. Unfortunately, they are always negatively influenced to use and abuse such substances. Ikediashi and his colleagues agreed that peer group membership leads to peer influence and antisocial behaviours (Ikediashi *et al.*, 2015).

Also, teenagers in Africa often face multiple challenges due to circumstances such as socio-economic statues of parents, lack of or inadequate health care services, and lack of or limited education. The situation leads to youth making wrong choices or following deviant peers who easily influence them to abuse drugs and or alcohol or join different deadly and notorious groups. In African culture, there are generally accepted set of values, norms and beliefs that guide the behaviour of community members. Children and teenagers are expected to live by certain standards dictated by the socio-cultural environment. These standards and values have been less binding and less respected in recent times due to the infiltration and impact of Western cultures. Youth now have regular access to the internet and can easily communicate with peers through different mediums and get influenced even without any face-to-face contact. This has posed different threats to the well-being of teenagers specifically and the socio-cultural environment generally.

While studies discussed peer influence and its negative impact on teenagers, no study has ever properly synthesized the results of existing literature in the subject area. This review synthesizes the findings of 20 studies conducted by independent researchers on peer influence and teenagers' antisocial behaviours. Both boys and girls of different backgrounds and ages were included in the various studies. Findings of the synthesis may help social workers, child protection workers, and policy and decision makers anywhere in the world to better understand how peer influence occurs and leads to teenagers' antisocial behaviours. Further, findings may guide leaders to know how to deal with peer influence concerns in their communities. It may, for instance, help them develop programs to control, check or even stop its occurrence.

Teenagers, settings or contexts and peer influence

Peer influence is one of the recent perspectives used to explain teenagers' antisocial behaviours in natural settings and it is seen mainly as negative influence by deviant teenagers on their vulnerable peers (Ikediashi *et al.*, 2015). There are three main levels of analysis that may help in understanding peer influence in intervention or treatment program settings or even in school settings. Individuals and their personality traits before going into any intervention program has been identified as one of the levels that is relevant. In relation to teenagers, these include temperament, gender, age, and behaviour. These factors have potentials of moderating peer influence effects when teenagers are grouped for any programs or activity (Dishion *et al.*, 2005). It is argued that teenagers' behaviour and response towards treatment are small social channels through which peer influence may and do occur and it is directly linked to or associated with the peer environment or context (Olagbaju, 2019; Olalekan, 2016). As shown in Figure I, contextual factors play major roles in teenagers' response to peer influence.

How teenagers relate to intervention settings and individuals (therapists) therein have important roles to play during the process and the effects intervention may have on them. Dishion & Dodge (2005) identified four of such contexts and noted that peer influence can take place when intervention is being carried out in any of the contexts. These contexts include community level intervention programs; intervention programs in public settings (for example, creation of alternative classes or education settings for high-risk behaviour children); outpatient and inpatient mental health treatment services; and juvenile justice settings. The settings must be made conducive and supervision in any form must be effective to prevent the occurrence of negative peer influence.

As mentioned earlier, peer influence effects (negative or positive) can be a separate or combined function of characteristics of teenagers during intervention and the setting where intervention takes place. The interaction of teenagers is not and cannot be limited to a specific setting or place. The interplay of different settings beyond teenager's immediate setting interacts with and impacts peer influence processes (Yakubu *et al.*, 2018). In relation to high-risk teenagers, they interact with different settings that have the ability to influence their attitude and behaviour. Olagbaju (2019), for example, noted that the desire to achieve education for all in Nigeria has resulted in using different approaches, including large class sizes. The author indicated that in doing so authorities ignored how peer influence (mostly negative) could impede such efforts in the short and or the long run. It was determined that peer influence, and interaction between class sizes and peer influence affected the success of the program. Noteworthy is that occurrences during intervention have direct effect on teenagers' development and change process. For example, a teenager's success in an intervention program does not solely depend on him/her but also on the relationship between the teen, the therapist, and other members/factors in the intervention program. Available evidence showed that a teenager's delinquent, criminal and risky behaviour may start or increase when in a setting that is not conducive for the development of prosocial skills or characteristics (Chigbu *et al.*, 2021; Wakoli *et al.*, 2016). Dishion *et al.* (2000) after studying contextual factors impacting teenagers' development and behaviour recommended that treatment programs for high-risk teenagers focusing on their conduct must be able to adequately handle the interaction with peers in the intervention settings because the peer setting is where teenagers' usually interact and get information and when left unchecked can lead to the production of negative intervention outcomes due to negative peer influences (Figure I).

