

SEXTING CORRELATES RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AMONG FEMALE ADOLESCENTS OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL IN NSUKKA URBAN AREA

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Abstract

The present study investigated associations between sexually explicit text materials (sexting) via social media and engagement in risky sexual activity among emerging female adolescents of senior secondary school age in Nsukka Urban Area. The research was to determine how online sexting and social media activity was linked with physical risky sexual behaviours. The participants were 145 female senior students from five public secondary school in Nsukka Urban Area, comprises SS2 and SS3 students. The students in their classroom, completed survey questionnaire assessing demographic information, use of technology, sexting activity, and risky sexual behaviours. Most participants reported sexting with their boyfriends and casual friends. The results indicated that sexting is used to maintain online relationship. The results also shown that sexting was associated with an increase in the number of sexual partners and, sexting behaviour was associated with unprotected sexual intercourse. However, as interactions in online settings become more common within romantic relationship, attitudes towards conventional, unconventional, and riskier sexual behaviours become more positive. Thus, the research findings are useful in understanding the role of smartphones on sexting with regard to public health care and safe sex education among emerging female adolescents in Nsukka Urban Area.

Keywords: Sexting; risky sexual behaviours; female adolescents; social media.

Introduction

Great interest arose in research about the sexual influence of sexting among female adolescents in the senior secondary school. Indeed, most concern are the high rate of Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STD), unwanted and unsuccessful aborted pregnancies, the teen girls get involved in their sexual relationship while in school. These acts of risky sexual involvements have led to serious reproductive health challenges, and to the worst untimely death through abortion among these emerging female adults (Drouin, 2012). The evaluation and comprehension of risky sexual behavior of these female adolescents are important to explore through the context of new media and sexting. Sexting has

gradually becoming a serious problem in the lives of adolescents in the secondary school and society as a whole. The increase in the use of social and new media has led to the rise in the prevalence of sexting, which in turn, resulted in risky sexual behaviours (Klettke, 2014). According to Rice (2012), sexting is defined as sending or receiving of nude or seminude images or sexually suggestive messages via cell phones. Anesu, Julita and James (2018), defined sexting as a phenomenon of transmission of sexually themed messages, images, audio and videos through technological gadgets. Furthermore, they added that sexting refers to the act or acts of sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit material, messages or images from an individual's cell phone or computer to another (Julita& James, 2018).

Female adolescents who sent their nude pictures to their casual or steady partners were more likely to engage in an unprotected and multiple sexual debut (Ybarrier& Mitchell, 2013). A study in Uganda by Rome (2016), found that female adolescents who reported having sent a sext were more likely to report having engaged in sexual intercourse without the use of condom or other contraceptive measures. Research findings from the college students show that many young female adults who exchange sexts messages are in committed unprotected romantic relationship (Drouin &Landgraff, 2012; Drouin, Vogel, Surbeg& Stills, 2013). Risky sexual behaviour leads to unwanted pregnancies and Sexually Transmitted Infections STI's, including HIV/AIDs. About 20,000 adolescent females under the age of 19years give birth daily in developing countries, with Nigeria not exempted (WHO, 2019). These assertions pose serious health consequences and the high rate of contracting sexually transmitted diseases like genital warts, chlamydia, gonorrhea, unsafe abortions, loss of virginity, promiscuity, school dropout and other forms of deviant behaviors are alarming among female adolescents age in Nigeria (Obiumu, 2014).

However, age at which adolescents indulge in sexual debut is significant to public health importance, because people who had sexual intercourse at younger age are more susceptible to risky sexual behaviours (Victor, Jennifer, &Echezona, 2016). Kirby (2011), asserts that younger people are at risk for a number of negative health Consequences associated with early and unsafe sexual activities, including sexual transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDs, unintended pregnancy etc. According to Ofordile (2002), adolescence is described as a status with uncertain and diffuse guidelines, engendering a period of questioning and searching for not only the meaning of life, but for a concrete way to go about living. Onyeneje (2003), described adolescence as a period of turmoil, frustration, insecurity and struggle, faced with so many conflicts and decisions of developmental tasks. Indeed, it is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. The stage in human life when a lot of physiological as well as anatomical changes take place resulting in reproductive maturity is known as adolescence period (Kirby, 2011). Thus, the current study will be anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) developed by IcekAjzen (1985), to explain why sexting motivate risky sexual behaviour. According to this theory, it posits that, both behaviour and intention of

performing that behaviour is premeditated before the action. The best indicator of behaviour is intention, which is predicted by the attitude towards behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2011). The theory explains that people who are more likely to sexts or sending of sexual explicit materials have prior intent to engage in physical sexual activities (Albarracin, Johnson & Fishbein, 2011).

