

Prevalence and Impact of Sexting among Undergraduate Students in University of Port Harcourt

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Abstract

The study investigated prevalence and impact of sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt. The design for this study was descriptive survey research design. The population and sample size of 3,627 and 600 undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, Humanities, Agricultural Sciences, Social Sciences, clinical sciences and management sciences who filled the questionnaires were used for the study. The Sexting Behaviour Scale (SBS), a Demographic Inventory (DI) and an academic performance record were used for data collection. The reliability of Sexting Behaviour Scale (SBS) was 0.51. Five research questions and one null hypothesis were formulated to guide this study. The data collected were answered with simple percentage, mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the Hypothesis was analyzed with one sample t-test. From the analyses, sexting behaviour is prevalent among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt. Females engage more in sexting than males, Faculty of humanities indulge more on sexting behaviour than the other faculties under study, The Year 2 students indulge more in sexting than the other levels of students and Sexting has a significant impact on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on the study area. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that ‘sexting and its dangers’ should be introduced as a course to newly admitted students.

Introduction

The problem of sexting has become an issue of great concern to parents, healthcare professionals, educators, law enforcement agencies and the society at large. The origin of sexting can be traced as far back as in the 21st century to mean a hybrid by collapsing the term ‘sex’ and ‘texting’ to describe a new form of technology motivated behaviour which involves the exchange of nude messages via short message system (SMS), video chats, WhatsApp, Instagram and other social networking sites. Arthur (2019) defined sexting as the digital recording of nude or sexually suggestive or explicit images and their distribution by mobile phone messaging or through social networking platforms. Sexting is the unlawful exchange of nude pictures of oneself or others through the use of social media applications, which has a negative impact on the mental health of the youths who engage in it. The term sexting is universally accepted but most undergraduate students prefer using the phrase, naked selfies, nudies and banana pics to engage in the practice of sexting and its problematic nature (Barroso et, al. 2022). Sexting can be described as a range of activities which may be motivated by sexual pleasure (Abraham, 2015). He further posited that these applications are used for

personal expression, self-discovery and adaptation of behaviours such as sexting which has become common recently among these generation of students.

The evolution of technology in Nigeria has made undergraduate students to have access to internet enabling devices which has exposed them to different websites that are harmful to their moral development. The use of internet enabling devices such as smartphones, tablets and social communication sites such as face book, twitter, Instagram, skype, instant messaging has provided them with high level of comfort and lack of restraint to sexual contents. In fact, these applications provide the youths with new avenues to explore their sexuality. As a result, most youths misuse these applications to the detriment of their physiological and psychological wellbeing. Personal encounter with a large number of undergraduate students shows that they indulge in the act of sexting even during lectures. Most of them sit at the back or tail end of the classroom to exchange pictures of themselves when taking their bath, snapshots of their private parts, romancing and engaging in sexual activities with another, while they are in class.

The prevalence of sexting among undergraduate students can be associated with the availability of cheap smart phones, and accessibility to unrestricted websites. These websites give room for undergraduates to create, distribute and exchange feedbacks on sex related contents and engage in real time sexual intercourse with other people almost everywhere (Doyle et, al. 2021). Most parents and lecturers may have down played this act to be a simple exchange of photographs among friends but sexting has the potentials of digital performance and retention in the long-term memory of its users. This in turn poses a threat to the mental health of its users in the nearest future. Marcotte et, al (2021) opined that sexting causes health risky behaviours and young people who engage in it, are exposed to risky physical activities so as to satisfy their aroused desires. These students are prone to engage in rape and sexual assaults in other to fulfil their sexual desires. Indulgence in sexting can lead to risky sexual behaviours like musturbation, sexual assault, sexual promiscuity, pornographic addiction, having unprotected sex and multiple sex partners.

Judge and Sossong (2019) stated that young people who engage in sexting were reported to be more likely to engage in physical sex so as to satisfy the fulfilment of the aroused desires shortly after exchanging sexual messages with their sexual partner. Globally, undergraduate students have fast adopted the social media platforms for socialising using the new technology of camera enabled devices because of its capacity to support peer interaction and friendship combined with its potential for connectivity (Pacheco and Melhuishi, 2017). Researches carried out on sexting as a behaviour problem shows that it affects the academic performance of

undergraduate students especially in University of Port Harcourt. These students are addicted to their phones and ear pieces. They pay little or no attention when lectures are going on. They hardly devote time for their studies and at the release of the examination time table, they over-read and end with a poor grade or the F-grade. Learned scholars have reported that a huge cause of the F-grades is attributed to the lecture methods used in teaching undergraduate students and these students do not have a history of failure in their primary and secondary school level; with little or no attention paid on the invention and misuse of the technological devices used by undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt. They also went further to ask if the F-grade also known as the failure grade is necessary in tertiary institutions. It is against these background that the researcher wishes to investigate the prevalence and impact of sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.

