

Perception of Students on Delectations and Perils in Exchange of Sexually Inclined Messages in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract: This study analyzed the nature of sexting in daily social interactions of middle level college (MLC) students in Nairobi, Kenya. It particularly assessed the delectations and perils the selected youth associated with the practice. Qualitative research approach utilizing multiple case study was adopted. Non-probability sampling techniques were employed to identify 65 students aged 18 to 24 years from five MLCs that were purposively selected. Data was generated through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The data was audio-recorded, transcribed and thematic coding procedures were used to categorize the data into themes and subthemes. Specific steps were taken to address the ethical concerns of confidentiality, privacy and anonymity. Findings showed that the selected youth were apprehensive and cautious about the perils and social sanctions of sexting but considered the practice pleasurable, thrilling and an opportunity to learn about dating and sexual related matters. The study concluded that sexting is a complex social-sexual behavior, therefore, motivations, perspectives and feelings why it is considered efficacious should form part of the scholarly and societal responses discussions. The study recommended the use of inclusive approaches to formulate strategies to deal with harmful norms and misconceptions that may surround youth negotiations and perceptions of positive outcomes of sexting.

Keywords: Sexting; sexually incline messages; mobile phones; sexual communication; students.

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Introduction

With the advent of smartphones, exchange of sexual messages has become a trend of the day (Hasinoff & Shepherd, 2014). As a result, research in different countries portrays sexting as a common digital activity among the youth (Phippen, 2012; Harris al., 2010). Stephen et al (2017) further posit that proliferation of affordable internet and smartphones has made “sending of sex messages a common activity for some teens” (p. 3). Apparently,

most of the studies have not analyzed the perceived opportunities and favorable outcomes from individuals who engage in the activity.

Sexting has been mostly perceived to be problematic and hence associated with numerous negative psycho-social experiences (Anastassiou, 2017). As much as we analyze the perceived social risks, there is a need to highlight the perceived benefits and pleasures adolescents associate with different forms of sexting. Karaian and Meyl (2015)

reiterate that effects of sexting cannot be adequately addressed in the negative connotations. Sexting is rampant despite the societal efforts put forth to discourage the behavior (Doring, 2014). The varied experiences and feelings why sexting is efficacious could be reasons adolescents continue to engage in the activity despite the perceived risks and concerns.

In Kenya, studies on adolescent sexting are few. By extension, elaborate analysis of the pleasures and risks youth associate with the behavior are unknown. Furthermore, sexting has hardly been analyzed from the perspectives and experiences of Kenyan youth with a view to recommending ways of dealing with the perceived concerns and risks. Exploring both benefits and risks from the perspectives and experiences of youth who engage in sexting will help to address some of the controversies over the most appropriate preventive measures and the role of the youth in addressing issues associated with the behavior (Doring, 2014; Burkett, 2015; Campbell & Park, 2014). It is vital to contextualize and localize the issues of everyday nature of youth sexting and more importantly extend the discussions beyond the risk and harm frameworks in order to develop effective response frameworks. Stephen et al (2017) posit that "... lack of Afro-centric research compels" researchers to "use international statistics to contextualize" issues of youth sexting. We require studies that "comprehensively analyzes the current practices of how teens are using their smartphones" (p.3).

Findings of this paper are based on a larger study that analyzed the perspectives, experiences and practices of middle level college (MLC) students in Nairobi, Kenya on the use of smartphones to create and exchange sexually inclined text messages, videos and photographs. The study focused on providing in-depth and elaborate analysis of first-hand experiences of exchange of the sexually inclined messages during interpersonal and group sexual interactions.

