

Exploring the Nexus Between Sexting and Suicidal Behaviour Among Undergraduate University Students in Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between sexting and suicidal behaviour among undergraduate university students in Kenya. The study used a correlational research design. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect primary data using Focus Group Discussion and a research questionnaire, which was adapted from SBQ-R. A total of 10,000 students had an equal chance to take part in the study. All ten universities located in Kiambu County were included in the study. In the selected universities, a total of 384 students were randomly sampled from various departments, also sampled via simple random sampling. Data analysis was done using SPSS (Version 25.0) computer software program. The study revealed that there is a positive, strong, and significant relationship between various forms of sexting and suicidal behavior among undergraduate university students ($r=0.574$; $p=0.000$). The study found that there a significant sex differences in relation to in relation to sexting among undergraduate university students since the p-values (0.040 and 0.037) were less than 0.05. The research established that sexting is very prevalent among undergraduate university students, with the most common forms of sexting being text messages, images, and videos. The study also concluded that there is a positive, strong, and significant relationship between various forms of sexting and suicidal behavior among undergraduate university students. The study recommends that University management should prioritize the mental health and well-being of students by integrating comprehensive education on the risks associated with sexting into the university's orientation programs and ongoing awareness campaigns. The study also recommends that student leadership at the universities in Kenya should advocate for peer-led initiatives that encourage safe online behaviors and create a culture of respect and consent among students. The study suggests that future research use primary and secondary data to investigate the connection between sexting and suicidal behavior among undergraduate university students.

Keywords: *Sexting, suicidal behavior, undergraduate University students*

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1. Introduction

Rapid societal, cultural, and interpersonal changes are now being seen as a result of Information Communication and Technology (ICT). The new technological advancements have influenced several cultural changes within society and how social interactions and relationships happen (Choi & Madigan, 2019). This rapid acculturation within the global communities has led to moral and cultural negative corruption among the young adults, especially the university students. Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, among others, have become outlets for university students' sexual and interpersonal exploration and expression (Englander & McCoy, 2017). A morally repugnant habit that has increased in popularity with the advent of modern technology is sexting. According to Choi (2019), sexting includes behaviours such as sharing sex images, videos, and text messages. Sexting is harmful because the information sent in private is accessible to anyone who wants to see it, which can lead to negative outcomes like suicidal thoughts, verbalization of suicidal thoughts, future suicidal thoughts, and suicidal actions (Korenis & Billick, 2018).

Sexting has become a global concern, especially among university students (Nyamnjoh & Brinkman, 2019). Most university students engage in sexting due to the negative influence, online access to sex tapes through media platforms. A boyfriend or girlfriend, for example, may request that the nude images be sent, or the student may send the images without asking. A student may also send a picture to grab the interest of the individual to whom they are appealing. According to Brinkman (2019), 20% of university students have transmitted nude images and sex videos of themselves to others.

Two schools of thought have emerged in the heated discussion over the dangers of teenagers' sexting habits (Doring, 2017). One school of thought sees sexting as a kind of healthy, modern sexual expression that may occur within either casual or committed love relationships (Choi, 2019). Sexting is seen as a way for marginalized communities to communicate with one another and as a means by which individuals may learn more about their own sexuality and the sexuality of others (Chong, 2017). Research has shown a high incidence of sexting across demographics, but a low prevalence of sexting harms, leading credence to the normality viewpoint (Doring, 2019). The other side of the argument views sexting as a deviant and dysfunctional conduct that either directly or indirectly exposes or engages adolescents in higher-risk activities like substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, and other online risks like cyberbullying and sexual online solicitation by grown-ups (Klettke, 2018).

Sexting is becoming a bigger issue both inside and outside of educational institutions, according to empirical research conducted in Canada, the UK, China, and the Netherlands. More than half of girls report experiencing online sexual harassment, according to a survey of 1800 students at 23 Canadian higher education institutions (Canadian Press, 2019). According to the study, 30% of the students said they had experienced sexual harassment on various social sites. Sexting was detrimental to their general well-being, psychosocial health, and sense of value, according to the poll results. This study only attempted to explain the effect of sexting on Secondary students and not the university students, who are mainly affected by sexting due to their ages of being in sexual relationships and exposure to social media. At the same time, the study used a descriptive study design, which made it not difficult to contrast the effects of sexting among the students. The present research is primarily correlational and will be conducted among undergraduate university students.

