Social challenges of adolescent secondary school students in Ghana: evidence from Cape Coast schools

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ABSTRACT
The study investigated the social challenges of adolescents in secondary schools in Ghana. A cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were collected from 376 students from five public senior high schools within Cape Coast Metropolis via a multistage sampling procedure. The data were analysed using means, independent samples t-test and multiple linear regression. The results revealed that the most prevailing social challenges students experience are feeling of rejection by friends, fear or concern about the future, and feeling of not being attracted to the opposite sex. This study provides preliminary understanding into a group of adolescent students that are more susceptible to social challenges. Female adolescent, early adolescent, students without residence on campus and students in their final year of study are more likely to experience social challenges than other groups. Moreover, the study revealed that students prefer seeking help from teachers and parents rather than school counsellors.

Introduction
Adolescence is the cycle of life between the ages of 10 and 19 years (World Health Organization, 2008). Okorodudu (2003) stated that adolescence is a period of rapid development, finding one’s real self, shaping personal values and identifying one’s vocational and social direction. According to Masten et al. (2006), adolescence serves as a window of opportunity to shape positive life trajectories. Similarly, Stattin and Kerr (2001) also asserted that adolescence is a time when major life decisions are made. Adolescence is conceptualized as a period of storm and stress (Arnett, 1999), and a crucial period for youth in preparation for adulthood (Valverde et al., 2012). Adolescent period usually overlaps with entering middle school or senior high school, which covers the period where changes take place in an individual’s life in terms of physical, social, and cognitive development (Burke et al., 2010). Hence, poorly managed changes may lead to social worries for adolescents (Valverde et al., 2012). Extant literature suggests that the move from adolescent to adulthood is an active phase for identifying one’s identity and personal ambitions (Wigfield et al., 2008). As they (adolescents) reach this stage, they encounter some challenges in their social life. According to the American Psychological Association (2002), the many changes experienced by an adolescent can be grouped into five major categories – physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioural. However, Trempala and Malmberg (2002) found that social problems are more common during adolescence than at any other time during any stage in a person’s life.
Social challenges of adolescents’ students

Most students transition to secondary or high school during adolescence. This transition normally comes with challenges, such as low self-esteem, lower student achievement and augmented social challenges (Alspaugh, 1998; Galton et al., 2003; Juvonen et al., 2004). For example, adolescents transition into secondary schools disrupts their social networks and pressure is mounted on them to develop social skills that allow them to form new networks and maintain interpersonal relationships with peers in entirely different and new environments (Berndt, 2004; Eccles, 2004). Extant literature shows that during this period adolescent students also become overly concerned about their body, the need for intimacy and companionship (Berndt, 2004), desire social reputation, and attention (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002), increased aggression and social manipulation (Espelage et al., 2004) and dealing with bullying issues (Shin & Ryan, 2012). Coupled with the pressure to develop social skills to navigate their new space, adolescents are further saddled with a myriad of challenges ranging from peer pressures, parental and family issues, time management, academic stress etc. (Akwei, 2015; Glozh, 2013). The skills adolescents are anticipated to develop, the choices they must make, and the settings they negotiate during the adolescent year are prescribed by social institutions, such as the educational system and by shared expectations regarding the necessities for easy transition and success in adulthood (Crockett, 1997). These social pressures lead to anxiety, depression, and constant feelings of being overwhelmed (Lewis et al., 2011; Noddings, 2003) which significantly impact their mental health negatively. Hence, Fok and Wong (2005) called attention to the need to provide coping strategies to support adolescents deal with potential social stressors. Research studies on adolescents have shown that peers/friends, teachers and parents/family play an instrumental role in social adjustment of adolescents (Cook et al., 2002; Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Veneziano, 2000).

