

Relationship between Exposure to Mass Media and Adolescent Students' Irresponsible Sexual Behavior in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Problem behaviours among secondary school going population world over are of concern to educators, counselors and psychologists and stakeholders. It is a multifaceted and a complex school problem that is manifested in various forms. Problem behavior is of concern because of its potential at the adolescent stage to undermine the achievement of both personal and national developmental goals. It emerges from the several studies that problem behaviors commonly occur in secondary schools. Considering the possible consequences of these behaviors on educational outcomes and socio- economic development of the individual adolescents, it is crucial to have an understanding of the specific occurrence of these behaviors among students in public secondary schools. Although the effects of problem behaviors are apparent as shown by its occurrence, the causes behind it are often abstract and obscure, making it difficult to pin blame on a single source. According to the literature that is available from other countries, mass media is responsible for students' problem behaviors. It is not clear if this factor has any influence on adolescent problem behavior in Kenya. This current study therefore investigated the relationship between exposure to mass media and students' problem behavior (irresponsible sexual behavior) in secondary schools in Bungoma Central Sub- County in Kenya. Many studies have been conducted on the influence of parental factors, peer influence, community influence on adolescents' problem behavior. Influence of exposure to mass media has not been given adequate attention in the academic area. The researcher in the present study filled this gap in knowledge.

Key words: Mass media, Irresponsible sexual behavior, Adolescent students

Introduction

Sexual and reproductive health is part of physical and emotional well being of all human beings. Adolescents globally have unique sexual and reproductive health needs and accompanying vulnerabilities. Many adolescents face sexual health risks of early sexual experiences, sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancies and illegal abortions. These challenges threaten their health and survival.

Youths represent majority of the population (Omolo, 2014). This young population is often a good target in social media sites. According to Todd (2009) the young are bombarded with video, shows, advertisements and movies with sexual messages.. With regard to sex, three out of four teenagers say that the social media content make it seem normal for youngsters to engage in sexual relations. The young teens regard the entertainment media as the number one source of information about sexuality and sexual health. Being open about sex and how they talk to their girl friends about it is largely because of what they see and hear (M'maita, (2011). Thus the study of Todd (2009) concluded that mass media targeted adolescents in general in turn making them vulnerable to sexual involvement. The present study focused on mass media and how it has impacted on sexual behavior among secondary school students.

Past studies show that sex is everywhere in the media. The average young TV viewer will see about 14,000 references to sex each year. Teens themselves say that TV as well as movies and other media, are their leading sources of information about sex and sexuality. According to studies by Eysenck, and Nias (2008) of roughly 14,000 references to sex a teen will see on TV each year,

only a small fraction (165) will include any reference to abstinence or delay of sex, birth control, risky pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Some studies Smith, V. (2004) show that repeated exposure to mass media with sexual content may influence teens to have sex earlier. A study of video games found that the few female characters in those games are often highly sexualized, wearing tight revealing clothing and having unrealistically large breasts and distorted small waists (Conway & Vartanian, 2000).

Studies done in the United States (Anderson & Bushman, (2002) have shown that time spent on social media increased by 37% in 2012 compared to 2011. Further Martinez- Pranter and Vandive (2014) point out that the usage of social media has fostered communication among teenagers. This has greatly influenced their indulgence into sexting which promotes unethical sexual behaviours. A research done Bolton et al., (2013) on understanding “generation Y and their use of social media sites in the United States established that, extreme usage of social media sites in the long run contribute to teenagers’ engagement in risky sexual behaviours. Another study by Larkin and Dwyer (2016) on the influence of social media sites and fighting among high school girls showed that circulation of fighting videos online has an influence on the desire of young girls to engage in physical fighting with other teenagers.

