

FACTORS INFLUENCING SEXTING BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

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Abstract

It is becoming a common practice among the youths to engage in sexting. The social phenomenon of sexting is deleterious, not only to those engaging in the malaise, but also to the society at large. This study adopts a survey method to investigate the factors that predispose undergraduate students to sexting. Using stratified sampling technique, a total of 385 sample size was selected from the University of Ilorin undergraduate population. Questionnaire as the instrument used was tested for validity and reliability using the face and content validity and internal consistency reliability, respectively. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), while frequency counts were used to analyse the demographic data. Based on the theory of planned behaviour (TPD), the study found that factors including gender, sexual orientation, and age of the undergraduate students do contribute to the social phenomenon of sexting. Recommendations were made that there should be an intensive sensitization against sexting for the young adults and their parents. School social work should be strengthened and social workers should be trained on social interventions to adopt in helping the youths involved in this act. In addition, social workers should assist to advocate for legal sanction against minor offenders.

Key Words: Behaviour; Communication; Sexting; Sexuality; Undergraduate; Youth

INTRODUCTION

The social phenomenon of sexting has attracted the attention of many investigators lately because of its harmful impact on those engaged in it as well as on societies. In the past decades, advancement in technology has transformed the means by which youths interact and communicate with their peers; youths' social orbit now revolves round electronic gadgets capable of sharing information in real time. Around 78% of young people own a cellular phone and one-third transfer greater than 3,000 texts a month (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2008; Mackay & Weidlich, 2009). The cellular phone is just one of the many electronic technologies that young people make use of consistently to share emotional experiences and control different needs. Text messaging comes atop as the means by which communication takes place

among the youths today, even ahead of cell calls (The Pew Research Centre, 2009). The integration of a cam along with a media messaging service (MMS) with smart phones has simplified methods to create and disperse nude photos of sexting youths (Calvert, 2009; Pew Research Centre, 2009; Chalfen, 2009; Katzman, 2010; Ferguson, 2011; Albury, Crawford, Byron & Mathews, 2013).

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children NCMEC (2009, p.20), sexting is defined as “young people composing raunchy messages, snapping sexually explicit images or photos of themselves or others in their peer group, as well as transferring these pictures and/or messages to their peers.” It is observed to be engaged in usually amongst the passionately related and romantic youths (Mitchell, 2012), and used by some teens when the specific physical sexual acts become inaccessible (Rice, 2012). Teens who take part in sexting have reported that this activity is viewed as a typical behaviour amongst them (Doring, 2014). It has been opined that youths that participate in the virtual world sex-related actions, such as sexting, could have troublesome family history (Johnson, 2015). Benotsch, Snipes, Martin and Bull (2013) indicate that teens from broken homes associate more with sexting.

Stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers) have expressed concerns about the negative consequences of sexting. One of these misgivings is some other risky sexual behaviour that people involved in sexting are more likely to perform. It has been reported that youths involved in sexting would most probably participate in dangerous actual sex (Gordor-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski & Zimmerman, 2013) and find ways to actualise the sexual desire aroused after communicating sexual messages with their sex-related companions (Lenhart, 2009). Benotsch et al. (2013) reported that brand-new dangerous sex-related habits are created by youths engaged in the act of sexting. Other negative consequences include embarrassment, public dissemination of sexual photos, inappropriate peer pressure for sex, and legal consequences if underage individuals are involved (Benotsch et al., 2013). However, Doring (2014) sees sexting as a safe habit or harmless action and also a regular means of connecting affection.

Notwithstanding the positivity given to sexting by scholars such as Doring (2014), the reported adverse consequences of sexting might be a major problem amongst youths because of their failure to manage complicated emotional issues which occasionally go along with sexting. Additionally, outside stressors like academic and social needs may worsen the situation because the emotional ability to cope with the extra pressure may be lacking in young people. There has been an enormous increase in the rate of phone usage in the sub-Saharan Africa in the last years (Masika, Omondi, Natembeya, Mugane, Bosire & Kibwage, 2015). Possession of smart cell phone by young people in developing nation has increased (Van Heerden, Norris & Richter, 2010), even amongst those of reduced socio-economic condition. These phones have become more budget friendly and also have an improved facility capacity to take pictures, develop video clips, and attach to social networking sites (Hinduja, 2010). Hence, with the ease of possessing cell phone and connecting to the cyber

space, it could safely be opined that occurrence of sexting among young people is not only in the developed countries but also in the developing nations including Nigeria.

An instance of students sharing nude image of themselves was reported to the Student Affairs Unit of the University of Ilorin in 2017/2018 Academic session; a nude picture shared between two lovers got into the hand of a third party who then tried to blackmail the lady to have sex with him. Her refusal would see the picture uploaded on the social media. There have been many similar cases unreported until recently and this social problem does not stop with students. It cuts across a lecturer-student relationship and among lecturers too. However, sexting is ultimately considered as a sexuality-related young people sensation. These young people have failed to fathom the harmful effects which sexting poses on them otherwise they would not eagerly embrace it (Ostranger, 2010; Srinivas, White & Omar, 2011; Draper, 2012; Hua, 2012; Sadhu, 2012).