Meanwhile, some studies had found contrasting evidence with sexting and risky sexual behaviour. Ferguson (2011), in his study found no presence of an association between sexting and risky sexual practices. Makgale and Plattner (2017), in their own study found no correlation between sexting behaviours and condom use. Base on the above narrative, the objective of this research is to identify risky sexual behaviour and its correlation with sexting among female adolescents of secondary school age in Nsukka Urban Area. Most knowledge about sexting behavior stems from studies investigating young people in North America, Europe and Australia (Doring, 2014; Klettke et al., 2014), little is known as to such findings apply to young people living in Nigeria. However, increasing number of empirical studies target the prevalence of sexting and possible risk factor related to sexting, but knowledge about female gender and sexting in senior secondary school is still limited. This study was aimed to investigate sexting behaviours on female senior secondary school students in Nsukka Urban Area and discuss the result in relation to sexting research conducted in Western countries. The results of the study should add to existing knowledge about sexting and provide parents, teachers, student counselors, and health care providers in Enugu State with some insights into factors associated with sexting behavior.

Methods

Design: The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design of adolescents studying in the public senior secondary schools in Nsukka Urban Area.

Area of Study: The study was carried out in five communities secondary school, owned and manage by Enugu State Education Board. The schools are located at semi-urban communities of Ibagwa, Orba, Okpuje, Ichie, Eziani and Agbani in each of these schools they have both junior and senior classes. The schools are mixed gender school only female participants were selected.

Participants: Were 145 female senior students from five different community secondary schools within Nsukka Urban Area in Enugu State. The participants were randomly selected from SS2, SS3 using class attendant register. The students were at the ages of 15 and 19 years old, which is the globally recognised age range for adolescents (WHO, 2020).

Instruments

The sexual risk survey: This scale was developed by Turchik and Garske (2009) to assess adolescent's perception about their sexual risks with uncommitted partners, risky sexual acts, impulsive sexual behaviours, intent to engage in unprotected sexual act and risk of anal sex and, standardized to African population by Turchik (2009). SRS consists of 24

items on a scale with a total score range of 0-76. The internal consistency analyzed by Cronbach Alpha value .93. According to test-retest reliability studies, it was found .49 ($P < 0.01$); Split-half (Guttman) was found .82.

Sexting scale: This scale was developed by Weisskirch and Delevi (2011) to assess the adolescent's sexting attitude, intention, and how regular suggestive photo or video is being sent to a receiver. The responses are on 2-points; Yes or No. The internal consistency reliability values are changing from .75 to .83. According to test-retest studies, values are changing from .70 to .80.

Procedure: The instruments were administered in classrooms by the researchers. The students were told about the purpose of the research and, that the information they would provide will be secured from their friends and parents and they were free to participate in the research. All the selected students accepted to participate in the study. It takes approximately 25 to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

Data analysis: Data were analysed using multiple regression and Chi-square statistics analyses. Regression analysis was applied to determine the predictors of sexting behaviours and chi-square test for association and differences between variables. The 5% - significance level ($P < 0.05$) and the 95% confidence interval were applied.

Results

The aim of this research was to investigate an association between online sexting and risky sexual behaviours among emerging female adolescents of senior secondary school age. The majority of the participants were from SS3 (66.7%, $n=98$), followed by SS2 (31.4%, $n=47$). The girls were between the ages of 15 and 19 years with an average age of 17 years. A slight majority was not dating (52%, $n=75$) while 29.4% ($n=43$) were currently dating, 18.6% ($n=13$) were engaged. On their sexual orientation, 89.2% ($n=129$) identified as heterosexual. Fifty-eight girls (40%) stated that they had engaged in sexting, while 87 (60%) had not. Conversely, 88.3% ($n=128$), used smartphone and enjoy sexting.