According to the World Health Organization (2018), more than 150 million girls and 70 million boys have experienced and still endure agonizing sexting situations, which frequently affect pupils' self-esteem. The current study will focus on undergraduate university students, while the previous study concentrated on secondary students. According to empirical research conducted by the American Association of Campus Women (AAUW), sexting is an "unfortunate part of university culture" that negatively impacts the mental health of millions of students, particularly those attending institutions (AAUW, 2019). These incidents appear to be an unpleasant but enduring aspect of college students' lives. According to statistics from the American Association of University Women (AAUW), over 80% of students report that sexting has an inverse effect on them and frequently leads to suicidal ideation (AAUW, 2019).

Sexting has led to numerous mental health problems, including social consequences, psychological and sexual consequences, among the users in general and university students to be particular. Sexting has been linked positively to suicidal thoughts, verbalization of suicidal thoughts, future suicidal thoughts, and suicidal behaviour (Temple, 2018). Sexting makes young people, particularly university students, feel dejected and hopeless, which may lead to isolation and even suicidal thoughts and actions. Ouystel (2019) found that the sexual minority and adolescent children in Kenya who sext have a higher probability of having negative psychological health outcomes, including depression and suicidal behaviour.

The prevalence of suicide thoughts, plans, attempts, and self-harm, as well as the psychological stresses linked to these behaviors, was investigated by Mutwiri et al. (2023) at two universities in Kenya. Undergraduate university students between the ages of 18 and 29 comprise the participants. Self-harm was 5.5%, suicidal planning was 5.9%, suicidal attempts were 7.8%, and suicidal thinking was 17.1%. The incidence of all suicidal behaviors was higher among female students and those attending private universities. Anxiety, family disputes, academic difficulties, financial hardship, and a sense of helplessness and depression were among the psychological stresses that drove developing adults to engage in suicidal behavior.

Umbrila (2020), in his study on young people in slums in Kenya, states that during the transition to maturity among young people, many psychological, physical, and mental changes occur, and survival mechanisms that help them find their footing and define themselves as individuals. Preliminary evidence suggests that sexting and suicidal thoughts are linked. For instance, in Kenya, during the first case of COVID-19 victims, the lady involved was attacked through social media platforms by unknown people sharing her nudes, which she had shared with intentions to reach specific persons (Nation Media Group, 2020). However, less is known regarding the connection between sexting and suicidal behaviour. Therefore, the current study will focus on various forms of sexting, the prevalence of sexting and suicidal behaviour, and how sexting and suicidal behaviour relate to each other.

Musyimi (2022), in a study at Machakos University among the university students on sexting and risky sexual behaviour, revealed that the drive to obtain popularity and approval by peers acts as a sexting incentive. Peer acceptability is a crucial component that plays a critical part in young adults' psychological development. These outcomes have the potential to instigate suicidal thoughts or actions. Hence, this study attempts to explain the connection between sexting and suicidal behaviour among undergraduate university students. At the same time, the study tends to use a correctional study design to show the relationship between sexting

and suicidal behaviour. According to Córdova and Ramos (2018), suicidal behaviour and conduct is a nonspecific symptom that indicates a complex interplay of internal conflict and external factors such as despair, worthlessness, trouble settling interpersonal issues, failure, rejection, and difficulties within the family or the relationship. Several factors can be used to explain the correlation between sexting and suicide behaviours. For one, it's plausible that suicide behaviour and attempts are both exacerbated by sexting. Here, depressed symptoms serve as a mediator between sexting and thoughts of suicide. Second, one might speculate that sexting causes suicidal behaviours and actions.

1.1 Problem Statement

There is a high prevalence of suicide among university students (Kabir et al., 2024; Ram, Suprakash Chaudhury & Jagtap, 2018; Ebohon & Osagiobare, 2023; Salifu and Yidana, 2024; Mutwiri et al., 2023). This has led to lasting emotional, mental, and physical health impacts, as well as economic consequences. A suicidal attempt causes the victim to feel ashamed and cut off from their loved ones because their effort to take their life was unsuccessful. Research has demonstrated that individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide are susceptible to depression, PTSD, protracted bereavement, and suicidal thoughts and actions.

Suicide is not a one-off event; it emanates from suicidal behavior. It has been linked positively to suicidal thoughts, verbalization of suicidal thoughts, future suicidal thoughts, and suicidal behaviour, according to Temple (2018). Sexting, defined as the act of sending sexually suggestive messages or images via mobile devices or the Internet, has become a prevalent practice among youth (Gassó, Klettke, Agustina & Montiel, 2019). Sexting is one of the factors associated with suicidal behaviours and eventually suicide. Sexting makes young people, especially college students, feel forlorn and depressed, which can result in loneliness, suicidal thoughts and actions, and ultimately suicide.

