



## TEENAGERS' EXPOSURE TO INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY IN ZARIA, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

#### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been growing societal concerns about teenagers' exposure to pornography through the internet. For instance, Arulogun (2002) expressed fear about the possible negative consequences that uncensored internet contents will have on the psychosocial well-being of varying categories of users especially children and teens in Nigeria. Infact, there are concerns that teenagers are becoming too exposed to this internet vice considering the fact that Internet usage have been witnessing a very rapid growth during the last decade across the world and hence making internet a big part of teenagers' lives. For instance, Pew Internet and American Life Project survey (2010), opine that 93 percent of teens aged 12 to 17 uses the Internet, compared with 79 percent of adults. Similarly in Nigeria, Longe, (2004) also established that children and teenagers belonging to the age range 7-18 years constitute over 32% of Internet users in Nigeria. In similar vein, observation of this trend shows that newer media which include social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, 2go, whatsapp, gaming sites, WeChat amongst others, have become very attractive to teenagers, who often access them through their cell phones. This allows teens to spend most of their time in communicating with people they already know online and sometimes with those they do not. As perceived logically, typical teens that stay online for longer periods than adults are more likely to access the Internet from different locations and participate in a wider range of online activities. However, such teenagers often become more exposed to Internet's pornographic contents through this wide range of online activities.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the Internet has not been beneficial to the world, as this new media has enormously improved the world's information and communication system like never before. Infact, the emergence of Internet has changed the lives of millions of people who go online on a daily basis at home, at school, at work and other locations such as Internet cafes, to send/receive e-mails, chat, research for school or work, download music or images, and to do many other activities that help their livelihood. The Internet, which is a global network comprising millions of smaller networks and individual computers connected by cable, telephone lines, or satellite links, permits individuals to connect with other

computers around the world from the privacy of their own homes. (Calder, 2004). Against this backdrop, amongst others, Internet access and usage across the world has been witnessing proliferation year by year, with approximately 1.11 billion users in 2007, 1.67 billion in 2009, and 1.97 billion in 2010 (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2010), indicating an upward trend in the number of digitally literate people. Such a rapid growth has been interacted with people's needs and motivation. The purposes of Information, communication, and entertainment have been prominent motives behind the Internet use.

However, in spite of these attractive benefits that the internet provides coupled with its increasing prominence in the lives of young people, researchers have continued investigating the influence that the Internet environment may be having on child and adolescent development. Of particular interest here, is its ability to communicate pornography to teenagers, coupled with the perception that they (teenagers) are within the ages of increasing self-sexual awareness and curiosity for sexual expression. It is important to acknowledge the fact that adolescent or teenagers' sexual development is complex and dynamic; as children get older, they gain a greater sense of their sexual self which is enhanced by interplay of biological and social changes which occur as individual matures through childhood into adolescence. Although puberty begins at different ages, virtually all boys and girls have started the process by 14 years of age. As observed, the expression of sexual curiosity spans a range of behaviors; from talking about sex, looking at sexual materials (e.g. Pornographic content), and to actually engaging in sexual activity

The aim of this research is to create enlightenment on the prevalence of teenagers' exposure to pornography on the internet. The research adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods of research as the two are considered necessary to sufficiently address the study in accordance with the research objectives.

#### *Teenagers' Exposure to Internet Pornography*

Perceptions	SA	A	U	SD	D
Most teenagers have access to Internet	57 (62.6)	28 (30.8)	2 (2.2)	3 (3.3)	1 (1.1)
Teenagers usually use mobile phone to access internet.	64 (70.3)	23 (25.3)	2 (2.2)		2 (2.2)
Teenagers use the internet often.	47 (51.6)	31 (34.1)	5 (5.5)	2 (2.2)	6 (6.6)
Teenagers mostly chat while they are using internet	59 (64.8)	26 (28.6)	2 (2.2)	1 (1.1)	3 (3.3)
Teenagers mostly watch or download music videos while using the internet	59 (64.8)	27 (29.7)		2 (2.2)	3 (3.3)
Teenagers often come across sexually explicit contents ( e.g. nude pictures) when browsing online	62 (46.2)	27 (29.7)	1 (2.2)	1 (2.2)	
Most teenagers participate in chatting about sex (i.e. sexting) with online friends	42 (46.2)	39 (42.9)	2 (2.2)	2 (2.2)	6 (6.6)
Teenagers are exposed to being sent sexually explicit materials (e.g. nude pictures or sex videos) while chatting online.	50 (55.0)	32 (35.2)	5 (5.5)	1 (1.1)	
Most teenagers send or share sexual contents to their online friends while chatting.	52 (57.1)	27 (29.7)	3 (3.3)	3 (3.3)	6 (6.6)