Table 1: Chi-square comparisons of students sexting based on senior classes, relationship status, and online activities (as measured by sexting scale) No significant differences in sexting behaviour were found based on participants' relationship status or general use of social media. Class differences were compared by using SS3 participants as a reference group, because they were older in age. The result revealed that individuals engaging in sexting were more likely to be SS3 students and more likely to report not being a virgin.

TABLE1: Chi-square comparison of sexting (sending/receiving sexually explicit text messages) based on participant characteristics and technology use (n=145)

<i>CLASSES</i>	<i>NO SEXTING (n=58) % (n)</i>	<i>SEXTING (n=58) % (n)</i>	<i>P</i>
SS 2 class	44.3(35)	55.7(44)	.026*
SS 3 class	27.1(13)	72.9(35)	
<i>FRIENDSHIP STATUS</i>			
Not in a relationship	42.6(29)	57.4(39)	.541
In a relationship	37.7(29)	62.3(48)	
<i>VIRGINITY STATUS</i>			
Yes	77.4(24)	22.6(7)	.000***
No	30.4(34)	69.6(78)	
<i>USE of SMART PHONES</i>			
Yes	37.5(48)	62.5(80)	.137
No	58.8(10)	41.2(7)	
<i>ENGAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA</i>			
Yes	26.9(21)	73.1(57)	.004***
No	55.2(37)	44.8(30)	
<i>USE SMART PHONE TO ACCESS SEXTING VIDEOS, PHOTOS & IMAGES.</i>			
Yes	20.0(13)	80.0(52)	
No	56.3(45)	43.8(35)	.032*
<i>SEND ONLINE SEXTING MESSAGES</i>			
Yes	35.9(42)	64.1(75)	.044*
No	57.1(16)	42.9(12)	
<i>SEXTS FOR POTENTIAL ROMANTIC PARTNERS</i>			
Yes	16.2(6)	83.8(31)	.000***
No	48.1(52)	51.9(56)	
<i>FLIRT WITH ROMANTIC PARTNER ONLINE</i>			
Yes	37.2(16)		
	62.8(31)	.000***	
No	41.2(42)	58.8(60)	

<i>SEARCH ONLINE FOR ROMANTIC PARTNERS</i>			
Yes	46.3(25)	53.7(29)	.004**
No	36.3(33)	63.7(58)	
<i>HAVE ONLINE SEXT BLOG</i>			
Yes	36.0(45)	64.0(80)	.011*
No	65.0(13)	35.0(7)	
<i>SEXTING FOR DISTANCE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP</i>			
Yes	11.3(7)	88.7(55)	.000***
No	61.4(51)	38.6(32)	

P<.05, ** P<.01, *** P<.001

While no differences in sexting were found based on participants' general use of social media, a number of differences emerged based on specific online activities. The following activities were found to be significantly linked with sexting i.e; Access to social media, use of smart phone to access social media, sending private online sexts, searching online for romantic partners, flirting with romantic partners online, having an online blog, and sexting long for distance romantic relationships. Interestingly, individuals who used the internet to search for romantic partner were less likely to send sexts.

Table2: Multiple regression analysis was performed to assessing relationship between sexting, use of social media, and engagement in risky sexual behaviours (as measured by the Sexual Risk Survey). Use of social media was a significant factor in predicting number of friends the participant had online i.e., engaged in sexual behaviour without protection ($b = .04$, $P<.05$) and the number of partners with whom they had physical sexual relationship ($b = .05$, $P<.01$.) The association between social media usage and having “friends with benefits” i.e., having sex with someone they knew but not in a committed relationship with, as well as, unprotected sex, approach significance. Same with sexting and unprotected oral sex. Individual engaging in sexting reported significantly more positive attitude towards unprotected sexual practices ($b = 5.45$, $P<.001$).

