

**Access to Social Media and Sexual Behaviour among Secondary School Students:
A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Morogoro, Tanzania**

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Abstract

Remarkable changes have happened in the communication industry due to the rapid growth of the social networking over the last five years. Adolescent at secondary school level are increasingly accessing and using these social networks in their daily lives. However, the impacts of their access to social media into their sexual behaviour remain underreported. This study was set to explore the relationship between social networks and sexual behaviour. The study was conducted in Morogoro and involved four secondary schools. The study adopted cross sectional research design. Simple random sampling and systematic sampling technique were used to select sample 200 students. Data analysis was done using the Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) where descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Index scale was used to gauge students' sexual behaviour and F-test was used to compare students' sexual behaviour and their access to social media. The study found that students had risky sexual behaviour: have many sexual partners and were not using condoms consistently. Majority of students have access to social networks and access to social networks was associated with their sexual behaviour. The study recommends that more education be given to parents on the effects of their children access to social networks and their undertaking of risky sexual behaviour so that they can guide and support them on using social networks that does not expose them to unfavourable sexual contents.

Key words: Sexual behaviour, social network, adolescent

1.0 Introduction

Communication is central to human being; it sustains and maintains human relationship and social interactions. The internet, since its inception in the 1990s has significantly changed the method used by people in communication, banking, shopping and transacting different deals (Akpan *et al.*, 2013). Remarkable changes have happened in the communication industry due to the rapid growth of the social networking over the last five years. Social network is a social space created on internet, this interface space enable people's connection and communication over the internet. The interfaces also enable people to create or share their contents with other people on the same site (Mirani, 2011). Social Networks are websites where users can create a profile all about themselves and communicate with other people, send personal or public messages to whom they choose, also upload photos, music and videos to share with other people, post what they are doing at any given time, chat to other people on forums in order to share ideas.

Recent research on youth sexual behaviour reveals that access to social networks is associated with health risk taking behaviours among youth (Akpan *et al.*, 2013; Jeckoniah, 2013). Literature on adolescents' health risk behavior posit that behavior is produced by the multiple and reciprocal interactions between people and their environments (Jessor, 1993; Lerner and Castellino, 2002). Other scholars including (Sallis and Owen, 1997; McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) argue that the potential

sources of influence on risky behaviors are specified at different levels of analysis, including interpersonal processes and networks, physical environments, and cultural norms and public policies. Empirical efforts to understand factors influencing adolescents' sexual behavior have for a very long time focused on adolescents' connections to families, schools, religion, and peers (Kotchick *et al.*, 2001; Resnick *et al.*, 1997 and, Romer, *et al.*, 1994).

Accesses to social media especially social networks have relatively received less attention. However, youth access to social networks may have an important dimension of young peoples' lives that may take on special significance during adolescence, and particularly for sexual risk behavior (Brown and Cator, 2000; Chapin, 2000; Kaaya *et al.*, 2002). Most of the social networks that youth and adolescent are exposed to include sexual imagery but rarely portray consequences of risky sexual encounters or healthy sexual messages (Kundel *et al.*, 2003 and Pardum *et al.*, 2005). Although literature show that youth and adolescents sexual behaviour is associated with frequent use of social networks; it is also acknowledged that youth and adolescent behaviour is ever changing and difficult to predict. Furthermore, the media landscape including social networks is evolving at a startling pace, with a greater diversity of content. The variety of content available on these social networks is practically limitless and content can now be viewed or used on computers, MP3 players, handheld video players, and cell phones, as well as on television sets, this trend has surpassed earlier believed means, model and pace of accessing and communication such information through "television" or "Internet" media (Weinstock, 2004). This new portability makes it possible to use media in a variety of new settings and, conceivably, throughout the day. Adolescents are immersing themselves in these and newer media, with social networking sites, cell phones, and instant messaging playing major roles in their everyday lives. Thus, it is critical that researchers begin to systematically study new media and new platforms to determine their influence on adolescent sexual behaviour. Given the emerging evidence linking more traditional media use with initiation of various sexual activities, to the extent that new media contain relevant sexual messages, researchers may find that these media are also linked to developing sexual behaviour. Therefore, this study was set to explore the impact of youth access to and use of social networks on their sexual behaviour. The study broadly try to answer this main research questions: How do social networks influence youth and adolescents' sexual intentions and behaviours?

