

The Prevalence and Perceptions of Cyber Dating Abuse among Undergraduate Students in Nairobi County, Kenya

Nancy Mayoyo¹, Francis Likoye Malenya² Jackton O. Ogeno³

¹(Educational Foundations Department, Kenyatta University, Kenya)

²(Educational Foundations Department, Kenyatta University, Kenya)

³(Educational Foundations Department, Kenyatta University, Kenya)

Abstract:

Background: The advancement of technology has contributed to the rise of intimate partner violence perpetrated through technology. Whereas research indicates that intimate partner violence is a common phenomenon, relatively little is known about cyber dating abuse (CDA) among Kenyan undergraduate students. This study sought to assess its prevalence and understand perceptions held regarding behaviors that constitute Cyber Dating Abuse. Johnson's typology of intimate partner violence was used to investigate the prevalence of certain forms of cyber dating abuse.

Materials and Methods: The study sample comprised 315 dating students drawn from selected universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. Using a cross sectional research design, the study collected both qualitative and quantitative data.

Results: Results indicate a high prevalence of Cyber Dating Abuse among respondents. Coercive control violence was the most pervasive form of abuse. Respondents exhibited ambivalence towards Cyber Dating Abuse. Majority perceived most of the acts to be rather normal than abusive. Just over a third had contrary opinion, reporting that depending on the contexts and the kind of relationships they were involved in, they constituted abuse. These misguided perceptions held by the respondents led to the justification of Cyber Dating Abuse hence its prevalence.

Conclusion: It is concluded that misconception contributed to the respondents' failure to recognize this abuse thus increasing their chances of suffering from Cyber Dating Abuse. This has an implication on preventive measures to be adopted so as to mitigate on negative effects on students' academic engagement.

Key Word: Cyber dating abuse, perceptions, intimate partner violence, prevalence

Date of Submission: 29-08-2020

Date of Acceptance: 14-09-2020

I. INTRODUCTION

Dating is a very important part of young emerging adults' social development and is a crucial part of their university experience (Kline, 2009). Romantic relationships among undergraduate students are quite normal and are significant for healthy social development. However, this period is characterized by conflicts as the emerging young adults learn to negotiate and form stable and healthy interpersonal relationships. Kline (2009) asserts that this phase is at times riddled with painful, complicated and often dangerous experiences. On the contrary, some of the young adults are unaware that these experiences comprise abuse and violence. This has been worsened by a new emerging form of dating violence that involves the use of information and communication technologies among young adults which has been found to have negative consequences on its victims (Gamez-Guadix, Borrajo & Calvete, 2018).

Research indicates that great advancement in information communication technology has revolutionized communication patterns among people in the contemporary world. Dating partners remain in constant communication through the use of phone calls, text messages, instant messaging and use of social media. This constant use of digital technologies has provided new opportunities for partners to abuse each other in what is referred to as cyber dating abuse. Flach and Deslandes (2017) define cyber dating abuse (CDA) as a new expression of intimate partner violence; an emerging phenomenon, intended to harm the partner and that has effects on the victims' mental health.

Studies around the world show that CDA is a social problem afflicting dating students. A study of 433 college students conducted in Europe-Spain established that over 50% had suffered from CDA victimization (Borrajo, Gamez-Guadix, & Calvete, 2015a). Reed (2015) in her study of high school students in USA established that 73% of females and 66% of males of 1162 students were victims of CDA. A quantitative study still in the US by Cutbush, Williams, Miller, Gibbs and Clinton-Sherrod (2012) of 1430 adolescents aged 12-13

years, established that 31.5% of the teens were victims of electronic dating aggression while 18.4 % were aggressors. A Kenyan study by Gitonga (2014) on internet crimes among university of Nairobi female students established that 77.6% of 201 of the respondents were victims of online harassment whereas 76.1% suffered from internet stalking.

