

The Influence of Social Media on the Prevalence of Sexual Harassment among Teenagers: A Case Study of Secondary Schools in Kandara Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Social media use by teenagers in secondary schools is on the increase with more and more students accessing face book, twitter, You-tube, email and other social sites. Whereas students use such social networking positively, the amount of time spent on the sites that consume academic time has resulted to alarming poor performance which research has associated with lack of adequate revision time, inadequate sleep amounting to poor concentration, and truancy in schools. Sexual harassment is on the increase, defiant sexual behaviors which include: lesbianism, homosexuality, multiple sexual partners and rapes amongst the students are on the increase due to sharing of pornographic images. Research has reported online sex where teenagers engage in sex with their partners on the screens through fantasy. Descriptive case study design was used to investigate from the respondents how their social media use has led to sexual harassment and consequently poor grades. This lowers a country's production due to under skilled workers and unemployment heightening insecurity. The study was to establish how the respondents' engagement in sexual immorality had been modeled by social media by their being primary or secondary consumers of the various sites. Simple random sampling was used in selection of 13 schools and a sample size of 320 respondents based on the school population. Social Norms Theory was used as the theoretical framework to explain the variables used in the research. Recommendations to parents, teachers and the Ministry of Education were provided as a call to all to reinforce useful utilization of social media by the teenagers and appropriate measures to curb sexual harassment in schools.

1.1 Background information

The social networking sites such as Twitter and Face book have become a raging craze for everyone nowadays. While media use is an integral part of the daily life of adolescents, there are a number of risks associated with social media use, specifically, negative effects on mental health, cyber bullying, texting/sexting, dangers of sexual solicitation, and exposure to problematic and illegal content and privacy violations (Barak, 2005). The negative effects of these social networking sites outweigh the positive ones. These sites have caused some potential harm to society as students become their victims more often than anyone else. This is because of the reason that when they are studying or searching their course material online, they get attracted to these sites to kill the boredom in their study time, diverting their attention from their work, (Kowalski, 2011).

Electronic media do have specific qualities that make them especially well-suited to cyber-bullying: "Anonymity, instantaneousness, the ability to escalate quickly, and intrusiveness are features of the Internet and social media that can enable or increase bullying and sexual harassment. A lack of specific physical locale may also convince bullies or harassers that they are beyond the school's legal reach as they sometimes are (Campbell, 2005).

When it comes to teen dating violence and sexual abuse within dating relationships, technology can be an often used tool in dating abuse. Sexual harassment after a bitter breakup has always existed in the schools but now post-breakup sexual harassment has jumped the physical barrier and has become an epidemic on social media websites. This harassment goes by multiple names: cyber bullying, social sexual shaming, cyber gender harassment, and even terms as graphic and demeaning as "revenge porn". Teens get away with posting these images because it mostly happens at night since people don't want to get caught so they usually put it up at night and then they remove it afterwards (Lenhart, 2007). In California, approximately 23% of teens report being threatened by a peer and Cyber bullying appears similar in prevalence to offline bullying (Lenhart, 2007). Cyber bullying has been shown to cause higher levels of depression and anxiety for victims than traditional bullying and has also been connected to cases of youth suicide with teens known to engage in reading hurtful comments days before their suicide attempts (Kowalski, 2011). Those most at risk for cyber bullying include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allied youth while "Allied youth" refers to young people who openly support them. Teens in relationships may also receive nude pictures or be pressured to send nude pictures of themselves to a partner. Relationship abuse can also include sending nonstop text messages or posting cruel comments on a boyfriend's or girlfriend's Face book or MySpace page (Li, 2005). Social networking websites are all increasingly being used to monitor, threaten, and harass relationship partners. One in three teens in relationships has been text messaged up to 30 times an hour by a partner to find out where they are, what they are doing, or who they are with (Wallis, 2006). Sexual cyber bullying can have many harmful effects on a teenager. Many teens begin to miss school or skip classes so they do not have to face their peers or they are afraid for their safety. Their grades can begin to suffer. Some students are removed from school and enrolled in a new one but because the image is public the bullying often follows the student to the new school. Some may eventually drop out of school, never finishing their education. Students can develop depression, anxiety, drug addiction, eating disorders and/or other mental health issues which have negative effects on their social and academic lives (Harmon, 2004). This study sought to establish how teenagers are sexually harassed through social media and how this negatively affects their school life and adult lives.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Previous research by (Barak, 2005) has shown that the rampant use of electronic communication and specifically social media by students has increased sexual harassment worldwide. In Canada, schools have reported their experiences of cyber harassment. In a research of 432 students from grades 7-9, 43.5% accessed explicit materials and 21% of this had suffered sexual harassment several times, Dooley & Hearn & Treyvaud (2009).