The mainstream mass media (television, radio, magazine, movies, music and the internet) provide increasingly portrayals of sexuality. Studies conducted on the relationship between mass media and sexual behavior suggests that the media keep sexuality on public and personal agendas. Media portrayals reinforce a relatively consistent set of sexual and relationship norms, and the media rarely depicts sexually responsible models. The media are an increasingly accessible way for people to learn about and see sexual behavior. The media may be especially important for young people as they are developing their own sexual beliefs and patterns of behavior and as parents and schools remain reluctant to discuss sexual topics. In the United States, young people spend 6 to 7 hours each day on average with some form of media. Many of those televisions are hooked up to cable and a video cassette recorder (VCR) (Brown & Newcomer, 2010). Sexual talks and displays are increasingly frequent and explicit in this mediated world. One content analysis found that sexual content that ranged from flirting to sexual intercourse had increased from slightly more than half of television programs I 1997- 1998 to more than two thirds of the programs in 1999- 2000 season. Depiction of intercourse (suggestive or explicit) occurred in one of every 10 programs. One fifth to one half of music videos depending on the music gene (Country, rock, rap) portray sexuality or eroticism (Brown & Newcomer, 2010)

The internet has increased dramatically the availability of sexually explicit content. The word sex is the most popular search term used on the internet today (Stout & Hillary, 2010). The internet may have both positive and negative effects on sexual health. According to the National Survey of Young People (10- 17 years old) who regularly used the internet, one out of four said she or he had encountered unwanted pornography in the past year, and one out of five had been exposed to unwanted sexual solicitations or approaches (Stout, Hillary, 2010). Despite increasing public concern about the potential risk of early unprotected sexual activity, most of the mass media rarely depict three Cs of responsible sexual behavior: commitment, contraceptives, and consideration of consequences. Although more than half of the couples who engage in sexual intercourse on television are in an established relationship, 1 in 10 are couples who have met only recently; one quarter do not maintain a relationship after having sex (Rubin, 1993). Unwanted pregnancies rarely are shown as the outcome of unprotected sex, and STIs other than HIV/AIDS are almost never discussed (Rubin, 1993). Abortion is never discussed in commercial television and magazines (Hocklong & Linda, 2003).

Two cross- sectional surveys have linked frequent exposure to mass media to sexual intercourse. However, because time order was not clear in these studies, it is plausible to conclude that adolescents who were having sex were also those most interested in sexual content in the media rather than the exposure to sexual media accelerated the adolescents’ initiation of sexual activity. The media are full of sexual information and in some of the different kinds of media the portrayals have grown increasingly frequent and explicit (Haggstron- Nordin, 2005). The most recent study of sexual content on television, for example, found that two thirds of all shows included sexual content. Studies have found that adolescents who were exposed to music videos containing more sexual references were more likely to approve of pre- marital sex than adolescents exposed to randomly selected music videos.

Young men generally report having their first sexual experience earlier than their female counterparts. Surveys in ten Latin American countries found that young men had initiated sexual activities on average one to two years earlier than young women had. An African regional conference reported that most teenage men are not informed about sexuality, safe sex, condoms and other contraceptives. Young men’s attitude towards sex, females, relationships in general often cause negative health and social consequences. Because many cultures associate multiple sexual partners with manhood, young men feel pressurized to engage in sexual behaviors that put them and their partners I at risk. Cultural norms, peer pressure and lack of self confidence may discourage young men from obtaining

reproductive health information and counseling. Earlier King and Stones posited that the nudity and sharing of pornographic materials has been on the rise in Australian schools as a result of the availability of social media channels that young adults are exposed to. The authors further noted that sexual orgies are arranged among friends in the social media hence the rise in immorality among college and middle school students. This study adopted an ethnographic survey, unlike the current study which was correlational in nature.

A recent study by Kiragu (2015) on negative influence of social media on our communities asserted that, the increasing access to smart devices by young teenagers has enhanced their capacity to access sexual materials from the internet share it with their peers through the widely available social network channels. This study however, did not establish the association between the social media usage and sexual practices on secondary school students specifically. A study by Kabiru and Orpinas (2009) found out that most secondary school students within the largest Nairobi informal settlement, Kibra had sexual intercourse at an early age with many confessing of having multiple sexual partners. The study further highlighted that most of these young adults also engage in routine sex trade within the sprawling Kibra informal settlement. From the foregoing, it is evident that sexual practices are prevalent among secondary school students. Similarly studies by Patricia and Ndun'gu (2014) and Omolo (2014) that focused on immorality among children as young as 15 years old in estates such as Karen and Runda respectively found out that youths are engaged in drug abuse and sexual orgies

