



The Role of Educational Environment in Shaping College Students' Behavioral Patterns in Tanga, Tanzania

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Abstract

The educational environment plays a critical role in shaping students' behavioral patterns, attitudes and overall development. This study investigated how the educational environment influences behavioral changes among college students at the Tanzania Public Service College (TPSC), Tanga Campus. Specifically, it sought to establish common behavioral patterns, the emergence of negative behaviors and key factors contributing to behavioral change. The study employed the descriptive survey design and a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. A sample of 240 participants was drawn from NTA Level 4 to Level 6 students, as well as teaching and non-teaching staff members. Data was collected using a questionnaire, an interview schedule and focus group discussions. The analysis involved the descriptive statistics and the thematic analysis approach. The most common behavioral patterns appeared in such themes as interaction, social media use, study habits and academic integrity, reflecting the academic and social dimensions of students' life. Negative behaviors, such as drug abuse, prostitution, plagiarism and abortion were prevalent, indicating the influence of socioeconomic pressures and peer influence. The study concludes that while the educational environment fosters positive engagement and learning, it also exposes students to risks that compromise their well-being and academic success. The study suggests that colleges should strengthen their support systems, including financial aid, counseling and mentoring, in addressing the identified challenges.

Keywords: Educational environment; shaping behaviour; change; college students.

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Introduction

Environment refers to surroundings and conditions in which we live. Each aspect of the environment may affect students' behavior, attitudes, perceptions, productivity and beliefs. The educational environment plays a critical role in shaping the behavioral patterns of college students (Zhang et al., 2023). When students transition from secondary school to college, they encounter new academic, social and personal challenges that may significantly influence their development. Literature shows that environmental forces influence an

individual's growth and development, right from the mother's womb (Laurence & Vimila, 2012).

The college environment, encompassing physical settings, academic policies, social interactions and cultural norms provides a vital context in which students' behaviors are molded. According to Saiyad (2020), the educational environment combines climate, culture, and ethos in which learning occurs. This environment is considered as the most critical aspect of students' learning experiences because it shapes their engagement,

motivation and overall academic success (Alnaim et al., 2024). Moreover, research shows that both the physical and social dimensions of the learning environment strongly influence student's behavior, perceptions and well-being (Khalil et al., 2023).

An adequate environment is necessary for fruitfulness of learning among children and students. The general condition of the schools, colleges and universities is a matter of great concern to a nation. The educational environment is equally a matter of great concern to any nation. The educational environment plays a vital role in shaping students' personality and overall development (Laurence & Vimila, 2012).

The school environment inculcates values, attitudes, perceptions and behaviors (Laurence & Vimila, 2012). It includes other factors with which students interact to develop professional attributes and adopt specific behaviors, attitudes, new thoughts, feelings or assumptions. In addition, Ahmad et al. (2012) explain that the educational environment encompasses the curriculum, personnel, facilities, peers and any activities carried out during student enrollment.

There are several components that influence students' learning process within educational environment. These include people, teaching materials, teaching and non-teaching staffs, learning resources, curriculum and physical space. The college environment, encompassing both residential settings, such as hostels and home-based living arrangements, plays a significant role in influencing, and at times contributing to the deterioration of students' behavior.

Gagne (1999) states that the educational environment for the child includes a host of structures, such as buildings, furniture, equipment, instructional materials, teachers, peer groups and other people involved in a child's development. Similarly Booth et al. (2005) highlighted the role of physical environment, such as facilities and equipment, sports, banners and strategies to promote participation. Moreover recent studies emphasize that both the physical and psychological dimensions of the educational environment affect student learning outcomes, engagement and well being (Khalil et al., 2023).

Educational environment can be grouped into three main categories: social, institutional and physical. The social environment refers to the influence of peers, family members and mass media in shaping norms, role modeling, persuasion and social support that affect students' attitudes and behaviors (Zinkeng & Molesy, 2019; Enviroliteracy, 2023). The institutional environment includes rules, structures and policies established by the organization and workplaces, which directly or indirectly shape learning experiences and opportunities (EBSCO, 2023). The physical environment includes all aspects that affect students directly or indirectly through interactions. These include, among others, classroom design, infrastructure lighting and access to resources, all of which contribute to concentration, motivation and achievement (Enviroliteracy, 2023). These factors all together contribute uniquely to the overall ambience of learning and personal growth within the college or university.