Literature Review

Exchange of sexually inclined messages, scientifically known as sexting, is rife within a section of the youth subculture. Sexting is the activity of exchanging sexually explicit or implicit videos, photos and text messages through digital enabled communication technologies (Vanden Abeele et al., 2014). Multiple definitions of sexting have been formulated, depending on the contexts, channels,

content characteristics and nature of the sexual messages (Doring, 2014, Bianchi et al, 2021, Baumgartner et al., 2014). In this study, the activity of youth sexting is defined as the use of smartphones to create and share sexually inclined text messages, photographs and videos. The definition adopted for this study treats sexting as an active composure and sharing of the sexually inclined messages by the sender to the receiver. It is also pertinent to note that this definition conceptualizes sexting as the process of exchanging provocative messages about sexual activity between willing participants. This form of sexting has attracted unprecedented scholarly attention and public debate because it is perceived to be dangerous and risky especially among young people (Eraker, 2010; Hasinoff, 2013).

Pleasures and Positive Outcomes of Sexting

Hasinoff and Shepherd (2014) considered the increasing rate of sexting among adolescents as driven by desire for "interpersonal intimacy, communication and expression" (p.3). In their study, Milton et al (2019) noted a significant increase in the number of young Australians who endorsed two-way sexting (42.21%) between the year 2012 and 2014. Youth perceive sexting as fun, pleasurable and suitable way of killing boredom (Lippman & Campbell, 2014a). Emergent scholarly perspectives such as sexual agency and 'emancipation' frameworks have been used to analyze sexting in context of sexual freedoms and social emancipation. These frameworks conceptualize how mobile phones 'emancipate' young people in a way that make them capable of exploring and expressing sexuality, beauty and sexiness with ease (Hasinoff, 2013). These frameworks further recognize that sexting is complex and multifaceted and hence it is imperative to analyze both opportunities and risks of the behavior (Hasinoff & Shepherd, 2014; Boyd, 2011).

Proponents of social emancipation and sexual agency further consider sexting to be a healthy form of sexual expression and exploration in social-sexual relationships, especially among young people who are developing into sexual beings (Hasinoff & Shepherd, 2014b). Emancipation frameworks particularly consider adolescence as a transition stage from childhood to adulthood whereby social-sexual skills useful later in life are developed. These skills include issues to do with sex and sexuality, dating, interpersonal and group communication (Judge, 2012; Burkett, 2015, Chege & Chebii, 2020).

Therefore, the extent of expressing sexual activities, exchanging sexually inclined messages and forming dating associations increase in the adolescent stage (Chege & Chebii, 2020).

In dating relationships, expressing love and affection through digital messages is perceived to be more convenient compared to face to face communication by youth (Chege & Wanjiru, 2017). Studies conducted among college students have revealed that girls share sexting photos to make their boyfriends happy (Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Englander et al., 2015). A study by Drouin et al. (2013) similarly found out that sexting within college students often take place among committed partners and those in casual sex relationships. These perspectives suggest that sexting is important in the development of skills necessary in peer social-sexual expression and interactions, social emancipation and sexual agency (Hasinoff, 2013; Doring, 2014). This study sought to listen to young college students' experiences of sexting and the perceived benefits and risks pertained to the behavior.

Perils and Challenges of Youth Sexting

Majority of the past studies link youth sexting to harmful immediate and long-term psycho-social consequences (Dake et al., 2012; Pearce, 2012). The behavior is considered as likely to bleed "catastrophic and long-term influence" on those who engage in it (Lennon & Murray, 2018, p.1). Martinez-Prather and Vandive (2014) argue that media production which involves active recording and dissemination of one's naked body through smartphones more readily "infiltrates the brain, causing unprecedented health, social, emotional and sexual problems" (p.2). Expressing sexual activities and behaviors through self-made sex videos and images is considered to be the primary negative outcome of adolescent sexting (Ringrose et al., 2013). Expression of sexual activities through sexting is believed to precipitate increased sexual activities among youths, which in turn leads to unplanned pregnancy, abortion and infection with STDs (Chege & Chebii, 2020).