As exposed by most of the research findings, children from rich families often communicate with other youths through social media and organize parties without the knowledge of their parents. In these parties the minors are known to engage in sex orgies and rampant drug abuse. The fact that the content is readily available in the internet, it is assumed that it is available for the youths. The youths are likely to observe and emulate what they see. The majority of the reviewed studies failed to address the influence of mass media on students' sexual behavior in depth. The current study sought to fill the gaps and contributed to the body of knowledge. In another study in Kenya, the author found that girls who are more biologically developed were more likely to seek out sexual images and information in the media and were likely to interpret media content as sexual and appropriate. From a report published on the Standard News Paper, Kenya, in December 2009, teens have become more exposed to sexual material in mass media, which has encouraged their escapades. "They receive sexual orientation through the media and not through sex education programs in schools which they resent" said Koech. Sexually charged material has become available and teens can access the internet through unsupervised cyber cafes or their mobile phones.

In Kenya a study was conducted on the influence of mass media on youth's sexual behaviors. It aimed at establishing the influence of mass media on the expression of sexual behavior among high school adolescents in Nairobi Province. The findings were that magazines are popular media that provide sexual information from the television. Information accessed through the media by adolescents included pornographic pictures and texts, dressing and fashion, sex styles and contraceptive use. The study found that half of the respondents (50.7%) had experienced sexual intercourse, 63% did not use condom during their first sexual intercourse, 54% of the respondents had had more than one sexual partner in the last one year; 55% of adolescents were influenced into sexual act by pornographic materials from movies. The frequency of material access was found to determine the number of sexual partners among the school going adolescents

From the above studies, it is evident that mass media is directly related to adolescent students irresponsible sexual behaviors. A lot has to be done in terms of programs to educate young men and women about reproductive health. The programs should include decision making and life planning skills that combine sexual health with a broad range of general health services. For instance, opportunities for socio-economic advancement may be coupled with knowledge or skills in reproductive health. Sports can be used as an entry point to raise sexual and reproductive health issues and promote healthy life styles (Kimani, 2014). Through youth's sports association, attitudes of youths can be changed to positive sex practices. Outreach sites such as discos, video arcades, the market place and local fairs are all places to reach young men and women with reproductive health information, condoms and services. Peer programs can help young men reach their peers with information. As peer influences are an important determinant of early sexual initiation, peer educators can provide young men with opportunities to examine the myths that have shaped their attitudes about themselves and about women.

There is abundant media attention focused on all matters related to pregnancy and abortion among youths, much of it is contradictory. Young men are taught as part of the official school curriculum that sexual intercourse and induced abortion leads to a wide range of chronic health and social problems. Young people who procure abortion often end up leading depressed, frustrated, lonely lives which may make them become drug addicts. Despite an official academic curriculum that vigorously condemns abortion (pre-marital sex

and pregnancy), unwanted pregnancy and abortion are prevalent among school going youths in Kenya. The researcher therefore sought to establish the relationship between mass media and irresponsible sexual behavior among adolescents in secondary schools.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. According to Kothari (2008) descriptive survey at times is the only means through which views, opinions, attitudes, and suggestions for improvement of educational practices and other data can be collected. The choice of descriptive survey was made based on the fact that in the present study, the researcher used a sample to represent the whole population and described the current characteristics of the population. No variables were manipulated to establish the influence of mass media on problem behavior. The researcher also used questionnaires and interview which are characteristic of a survey design to adequately get information from a sample in order to describe the population under study. This involved self report on opinion and attitudes of respondents on the influence of mass media on problem behavior among adolescents. This was in line with Kumar (2011) who observed that survey research design is the most appropriate for obtaining self- reported opinions, attitudes, beliefs and values. The study was conducted in Bungoma Central Sub- County in Kenya. This is one of the eight Sub- Counties in Bungoma County. The Sub- County was purposively selected because it has many public secondary schools which are a mixture of girl's only schools and boy's only schools as well as mixed schools. This was essential for comparison purposes.

The target population of the study was 40,000 students in all public secondary school in the Sub- County. A considerable high proportion of problem behavior reported in the Kenyan school system occurs at secondary school level, hence the choice of secondary school students as part of the study population (Makabila, 2010). The teacher counselors were selected because they handle problem behaviors of students. The Deputy Principals were selected because they are in charge of discipline. In this study, both probability and non-probability sampling was used to select study samples. Non probability was used to select Bungoma Central Sub-County. Purposive sampling was used to select the 10 schools and form two class of students enrolled in public secondary schools. To select the specific sample from the population of form twos who took part in the study, simple random sampling was used to select the student respondents. The deputy principals and teacher counselors were selected proportionately to the 10 selected schools for the study. Thus the study selected 10 deputy principals and 10 teacher counselors for the study.

