
SEXTING BEHAVIOR AMONG GEN. ALPHAS: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING THERAPY

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ABSTRACT

Sexting, a deviant and risky vice, is becoming prevalent among teens in Nairobi County primary schools due to technology advances of Gen. Alphas and peer pressure. This study aims to aid in exploration of the aspects of teenage involvement with explicit digital material, especially through the practice of sexting repercussions and its therapy. It will explore motivations that encourage this practice and the unintended exposure heavily influenced by the media.

KEYWORDS: sexting, internet, Gen. Alpha, depression, ICBT, CBT therapy.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there is a higher digital culture of using technologies to send private messages and more so smart phones and other media outlets. The evolution of technology has led to diverse impacts across different ages and more so the teens. Due to the secrecy of sexting behavior, high prevalence of internet, and intensive peer pressure, it is becoming hard to contain this vice in Nairobi schools due to high prevalence on media usage. The teens have many chances to send privatized messages to their peers. It is causing poor performances and low esteem to the students under investigation.

Sexting Causes

There are both intrinsic and extrinsic factors which trigger sexting. On peer culture, J Bryant notes that girls are introduced to the vice by boyfriends while boys are pushed by other exposed boys in most cases (Bryant, 2009, 46).

A major pathway has been identity crisis among the Gen. Alpha which in turn is 'increasing the frequency of sexting vice' (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). It is bringing with it 'mental health disorders and risky behaviors (Baumgartner et al., 2012).

Another major trigger of sexting behavior is the digital culture and availability of mobile phones (Smith, 2011). This has been the dominant avenue for the teens that are curious to explore themselves and the world around them.

Katarina Holla et al in their study note that 'as for children, the main motives for exposing oneself in the cyberspace are primarily related to drawing someone else's attention, as well as getting tangible things in return. The study also indicates sex-bullying as a major avenue to harass and humiliate others online (Holla, *JIR*).

Sensation or lust was reported too in that 'young people with higher sensation seeking tendencies are more likely to receive and/or to send sexts (SE Baumtager, D Bianchi, 2014).

Lohmann states further factors as infatuation, curiosity, peer pressure, and distraction as possible triggers (Lohmann, 2012). Further causes have been identified as identity formation, sexual exploration, attitudes towards sexting and subjective norms and relationship formation, including flirting (Burkett, 2015; Hudson & Fetro, 2015).

Impulsivity behaviors were noted by Habil Otanga and Hannah Aslam as causative triggers of sexting in their paper on impulsivity traits (Otanga, 2020).

Outcomes

Some negative outcomes of sexting are relationship between sexting, depression and stress (Klettke, Hallford et.al.,2019). Dake, Price, Maziarz & Ward proved too that being depressed, having contemplated or attempted suicide in the past year, or having been cyber or indirectly bullied were significantly correlated with sexting (Dake, 2012). The Australia Institute notes further outcomes as public humiliation, damaged reputations, and social ostracization (AI, 2002). According to Deborah Gordon et al in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* it leads to unhealthy impulsive behaviors, emotional blackmail and also weaponizing of girls in revenge porn (Gordon, *JAH* 52, 2013). This proves the negativity that comes from sexting which leads to addiction and impulsive sex.

The mental issues related to sexting which have received wide scholarship are depression, anxiety and stress (Chaudhary et al., 2017; Dake et al., 2012; Eugene, 2015; Frankel et al., 2018; Gámez-Guadix & de Santisteban, 2018; Kim et al., 2020; Klettke et al., 2018, 2019; Temple et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel et al., 2014; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014).

CBT/ICBT Therapy

Compulsive and impulsive sexual behaviors like sexting require Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. These two therapies mostly engage the teens in psycho-education on sex that provides key advisory information to the teens. Thomas Durham lists some of the compulsive behaviors like compulsive affairs, porn, voyeuristic club sex, and consensual sexting. The study suggests that the treatment is multimodal (Durham, NAADAC).

Doyle (Doyle et al, 2021) notes the psychological consequences (victimization, sexual bullying, mental health disorders, quality of life and emotional disturbances. Hence therapy must engage the psychological aspect of Gen. Alphas. Petros Galanis et al studied the vice and highlighted the descriptive statistics on self-esteem, depression, and stress using Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (cf. IJCS).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for sexting, self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress scales.

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum value	Maximum value
Sexting	1.7	0.8	1	3.5
Self-esteem	28.2	4.1	16	38
Depression	10.1	9.3	0	42
Anxiety	8.9	8.2	0	36
Stress	14.9	9.5	0	42

CBT Therapy

There is internet based CBT (ICBT) for Gen Alphas and teens undertaken by Gerhard Andersson et al. This will assist much in addressing the mental issues accompanying sexting vice. He cites three module 1-4 steps for treatment:

The first module consisted of psycho-education about IPV, mental health problems associated with IPV, and an introduction to ICBT. The second module focused on negative cognitions and their role in the etiology and maintenance of mental health problems. The third module

introduced exposure treatment (Andersson, II, Vol. 26, 2021).

The next modules were,

Similarly, modules four through eight in the depression track focused on psycho-education about depression and its effects, models of the development and maintenance of depression, behavioral activation, and cognitive restructuring. Module eight in both tracks consisted of treatment summary and formulation of a maintenance plan. A ninth module was administered following treatment completion, focusing on strategies to avoid setbacks and relapse (ibid).

CONCLUSION

The triggers and impacts of sexting have been discussed and proven as relevant in the context of the study. The ICBT, CBT therapy design needs to be implemented to assist the addicted teens and the ones at high risk of impulsive behaviors. The online induced therapy will be beneficial for the primary students under this study.

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