Studies have revealed that the number of sexual activities and sexual partners increase when sexting is involved (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014). Adolescents who practice sexting are also at risk of experiencing harassment, cyber-bullying and other forms of sexual aggression perpetuated on the internet or other digital technologies (Hasinof, 2013; Chege & Wanjiru, 2017). Research has also established a

connection between sexting and self-esteem. For example, Drouin and Tobin (2014) noted that girls who experienced low-self-esteem and anxiety of losing the boyfriend had sent unsolicited naked images to the boyfriend. Dake et al (2012) found a relationship between exchange of self-made sexting images and physical abuse such as being hit by the boyfriend and sometimes coerced sexual intercourse. Lennon and Murray (2018) concur that the relationship between sexting and bullying should be taken seriously. On the contrary, Walrave et al (2014a) opined that sexting does not necessarily involve bullying or harassment. It is a practice among young people that entails exchange of sexual texts and images within the contexts of friendships, courtships and social bonding or dating (Albury et al., 2010).

Young people in consensual sexting just like adults often engage in sexting for interpersonal intimacy, communication and expression (Albury et al., 2013). Additional challenges associated with sexting include damage of reputation (Cooper et al., 2016) and possible prosecution with child pornography laws that prohibit circulation of naked photos and videos of minors (Eraker, 2010; Hasinoff, 2013). In Kenya, youth sexting is outlawed in the penal code and cyber-crime and computer misuse Act of 2018. Most scholars therefore underscore the importance of raising awareness on consequences of sexting among young people and children (Wicks, 2017). As a result, a number of intervention initiatives meant to discourage the behavior have been suggested (Harris et al, 2010; Pearce, 2012). These strategies have nevertheless failed because sexting by youth has escalated instead (Stephen et al, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Two theories notably the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) were used to guide collection and interpretation of the findings for the study. The analysis provided in this article relate directly to the TPB. TPB was relevant in assessing the social contexts in which sexting took place, particularly how peer norms and peer perceptions influenced how the students engaged and interpreted their sexting practices. TPB was first suggested by Ajzen (1991) to "predict and explain human behavior in specific contexts" (p.4).

Methodology

This section describes the approach, sampling and procedure of data analysis used in the study

Research Approach

This study adopted the qualitative research methods approach. The emphasis was on the qualitative dimension of sexting, particularly meanings, interpretations, experiences and activities of young people who engaged in sexting. Qualitative strategies which are hinged on relativist-interpretivist research paradigm are most appropriate when analyzing subjective perspectives and experiences concerning a given social activity like sexting (Creswell, 2013). The study used multiple cases study design to assess the perceptions and activities of how smartphones were used by young college students in Nairobi to create and send sexually inclined messages.

Population and Sampling

Non-probability sampling techniques were employed to identify the research site and participants. Purposive sampling was used to identify five MLCs in Nairobi. Then, purposive and snowball sampling strategies were used to select 65 students, aged 18-25 years. To recruit participants, the researchers obtained permission from the administrators of the colleges and then worked with the administrators and lecturers in order to access the students. Students were informed about the study while taking classes and when sitting in the college premises during breaks, especially between 10am and 5pm. Students who participated in the study had their contact details recorded in the field notebook, including the time they wished to be contacted. At the onset of the recruitment, students were clearly informed about the sensitive nature of the study and how the research was to be conducted. The first set of participants was purposively selected then progressively the existing participants provided referrals to recruit more participants through the researchers based on willingness to participate and conversancy with sexting. The selection process ensured that only students who used their smartphones to create and share sexually inclined text messages, photos and/or videos with colleagues or romantic partners were selected as either primary or referral participants.

Instruments

To obtain data for the study, in-depth interviews and FGDs were used. Interview and FGDs guides were developed to assist the researchers on the areas to elucidate responses during the conversations. In total, thirty in-depth interviews

involving 11 males and 19 females (N=30) and seven FGDs (N=35) were conducted with the selected participants. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 125 minutes while the FGDs lasted between 75 minutes and 107 minutes. Each of the FGDs comprised of five members. The researchers conducted two FGDs in two of the colleges. The FGDs and interviews were conducted in the college premises when students were free to avoid interfering with their classes. During interviews, both male and female participants expressed their personal sexting experiences and activities freely without feeling embarrassed. During FGDs, participants discussed issues related to group sexting activities and perceptions but were requested to refrain from reporting personal sexting behaviors in such forums. This was done to protect participants from feeling ashamed after the FGDs. Consent was sought and permission to record the conversations using an audio recorder was also sought.

