

Original Research Article

Social Media Accounts Use and Sexual Partner Seeking among Adolescents in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study was done to examine the psychosocial effects of sexual partner seeking via social media accounts among adolescents; and assess whether sexual partner seeking matches with sexual orientations among adolescents using social media accounts in Dar es Salaam. Correlational research design and questionnaires were used to collect data among 264 adolescents in universities and 234 adolescents in secondary schools, who were sampled using stratified sampling technique. The obtained data were subjected to descriptive and correlational analysis and test using SPSS IBM Version 20 and presented in tables. The results indicate that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts has enhanced adolescents to be sexually overambitious to the extent of engaging in risky sexual debuts, disclosure of adolescents' privacy/secretcy, demoralization due to postage of naked pictures or their sex videos after breaking up with the partners, together with intimidations, cyber-sexual abuse and sexual insults after meeting with untrustworthy sexual partner seekers. They also indicate that sexual partner seeking is relative to sexual orientations of adolescents as driven by self-interests and sexual feelings. Therefore, it is concluded that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts is done under risky circumstances and affects the psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents. It is also recommended that more studies should be done in order to inform about coping mechanisms for the adolescents who encounter the psychosocial effects after meeting sexual partner seekers via social media accounts.

Keywords: Adolescents; Adolescent Students; Social Media Accounts; Sexual Partner Seekers; Dar es Salaam.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual partner seeking refers to an action of searching for a romantic friend or couple. The action is influenced by internal drives that push an individual to project emotions and feelings to whoever desire to engage in romantic relationship (Kelly & Dunbar, 2001; Little *et al.*, 2002; Buss, 2003). At its pace, it demands sexual partner seekers to approach those attracted to and ensure known ethics, customs, norms and age and gender factors are considered (Furman & Shaffer, 2011). For instance, those gloomed in African traditions are obligated to initiate sexual partner seeking process when they reach mature age. They are to seek for the progeny history of those interested with before initiating the process, so as to avoid inheritance of diseases like sickle cell anemia or "family curses". Thus, parents and elders are involved in the process in order to seek approvals (Mensch, Grant, & Blanc, 2005).

Men of different age and caliber are reported to be the initiators of sexual partner seeking process because they are the ones to propose and pay dowry. The process is often accompanied by requests, appointments, promises and agreements. At initial stage, those approached are the ones to prove their choices right before responding by either accepting or refuting the relationship proposal. For those who accept, they do proceed to ensure attachments, intimacy and pleasure are attained through sexual activities, timely communication and commitments. For those who refute, they do restrict requests and conversations regarding relationship affairs (Hill., & Preston, 1966; Scheib, 2001; Schmitt, 2005; Little *et al.*, 2007; Tang., Bensman., & Hatfield, 2012; Meston., & Stanton, 2017).

Prior to globalization, sexual partner seeking was physically done and both partners met somewhere for conversations and responses. Men would also not

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approach unfamiliar women and women would likewise not dare to establish sexual relationships with unfamiliar men. In some occasions, men used to ask for mobile contacts of those interested with and establish conversations through text-messaging or phone calling. Contemporarily, due to globalization, men and women are exposed to social networks and apps that enable them to meet each other regardless of geographical diversity (Sevcikova & Daneback, 2011; Seal *et al.*, 2015). Those with an agenda of sexual partner seeking do take advantage to approach whoever they are attracted to via social media accounts (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008). Arguably, men are the most practitioners and do use social media accounts to find sexual partners for dating, sexual intercourse or both (Pravosud *et al.*, 2022). Women also do use social media account platforms to find sexual partners for stress reduction, pleasure, social status, revenge, resources, affection, self-esteem boosting and satisfaction (Armstrong *et al.*, 2015).

Other studies indicate that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts has made adolescents to encounter cyber bullying and meet people with different sexual orientations and identities, thus establishing risky sexual relationships (Finkel *et al.*, 2012; Anzani, Di Sarno, & Prunas, 2018). For instance, in Taiwan and in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire it was found that social media accounts are used by homosexuals to search for same-sex sexual partners, thus influencing even non-homosexuals to engage in homosexual sex (Ko *et al.*, 2016; Thomann *et al.*, 2020). In Britain it was found that heterosexuals do use social media accounts and other dating sites to search for sexual partners and encountered emotional harms and harassments after meeting untrustworthy partners (Reid *et al.*, 2022). Elsewhere like in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, social media accounts are used by both heterosexuals and homosexuals to search for sexual partners in order to satisfy emotional and sexual appetites (Cox *et al.*, 2014; Ross *et al.*, 2018). However, there is little documentation about the psychosocial effects of sexual partner seeking via social media accounts and whether sexual partner seeking matches with sexual orientations among adolescents in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Therefore, this study was set to address the gap under the following objectives:

1. To examine the psychosocial effects of sexual partner seeking via social media accounts among adolescents in Dar es Salaam
2. To assess whether sexual partner seeking matches with sexual orientations among adolescents using social media accounts in Dar es Salaam

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

Correlational research design was used to collect data and determine the relationship between social media accounts use and sexual partner seeking. This was possible through the use of questionnaires that had comparative questions, quantitative analysis and

correlational test and interpretation based on correlation coefficients (Cohen, Manion, & Marisson, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Area of the Study

This study was carried out in Ubungu, Ilala, Temeke and Kigamboni districts which are found in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania due to availability of adolescents in educational institutions like universities, colleges and secondary schools, who are likely to own and use smartphones that enable accessibility of social media accounts. Meanwhile, Miburani, Gongolamboto, Kigamboni, Ubungu wards found in those districts were sampled using stratified sampling based on the availability of learning institutions like universities and secondary schools that accommodate adolescents. Thus, the study area was visited by means of terrestrial and water transport (especially kigamboni ward) for possible data collection among sampled respondents.

Targeted Population

Adolescents in universities and secondary schools were the targeted population. Those in universities were targeted because they are likely subjected to internet use at campus due to free Wi-Fi connection (affordable bundles) and owning of social media accounts together with smartphones and laptops that may be connected to free Wi-Fi. They were also targeted because they are likely to engage in romantic relationships, search for sexual partners in both online and offline environment, and have regular conversations with their sexual partners via social media accounts like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc. Those in secondary schools were targeted because they are likely to own smartphones due to affordable purchasing price and influenced to use social media accounts for updates and other significant reasons. They were also targeted because they are in puberty stage that enforces them to initiate sexual relationships, thus using even social media accounts to search for sexual partners.

Sampling and Sample Size

Stratified sampling technique was employed to obtain the sample size of 572 using the $n = N/1 + N(e)^2$ formula out of an estimated population (N) of 1000 adolescent students in universities and 1000 adolescent students in secondary schools. Unfortunately, about 264 adolescent students in universities and 234 adolescent students in secondary schools willingly accepted to participate in the study. The participants from universities were selected out of three strata based on social media account ownership and accessibility, engagement in sexual affairs, regular conversations with online friends via social media accounts. The participants from secondary schools were also selected out of two strata based on accessibility to smartphones and social media account groups that enable them to meet with online friends having different sexual orientations. Such a process took place in the premises of the universities

and secondary schools immediately after the researchers accessed adolescent students as respondents.

Instruments, Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation

Questionnaires were used as instrument for data collection. They were sectioned to capture demographic information of respondents and obtain information regarding the social media accounts use and their psychological effects among adolescent seeking sexual partners. They were also sectioned to capture information regarding sexual partner seeking with influence of sexual orientations via social media accounts.

The collection of data took place through physical distribution of the questionnaires to the respondents found in their campuses and school compounds and return as per the agreement. That happened so as to give chance and freedom those who are shy to share their experiences and opinions as asked in the questionnaires. It was also done so as to collectively gather the unison data that were quantified, analyzed and tested to determine their reliability. Afterwards, the obtained data were subjected to descriptive analysis and correlational test through the use of SPSS IBM Version 20 and then presented in tables showing mean scores and correlational coefficients.

Validity and Reliability

Validity was ensured through reviews and assessments done to authenticate the contents of questionnaires and relevancy of asked questions. This was accompanied by revisions done as per the comments and recommendations from reviewers/experts. The questionnaires were also translated into Swahili language to eliminate barriers and enhance comprehension.

Afterwards, reliability was determined by Cronbach Alpha’s scale under the cutoff point of 0.7.

Ethical Considerations

Permissions from authorities were processed to legalize the study. Respondents were firstly informed about the study and later asked to willingly participate by filling in the provided questionnaires. They were also instructed to not write their identity (names or signatures) and freely were to withdraw themselves regardless of any reason. Hence, the study reached its conclusions without ethical violence.