Conceptual explanation of peer influence occurrence

This study, just like other studies on teenagers' delinquent behaviours, is informed by social bond theory. It is a theory used to explain why and how some people may become delinquents and commit crimes while others do not. The theory talked about attachment (bonding), commitment, belief, and involvement, and how these influence individuals, especially teenagers/youth, to act criminally or develop delinquent and criminal behaviour tendencies. The generalizability and applicability of the theory in any country is unquestionable. It has been evaluated and proven to determine youth delinquent behaviours across the globe (Kim et al., 2010). In effect, the theory can and has been used everywhere in the world including several African countries as shown briefly below. Khoury-Kassabri and his colleagues used it to analyze and explain Palestinian-Arab youth behaviours and concluded that bonding with negative social influences make youth behaviour in the region antisocial (Khoury-Kassabri *et al.*, 2023). Unam (2017) used social bond theory to document why laws and policies, and efforts to check or control drug use in Nigeria failed thus far. Even the introduction of Restorative Justice to help check the anomaly has not been able to do so.

Wu and his colleagues tested social bond theory on drug abusers in China and determined that positive parental attachment, involvement and positive belief system are strong influences that may help users and addicts to abstain from using (Wu *et al.*, 2021). Kariuki-Githinji (2020) sought to find out if parenting practices and styles determine delinquency among teenagers in Kenya. She used social bond theory to underscore her study. The study found that parent-child conflict "significantly positively" account for teenagers' "non-illegal and generalized delinquency" and parental alcohol abuse is "positively related to non-illegal and minor-illegal delinquent behaviour" by children (Kariuki-Githinji, 2020, p. 95). Social bond theory was further used in a study by Baffour

and Abass (2016) to explore delinquent behaviour concerns among inmates in a prison in Ghana. Findings demonstrated that weak or insecure attachment or bonding with caregivers lead to child-parent conflict, inadequate supervision and child abuse. These account for teenagers' delinquency even when they are incarcerated.

Hirsch developed social control/bond theory in 1969 to explain how a teenager may become a delinquent or be easily influenced negatively by peers to become a delinquent or a deviant. He contended that everyone is born with some criminal disposition and that human beings by their nature are self-centered and aggressive (Hirsch, 1969). In effect, any individual can be a delinquent as it is a tendency inherent in all human beings. Many people, however, do not become delinquents because they develop prosocial principles by associating with prosocial people or friends and prosocial institutions, and these invariably shape their behaviour and prevent them from indulging in crimes and delinquent acts. Hirschi alluded to how positive parenting and adult direction, supervision and monitoring can prevent children from behaving antisocially. Scholars agreed that negative peer influence easily occurs when teenagers are aggregated and are inadequately supervised and or there is total lack of adult monitoring and this potentially leads to antisocial behaviours and commitment of crimes (Dishion *et al.*, 2011; Ikediashi *et al.*, 2015).

