

**Sexting and Risky Sexual Behaviour among the Youth in Kenya:**

**Implications on the Fight against HIV**

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## Introduction

Sexting, the practice of sending sexually suggestive messages and sharing nude or seminude pictures via cell phone or posting them online (Henderson, 2011), has drastically increased with the heightened use of smart phones and tablets among the youths in Kenya and many other parts of the world. The decrease in the cost of the mobile phones in Kenya, the low cost of data bundles and improved connectivity, has enabled the Kenyan youths to become more technologically versatile than ever. Most youths possess cell phones that are well equipped with immediate access to cameras, video, and internet access; making the capturing and transmission of nude or semi-nude photos of themselves or sexually suggestive text messages easier and faster.

Sexting has increasingly become an issue of concern to many developed countries including United States of America, Britain and Canada (Contemporary Sexuality, 2009). For instance, an online survey of 1280 teens and young adults between 13 and 26 years by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2008) indicated that approximately one-half of the respondents have electronically transmitted nude or semi-nude photos. Additionally, of those surveyed, 38% of teens and 58% of young adults (a total of 48% combined) had sent sexually suggestive messages through their cell phones via text messaging or other social media networks including Facebook. Henderson (2011) in a study that involved 408 respondents established that nearly two thirds of participants had sent nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves. Cell phones were reported the primary medium in transmission of "sext" (sexting message).

Despite plethora of research about sexting in many technologically advanced states, there seems to be a dearth of information about the relationships between sexting and sexual risky behaviour among the youths in Kenya and the implication of sexting on the fight against HIV among the youths in Kenya. In addition, there is no known scientific research

regarding the relationship between the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors associated with sexting and sexual behaviors among the youths in Kenya. This study hopes to fill this gap.

The purpose of the proposed study will be to examine sexting (beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors) in relation to sexual behaviors using empirical research data and describe its possible implications for the fight against HIV among the youths in Kenya. To achieve this purpose the study sets out to:

1. Explore the behaviors involved with sexting such as how often sexually suggestive messages are sent, the mediums in which they are sent, and to whom they are sent.
2. Describe attitudes and beliefs associated with sexting among youths in Kenya.
3. Establish if there exists a correlation between involvement in sexting, and sexual risk behaviour among the Kenyan youths who participate in sexting.

The knowledge from this research may benefit parents, educators, professionals of youths' sexuality and sexual behaviours, counsellors as well as the government and non-governmental organizations participating in the fight against STIs, HIV and other youths sexual risk behavior. The researcher postulates that understanding the motivation behind sexting may facilitate parents, the youths' organizations, and school counsellors to better understand and provide proper sexuality education to the technologically driven youth of the current time. Further the finding will inform various researchers in the field of human development, psychology, sociology, education, media studies and communication.

### **Background**

Previous studies have shown that sharing of sexually suggestive messages and nude or seminude images, is part of a prelude to sexual activity and may be just one part of a sexual relationship (Henderson, 2011). Young adults who share nude or seminude images of themselves appeared to have a greater acceptance of sexual promiscuity (Lo & Wei, 2005). In

addition, it has been established that the behaviour of sharing nude or seminude is associated with high-risk sexual behaviors and that young adults exposure to sexually explicit images is also associated with certain types of sexual behaviors (i.e., anal sex and multiple sexual partners) (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2008). In addition, it is imperative to note that traditional strategies to meet sex partners (e.g., going to the street and clubs, or meeting through friends) have been augmented by modern communication trends like sexting (Henderson, 2011).

Sexting has undoubtedly done more than changing the patterns and engagement structures of social interactions among the youths. Apparently, sexting is emerging as rich environment of potential risk for acquiring or transmitting sexually transmitted disease (STD), including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS (Benotsch, Snipes, Martin, & Bull, 2013; Majied, 2013; Bryant, Heath, & Carter, 2014)