Studies globally, regionally, and locally on the relationship between sexting and suicidal behavior have come up with varied findings. According to certain studies, sexting and suicidal thoughts and actions are related (Temple, 2018; Ouystel, 2019). Other researchers have shown there is no relationship (Salifu & Yidana, 2024). Most of the which showed there is a relationship were done in western countries (United Kingdom, Israele, Canada, Britain, China and Netherlands) which have a different cultural background and cannot be generalized to Kenyan Context based on these discrepancy on the current literature the current study focus on the relationship between various forms of sexting (sexually provocative messages, sex videos, sexual text messages) and suicidal behavior (suicidal thoughts/wishes, suicidal attempts, verbalization of suicidal thoughts, future suicidal thoughts) among undergraduate university students in Kiambu County.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To determine the prevalence of various forms of sexting among undergraduate university students.
- ii. To establish the prevalence of suicidal behaviour among undergraduate university students
- iii. To determine the association between various forms of sexting and suicidal behaviour among undergraduate university students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 The Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicidal Behaviours

This model was propagated by Thomas Joiner in 2005 at Florida State University in the United States of America. The theory posits that the ability to be involved in suicidal behaviors is distinct from the yearning to engage in such behaviors. People commit suicide, it is assumed, because they have the means to do so and choose to do so. Two of the three basic components in this theory are directly connected to suicidal behavior that is prevented: a sense of not belonging and a sense of being overburdened. The theory also provides a statement of the links between these constructs in the form of four hypotheses, which specify a causal route for the development of the desire for suicide and the competence to participate in significant suicidal activity. Below is a figure describing how the various constructs interact, resulting in suicidal behaviour.

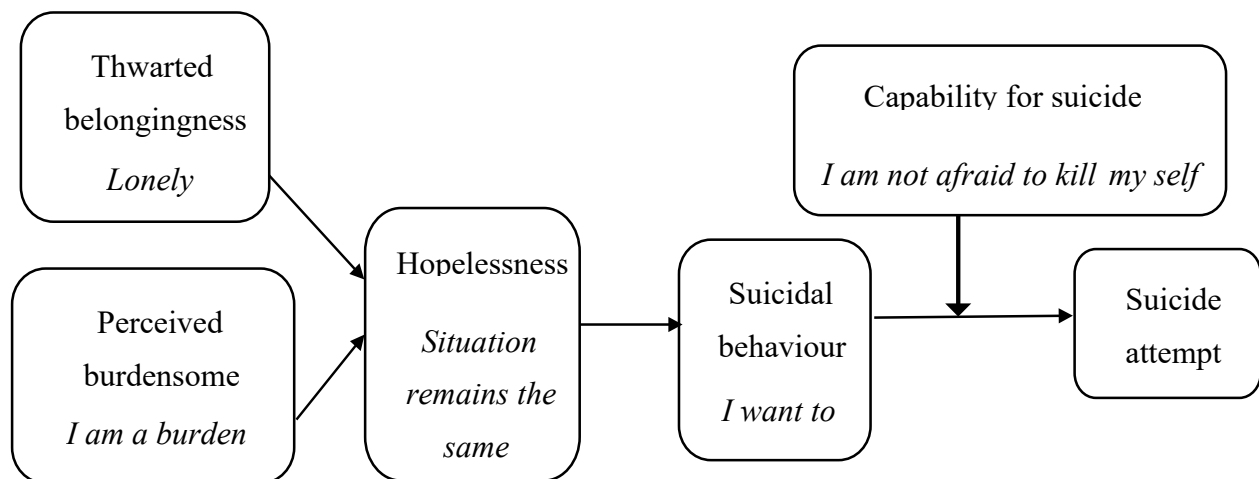


Figure 1: Constructs Interact Resulting in Suicidal behaviour

According to the Interpersonal Theory, thwarted belonging is not a fixed personality feature but rather a state of mind that is affected by both external and internal variables. Factors such as a person's real social surroundings such as the size of his or her social network; Activated interpersonal schemas (Hawkey, 2008), such as the propensity to see other people's actions as signals of rejection; Downey (1996), and present feelings, such as thoughts of depression; According to the notion, an individual's sense of belonging changes and evolves throughout time. Consequently, of both external and internal social factors, such as sexting, which may later cause indicative or rejection by peers or the society at large, resulting in suicidal thoughts, verbalization of suicidal thoughts, future suicidal thoughts thus suicidal behaviour.

The theory highlights young people's beliefs, based on societal norms and practices, that they are disposable members of society. Pathogenic cultural views toward young people on their social behaviors, such as sexting, have been implicated as a cause of suicidal behavior. This, in turn, leads to social isolation, hopelessness, and perceived burdensomeness to members of society and the family, leading to suicidal behavior. Young people's suicidal behaviour was shown to be connected with the theory's view that they are disposable in society. Even though this theory explains the suicidal behavior, which might lead to a suicide attempt or complete

suicide, it is limited because it does not include sexting, which is a key contributing factor in suicidal behavior, and therefore the need to explain sexting, various forms of sexting, its prevalence, and the effect of sexting among undergraduate university students using Multiple Goal Theory.

