

## Sexting: Emotional promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking in Pakistani young adults

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### Abstract

The previous studies found sexting to be an established phenomenon in young adults. This study is aimed to predict sexting from emotional promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking in young adults and to assess the role of age and sex in relationship among sexting, emotional promiscuity, and sexual sensation seeking. 201 undergraduate students of both sexes are recruited from the main campus of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur with age range of 18-30 years. Three scales Brief Sexting Scale, Emotional Promiscuity Scale and Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale are administered to collect the data. All the participants were required to sign the essential informed consent before participation. The data were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. There has been found a statistically significant positive relationship among sexting, emotional promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking. The sexual sensation seeking significantly predicted sexting. The women are found significantly higher on sexting and sexual sensation seeking. There has been found no age differences in sexting, emotional promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking. It has been concluded that the sexual sensation seeking significantly predicted sexting in university students.

### Article History

Received:  
October 22, 2020

Last Revised:  
April 8, 2021

Accepted:  
April 9, 2021

Published:  
April 17, 2021

**Keywords:** sexting, emotional promiscuity, sexual sensation seeking, young adults, adolescence, Pakistani youth, Pakistani adults.

### How to Cite:

Bilal, A. (2021). Sexting: Emotional promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking in Pakistani young adults. *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, 5(1), 75-88. <https://doi.org/10.47264/idea.lassij/5.1.6>

### Publisher's Note:

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## 1. Introduction

Sexting has turned out to be an integral part of young people's lives in an age of globalization (Dodaj *et al.*, 2020). The exact prevalence of sexting in Pakistani young adults is not known due to lack of research in non-Western countries (Ngo *et al.*, 2017) and sensitivity of the problem. Yet, some previous studies pointed toward the role of promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking as the causes of sexting in young adults in Pakistan (Anwar *et al.*, 2019). However, there is currently lack of studies on relationship of sexual sensation seeking and promiscuity with sexting (Jones & Paulhus, 2012) as previously found researches had mostly been conducted in western context (Brar *et al.*, 2018). The present study was aimed at finding out the relationship of sexual sensation seeking and promiscuity with sexting in young Pakistani adults. The study also aimed to find out age and gender differences across sexual sensation seeking, promiscuity, and sexting in young adults.

In recent times, the adult romantic relationships had been mediated by computer or technology based sexual communication. This is now popularly called sexting (Morelli *et al.*, 2016; Drouin *et al.*, 2013). Currently, the text messaging and social networking sites are popular among young adults of age 18-29 years (Smith, 2011; Hampton *et al.*, 2011). Young adulthood is a period starting with the age of 18 years and ending with 29 years (Arnett *et al.*, 2014). Almost, 95% of young adults in this age group own a cell phone. Among those, who own cell phone, 97% send or receive text messages. A study by Brenner and Smith (2013) revealed that 90% of the internet users between the ages of 18-29 years use social networking sites regularly. These platforms have also become the trends to be used for sending or receiving sex related content (Lenhart, 2009). The text messaging is the popular method of sexting followed by email, Facebook, and Twitter (Drouin *et al.*, 2013).

The term sexting was used as an official word in 2009 initially by media (Forbs, 2011). The studies on sexting are growing after the results were published from the famous Sex and Tech Survey conducted in 2008 (Döring, 2014; Temple & Lu, 2018). The scientific community is divided around the legitimacy of sexting behaviour among adolescents. Some consider sexting a normal behaviour while others consider sexting a negative behaviour (Döring, 2014). The research, on the other hand, supports the later (Kosenko *et al.*, 2017).

As the researchers have no uniform definition of sexting, therefore, the prevalence of sexting can not be determined despite several studies reported different prevalence rates (Strassberg *et al.*, 2013; Drouin *et al.*, 2013). However, sexting is a popular behaviour among adolescents and young adults (Peskin *et al.*, 2013). The prevalence of sexting a photo in young adults of ages 18-30 years was found to be 33% and 57% respectively (Klettke *et al.*, 2014). Previously, the Sex and Technology Survey indicated the prevalence of sexting from 20-38% in teenagers (13-19 years) and 33-58% in young adults of ages 20-26 years (The National Campaign, 2008).