The school environment significantly influences behaviour patterns of students by shaping their interactions with peers and instructors within the classroom setting. Factors, such as class size, teaching style and classroom atmosphere, can contribute to students' engagement, participation and overall behaviour of college students (Foote et al. 2003). Ziegler (2022) further argued that the educational environment in higher education institutions strongly influences students' behaviour in multiple ways. For example, while campus safety is the only factor affecting students' intention to engage in physical activity, the accessibility of wellness or fitness facilities does not appear to have a significant relationship with participation in such activity.

The institutional culture, that is the values and norms upheld by institutions also play a vital role in shaping students' behaviour. For instance, institutions that prioritize academic excellence, discipline, accountability and responsiveness, diversity and inclusiveness and student well-being tend to foster positive behavioral norms and attitudes among the students at the college. Pro-environmental behaviour among college students is shaped by perceived social and personal values, with the former having a more significant effect size (Song et al. 2022). The college environment forms a basis of day-to-day interaction by all

members of the institutions, including the visitors and the people who live within the area of residences and the community at large. Positive school environments in universities are directly and positively related to sustainable behaviour and student well-being (Beatriz et al., 2022).

The college environment also shapes and modifies students' lifestyles and ways of life. Rodriguez (2012) highlighted that students learn new behaviour within their college environments through a self-regulatory approach, which involves the motivation and ability to control responses and evaluate whether those responses match desired standards and the energy needed or expectations.

While some studies indicate that the college environment had both positive and negative contributions on students' development, especially in shaping their behaviors, Gibbons and Gerrard (1995) found the perceived prevalence of their peers using various substances, for example, alcohol, marijuana, inhalants and tobacco, in college. Similarly Barnett et al. (2012) observed that binge drinking often results in negative consequences, including damage to self, others and property. This demonstrates how students may adopt either positive or negative behaviour through direct interaction and socialization with peers or the broader college community.

Although educational achievement remains the primary concern among the students, parents, government and other stakeholders, there is a tendency to overlook the non-academic aspects of the academic environment that play a significant role in students' behavioral changes and then affect the entire life of the students. Behavioral patterns among college students encompass a wide range of activities and attitudes, including academic behaviors (example study habits, class attendance), social behaviors (example friendships, social activities), healthy behaviors (example substance use, mental health practices, prostitution, abortion) and ethical behaviors (example academic integrity, respects of others); these patterns are shaped by individual characteristics and the educational environment. The steadily increasing undesired actions among college students significantly threatened the community's moral values and

customs. Understanding how these environmental factors impact student behaviour is crucial for educators, administrators and policymakers to foster to a supportive and conducive learning atmosphere. This study investigated how educational environments like campus culture, social norms and institutional values shape student behaviour and attitude changes in Tanzania.

Theoretical Framework

This section presents the reviewed theories on behavioral change and covers the most frequently used theories and models of behavioral change.

Social Theories and Models

The educational environment significantly influences student's behavior by shaping their attitudes, values and their overall development. To explain this phenomenon, the study draws on several perspectives under social theories and models, which provide a framework for understanding how environmental and social factors interact to influence student behaviour.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Rogers (1983) introduced the diffusion of innovation theory, which outlines how a new idea or innovation is communicated and spread through a social system or community. This theory identifies the key factors and mechanisms that influence the adoption and spread of innovations, shedding light on various stages and patterns involved in the diffusion process. The theory provides insights into how new ideas, products or innovations spread and gain acceptance among society or a specific group of members.