In the past few years, more than 75 billion messages have been sent a month. Youths currently see sexting as a way of communicating and interacting socially in an extra flirty manner without the person-to-person communication (Ostrager, 2010). This form of social communication is much deleterious than the youths know about. The sexuality of the youths and repercussions has been major concern in the Nigerian Universities and other higher institutions for some decades (Balogun, Obimuyiwa & Abdulaziz, 2019). Moreover, young people might be jeopardizing their futures by putting compromising, irrecoverable photos online that could get into wrong hands and thereby exposes them to the danger of cyber bullying, blackmailing, extortion, and sexual overtures online. Although sexting is a new social phenomenon in Nigeria, a newspaper revealed its existence among the Nigerian young people as well as in other nations (Daily Trust, 2010). It is now common among students in the Nigeria Universities and becoming rampant in the University of Ilorin as evident in the instances reported (Balogun et al., 2019).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to investigate the factors influencing sexting behaviour among the undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin. The specific objectives of the study are:

- (1) Investigate the difference in sexting behaviour between male and female undergraduate students in the University of Ilorin.
- (2) Identify the difference in sexting behaviour of undergraduates in the University of Ilorin based on sexual orientation.
- (3) To find out whether age group of undergraduate students in the University of Ilorin influence sexting behaviour.

HYPOTHESES

- There is no significant difference in sexting behaviour between male and female undergraduate students in University of Ilorin.

- There is no significant difference in sexting behaviour among undergraduate students of University of Ilorin based on sexual orientation.
- There is no significant difference in sexting behaviour among undergraduate student in University of Ilorin based on age group.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study is the descriptive survey method. The population of study consist of the approximately 40,000 undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The majority of the population was between the age of 18 and 24years. A stratified sampling technique was used to select a Cochran's calculated sample of 385 by selecting 22 respondents each from 15 faculties. A standardized five-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to gather data from the respondents. The face and content validity of the research instrument were determined by two social workers and two criminologists. The internal consistency reliability of the instrument was determined using a Cronbach alpha, the coefficient of 0.82 was obtained. The reliability was done by administering the instrument to 20 undergraduates with sexting behaviour who were not part of the study and a Cronbach test was conducted on the response given. The data gathered and compiled for the study was analysed using both descriptive statistics; simple percentage, and inferential statistics: t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by gender, age, sexual relationship, and current relationship.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	235	61
Male	150	39
Total	385	100
Age		
21-24 years	275	71.4
Below 21 years	103	26.8
25 years and above	7	1.8
Total	285	100
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	191	49.6
Homosexual	141	36.6
Bisexual	32	8.3
Other	21	5.5
Total	385	100

Current Relationship		
Single	142	36.9
Dating	135	35.1
Relationship	80	20.8
Married	24	6.2
Cohabiting Bisexual	4	1
Total	385	100

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The table 1 above shows frequency distribution of respondents by demographic characteristics. There are more female respondents, 235 (61%) than male respondents, 150 (39%). In terms of age, the age range of 21-24 years formed the largest block with 275 (71.4%) respondents, followed by the age range below 21 years, 103 (26.8%) respondents. The age range, 25 years and above are the least represented with 7 (1.8%) respondents. On sexual orientation, Heterosexual respondents recorded 191 (49.6%) responses, then the Homosexuals with 141 (36.6%) responses. The Bisexual had 32 (8.3%) responses, while other sexual orientations gave 21 (5.5%) responses. Equally shown on the table is the current relationship status with the Single status having 142 (36.9%) respondents, Dating status with 135 (35.1%), then, respondents in Relationship with 80 (20.8%), followed by the Married status, 24 (6.2%), while respondents who are Cohabiting Bisexual recorded the smallest response, 4 (1%).

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in sexting behaviour between male and female undergraduate students in University of Ilorin

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values on the sexting behaviour among undergraduates based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t-value	Cri. t-value	Sig.	Decision
Male	150	50.5800	26.07147	383	2.641	1.96	0.009	Rejected
Female	235	43.6511	24.46237					

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 2.641 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 ($p=0.009 < \text{sig.} = 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis one which states that, there is no significant difference in the relationship between male and female and sexting is rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in sexting behaviour among undergraduate students of University of Ilorin based on sexual orientation.

Table 3: ANOVA results on sexting behaviour of undergraduates based on sexual orientation

Sexual Orientation	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Cri. F-ratio	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	11521.640	3	3840.547	6.248	3.10	0.001	rejected
Within Groups	234180.022	381	614.646				
Total	245701.662	384					

Table 3 shows that the calculated f-ratio of 6.248 is greater than the critical f-ratio of 3.10 at 0.001 (<0.05) significant level. Therefore, hypothesis two which states that, there is no significant difference among undergraduates with sexting behaviour based on their sexual orientation is rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in sexting behaviour among undergraduate students in University of Ilorin based on age group.