Sexting through various digital media platforms provide an excellent means of initiating sexual contact without initial face-to-face interaction (Lewis et al., 2013). This form of communication provides ample opportunities for the young adult to hide sexual activity from parents or peers and initiate contacts even with strangers via the social networking sites and other digital media platforms (Majied, 2013). This exposes the young and naïve young adults exploring sexuality and thus making them more vulnerable to contracting HIV and STDs. Beyond providing an understanding of sexting behaviour among the youths, the purpose of the proposed study is to establish if there exist a correlation between sexting and Risky Sexual Behaviour among the Youth in Kenya.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Meaning of Sexting**

The definition of the term sexting may not be legal but, most state laws generally concentrate on nude or semi-nude of images of minors under the age of 18 which may be

transmitted through cell phones to anyone, regardless of the age of the recipient; however, images can be distributed through computers, web cameras, or digital cameras (Sacco, Argudin, Maguire, & Tallong, 2010). The term sexting, a unification of the word sex and texting, is an activity specifically engaged in through cell phones (Jaishankar, 2009; Lenhart, 2009). In this study the term sexting will be used to describe the convergence of texting and sending sexually explicit images through SMS technology.

## **2.2 Characteristics Sexting participants**

Many of the literature consulted reveals similar findings regarding patterns of sexting. The case in point, sexting has been found to be predominant among older teenagers and young adults (AP-MTV, 2009; Lenart, 2009; Temple et al., 2012). Older teenagers (17 years old) are more likely to send sexting images than compared to younger participants (12 years old), eight percent versus four percent, respectively (Lenhart, 2009). Similar findings also reveal sexting is most common among 18 to 24 year olds (33%) versus 14 to 17 year olds (24%) (AP-MTV, 2009). Many scholars argue that sexting is utilized for social (romance, flirtation or finding a sex partner) but also antisocial (blackmail, (cyber) bullying and harassment) goals (Wartena, 2012). Often content of a "sext" (sexting message) is something intimate and meant to be private, usually shared between people in a romantic relationship. While many scholars agree that motivation of sexting appears to be a way to communicate to each other for romantic / flirtatious reasons, some scholars have cited other forms of motivations for sending a "sext" including; a partner requesting for them (James 2009), as a form of seduction (Jones 2008), form of feedback on how one looks (Alapo 2009) or as a form of "safe" sex (Wartena, 2012). Considering its motivations (Chalfen 2009, Wartena 2011) it could be argued that sexting has a more social and intrapersonal nature than other sexually explicit material. Weisskirch and Delevi (2011) established that attachment anxiety

predicted positive attitudes towards sexting such as; accepting it as normal, that it will enhance the relationship, and that partners will expect sexting.

### **2.3 Sexting frequency through mobile phones**

Bearing in mind the pervasiveness of cell phone use among teenagers, a research by Kathy & Donna (2014) studying whether a positive relationship existed between sending a sext message and cell phone use, looking at; regular cell phone usage, average daily texting frequency, turning the cell phone off at night and sleeping with the cell phone on. They found out that regular cell phone and sending a "sext", had 99% agreed doing the same. Only 1% of those who did not use a cell phone regular reported sending a sext message. In addition, those who reported sending a sext message, were more likely than those who did not send a sext message to send a high number of texts each day in the USA and this prompt a study in Kenya to find out if the situation is the same.

### **2.4 Sex-related topics the youth are interested on from online**

The study done by Laura & Kristian (2013) in the UK looked at the number of studies that address what sex-related topics youth seek or engage with online. Data was mainly based on two different methodologies: (a) content analysis of youth questions and discussions on sexual health Web sites, and (b) surveys or interviews with youth about their interests and retrospective activities online. Thus most commonly cited online sex education topics of interest that the youth were found interested on about their information included: HIV/AIDS/STIs (eight studies cited this topic), pregnancy/childbirth (eight studies), sex acts/behavior (seven studies), contraception/protection (seven studies), information about the body (six studies), relationships/social issues (five studies), and sexual identity/orientation (three studies) while others were concerned with how sexual infections might be transmitted (Vickberg, Kohn, Franco, & Criniti, 2003) among others areas. An interest in pregnancy/childbirth integrated questions on whether one could get pregnant in different situations, like

if a condom broke or if an adolescent pulled out during sexual intercourse (Suzuki & Calzo, 2004; Vickberg et al., 2003). Adolescents' interest in sex acts/behaviors often included questions about how to have sex in certain ways, like anal or oral sex (Gilbert, Temby, & Rogers, 2005; Hooper et al., 2008).