Validity and Reliability

Credibility is a critical component in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011). In this study, two forms of validating the findings were employed, namely triangulation and providing thick and rich descriptions to communicate the results. Triangulation of interview and FGDs data ensured the credibility of the findings. The large sample size, use of both in-depth interviews and FGDs techniques and collecting data until saturation point was reached ensured that the reliability criteria was achieved. Use of different participants in interviews and FGDs further enhanced richness of data. Moreover, the final report of the findings was enriched with direct quotes from the participants and this further strengthened the credibility of the data.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The process of data analysis began with verbatim transcription of the audio transcripts into text documents using the Listen N Write transcription software. This was followed by familiarization with the data through reading the text transcripts several times and putting down important analytical notes and jottings. Then systematically and interactively, salient segments were identified and assigned codes by reading through the transcripts. Thereafter, the salient data segments and codes were cut out from the transcripts and were pasted on fresh documents. Then the codes and information from the transcripts were read through and organized

into categories. The transcribed information, the salient data and the categories were reviewed to develop themes. The process of developing the themes was iteratively done. This involved naming, renaming and dropping themes to the point where relevant themes and subthemes were ultimately developed to interpret and tell the story of youth sexting. The resultant themes were used to organize the findings guided by the objectives and research questions of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Sexting is a sensitive topic as it relates to expression of sexual activities and behaviors. Critical issues of concern that were considered included consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality and anonymity were achieved by using symbols to identify both the participants and colleges. The symbols were also used to refer to participants' quotes during construction of the final report. Further, the researchers made it clear that participants were not to share personal sexting activities during FGDs. In order to make informed consent, the nature of the study and other pertinent details were clearly explained to the participants. The researchers then sought participants' consent and permission to record the conversations using an audio recorder by filling the consent forms. Before accessing the research sites to recruit the participants, the researchers first sought for a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings that were part of results obtained from the following research question: How does exchange of sexting messages relate to daily social activities among the selected MLC students?

Students' Perceptions of Delectations and Opportunities of exchange of sexually inclined messages

Interesting dimensions were brought out by participants who associated sexting with positive outcomes and experiences. Most participants observed that in peer social interactions and dating, sexting was perceived to be normal. They further indicated that the practice was considered an important part of digital fun and was a common way of killing boredom. One female FGD attendee exclaimed, *"just for fun, yeah just for fun"* [FG06]. Findings revealed that there was a strong urge for some girls and boys to use smartphones to record

and store raunchy images and videos for self-love and admiration. The girls mostly recorded and deleted or preserved photos showing breasts, pants and sometimes derriere to experience beauty and sexiness. One of these girls responded, *"hmmm may be once yeah, i take them once but i have never sent any to anyone."* When asked which part of the body she recorded, she laughed and said *"my behind yeah, i see them then delete (F1INT)"*. Another girl who recorded nude images of herself said, *"yeah sometimes i do take some nudes of myself and then i just store them in my phone"* (F4INT). Van Ouytsel et al (2016) noted that adolescence stage is marked by curiosity and therefore the number of adolescents exploring sexuality and sexually related information soars in this age.