According to Nyoni (2008), there are four essential elements that constitute the theory: innovation, communication, social system and time; these elements operate interdependently to influence adoption processes. Innovation, which refers to the new idea or practices, whose adoption depends on its perceived advantage, compatibility, complexity, trainability and observability. In the context of learning environment, this could be adopting positive or negative behaviors like study habits, healthy lifestyle, digital learning or engagement in negative behaviors like sexual assault, drug abuses and the like.

Communication is the process of sharing information about an innovation through formal or informal channels, often facilitated by opinion leaders or change agents. The social system encompasses the community or group in which adoption occurs, with its norms, values and structures influencing the rate and pattern of adoption. Time shapes the innovation-decision process, the categorization of adopters (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards) and the overall diffusion rate. Together, these elements determine how innovations are introduced, evaluated, and ultimately adopted or rejected within a social context. Together, these elements interact to shape how innovations are introduced, evaluated and either adopted or rejected within a social context (Rogers, 1983).

People's exposure to a new idea, which occurs within a social network or through the media, will determine the rate at which various people adopt a new behaviour. The theory posits that people are most likely to adopt new behaviors based on favourable evaluation of the idea communicated to them by the members they respect (Kegeles, 1996). The theory emphasizes the role of the social system, as it encompasses the network of relationships, norms and values within a community. It defines the context in which the innovation is introduced and determines how individuals perceive and adopt it. The factors, such as cultural values, socioeconomic status, and social networks profoundly shape the diffusion process. Therefore, the theory suggests that individuals exposed to an innovation and their interactions within social networks influence decisions to adopt or reject it. People may adopt an innovation when they perceive it as having advantages and reject it if it has disadvantages. The Diffusion of innovation theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how new ideas and behaviors spread within a community, including educational environments. By considering the innovation, communication channels, social system and time, educators can better understand and influence the adoption of positive behaviour patterns among college students.

Factors that Shape Behavioral Patterns

Behavioral patterns among college students are shaped by multiple interrelated factors; these

include family, peers, institutional practices, social media, religious affiliation, financial status and broader societal influences. Understanding these factors is crucial for identifying the mechanisms through which positive behaviors are encouraged and negative behaviors are mitigated within the academic environment.

Parental Influence

Parents play significant roles in shaping their children's behaviors, attitudinal perceptions and thoughts. Parents often act as primary role models, demonstrating behaviour and attitudes that children tend to emulate. Positive behaviors, such as discipline, respect for education and strong work ethics are likely to be adopted by children. Early disciplinary practices instilled by parents shape children's ability to self-regulate, follow rules, and maintain focus, which are essential skills in a college environment. In addition, parents may encourage children to set goals and pursue academic achievements. Additionally, parents should educate children by way of living, discipline them since childhood, provide the necessary facilities and resources, help children build goals and motivate them to adopt positive behaviors and make constructive life choices (Hassan, 2004; Arifin et al. 2018).

Parents are also responsible for controlling and managing their children on education, family responsibilities and spirituality. Such guidance helps bring up well-behaved children for a more prosperous future. Active parental involvement in college-related activities, such as attending parents-teacher meetings, participating in college events and monitoring academic progress, reinforces the importance of education and helps students stay engaged and motivated. This in turn helps in controlling unacceptable behaviour while fostering acceptable behaviour among the college students.

The Influence of Peer

Peer interactions, social norms and group dynamics within campus communities can significantly impact students' behaviour patterns, including their attitudes toward academic achievement, social responsibility and personal conduct. Peer interaction can lead students to adopt either positive or negative behaviors depending on the prevailing norms within their peer groups. According to

Obaki (2017), human behaviour, while partially rooted in genetics, is primarily shaped by environmental factors including peer influence. Peers play a critical role in shaping character and behaviour of students and therefore strongly influencing their development (Che, 2005, as cited in Arifin et al., 2018). Peer group within college environment can have both negative and positive effects on students academic performance as well as the behaviour change in general.

Institutional Policies, By-laws and Practices

Institutional policies and practices related to academic integrity, student conduct codes (by-laws) and disciplinary measures against students who misbehave could shape students' behavioral patterns. Kuh and Hu (2001) focuses on the influence of university environment from the perspective of students' inputs. It was noted that students' experiences are effective and can promote effective learning and development. The college may establish clear expectations, promote accountability, commitment, teamwork spirit, cooperation and foster a culture of respect, responsibility and ethical behaviour (Dwairy, 2005).