Statement of the Problem

Sexting is a behaviour problem that is relatively new and it is commonly noticed among undergraduate students in the society due to their heightened emotions and availability of cheap internet devices. Sex which is an aspect of sexting is a physiological need of mankind, its indulgence by unmarried persons is culturally and morally unacceptable in our society today because of its resultant effect. Undergraduate students who indulge in sexting complain of early exposure to sex, poor academic performance, taking of sex enhancing drugs, lack of sexual satisfaction, masturbation, sexual promiscuity and wrong sexual orientation, which has in turn resulted to the increased spread of sexually transmitted diseases and infections, rape, increased rate of abortion, school dropout and damage to the public health of the undergraduate students. It is based on the above premise that the study examined the prevalence and impact of sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the prevalence and impact of sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt. However, the following specific objectives guided the study;

1. To investigate the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.
2. To examine the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on their gender.
3. To determine the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on their faculty of study.

4. To determine the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on their level of study.
5. To ascertain the impact of Sexting on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered to obtain the results of the study;

1. What is the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt?
2. What is the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on their gender?
3. What is the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on their faculty of study?
4. What is the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on their level of study?
5. What is the impact of Sexting on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt?

Hypothesis

The **null** hypothesis which were tested at 0.05 level of significance were formulated to guide this study,

1. Sexting does not significantly positive impact on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was used in this study. The population of this research study comprised of both male and female undergraduate students in 6 faculties of University of Port Harcourt. As at the time of the study, there were 3,627 undergraduate students who had smart phones in Faculty of Education, Humanities, Agricultural Sciences, Social Sciences, clinical sciences and management sciences who filled the questionnaires. The target sample size of 600 undergraduate students who use smart phones were used for the study. The probability and non-probability sampling methods were adopted. The Taro Yamene's formula for determination of sample size was applied to estimate the minimum sample size to be used. The simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the faculties of study. Thereafter, the researcher used non-proportional stratified random sampling method to divide the sample size into strata based on gender and their faculties of study. 188 males who indulge in sexting

were gotten from the various faculties under study faculty and 412 females were gotten from the 6 faculties. Lastly, the purposive sampling method was used to draw the respondents from the various stratum.

Two non-cognitive instruments and one cognitive instrument were used to collect data for the study. They include, the Sexting Behaviour Scale (SBS), a Demographic Inventory (DI) and academic performance record consisting of the students CGPA. Sexting Behaviour Scale (SBS) was self-developed and it consisted of 10 items in a 4-point likert scale format of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Participants who scored 60 and above were regarded as being high in the sexting behaviour problem while those below 60 are regarded as being low/not indulge in sexting. The Demographic Inventory (DI) consisted of the gender and faculty of study, while the students who engage in sexting were asked to provide certified copy of their CGPA at each level.

The face validity of the instruments were determined through expert judgement and multivariate statistical methods. Some copies of the preliminary versions of the instruments were given to the project supervisor and two other experts in the department of Educational Psychology Guidance and Counselling University of Port Harcourt for proper scrutiny. After making modifications and ascertaining the suitability of the items to the respondents, their suggestions and corrections were being reflected in the final version of the instruments. Content and construct validity of the instruments was established using the two phase approach. The instrument with additional information such as research topic, statement of problem, purpose of study, specific objectives, research questions and hypothesis were given to the same three experts in the department of educational psychology, G&C. They were asked to affirm the degree of relevance of each item of the instrument while drawing their attention to the research questions and hypothesis. Their criticism and corrections were considered in structuring the final draft.

To establish the reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach alpha method of internal consistency was used to estimate the internal consistency of the instrument. The Sexting Behaviour Scale (SBS) was pilot tested on a sample of 20 respondents, using the Cronbach alpha method of internal consistency to estimate the internal consistency and it gave a reliability index of 0.51. This indicated that the items in the scales have internal consistency.

The instruments were administered to entire group of undergraduate students before and after lectures in University of Port Harcourt who were able to provide their CGPA. The items were filled and returned at the spot to the researcher and their research assistants. The 600 properly

filled questionnaires of undergraduate students who were able to provide their CGPA. were analysed for the study.

The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics of simple percentage (%) to answer the research questions 1 to 3, research question 4 was answered with mean and standard deviation. One sample t-test was used to test hypotheses 1.

Results and Discussion

Research Question Two: What is the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt?