METHODS

There was a rigorous systematic search and selection of relevant available literature published over the past 25 years; until March 31, 2022. I searched from Campbell Systematic Reviews, Social Work, Social Service and Sociological Abstracts, PsycINFO (Psychological Information), AJOL (African Journals Online), Google Scholar, Leddy library all Sources, Education Research Complete, Academic Search Complete and hand searches. This broad sampling frame that included published and unpublished, scientific, and grey literatures was designed to control for publication bias. Keywords used are Teenagers or Youth and (group or treat* or therapeutic or peer influence) and (behav* challenge or delinqen* or crim* or arrest or convict* or Africa) and (systematic review or synthesis). I searched for qualitative and quantitative studies of youth 10 to 19 years of age. Thirty-one out of 49 independent studies were selected. Eleven of the studies were exclude because the majority of their participants were children, less than 10 years of age. The twenty remaining relevant independent studies are this review's sample. The study is guided by these questions 1a. How does peer influence occur, 1b. How does it lead to teenagers' antisocial behaviour and possible commitment of crimes? Interpretive synthesis and in-depth descriptive approach is used to analyze and interpret selected articles. To achieve validity, there was a rigorous and systematic search and selection of relevant available literature for review

Table 1: Table of articles included in the study

Author & Year	Purpose/Research Question	Method	Result
Anyio (2005)	To examine the association between drinking alcohol, peer influence and Students' school attendance	Quantitative using correlation	No significant association between peer group influence and student behaviour towards school was determined. There was, however, positive significant association between drinking alcohol and students general approach to school issues confirming that when a teenager is associated with or attached to a negative influence such as drinking alcohol, there is a high possibility that he/she could be influenced negatively
Baffour *et al.* (2016)	Using social bond theory to explore factors that predispose prisoners in Ghana to delinquency	Qualitative method using interviews	Findings showed that weak or insecure attachment to or bonding with caregivers lead to child-parent conflict, inadequate supervision and child abuse. These account for teenagers' potentials of associating with deviant peers and subsequently being influenced negatively and even when they are incarcerated

			their delinquent and criminal predispositions never change
Chebukaka (2014)	To explore, using social bond and social learning theories, drug abuse among public secondary school students in Kenya	Descriptive survey and ex-post factor methods	Findings indicated that students who use and abuse drugs seemed to lack knowledge about their effects and wrongly rely on peers for such information. Unfortunately, they are always negatively influenced to use and abuse such substances. Negative peer influence was, therefore, identified as the main factor that pushes students or teenagers to use and abuse drugs
Chinedu Ugwu *et al.* (2018)	To explore factors that influence students'(males) drug use	Quantitative design using different tests	Isolation "(social alienation")" was found to be a strong predictor of drug abuse by students. It is so because isolation makes young people attach themselves to anybody who offers to be a friend and such people are often not the right individuals. Such friends, usually bad, end up introducing innocent teenagers to wrong activities or practices. It is not surprising that part of the findings showed that, "religious commitment" is a negative predictor of substance use. Churches advocate against such practices.
Chigbu *et al.* (2021)	To find out if peer influence determines sexual behaviour of teenagers in southeast Nigeria	Correlation survey design method was adopted using questionnaires	There is a positive association between peer influence and sexual behaviour among teenagers who participated in the research. It was noted that teens who make Facebook friends or complete homework with opposite sex are susceptible to negative peer influence and subsequently practice unwanted behaviours.
Dishion *et al.* (2000)	The study focused on the discussion of contextual covariates that account for drug and alcohol use by teenagers	The study used monthly interviews and phone calls between teenagers and parents to model contextual factors that account for changes in teenagers' behaviours	Contextual factors including parental and peer influence account for changes in teenagers' substance use. The change can be positive or negative use depending on conditions in the environment.
Dishion *et al.* (2011)	To investigate peer influence on adolescents' delinquency and violent behaviour	Qualitative method	Peer influence can be responsible for different negative behaviours throughout a child's life until late teen ages.

