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Adolescent risky behaviours in Johannesburg: understanding the role of parents and peers from a qualitative perspective

Ralesego, Lesego Katlego

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was conducted to explore what adolescence perceive as risky behaviour and the reasons behind adolescents partaking in this type of behaviour knowing the outcome. In addition, this study looks at the association between parental and peer influence on behavioural outcomes. This study was based on focus group discussions made up of 26 students from the two high schools in Johannesburg, South Africa. Participates were asked to take part in analysing two cases studies and two activities around what the participate deemed as socially acceptable behavioural choices.

The study found, that parental influence compared to peers is minimal and as a result parents mainly become the support to a participant's individual decision and therefore not seen as very influential. There is also an acknowledgement to group activities, such as sports, which are provided at schools being recognised as acceptable behaviours because they are primarily seen as being socially acceptable. On the other hand, activities that have largely resulted in negative outcomes and that have little to no health benefit have been deemed not socially acceptable and as a consequence have been noted as unacceptable behaviours.

The findings indicated that there is a general understanding of the possible outcomes by the participates, yet, this has not discouraged some of the participants from exhibiting different views on some of the activities being ranked as acceptable or unacceptable. Furthermore, adolescents are aware of their environment and the perceived norms that influence their ability to assess what is socially acceptable and what is risky.