Table 1: Simple percentage showing the Prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students

Prevalence Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
High	534	89.0	89%	89.0
Low	66	11.0	11%	100.0
Total	600	100.0	100.0	

From the above table, it shows that sexting as a behaviour problem exist among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt. Using the above table, 534 undergraduate students engage in sexting which indicated 89% of undergraduate students, while 66 undergraduate students do not indulge in sexting/they are not addicted to it but one way or the other have indulged in sexting in the past which showed 31% of undergraduate students. The findings showed that the practice of sexting behaviour problem is prevalent among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.

Research Question Two: What is the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on their gender?

Table 2: Simple percentage showing the Prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students based on Gender

GENDER Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
Female	412	68.7	69%	68.7
Male	188	31.3	31%	100.0
Total	600	100.0	100.0	

From the Table 2 above, it shows that sexting as a behaviour problem exist among undergraduate students in university of Port Harcourt and the females indulge in it based on the researcher’s study area. Using the above table, 412 females engage in sexting which indicated 69% of undergraduate students, while 188 of male students indulge in sexting which showed 31% of undergraduate males who indulge in sexting. The findings showed that female undergraduate students practice the habit of sexting more than the males based on the researcher’s area of study.

Research Question Three: What is the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on their faculty of study?

Table 3: Simple percentage showing the Prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students based on their Faculty of Study

Faculty of Study	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Education	169	28.2	28.2	28.2
Humanities	230	38.3	38.3	66.5
Social Sciences	43	7.2	7.2	73.7
Agricultural Sciences	35	5.8	6	79.5
Clinical Sciences	63	10.5	11	90.0
Management Sciences	60	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	600	100.0	100.0	

From table 3, it shows that sexting as a behaviour problem exist among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt and it is commonly practiced in the faculty of Humanities, Education, Clinical Sciences, Management Sciences, Social Sciences and Agricultural Sciences respectively based on the researcher’s study area. Using the above table, faculty of Humanities had 230 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 38%, Education had 169 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 28%, Clinical Sciences had 63 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 11%, Management Sciences had 60 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 10%, Social Sciences had 43 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 7% and Agricultural Sciences had 35 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 38% who indulge in sexting respectively. The findings showed that undergraduate students in

faculty of humanities practice the habit of sexting more, followed by faculty of education, Clinical Sciences, Management Sciences, Social Sciences and Agricultural Sciences respectively the researcher's area of study.

Research Question Four: What is the prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on their level of study?

Table 4: Simple percentage showing the Prevalence of Sexting among undergraduate students based on their level of study

Level of Study	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
YEAR 1	242	40.3	40.3	40.3
YEAR 2	280	46.7	47	87.0
YEAR 3	43	7.2	7.2	94.2
YEAR 4	35	5.8	6	100.0
Total	600	100.0	100.0	

From table 4 above, it shows that sexting as a behaviour problem exist among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt and it is commonly practiced among the Year 2 students, Year 1 students, Year 3 students and Year 4 students respectively based on the researcher's study area. Using the above table, Year 2 students were 280 with a valid percentage of 47%, Year 1 students were 242 with a valid percentage of 40%, Year 3 students were 43 with a valid percentage of 7% and Year 4 students were 35 with a valid percentage of 6% who indulge in sexting respectively. The findings showed that Year 2 students, Year 1 students, Year 3 students and Year 4 respectively indulge in sexting based on the researcher's area of study.

Research Question Five: What is the impact of Sexting on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt?

Table 5: Mean and Standard showing the impact of Sexting on the academic performance of undergraduate students

Impact of Sexting	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Mean				
Negative	501	2.6959	.83926	.03750
CGPA Positive	99	2.6875	.80728	.08114

From table 5, it shows that sexting as a behaviour problem exist among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt and it has a negative impact on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt. 501 and 99 participants said that sexting has a Negative and positive impact respectively on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt. A mean score of 2.6959 Standard deviation of .83926 for a negative impact. Positive impact had a mean score of 2.6875 and a Standard deviation of .80728.

Hypothesis One: Sexting does not significantly impact positively on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.

Table 6: Independent sample z-test showing the impact of sexting on the academic performance of undergraduate students

	Mean difference	F	z	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
CGPA Equal variances assumed	.06243	.168	.574	598	.566
Equal variances not assumed	.06243		.566	81.313	.573

Table 6 shows that sexting significantly impact on the academic performance of students that indulge in it. This was illustrated with a mean difference of .06243 for Equal variances assumed and Equal variances not assumed. When these mean scores were subjected to z-test, it was found that a calculated z-values of .574 and .566 was obtained at df of 598. Its calculated t-value was not significant at .573 levels which is higher than the chosen .05 level of probability.

Thus, an insignificant negative impact was obtained. The **null** hypothesis of no significant positive impact was accepted. This is an indication that sexting has no positive impact on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.