Adolescents coping mechanisms for managing social challenges in school

Friends

Extant literature has demonstrated that a common coping mechanism that adolescents often use in navigating social challenges is having friends and peer acceptance (Erath et al., 2010; Hodges et al., 1999). Farrington (1993) and Robinson (1995) found that acceptance of friends/peers positively correlated with good adolescent social adjustment and increased the likelihood of forming and maintaining productive interpersonal relationships. (Shin & Ryan, 2012) asserted that coping with friends is multifaceted. In tandem with social achievement goals, Shin and Ryan (2012) identified three coping responses with friends—mastery, avoidance, and nonchalance. These coping responses have been supported by other works (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Wilton et al., 2000). When faced with social problems, adolescents seek advice from friends on how to navigate and improve on their situation (Shin & Ryan, 2012). Thus, adolescents use their friends as resources to obtain the needed social support—mastery coping. On the other hand, if the social problem emanates from their relationship with peers, adolescents are likely to remain silent on the issue because they feel safer not to talk about it, to avoid incurring negative evaluation and judgements from peers and risking their desire for reputation and attention—avoidance coping (Shin & Ryan, 2012). Using the nonchalant coping response mechanism, adolescents behave as if they are not bothered by the problem, and they discount the social challenge to friends rather than solving it (Shin & Ryan, 2012). In a similar work, Hombrados-endieta et al. (2012) found that friends provided socio-emotional support and informational support for adolescents.
Teacher, counselling, and guidance coordinators support

The perceptions adolescent students have regarding support from teacher and school guidance and counselling coordinators have been found to significantly impact their social adjustment and self-esteem (Katia & Jean, 2004; Ryan & Patrick, 2002). For example, Katia and Jean (2004) found that adolescent students experienced decreased depressive symptoms and an increase in self-esteem when they perceived augmenting support from their teachers. Conversely, they experienced decreased self-esteem and augmented depressive symptoms when they perceived less support from teachers. School guidance and counselling coordinators are also a source of support for adolescent students to cope with their social challenges (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009). Kesting and Seidel (2005) studied the need for personal social counselling among secondary school students in Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State, the study found that personal social counselling enables students to make an adequate social adjustment. Extant literature reveals that students preferred receiving help in the forms of either individual counselling or printed materials (Gallagher et al., 1992; Rule & Gandy, 1994; Wills & DePaulo, 1991). However, other studies have revealed that students have a strong preference for close friends or relatives over counsellors as sources of help in times of challenges (Rule & Gandy, 1994; Wills & DePaulo, 1991).

Family members

Parents/family have been found to be one of the social supports for adolescent (Barrera & Li, 1996; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Veneziano, 2000; Woolley et al., 2009). Hombrados-endieta et al. (2012) conducted a study to explore social support systems (i.e. father, mother, classmates, and teachers) of adolescent students. Mothers were found to be the main social support provider for the adolescents. Emotional support was primarily provided by parents while friends tended to provide both informational and emotional support. The authors found that comparatively with males, females received less support from the father. Notwithstanding, research studies have consistently shown that family or parental support decreases significantly as adolescents progress from primary education to secondary education (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Green et al., 2007; Seginer, 2006; Spera, 2005). Other studies have also found that as support from friends increases during adolescence, parental support declines significantly (Cheng & Chan, 2004; Colarossi & Eccles, 2003). Despite the decline in providing social adjustment support, family or parents play an instrumental role in social adjustment of adolescents (Kol & Bowen, 2009; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Veneziano, 2000).

Context

Secondary school education within Ghana educational context is schooling for adolescents. For most adolescents in Ghana, secondary school is a prominent part of their life. It is here that they relate and develop relationships with their peers and where they have the opportunity to develop key social skills to navigate their social spaces. Students experience a myriad of challenges during this period. Unfortunately, research on adolescent students in Ghana has focused on their academic, behavioural and health challenges (Akwei, 2015; Glozah, 2013, 2015). Research on adolescent students’ social challenges in Ghanaian secondary school context is limited. Hence, this study sought to investigate the social challenges of adolescent students in secondary schools and sources of help in coping with these challenges. This study is crucial since knowledge of various forms of adolescent social challenges, the sources and frequency of help provides clearer understanding and effective way of supporting and promoting adolescents mental and overall well-being (Cohen, 2004; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Uchino, 2004). Evidence from this study provides a preliminary understanding of the common social challenges adolescent students in secondary school experience and the coping strategies they adopt. This will help educational policy makers and stakeholders to enact policies to provide social support to these students during this period.
Based on the objective of the study, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What are the social challenges of adolescents in senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis?
2. What are the sources of help used by adolescents for managing their social challenges?
3. Is there a significant difference in adolescents’ social challenges based on their demographics (i.e. gender, age and residential status)?
   (a) Do students’ age, and class level predict their social challenges?

Methods

Design and sampling

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design method. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 376 samples from 5 secondary schools in the Cape Coast metropolis. In the first stage, purposive sampling was employed to select 5 mixed public schools out of the total 11 public senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The reason for using purposive sampling was to get males and females as well as day and boarding students who were in the same environment. In the second stage, proportional stratified sampling was used to select 376 from the five schools.