Hendricks (2019)	To explore the effects of school violence on students	Exploratory qualitative method	School violence has different negative impacts on students including aggressive behaviours. It negatively affects their mental health and they suffer from increased levels of anxiety, depression and low self-confidence. Ultimately, they resort to negative behaviours
Ikediashi *et al.* (2015)	To explore antisocial behaviour of adolescents	Qualitative	Peer group membership leads to peer influence (negative) and antisocial behaviours.
Kariuki-Githinji *et al.* (2020)	To explore the relationship between parental behaviours and teenagers delinquency using social bond theory	Correlation survey design methods	Parent-child conflict was found to "significantly positively" account for teenagers' "non-illegal and generalized delinquency" and parental alcohol abuse is "positively related to non-illegal and minor-illegal delinquent behaviour" by children. This confirms that when teenagers bond with negative individuals, the end result is often negative behaviours
Khoury-Kassabri (2023)	Using social bond theory to determine Palestinian-Arab youth delinquent behaviours.	Qualitative method using face-to-face semi-structured interviews	Bonding with negative social influences makes youth get influenced negatively and their behaviour in the region becomes antisocial and criminal
Kim *et al.* (2010)	To explore if peer influence has greater impact on teenagers substance abuse than parental influence. Social bond theory was used to inform the study.	Multivariate analyses was used	Peer influence, just like parental influence, may result in substance misuse and abuse if the influence or the bond is with negative individual.
Olagbaju et al (2019)	To explore the effects of class size and peer influence on teenagers' or students' achievement	Inferential survey design	There were significant main peer influence effects on students' achievement or lack thereof and significant interaction of class size and peer influence effect on students' achievement
Olupe (2005)	To explore the impact of peer influence on study habits of students from different socio-economic backgrounds.	Qualitative	Peer influence is found to play a significant role in students' learning, parent's economic status notwithstanding
Oloyede (2005)	To explore influence of peer groups on study habits of high school students	Quantitative using Pearson-Product Moment correlation regression and T-test	The study did not find any significant association between peer influence and students' study habits. Further, peer influence did not significantly predict how students approach studies.
Ozbay *et al.* (2006)	To test social bond theory on youth delinquency in a developing country	Factor and regression analysis were used	Social bond theory plays a vital role in explaining teenagers' delinquent acts as bonding with deviant individuals or societies leads to negative peer influence and subsequently to negative behaviours and commitment of crime

Ugoji (2011)	To explore the impact of parental status and peer influence on teenage pregnancy	Quantitative using Pearson correlation and Multiple Regression	The main and interaction effects were observed to be significant. The study confirms the occurrence of peer influence when teenagers are grouped anywhere
Wakoli *et al.* (2016)	To explore peer influence on teenagers' aggressive behaviour	Descriptive survey design with mixed method	Negative peer influence accounts for teenagers' aggressive behaviour. Such behaviour starts when teenagers associate with deviant peers.
Wu *et al.* (2021)	It explored the impact of social bond theory on Chinese drug users' willingness to stop or not to stop using	Quantitative design using ordinary least squares regression and ordinal logistic regression	The study supported the theory's variables such as bonding/attachment in assisting or not assisting users attitude to stop or not to stop
Yakubu *et al.* (2018)	To determine factors that are responsible for teenage pregnancy in sub-Saharan Africa	Qualitative systematic study	Peer influence was identified as one of the major factors that account for teenage pregnancy in the region.

FINDINGS

The review tried to determine how peer influence (mainly negative) occurs and how it leads to teenagers' antisocial behaviours and possible commitment of crimes using interpretive synthesis and in-depth descriptive approach. The focus is mainly on teenagers in Africa. It is evident that risky to antisocial behaviour peers can influence well-behaved peers to become antisocial and act in various unacceptable ways and even commit serious crimes. Negative peer influence may occur during or after a vulnerable teenager has contact and interaction with antisocial behaviour peer(s).

Aggregation of teenagers

When a normal (well-behaved) teenager is placed in a group with deviant peers there is a high probability that the teenager's behaviour may change for worse and when a deviant youth associates with other deviant peers what results is a worse form of antisocial behaviour. The phenomenon is qualified as negative peer influence and it pervades all sectors where teenagers are grouped, including treatment settings, schools, alternative education programs or reform schools, mental health clinics, juvenile detention centres or jails as well as boot or wilderness camps. In effect, caution must be taken, and effective plans developed when aggregating youth for any purpose to avoid the occurrence of negative peer influence. Peer influences can be short to long-term, with their impacts possibly being greater the longer the peer-youth exposure. It is incumbent on policy makers and program designers to consider the above critically when putting teens in groups for any purpose. Note that the amount of time a teenager must be exposed to a deviant peer before the insurgence of negative peer influence is yet to be explored in existing literature.