2.1.2 Multiple Goals Theories

Caughlin (2010) propagated these sets of theories. He popularized these ideas by arguing that the theories are dominant for understanding the process of message creation in human interaction. The five pillars of this approach are "clarity," "challenge," "commitment," "feedback," and "task complexity." Research examining these effects of sexting on undergraduate university students' interpersonal and communicative lives may make use of these theories. The Multiple Goals Theory has a macro perspective of communication, thus the ability to explain the complexities of the current situation of the sexting problem among undergraduate university students. As a result, these ideas provide light on the circumstances of sexting and how it might affect the social lives of university students. This theoretical stance may be used to classify a wide range of other theories. Multiple theories, including the identity implications theory (Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998), the theory of message design logic (O'Keefe, 1988), the goals-plan-action model (Dillard, 2008), and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978), have been characterized as MGT by Wilson and Feng (2007).

Further, the theoretical perspective outlines the various goals in communication networks, which include: instrumental, to imply the core reason for social interaction; identity, which states what a person is concerned with; and finally relational, to show the desirable outcome of the communication (Caughlin, 2010). This perspective may therefore help to explain different media platforms on which sexting takes place, that as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc., and what motivates people to engage in sexting and further explain its prevalence, especially among university students. In summary, Multiple Goals Theories are essential when examining messages in various contexts of sexting. Therefore, these theories informed the study by helping the researcher understand the context of messaging about sexting and how it affects the people involved in the process of sexting.

Numerous goal theories can be applied to a variety of research objectives, including understanding how people evaluate communication in interpersonal relationships, determining what is appropriate and inappropriate to say in particular contexts, and explaining why people say particular things in particular contexts. Scott and Caughlin (2014) describe how "a multiple goals theoretical perspective offers a useful means of conceptualizing and evaluating what counts as better or worse communication" by emphasizing how well people attend to the many pertinent goals. Consequently, by adopting this viewpoint, we may evaluate how individuals focus on various objectives throughout their sexting encounters, how focusing on particular objectives promotes more or less desirable communication, and how this communication connects to particular relationship outcomes (Dodaj & Sesar, 2020). In this context, individuals may have multiple goals with sexting interactions that can facilitate desirable communication and other intended outcomes. Goals can include intimacy, connection, attraction, playfulness, behaviour engagement, and conversational reciprocation.

2.2 Empirical Review

According to Kopel (2019), the term sexting was first used in 2005, and the terms sex and texting were combined in 2009. On the other hand, Ouystel (2019) states that sharing of erotic

content, e.g., pictures, videotapes, through the internet and smartphones is a common description, but the scientific community has not yet settled on a single meaning for the word sexting. As a result, it has been variously defined, with some emphasizing the sharing of simple images and others encompassing the distribution of any sexual material. Kopel (2018) includes compulsion as a part of the sexting actions, while other scholars believe sexting to be entirely consensual; other descriptions comprise sending text messages as part of the sexting behavior, though others do not. There is no universally accepted definition of sexting since the current literature on the topic uses different demographic samples, such as teens vs. adults, and different items to quantify sexting.

Sexting has attracted the attention of many groups throughout the world, according to research conducted in Spain and published in 2009 among teenagers, much before the widespread use of smartphones among young people today (Lenhart, 2019). All of the research participants were between the ages of 12 and 17, and the findings indicated that 15% had received and 4% had provided nude or seminude photos. This study was carried out in one of the European countries; thus, it might not give a real reflection of other parts of the world, especially sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, the study was carried out among the adolescents, while the current study attempted to look at the prevalence of sexting among the undergraduate university students whose ages range between 18 and 27 years of age. This age group is highly involved in sexting, and almost all of them have access to smartphones and the internet. At the same time, these studies were carried out in Western Europe, which is a different area as opposed to the current study, which was taking place in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Kokkinos and Krommida (2022) investigated sexting among 3,171 Greek college students regarding various relationship kinds, including friends, romantic partners, and strangers. In addition to providing demographic and relationship status data, participants filled out an anonymous online survey that evaluated sexting within the previous 12 months. Participants frequently engaged in the practice of exchanging sext messages via mobile devices and the Messenger app. Males and non-heterosexuals were more likely to engage in sexting. Participants who were 25 years of age or older were more likely to sext strangers than those who were 18 to 24. Exchanging sexts was more common among romantic couples than among strangers. One methodological flaw in the study was the use of online surveys. It is also contextually incompatible with the current study because the study was conducted in Europe.