Results suggested that in romantic relationships sexting was considered a convenient way of communicating sexual interests and expressing affection. A section of participants said that when they flirted and played with romantic partners through sexual messages, the experience was fun, thrilling, self-fulfilling and somehow it led to achievement of sexual satisfaction. Some girls exchanged sexual messages with romantic partners to enhance dating relationship, experience sexual satisfaction and express affection. For example, the married female participant (aforementioned) sent images of her genitals to the husband as a way of expressing affection and maintaining the marriage. She perceived sexting as a way of enhancing intimacy, showing affection, commitment and faithfulness towards a marriage partner. She believed that the husband would achieve sexual satisfaction and thus remain faithful and focused on her after looking at the images:

The picture will help him to cool down because he is away for two weeks or three weeks and maybe he is faithful to you and you are faithful to him, so when send him your nude images he will feel i love him and he remembers you and feels he should not betray his wife because he loves her; the nude image makes him remember about you as the wife yeah [F2INT].

The aforementioned girl who recorded raunchy images showing her genitals also acknowledged to have sent such photos to her boyfriend as a way of expressing love and affection. She believed that the

boyfriend experienced sexual satisfaction when he looked at her naked photographs, “

ok when you send he is like when are you coming, will you come here now and you imagine that time you it is midday, you tell him it is too early I’m so busy then he is like that nude image has stimulated me today and he just cools down (F4INT).

When romantic partners approved sexting as a way of maintaining and showing affection in the relationship, this fueled the desire for exchange of explicit videos and images. When dating partners are source of influence to sext, then they become “important normative referents” (Walrave et al, 2014b, p. 4), Lippman & Campbell (2014) found girls in romantic relationships sexting to receive male approval.

In addition, some female participants engaged in sexual conversations and shared sexting videos and photographs with trusted female colleagues on girls only chat groups. They mostly explored and discussed topics on sex, dating, gender roles, sexual identity and other feminine related issues. A girl who was a member of a girl only chat group retorted,

mostly they talk about man, the dick that is the only thing, you know I was added into a group, a ladies’ group you know it was crazy nothing else then sent pictures and the argument was not whether he is handsome or not thing was how is it do you like it short, long, they post dicks of men they have slept with.....[FG06].

Another female participant who was in a chat group with former high school girls noted, “...images something that will make us laugh, this boy and that boy like comparing such kind of thing yeah, yeah sometimes they compare boys” [F12INT]. They perceived discussing sexual matters freely away from boys as a way of enhancing their sexual emancipation and empowerment, “yeah ladies discuss these things freely in their ladies’ groups” (FG05). With reference to TPB, findings revealed that sexting activities performed by students were influenced by romantic partners and close trusted colleagues (Ajzen, 1991; (Ajzen, 1991; Cooper et al, 2016).

Some girls in dating relationships perceived sexting and pornographic videos and photos as source of information on sex skills and styles. There was

tendency to connect the sex skills learnt from watching pornography to enhancement of dating relationships, sexual satisfaction and expression of affection,

I think I’m not perfect for my boyfriend so I go look for porn so that I learn on the ways I can make him happy and both of us can stay longer together” [F3INT]. The married female participant searched and watched pornography to learn about sex styles, “yeah i do when i watch I’m like there is a porn i watched go and see sometimes i end up downloading them then i store them on my phone (4INT).

Another girl who watched sex videos to improve on her sexual skills experimented with what she learnt whenever she had sex with her boyfriend

Well ok i just look for may be sex styles of having sex okay when you are watching porn you see this part and this part, there is this and the other person so you just look at them and then you are like which one is the best yeah, yeah i can tell if you ask me about this style and this style yeah” (F4INT). The girl who dated multiple men also consumed pornography to improve on her sexual skills. She wanted to learn “sex styles” and “how to hold the partner (F7INT).

In numerous instances, participants were concerned that parents neglected the responsibility of discussing sex related topics with their children. As a result, sexting and commercial pornography served as important sources of information on sex and sexuality related matters for them. For example, a Muslim female participant noted that young people have a great curiosity to learn about sex and gender roles but religion and parenting have ignored that fact. Therefore, sexting and internet becomes the only source of such information, as she reports in the following extract:

I think that it is just natural (laughs) , it is nature , it is like they expect you know this is wrong and this is right because they talk about that they just tell you how to cook, how to take care of your husband they don’t go to specific sex issues (laughs), in our[Muslim] religion you are not supposed to talk about sex with anyone else apart from your husband , the problem comes

where your husband does not know much because even him he did have a chance to learn about sex (all laugh); there you have to Google, both of you have to use Mr. Goggle, Google is there for you, you see nowadays everybody is talking about sex styles, you see even young children they are talking about everything.....[FG05].

