
**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE AND RISKY SEXUAL
BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KAJIADO COUNTY,
KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the relationship between social media exposure and risky sexual behaviour among secondary school students in Kajiado County, Kenya. A sample size of 2,584 participants, including 39 principals, 74 teacher counselors, and 2,471 students, was selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey design, with data collected through questionnaires administered to students, principals, and teacher counselors. Data analysis involved both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that 62.6% of students believed social media accessibility exposed adolescents to risky sexual behaviours, while only 9.4% reported having engaged in sexual intercourse. Additionally, 87% of students had attended intervention strategies on responsible social media use. The study concluded that there is significant exposure to sexual content on social media among secondary school students, and while most students are not engaging in sexual intercourse, some risky behaviours exist. Social media sexual content was associated with increased risky sexual behaviour, and schools are implementing various intervention strategies, though their effectiveness requires further evaluation. The research recommends that developing age-appropriate and culturally sensitive intervention strategies, strengthening parental guidance and involvement, implementing comprehensive sexuality education programs integrated with digital literacy, fostering collaborations between schools, parents, and community organizations, and regularly evaluating and adapting intervention strategies to address the evolving challenges of social media use among adolescents.

Keywords: *Social Media Exposure, Risky Sexual Behaviour, Secondary School Students*

1.0 THE BACKGROUND

The rapid growth of social media has profoundly influenced adolescent behaviour, especially in matters related to sexual health. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok provide spaces where adolescents can interact, share ideas, and access content that shapes their identities. However, these platforms also expose young people to sexually explicit content, which can influence risky sexual behaviour, including unprotected sex, multiple sexual partners, and early sexual initiation (Darteh, Dickson & Amu, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines risky sexual behaviour as activities that increase the likelihood of negative outcomes related to sexual health, such as sexually transmitted infection (STIs), HIV, and unintended pregnancies (WHO, 2012). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to these risks due to their developmental stage, which is characterized by exploration, sensation-seeking, and identity formation (Throuvala et al., 2019).

In Kenya, the situation is alarming, with reports showing an increase in teenage pregnancies and STIs among adolescents. The Ministry of Health (2019) reported over 2,800 AIDS-related deaths in young people aged 15-24 years. This rise in risky sexual behaviour is often attributed to the increasing use of social media, where adolescents are exposed to sexual content without adequate guidance on responsible use (Mutisya & Theuri, 2021). The rise of anti-social behaviour and risky sexual behaviour among secondary school students in Kajiado County has become a cause for concern for various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education (MOE), churches, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and parents. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the ministry of education has implemented comprehensive sexuality education programs, awareness campaigns, and peer education programs to address the issue. Despite interventions from the Ministry of Education through various channels, such as the District Education Office, school heads, parents, religious leaders, and non-governmental organizations, anti-social behaviour is still on the rise in Kajiado County, with over 30 percent of students engaging in risky sexual behaviour (Kiruhi, 2018). As use of social media expands there is increase of risky behaviours among the young people. In Kajiado County teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are on the upsurge.

According to Ugoji (2014), the new media ecology includes the Africa's youths especially those living in urban areas. What this ecosystem or environment has are learning opportunities but comes with certain dangers that might influence adolescent socio-sexual development. Magadi *et al.* (2021) stated that out of teenage sex in Kenya, 22 percent of the teenagers who have had sex had their first sexual practice at the age of 14-16. Although more men (69%) and women (72%), respectively, utilised this was due to teenagers and young adults' familiarity with a single sexual partner. According to Sanchez *et al.* (2013), adolescents consume media daily, but it can harm their mental health, lead to texting/sexting, sexual solicitation, expose them to content that is harmful and unlawful, as well as an invasion of privacy. Teenagers face comparable online and offline threats. The risk profile associated with various social media platforms relies on the danger, the adolescent's media use, and their psychological state. Importantly, hazardous teens typically participate in dangerous offline behaviour and may struggle in other areas of their lives.