Boer et al. (2021) sought to better understand the elements involved in dissemination by examining the prevalence of (non-consensual) sext-sharing among Dutch adolescents and the characteristics of individuals who engage in it. The characteristics that people most strongly linked with sext-sharing were being male, between the ages of 12 and 14, using social media frequently, seeing online porn, having sex, and being the target of sext-sharing. According to the findings, sext-sharing is less common among older teens and is associated with adolescents' levels of sexual curiosity and online activity. The method of data analysis adopted in the study was logistic regression, hence showing a methodological gap. The study further focused generally on adolescents without specifying those in universities, hence showing a contextual gap.

Commey et al. (2024) carried out a study titled "A Scoping Review of Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Impact of Sexting Among College Students in Africa." Four major electronic databases—PubMed, PsycINFO, Central, and JSTOR—were searched for records. ProQuest,

Google, and Google Scholar were used for additional searches. Eleven articles in all satisfied the eligibility requirements and were reviewed. The review's findings were categorized under four primary headings: sexting type, prevalence, sexting predictors, and sexting outcomes. Sending and receiving sexually explicit texts and images, as well as sharing explicit films and images on social media, were the primary forms of sexting. General sexting prevalence percentages varied from 9.9% to 74.4%. There was a methodological gap in the systematic review that was used as the approach.

Pompili (2018) found that one in four individuals has known someone who has considered suicide, while on the other hand, the study further indicated that for every suicide, there are six or more persons who survived the death of a treasured family member to suicide. Suicide is one of the primary causes of death in the area of mental health, besides the survivors themselves. The emotional wounds left by a suicide victim take longer to heal than those left by any other cause of death. After a suicide attempt fails, the grieving process may culminate in further suicide attempts (Pompili, 2018).

Srivastava et al. (2023) examined the relationship between suicidal (ideation, planning, and attempt) and non-suicidal self-harm behavior and digital sexual violence (threat to post or nonconsensual publishing of sexually explicit information). Higher odds of reporting suicidal ideation (odds ratio [OR] = 1.88), suicide plan (OR = 2.12), suicide attempt (OR = 3.56), and self-harm (OR = 1.96) were linked to the risk of uploading sexually explicit media without permission. On the other hand, uploading sexually explicit content without consent was linked to increased chances of reporting suicidal thoughts (OR = 1.82), as well as suicide attempts (OR = 2.20). The use of multivariate logistic regression made the study to have a methodological gap. Moreover, the study did not specify the university students, hence making it too difficult to present a contextual gap.

Mugambi, Munene, and Mogute (2020) aimed to ascertain the prevalence of suicidal behavior, ascertain the prevalence of SB among adolescents suffering from DD and/or PTSD, and establish a correlation between the prevalence of SB and the sociodemographic attributes of adolescents residing in Nairobi's informal settlements. The study involved 1,040 high school students from Nairobi, Kenya. The findings showed that among the 1,040 teenagers from Nairobi's informal settlements, there was a 21.5% overall prevalence of SB, 17.0% PTSD comorbid with SB, 16.6% DD with SB, and 15.0% DD with PTSD and SB. Compared to male respondents, the prevalence was substantially greater among female respondents. There was a contextual gap because the study only looked at teenagers in Nairobi who had either post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression disorder (DD).

According to Klettke's (2019) analysis of the literature, there are substantial connections between suicidal conduct, dissemination of sexual material without authorization, legal implications, and poor mental health outcomes. Sexting is also strongly associated with online victimization conduct, including cyberbullying, violence in online dating, and revenge porn, as shown by the study. This study was mainly based on secondary information obtained from various published sources, which may not be easily established. The current study, therefore, used primary data collected among university students to understand the relationship between sexting and suicidal behavior among them. Further, the study emphasizes the relationship between sexting with other factors, thus providing an opportunity for a study to find out the association involving sexting and suicidal behavior among students of higher learning.

Dodaj, Sesar, and Cvitkovic (2019) looked into the incidence of sexting among boys and girls. A sample of 711 teenagers between the ages of 14 and 19 participated in the study. According to the study's findings, sending sexually explicit content is the most common form of sexting, while uploading sexually explicit content is the least common. Sexting was shown to be more common among boys than among girls. Additionally, students who engage in sexting are more likely to consider suicide and suicidal ideation. Because high school pupils were the study's primary focus, it demonstrated a contextual gap.