Students' Perceptions of Perils and Challenges of Exchange of Sexually Inclined Messages

Majority of the participants were concerned that during online and offline interactions, colleagues rarely discussed about the challenges of exchange of sexting messages. One of the girls said, "they don't talk about that, they don't talk about the effects (F16INT). To validate her sentiments, a male participant remarked, '...let me tell you, they know it is bad no one does a negative thing without knowing (M10INT).

It also emerged that some students jokingly discussed about challenges related to sexting but such discussions hardly yielded useful information. As such, students could not learn from each other about consequences of sexting; "when the talk about it, they don't say in a positive way, they will just rub it off as a joke people will just laugh at it and life goes on (M6INT). Similarly, one of the girls said they casually discussed about the possibility of naked photos sent to boyfriends being distributed to other people to the extent of reaching mass audience:

Yeah, there is this girl that we share everything, so when we were just talking, i told and she told me the same, you can send a nude may be to a boyfriend or even your friend the next thing you know is find your photo or video in the internet, they are some sites i have heard that you can, if you send vides they pay, so, may be that is their intention, yeah [F8INT].

Results indicated that participants were concerned about the challenges of sharing one's private content with another person without consent of the sender. Findings further indicated that sexual messages shared with colleagues or dating partners were distributed in a number of ways. The messages were mostly shown on phone without transferring to another phone. Sometimes the messages were sent to close and trusted friends as prove of dating and having sexual activities with romantic partners. One boy who was shown sext text messages exchanged

with a certain girl as proof of sexual intercourse said, ".... I asked him how many times he has slept with the girl, the boy showed the text..." (M1INT).

Female participants who belonged to private girls' only chat groups on WhatsApp often received sexual messages posted by fellow girls. Nearly all participants disclosed that social forums with closely knit membership were perceived to be convenient and safer for posting private content compared to virtual groups with densely knit membership. They mostly mentioned *team mafisi* on Telegram and *Kilimani mums and dads* on Facebook as common virtual groups with densely knit membership where members frequently posted sexting videos and images showing explicit nudity and sexual escapades. One boy noted: in team mafisi you find photos posted there, for example naked man or naked woman (M3INT). Most previous studies likewise consider unwanted forwarding as the greatest social risk connected to sexting (Anastassiou, 2017; Colenbrander, 2016).

Most female participants declined to send naked images to boyfriends despite being asked to do. They said that they feared the images could be published on public profiles, "yes you don't know the reasons why the person has asked for your nudes.... from there you will find it in Facebook, Instagram...by the end of the time you will find like everyone has your photo in the phone" (F3INT). They further indicated that the naked images could be used to blackmail, harass and force them to do what the boys wanted, "...if the boy wants anything from you and you appear hesitant he tells you he is going to upload you" (FG03).

Both male and female participants were concerned that girls suffer more shame and resentment in case their sexting messages 'leaked' to third party. According to them, part of destroying the reputation of girl involves portraying as her 'loose' and 'cheap to get' especially after casual sex,

Because you have finished with the girl you give the number to your friend to go and try whether he can win the lady and have sex with, take a photo and come and show to proof...." (M8INT). A female participant described how a man posted what she referred to as 'shit' exchanged with a girl he dated, "the one i have come across is a man sending shit about a certain lady..... [F4INT].

Participants further noted that victims of sexting gone wrong would suffer various psychosocial problems, “feel sad” and “even get depressed and then.... have trust issues with people...” (F8INT). They commonly mentioned feelings of resentment, betrayal, depression and suicide tendencies as possible outcomes of one’s sexting behaviors being made public, “yeah, it has, your moral will down, even you can commit suicide” [F11INT]. According to them, private images and photos posted on the internet would cause permanent and irreversible social damage, “the consequences of sending these images, first of all the internet never forgets... your kids will Google those things and they will get them just there, so the internet never forgives” (FG04).