2.0 Methodology

This study adopted cross sectional research design. This design was considered appropriate given the nature of study objectives and the limitation in financial resources and time, the design is also commonly used in socioeconomic and behavioural studies. The study was conducted in Morogoro municipality in Morogoro region. Morogoro is among the regions in Tanzania that is exposed to many risks of HIV/AIDS and STIS, due to many visitors who pass in the town to other upcountry regions and countries. Youth, especially secondary school students in Morogoro town as in many other urban areas in Tanzania are increasingly accessing and using social networks for different

proposes, hence it was considered a good case from which to draw empirical evidence and lessons. Two wards: Kihonda and Kilakala, were randomly selected. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select schools with different attribute such as boarding, day schools, public and private schools to improve representation of student's behaviour in Morogoro town. The following schools participated in the study: Kigurunyembe, Morogoro, and Kihonda and Educare secondary schools. In each school two classes were selected one from ordinary level and the other from advanced level (for the schools with both Ordinary and advanced level). The mixture of the ordinary/junior and advanced/experienced students aimed at capturing the diversity and representation of student community in Morogoro town. Systematic sampling technique was used to select 25 students in each class; hence, 50 students were selected from each school making a sample of 200 students for the study. Individual questionnaire was the main method for data collection. With the aid of Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) descriptive and inferential statistics was computed. Index scale was used to gauge student's sexual behaviour and F-test was used to compare student's sexual behaviour and their access to social media.

An index scale was developed using a list of sexual behaviour variables. Nine variables were used to form this index. These variables were: ever had sex, age at first sex, ever had sexual partner, number of sexual partners, condom use, condom use for the first time during sexual intercourse, condom use for last time during sexual intercourse, general condom use and incidences of STD's. For each variable, every "Yes" response was given a value of 1, which indicated high risk, while "No" response was given a value of 0, meaning low risk. In this case, an index scale ranging from 0 (meaning low risk) to 9 (meaning high risk) was obtained as an indicator of risky sexual behaviour. The index had a mean of 1.6. Furthermore, the values on the index of the risk of sexual behaviour were categorized into low risk, medium risk and high risk of sexual behaviour in order to get a meaningful and comparable analysis. Scores of 0 to 3 on the index were considered as low risk, 4 medium and 5 to 9 high risk.

3. 0 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Socio demographic characteristics of respondents and access to social networks

Access to social network is associated with some socioeconomic characteristics of respondent. In this study socioeconomic and demographic information of respondent were sought in order to establish the distribution of respondents as well as to establish the background variables to be used in linking the socioeconomic variables, access to social networks and sexual behaviour. The study involved both sexes where male were 54% and female were 46%. The minimum age of respondent was 15years whereas the maximum age was 27 years and the median age was 19 years. Majority of the respondent (69.5%) were in the 15-20 years age bracket and about one third (30.5%) were aged above 21 years. This adolescent age group is also a transition age from childhood to adulthood where youth experience physical and emotional changes, it is also at this age where youth's interest

to explore and experiment sexual relations begin (Weinstock, 2004, Asrat, 2014). In this study majority of respondents were living with both parents (66.5%) and less than a quarter (20%) were living with single parents whereas 13.5% were living with other relatives or guardians. More than half of the respondents (56.5%) were living at home with parents and relatives whereas 30% and 13.5% were living in school hostels and private accommodation respectively. Living arrangement while studying may have influence on ones access to social network as well as adopting risky sexual behaviour by adolescents (Wirtu *et al.*, 2012; Asrat, 2014).

Findings presented in Table 1 reveal that majority of students 94.6% had access to social networks. Correlation analysis revealed that there was a relationship between students' access to social networks with their age, sex and living arrangement (person living with the respondent) ($P < 0.005$). Parents or guardians' level of education was not related to students access to social networks ($P = 0.057$).

Mobile phones and computer modems were the most common means used by students to access the social networks and about half of the respondents were introduced to these social networks by their friends. Sexwise more male students than females were more likely to be introduced to social networks by their friends (61.0% and 48.9% for male and female respectively). Students living with parents and relatives had more access to social networks (53.5%) as compared to students living in school hostels accommodations (27.5%) and those living in private accommodations (13.%)

Parents and teachers were mentioned by just a few respondents to introduce them to social networks (7% and 2.5% for parents and teachers respectively). Therefore, these findings imply that students are accessing these social media without proper guidance by knowledgeable people such as teachers and parents which pose a risk for such students to explore contents that may contain sexual messages. Asrat (2014) also found that adolescent are easily influenced by their friends and peer in making decision related to sexual behaviours and encounters.