Soy (2021) established that guidance and counseling services assist students in resolving societal, psychological, cultural, and academic issues resulting from the swift changes in the country's economy and society. While Guidance and Counseling is a readily available service in many affluent countries, its positive effects are not yet properly utilized in less developed and developing nations (Hackbarth, 2016). In certain nations, it is believed that career-guidance and counseling services (CGCS) services are a privilege that need to be primarily restricted to a select group of individuals. The professional ability of the teachers implementing these programs determines their efficacy. Teachers should be able to apply the skills and knowledge they learn in training to the classroom. Through the procedure, the trainees feel competent by learning how to recognize difficulties and find solutions through tutor arbitration. According to Sinengela (2016), there is a need for regular, systematic, short in-service training. This is especially true following changes to the goals and priorities for national development. Trainings and seminars, including pre-service and in-service programs, familiarize participants with the new curriculum and serve to prepare everyone involved in the guidance and counseling process.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a cross-sectional descriptive survey design to examine the relationship between social media exposure and risky sexual behaviour among secondary school students in Kajiado

County. A descriptive survey allows for the collection of data at a specific point in time, making it ideal for assessing the prevalence of certain behaviours and their correlates. The target population for this study included secondary school students, principals, and teacher counselors in Kajiado County. A sample size of 2,584 respondents was selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The sample included 39 principals, 74 teacher counselors, and 2,471 students from various public and private secondary schools. Data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires administered to students, principals, and teacher counselors. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions designed to assess the level of accessibility to social media, exposure to sexually explicit content, and engagement in risky sexual behaviours. The responses were measured using a Likert scale. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means to summarize the findings. Chi-square tests were used to establish the relationship between social media exposure and risky sexual behaviour. The results were presented in tables and figures to facilitate interpretation.

3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Demographic Information

This part includes demographic information of the secondary school's students the findings are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Students Demographic Information

Demographic Information	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male.	902	49.3
	Female.	927	50.7
Age	13-15. years.	597	49.6
	16-18. years	589	45.2
	over 19 years	643	5.2
School	Sub County.	435	28.8
	County.	449	29.5
	Extra County.	458	25.0
	National.	487	16.6
Class	Form 1.	455	24.9
	Form 2.	463	25.3
	Form 3.	468	25.6
	Form 4.	443	24.2

The demographic information in Table 1 indicates a balanced gender distribution among the respondents, with 49.3% male and 50.7% female. The majority of respondents are aged 13-18, with 49.6% in the 13-15 age range and 45.2% in the 16-18 age range, while only 5.2% are over 19. In terms of school type, most respondents attend County and Sub County schools, at 29.5% and 28.8%, respectively. Extra County schools represent 25.0%, and National schools have the smallest representation at 16.6%. The class distribution is evenly spread, with around 24% to 26% of respondents in each form (Forms 1 to 4).

3.2 Level of Accessibility to Social Media

The study established how easily accessible social media is for secondary school students who engage in risky sexual behaviour. The results are shown in figure 1 and table 1.

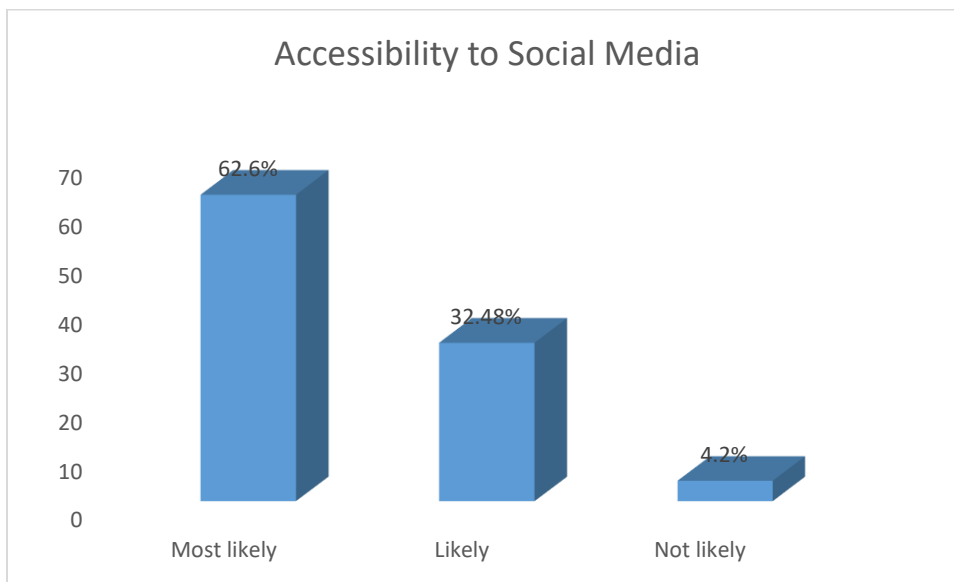


Figure 1: Accessibility to Social Media

The results in figure 1 indicate that the majority of students believe accessibility to social media can expose adolescents to risky sexual behaviours. 62.6% of the 1829 students surveyed expressed this view, while 32.48% also agreed with this assessment. Only 4.2% of respondents felt that social media accessibility does not lead to such risky behaviours among adolescents. These findings in figure 1 suggest a widespread perception among the student population that the prevalence and ease of access to social media platforms can have detrimental effects on young people's sexual

decision-making and behaviours.