The bonding effect

Persistent exposure of youth to the most problematic delinquent and virulent antisocial behaviours leads predictably to the transmission of those behaviours through negative peer influences. Teenagers voluntarily bond for various purposes, ranging from academic (prosocial) to problematic (antisocial [e.g., illicit drug use]). Their relative direction then, prosocial, or antisocial, may be affected by the way group programs are designed. The lack of effective adult monitoring and or supervision are prevalent in different settings compounding the risk factor in many of these systems, but especially in the criminal justice systems where bonding occurs easily. The criminal justice system is largely associated with negative peer influences culminating in varied criminal behaviours including drug abuse and murder by youth even after serving prison sentence.

Unintended occurrence

Socio-recreational programs such as midnight basketball leagues and related education and training programs have the grave potential to produce negative peer influences. It is evident that community programs meant to assist teenagers in behavioural change can be as unhelpful as they are helpful as they can be natural reservoirs of negative peer influences. There are some organized community youth programs noted in the literature that inadvertently encouraged negative peer influences and engendered antisocial behaviours among participants. Such represents an obvious challenge to any congregate youth intervention program.

Pull and socialize factors

Teenagers typically have similar behavioural traits as their friends and are most often attracted to peers they think are like them. Further, it needs to be noted that during their development teenagers typically experiment with various groups and activities. They often start with non-delinquent groups and deviate along the way to delinquent or even more deviant, crime-committing groups. Since moderations of such effects, buffering or potentiating, may result from interactions with personal and or socio-structural factors, evidence in support of them or lack thereof needs to be critically investigated and documented.

Gender and age

Negative peer influence can be moderated by the gender and or age of a teenager. Findings from the synthesis support the fact that girls may be more susceptible to negative peer influences than boys. Age also seems to be a factor -- early to mid-adolescence is a time when boys and girls become more susceptible to negative peer influences. Further, aggressive behaviours are prevalent among groups of children from early school age (kindergarten or grade 1) to early teens (e. g. 13years), while drug and alcohol use, sexual promiscuity and delinquency are more prevalent among older teens. Also, teenagers seem more negatively influenced by peers who are slightly older. Teenagers' family characteristics seems to be an important factor just as positive or negative parental influences are. In short, teenagers' susceptibility to negative peer influence depends upon personal and socio-contextual conditions, and developing adequate knowledge about such conditions and circumstances would be an important step toward prevention.

Choice or selection effect

Teenagers naturally yearn to be recognized as "drip" or popular. Such action increases their chances of being influenced negatively by delinquent peers who have already popularized themselves through their risky, deviant, or antisocial behaviours. Consistent with social learning theory, teens seem to easily concede to normative social influences of popular peers as they yearn for popularity. One can envision, for example, using life space interventions to minimize the influence of popular antisocial peers while maximizing the influence of popular prosocial peers.

Institutional characteristics and social mix

Institutional characteristics and case mix are condition that may lead to peer influence, hence the need for them to be critically examined. The number of teenagers in an institution and their composition, that is, whether they are a homogeneous delinquent group or a mixed group (delinquent and non- delinquent) as well as overall program endowment (availability of resources or lack thereof) probably largely determine the extent to which peers negatively or positively influence other teens in institutional and or residential settings. Deviant group members consistently had the most influence in programs where they were in the majority and relatively much better-behaved youths were in the clear minority.

DISCUSSION

The studies reviewed include qualitative, quantitative and systematic reviews that focused on peer influence (mainly negative) and teenagers in different group settings. The literature seemed to generally identify peer influence in homogeneous and heterogeneous groups of teenagers (that is, deviants and deviants or deviants and non-deviants). The review indicates situations that may make teenagers more susceptible to negative peer influence.