Table 4: ANOVA results on sexting behaviour of undergraduates based on age

Age	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Cri. F-ratio	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	3992.901	2	1996.450	3.155	3.10	0.044	rejected
Within Groups	241708.762	382	632.745				
Total	245701.662	384					

Table 4 shows that the calculated f-ratio of 3.155 is greater than the critical f-ratio of 3.10 at 0.044 (<0.05) significant level. Therefore, hypothesis two which states that, there is no statistically significant difference among undergraduates with sexting behaviour based on age is rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study seeks to find the relationship between factors that influence sexting behaviour among undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin. The first hypothesis raised showed that there is significant difference between male and female participation in sexting behaviour among undergraduates. This implies male undergraduates' participation in sexting behaviour is different to female involvement in it. Therefore, the gender factor is statistically significant in sexting behaviour among undergraduates. The study results agree with the findings of Shisana and Simbayi (2003), which reported that sexually active boys typically participate in sexting behaviour and other related sexual activities compared to their female counterparts. Despite disparity in the settings of the two studies, agreement between the two findings indicates that gender is a vital factor determining sexting behaviour.

This study also found that there is a significant difference in the sexting behaviour among the undergraduates based on sexual orientation. Although, majority

of the undergraduate respondents were heterosexually oriented, sexual orientation influences sexting behaviour. The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people may engage more in sexting because of the fear of legal sanction and stigma associated with LGBT sexual orientation. This agrees with the findings of Eraker (2010), which affirms that teenagers who are afraid of the legal sanction against sexting behaviour and pornography are mostly with illegal sexual orientation as well. All the categories of sexual orientation are likely to sext for the reason of affordability of physical relationship. Online romantic relationship is less costly to maintain than offline romance.

Lastly, the study found that there is a statistically significant difference among age groups that participate in sexting behaviour. This means that some age groups tend to be more involved in sexting behaviour than others, especially, the age group just reaching puberty. If the first sexual experience is at just reaching the puberty and accessing sexual intercourse subsequently becomes difficult, sexting may maybe engage in. The study of Nikula (2009) corroborates this study's finding in this regard because as submitted by the author, there is a positive correlation between age and sexual experience; as age increases the participation in sexual activity also increases. Moreover, similar finding has been submitted by Shisana et al. (2003) as they identified a similar trend towards earlier sexual debut amongst younger respondents, where the median age at first sex for respondents aged 15-24 year was found to be 16 years.

CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to study the factors influencing sexting behaviour among the undergraduates at the University of Ilorin. The factors including gender, sexual orientation and age significantly contribute to sexting behaviour among the undergraduates. Both the male and female undergraduates engage in sexting although the male undergraduates are more likely to sext than the females. The LGBT undergraduates' sext more to avoid legal sanction and the stigma attached to being queer. This means the participation in sexting behaviour between male and female is different. Age difference was found to sexting behaviour as it greatly determines independence level of the undergraduates as well as relates to their sexual urge. These identified factors should be considered when intervention programme is designed to help the youths engaging in sexting overcome the malaise.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

Some children and young people engage in sexual behaviour that is not appropriate for their age or development. Early intervention in this harmful behaviour will go a long way in preventing severe problems that may arise in the future. By the virtue of their training, Social workers are among the team that can provide interventions to youth who engage in sexting. They can use their knowledge and skills in early recognition of this harmful behaviour and ensure they work together with other team members who include; teachers, nurses and psychologist to provide appropriate intervention. This

study has shown that there is a strong correlation between the age, gender, sexual orientation, and sexting behaviours of sexting youths. Therefore, social workers need to consider these factors when designing social work intervention to help the youths curb this act. In this regards, social workers should help develop educational materials that equips the youths to make informed decisions about sexting. Social workers have a major role to play in the rehabilitation of the victims of sexting that may include post-traumatic counselling and therapy.

Availability of therapeutic measures would save victims from dire consequences including committing suicide, falling into emotional depression and shame. Social workers should be cognisant of the prevalence of sexting and why some youths get involved in sexting. The knowledge could assist social workers formulate guiding principles useful to young people involved in sexting practices because of pressure or coercion. Empowering the sexting youths by this means could assist reduce or avoid negative outcomes which could cause irreparable damage to the future wellbeing of the sexters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sexting is a harmful sexual behaviour that puts the youths at risk of committing serious sexual offences later in life. This study therefore, recommends that school social work should be strengthened in Nigeria at this time to be able to provide the help that is needed by the youths. There should be educational training for social workers on this new social problem that confronts the youths. The training should focus on social interventions that can be used in working with these youths. In addition, parents should also be educated on preventive measure against sexting. Social workers should help advocate for laws that make sexting a punishable offense especially among the adolescents. However, this cannot be done until sufficient education has been provided which makes the legal ramifications of sexting for the adolescents. Attention should be paid to sexting in the sexuality education curricular right from the junior secondary school.

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