The prevalence of sexting depends on the definition of sexting that what is being included in sexting behaviour and how it is being carried out (Dir *et al.*, 2013; Drouin *et al.*, 2013). However, when defined explicitly as sending or receiving naked or semi naked photos or videos, 13-44 % of young adults have been found to sext (Benotsch *et al.*, 2013; Gordon-Messer *et al.*, 2013). The seminal study by Lenhart (2009) defined sexting as sending semi naked or naked, sexually suggestive photos or videos of one's self. Later, Weisskirch and Delevi (2011) broadened the definition of sexting by including the sending or receiving of semi naked or naked messages of one's self.

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However, researchers have no agreement on the substance of sexts, the method or device used to send such sexts, and the context of the relationship in which the sexting occurs (Drouin *et al.*, 2013). The previous research founded that sexts were sexually explicit and suggestive, naked, or semi-naked; the method of sexting was sending or receiving text and instant messages, and use of social networking sites; and sexting occurred in the contexts of relationship with romantic and committed partners, or cheating partners (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012). The commonest method of sexting was through the use of internet and cell phones (Gamez-Guadix *et al.*, 2017).

There is currently lack of studies on relationship of sexual sensation seeking and promiscuity with sexting (Jones & Paulhus, 2012). The previously found researches had been conducted in western context. The present study aimed at finding out the relationship of sexual sensation seeking and promiscuity with sexting in young Pakistani adults. The study also aimed to find out age and gender differences across sexual sensation seeking, promiscuity, and sexting in young adults.

## 2. Review of literature

The sexting is associated with both promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking behaviour (i.e., the tendency to seek sexually seductive and innovative behaviours including sexually risky behaviour) as found by a meta analysis (Mori *et al.*, 2019; Kosenko *et al.*, 2017). Several reasons have been offered in the past for engaging in sexting and sexual sensation seeking behaviour of the individuals. One is to consider sexting as an alternative to physical sexual relationship (Lenhart, 2009).

The sexual sensation seeking behaviour had been found to be high in sexters as compared to non sexters and is considered by some to be the predictor of sexting (Champion & Pedersen, 2015; Van-Ouytsel *et al.*, 2014; Dir *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the sexting is found to be associated with promiscuity too. The young adults who engaged in sexting behaviours were found more likely to engage in casual sex including sex with multiple partners, a form of emotional and sexual promiscuity (Dake *et al.*, 2012; Rice *et al.*, 2014).

The phenomenon of promiscuity is correlated with lowered quality of healthy living (Okafor & Duru, 2010). The phenomenon of promiscuity can be defined as the tendency to engage in some form of emotional or sexual relationship with multiple partners, and have casual sex (Jones & Paulhus, 2012). The promiscuity can either be emotional or sexual, the sexual promiscuity includes the forms such as casual sex and hook-ups (Garcia *et al.*, 2010), and the emotional promiscuity includes falling in love easily with multiple partners (Jones & Paulhus, 2012). It has been found that sexual promiscuity leads to the experience of emotional promiscuity as well (Pinto & Arantes, 2017; Jones & Paulhus, 2012).

The older participants were found more likely to be engaged in sexting behaviour as reported by a number of researches (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014; Rice *et al.*, 2014; Baumgartner *et al.*, 2014). Although, the older adults were found to be involved in sexting behaviours, yet the sexting behaviour had adverse effects on teenagers (Livingstone & Gorzig, 2014).

There is inconsistency in previous literature regarding the gender wise prevalence of sexting. Most studies found no gender differences in sexting behaviour (Benotsch *et al.*, 2013; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011), while some other studies found men to send and receive more

sex as compared to women (Sharma *et al.*, 2019; Strassberg *et al.*, 2013; Gámez-Guadix *et al.*, 2015). Alternatively, there are studies which document the prevalence of sexting in women is high as compared to men (Reyns *et al.*, 2013). There are gender differences in sexual sensation seeking and promiscuity too. Another study found that men were more likely to engage in sexual promiscuity whereas women were more likely to engage in emotional promiscuity (Sagarin *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, the men had been found to be high in sexual sensation seeking as compared to women (Flanders *et al.*, 2013).

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1. Research design**

The cross sectional and survey research design was employed in this research.

#### **3.2. Participants**

201 undergraduate and postgraduate students of both sexes (M=100, W=101) were recruited purposively from the main campus of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur in South Punjab, Pakistan based on their Yes response to sexting question. The sample size was calculated by referring to online available sample size calculator available at fluidsurveys.com. The estimated sample size was 375 with 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. The response rate of participants was around 54%. The students of age group 18 to 30 years (M=21.63, SD=2.42) were included in the sample. All the participants signed the essential written informed consent before enrolling for the study.