Table 2: Level of Accessibility to Social Media

Descriptive Statistics	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Has parental guidance reduced your accessibility to social media?	1829	1	3	2	0.809
I have access to sexual content from social media platforms	1829	3	5	3.98	0.807
I often send sexual messages to others	1829	2	5	3.49	1.122
My parents/ guardians restrict my accessibility to social media	1829	1	5	3.06	1.419
I have used school internet services to look for others with whom I can develop a romantic relationship	1829	1	5	2.99	1.422
If I had means of accessing internet I would often be on social media reading the posts and comments friends post about their sexual experiences	1829	1	5	3	1.387

The findings from Table 2 suggest a moderate to high level of accessibility to social media and related content among the surveyed students. While parental guidance has moderately reduced their accessibility, the students still maintain a relatively high level of access to sexual content and engagement in related behaviours.

3.3 Sexual Behaviour Engaged In

The findings presented in Table 3 provide insights into the risky sexual behaviours engaged in by secondary school students.

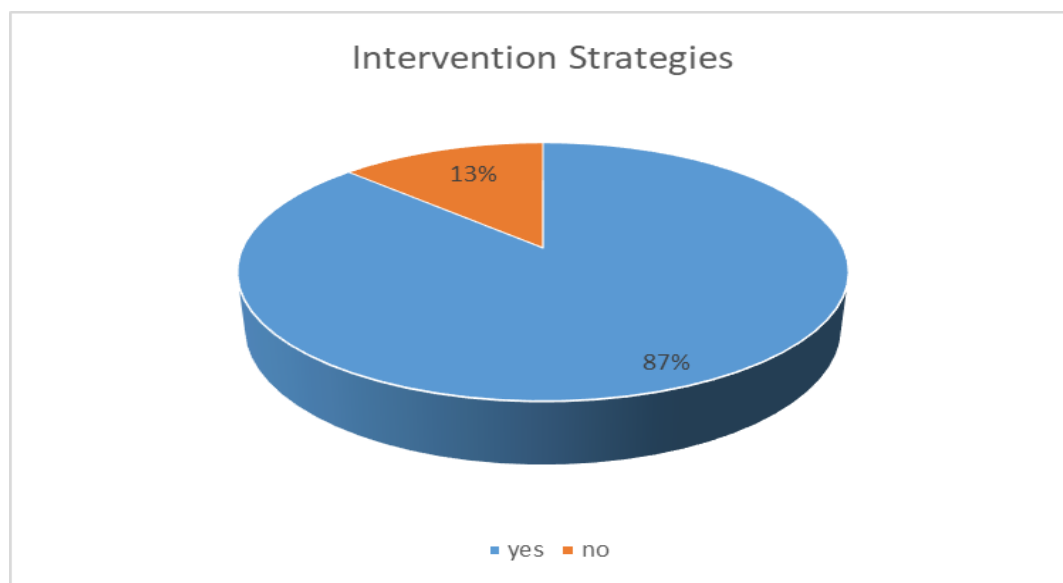
Table 3: Risky Sexual Behaviour Engaged in by Secondary School Students

Descriptive Statistics	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
I have unprotected sex	1829	1	4	2.49	1.142
I have sex with a partner who has sexual transmitted disease	1829	1	2	1.5	0.5
I engage in sex trade	1829	1	5	3	1.417
I have multiple sex partners	1829	1	5	2.99	1.384
I have unprotected mouth-to-genital contact	1829	1	4	2.48	.11.126

Table 3 shows a mean score of 1.5 of students having sex with a partner who has a sexually transmitted disease, indicating a relatively low risk in this area. Similarly, their engagement in unprotected mouth-to-genital contact had a mean of 2.48, also falling within the low-to-moderate risk range. The students' self-reported incidence of unprotected sex had a mean of 2.49. This trend continued with their involvement in sex trade, which had a mean score of 3.0, again signaling a moderate level of risk. The students also reported a mean of 2.99 for having multiple sex partners, further contributing to an elevated risk profile. The overall mean score across all the variables resulted in a value of 2.492, which situates the secondary school students in the moderate risk range for risky sexual behaviours.

3.4 Intervention Strategies

Students were asked if they have attended any intervention strategies on social media usage in a responsible manner in their school as shown in figure 2.