Participants

Out of the 376 participants who responded to the survey, the majority 197 (54.5%) were males, while 170 (45.2%) were females. Also, Form 1 students were 195 (51.9%), Form 2 students recorded 39 (10.4%) and Form 3 were 142 (37.8%). This means that the majority of the students were Form 3 students. Concerning participants’ age, students within the ages of 13–15 were 118 representing 31.4% and above 15 years were 257 representing 68.4%. This implies that the majority of Senior High School students fall within the ages of 16–19 years.

Instruments

Social Challenges of Adolescent Inventory was used to examine students’ social challenges. This inventory was developed by the researchers. Content-related evidence and face-validity were used when framing the items. The instrument initially had 31 items, which were pilot tested using 30 students from a selected mixed school in Komenda Edina Eguafo Abrem Municipality in order to check understanding, ambiguity and to correct any misunderstandings, which came up due to the framing and construction of the items. In all, nine items were removed. The final questionnaire was made up of 22 items that measure adolescent students’ social challenges. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach’s Alpha. The reliability coefficient was 0.72.

Ethics

This study received ethical clearance from the University of Cape Coast, College of Education ethical review board. Participants were informed that they had not waived any legal rights by consenting to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary, and they can decline to participate in the research or any aspect of the research at any time without penalty/loss of benefits. Confidentiality was ensured, and participants’ responses were protected to the extent permitted by applicable laws. No identifying information was used in the presentation or publication of results from this study including participants’ name or institution’s name.
Data analysis

To understand adolescent social challenges and coping mechanisms or sources of help, means and standard deviation were used. The questionnaire was a 4-point, Likert-type scale whose responses ranged from ‘Strongly Agree’ (SA), ‘Agree’ (A) and Disagree (D) to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (SD). The highest score possible on any item = 4.0, the case where all respondents strongly agree with the item. The lowest score possible on any item = 1.0, the case where all respondents strongly disagree with the item. Hence, the mid-point of these two extremes scores is

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\frac{4 - 1}{2} = \frac{3}{2} = 1.50
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In other words, the cut-off point is either 4.0–1.50 or 1.0 + 1.50, which in either case is 2.50. This cut-off point (2.50) was used for deciding whether a social or academic challenge was profound or mild. Hence, if respondents scored 2.50 or higher, the challenge was deemed as relatively profound and below 2.50, was considered relatively mild.

Independent t-test was used to determine whether significant differences exist in the social challenges of adolescents based on gender, age and residential status. Linear multiple regression was also used to determine if adolescent age and class level predict their social challenges.

Findings

Research question one

To understand the most prevailing social challenges of adolescent students, the responses to the items were ranked. The results showed that seven of the items (that is 31.8% or nearly one-third) were higher than the cut-off point mean of 2.50; hence, they represent the most prevailing social challenges students face. For example, students agreed that they feel rejection by friends (\(M = 3.39, SD = 1.13\)) and agreed that they feel not attracted to the opposite sex (\(M = 2.88, SD = 1.17\)). This implies that most students struggle with a sense of rejection by their peers. They feel they are not worthy to be accepted by their friends. Students also agreed that they have feelings of fear and concern for the future (\(M = 3.18, SD = .84\)). Moreover, students agreed that they easily get hurt or offended by others (\(M = 3.14, SD = .83\)) and that they easily get irritated at the least provocation (\(M = 2.96, SD = .73\)). They also have difficulty getting along well with others (\(M = 2.70, SD = .84\)). This may probably be due to emotional and behavioural imbalance. Table 1 presents the social challenges of adolescents in Senior High Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

Research question two

The results showed that adolescent students get support about their social challenges from many sources. Support from teachers recorded the highest mean (\(M = 3.25, SD = 1.073\)) followed by their parents/family (\(M = 3.05, SD = 1.063\)) and friends/peers (\(M = 2.86, SD = .89\)). This means that most adolescent students seek support from their teachers when experiencing social challenges. Aside from the teachers, adolescents seek support from their parents/family and friends. Most adolescent students prefer seeking support from teachers, parents/family, and friends rather than school counsellors. The findings also revealed that when adolescents are faced with challenges, just a few will prefer not to talk to anybody about it. Table 2 presents the sources of help used by adolescents for managing their social challenges.
Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the social challenges of adolescents in senior high schools in the Cape Coast metropolis.