Further, studies on perceptions reveal that the myths of romantic love that young people believe in have been found to influence their perceptions of how their romantic relationships should be. Some of these myths include a belief that suffering is part and parcel of love, jealousy is a sign of love and that love has the power to overcome all problems (Rodríguez-Castro., Lameiras-Fernández., Carrera-Fernández., & Vallejo-Medina, 2013). Moreover, research shows that such beliefs make adolescents to fail to recognize abuse and to condone it. They also believe that controlling behaviours are a sign of love (Francis & Pearson, 2019; Malonda, Tur-Porcar, & Llorca, 2017) and thus a normal part of romantic relationships (Lucero, Weisz, Smith-Darden & Lucero, 2014; Reed, Tolman & Sayfer, 2016). Although girls interpreted controlling acts as a means of protecting and proving their love, it could be a sign of possessiveness hence, a kind of Cyber Dating Abuse behaviour (Reed, et al., 2016).

Most research on prevalence and perceptions on cyber dating abuse have been conducted among adolescents in western countries. There is a dearth of empirical studies conducted in Kenya on the same. Therefore, this paper sought to explore Kenyan undergraduate university students' perception of the concept of Cyber Dating Abuse and its prevalence among them.

II. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Johnson's typology of intimate partner violence theory was utilised in this study to understand the kind of abuse experienced by undergraduate students. This theory propounded by Michael Johnson explains Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) from feminist and family violence theorists' perspectives (Johnson, 1995). Initially, he outlined two kinds of IPV namely Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence (Ali, Dhingra & McGarry, 2016). Patriarchal Terrorism arises out of traditional patriarchy that gives men authority to control their women (Johnson, 1995: p 284). It is therefore understood from a gendered feminist perspective. On the contrary, Common Couple Violence is not gender based but arises out of conflict that gets out of control within a family (Johnson, 1995: p 284). It thus can be explained from the Family Violence perspective. Johnson refined his typology in 2005 and added two other kinds of violence. He also modified the vocabulary of the earlier types; Patriarchal Terrorism/ Intimate Terrorism was renamed Coercive Control Violence while Common Couple Violence was renamed Situational Couple Violence. He added Violent Resistance and Mutual Violent Control.

Violent Resistance emanates from retaliation with violence in self-defense by a partner in response to Coercive Control Violence. Finally, Mutual Violent Control is as a result of both intimate partners being violent and controlling (Melander, 2010). Johnson (2006) specifies that these kinds of violence are differentiated by the extent of control entailed in each, and not by how severe the violence is. In the context of this paper, it is argued that the constant use of technology among undergraduate students exposes them to the different types of violence outlined by M Johnson.

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. The target population was drawn from 3 randomly selected universities in Nairobi City County namely Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenyatta University and Multimedia University of Kenya. The study's respondents comprised a convenient sample of 384 undergraduate students. Further, simple stratified sampling technique was used to select 48 respondents from the convenient sample for the focus group discussion (FGD). Data analysis was based on responses from 315 respondents (52.4% males and 47.6% females) who reported to have been dating at the time of the study or had been dating in the previous one year. Respondents' ages ranged from 18-35 with a mean average age of 21(SD = 1.99). 41.3% of the respondents were dating casually while 48.9% were dating exclusively. 59% had relationships that had lasted less than a year, 19.4% had relationships not exceeding two years while 21.6% had relationships that had lasted over two years. The study utilized a self-administered questionnaire to collect quantitative data. A focus group discussion guide was used to obtain contextual information on respondents' perceptions. Six focus groups comprising eight members each were used. Each group was made up of a homogeneous sample based on gender. This was crucial given the sensitivity of the topic of discussion so as to encourage self-disclosure among participants. A research assistant took down notes during discussions. In addition, the sessions were audio recorded. The qualitative data were transcribed before being translated and coded to establish recurrent themes and conclusions drawn. After synthesizing the data, they were reported in text and narrative form. These sets of data were triangulated to provide a wholesome picture of the issues raised in study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Prevalence and perceptions on Cyber Dating Abuse among dating Kenyan undergraduate students

CDA was measured by the Cyber Dating Abuse Scale adopted from a validated measure of cyber dating abuse behaviours by Borrajo et al. (2015b) and Reed et al., (2015). Any respondent who acknowledged perpetrating or experiencing any of the CDA behaviours was deemed to be a perpetrator or victim of CDA. Findings showed that 90.2 % were perpetrators while 87.3% were victims.