The sample size of students in form two was determined using a formula developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) which assumes:

$$S = \frac{x^2 NP (1-P)}{1 - d^2 (N-1) + x^2 P (1-P)}$$

Where { } { } { }

S = required sample size

X = the table value of chi- square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level.

For a significance level of @ =0.5, x =1.96

N = The population size = 10,000

P = The population proportion (assumed to be 100 since this would provide the maximum sample size) = the degree of accuracy expressed as proportion (0.5)

Using this formula, 370 students in form two were obtained where the researcher used simple random sampling to obtain 37 student respondents per school. Deputy Principals and teacher counselors (1) were selected proportionately to the sampled schools. According to Mcneil (1990) data in a large study intended for statistical analysis should be collected from at least a sample of 10% of the population. This view was taken into consideration in the selection of the sample for schools, deputy principals and teacher counselors. The qualitative and quantitative data was extracted from students' and deputy principals' questionnaires and presented as follows:

Results

As the managers of discipline in the schools, deputy principals were core in this study. The researcher sought to establish from them whether there is presence of irresponsible sexual behavior in the schools. Their responses were indicated in table 1.

Table 1: Existence of irresponsible sexual behavior

| Type of Gender | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Yes | 9 | 90 |
| No | 1 | 10 |
| Total | 10 | 100 |

Most of the respondents agree that they have experienced and witnessed irresponsible sexual behavior in their schools while just only 10% of the responds who do not agree to this. In terms of how often the irresponsible sexual behaviors are witnessed in the schools, table 2 was a summary of the same.

Table 2: Manifestation of the irresponsible sexual behavior

| Type of Gender | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Never | 0 | 0 |
| Once in a while | 2 | 20 |
| Pretty often | 3 | 30 |
| Very | 5 | 50 |
| Total | 10 | 100 |

The results show that 50% of the interviewed deputy principals believe the irresponsible sexual behaviour is so often manifested in the schools they are administering. Besides, collectively 100% of the respondents agree that there is existence of such behaviors in their school. Nevertheless, none of the deputy teachers seem to be having a different persecution. In terms of dealing with this kind of behavior, the three main ways which were dominant were guidance and counseling, suspension and role modeling.

The researcher found out from the students that availability of sexual content in social media sites has increased sexual practices among secondary school students as depicted in figure 1.

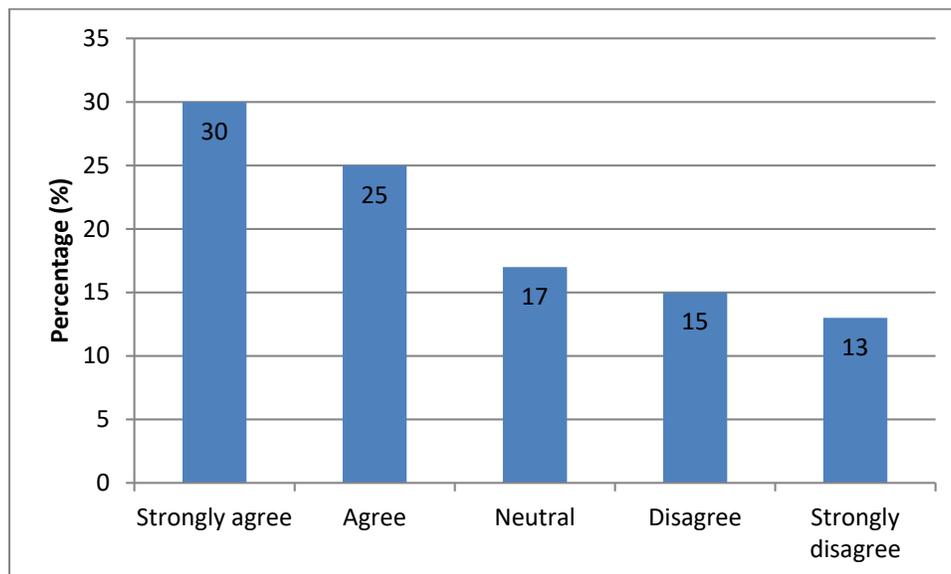


Figure 1: Availability of sexual content in social media sites and sexual practices

Form the figure, majority (represented by 30%) strongly agree that sexual content in social media sites has increased sexual practices among secondary school students. 28% of the respondents however do not agree to this. As to whether most secondary students adopt nudity habits when they see them being glorified in social media sites, majority of the students either strongly agreed or agreed to this fact. This can be exemplified in table 3.