Table 1: Access to social networks (Percent n=200)

SN	Variable	Male	Female	All
1	Have access to social networks			
	Yes	94.4	93.5	94.0
	No	5.6	6.5	6.0
2	Means of access to social networks			
	Mobile phone	78.6	80.9	79.7
	Modem on computer	18.4	12.4	15.6
	Internet	2.9	6.7	4.7
3	Who introduced students to social networks			
	Friend	61.0	48.9	50.5
	Brother	13.9	15.2	14.5

	Myself	14.8	12.0	13.5
	Parents	6.5	7.6	7.0
	Sister	0.9	13.0	6.5
	Teacher	1.9	3.3	2.5
4	Type/kind of networks accessed (respondent who accessed)			
	Face book	75.9	71.7	74.0
	You tube	61.1	43.5	53.0
	Virtual game	54.6	44.6	50.0
	Whatsapp	29.6	31.5	30.5
	Twitter	29.6	25.0	27.5
	Jamii forum	26.9	18.5	23.0
	Instagrame	13.0	14.1	13.5
	Skype	3.7	5.4	4.5
	Badoo	3.7	1.1	2.5
5	When do you access social networks			
	At home	85.7	74.2	80.4
	After class hours	7.6	4.5	6.2
	During holiday	1.9	7.9	4.6
	In the dormitory	1.9	6.7	4.1
	Weekend	1.9	3.4	2.6
	During the class hours	1.0	3.4	2.1
6	Source of finance for accessing socio-networks			
	From Parents	68.9	71.9	70.3
	From your own pocket	19.8	13.5	16.9
	From relatives	11.3	13.5	12.3
	From your boyfriend/girlfriend	0.0	1.1	0.5

The common social networks accessed by youth in this study included face book, YouTube, virtual games and whatsapps whereas the least common social networks accessed were Skype and Badoo. Weinstock (2004) contend that the variety of content available on these social networks is practically limitless and content can now be viewed or used on computers, MP3 players, handheld video players, and cell phones, as well as on television sets hence poses a risk to influence adolescent sexual behaviour. This study also found that most of the students access these social networks at home and majority of the respondents receive the money or costs associated with accessing these social media from their parents. Furthermore, female respondents were more likely to receive such assistance from their parents than their male counterpart (68.9% and 71.9% for male and female respectively).

3.2 Student's sexual behaviour

In order to underscore the association between students access to social networks and their sexual behaviour it was important to gauge the level of student's sexual behaviour. Table 2 present findings on student's sexual behaviour. Findings presented in Table 2 reveals that half of the respondents were sexually active, more male respondents reported to have been involved in sexual intercourse than their female counterparts. More than half of the respondents (55.8%) have had sexual intercourse during the past two months preceding this study. The self reported age for the first sexual intercourse was found to be seven years; it was further revealed that age at first sexual intercourse was lower for male respondent than their female counterparts. About half of all respondents acknowledged having a sexual partner; and about three quarters (72.3%) of the respondents had one sexual partner. Male respondents reported to have many sexual partners than their female counterparts. About a quarter of male respondent (21.2%) of male respondents reported to have more than three sexual partners whereas only 2.5% of female respondent reported to have three partners. Many studies also indicated that secondary school students are becoming sexually active at an increasing earlier age (9-11) (Asrat, 2014; Resnick, 1997). This early initiation of sexual activity prolongs the period of exposure to risk of pregnancy and risk of contacting STDs, including HIV infection during the reproductive span.

This study found that the rate of using condom during sexual intercourse was low and inconsistent. Only 55.8% of all respondent used condoms during their first sex, more males reported using condom in their first sex than their female counterparts (58.1% and 51.5% for male and female respectively).

Table 2: Sexual behaviour (Percent n=200)

SN	Variable	Male	Female	All
1	Ever had sexual intercourse			
	Yes	61.1	37.0	50.0
	No	38.9	63.0	50.0
2	Age at first sex			
	5-10 years	4.8	0	3.2
	11-16 years	49.2	54.8	51.1
	17-22 years	46.0	45.2	45.7
3	Do you have a sexual partner(s) (Girl/boyfriend)			
	Yes	57.0	48.9	53.3
	No	43.0	51.1	46.7

4	Number of sexual partners			
	one	59.0	92.5	72.3
	Two	19.7	5.0	13.9
	Three	13.1	2.5	8.9
	Four	1.6	0	1.0
	Five	4.9	0	3.0
	More than five	1.6	0	1.0
5	Condom the first time one had sexual intercourse			
	Yes	58.1	51.5	55.8
	No	41.9	48.5	44.2
6	Condom the last time one had sexual intercourse			
	Yes	79.0	60.6	72.6
	No	21.0	39.4	27.4
7	General condom use during sexual intercourse			
	Every time	39.3	33.3	37.2
	Almost every time	19.7	15.2	18.1
	Sometimes	31.1	24.2	28.7
	Rarely	8.2	21.2	12.8
	None	1.6	6.1	3.2
8	Last time one had sexual intercourse			
	1-3 days	3.2	6.1	4.2
	4-7 days	8.1	0	5.3
	1-3 weeks	25.8	3.0	17.9
	1-2 months	25.8	33.3	28.4
	More than 5 months	37.1	57.6	44.2
9	Incidence of Sexual Transmitted diseases during the past 12 months			
	Yes	0	2.2	1.0
	No	100	97.8	99.0