The findings presented in Figure 2 indicate that 87% of the students reported attending intervention strategies on responsible social media usage in their school, while 13% reported not attending such interventions.

3.5 Inferential Statistics

A Chi-square test was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between social media exposure and engagement in risky sexual behaviours. The test results indicated a significant correlation ($p < 0.05$), confirming that exposure to sexually explicit content on social media is associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in sexual activity. This reinforces the idea that social media can serve as a catalyst for risky sexual behaviours, especially in the absence of adequate supervision or intervention.

Table 4: Summary of Key Findings on Social Media Exposure and Sexual Behaviour

Variable	Percentage (%)	Comments
Students who believed social media contributes to risky sexual behaviours	62.6%	Majority believe social media influences sexual behaviour.
Students who admitted to engaging in sexual intercourse	94%	Affected mainly by social media exposure and peer pressure.
Students who regularly encountered sexual content on social media	40%	Significant portion of students exposed to sexual content.
Students who participated in intervention programs	87%	High participation rate in intervention strategies.
Statistically significant relationship between social media exposure and risky sexual behaviour (Chi-square)	$p < 0.05$	Confirmed significant correlation between social media exposure and sexual behaviour.

The data in Table 4 demonstrates the widespread belief among students that social media plays a significant role in promoting risky sexual behaviours. The table also highlights the relatively small but significant proportion of students who have already engaged in sexual activity, indicating that while most students are not engaging in risky behaviours, the potential for exposure is high. Furthermore, despite the high participation in intervention programs, the regular exposure to sexual content remains prevalent, suggesting that these programs may require reinforcement or reevaluation for greater effectiveness.

4.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1 Summary of the Findings

4.1.1 Level of Accessibility to Social Media

The study found that the level of accessibility to social media sexual content varied significantly among secondary school students in Kajiado County, Kenya, with age being a crucial determinant. The majority of students over 15 years old (62.6%) reported having access to such content, while only 32.5% of those aged 12-15 and a mere 4.9% of those under 12 had similar access. This finding highlights the increasing exposure to sexual content on social media as adolescents grow older and gain more independence in their digital activities. These findings corroborate previous research highlighting the widespread use of digital technology and internet access among adolescents (Sonnenberg, 2020; Tajudeen et al., 2016).

4.1.2 Sexual Behaviour Engaged In

The study investigated the sexual behaviours engaged in by secondary school students and found that, on average, students rarely engaged in unprotected sex ($M=2.49$) and were not likely to have sex with a partner with a sexually transmitted disease (STD) ($M=1.5$). These findings suggest a level of awareness among students about the risks associated with unprotected sex and the importance of partner health status. However, the study also revealed that students occasionally engaged in sex trade ($M=3.0$) and had multiple sex partners ($M=2.99$). The sexual behaviours engaged in by secondary school students in this study, such as occasional involvement in sex trade and having multiple partners, align with the literature review's discussion of the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among adolescents in various contexts (Magadi et al., 2021; Kassa et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2013).

4.1.3 Intervention Strategies

The study explored the intervention strategies employed to promote responsible social media usage among secondary school students. Students displayed a moderate understanding of the social media policies in place at their schools. While many were aware of these policies, a notable number of students were not, indicating a gap in communication or enforcement. Students' attitudes toward ethical media use was generally positive, with many recognizing the importance of ethical behaviour in supporting the strategies implemented by their schools. This positive attitude is

crucial for the success of intervention programs. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1969), widely applied in media studies, suggest that positive reinforcement of ethical behaviour observed in media can encourage similar behaviour in real life. Sanchez et al. (2013) and Smith et al. (2016), have shown that social media platforms significantly influence adolescents' sexual behaviours, often leading to risky activities such as early sexual initiation and exposure to sexually explicit content.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings the study recommends the following:

- i. Develop age-appropriate and culturally sensitive intervention strategies that address the specific needs and challenges faced by different age groups, considering their varying levels of social media accessibility and sexual behaviour patterns.
- ii. Strengthen parental guidance and involvement in promoting responsible social media use and sexual health education, as parental influence was found to have a mitigating effect on social media accessibility.
- iii. Implement comprehensive sexuality education programs that integrate digital literacy and address the influence of social media on sexual attitudes and behaviours, equipping adolescents with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the digital landscape responsibly.
- iv. Foster collaborations between schools, parents, and community organizations to create a supportive environment for adolescent sexual health, leveraging the strengths and resources of each stakeholder group to provide holistic support and guidance.

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