Table 3: Adoption of nudity habits from social media sites

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly agree | 120 | 32 |
| Agree | 102 | 28 |
| Neutral | 82 | 22 |
| Disagree | 42 | 11 |
| Strongly disagree | 24 | 7 |
| Total | 370 | 100 |

As much as majority (represented by 60%) agree that students adopt nudity habits when they see them being glorified in social media sites, 18% of the respondents do not completely agree to this.

It was also found out by the researcher that most secondary school students are adopting sexual habits such as multiple sexual partners which are glorified in social media sites. A large percentage of the respondents (51%) agree that school students are adopting sexual habits such as multiple sexual partners which are glorified in social media sites. Nevertheless, some of the respondents (16%) do not agree to this.

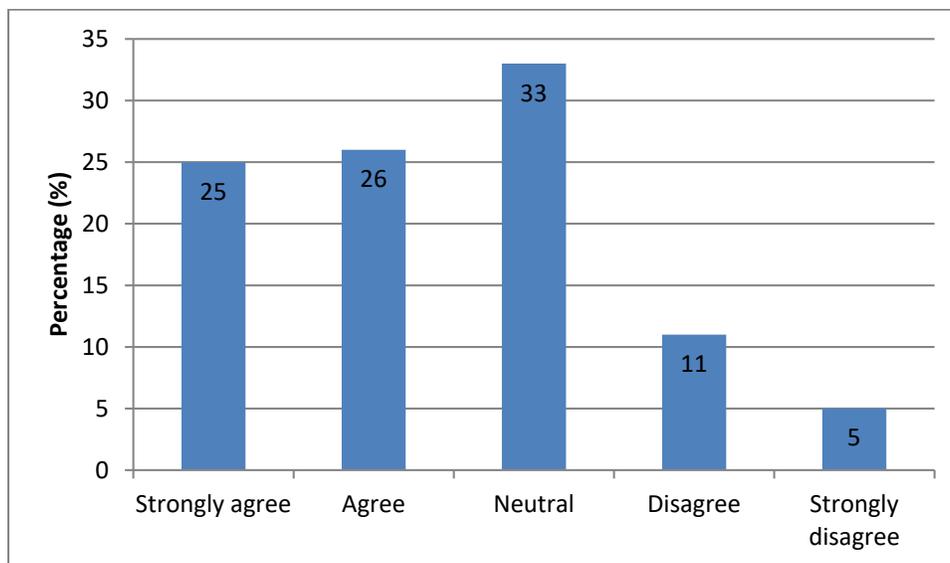


Figure 2: Response on whether social media influences sexual habits

When students were asked if they post nude photos online, many of the secondary school girls have been increasingly posting nude photos in a bid to get online acceptance as indicated in table 4.

Table 4: Posting of nude photos online

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-----------|----------------|
|----------|-----------|----------------|

| | | |
|-------------------|------------|------------|
| Strongly agree | 82 | 22 |
| Agree | 115 | 31 |
| Neutral | 107 | 29 |
| Disagree | 40 | 11 |
| Strongly disagree | 26 | 7 |
| Total | 370 | 100 |

A large percentage of the respondents (53%) agree that secondary school girls have been increasingly posting nude photos in a bid to get online acceptance. Nonetheless, some of the respondents (18%) do not agree to this. In fact, it was established that most secondary school students adopt nudity displayed in social media sites in order to achieve social acceptance among other students as portrayed in figure 3.