**Key:**

Numbers in Parentheses are percentages, SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree

U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

**Access to Internet**

From the table above, the result of the data collected through questionnaire survey shows that the highest number of teenage respondents holds the perception that teenagers have access to the internet as 26 of them who represent 62.6 percent of the total respondents, strongly agreed that most teenagers have access to the internet while 28 teenagers who represent 30.8 percent of the respondents agreed. However, while 3 teenage students, who represent 3.3 percent of respondents, strongly disagreed, a teenage student (1.1 percent respondents) disagreed that most teenagers have access to the internet. However, 2.2 percent of respondents are undecided as they could not say whether most teenagers have access to internet or not.

The above result, which claims that teenagers of our society

have sufficient access to the internet, is further accentuated by a teacher and counsellor in one of the Secondary School, when he stated thus:

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, students, young ones are allowed access to all sorts of internet-enabled gadgets be it handset, IPAD and other ones.

**Mobile Phone as the Mostly Used Medium of Accessing Internet**

In the quest to identifying the most commonly used communication medium through which teenagers access the internet, the data collected from teenage student respondents as shown in the table, indicate that mobile phone is the widely used medium through which teenagers access the internet. This is evident as the total number of 64 teenagers who represent 70.3 percent of total respondents, strongly agreed that the most used medium of accessing the internet by teenagers is through mobile phones while 23 teenage students who represent 25.3 percent of the respondents agreed. However, while 2.2 percent respondents disagreed, two teenagers who represents 2.2 percent of the total respondents is undecided and could not say whether it (i.e. Mobile phone) is the mostly used medium of accessing the internet by teenagers or not.

A teacher in one of the Secondary School, further corroborated the above result when he said that:

“Teenagers of our society mostly access the internet through their phones, laptops and IPAD but the commonest medium is through mobile phone”

**Analysis of the Responses of Teenagers’ Coming across Pornographic Contents while surfing the internet**

From the table, 62 teenage students who represent 46.2 percent of the respondents, strongly agreed that teenagers often come across pornographic contents when surfing the internet while 27 teenagers who represent 29.7 percent of the respondents merely agree. However just one (1) teenage student who represents 2.2 percent respondents, strongly disagreed while the same percentage of respondents is undecided and could not say whether teenagers often come across pornographic content while surfing the internet or not. The above result clearly shows that majority of the teenage respondents strongly agreed that teenagers are truly exposed to pornographic contents while surfing the internet.

This is also being supported by the interview response of a teacher in one of the secondary school when he said;

“This is a worrisome issue in our society today. And not just on internet, teenagers are equally exposed to pornography through peer group influence. There are so many of them who do not have intention of consuming these sexually explicit materials until their friends or the internet bring it and tempt them to view them”

Guidance and Counseling teacher in one of the Secondary School equally attested to this when he said that;

When teenagers go online to do their homework, and things such as pornographic contents pop-up, they hardly could resist them. The pop-up comes up spontaneously even when you did

nothing to bring them up. 2 days ago I was trying to download a song, and a porn site pop-up. So, all of these things get them (teenagers) curious; they really want to know. It is like ‘now this is out, let me see what is inside’. Most time we really do not blame teenagers, we blame people who expose this things to the public. It’s just too free and cheap

**Teenagers’ Participation in Chatting about Sex with Online Friends (i.e. Sexting)**

The table reveals that majority of teenage respondents hold the perception that most teenagers usually participate in chatting about sex (i.e. sexting) with online friends. This is indicated with 42 teenagers who represent 46.2 percent of the respondents, strongly agreed to the perception, while 39 teenagers who represent 42.9 percent agreed. However, while 2.2 percent of respondents strongly disagreed, 6.6 percent of respondents simply disagreed. The table equally shows that 2.2 percent of the respondents could not say whether most teenagers usually participate in chatting about sex (i.e. sexting) with online friends or not.