During interviews and FGDs, several participants described experiences of unpleasant sexting incidents they had witnessed. One of the female participants explicated how her best friend was harassed and shamed by touts she dated. The touts created a WhatsApp group to share explicit text photos and text messages the girl sent to them, ‘they created a WhatsApp group and stared discussing her, she had sent him her nudes...’([F6INT]). Another female participant who sent images of her private parts to several men in what seemed to be transactional sexual relationships narrated how she avoided showing the face when recording such photos. She perceived explicit images that don’t show the face as likely to cause less damage in case they were posted online. She was confident that it was possible to exonerate herself and deny being the one shown in the image:

Interviewer: why do you hide the face? Interviewee:

(laughs) you don’t know which phone will receive that nude image or who will be shown that picture so when the face is not showing no one can know its you, even he suggests its you he cannot prove it, when face is missing he cannot tell who the person is and other parts like the boobs are the same for all girls, may be size is different [F7INT].

Another female participant described how her friend in college was nervous and disturbed that the sexually explicit images she exchanged with the boyfriend would be ‘exposed’ after end of the dating relationship, “we asked the girl and she said she used to send her nudes to the man and the boy used to send his too to her and she thought they were in love when they were two then after that...”

[F16INT]. Another girl explained how her friend lost a phone containing raunchy images she had recorded. Later the images were uploaded using her WhatsApp account, “whoever stole the phone saw those photos and uploaded the photos using her WhatsApp account” (FG01).

Sentiments from most of the participants revealed the various forms of social shamming and bullying victims of escalated sexting were likely to be subjected to in school. For example, one of the female participants bluntly referred to fellow girls who sent naked photos to boyfriends as prostitutes, “maybe she is a prostitute and will be looked down upon as a cheap person” [F2INT]. The aforementioned female participant was also ruthless when describing how her friend was anxious about possible loss of private images she had exchange with the boyfriend, “some girls are ‘cheap’, i have one here, she engages in such communication now it has come to the reality, the guy has dumped her the guy after all that yeah” (F16INT).

Participants were concerned that bullying in school following loss of privacy would result to poor academic performance and self-isolation, “you won’t be at ease you won’t be comfortable sitting there.... everyone [will] laugh at you, yeah, you are likely to get embarrassed, and people might mock you” (F9INT). They argued that friends would abandon the victim for fear of being perceived as ‘birds of a feather.’ It was also established that most participants felt that colleagues lacked necessary social skills to offer emotional support and companionship to victims of negative experiences of sexting, “friends will mock you about sharing funny photos” [F6INT]. A male participant who was a head boy in one of the colleges observed that he would not effectively execute his mandate as a student leader if the sex text messages he shared with his girlfriend were exposed:

that has never happened, but i know if it happens, I will have fight with, my relationship, I told you about my position here in school, my relationship with other students will be done yeah, so sometimes when looking for someone to have that close relationship, with, how to look for someone with a strong character, a person you know, you trust with your privacy yeah [M4INT].

A number of female participants described how girls would experience physical and cyber insults, online harassment, cyber stalking and threats once their self-created naked photos were shared with unintended recipients, especially on public forums: "one consequence I know is cyber bullying.... maybe when you were sending that photo that person told you is going to be private now you see he starts bullying you [FG05]. Thought it did not come out strongly, some participants mentioned long term consequences related to family, marriage and parenting issues. One girl reported "...when you are exposed on social media, people will bully your reputation that will include even your family members seeing your nude images" (F6INT).