A student experiencing sexual harassment may stop doing their school work and taking part in school-related activities. They may skip, drop classes, or they may drop out of school entirely. Studies have shown increased sexually defiant behaviors such as homosexuality, lesbianism, premarital sex and rapes by minors. It is no wonder then that teenage abortions, use of birth contraceptives by minors are on rise (Barak, 2005). Some students may abuse drugs and/or alcohol to cope. In extreme cases, students may think about or even attempt suicide.

Students spending study time in social media, engaging in sexual solicitation, viewing pornography, texting sexual messages become victims of sexual harassment. The consequences should worry any nation which aspires to overcome poverty. The students' careers are ruined because of the poor grades they attain as a result of compromising their school work. The nation increases under qualified or substandard human resources translating to low national production consequently poverty which Kenya seeks to fight out in its vision 2030 making it an unfeasible venture. Under skilled and hence unemployed citizens engage in crime; mugging, worsening an already compromised security. A nation without morals with a sexually immoral young generation can only pave way for higher prevalence of the HIV virus; the worst grave results being population decrease tangled with low production, (Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later, 2006).

The question as to what the parents, teachers and the Ministry of Education in Kenya have done to avert this trend despite research findings on the dangers of social media, lay the researcher's background to establish that the rise in sexual harassment in schools, its short and long term effects on the teenagers is a critical menace propagated greatly by social media. The purpose of the study was to determine the use of social media among the secondary school students in Kandara sub-county and how this increases sexual harassment amongst the students.

2.2.4 Theoretical framework

Sexual harassment refers to unwanted sexual conduct (MacKinnon, 1979). In the school setting, it includes unwanted sexual behavior that interferes with a student's educational opportunities. It can include making verbal or written comments, making gestures, displaying pictures or images, using physical coercion, or any combination of these actions. It can take place in person or through electronic means such as text messages and social media. Posting or sharing pornography, sexual pictures or cartoons, sexually explicit graffiti, or other sexual images (including online), making sexual jokes and bragging about sexual prowess are also part of sexual harassment. Bullying based on sex or gender, spreading sexual rumors or gossip (including online) all are included (Mackinnon, 1979).

Sexual harassment as an unwanted sexual behavior interferes with a student's right to receive an equal education. Sexual assault, rape, dating violence, and other forms of sexual violence are considered extreme forms of sexual harassment and are subject to criminal prosecution, (Kowalski, 2011).

Previous research (Gasser et al, 2010) indicates that cyber bullying is rarely pre-meditated, in many cases it is done impulsively and not planned out like in traditional bullying where the bully pre-meditates the next attack. Unlike traditional bullying it doesn't involve face to face interaction. Teens can become desensitized to a computer screen, and say or do things they wouldn't do to a person's face as they can't see the person's reaction to what they post or text they may not know if they've gone too far. *Therefore, we may conclude that cyber bullying has the potential for far more harm than traditional, in-person bullying* ((Gasser et al, 2010). According to the Social Norms Theory adolescents will tend to match their own behaviors to what they perceive to be the norm among their peers. Since adolescents, like adults, tend to overestimate unhealthy behaviors and underestimate protective behaviors, they may tend to be negatively influenced by their misperceptions of the behavioral norms and engage in risky activities. Through social media, students are lured into sexual activities to fit into what they watch and read as they get carried away by what they think everybody else is doing and they need to move with the current (Gross 2004).

2.2.5 Conceptual framework



In this study it was expected that the more sexual texts and solicitation are shared in the social sites, the higher the prevalence of sexual harassment.

2.2.3.2 Sexting and sexual solicitation

Sexting entails the sending of nude, partially nude or sexually suggestive images or text typically sent from one cell phone to another; however computers may also be used. While so-called sexting can occur between adults, it is most problematic when it involves minors as it can result in not only public embarrassment, but it may also have serious legal implications (Barak, 2005).

Camera-enabled cell phones and the popularity of texting have made the sending of sex messages a common activity for some teens. There are a number of reasons that explain why this occurs. Often, teenagers get involved in sexting as a result of peer pressure or a need to fit in. A boyfriend or girlfriend may ask for images to be sent, or in some cases the teen may send the images without prompting or encouragement. In other cases, a teen may send a picture as a prank or to get the attention of person that they are attracted to. Statistics show that approximately 20 percent of teens between the ages of 13 and 19 have sent nude images of themselves to others. Between 67 and 71 of teens percent have sent them to a boyfriend or girlfriend. Roughly 38 to 39 percent of teens have received or seen nude texts of other teens. These images were either sent to them directly or shared by someone else. One out of ten sexting senders have sent sexting messages or images to someone they did not know directly or knew only online (Internet Watch Foundation Annual Report, 2008).