| Item number | Social challenges of adolescents                                                                 | Mean  | Std. D | Rank |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|------|
| 19          | I sometimes feel rejected by my friends                                                        | 3.39  | 1.13   | 1st  |
| 21          | I have fear and concern about the future                                                        | 3.18  | .84    | 2nd  |
| 9           | I easily get hurt or offended by others                                                         | 3.14  | .83    | 3rd  |
| 18          | I easily get irritated at the least provocation                                                 | 2.96  | .73    | 4th  |
| 17          | I feel am not attracted to the opposite sex                                                     | 2.88  | 1.17   | 5th  |
| 10          | I have difficulty getting along well with others                                                | 2.70  | .84    | 6th  |
| 20          | I prefer to spend less time with my family                                                      | 2.60  | .86    | 7th  |
| 13          | I have my parents intervening in my choice of career                                             | 2.49  | .96    | 8th  |
| 14          | I have few friends I relate with                                                                | 2.47  | .86    | 9th  |
| 11          | I do not have people I always share my problems with                                            | 2.44  | .95    | 10th |
| 15          | My friends often intimidate me                                                                  | 2.42  | 1.06   | 11th |
| 22          | I have a bad temper                                                                              | 2.37  | .76    | 12th |
| 16          | I have difficulty keeping my friends                                                            | 2.35  | 1.03   | 13th |
| 7           | I always feel embarrassed when I talk about sex or people talk about sex to me                  | 2.19  | .90    | 14th |
| 8           | I feel shy                                                                                      | 2.19  | .80    | 14th |
| 3           | I always disagree with my parents                                                               | 2.14  | .89    | 16th |
| 12          | I sometimes drink alcohol when I get disturbed                                                   | 1.88  | .84    | 17th |
| 4           | My parents do not educate me on trendy social issues                                            | 1.85  | .81    | 18th |
| 1           | I am afraid of not making it in life                                                             | 1.77  | .82    | 19th |
| 2           | My parents insist on choosing a career for me                                                    | 1.76  | .43    | 20th |
| 6           | I do not get all my basic needs from my parents                                                 | 1.67  | .47    | 21st |
| 5           | My parents always choose my friends for me                                                       | 1.45  | .50    | 22nd |

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the sources of help used by adolescents for managing their social and academic challenges.

| Sources of help when I am faced with challenges, I | Mean  | Std. D | Rank |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|------|
| Seek advice from my teachers                      | 3.25  | 1.07   | 1st  |
| Speak to my parents/family                        | 3.05  | 1.06   | 2nd  |
| Seek advice and help from my peers                | 2.86  | .89    | 3rd  |
| Go to the counsellor in my school to resolve it   | 2.69  | .73    | 4th  |
| Talk to nobody                                    | 2.64  | 1.04   | 5th  |

Research questions three

The result from the independent t-test showed statistically significant differences exist between adolescent gender and social challenges $t$ (df = 374) = 3.59, $p < .05$. It was observed that female adolescent students experience more social challenges than males. Moreover, the result showed significant difference $t$ (df = 374) = 20.85, $p < .05$ in adolescent students age and social challenges. It was found that early adolescents (i.e. 13–15 years) experience more social challenges than late adolescents (i.e. 16–19 years). Finally, the result showed significant difference $t$ (df = 374) = −29.75, $p < .05$ in adolescent students’ residential status. It was found that adolescent students who are non-residents experience more social challenges than residents’ students. The result of the analysis is presented in (Table 3).

The multiple linear regression analysis results showed 65.1% ($R^2 = .651$) of variations in adolescent students’ social challenges is explained and accounted for by the predictors (i.e. class level and age). The results showed that the class level of adolescent students positively and significantly predicted social challenges ($β = .390$, $p < .05$). This means that adolescent students in high-class level are likely to experience more social challenges and vice versa. Also, the age of adolescent students inversely predicted social challenges ($β = −.934$, $p < .05$). This means early adolescents are more likely to experience social challenges than late adolescent students. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.
Table 3. Results of t-test analysis comparing adolescents’ social challenges and demographics (i.e. gender, age, residential status, and school level).

| Variables         | N   | Mean | Std. D | df | t-value | P-value |
|-------------------|-----|------|--------|----|---------|---------|
| Gender            |     |      |        |    |         |         |
| Male              | 206 | 51.9 | 5.82   | 374| 3.59*   | .000    |
| Female            | 170 | 57.75| 13.73  |    |         |         |
| Age               |     |      |        |    |         |         |
| 13–15             | 118 | 57.4915| 2.22  | 373| 20.855  | .000    |
| 16–19             | 257 | 49.9339| 3.63  |    |         |         |
| Residential Status|     |      |        |    |         |         |
| Resident          | 106 | 47.0000| 2.00  | 374| −29.754 | .000    |
| Non-Resident      | 270 | 54.3778| 4.07  |    |         |         |

Source: Field Survey * Significant, p < .05 (2-tailed).