#### **3.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

The students studying in The Islamia University of Bahawalpur who were under the age of 30 years and who responded yes to 1<sup>st</sup> question on Brief Sexting Scale were included in the study. The students of other institutions and beyond 30 years or those responded no to 1<sup>st</sup> question on Brief Sexting Scale were excluded from the study.

#### **3.4. Measures**

##### **3.4.1. Informed Consent Form (ICF)**

The researchers explaining the nature of the study to participants developed an informed consent form. All the participants were required to read and agree to the informed consent form before enrolling for the study. All ethics related information and research protocols were explained to the participants before their enrolment.

##### **3.4.2. Socio-Demographic Information Form (SDIF)**

A socio-demographic information form was constructed by the researcher that contained information about the age and sex of the participants.

##### **3.4.3. Brief Sexting Scale (BSS)**

The six items were adapted from the Sexting Behaviours Questionnaire (Dir, 2012) designed

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in a Likert-type scale from 1-5 where 1 represented never and 5 represented frequently. The internal consistency of the scale was found to be 0.81 Cronbach Alpha.

#### **3.4.4. Emotional Promiscuity Scale (EPS)**

The Emotional Promiscuity Scale (EPS) was developed by Jones (2011) which contains 10 items designed in Likert-type format from 1 to 5 where 1 represented strongly disagree and 5 represented strongly agree. The scale measured the tendency of emotional promiscuity in university students of both sexes. The internal consistency of the scale was 0.69 Cronbach Alpha for both sexes.

#### **3.4.5. Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale (SSSS)**

The Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale (SSSS) was developed by Kalichman & Rompa (1995) to assess the constructs of sexual adventure and sexual risk-taking behaviours in adolescents and adults. The scale has a total of 10 items designed in Likert type format from 1 to 4. The 1 represents not at all like me and 4 represents very much like me and total score is the sum of score on each item. The scale has internal consistency of 0.83 and 0.81 Cronbach Alpha for male and female college students respectively.

### **3.5. Procedure**

The Research Ethics Committee of the department of Applied Psychology at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan granted ethical approval for conducting the study. The data collection was duly allowed by the Head of Department of Applied Psychology at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. All the participating men and women signed the written informed consent before enrolment in the study. The data was collected from the undergraduate and postgraduate students from the main campus of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur by administering the SDIF and the 3 scales.

### **3.6. Ethical considerations**

The study met all the ethical considerations of research. The nature and purpose of the study including possible harms was explained to all participating students and written informed consent was obtained from all the participating students before enrolling them in the study. They were ensured about the confidentiality of their data.

### **3.7. Statistical analysis**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM, USA) version 25 was used to analyze the data. The results were expressed in the form of socio-demographic characteristics of participants at baseline, correlation among the sexting, emotional promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking, regression analysis with sexting as outcome variable, and several t tests for finding age and sex differences in all three variables. The effect size in t tests was represented by Cohen's d. The 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 were considered small, medium and large effect sizes respectively (Cohen, 1977). The correlation was two tailed and was significant at 99% confidence interval whereas the regression analysis and t tests were significant at 95% confidence interval.

### 3.8. Limitations

A small, university based sample size is the limitation of this study, as findings cannot be generalized to broader university sample. The purposive nature of the sexting scale and cultural sensitivity associated with the phenomena of sexting made it difficult for people to take part in the survey. Other socio demographic variables should have been included to make the research more informative.

## 4. Results and analysis

### 4.1. Baseline characteristics of participants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants at baseline are outlined in table-1. The (n=201) undergraduate and postgraduate students participated in the study. Around 88% of them was in the age range of 18-24 years whereas 12% were in the age range of 25-30 years (M=21.63 years; SD=2.42). There were 100 (49.8%) men while 101 (50.2%) were women students.

Table-1: Socio-demographic characteristics of participants at baseline

Socio-Demographic Variables	Baseline Characteristics	n	%
Age (M=21.63, SD=2.42)	18-24 years	176	87.6
	25-30 years	25	12.4
	Total	201	100.0
Sex	Men	100	49.8
	Women	101	50.2
	Total	201	100.0

### 4.2. Correlation analysis

The table-2 shows the results of correlation analysis among sexting, emotional promiscuity, and sexual sensation seeking in the participating students. There was found a significant positive correlation of the sexting with both the emotional promiscuity ( $r(199)=.33, p<.01$ ) and the sexual sensation seeking ( $r(199)=.53, p<.01$ ). Similarly, there was also a significant positive correlation between the emotional promiscuity and the sexual sensation seeking ( $r(199)=.50, p<.01$ ).