Teachers in the educational environment play a crucial role in shaping students' behaviors through interactions and disciplinary methods. Effective teaching, clear expectations and fair discipline contribute positively to students' behaviour. Conversely, inconsistent discipline and ineffective teaching can provoke misbehavior (Kyriacou, 1997). The relationship between teachers and students is crucial in shaping academic experiences and fostering personal growth. Promoting a positive and supportive teacher-student dynamic lays the foundation for a successful learning journey and contributes to the overall development of students' behaviors and personalities.

Influence of Social Media

Social media and mass media play a significant role in shaping students' behaviors, attitudes, and personal development, offering both positive and negative effects. While media can serve as a source of knowledge, cultural exposure and social empowerment. It can also negatively influence youth behavior, particularly when students are exposed to aggressive or violent content. Bandura (1985) highlighted that children and students tend to imitate behaviors

observed in media, suggesting that prolonged exposure to violent films or aggressive media can encourage undesirable actions. Parental and guardian oversight is critical in moderating media consumption, including limiting access to television, films, and online content as well as monitoring peer interactions. Obaki (2017) emphasizes that when students begin to display negative behavioral changes, parents should assess the influence of peer groups and intervene early to prevent social rejection, which can harm self-esteem, academic performance, and long-term development.

Beyond media, societal influences in this context, including family dynamics, cultural norms and observational learning can significantly shape student behavior. Anzari and Shamnadh (2019) observed that students acquire social knowledge and a sense of identity through observation of societal roles and behaviors. Exposure to violence or negative societal norms can desensitize students and contribute to aggressive tendencies, whereas supportive family and societal structures promote resilience, ethical decision-making and pro-social behavior. The integration of positive societal norms into students' environments helps foster academic commitment, personal development, and behavioral responsibility.

Research further highlights the role of perceived social and personal values in shaping student behavior. Song et al. (2022) found that college students' pro-environmental behavioral intentions are positively influenced by these values, with social values having a stronger effect, emphasizing the importance of fostering ethical and socially responsible attitudes. Similarly, Torroba et al. (2023) demonstrated that ecological intelligence enhances university students' environmental behavior through knowledge and attitudes, suggesting that educational interventions can cultivate responsible and sustainable practices. These findings underscore that both societal and educational influences are critical in promoting positive behaviors, environmental responsibility and personal development among students.

Overall, media exposure, family guidance, societal norms and educational interventions collectively form the behavioral landscape for students, highlighting the need for coordinated support to encourage ethical, pro-social, and

sustainable behaviors while mitigating the risks of negative influences.

Methodology

This section presents the the methodology that guided this study.

Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design, with mixed approach used to systematically collect information regarding the perceptions, attitude, characteristics, opinions and behaviour. Kothari (2004) emphasizes that a descriptive survey design is useful in obtaining information that reflects the current state of population’s characteristics and opinions of specific populations or groups. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a

mixed-method approach allows researchers to combine both qualitative and quantitative techniques to gain a deeper understanding of research problems.

Population and Sampling

The study targeted college students from National Technical Award (NTA) level 4 to NTA level 6 at TPSC-Tanga campus, Tanzania. The total sample comprised 240 including 220 enrolled in various classes and at the college and 20 respondents as key informants, such as teaching staff, human resources officers. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were applied in selecting the respondents. The distribution of selected sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Composition of the Sample

Category	Sample Size			
	Male	Female	Total	Percentages (%)
NTA level 4 students	25	35	60	25
NTA level 5 students	40	40	80	33.3
NTA level 6 students	30	50	80	33.3
Key informers	12	8	20	8.3
Total	107	133	240	100

Table 1 presents the distribution of the selected sample. NTA Level 6 and NTA Level 6 students accounted for 80 respondents (33.3%) each. In addition, 60 respondents (25.0%) were from NTA Level 4 whereas 20 respondents (8.3%) were key informants, including teaching staff, human resources officers, patrons and matrons. The majority of the respondents were drawn from NTA Levels 5 and 6, as students in these categories possess greater exposure to the college environment and are more experienced with behavioral trends among students.