Mussap, Clancy, and Klettke (2023) investigated the attitudes and views of cisgender and transgender individuals regarding non-consensual sexting and cyberbullying. Research on cyberbullying and sexting victimization experiences, perpetration practices, and positive attitudes/beliefs was completed by 638 ciswomen, 722 cismen, and 146 transgender and gender variant people between the ages of 18 and 66 ($M = 23.27$, $SD = 3.66$). Significant gender disparities in cyber and sexting victimization and perpetration were found using MANCOVAs. Compared to cismen, ciswomen reported committing cyberbullying 8% less frequently, engaging in non-consensual sexting 17% less frequently, and being victimized by non-consensual sexting 77% more frequently. The study's focus on transgender adults created a contextual gap. Additionally, there is a methodological gap in the analysis due to the use of MANCOVA.

Yisa and Orji (2024) looked at 700 Nigerian social media users' sexting prevalence, trends, and effects on mental health. Descriptive, regression, and structural equation model (SEM) approaches were used in the investigation. According to the study, 58% of participants used sexting, which is a significant number considering Nigeria's cultural conservatism. Furthermore, over 41% acknowledged sending or receiving forwarded sexted photographs or texts without the victims' authorization, which raises the possibility of cyberbullying and the mental health issues that may follow. The study also discovered that sexting and depression were strongly positively correlated, but that the consequences of sexting on depression varied by gender, with males who sexted having higher levels of depression than women. The study's emphasis on social media usage creates a contextual vacuum. Furthermore, the employment of a structural equation model for data analysis presents a methodological flaw.

The nature, causes, and effects of sexting behavior are among the often-researched aspects of sexting that Dodaj et al. (2024) conceptually review. The agreement was crucial for almost every trait that was looked at in sexting studies. The study highlighted the significance of social and cultural values as contextual variables for youth sexting engagement. Laws, religious beliefs, and social and cultural norms are important cultural and social determinants of sexual attitudes. These elements might also play a part in describing sexting as a sexual behavior. There is a methodological gap in this study because of the way the data was collected.

The study conducted by Kaggwa et al. in 2022 examined the prevalence and contributing factors of suicidal ideation, suicide intent, and suicide attempts among university students in Uganda. In southwest Uganda, 540 undergraduate students (363 men, mean age 23.3 years) took part in a cross-sectional survey. Suicidal ideation was evaluated using items from the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28), while suicide attempts and plans were evaluated using additional specially designed questions. The study also looked at why the suicide plan was not carried out. The factors linked to various types of suicidal behaviors were identified using three independent regression models. Any type of suicidal behavior was more likely to

occur in people with a long-term physical medical condition. The inability to pay for college tuition was linked to suicidal thoughts. Having a history of sexual abuse and struggling to pay for college tuition were linked to suicide attempts. However, because chi-square and cross-sectional design were used for data analysis, the study had a methodological gap.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the research variables.