## 2.5 Future impact on the life the youth

Being ignorant of their online interactions create a "digital footprint", likely to exist in cyberspace into perpetuity (O'Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Walker, Sanci, & Temple-Smith, 2011). One's sexting history could therefore have unforeseen negative implications for their study, HIV/AIDS and career opportunities, as tertiary educational institutions and employers are known to screen their prospective candidates' online histories before making a decision about placement (Shafron-Perez, 2009).

## 3.0 Methodology

The study will adopt descriptive design utilizing quantitative approach. A survey will be administered to undergraduate students above 18 years old. Consented participants will complete a self-administered anonymous survey that will include questions assessing demographic information, cell phone ownership, sexting behaviors including attitudes and beliefs on sexting; and sexual behaviors. Data will be collected during fall semester (September–December 2015).

*Table 1: summarized methodology*

Key		
Population	All youths in universities: Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda	Kenya - Nigeria - ? Uganda - ? Total = >1 million
Sampling technique	Multi stage sampling	-cluster sampling (based on the region) - random sampling in each

<p>Sample size</p>	<p>According to Saunders et al (2009), cluster sampling can permit large sample size, can be used for dispersed clusters and relevant to cluster. The population will first be clustered based on geographical regions and in each cluster, a number will be selected randomly.</p> <p>Data will be collected from 2395 respondents. Saunders et al (2009:219) recommends this sample size where respondents fall within the 1,000,000 – 10,000,000 with a 2% error margin at a 95 confidence level.</p>	<p>region</p> <p>Of the 2395,</p> <p>Kenya (35% of population) Uganda (78% of population) Nigeria – (50% of population)</p> <p>Gives ratio:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Kenya</td> <td>Uganda</td> <td>Nigeria</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0.21</td> <td>0.48</td> <td>0.31</td> </tr> </table> <p>Kenya – 514 youths in all regions. Currently, 312 data collected in Nairobi only.</p> <p>Data collection will resume in Kisumu, Mombasa and Kisumu.</p>	Kenya	Uganda	Nigeria	0.21	0.48	0.31
Kenya	Uganda	Nigeria						
0.21	0.48	0.31						
<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Descriptive and inferential statistics; percentages, cross tabulation, correlation, confirmatory factor analysis to reduce weak variables, and regression.</p>							

#### 4.0. Findings

##### Demographic

On the age, the mean age was 22.36, median 22.00 with SD of 3.225. The minimum age was 16 and the maximum age is 36. Of the respondents, 85.5% were single, 9% married, 4.1% engaged and 1.4% dating.

Female were the majority; 60.8% and male were 36.2%. Christians are the majority at 79.5% while undergraduates were 85.2%. Table below indicates this.



Table 1: Demographics

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Marital Status	single	248	85.5
	engaged	12	4.1
	married	26	9
	dating	4	1.4
	Total	290	100
Gender	Male	120	39.2
	Female	186	60.8
	Total	306	100
Religion	Christian	232	79.5
	Hindu	20	6.8
	Muslim	14	4.8
	none	8	2.7
	catholic	18	6.2
	Total	292	100
Current Education level	high school	14	4.7
	undergraduate	254	85.2
	graduate	30	10.1
	Total	298	100

4.1. Explore the behaviours involved with sexting such as how often sexually suggestive messages are sent, the mediums in which they are sent, and to whom they are sent.

When asked to state which platform is most used to share sexy messages or nude/seminude pictures, the results were: There is similarity on the socialization platform and platforms used in sharing nude pictures. Whatsapp (28.7%), facebook (17.9%), instagram (16.7%) and SMS (12%) are the common favourite socialization platform while used platform in sharing nude pictures are Whatsapp (42.5%), facebook (18.1%), instagram (13.6%) and SMS (6.3%). Table 2 indicates this.

Table 2: Favourite socialization platform and nude sharing platform.