RESULTS

This section presents the gathered findings based on the objectives of the study. The results with mean scores and standard deviations are interpreted using the scale of 1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagree, 1.50-2.49=Disagree, 2.50-3.49=Undecided, 3.50-4.49=Agree, and 4.50-5.00=Strongly Agree. Those with correlational coefficients are interpreted with either negative (-) or positive (+) relationship under the scale of 0.20–0.34=Weak, 0.35–0.64=Fair, 0.65–0.84=Strong, Over 0.85=Very Strong (Cohen, Manion & Marisson (2007, p.635). Hence, the following are the results as presented in subsequent tables based on the objectives of the study.

Study Objective 1: To examine the psychosocial effects of sexual partner seeking via social media accounts among adolescents in Dar es Salaam.

The first objective of the study sought to examine the psychosocial effects of sexual partner seeking via social media accounts among adolescents in Dar es Salaam. To answer this objective, adolescents in universities and secondary schools were provided with questionnaires so as to provide data as presented in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1: Psychosocial Effects of Sexual Partner Seeking via Social Media Accounts among Adolescent Students in Universities (n=264)

S/N	Items in Questionnaire	Mean	Std. Dev	Interpretation
1	I was sexually aroused and practiced cybersex	4.5758	.98754	Strongly Agree
2	It made me to be sexually overambitious	4.1061	1.48891	Agree
3	I faced cyber-sexual bullying & insecurities	4.3826	.97567	Agree
4	It made me to form current sexual identity	1.6970	.61588	Disagree
5	It made me to meet with untrustworthy partners	4.1705	.71733	Agree
6	It has disadvantaged my privacy/secrecy	3.5795	1.19621	Agree
Overall		3.7519	0.99692	Agree

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that adolescents in universities were sexually aroused and influenced to practice cybersex once they met with friends seeking sexual partners via social media accounts (n=241, Mean=4.5758, SD= .98754). This portrays that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts invokes sexual feelings to convince the approached to have sexual partners, thus opting to establish sexual talks and send self-naked videos to sexually stimulate themselves.

The results also indicate that adolescents in universities became sexually overambitious once they met and established intimate relationships with friends seeking sexual partners via social media accounts (n=200, Mean=4.1061, SD=1.48891). This depicts that sexual partner seekers have used social media accounts to prioritize sexual issues and through promises adolescents in universities have become infatuated to commit themselves in sexual affairs.

On the other hand, the results indicate that adolescents in universities have faced cyberbullying and insecurities (n=243, Mean=4.3826, SD= .97567) and disclosure of their privacy/secretcy after establishing sexual relationships with those they met in social media accounts (n=202, Mean=3.5795, SD=1.19621). This depicts that sexual partner seekers have always hacked and leaked private information of adolescents in universities whenever denied to establish sexual relationships or disagreed on their terms. For those who happen to establish sexual relationships and later on breakup become embarrassed after finding their naked pictures/videos (especially when they had sex) or romantic charts posted on social media account pages, thus being demoralized and psychologically tortured. The results also indicate that adolescents in universities have met with untrustworthy partners who approached them via social media accounts (n=252, Mean=4.1705, SD= .71733). This depicts that most sexual partner seekers do misbehave and show dishonesty characters

that predetermine instabilities and dissatisfaction in established relationships. Others have been craving for sex, destructive and less concerned with interpersonal goals, thus leading most adolescents to regret and have suicidal ideations and attempts.

The results finally indicate that most adolescents in universities are not influenced to form sexual identities like of sexual partner seekers who approach them via social media accounts (n=258, Mean=1.6970, SD= .61588). This entails that adolescents in universities are less interested with sexual partner seekers who are of the same sex, thus not easily influenced to accept homosexual or bisexual identities but rather maintain their heterosexual identities and orientations. So, those who are heterosexuals are likely attracted to heterosexual sexual partner seekers and those who are homosexuals/bisexuals are likely attracted to homosexual/bisexual sexual partner seekers.