Table 4. Multiple linear regression analysis between Class level, Age and Social Challenges.

| Variables          | Unstandardized coefficients | Standardize coefficients | t-value | P-value |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| (Constant)         | 64.813                      |                         | 117.371 | .000    |
| Class level        | 1.995                       | .182                     | .390    | 10.939  | .000    |
| Age                | −9.621                      | .368                     | −.934   | −26.165 | .000    |
| Multiple R value   | 0.805a                      | F value                  | 346.486 |         |
| R Square value     | 0.651                       | P value                  | 0.000   |         |
| Adjusted R Square  | 0.649                       |                          |         |         |

a Predictors: (Constant), Class Age.
b Dependent Variable: Social Challenges.

Discussion

The study examined the specific social challenges of adolescents and the coping mechanism of senior high schools within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana. Further, the study analysed whether significant differences exist in adolescent students’ social challenges based on their demographics (i.e. gender, age and, residential status,) and whether adolescent students’ age, and class level predicts their social challenges. The findings revealed that social challenges of students are centred on their relationship with peers and friends. Adolescent students experience feeling of rejection by friends, not being attracted to the opposite sex, and fear or concern for the future. Students further reported easily getting hurt or offended by others, easily getting irritated at the least provocation and difficulties getting along well with others. Being accepted by peers has important implications for adjustment both during adolescence and into adulthood (Bagwell et al., 1998), and being rejected by their peers can have serious negative effects, such as misbehaviour, drug abuse, dropping out of school and aggression (American Psychological Association, 2002). These findings support previous works that also found that forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships with peers in entirely different and new environment is a major social challenge of adolescent students (Akwei, 2015; Agbemafah, 1991; Berndt, 2004; Mullan & Dickson, 1991; Eccles, 2004; Glozah, 2013; Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (ReCCAP), 2007). In a study conducted by Derdikman-Eiron et al. (2011) they found that the feeling of not having many friends significantly impacted self-esteem, and overall psychosocial functioning of adolescents. Although, adolescent students’ feeling of rejection by others and opposite sex have been extensively discussed in extant literature (American Psychological Association, 2002; Bishop & Inderbitzen, 1995; Bagwell et al., 1998; Santrock, 2001; Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). However, one interesting finding that emanated from this study is students’ feeling of fear for the future. This feeling of fear for the future could stem from several factors including but not limited to fear of whether they can pass their school leaving examination (e.g. West Africa Secondary School Certificate Examination) which will significantly determine their next progress in life (i.e. having post secondary education) (Abdi Zarrin et al., 2020; Goldberg, 1973; OECD, 2020); fear of whether they will get support to further their education to the tertiary or not etc. In a study conducted by Hejlová
(2005) in Czech school environment, it was found that students reported having fears due to anticipation of having low marks, failing exams, punishment etc. It is not surprising that our study found that students at the high class level (i.e. final year students) who are about to write the school leaving exams indicated experiencing more social challenges than those in lower class level. Of course, these are not exhaustive factors that could cause students to anticipate what will happen in the future and develop fear for it. This finding should propel preliminary investigation into the underlying factors that trigger students’ feeling of fear for the future.

Furthermore, the study found that comparatively female adolescent students experience more social challenges than males. This finding supports the work of Glozah (2013) who examined how social support influences the psychological wellbeing of Senior High School students in Ghana. The difference in adolescent students’ male and female social challenges may be explained by Africa’s cultural definition of ‘womanhood’ and roles assigned to both genders. For example, in a typical Ghanaian culture where an adolescent girl should be ‘a little mother’ wherever they are, especially at home to assist in house chores, most females are mostly busy. Hence, most adolescent females may experience difficulties developing social skills to make and maintain successful relationships and navigate their new environment. Yeo et al. (2007) found that although female adolescent students indicated good interpersonal and stronger relationships with parents than boys, they, however, experienced more worries and socio-emotional challenges than male adolescents. Our study also found that in early adolescence, students without residence on campus and students in their final year of study were more likely to experience social challenges. Deductively, female early adolescent students who are in their final-year experience are even more likely to experience social challenges.