Mitchell et al (2001, cited in Barak, 2005), who conducted a survey of American teenagers found that 19% of these youths (mostly older girls) had experienced at least one sexual solicitation online in the preceding year. Overall, boys aged 13 and 14 living in rural areas are the most likely of their age group to access pornography (Thompson, 2007). Forty-two percent of Internet users aged 10 to 17 surveyed said they had seen online pornography in a recent 12-month span. Of those, 66 percent said they did not want to view the images and had not sought them out. The results from a telephone survey of 1,500 Internet users aged

10 to 17 conducted in 2005, with their parents' consent in (Wolak, Janis, et al. 2007); most kids who reported unwanted exposure were aged 13 to 17. Still, sizable numbers of 10- and 11-year-olds also had unwanted exposure. More than one-third of 16- and 17-year-old boys surveyed said they had intentionally visited X-rated sites in the past year. Among girls the same age, 8 percent had done so. Overall, 34 percent had unwanted exposure to online pornography, up from 25 percent in a similar survey conducted in 1999 and 2000. (Wolak, Janis, et al. 2007).

2.2.3.3 Prevalence of sexual harassment

As a result of exposure to sex texts the teenager in the images can end up ostracized by their peers, humiliated and even threatened. What many teens don't take into account is that a sex text can swiftly spread beyond the person that it was intended for. Once an image is sent, there are no guarantees that the person who received it will keep it private or even delete it. In some cases, the recipient may forward the images to others on his or her contact list or the images may end up on the Internet. Once an image is on the Internet, it can remain there for the indefinite future and become available for anyone to view. This can cause problems in school, within the family, and it may even result in depression. Sexting can also continue to negatively impact a person beyond their high school years. Images online can follow a person into college or they may be seen by future employers, potential relationships and even a person's future children may eventually come across them (Dempsey et al, 2009).

2.3 Critique of the existing literature

In a study by Cradle (2010), 53% of the children (respondents) put false information. This is a major challenge of sexual related research being too sensitive is prone to false information and especially from minors who may fear consequences e.g. punishment from adults if discovered or harassment by peers if they report on them. The studies available have generalized sex texts on social media as sexual harassment. New measures that allow researchers to accurately assess the amount of sexual content that youth are exposed to (or create) as a consequence of using new media. These measures should cover all aspects of content; for example, they will need to assess messages posted, chatting on the site, groups joined, and friends displayed, as well as a profile's text, photos, and videos. They may also need to account for similar content accessed or created on different platforms (e.g., video viewed on television versus a cell phone) and assess multitasking (whatever the youth might also be doing at the time the content is consumed, e.g., homework, talking to friends).

3.1 Research Design

The study employed the descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of social media on the prevalence of sexual harassment of secondary students. Descriptive survey designs are used in preliminary and exploratory studies to allow researchers to gather information, summarize, present and interpret it for the purpose of clarification, Orodho (2002). Kerlinger(1973) preferred ex-post facto design to other designs in investigation of education problems. The descriptive survey research design was suited to the study because it allowed the researcher to study the state of sexual harassment in the schools without manipulating variables.

In this study the population comprised all 56 schools in Kandara sub-county. Gay (1992) recommends a minimum sample of 20% and as such, the researcher narrowed the study to an accessible population which comprised of 13 secondary schools stratified into four categories: single boys only, single girls, mixed day and mixed boarding-gender. In each school, the stratified random sampling technique was used to select the students based on

the school population and from each class the simple random sampling was used to select the students.

The main tool of data collection for this study was the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of a list of questions relating to the objectives and research questions of the study. They were administered directly to the respondents and collected on the same day. Before the actual research, the questionnaire was piloted in similar schools outside Kandara sub-county. After all the data was collected, data cleaning was done in order to determine inaccurate, incomplete, or unreasonable data. After data cleaning, the data was coded and entered in the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data was analyzed by frequency tables and percentages. Qualitative data was analyzed qualitatively using content analysis based on analysis of meanings and implications emanating from respondent information and comparing responses to documented data on the influence of social media on sexual harassment and presented thematically in line with the objectives of the study.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

4.3.2 Various forms of sexual harassment that students experience through social media.

The findings of the various forms of sexual harassment that students experience through social media which mostly take the forms of sexual texting and solicitation are illustrated in the table below in terms of how often they are accessed and how this leads to sexual harassment and sex encounter.