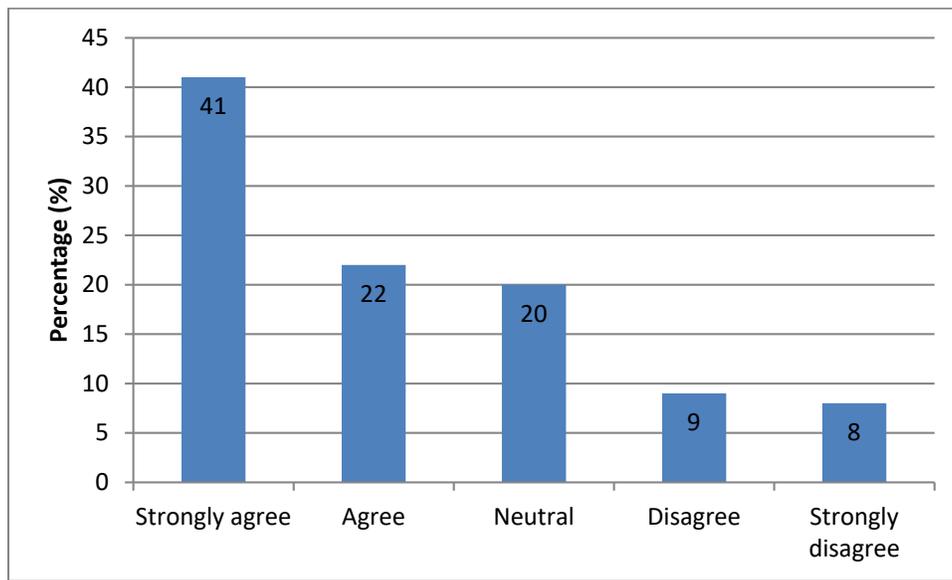


Figure 3: Social acceptance and posting of nude photos

A large percentage of the respondents (63%) agree that secondary school students adopt nudity displayed in social media sites in order to achieve social acceptance among other students. Nonetheless, some of the respondents (17%) do not agree to this. In regard to respondents' response on whether they have a friend whom they regard as a sexual partner, A large percentage of the respondents (78%) agree that they indeed have friends whom they regard as sexual partners. Nonetheless, some of the respondents (22%) do not have such friends. This is shown in figure 4.

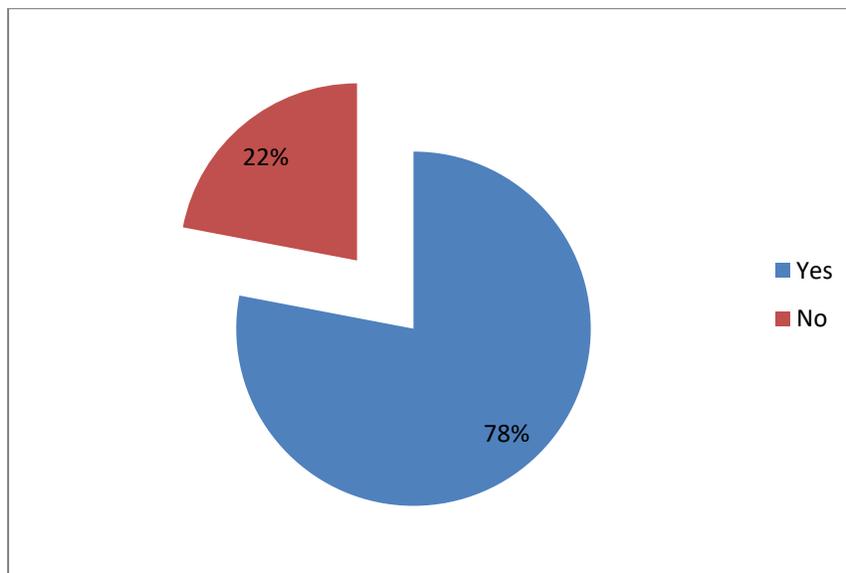


Figure 4: Exposure to sexual partners

For those respondents who reported that they have friends whom they regard to as sexual partners, majority of them admitted of being taken to a movie or video. Though a large percentage of the respondents (73%) agree that they indeed they have watched movies with the friend they regard as sexual partner, some of the respondents (27%) have never watched movies. Respondents that reported of watching a movie noted Nigerian movies (hollywood), bollywood and action movies as being their preferred movies. In addition, 72% of the respondents admitted that their partners insisted on having sex with them after watching the movies. Even so, some of the respondents (28%) have never experienced that.