Table-2: Correlations among sexting, emotional promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3
Sexting	201	14.62	10.58	-		
Emotional Promiscuity	201	26.06	8.67	.33**	-	
Sexual Sensation Seeking	201	22.67	9.21	.53**	.50**	-

\*\* $p<.01$

### 4.3. Multiple regression analysis

The Table 3 gives the regression analysis to predict the sexting from emotional promiscuity

and sexual sensation seeking. The multiple linear regression significantly predicted sexting ( $F(2,198)=41.09$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $R^2=.29$ ). The emotional promiscuity did not significantly predict the sexting ( $t=1.34$ ,  $p>.05$ ) whereas the sexual sensation seeking did significantly predict sexting ( $t=7.08$ ,  $p<.05$ ), although the overall model was significant.

Table-3: Multiple regression analysis

Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	F(df)	Sig.	β	SE	t	Sig.
Emotional Promiscuity	.29	41.09 (2,198)	.000	.11	.08	1.34	.18
Sexual Sensation Seeking				.56	.07	7.08	.000

Outcome= Sexting

#### 4.4. t Tests

The Table 4 gives the results of t tests computed to find differences in socio-demographic variables such as age, and sex for sexting, emotional promiscuity, and sexual sensation seeking. There were no statistically significant differences in sexting ( $M=14.30$ ,  $SD=10.80$  vs  $M=16.88$ ,  $SD=8.72$ ), emotional promiscuity ( $M=25.99$ ,  $SD=8.82$  vs  $M=26.56$ ,  $SD=7.70$ ), and sexual sensation seeking ( $M=22.23$ ,  $SD=9.26$  vs  $M=25.80$ ,  $SD=8.33$ ) between the two age groups respectively ( $t(199)=-1.14$ ,  $p=.25$ , Cohen's  $d=.26$ ); ( $t(199)=-.30$ ,  $p=.76$ , Cohen's  $d=.06$ ); and ( $t(199)=-1.82$ ,  $p=.07$ , Cohen's  $d=.40$ ). There was found statistically significant differences between sexes in sexting and sexual sensation seeking respectively ( $t(199)=-4.57$ ,  $p=.000$ , Cohen's  $d=.64$ ; and ( $t(199)=-2.84$ ,  $p=.005$ , Cohen's  $d=.40$ ). The women were found significantly higher on sexting ( $M=17.86$ ,  $SD=10.67$  vs  $M=11.35$ ,  $SD=9.47$ ) and sexual sensation seeking ( $M=24.48$ ,  $SD=9.57$  vs  $M=20.85$ ,  $SD=8.49$ ) as compared to men respectively. There was no significant gender difference ( $M=26.05$ ,  $SD=7.82$  vs  $M=26.07$ ,  $SD=9.48$ ) in emotional promiscuity ( $t(199)=-.02$ ,  $p=.98$ , Cohen's  $d=.002$ ).

Table-4: Results of several t tests

Age	18-24y (n=176)		25-30y (n=25)		t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Variables	M	SD	M	SD			
Sexting	14.30	10.80	16.88	8.72	-1.14(199)	.25	.26
Emotional Promiscuity	25.99	8.82	26.56	7.70	-.30(199)	.76	.06
Sexual Sensation Seeking	22.23	9.26	25.80	8.33	-1.82(199)	.07	.40
Sex	M (n=100)		W (n=101)		t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Variables	M	SD	M	SD			
Sexting	11.35	9.47	17.86	10.67	-4.57(199)	.000	.64
Emotional Promiscuity	26.05	7.82	26.07	9.48	-.02(199)	.98	.002
Sexual Sensation Seeking	20.85	8.49	24.48	9.57	-2.84(199)	.005	.40

## 5. Discussion and findings

The present study was aimed at finding a relationship among sexting, emotional promiscuity, and sexual sensation seeking and to find age and sex differences in these behaviours among university students. The present study did find a significant positive relationship among the sexting, emotional promiscuity, and sexual sensation seeking. The previous studies reported a significant relationship between emotional promiscuity, sexual sensation seeking, and sexting (Mori *et al.*, 2019; Kosenko *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, there was also a significant positive

relationship between emotional promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking in participants. The previous studies did report a significant correlation between sexual sensation seeking and emotional promiscuity (Kosenko *et al.*, 2017).