One of the girls who exchanged explicit photos with her boyfriend noted that "*people who know [her] especially family, friends, yeah relatives*" would be disappointed if her explicit content leaked. She would have lost her "dignity and hurt [her] friends" especially because she was "brought up in a Christian family"... (F4INT). The female participant (aforementioned) who shared images showing her genitals with her husband was confident that the partner could not share such images with anyone because doing so could destroy the family and marriage, "... cannot share that nude image with anyone because he is your husband he cannot forward such images to others because he knows that if he does that it will destroy the marriage" (F2INT).

Findings indicate that some participants used videos and images to express sexual activities and behaviors. It was further observed that exchange of sexually inclined messages between romantic partners acted as a catalyst for heightened sexual activities. This was especially more pronounced when the motivation was to arouse the sexual partner into sexual activity. Participants who created and sent sexual content experienced sexual stimulation and strong desire to engage in sexual activity. A boy confessed, "once you start [sex] chatting, there is a way it brings the sexual desires, arouse and it is usually for that time you are chatting" (M2INT). Another boy "...reached a point where [they] stopped because [he] used to get stimulated" when chatting with girlfriend (M8INT). One girl said it was "obvious she got stimulated" when exchanging sext text messages with her boyfriend (F2INT).

A number of boys acknowledged to have created and sent sexually explicit text messages to communicate intentions to have sex and flirt sexual partners. It also seemed that sexually loaded text messages were mutually exchanged to arouse each other with the intention of having sexual intercourse. A boy who exchanged sexually explicit text messages before meeting his girlfriend for sexual intercourse said, "yeah those are the things we were doing before sex" [M5INT]. Most participants felt that exchange of explicit text messages made it easy for boys to ask for sex from the girls or imply they were interested in having sex.

One girl confessed, "when we are chatting, may be when we are far, may be once in a while he just like says i miss you and i miss the whole of you so you just know like he misses sex "[F15INT]. Two female participants confessed to have performed masturbation as an alternative sexual activity following buildup of sexual tension after exchange of sexually inclined messages with dating partners. One of them could not discuss this behavior with the romantic partner, "yeah I do it (laughs loudly) I cannot tell him that" [F7INT].

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The study concluded that sexting occurred frequently in daily social interactions among the selected students and various delectations encouraged the practice despite the perceived perils and challenges. Most participants associated sexting with positive feelings of pleasure, fun, thrill and opportunities to learn about dating and sexual matters. In addition, participants acknowledged that sexting put them in serious perils and dangers related to risky sexual behaviors and ridicule by peers and adults in case the private messages were 'exposed' to unwanted parties. The researchers argue that it is important to analyze both positive outcomes and challenges of youth sexting, particularly from perspectives and experiences of young people with firsthand information in order to suggest effective mitigation measures. Sexting is mostly considered presumptuous in prior research and the use of the risky framework has largely been used to analyze this youth behavior. Sexting is not considered to be entirely wrong by adolescents and therefore strategies aimed at its total eradication might be unsuccessful. In fact, a number of societal efforts put forth so far have tended to emphasize total eradication of sexting, an approach that has

failed to discourage the behavior among the youth. This study further concludes that sexting is a complex and multifaceted youth behavior that is often practiced within the broader spectrum of social-sexual interactions, relationships and conversations.

Recommendations

The study recommends that youth sexting should be discouraged because of the detrimental effects and negative experiences presented in this paper. The positive perceptions and delectations youth associated with sexting in this study are considered to be as a result of misconceptions and lack of proper information on varied issues related to daily social-sexual interactions among youth. Therefore, there is a need to put forth efforts aimed at discouraging youth sexting. This study recommends the use of well thought tactics while responding to issues of youth sexting. Youth need to be equipped with relevant information on varied issues pertaining to peer social interactions, dating and use of smartphones in order to counter negative norms they have about sexting. Teachers and parents should particularly devise ways of dispelling prevailing misconceptions and harmful peer norms that promote sexting as normal and pleasurable. The paper particularly recommends strong linkages and guild associations of teachers, parents, scholars and youth forums in addressing negative consequences and misconceptions and illusions youth might have about positive outcomes of sexting.

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