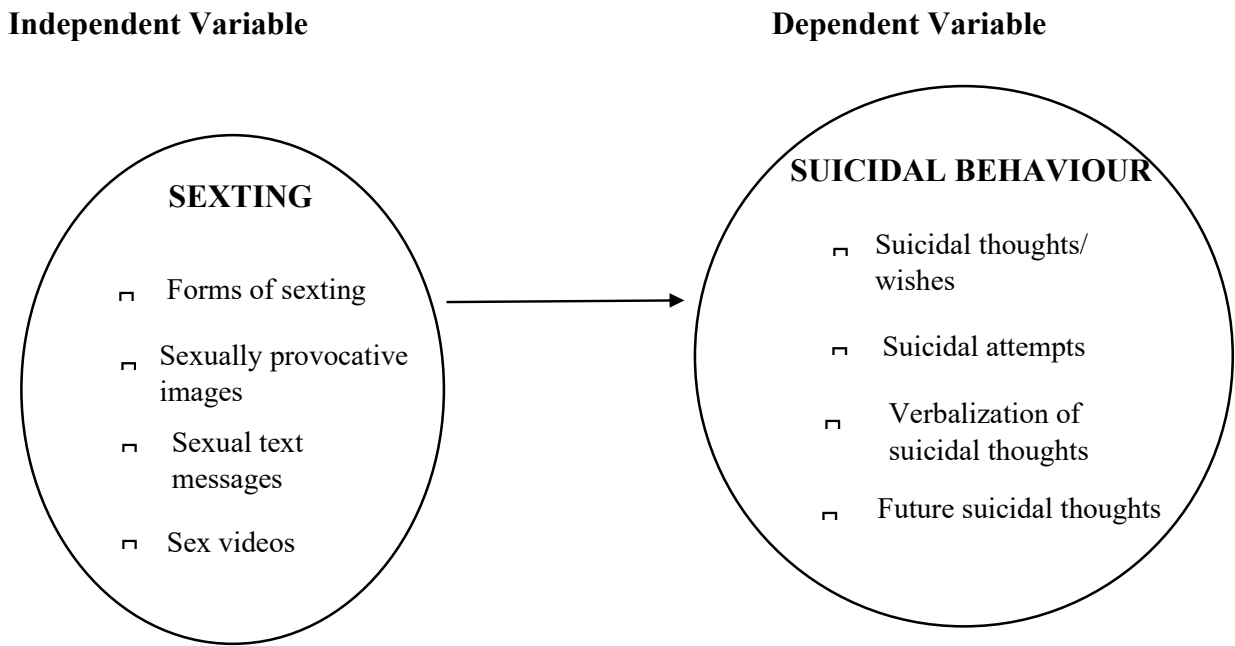


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

The study used a correlational research design. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect primary data using Focus Group discussions and a research questionnaire, which was adapted from the SBQ-R. A total of 10,000 students had an equal chance to take part in the study. All ten universities located in Kiambu County were included in the study. In the selected universities, a total of 384 students were randomly sampled from various departments, also sampled via simple random sampling. Correlation was utilized to show the linear relationship between sexting and suicidal behaviour. This is because Pearson’s correlation is useful in prediction for future behaviour of the young adults when it comes to sexting and suicidal behaviours. The qualitative data were analyzed on a thematic basis, thus allowing for triangulation of the study findings and further ensuring consistency and reliability of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Prevalence and Various Forms of Sexting

The study sought to determine the prevalence and various forms of sexting among undergraduate university students. The respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with various questions regarding sexting. The findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Questions Regarding Sexting

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Mean
Are you informed about sexting?	4.2%	7.4%	88.3%	4.214
Have you ever sent or received a sext in the past year?	21.4%	4.0%	74.7%	3.644
Do you use social media platforms to pass sexts?	19.9%	11.1%	68.9%	3.627
Have you ever seen a leaked sext?	22.2%	9.1%	68.6%	3.821
Have you ever been a victim of a leaked sext?	56.5%	10.8%	32.8%	2.613
Prevalence Composite Score				66.7%

From the findings in Table 1, most of the respondents agreed that they are informed about sexting (88.3%; Mean=4.214), that they have ever sent or received sext in the past one year (74.7%; Mean=3.644), that they use social media platform to pass sext (68.9%; Mean=3.627) and that they have ever seen a leaked sext (68.6%; Mean=3.821). However, the respondents disagreed that they had ever been a victim of a leaked sext (56.5%; Mean=2.613). The composite score of 66.7% implies that sexting is very prevalent among undergraduate university students. This is largely driven by increased access to smartphones, social media, and private messaging platforms. The behavior is often linked to romantic relationships, sexual exploration, and peer influence, with many students perceiving it as a normalized aspect of modern dating culture. Despite its prevalence, sexting carries potential risks, including privacy breaches, emotional distress, and reputational damage, especially when explicit content is shared without consent. However, the study established that there was a lower rate of leaks affecting the students, which facilitated a perceived sense of security despite widespread engagement in sexting activities.

Further, the participants were asked to indicate their opinions on various questions regarding sexting among undergraduate students. The respondents indicated that they have ever sent or received sexts from different people, including romantic partners, friends, and classmates. In addition, most of the respondents also indicated that they receive and send sexts at least once every day. The above finding indicates that undergraduate university students frequently engage in sexting with different people daily. The participants also noted that there are various forms of sexting among undergraduate students. These include sending and receiving sexts through messages, images, and videos. The findings imply that sexting is done through various forms, including text messages, images, and videos.

In support of the above findings, one of the focus group discussion members said;

The most common sites for sexting are Telegram, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook. In addition, sexting is increasingly prevalent among undergraduate students, with varying forms such as sending sexually explicit texts, images, or videos. The rise in smartphone usage and access to social media platforms has contributed significantly to this trend, with students often engaging in consensual, non-consensual, and coerced sexting (Source: Focus Group Member 1).

4.2 Prevalence of Suicidal Behaviour in Relation to Sexting

The study aimed to determine the prevalence of suicidal behaviour in relation to sexting among undergraduate university students. The respondents were asked to specify their agreement with various questions regarding suicidal behaviour in relation to sexting among undergraduate university students. The findings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Agreement with Questions on Suicidal Behaviour in Relation to Sexting

	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Mean</u>
In the past year, have you thought about or attempted to kill yourself after sending or receiving a sext?	59.9%	12.8%	27.4%	2.447
How often have you thought about killing yourself in the past year after sending or receiving a sext?	61.8%	14.5%	23.6%	2.336
Have you ever told someone you were going to kill yourself or that you might do so after sexting in the last 12 months?	63.5%	12.5%	23.9%	2.313
How likely is it that you will send or receive a sext and then try suicide at some point?	64.6%	19.4%	16.0%	2.165
<u>Prevalence Composite Score</u>				<u>22.7%</u>