Reinforcement to the above result is also the response of a teacher in one of the Secondary School, when he said:

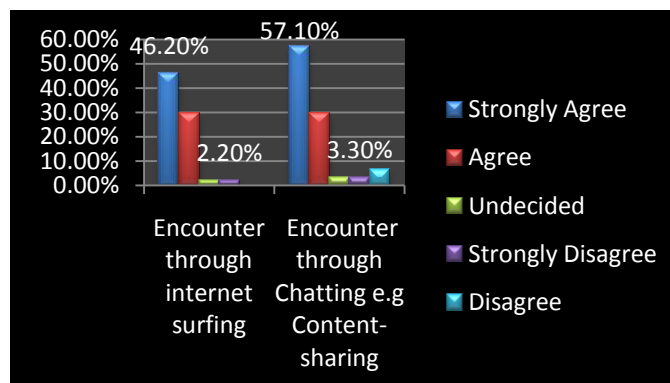
The ones we called children nowadays should no longer be called children. As there is nothing that can be hidden under the sun, they are all exposed. I had caught about few students. I was about to teach, then I saw this particular child and with the help of psychology I could tell when a child is responding or when he is absent minded; the child’s head was bent when I caught him, he was with his phone chatting on 2go, and when I read through it, I saw naughty chat with some foul languages, then, I removed the page and went to his folder and saw it full of pornographic movies; I was so mad at him

**4.2.5: Teenagers’ Exposure to receiving Pornographic Materials during Online Chatting**

The data collected from teenage respondents as shown in table 4.2, indicate that 50 teenagers who represent 55.0 percent respondents, strongly agreed that teenagers are exposed to being sent sexually explicit materials (e.g. nude pictures or sex videos) while chatting online, while 32 teenage students, who represent 35.2 percent of the respondents from the school merely, agreed. However, while one teenage student who represent 1.1 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with that perception, 5 teenagers who represent 5.5 percent of the respondents could not say whether teenagers are exposed to being sent sexually explicit materials while chatting online or not.

As it could be seen from the data collected above, majority of the respondents are of strong opinion that teenagers are very vulnerable to receiving materials during online chatting. a teacher of one of the Secondary School, affirmed to this when she said:

“I have not directly witnessed them (teenagers) viewing pornography but I have often caught them discussing it especially the male ones; they often discuss about the pornographic contents they have gotten from the internet especially when they are chatting on the social media like 2go”



**Diagram 1: Graphical Representation of Teenagers’ medium of Exposure to Internet Pornography.**

Diagram 1 above, shows two major medium through which teenagers were exposed to Internet pornographic materials. As indicated, 46.2 percent respondents strongly agree that teenagers are often exposed to pornography during the process of internet surfing while 57.1 percent strongly agreed that teenagers often encounter pornographic materials through chatting e.g Content-sharing.

**Reasons for Teenager’s Exposure to Internet Pornography**

**Reasons for Pornography Exposure**

	SA	A	U	SD	D
Teenagers visit pornographic sites to learn the techniques/skills of real-life sex performance.	38 (41.8)	35 (38.5)	4 (4.4)	5 (5.5)	9 (9.9)
Teenagers visit pornographic sites for gratification purpose i.e. To relieve their sexual urges.	32 (35.2)	37 (40.7)	6 (6.6)	10 (11.0)	6 (6.6)
Unintentional exposure to online sexually explicit images/videos is very common among teenagers	47 (51.6)	29 (31.9)	5 (5.5)	6 (6.6)	4 (4.4)
After viewing an online pornographic video/image, teenagers are likely to subsequently revisit the same website to view it again.	52 (57.1)	28 (30.8)	3 (3.3)	5 (5.5)	3 (3.3)

In the quest to get excitement, teenagers resorts to viewing Pornographic materials online	43 (47.2)	31 (34.1)	6 (6.6)	5 (5.5)	6 (6.6)
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**Internet Pornography as a Medium for Learning Techniques of Real-Life Sex Performance**

The responses of teenage respondents when asked about the reasons why teenagers are exposed to internet pornography indicated that, 38 teenage students who represent 41.8 percent strongly agreed that teenagers visit pornographic sites to learn the techniques/skills of real-life sex performance while 35 teenagers who represent 38.5 percent of the respondents from the school, agreed. However, 5.5 percent of the respondents (i.e. 5 teenagers) strongly disagreed to the perception while 9teenage students who make up of 9.9 percent of respondents merely disagreed. It is also revealed that 4.4 percent of the respondents were undecided as they could not say whether teenagers visit pornographic sites to learn the techniques/skills of real-life sex performance or not.

The result clearly indicates that the quest for learning the techniques of real life sexis one of the motivations behind teenagers search for pornography on the internet; this is evident as majority of respondents agreed to this perception. The result is also corroborated by a staff when he said that:

Young ones are always seeking for knowledge and most parents these days hardly sit down to teach their children what they need to know or do and so they seek for knowledge in any way they could get it. Some of them have heard a lot about sex and are curious to know how to do it; so they consequently resort to viewing pornography”

**Teenagers Visit Pornography sites For Sexual Gratification Purpose**

Also in response to the reasons why teenagers are exposed to internet pornography, the table indicates that 32 teenage students, who make up of 35.2 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that teenagers visit pornographic sites for sexual gratification purposes while 37 teenagers who represent 40.7 percent of the respondents agreed. However, while the majority of the respondents obviously agreed to the perception, very few of them do no concur to it as the table reveal that 10 teenage respondents who represent 11.0percent of the respondents from both schools, strongly disagreed while 6.6 percent of the respondents disagreed. Meanwhile,6 teenagers who represent 6.6 percent of the respondents are undecided on the perception as they could not say whether teenagers visit pornographic sites for sexual gratification purposes or not.