Sources of Data

The study employed multiple instruments for data collection, including a questionnaire, an interview schedule and Focus Group Discussions .

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the study instruments was ensured though content validity and triangulation. Content validity was established by subjecting the instruments to expert review by researchers and lecturers in the field, who assessed their relevance, clarity and alignment with the study objectives. Triangulation of data collection methods further enhanced the

internal validity by allowing cross-verification of information from different sources. External validity was strengthened by selecting participants from various educational levels from NTA level 4, NTA level 5 and NTA level 6, ensuring that the findings could be generalized to a wider student population. Reliability of the instruments was ensured through a pilot study conducted with a small group of students at the Tanzania Public Service College (TPSC), Tanga campus. The pilot study tested the consistency, clarity and applicability of the instruments. Necessary adjustments were made to improve wording and structure before final administration. In addition, the use of standardized procedures in administering questionnaires and conducting interviews helped to maintain consistency.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Quantitative data involved descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies and percentage. Analysis of the qualitative data involved the thematic approach, whereby the researcher merged similar findings in the process of analysis and interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained the informed consent form participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary. The researcher ensure confidentiality and informed consent especially when dealing with sensitive behavioral data. Data was used solely for the intended research purpose.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study. It begins with the presentation of demographic

factors and then uses research questions to guide the findings.

Analysis of Demographic Variables

Table 2 indicates that 133 respondents were female, constituting 55.5% of the total while 107 were males, accounting for 44.5 % of the sample. The majority of the respondents, representing 120 (50%), were aged between 15-20 years, 60 (25%) were between 21-25 years, 40 (16.6%) were between 26-30 years and 20 (8.3%) were 31 years and above.

Table 2: Demographic Variables (N = 240)

	Demographic variable	Responses	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	133	55.5
	Male	107	44.5
Age (yrs.)	15-20	120	50
	21-25	60	25
	26-30	40	16.6
	31 and above	20	8.3
Educational level	NTA level 4	60	25
	NTA level 5 & 6	165	69
	NTA level 7, 8 & 9	13	5
	NTA level 10	2	1
Marital status	Marriage	51	21
	Single	189	79

Table 3: Common Behavioural Patterns Exhibited by College Students (N=240).

Types of behaviors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Peer interaction Social interactions (socialization)	64	27%
Study habits	38	16%
Class attendance	20	8%
Academic integrity	36	15%
Social media use	57	24%
Health and well-being behaviour	25	10%
Total	240	100%

The majority of the respondents (69%) were studying at NTA level 5 and 6 while 25% were at NTA level 4. Furthermore, 13 (5%) were at NTA level 7, 8 & 9 and only 2 (1%) were at NTA level 10. Moreover, most of the respondents were single (79%) while 51 (21%) were married.

Research question 1: What are the common behavioral patterns exhibited by college students within the educational environment in Tanga?

In this study, behavioral patterns are understood as the recurring ways students act, respond, and interact in their academic, social and personal lives as shaped by the educational environment (Bronfenbrenner,

1994). Based on this understanding, the first research question was designed to identify the common behavioral patterns exhibited by college students at TPSC-Tanga through their interaction with the academic, social, and environmental aspects at the college context, as reflected in Table 3.

Table 3 shows the common behavioral patterns exhibited by college students at the Tanzania Public Service College, Tanga Campus (N=240). The most frequently reported behavior was peer interaction or socialization (64 students, 27%), followed by social media use (57 students, 24%), study habits (38 students, 16%), academic integrity (36 students, 15%),

health and well-being behaviors (25 students, 10%) and class attendance (20 students, 8%). These patterns reflect students' existing behaviors in their academic, social and personal lives and demonstrate how the college educational environment shapes student conduct, directly addressing the research question on behavioral patterns.