	Favourite socialization platform	Used platform in sharing nude pictures
Facebook	17.9%	18.1%
Blogs	2.7%	4.5%
Twitter	7.4%	3.5%
Instagram	16.5%	13.6%
Pinterest	5.4%	0.7%
Whatsapp	28.7%	42.5%
SMS	12%	6.3%
Emails	7.9%	3.5%
Snapchart	0	5.9%
All	1.5%	1.4%
Total	100%	100%

Respondents were asked to state the frequency at which they send/receive sexy message and nude/semi-nude pictures/videos. Majority indicated they sent monthly; sexy message (35.2%) and nude/semi-nude pictures (49.2%). Figure 1 below shows this.

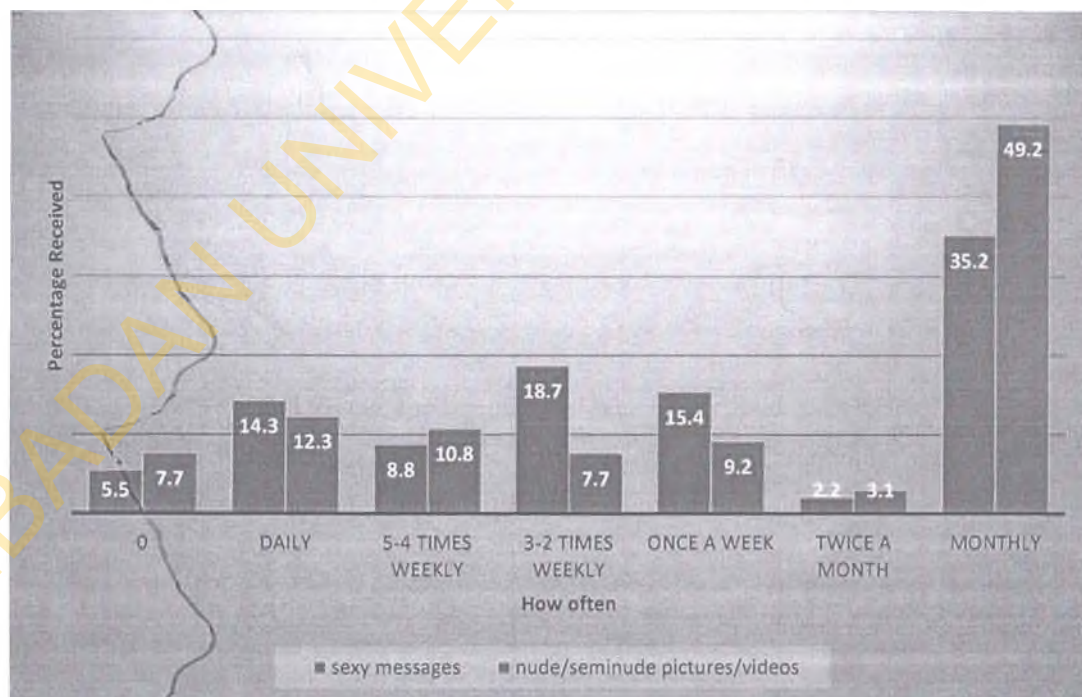
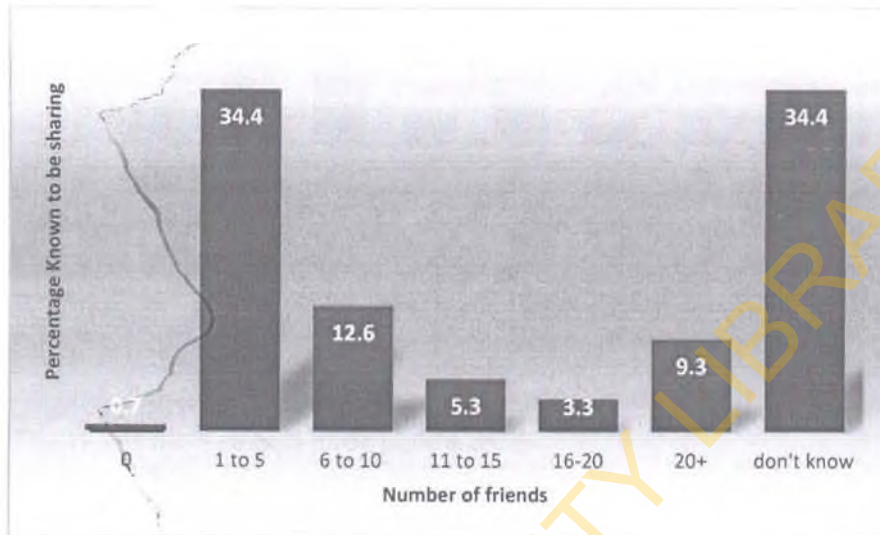


Figure 1: Frequency of sexting.