Though peer influences can either be negative or positive, existing literature has focused more on negative peer influences. Negative peer influence can make teenagers to change acceptable behaviours to antisocial behaviours. Antisocial behaviour is any type of conduct that may cause discomfort or distress to another person(s)

or breach someone's rights (Wachikwu *et al*., 2012; Ikediashi *et al*., 2015). Negative peer influences are often portrayed as infectious and vulnerable teenagers who meet delinquent or deviant teenagers, for example, can be at risk of becoming infected. Deviant peers can influence others to become aggressive or violent, abuse alcohol or other substances, carry guns, become delinquents and many other similar types of behaviours (Chigbu *et al*., 2021; Ikediashi, *et al*., 2015; Wakoli *et al*., 2016).

Further, negative peer influence occurs without pressure or coercion from the influencer and marks the onset of delinquency and antisocial behaviours among teenagers. An interesting finding is that normal youth associating with deviant peers is a potential condition for the development of delinquent or deviant behaviours. It is argued that deviant peers relationship with vulnerable ones predicts antisocial behaviours (Ikediashi *et al*., 2015). Many teenagers do not start delinquent or antisocial behaviours until they have contact with and exposure to deviant friends and subsequently get influenced negatively (Figure 1).

The findings also align with studies that indicate that deviancy training is a channel through which negative peer influences may occur in group settings, although this has not been well explored in available literature. The intensity of exposure to delinquent friends seems the best predictor of deviance transmission to previously non-delinquent, better behaved teenager (Ikediashi *et al*., 2015). How exactly this happens is a question yet to be adequately addressed. Noteworthy is that much seems to be known about the risks of negative peer influences in group contexts such as alternative education programs, detention centres, mental health clinic to name a few, but not in child protection/welfare sectors (Ikediashi *et al*., 2015).

Available studies seemed to support the argument that intervention programs have not been successful in dealing with teenagers' delinquent and risky behaviours due to negative peer influence occurring in such settings. Further, other programs, including school programs, that bring teenagers with behavioural challenges together for any purposes fail to achieve positive results due to negative peer influence effects (Chebukaka, 2014). There seems to be developing evidence about specific conditions and circumstances that may potentiate negative peer influences in different settings – these are yet to be explored in extant studies.

Evidence supports Hirschi's germinal theory that teenagers who are connected to prosocial activities on regular basis and are committed to such activities may most likely not engage in deviant behaviours and activities even if they are introduced to them by peers. Their prosocial perceptions and beliefs direct and prevent them from committing crimes. The opposite may be the case if such beliefs and perceptions are antisocial in nature (Wu et al., 2021). For instance, if teenagers believe that drug and alcohol use are wrong, they may not use them, but if they see nothing wrong or immoral with substance use or abuse, they are more likely to use them. It was no surprise to note that some authors wrote clearly about mentorship intervention programs for behaviourally challenged children where such children could be linked to and possibly bond with positive mentors and or role models to teach them prosocial behaviour skills (see Maarman *et al*., 2021; Mugumbate *et al*., 2020).

Peer influence seems to be pervasive in schools in Africa and often results in substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse and sometimes leads to pertinent school programs (e.g. Education for All) not achieving desired results (Olagbaju *et al*., 2019; Yakubu *et al*., 2018). It is suggested that, among others, thorough research should be carried out to examine how influence of deviant peers on vulnerable teenagers leads to truancy, promiscuity and dropping out of school in Africa.