The qualitative data confirmed these patterns. During interviews, students reported actively engaging with peers for both academic and social purposes, using social media for learning and networking, maintaining study routines in structured learning spaces, observing academic integrity, attending classes regularly and participating in activities promoting health and well-being. This triangulation reinforces the reliability of the findings.

In a brief discussion, the findings align with prior research, indicating that the educational environment significantly shapes student behavior. Effective peer interaction fosters social bonds and a sense of belonging, which are important for students' academic and personal development (Miao & Ma, 2022). Study habits are enhanced by access to supportive learning spaces and teaching resources (Tinto, 1997). Academic integrity reflects institutional norms and ethical reinforcement within the college (Bandura, 2001). Social media use, when guided appropriately, can complement learning and

professional development. Health and well-being behaviors are influenced by available recreational facilities and institutional programs promoting physical and mental health (Bartkowski et al., 2008). These findings demonstrate that the educational environment at Tanzania Public Service College, Tanga Campus, plays a critical role in shaping students' behavioral patterns across academic, social, and personal domains.

Research question 2: How does the educational environment at TPSC Tanga contribute to the development of negative behavioral patterns among students?

In this study, negative behaviour is defined as any act, action or pattern of interaction that disrupt learning, undermine students' personal development or negatively affect the students' well-being. The research question is designed to identify the common negative behaviors exhibited by students both within and outside the college environment. The results are presented in Table 4.

Respondents identified prostitution as the most prevalent negative behavior among students. Some students reportedly engaged in prostitution as an alternative means of coping with financial difficulties. Although Roberts et al. (2010) highlighted financial strain as a primary driver of students' involvement in sex work, financial hardship should not be considered a justifiable factor contributing to this behavior.

Table 4: The negative Behaviour Patterns that College Students Exhibit (N=240).

Types of behaviors	Frequency	Percentage
Prostitution	69	29%
Plagiarism and examination cheating	34	14%
Abortion	24	10%
Drug abuse and alcoholism	68	28%
Conflict and relationship	45	19%
Total	240	100%

This is because research has shown that some students from relatively privileged financial backgrounds also participate in prostitution (Sanders, 2008), indicating that motivations may extend beyond financial necessity. These may include peer pressure, lack of parental supervision and insufficient institutional control or support from college administration.

Drug and alcohol use, as reported by 28% of the respondents, remains a significant concern.

The World Health Organization (2004) reported the global health burden of alcohol consumption, noting its role as a leading risk factor for disease and injury. Locally, the prevalence of substance use in colleges points to the need for comprehensive preventive measures and support services. Conflict and relationship issues, mentioned by 19% of the respondents, also resonate with prior findings. DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998) observed that inadequate supervision and weak reporting

systems in student housing environments often foster conflict and misconduct. This suggests that college environments contribute not only to academic pressures but also to interpersonal and social challenges that influence student behavior.

Research question 3: What factors contribute to behavioral change among college students?

This question aimed to establish factors that contribute to behavioral change among college students as reflected in Table 5. As shown in Table 5, the most influential factor contributing to behavioral change among the college students was social influence; with 214 respondents (89%) agreeing that peer pressure shaped their behavior while only 11%

disagreed. Social interactions within the college environment were seen to shape attitudes and lifestyles. This was reinforced by qualitative evidence, where one student explained,

Peer pressure does contribute to students engaging in behaviors that are harmful to their academic and personal lives. It is difficult to resist when the people around you are doing the same thing. This can lead to a cycle of negative behaviors that is hard to break.

The second most significant factor was poverty, reported by 195 (81 %) respondents. Students highlighted that financial hardship often pushed them into risky coping behaviors while others withdrew or isolated themselves due to shame and a lack of resources. One student stated:

Table 5: Factors Contributing to Behavioral Change (N=240).