The researcher further tried to find out the number of sex partners the respondents have had in the last three years and results are as indicated in table 5.

Table 5: Sex partners

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------|----------------|
| 1 | 150 | 41 |
| 2 | 120 | 32 |
| 3 | 60 | 16 |
| 4 and above | 10 | 3 |
| None | 30 | 8 |
| Total | 370 | 100 |

The majority of the respondents have had 1 sex partner in the last 3 years, followed with those having two sex partners and finally 3 and 4 respectively. Nevertheless, there exist those that have never had any sex partner in the last 3 years. Further, about the respondents' source of sex partner, most of them reported of getting them through mass media such as face book or pen pals in magazines. Majority of the respondents' source of sex partners was through mass media. However, a few (41%) did not get their partners through mass media. It was also established by the researcher that only 11% of the respondents have ever been accused of any sexual offence as shown in figure 5.

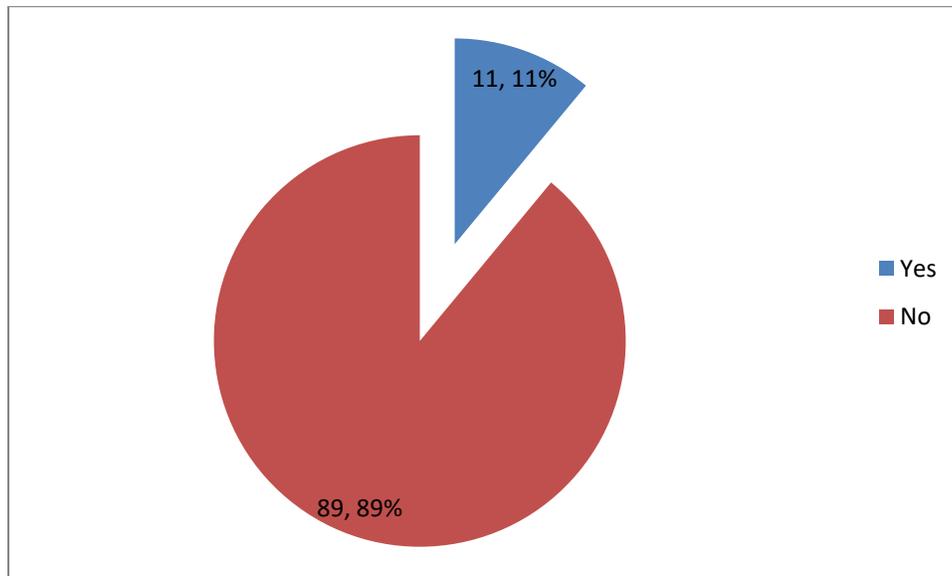


Figure 6: Accuse of sexual offence

It can be depicted from the figure that most (about 89%) of the respondents have never been accused of the sexual offenses whilst have been accused of the sexual offenses committed. The majority of the respondents (54%) support practices such as sex before marriages in adolescents, however some with almost an equal percentage (46%) do not accept and support this as shown in table 6.

Table 6: Practice of sex before marriage

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------|----------------|
| Yes | 200 | 54 |
| No | 170 | 46 |
| Total | 370 | 100 |

The researcher also sought to find out whether respondents felt that secondary school students be allowed to have mobile phones in school. Majority of the respondents (73%) strongly agree that it is worth it to allow mobile phones in school. Nevertheless, there are those students who believe that it is not important at all to have phone in school. This is exemplified in figure 7.