Table 4: Frequency of sex messages are shown on the table below

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Once	61	19.06
Few times	90	28.13
Many times	67	20.94
Uncountable times	102	31.88

In table 4 respondents accessed sex messages where 31.88% accessed uncountable times, 20.94% many times which adds up to over 50% teenagers exposed heavily to sex texts. Few times exposure was at 28.13% whereas 19.06% accessed once. Every respondent had therefore been exposed to sex messages meaning all the respondents were possible victims or perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Table 5: Showing correlation between sex favors and sex will

Correlations^a

		Sexwill	Sexfavor
Sex will	Pearson Correlation	1	.638
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.181
Sex favor	Pearson Correlation	.638	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.181	

The Pearson correlation shows that there is a high relationship between sexual favors and the willingness to engage in sex at 0.181; higher than $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level (more than 95% confident of the relationship). Where sex favors through sex text messages and solicitations were applied the respondents mostly ended up giving into sex or sexual fantasy. This is an indication that the teenagers are enticed into sex from what they get exposed to in the social sites.

4.3.3 Prevalence of sexual harassment**Table 6: Showing sex texts senders either as adults or teenagers**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Very true	149	46.6
True	78	24.4
Untrue	54	16.82
Very untrue	39	12.18

From the above table it shows that 71% (46.6 + 24.4) of the sex texts are sent by teenagers. This indicates that teenagers are mostly their own harassers and only 30% are harassed by adults. This would make the harassment appear as part of their growing up and social interaction with peers heightening the vice. It would explain why the vice is rarely reported as many of the victims may find it hard to tell out their peers or they may take in the perpetrators as their lovers.

Table 8: Showing issues to be addressed to curb pornographic materials sharing among teenagers through social media

Alternatives/Responses	strongly agree	Agree	neither agree/disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
Ease access to the site	56	29	5	8	20
A sense of belonging	15	23	10	21	5
Lack of guidance on the dangerous materials	46	17	3	16	7
Parents and teachers ignorance	30	23	6	12	7

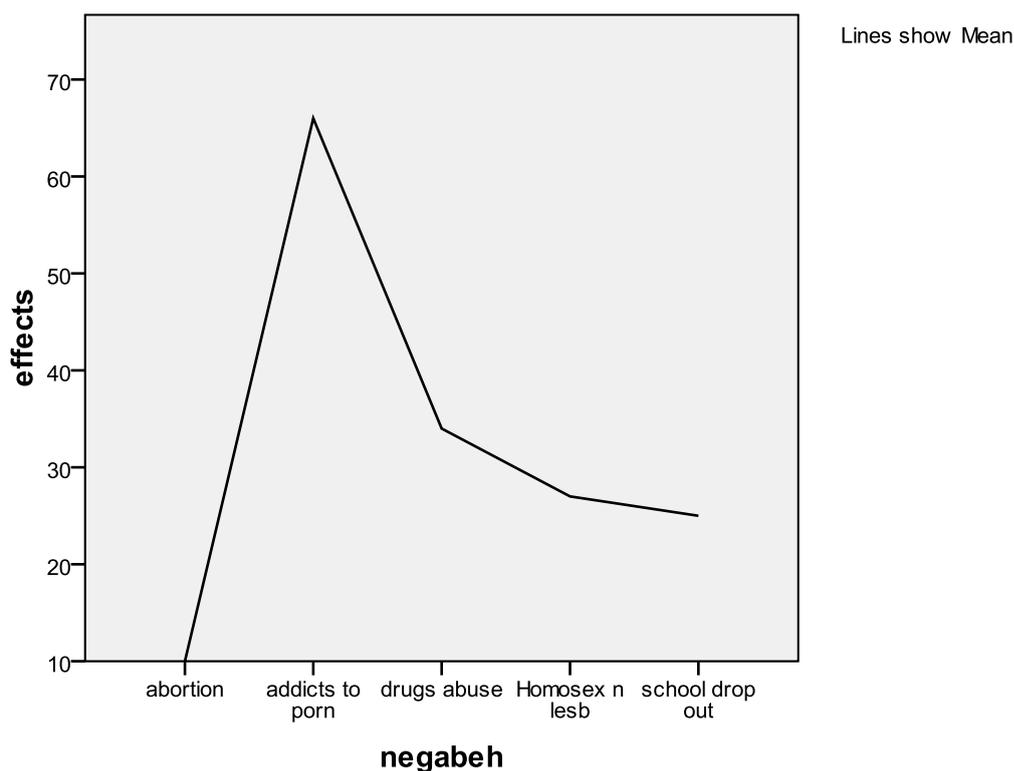
Table 8 shows that 56 of the respondents have easy access to social sites making them prone to sexual harassment which is sent without their consent to their accounts. 15 share pornographic texts as a sense of belonging; to identify with others. 46 lack guidance on the dangers of pornographic texts; they are simply not aware they are harmful. 30 blame parents and teachers for not being aware of the sexual materials access on social sites and this can be attributed to digital gap/awareness and lack of parental control.