The current study may assist families and social workers to have a second thought when assisting teenagers who have behaviour challenges. The study results may benefit child protection or welfare agencies and in directing them about decisions they make concerning teenagers' behaviours. It may help contribute or add to existing knowledge in the subject area, develop more insight into peer influence and teenagers' antisocial and criminal behaviours, and address gaps in service providers' and social workers' understanding of how deviant teenagers negatively influence their peers.
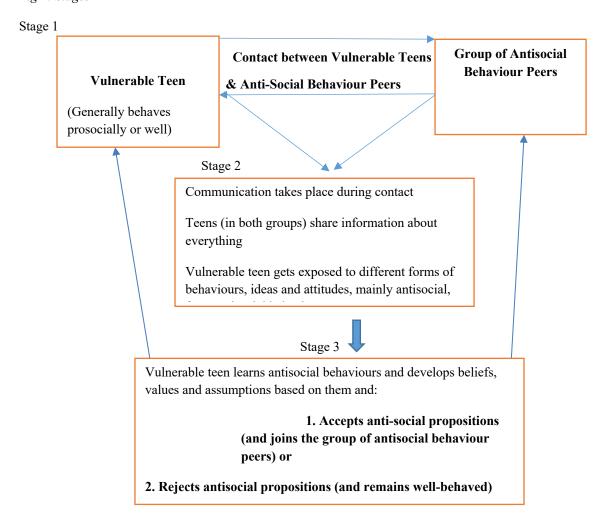
Influencer-influenced model

Available information showed that different processes take place before teenagers get influenced by deviant peers. These processes are shown in Figure 1. As demonstrated in Figure 1, stage 1, peer influence is an activity that starts with face-to-face contact among teenagers when they are placed in groups for treatment or intervention, alternative education programs or when in a group for any other social activity including sports, athletics and leisure. Communication, stage 2, seen as the route through which peer influence occurs, takes place during such face-to-face contacts where teenagers (both vulnerable and deviants) share information about everything. They get exposed to different forms of behaviours, ideas, and attitudes (antisocial and prosocial) from each other. Teenagers learn and either accept or reject these behaviours from their peers, and develop beliefs, values, assumptions, and biases based on them (see stage 3, Figure 1).

Peer contact and communication, the main mediums through which peer influence occurs, are seen as stages where both sides (group of deviant teenagers versus vulnerable teenagers) try to influence each other – positively or negatively, but mainly negatively. Peer influence does not occur accidentally. Teenagers willingly accept to become antisocial or prosocial individuals. Those that are resilient and bonded with prosocial activities are better

equipped to ward off negative peer influences. Arguably, vulnerable youth have options -- either to accept to be influenced or refuse to be influenced, especially negatively. The duration of contact and communication before the onset of antisocial behaviours is not clearly explored in extant literature.

In influencing vulnerable teenagers, delinquent teenagers expect them to respond positively. A positive response to negative propositions results in negative influence and subsequent antisocial behaviours (Figure 1). Extant literature seem to more typically depict peer influence processes as linear and unidirectional, where only vulnerable youths are influenced, most often negatively. Observably, two processes and outcomes may happen simultaneously when delinquent peers attempt to influence vulnerable peers. At risk teens may get influenced negatively or delinquent peers may get influenced positively. The latter has generally not been studied and so it is not well documented. Anecdotally, teenagers sometimes react and consciously reject all delinquent propositions of their peers. The occurrence of one, the other or both outcomes depend upon how youths respond to their peers, and such responses seem related to a constellation of personal, familial, and social-structural factors.

Fig 1: Stages

Fig 1: Stages

In short, contact and communication facilitate peer influences, pro and con. And it is observed that preventing such peer contact and communication is not only impossible, but undesirable. So given that prevention of peer contact/influences is not possible, the challenge becomes one of facilitating the social-structural predictors of positive peer influences while impeding or eliminating the social-structural predictors of negative influences. Advancing better understanding of such social-structural, socioeconomic and program endowment-related factors will be needed to do this effectively.

CONCLUSION

When schools aggregate and place students labelled as high-risk, academically or behaviourally, in homogenized special education classrooms, such concentrated exposure to other high-risk peers tends to produce null results at best; at worst academic performance diminishes further with concomitant increases in alcohol and drug problems,

and other related behavioural problems, including delinquency and criminal activity. Concentrating similarly challenged teens into treatment or intervention programs must be undertaken only with much forethought and probably only with enough resources. It needs to be noted that prevention of peer contact, communication and subsequent influences are impossible when teenagers are congregated. The importance of the lives of teenagers and the implication of antisocial behaviours on individuals and society make the need for a more thorough study into the effects of negative peer influence on teenagers and behavioural challenges that result from it very crucial.

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