Condom uses during last sex were relatively higher for both sexes (79.0% and 60.6% for male and female respectively). However, only 37.2% (39.3% male and 33.3% female) reported to use condom every time they had sex. As found also in this study, respondents had many sexual partners and were inconsistent in using condom during sexual intercourse; such risky behaviour put them at higher risk of contracting and further spreading the HIV viruses and other Sexually transmitted diseases. Nevertheless, very few respondents reported to have contracted sexually transmitted

diseases during the past 12 months preceding this study. Similar findings have also been reported in Tanzania and other parts of the world where adolescent and youth were reported to have low and inconsistent use of condoms (Jeckoniah, 2013; Kaaya *et al.*, 2002). It is also argued that condom use behaviour especially during first intercourse is associated with its future use (Njau *et al.*, 2014; Jeckoniah, 2013, Lema *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, the findings of this study predict that respondents are more likely to continue having low use of condoms.

3.2.1 Index of sexual behaviour

Findings presented in Table 3 reveal that majority of students (56%) were categorized in the low risk category. A quarter of respondent (25.5%) were categorized in medium risk group and less than a quarter (18.5%) were categorized in the high risk category. Mixed findings where youth were categorized in higher or low medium risk behaviour have been reported in literature (Singh and Das, 2011; EAC/EALP, 2010). Sexiwise, more female respondents' were categorized into low risk behaviour than their male counterparts. This finding further confirms the earlier findings reported Table 2 on the involvement in risky sexual behaviour especially on the number of sexual partners. And, more male were categorized into medium risky behaviour than their female counterparts.

Table 3: Score on the sexual behaviour index level of risk behaviour (n=200)

Score	Percent		
	Male	Female	All
0.00	36.1	45.7	40.5
1.00	3.7	7.6	5.5
2.00	3.7	13.0	8.0
3.00	3.7	0.0	2.0
4.00	19.4	10.9	15.5
5.00	13.9	5.4	10.0
6.00	10.2	6.5	8.5
7.00	9.3	7.6	8.5
8.00	0.0	3.3	1.5
Level of risk sexual behaviour			
Low risk behaviour	47.2	66.3	56.0
Medium risk behaviour	33.3	16.3	25.5
High risk behaviour	19.4	17.4	18.5

3.2.2 Risk sexual behaviour and access to social media

In order to determine the influence of students' access to social network and their sexual behaviour, an F- test was used to compare the mean score of the index for the level of risk of the students' sexual behaviour and students' access to social networks. The study revealed that there was an association between students sexual behaviour and their sex ($P = 0.050$). Score on the sexual behaviour index was higher for male student than for female, this implies male students were more likely to engage into risk sexual behaviour than their female counterparts. All other variables were not statistically significant. The score on the mean index reveal that the risk sexual behaviour increased with an increase in age, whether one had access to social networks and the frequent of accessing the social networks. This implies that access to social networks is more likely to influence ones' sexual behaviour. The relationship between access to social networks and adolescents' sexual behaviour may be due to the media's role as an important source of sexual socialization for teenagers and the messages exchanges through that communication channels. Adolescence is a developmental period that is characterized by intense information seeking, especially about adult roles, and given the lack of information about sexuality readily available to teens, adolescents may turn to the media for information about sexual norms (Brown *et al.*, 2002).

Table 4: Risk sexual behaviour and access to social media (n = 200)

Category	Mean index	F	P
Sex of respondent			
Male	1.7222	3.703	0.050
Female	1.5109		
Age			
13-18 years	1.5934	0.443	0.643
19-25 years	1.6415		
26+ years	2.0000		
Access to social networks			
Yes	1.6277	0.036	0.849
No	1.5833		
Frequency of visit to social networks			
One times	1.4091	1.457	0.195
Two times	1.4783		
Three times	1.5714		
Four times	1.8000		
Five times	1.8667		
Six times	1.7000		

Several times	1.8222		
Type of social media visited			
Whatsapp	1.7377	1.843	0.176
Twitter	1.6364	0.016	0.899
Face book	1.6689	1.815	0.179
YouTube	1.7358	4.646	0.032
Jamii forum	1.7174	0.839	0.361
Skype	1.4444	0.505	0.478
Instagram	1.8519	2.667	0.104
Badoo	1.6250	1.529	0.218
Visual game	1.7100	2.396	0.123
Index mean	1.6250		

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this study suggest that access to social network may have important associations with adolescents' sexual behaviour. The study also found that the youth are supported by parents to access these social networks. Therefore, parents need to be informed on the impact of social network on their adolescent sexual behaviour and that social network should be considered along with family, church, school, and peers as an important context for sexual socialization.

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