Summary of Findings

The following are the findings of this study:

1. There is a high prevalence of sexting behaviour among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.
2. Both male and female gender indulge in sexting behaviour based on the faculties under study in University of Port Harcourt; also, the female gender indulges in the stated behaviour more than their male counterparts.
3. Undergraduate students in the faculty of Humanities in the University of Port Harcourt indulge in sexting more than any other students in the faculties under study. This is followed by the faculty of Education, Clinical Sciences, Management Sciences and Agriculture respectively in the University of Port Harcourt.
4. Students in Year 2 indulge in sexting behaviour more than any other students based on the faculties under study. This is followed by students in Year 1, Year 3 and Year 4 respectively.
5. Sexting as a behaviour problem has a significant impact on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study was presented based on the research questions using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation and hypothesis was tested using z-test as its statistical tools.

1. Prevalence of Sexting on undergraduate students based on their gender

In order to determine the prevalence of gender on sexting behaviour among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt, the simple percentage was performed in relation to research question 1 as stated in the study. The result indicated that female gender indulges in the stated behaviour more than their male counterparts This is indicated by 69% in females as against 31% in their male counterparts. The result is not in agreement with the work of Audrey, Alexa, Michelle, Melina and Temcheff (2024) who investigated the Impact of Conduct problems and sexting: Gender differences. It was discovered that male adolescents with conduct problem were more likely to practice sexting than female adolescents. The result also revealed that females with childhood and adolescent problems indulge in sexting. This result

is not surprising because males are easily influenced by peers and they want to do that which will make them feel among in the society, unlike their female counterparts. On the other hand, the difference in the research findings could be as a result of the different categories of respondents and setting.

2. Prevalence of Sexting based on their faculty of study

In order to determine the prevalence of faculty of study on sexting behaviour among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt, the simple percentage was performed in relation to research question 2 as stated in the study. The result indicated that faculty of Humanities had 230 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 38%, Education had 169 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 28%, Clinical Sciences had 63 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 11%, Management Sciences had 60 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 10%, Social Sciences had 43 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 7% and Agricultural Sciences had 35 undergraduate students that practice sexting which showed 38% who indulge in sexting respectively. There is no research work done on the faculty of study based on the investigation of the researcher.

3. Prevalence of Sexting on undergraduate students based on their level of study

In order to determine the prevalence of level of study on sexting behaviour among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt, the simple percentage was performed in relation to research question 3 as stated in the study. The result indicated that sexting is commonly practiced among the Year 2 students, Year 1 students, Year 3 students and Year 4 students respectively based on the researcher's study area. Using the above table, Year 2 students were 280 with a valid percentage of 47%, Year 1 students were 242 with a valid percentage of 40%, Year 3 students were 43 with a valid percentage of 7% and Year 4 students were 35 with a valid percentage of 6% who indulge in sexting respectively. This result is in agreement with the work of Strasberg, Ryan and Jordan (2024) who investigated Sexting by High School Students: An Exploratory and Descriptive Study. A sample size of 606 high school students was used for the study. Results shows that younger students indulge in sexting more than the older ones. This result is not surprising because it is believed that the higher the young students go, the tougher it becomes for them. Also, the younger students are not being occupied with much workload like project writing, seminar presentations etc.

4. Impact of sexting on the academic performance of undergraduate students

In determining the impact of sexting on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt, an N value of 600 and a mean difference 71.5150 and 2.6945 for sexting behaviour and the students CGPA. When these mean scores were subjected to one sample t-test, it was found that a calculated t-values of 147.723 and 79.195 was obtained at df of 599. Its calculated t-value was significant at .000 levels which is lower than the chosen .05 level of probability. Thus, a significant positive impact was obtained. This study is in line with the works of Nwaoboli, Abdul and Asemah (2023) who investigated Sexting behaviour among undergraduate students of some selected Universities in Edo State. This study adopted the survey research design. The findings of the study show that when students are distracted from academic activities like embarking on ASSU strike and SUG week, it is the major impact of sexting which affects their academic performance. The result of the present study is not surprising, because it is believed that academic is a jealous profession and ones a student is being distracted by sexting, it leads to poor academic performance.

Conclusion

The conclusions were drawn that Females engage more in sexting than males based on the area of study, Faculty of humanities indulge more on sexting behaviour than any other faculty of study based on the areas of study and the Year 2 students indulge more in sexting than the other levels of students based on the areas of study. Lastly, Sexting has a significant impact on the academic performance of undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt based on the study areas.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that ‘sexting and its dangers’ should be introduced as a course when the undergraduate students are newly admitted into the University and they should be educated about its dangers during their year 1 orientation programme. The University management should device a means on how to control the usage of smartphones during lecture hours, study areas and within the campus environment.

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