Table 9: Showing frequency of students' reporting to teachers and parents of sexual harassment encounter

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly agree	61	19.06
Agree	28	8.75
Neither Agree or Disagree	15	4.69
Disagree	95	30
Strongly Disagree	120	37.5

Table 9 shows that 30% of the respondents disagree of reporting sexual harassment to parents and teachers as 37.5% strongly disagree. This implies most students chose to fall silent and they suffer secretly. 19.06% strongly agree that they report as 8.75% agree. Only 4.69% don't agree or disagree. It is therefore difficult to punish sexual harassment perpetrators since they are not normally reported so measures to curb the vice should focus on parental control and risk awareness of sexual harassment on a student's life as well as their future.

Figure 5: Showing negative behaviors resulting from sexual harassment exposure



Where negabeh = negative behaviour

Homosex n lesb= homosexual and lesbianism

Figure 5: shows addiction to pornography taking the highest toll as a negative behavior practised by the respondent after being exposed to sexual harassment. Drugs abuse takes the second toll while homosexuality and lesbianism would be rated third. School drop out and abortion rarely occur. Sexual harassment prevalence has thus yielded these vices further distracting these students from their studies and this is reflected finally in their performance.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to find out the influence of social media on the prevalence of sexual harassment among teenagers. To be able to establish this relationship it was paramount to examine the forms in which sexual harassment occur online through sex texts and solicitations and the impact this has on the heightened sexual harassment in schools and consequent poor academic performance.

5.2.2 Forms of sexual harassment through social media

The study shows that most online or cyber bullying occurs in the form of sexual texting and sexual solicitation. The significant correlation between sexual favors and willingness to engage in sex shows that teenagers were using social sites for sex solicitation and some teenagers fall prey to this by either fantasizing sex or engaging in sex with people they meet offline. It is shocking just how many students are hooked to pornography which results to sex fantasizing long after sharing the sex texts and consequently poor concentration in class.

5.2.3 Prevalence of sexual harassment

Whereas schools might be doing well to fight physical bullying through tough discipline measures on such perpetrators, online bullying is becoming a harder to deal with crime. The study shows that most students don't report online sexual harassment. This could be

explained by the anonymity one may simply not know who sent a sex text if it is circulating in Face book or one may fear more damage of character on the social site as a revenge by the one reported. Sexual solicitation is not forced so if one is lured to it and they give in then they cannot report. The findings indicate that online sexual harassment is not slowly but fast overtaking face to face harassment in schools.

5.4 Conclusions

The results of this study revealed that online sexual harassment has become a big challenge facing secondary schools in Kandara sub-county. Technological advancement which has helped students with course work material has on the other hand paved way for misuse of social sites by students falling into the trap of victims or perpetrators of sexual harassment mainly through sexual texting and sexual solicitation. This has impacted negatively on students' performance pushing down the quality of education and consequently quality of life in the society due to under skilled human resources arising from poor grades.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the discussion of the findings, the researcher made various recommendations to address the influence of social media on the prevalence of sexual harassment amongst teenagers.

1. All the stakeholders have to play an active role in curbing sexual harassment in schools. The researcher recommends that the stakeholders should come up with strong guidance on dangers of sex texts sharing and consequent sexual harassment.
2. Heavy penalty of the offenders could also send a warning to potential offenders. This would be in line with the sexual harassment policy already in place by the Ministry of Education and would help implement it in the schools more effectively.
3. Parents should be sensitized through counseling forums in schools on how to be technologically updated so as to be aware of just what their children are capable of accessing on social media.

According to the researcher based on the gaps identified in the research further research should be conducted to investigate the actual causes of harmful behaviors such as online sexual harassment and the risk factors thereof and not just the forms they take. This will reduce the occurrence of the vice rather than fighting the behavior which has been quite difficult.

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