TABLE 2: Regression coefficients (b) and standard errors (SE) for number of people engaging in sexual behaviours based on sending/receiving sexually explicit text messages (sexting) and social media enjoyment

Standard multiple regression: Predictors	F	b	SE	P
Physical partners (no sex) Sent sexts Use social media R ²	3.44	.17 .05 .30	.50 .02	.73 .01**
Hooked up Sent sexts Enjoy social media R ²	2.08	.01 .04	.51 .02	.99 .05*
Number of sexual partners Sent sexts Use social media R ²	1.37	.24 1.68 .00	1.21 .05	.10 .95
No protection from pregnancy Sent sexts Use social media R ²	1.58	.42 .09 .21	1.21 .05	.73 .08#
Fellatio without condom Sent sexts Use social media R ²	3..98	1.58 .60 .31	.85 .04	.07 .10#
Friends with benefits Sent sexts Use social media R ²	2.98	.71 .04 .28	.51 .02	.17 .07#
SRS Sent sexts Use social media R ²	5.88	5.45 .02 .37	1.59 .07	.00** .82

SRS – Sexual Risk Survey Scale**P< .05, **P<.01, *** P<.001****#approaching significance****Discussion**

The study was aimed to examine sexting and risky sexual behaviour among the emerging A female senior secondary school student in Nsukka Urban Area in Enugu State. Similar to what was found among college students in the western countries (e.g., Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Drouin et al., 2013; Henderson & Morgan, 2011), The female students in Nsukka Urban Area engaged in sexting behaviours, and several of them sent sexts to their boyfriends in order to flirt, have fun or to initiate physical sexual activity. Results suggest that sexting is common among young emerging adults and there is a strong link between sexting and risky sexual behaviour in line with (Gorden-Messer, Bauermeister, Cyrodzinski & Zimmerman, 2013), research report on sexting and sexual behaviour. In this study, it was observed that many female students who have access to internet, smart phones do sexts more than those who do not have.

The current study found out that a good number of students who participated in sexting had been sexually active and were more engaged in online activities than those who did not sext. The results suggest that students use social media and internet as a way to find and maintain romantic relationship. The positive relationship between social media sexting and number of physically intimate partners, were linked to risky sexual activity in support of the findings by Benotsch et al; (2013) and Crimmines & Seigfried-Spellar (2014), that confirmed a strong relationship between sexting and unprotected sex. Based on the regression findings, it appears that it is not only sexting that is linked with risky sexual behaviours, but more general usage of social media network. This is in consistent with previous research report, stating that sexual aspects of mobile technology are on the rise (Benotsch, Snipes, Martin & Rill, 2013), this is associated with an increase in the frequency of sexting and the increase in the number of sexual partners. Similar to findings by Benotsch et al., (2013), multiple sexual partners make young people probably more likely to receive and send sexts more often than having only one or no sexual partner. Future research is warranted to observe potential links between social media, sexting, casual sexual activity and adverse sexual health challenges, such as unintended pregnancies and STIs. Many studies have empirical evidences suggesting casual sex puts emerging adult's health at risk (Johnason, Li, & Richards, 2011; Lehmiller, Vanderdrift, & Kelly, 2014; Parl, McManus, & Hayes 2000); although a knowledge gap still exists linking online social media behaviours with negative sexual health consequences through sexting and risky sexual behaviours.

Conclusion

The practice of sexting, the sending or receiving sexually suggestive text messages, photos or videos via cell phone has not been studied extensively. In spite of the need for more research, the results of this study suggest that sexting is a common form of social

media communication among adolescents. The results also shown that sexually active students are more likely to engage in sending sexts than sexually non-active students. This suggest that frequent sexting is associated with risky sexual behaviours, which makes sexting an important topic to be discussed in public health care and sex education. Awareness on risk associated with sexting should be created among emerging adolescent youth. Sex and digital education for young people must be encourage to assist them to develop skills and competencies of protecting their privacy and love life with their partners.

In addition, sexting as a risky behaviour could make young people vulnerable to STDs including HIV infection, unwanted pregnancy, abortion etc, which could pose a serious reproductive health challenges in the future. Empowering young adults to protect their sexual intimacy from online partners will lead to the protection of their sexual life through practice of safe sex. Parents, teachers, students' counselors, and health care providers should discuss the topic sexting, when discussing sexual and safer sex with young adults, especially the female gender to be aware of the risk associated with sexting and its correlated consequences.

Limitations

The current study encountered some limitations, which include homogenous nature of the participants' characteristics (being female senior secondary school students), in the public school. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other adolescent youths in Enugu State. Secondly, based on the self-report survey questionnaire used in gathering data, the privacy and sensitive nature of research topic (i.e, participants' sexuality and related behaviours), the participants may have had under or over-reported their engagement in sexting and risky sexual behaviour.

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