The multiple regression analysis reported that sexual sensation seeking significantly predicted sexting in university students. The previous research reported that sexual sensation seeking led to the behavioural expression of sexting in adolescents and young adults (Champion & Pedersen, 2015; Van-Ouytsel *et al.*, 2014; Dir *et al.*, 2013). The present study confirmed the previous findings in Pakistani university students too. However, the present study found that emotional promiscuity did not predict the sexting behaviour, although, there was a positive association between the two behaviours.

The present study did not report a significant difference in two age groups of young adults (18-24 years and 25-30 years) in sexting, emotional promiscuity, and sexual sensation seeking. The previous research did indicate that increased age was positively associated with sexting and emotional promiscuity, and the sexual behaviour increased with age (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014; Rice *et al.*, 2014; Baumgartner *et al.*, 2014). But this pattern was not found in this study. The sensitive nature of these issues (emotional promiscuity and sexting) made it difficult to be reported by this study sample. The university students may have shown the social desirability effect and have not revealed truly their experiences.

There were, on the other hand, significant gender differences found in the sexting and sexual sensation seeking. The women students were found to send or receive more sexts and show more sexual sensation seeking as compared to the men. The previous research about the gender differences in the sexting is mixed, although, some studies did report the women to be higher in the sexting (Reyns *et al.*, 2013). Given the cultural context of Pakistan, the finding of the women being high on sexual sensation seeking is new and warrants further research. The overall repressive attitude towards these behaviours is the one reason that the women expressed their experiences more openly. The present study did not find any gender difference in the emotional promiscuity.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

The present research concludes that sexting is associated with emotional promiscuity and sexual sensation seeking in young adults, though, sexual sensation seeking was found to be strong predictor of sexting in young adults. The women students were found high in sexting and sexual sensation seeking as compared to men students. There should be relevant education at campus level so that young adults may make informed choices about engaging in these behaviours (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). The further research may be conducted with other socio demographic variables in context of sexting in young adults.

## **6.1. Recommendations**

The findings recommend providing education about these behaviours as a part of university curriculum although, simply providing education for teaching young people to avoid sexting is not sufficient and does not yield positive results (Walker *et al.*, 2013). Yet, education can make young people take more informed decisions.

## Funding

The author did not receive any funding for conducting or reporting of this research.

## Conflict of interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

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## Annexure-A:

## 1. Socio-demographic Information Form (SDIF):

a) Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ b) Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ c) Age: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Brief Sexting Scale (BSS)

Sr. #	Statements	Never	Only Once / Twice	Less than Monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
1	Have you ever sent sexually suggestive photo or video of yourself?						
2	Have you ever sent a photo or video of yourself in underwear or lingerie?						
3	Have you ever sent a nude photo or video of yourself?						
4	Have you ever sent a sexually suggestive text message?						
5	Have you ever sent a text message propositioning sexual activity?						
6	Have you ever forwarded on or showed others explicit messages which were meant to be kept private?						

## 3. Emotional Promiscuity Scale (EPS)

Sr. #	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I fall in love easily.					
2	For me, romantic feelings take a long time to develop.					
3	I feel romantic connections right away.					
4	I love the feeling of falling in love.					
5	I am not the type of person who falls in love.					
6	I often feel romantic connections to more than one person at a time.					
7	I have been in love with more than one person at the same time.					
8	I fall in love frequently.					
9	I tend to jump into relationships.					
		A	B	C	D	E
10	During your entire life, how many people have you fallen in love with?	None	1	2	3	4 or more

4. Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale (SSSS)

Sr. #	Statements	Not at all Like Me	Slightly Like Me	Mainly Like Me	Very Much Like Me
1	I like wild sexual encounters.				
2	The physical sensations are the most important thing about having sex.				
3	My sexual partners probably think that I am a risk taker.				
4	When it comes to sex, physical attraction is more important to me than how well I know the person.				
5	I enjoy the company of sensual people.				
6	I enjoy watching X rated videos.				
7	I am interested in trying out new sexual experiences.				
8	I feel like exploring my sexuality.				
9	I like to have new and exciting sexual experiences and sensations.				
10	I enjoy the sensations of intercourse without a condom.				