To further validate the above result, a Teacher in one of the Secondary School , opines that teenager usually log into pornographic website to personally experience those pornographic and sexual experiences that has been shared with them by their friends or peers. Also in the words of a teacher ,

“Why would anyone want to look for internet sexually explicit materials without you wanting to gratify your emotion? Everyone is looking for a means in whatever form, to satisfying

his own sexual needs or emotional desires”

**Teenagers Are Inadvertently Exposed To Internet Pornography**

The data collected from teenage respondents from selected schools as indicated by table shows that 47 teenage students who represent 51.4 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that unintentional exposure to online sexually explicit materials is very common among teenagers while 29teenagers, who represent 31.9 percent of the respondents, agreed. However, while 6 teenagers (i.e. 6.6 % of respondents) strongly disagreed, 4.4 percent of the respondents simply disagreed as 4.4 percent of the respondents (4 teenagers) are undecided and could not say whether it is true that unintentional exposure to online sexually explicit materials is very common among teenagers or not.

With the majority of the respondents agreed that teenagers are inadvertently exposed to internet pornography, as highlighted above, it is logical to see the internet being an entity that is responsible for ‘pushing’ pornography at its users. This is well corroborated by a teacher when he said that;

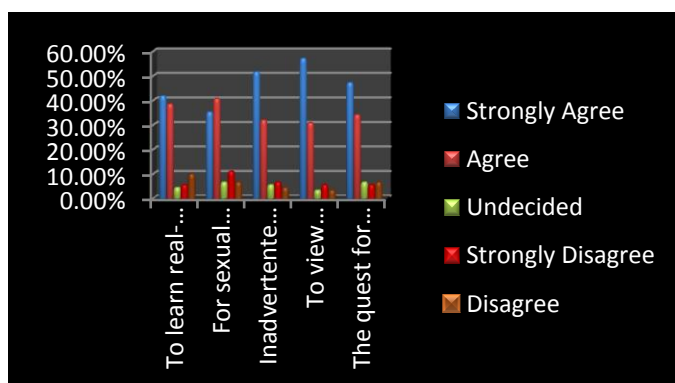
“When you go to YouTube to download or browse for any material, you do not necessarily have to browse for a sexually explicit content before they are being displayed on the website page, and so, one could easily be tempted to open them. For instance I have seen many of Kim Kardashian sexually explicit pictures and sexual scandals’ videos online. They are not truly sexual scandals but they are just meant for business motive of making money; this is because the more you view or download them, the increase their monetary gain. Kim kardashian for instance, often have millions of people that download each of her sexual videos, and she has a monetary share on each download that is being done”

**Teenagers Resorting to Viewing Pornography in quest for Excitement**

Also one of the responses provided by teenage respondents when asked about the reasons why teenagers are exposed to internet pornography,43teenage students who represent 47.2 percent of the respondents, strongly agreed that teenagers often resort to viewing pornographic materials in quest for excitement while 28 teenagers who represent 30.8 percent of the respondents, agreed. However, while 5teenage students who represent 5.5 percent respondents, strongly disagreed, and 6 teenage respondents (i.e.6.6 percent respondents) disagreed, 6 teenagers that make up 6.6 percent respondents could not say whether teenagers often resorts to viewing Pornographic materials online in the quest to getting excitement or not.

The above responses obviously shows that the highest numbers of the respondents to the question, are of strong opinion that teenagers often resort to viewing Pornography in the quest for excitement. It is also being affirmed by a teacher when he said that:

“Things that catch teenagers’ attention and fancies are usually things that are above them especially things that are meant for the adult or legally married; they are usually anxious and in haste to have a taste of it. Whenever we teachers come to the class and say a little thing that is sexually related, we instantly get the students attention and they become excited and happy



**Diagram 2: Graphical Representation of Reasons Why Teenagers are Exposed to Internet Pornography.**

Diagram 2 above shows the graphical representation of respondents' views on the various reasons why teenagers find themselves exposed to Internet pornography. It could be seen that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the quest to learn real-life sex techniques, sexual gratification, inadvertent exposure, the urge to view again after exposure and the quest for excitement are the major reasons why teenagers are exposed to the internet pornographic materials.