Regarding coping mechanisms adopted to mitigate social challenges, adolescent students indicated that teachers, parents and peers/friends are the major social support system. Students prefer discussing their social challenges with their teachers, followed by their parents and friends/peers. In contrast, Hombrados-endieta et al. (2012) found that teachers provided less social support than friends. Extant literature also shows that support from teachers has been found to significantly impact adolescent students’ social adjustment and self-esteem (Katia & Jean, 2004; Ryan & Helen; 2001). Furthermore, peers/friends have also been found to provide social adjustment support for adolescent students (Erath et al., 2010; Hodges et al., 1999). Discussing challenges with school counsellors was the least preferred source of help that students patronized. It is not surprising that students feel less likely to discuss their social challenges with school counsellors. Literature has consistently shown that students have a strong preference for close friends or relatives over counsellors (Duncan et al. 2005; Rule & Gandy, 1994; Wills & DePaulo, 1991). Providing an explanation, Kamunyu et al. (2016, p. 144) found that ‘gender of the counsellor, social mistrust in the counselling service, lack of confidence in the counsellors and location of the counselling centre’ are the major reasons students do not patronize counselling services in school. For example, a male student will feel more confident to discuss social challenges with a male counsellor than with a female counsellor. It is therefore imperative that further studies are carried out to examine issues that force students to eschew school counselling services.

Limitations, recommendations and implications for research, policy, and practice

This study examines the social challenges of adolescent students. The restricted sampling of a relatively small size in one region in Ghana, however, limits the generalizability of the study’s findings, which is a limitation of the study. Therefore, future research could increase the sample size to allow for broader generalization of the results. Again, the study relied largely on questionnaires as the main data collection instrument, and self-reporting can inflate capacity. This can happen for a variety of reasons, including social desirability bias and attempting to protect privacy. However, assuring participants of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses help reduce the probability of this problem occurring. Also, the study used cross-sectional design, future research can focus on a longitudinal analysis to get further accurate data on the evolution and progression of social challenges during various phases of adolescence. Notwithstanding, this study has provided some uniquely compelling evidence.
Although the study found that most adolescent secondary school students are faced with a myriad of challenges, the extent of students’ social challenges differed significantly based on their gender, age, class level and residential status. This study provides preliminary understanding into a group of adolescent students that are more susceptible to social challenges. For example, female adolescent, early adolescent, students without residence on campus and students in high-class level are more likely to experience social challenges than the other groups. School and guidance coordinators are in a position to adopt measures to provide extra social adjustment support for these groups of students. Unfortunately, most adolescent students are likely to discuss their challenges with teachers and parents and are less likely to patronize school counselling services (Duncan et al. 2005; Rule & Gandy, 1994; Wills & DePaulo, 1991). This situation is very worrying as most teachers may not have the prerequisite skills to effectively support students to deal with their social challenges. However, since adolescent students’ perception of teachers’ support significantly impacts their social adjustment and self-esteem positively (Katia & Jean, 2004; Ryan & Helen 2001), teachers can be given professional training to support students’ social adjustment. Again, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) discussions are a great opportunity for parents, teachers, school authorities and all educational stakeholders to discuss effective ways of supporting adolescent students.

To help students patronize counselling services in school, research has consistently shown that counselling services in schools are likely to be patronized if students develop trust and confidence in school counsellors. Again, gender of the school counsellor plays a critical role in students’ patronage of school counselling services (Kamunyu et al., 2016). For example, female students are more likely to feel more confident to discuss social challenges with female counsellors than male counsellors (Kamunyu et al., 2016).

Conclusions

This study has provided a preliminary understanding into the specific social challenges that most adolescent students in secondary schools in Ghana face. The study has also accentuated various groups of adolescent students that are more susceptible to social challenges. Feelings of rejection by friends, feeling of not being attracted to the opposite sex, and fear of concern or concern for the future are the major social challenges for adolescent students. Female adolescent, early adolescent, students without residence on campus and students in their final year of study are more likely to experience social challenges. Some possible explanations have been provided to extricate why these groups of adolescent students experience more social challenges than the others. Since these possible explanations are deducted from studies from other contexts and jurisdictions, future research can investigate to provide contextual understanding of why certain groups of adolescent students are more likely to experience social challenges than others.

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