Respondents also admitted they knew their personal friends who have ever shared nude/semi-nude pictures through their mobile phones. Majority (34.4%) knew 1 to 5 of their friends as indicated in figure 2.



*Figure 2: Number of friends who share nude photos.*

Despite knowing the number of friends who share nude photos, the respondents indicated they have shared nude photos with: closest boyfriend/girlfriend (17.4%), followed by extra-marital sex partners (14.6%), while others were ranked below 10% as indicated in figure 3.

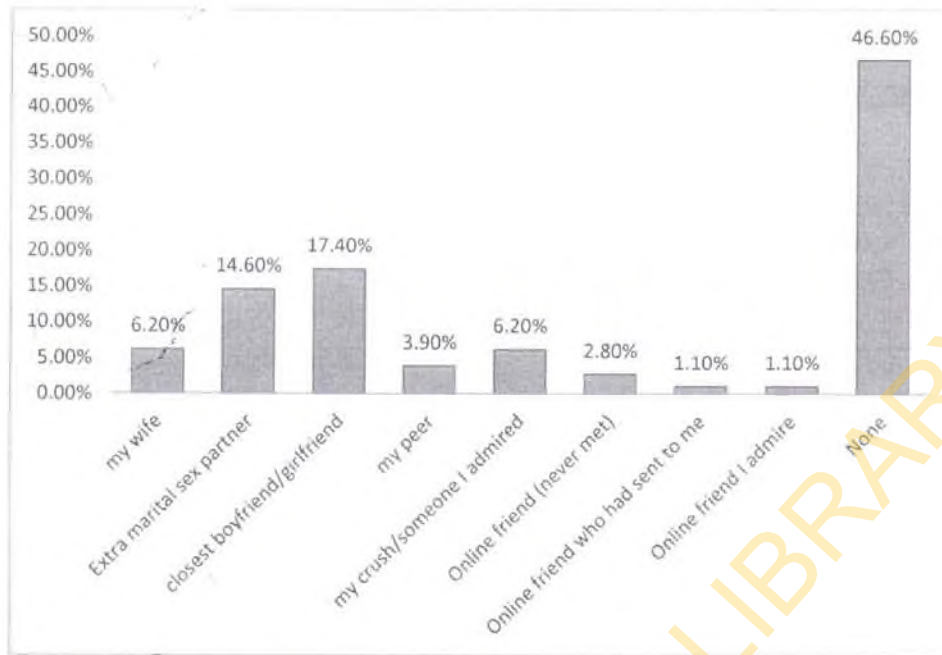


Figure 3: I have shared nude photos with

4.2.: Describe attitudes and beliefs associated with sexting among youths in Kenya.

The respondents' key effects on both sending sex information and effect of sharing nude/semi-nude photos were: increase in urge for sex, negative self-image and reputation and increased thinking about sex. Table 3 shows this.

Table 3: Effect of sexting – sending sex information and nude photos.

Effects	effects of sending sex information	effects of sharing nude/seminude photos
Increased urge for sex	20.9%	17.4%
Negative self-image and reputation	22.5%	25.3%
Increased thinking about sex	18.1%	17.7%
Makes one sexually active	9.1%	7.3%
Addiction to sex	5.8%	6.4%
Extra marital partners	8.8%	8.5%
Problems with future employers	8.5%	8.2%
Others	6.3%	9.1%
	100%	100%

The comparison between male and female perception on sexting is indicated in table 4:

Table 2: perceptino of sexting – male and female.