From the findings, most respondents disagreed that in the past year, they had thought about or attempted to kill themselves after sending or receiving a sext (59.9%), while 27.4% of the respondents agreed. In addition, 61.8% of the respondents disagreed that they had often thought about killing themselves in the past year after sending or receiving a sext, but 23.6% agreed. Further, 63.5% of the respondents disagreed that in the past year, they had told someone that they were going to commit suicide or that they might do it after sexting, while 23.9% agreed. Finally, 64.6% of the respondents disagreed that it is likely that they will attempt suicide someday after sending or receiving a sext, while 16% agreed. According to the Paykel Suicide Scale (PSS), the composite score of 22.7% implies that there is a moderate prevalence of suicidal behaviour in relation to sexting among university students. The finding suggests a notable association between sexting and suicidal behavior, with a notable proportion of students reporting thoughts or attempts of suicide in the past year after sexting.

In support of the above findings, one of the focus group discussion members said;

Honestly, sexting has become so common among students, and the pressure that comes with it is overwhelming. I've seen friends who, after their private photos were leaked,

became so depressed that they started talking about ending their lives. It's like once that happens, the shame and anxiety just consume you (Source: FGD member 2).

4.3 Relationship Between Different Forms of Sexting and Suicidal Behaviour

The study further sought to establish the relationship between different forms of sexting and suicidal behaviour among undergraduate university students. The study tested the hypothesis that states, *“there is a statistically significant relationship between various forms of sexting and suicidal behaviour among undergraduate university students”*. The study conducted a correlation analysis to test the hypothesis. The findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlations for Testing Hypothesis One

Forms of Sexting: Suicidal behaviour			
Forms of Sexting	Pearson Correlation	1.574**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	351	351
Suicidal behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.574**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	351	351

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study found a positive, strong, and substantial correlation between different types of sexting and suicidal behavior among undergraduate university students ($r=0.574$; $p=0.000$), as indicated by the results in Table 4.8. The alternative hypothesis was accepted since the p-value (0.000) was less than 0.01. Thus, the study concluded that among Kenyan undergraduate university students, there is a substantial correlation between different types of sexting and suicidal behavior.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that sexting is very prevalent among undergraduate university students, with the most common forms of sexting being text messages, images, and videos. Students are informed about sexting and actively engage in it primarily through social media platforms. There is a lower incidence of personal victimization from leaked sexts, indicating a possible disconnect between participation in sexting and the experience of its negative consequences.

The study also concluded a significant, positive correlation between suicidal conduct among undergraduate university students and different types of sexting. This could be attributed to the fact that a notable proportion of respondents reported thoughts or attempts of suicide in the past year after sexting. Sexting can lead to suicidal behavior if the students involved experience severe emotional distress, such as shame, cyberbullying, or social isolation, as a result of the images, messages, and videos being shared or exposed without their consent.

6. Recommendations

The study established a moderate prevalence of suicidal behaviour; therefore, it recommends that University management should prioritize the mental health and well-being of students by integrating comprehensive education on the risks associated with sexting into the university’s orientation programs and ongoing awareness campaigns. This education should focus on the

potential legal, social, and psychological consequences of sexting, including its link to suicidal behavior.

The study concluded that sexting is very prevalent among undergraduate university students; there is a need for university management to establish clear, confidential channels for students to report sexting incidents and seek help if they feel vulnerable. The universities should strengthen their mental health services by employing more counselors trained in handling issues related to digital harassment and cyberbullying, ensuring that students have access to timely and appropriate support.

The study recommends that student leadership at the universities in Kenya should advocate for peer-led initiatives that encourage safe online behaviors and create a culture of respect and consent among students. Leaders should work to destigmatize seeking help for mental health issues, particularly those arising from digital harassment like sexting. They should collaborate with university management to organize workshops and forums where students can openly discuss the dangers of sexting and learn coping mechanisms.

The report also suggests that national policies that address the relationship between university students' digital behavior, mental health, and suicide prevention should be developed and put into effect by the Ministry of Education. This includes mandating the integration of digital literacy and mental health education into the university curriculum, with a specific focus on the dangers of sexting and its psychological impacts.

The findings showed that sexting is very prevalent, and hence, the study also recommends that there is a need to raise awareness and educate students by conducting awareness campaigns and educational workshops that inform students about the potential risks of sexting, including its connection to suicidal behavior. These programs should emphasize digital citizenship, consent, and safe online practices, while also destigmatizing seeking help for mental health concerns.

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