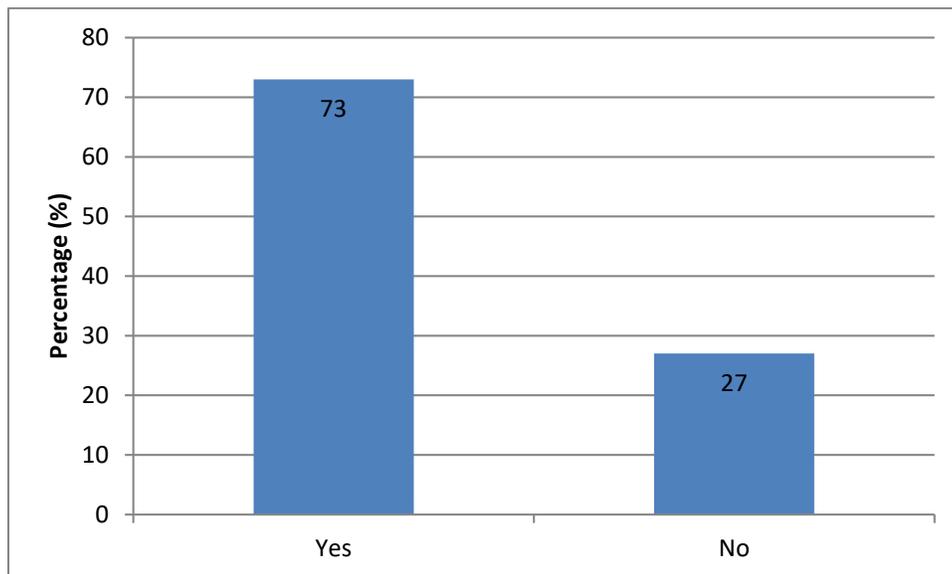


Figure 7: Feeling on ownership of a phone in school

The respondents who were of the opinion of having phones noted that the phones will be used for research and Communication.

Further, it was also noted that most of the high school students (81%) prefer to be given condoms while only 19% are of the contrary opinion and believe that it is not important at all to have condoms given to students. Those who were of the opinion of condoms being given mentioned that they are for protection while those of the contrary opinion noted that it promotes immorality.

Finally, the researcher rated the following as sources of sexual information: Parents, Peers/friends, Television/video, Internet pictures, Movies, Mobile phones and Theatres and the results were as shown in table 7.

Table 7: Sources of sexual information

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Parents | 10 | 3 |
| Peers /friends | 100 | 27 |
| Television/ video | 80 | 22 |
| Internet pictures | 80 | 22 |
| Movies | 20 | 5 |
| Mobile phones | 60 | 16 |
| Theatres | 20 | 5 |
| Total | 370 | 100 |

From the table, it was established that the leading sources of sexual information were peers/friends, television/video and internet pictures. It was also reported that 57% of the respondents were positive that sexual information from their favorite mass media source makes them desire to have sex? However 43% percent of the respondents don't agree that sexual information can make them have desire for sex. Those respondents who were of the opinion noted that by watching pornographic most students feel it's worth to try and put what they have seen into practical.

Most of the students (62%) agree that they have at some point watched pornographic movies. Out of the sampled population it is only 30% of the students who do disagree to the view of the majority. Respondent's response on how frequent they use the following media to access sexual information.

Correlation was done to determine the relationship between mass media and sexual responsibility and the results are manifested in table 8.

Table 8: Correlation of relationship between mass media and sexual responsibility

| | | Mass Media | Sexual Irresponsibility |
|---|---------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Mass media | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .262** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 100 | 100 |
| Sexual Irresponsibility | Pearson Correlation | .262** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 370 | 370 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

From the correlation (Pearson Correlation -approaching 1 from the positive) of response by the students on exposure to mass media and adolescent students' Sexual Irresponsibility in secondary schools in Bungoma Central Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya, it depicts Sexual Irresponsibility behavior among the students can intensely be influenced by their exposure to mass media. The positive value .262** of Pearson Correlation implies that the Sexual Irresponsibility behavior among the students in secondary schools heavily relies on their exposure to mass media, as it can be seen from the data collected from the respondents.

The number of students as it can be seen from the respondents who engage in Sexual Irresponsibility behavior clearly and equally bring together with the number of students exposed to mass media. This clearly shows how students can engage in sexual irresponsibility having exposed to mass media contents. It therefore worth to conclude that mass media has a great impact on the sexual irresponsibility of the students. Sexual being part of physical and emotional well-being of all human beings, it seems like indeed the mass media impacts negatively on the emotions of the students thus making them engage in sexual irresponsibility.

The research (*from the positive correlation of value .262***) ascertains the research done by Todd (2009), that the young are bombarded with video, shows, advertisements and movies with sexual messages. With regard to sex, three out of four teenagers say that the social media content make it seem normal for youngsters to engage in sexual relations.

Recommendation

The schools should organize sessions for parents and educate them on effective ways of regulating the students from exposure to mass media. Besides too the school should organize sessions for students and educate the on the effect of use of mass media for bad content access like pornographies.

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