		Not common at all	Not very common	Fairly common	Very common
Sending sexy messages to someone else	Female	4.1	10.1	48.6	37.2
	Male	6.2	20.5	30.8	42.5
Sending sexy (nude/semi-nude) pictures of oneself to someone else	Female	6.0	22.8	47.7	23.5
	Male	6.8	31.5	32.2	29.5
Posting sexy (nude/semi-nude) picture/video of oneself online	Female	13.0	24.0	37.0	26.0
	Male	15.2	38.6	27.6	18.6
Sharing/forwarding sexy messages/pictures with other people than the one they were meant for.	Female	12.0	24.0	39.3	24.7
	Male	8.9	27.4	35.6	28.1

However, further analysis shows correlation between male and female perception on sexting: there is minimal difference of texting based on gender.

Table 3: Correlation – sexting based on gender.

		How common is sending sexy messages to someone else among males of your age?	How common is sending nude/seminude pictures of the self to someone else among males of your age?	How common is posting nude/seminude pictures/videos of the self online among males of your age?	How common is sharing/forwarding sexy messages/pictures with unintended people among males of your age?
How common is sending sexy messages to someone else among girls/females of your age?	Pearson Correlation	.433**	.437**	.325**	.190
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	0.000	0.000	0.022
How common is sending nude/seminude pictures of the self to someone else among girls/females of your age?	Pearson Correlation	.256**	.326**	.207*	-0.017
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	0.000	0.013	0.844
How common is posting nude/seminude	Pearson Correlation	.200	.248**	.280**	0.051

pictures/videos of the self online among girls/females of your age?	earson Correlation	.045			
	Significance (2-tailed)	0.593	0.003	0.001	0.547
How common is sharing/fowarding sexy messages/pictures with unintended people among girls/females of your age?	Pearson Correlation	-.172	.279**	.260**	-0.028
	Significance (2-tailed)	0.039	0.001	0.002	0.735
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).					

Despite the frequency of sexting, the persons whom sexting takes place and similarity based on gender, the respondents (99%) indicated they were not addicted to habits of sharing nude/semi-nude pictures of self to others.

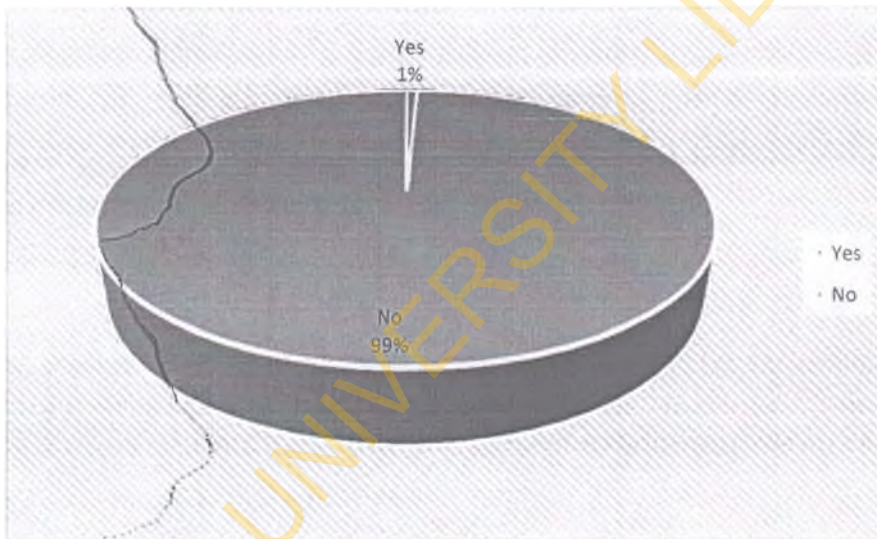


Figure 4: are you addicted in sexting?

4.3: Establish if there exists a correlation between involvement in sexting, and sexual risk behaviour among the Kenyan youths who participate in sexting.

The correlation analysis is based on a number of variables.

The first test shows there is no correlation between friends who share nude/seminude pictures and frequency of sending/receiving sexy message and pictures. This shows friendship does not influence once behaviour. Table 6 shows this.

Table 6: Correlation between friends and personal habit of texting.

		Frequency in which I send/receive sexy messages	Frequency in which I send/receive nude/seminude pictures/videos
Number of your friends ever shared nude/seminude pictures via mobile phones	Correlation Coefficient	-0.159	-0.135
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.134	0.289

However, there was correlation between known friends who send nude/semi-nude pictures and 'Asked someone to send a personal sexy message/picture/video to you'. This shows those with known friends tend to ask to receive the nude/semi-nude pictures and not sending.