Table 2: Psychosocial Effects of Sexual Partner Seeking via Social Media Accounts among Adolescent Students in Secondary Schools (n=234)

S/N	Items in Questionnaire	Mean	Std. Dev	Interpretation
1	I faced cyber-sexual bullying & insecurities	4.2348	.80266	Agree
2	It exposed me to risky sexual debuts	3.9091	.80827	Agree
3	It exposed me to untrustworthy lovers	4.0038	.90414	Agree
4	It made me to form current sexual identity	3.3295	1.27618	Undecided
5	It unsecured my privacy/secretcy	4.4545	.89667	Agree
6	I have no confidence with online friends	4.3295	1.18342	Agree
	Overall	4.0435	0.97855	Agree

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that adolescents in secondary schools have faced cyberbullying and insecurities once they met with sexual partner seekers via social media accounts (n=250, Mean=4.2348, SD= .80266). This depicts that sexual partner seekers via social media accounts do take advantage to rob and seduce adolescents in secondary schools, thus those not in favor become intimidated and sexually insulted depending on their body morphologies, voices or sexual orientations. The results also indicate that adolescents in secondary schools have met sexual partner seekers via social media accounts and became subjected to risky sexual debuts (n=233, Mean=3.9091, SD= .80827). This depicts that sexual partner seekers do influence adolescents in secondary schools to accept sexual relationships and later on enforce sexual activities regardless of sexual-health considerations and HIV/AIDS tests. In some instances, adolescents do meet with sexual partner seekers with different sexual identities and orientations, thus influenced to practice homosexual sex, oral-genital sex or penile-anal sex.

On the other hand, the results indicate that adolescents in secondary schools do meet with untrustworthy sexual partner seekers via social media accounts (n=234, Mean=4.0038, SD= .90414), thus subjected to emotional disturbances, demoralization, abuse and sexual malpractices. This depicts that most

sexual partner seekers via social media accounts do want to satisfy their sexual thirsts and always are not in favor of the life goals and ambitions of the adolescents in secondary schools, thus possibly be contributive in sexual misconducts, psychological torture and physiological damage. The results also indicate that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts has disclosed the privacies/secrets of adolescents in secondary schools (n=242, Mean=4.4545, SD= .89667) and made them to be less confident with whoever they meet in social media accounts (n=224, Mean=4.3295, SD=1.18342). This depicts that sexual partner seekers via social media accounts have imposed threats and not considered dignity and welfare of adolescents in secondary schools, thus creating phobias, stresses and lowering their self-esteems.

The results finally indicate that some of adolescents in secondary schools are sexually motivated to form other sexual identities like of sexual partner seekers (n=152, Mean=3.3295, SD= 1.27618) and some are not (n=112). The reasons for the adolescents to form other sexual identities might be due to personal interest towards specific sexual identity and commitment to sexually orient in accordance to selected identity. For those who do not form the other sexual identities might be influenced by less interest and commitment toward specific sexual identity despite having sexual partner

seekers who convince them to be homosexuals/bisexuals.

Study Objective 2: To assess whether sexual partner seeking matches with sexual orientations among adolescents using social media accounts in Dar es Salaam.

The second objective of the study sought to assess whether sexual partner seeking matches with sexual orientations among adolescents using social media accounts in Dar es Salaam. To answer this objective, adolescents in universities and secondary schools were provided with questionnaires so as to provide data which were put under correlational test and are subsequently presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation between Sexual Partner Seeking and Sexual Orientations among Adolescents using social media accounts (n=498)

		Heterosexual partner seekers	Heterosexuals	Homosexual partner seekers	Homosexuals
Heterosexual partner seekers	Pearson Correlation	1	.992**	.226**	.224**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	498	498	498	498
Heterosexuals	Pearson Correlation	.992**	1	.221**	.219**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	498	498	498	498
Homosexual partner seekers	Pearson Correlation	.226**	.221**	1	.996**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	498	498	498	498
Homosexuals	Pearson Correlation	.224**	.219**	.996**	.
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	1
	N	498	498	498	498

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

The results presented in Table 3 indicate positive and very strong relationship between heterosexual partner seekers and heterosexuals (sig= .000, r= .992**). This implies that heterosexual sexual partner seekers are often interested with those having heterosexual orientation, thus eligible to initiate penile-vaginal sexual intercourse, impregnate, conceive and procreate whenever necessary. The results also indicate positive and very strong relationship between homosexual partner seekers and homosexuals (sig= .000, r= .996**). This implies that homosexual partner seekers are interested with and need to commit to fellow homosexuals, thus eligible to initiate penile-anal sex, oral-genital sex, and identify their genders contrary to biological sex. The results furthermore indicate positive and weak relationship between homosexual sexual partner seekers and heterosexuals (sig= .000, r .221**), and between heterosexual sexual partner seekers and homosexuals (sig= .000, r= .219**). This implies that homosexual sexual partner seekers are less interested with heterosexuals and heterosexual sexual partner seekers are likewise uninterested with homosexuals due to difference of sexual feelings and kind of desired sexual activities.