### Discussion of Findings

The data gathered and analysed in this study are further discussed here in relation to the research questions.

In the foremost, it is necessary to find out if the internet is accessible to teenagers in Zaria before enquiring for their exposure to online pornography. Hence, the respondents clearly indicated that the general availability of mobile phone to the teenagers of the sampled population have made internet highly accessible to them. It is also discovered that teenagers of nowadays are not just only enjoying affordability of internet but could also afford internet-enabled mobile phones and even IPAD. This also affirm the opinion of Longe, (2004) when he established that children and teenagers belonging to the age range 7-18 years constitute over 32% of Internet users in Nigeria.

However, it is found out that in the course of surfing the internet, of which is mostly for educational and informational purposes, teenagers are often exposed to sexually explicit contents through internet pop-up adverts of which most time are neither preventable nor avoidable. In this case, they are not to be blamed as this kind of exposure is inadvertent. This validate the opinion of Daniel and Josephine, (2001), In a survey of adult-oriented commercial sites, that the majority of adult-oriented sites (about 74 percent) were found to display adult content on the first page (accessible to anyone who visits the page) and often through which they display their sexually explicit banner adverts to other sites. Teenagers are also exposed to pornographic contents by peer-to-peer sharing of these sexual contents through their interaction with friends and colleagues.

Apart from surfing the internet for education and informational purposes, teenagers are also found to be highly involved in using the internet for online interaction (i.e. chatting) with their

friends and colleagues. However they are not just chatting, they often also chat about sex (also referred to as 'Sexting') with their online friends. Katherine (2006) in her paper, 'Internet Infidelity: A Critical Review of the Literature', opines that people are using the Internet more frequently to form friendships and romances and to initiate inordinate affairs. This is further reinforced the opinion of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2014), claiming that nearly 40% of all teenagers have posted or sent sexually suggestive messages, even though the practice is more common among boys than girls.

Apart from a case of chatting about sex, which is mostly done deliberately, teenagers are also very vulnerable to being sent or being exposed to unsolicited sexually explicit materials in the process of chatting online. For instance, an online friend who craves to be noticed based on his or her sexual qualities could send his/her sexually explicit picture to another online friend or could even paste it as a profile's displayed-picture, and then initiate a conversation; this is more common with girls. It equally go in line with the opinion of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2014) which added that, sending semi-nude or nude photos online is more common among teen's girls as 22% of teen girls report sending images of this nature, while only 18% of same-age boys have.

All these provide answers to the research question which asked if teenagers are exposed to internet Pornography. It is indeed confirmed that teenagers in the selected schools are well exposed to internet pornography.

### Conclusion

Teenagers of the selected schools are well accessible to the internet. They usually access it through their internet-enabled mobile phones. Furthermore, teenagers are well exposed to sexually explicit contents when accessing the internet. Teenagers could either be inadvertently exposed to these sexual contents or intentionally be exposed. As sited, through the internet Pop-up sexual adverts, teenagers often inadvertently become exposed to pornographic internet contents. However, they (teenagers) often intentionally make themselves available to these sexual contents by their involvement in sexting (e.g. through Social media) and deliberate search for them through the pornographic websites.

The issue bordering on teenagers exposure to internet pornography as observed so far, is perceived to be treated nonchalantly by relevant stakeholders and government in Nigeria. This seeming show-of-apathy is evidently reflecting on the present state of lack of coherent policy framework, laws, and efficient enforcement procedure to remedy this social issue in the country. It is viewed as an unexpected and irrational negligence on the part of the government, considering the high level of general awareness about this social issue, coupled with its associated negative implications on the sexual development of Nigeria teenagers.

Though the enormity of the negative implication of teenagers' exposure to pornography on the internet is yet to be generally perceived as a matter of 'State of Emergency' at the moment, one should be apprehensive about how long this social problem is being allowed to thrive. It is imperative to interrogate the rationality behind allowing the situation to degenerate to a

point where its implications such as incidences of rape, early sex, early pregnancy, incest, STD infections among others, becomes not only predominant in the country but also become a major developmental issue that posterity would have to fatefully face, accept and contend with.

It is hereby recommended that parents and teachers should largely discourage the ownership of phones by teenagers until they are matured and well-bred with sufficient sex education. Nigerian government in collaboration with telecommunication service providers should develop software applications that will be sensitive enough to block and remove all pornographic materials that could be accessed by Nigeria internet audience. This should also be supported by creating a dedicated hotline that will receive and swiftly treat complaints or notifications from the network users as regards cases of sexual contents found online.

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