Table 4: Correlation between friends and trend to ask for sexting.

		In the past 30 days, I have sent to someone	In the past 30 days, I have posted to someone's online profile or as privates message	In the past 30 days, I have internet-sent/posted	In the past 30 days, I have received from someone	In the past 30 days, I have shared with others, not intended persons	In the past 30 days, I have had someone share with me but supposed to be private	In the past 30 days, I have asked someone to send to me sexy message
Number of your friends ever shared nude/seminude pictures via mobile phones	Correlation Coefficient	0.021	0.052	.170	0.133	0.111	0.045	.193
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.803	0.533	0.043	0.112	.183	0.591	0.019

The Frequency at which one send or receive sex message and nude pictures had the following correlations:

- frequency of sending sex message and Frequency in which I send/receive nude/semi-nude pictures/videos in the past 30 days ( $p=.000$   $r=.732$ )
- frequency of sex message and Sent a sexy personal message/picture/video to someone in the past 30 days ( $p=.003$   $r=.310$ )
- frequency of sex message and Posted a sexy personal message/picture/video to someone's online profile or as private message in the past 30 days ( $p=.000$   $r=.375$ )
- frequency of sex message and Internet sent/posted a sexy personal message/picture/video in the past 30 days ( $p=.001$   $r=.349$ )
- frequency of sex message and Shared a sexy message/picture/video with someone other than the one(s) it was originally meant for in the past 30 days ( $p=.004$   $r=.305$ )
- frequency of sex message and Had a sexy message/picture/video (originally meant to be private) shared with me in the past 30 days ( $p=.019$   $r=.249$ )
- frequency of sex message and Asked someone to send a personal sexy message/picture/video to you in the past 30 days ( $p=.005$   $r=.297$ )

There is no correlation - between frequency of sex message and Received a sexy personal message/picture/video from someone in the past 30 days ( $p=.076$   $r=.191$ )

On the frequency of sending nude photos, there was correlation with:

- Frequency of sending nude photos and Frequency in which I send/receive nude/semi-nude pictures/videos in the past 30 days ( $p=.000$   $r=.732$ )
- Frequency of sending nude photos and Posted a sexy personal message/picture/video to someone's online profile or as private message in the past 30 days ( $p=.006$   $r=.347$ )
- Frequency of sending nude photos and Internet sent/posted a sexy personal message/picture/video in the past 30 days ( $p=.007$   $r=.339$ )
- Frequency of sending nude photos and Shared a sexy message/picture/video with someone other than the one(s) it was originally meant for in the past 30 days ( $p=.008$   $r=.335$ )

There is no correlation between

- Frequency of sending nude photos and Received a sexy personal message/picture/video from someone in the past 30 days ( $p=.052$   $r=.250$ )
- Frequency of sending nude photos and Had a sexy message/picture/video (originally meant to be private) shared with me in the past 30 days ( $p=.300$   $r=.134$ )



Frequency of sending nude photos and Asked someone to send a personal sexy message/picture/video to you in the past 30 days ( $p=.279$   $r=.140$ )

Table 5: correlation between frequency of texting and personal behaviour

		Frequency in which I send/receive sexy messages	Frequency in which I send/receive nude/seminude pictures/videos	In the past 30 days, I have sent to someone	In the past 30 days, I have posted to someone's online profile or as private message	In the past 30 days, I have internet-sent/posted	In the past 30 days, I have received from someone	In the past 30 days, I have shared with others, not intended persons	In the past 30 days, I have had someone share with me but supposed to be private	In the past 30 days, I have asked someone to send to me
Frequency in which I send/receive sexy messages	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.732**	.310**	.375**	.349**	.191	.305**	.249*	.297**
	sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.003	.000	.001	.076	.004	.019	.005
Frequency in which I send/receive nude/seminude pictures/videos	Correlation Coefficient	.732**	1.000	.347**	.339**	.250	.134	.335**	.225	.140
	sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.006	.007	.052	.300	.008	.079	.279

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