Statement in the Questionnaire	Ranking	Agreement		Disagreement	
		f	%	f	%
Poor enforcement (By-law)	1	46	19%	194	81%
Social influence	2	214	89%	26	11%
Technology and media	3	149	62%	91	38%
Personal experiences and life events	4	74	31%	166	69%
Poverty	5	195	81%	45	19%
Stress and Anxiety	6	107	45%	133	55%

Financial difficulties can create a lot of stress for students. They might feel embarrassed about their situation and try to hide it, which can lead to withdrawal and isolation from social interactions. On the other hand, some might engage in risky behavior as a way to cope with their stress.

Another participant reinforced this view saying,

Poverty affects many students' ability to access resources that can help them succeed. Without proper study materials, a quiet place to study, enough food, and good accommodation, it is tough to focus on academic issues. This can lead to changes in behavior as they try to cope with their situation.

These findings are consistent with Mwangi (2017), who observed that children from low-income backgrounds often develop behavioral challenges that affect their social and educational development. Furthermore, financial hardship has also been associated with increased vulnerability to risky behaviors, including substance abuse and sexual exploitation, which, in turn, heightens the risk of

sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS.

However, it is important to emphasize that poverty does not inevitably lead to risky behavior since there is a possibility for students from poor families to remain resilient and committed to positive lifestyles, such as academic commitment, healthy coping strategies, peer-support networks, financial discipline and community engagement. Since some students from privileged families may engage in harmful practices, this suggests that while financial challenges create vulnerability, factors such as personal values, family support and peer networks may play a decisive role in shaping students' behavioral outcomes.

Technology and media were cited by 149 (62%) respondents as influential in shaping behavior, though 91 (38%) respondents disagreed, reflecting mixed views on whether digital platforms were more beneficial (e.g., supporting learning) or harmful (e.g., exposure to negative trends). One student emphasized the influence of digital platforms, stating, "Social media has a huge impact on how we behave. We see

influencers and celebrities promoting certain lifestyles, and it makes us want to emulate them.”

The role of stress and anxiety was more divided, with 107 respondents (45%) agreeing and 133 (55%) disagreeing to the statement. This suggests that while academic workload and financial struggles affect some students' behavior, others remain more resilient to these pressures. Personal experiences and life events were less influential, with only 31% agreement while the least significant factor was poor enforcement of by-laws, with only 19% agreement and 81% disagreement.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that peer influence and poverty are the leading drivers of behavioral change among college students, followed by technology and stress-related pressures while by-law enforcement and personal life events playing relatively minor roles.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The study concludes that the behavioral patterns of college students in Tanga are shaped by the educational environment, encompassing academic, social and personal domains, including peer interactions, study routines, academic conduct, social media use and health-related activities. While the environment supports positive behaviors, it also contributes to the emergence of negative patterns, such as substance use, academic misconduct, risky sexual behaviors and interpersonal conflicts. Behavioral changes among students are primarily driven by social dynamics and socioeconomic factors, with additional influences from technology, stress and personal life experiences within the college context. Peer influence and financial challenges, in particular, were identified as the most common reasons for behavioral change, underscoring the pivotal role of social interactions and economic circumstances in shaping student conduct and overall development.

Recommendations

To enhance students' behavior, academic success and overall well-being, colleges should implement comprehensive strategies that address both social and economic factors that lead to bad behaviors. The institutions should

provide scholarships, part-time job opportunities and financial counseling to alleviate the economic pressures that often drive students into negative coping mechanisms. These measures may reduce financial stress and allow students to focus more on their academic and personal development. Promoting ethical academic practices through clear policies, integrity awareness campaigns and academic support services can help reduce such misconduct as plagiarism. Organizing events that combine social and educational activities may foster balanced engagement, positive peer interaction and constructive use of leisure time. Strengthening support services, including tutoring, counseling and academic advising will ensure that students receive timely assistance to overcome academic, psychological and social challenges. Such services will contribute to resilience, reduce dropout risks and promote healthier coping mechanisms among the students. Finally, colleges should develop programs that promote independence and responsibility, such as mentorship schemes, leadership training and life skills workshops. These initiatives will equip students with problem-solving abilities, decision-making skills and a sense of accountability, enabling them to transition smoothly into adulthood and succeed beyond their college life.

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