DISCUSSION

This study has revealed that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts has led adolescents to be sexually overambitious to the extent of engaging in risky sexual debuts, encounter disclosure of their privacy/secretcy, be demoralized and stressed due to postage of naked pictures or their sex videos after

breaking up with the partners, together with being intimidated, sexually abused and insulted after meeting with untrustworthy sexual partner seekers or denying to establish sexual relationships with them.

Such findings are in harmony with those of Cooper *et al.*, (2000), Cooper *et al.*, (2001), Gullette and Lyons (2006), Liau, Millett and Marks (2006), Cruess *et al.*, (2017) and Xu *et al.*, (2022). Their similarity relies on the fact that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts has enhanced risky and unprotected sexual activities like condomless sex, penile-anal sex and HIV/AIDS infection, sexual arousals and cybersex through sending self-recorded pornographic videos, and psychological disorders like stress due to cyber-sexual bullying and sexual abuse once met with untrustworthy sexual partner seekers. Arguably, such effects are determined by pull and push factors that include being sexually overambitious without considering sexual-health principles, failure to recognize the intentions of sexual partner seekers and inability to cope with developed stressors after meeting with sexual partner seekers (Coleman *et al.*, 2010; Adam., Murphy & de Wit, 2011; Buhi *et al.*, 2012; Wéry & Billieux, 2016).

Other similar studies have found that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts disclosed the privacy/secretcy of those who were approached and ended in relationship breakup (Ostheimer & Iqbal, 2019). Others have faced intimidations and bad name-calling once they directly refute to show interest or accept sexual partner seekers, thus feeling insecure and unworthy despite the fact that they have never met or

known each other before meeting in social media accounts (Reed., Conn & Wachter, 2020). Those who happen to establish sexual relationships after meeting with sexual partner seekers in social media accounts have developed low self-esteems, be discouraged and have suicidal ideations and attempts due to less fulfillment of set promises, imposed sexual misconducts and sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS infection as brought by unprotected sex, and denials after impregnation (Bolding *et al.*, 2005; Olshen., McVeigh., Wunsch-Hitzig & Rickert, 2007; Ko *et al.*, 2016).

On the other hand, this study has revealed that sexual partner seeking matches with sexual orientations as driven by self-interests and sexual feelings. This means sexual partner seekers with homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual orientations do use social media accounts to search and approach homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual adolescents based on their self-interests and sexual feelings. Such findings are in harmony with those of Phillips (2014) and Williams (2020) which relies on the fact that both heterosexual and homosexual sexual partner seekers do search for sexual partners of the same sexual orientations, so as to manifest desired sexual activities. The homosexual sexual partner seekers who regularly meet with heterosexuals do convince them to accept homosexuality, thus some become influenced to establish homosexual relationships while the majority refute and face cyberbullying and abuse depending on their orientations and make-ups (Cabecinha *et al.*, 2017).

Other studies have similarly revealed that those approached by sexual partner seekers via social media accounts do accept those in favor of their sexual orientations and deny those who have different sexual orientations (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008). The reasons for accepting or denying depend on how they do compare themselves with sexual partner seekers and determine their interests based on socio-cultural and religious perspectives regarding sexual orientations. In some instances, others deny even those with similar sexual orientations due to reflection of sexual abuse experiences (possibly during childhood), exalted fear of being heartbroken, having less information about one's behaviors and home originality, and inability to recognize the intention of sexual partner seekers (Couch, 2006). Hence, based on these circumstances and reasons, some adolescents have managed to establish successful sexual relationships and some ended up in regression and tortures once they met with untrustworthy sexual partner seekers via social media accounts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is discovered that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts has led adolescents to be sexually overambitious to the extent of engaging in risky sexual debuts, encounter disclosure of their privacy/secretcy, be demoralized and stressed due to postage of naked pictures or their sex videos after breaking up with the partners, together with being

intimidated, sexually abused and insulted after meeting with untrustworthy sexual partner seekers or denying to establish sexual relationships with them. It is also discovered that sexual partner seeking is relative to sexual orientations of adolescents as driven by self-interests and sexual feelings. Therefore, it is concluded that sexual partner seeking via social media accounts is done under risky circumstances and affects the psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents. It is also recommended that more studies should be done in order to inform about coping mechanisms for the adolescents who encounter the psychosocial effects after meeting sexual partner seekers via social media accounts.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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