Eight Likert-like items adapted from a cyber dating abuse scale by Reed, Tolman and Ward (2016) were used to measure the prevalence of CDA victimization. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had ever experienced any of the CDA behaviours. They were also asked to show the extent to which they agreed to whether the behaviors listed constituted abuse. Three items focused on monitoring and control behaviors, three items focused on direct aggression and two items were on sexual coercion abuse. The responses to the questions were strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, strongly agree and agree. In the analysis all responses indicating strongly agree and agree implied the respondents deemed the behaviors to be abusive whereas strongly disagree and disagree implied the behaviors were not deemed to be abusive. Responses obtained from in depth discussion on the same from the FGD have been triangulated to provide a full picture of the respondents’ perceptions. Results from descriptive statistics are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Prevalence and perceptions of CDA

CDA behaviours	Have you experienced CDA?				To what extent do you agree that the following behaviours are abusive					
	Yes		No		SD/D (Not abusive)		Neutral		SA/A (Abusive)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Accessing accounts to monitor one	157	49.8	158	50.2	136	43.2	39	12.4	140	44.4
Sending too many messages	166	52.7	149	47.3	120	38.1	74	23.5	121	38.4
Pressuring partner for passwords	117	37.3	197	62.7	151	47.9	49	15.6	115	36.5
Sharing private information publicly	53	16.8	262	83.2	161	51.1	25	7.9	129	41
Sending threatening messages	55	17.5	262	83.2	181	57.5	27	8.6	107	33.9
Posts to elicit jealousy	95	30.2	220	69.8	161	51.1	44	14	110	34.9
Pressuring partner to sext	68	21.6	247	78.4	160	50.8	55	17.5	100	31.7
Pressuring partner to send sexual photos/videos	45	14.3	269	85.7	189	60	26	8.3	100	31.7

Key: SD/D- Strongly Disagree/Disagree; SA/A- Strongly Agree/ Agree

4.1.1 Monitoring and controlling behaviours

Descriptive statistics indicated that this was a common form of abuse suffered by the respondents as illustrated in Table 1. 49.8% reported that their partners had accessed their online accounts, phone log and text messages to monitor and control them, 52.7% reported that their partners had sent them too many messages and demanded for immediate response making them uncomfortable while 37.3% had been pressured for passwords.

The respondents were further asked what their perceptions were regarding the three behaviours. 43.2% of the respondents did not perceive accessing partners’ online accounts; phone log and text messages to monitor and control them to be abusive while 47.9% felt the same about individuals demanding for passwords. Males considered these acts which they attributed to mistrust to be a norm among females. Females affirmed these sentiments reporting that the behaviours were normal among females who were either exclusively dating or newly dating. Besides, for newly dating partners moderate monitoring was perceived as a reflection of love. However, those who had dated for a while considered these acts annoying and uncomfortable. Nevertheless, males reported that demand for passwords caused them anxiety.

On the contrary, 44.4% of the respondents found accessing online accounts, phone log and text messages to monitor and control partners to be abusive and so did 36.5% who felt demand for passwords was abusive. These respondents reported that monitoring and controlling a partner was an infringement on their right to privacy, freedom of movement and association. Males echoed that these behaviours which they found uncomfortable were a form of harassment by insecure and controlling partners. In one case reported to the university authorities, a victim of monitoring and control sought help due to the abuse they were experiencing. The victim’s partner was monitoring his every activity online causing him fear, anxiety and social

embarrassment among his peers. This incident underscores the abusive nature of this act which is detrimental to one's social and academic life.

Responses to perception on partners sending too many messages with an expectation of immediate response were quite varied. 38.1% of the respondents did not perceive the act to be abusive but rather a norm especially among partners who were in new relationships. Discussants in the FGD affirmed that this act from a person they loved was something they welcomed. A male respondent retorted, "I see nothing wrong with this, it is ok because everyone needs attention. If anything, it is a sign of love". A few discussants though felt that even though the behaviour was not abusive, they found it nagging and restricting especially when partners had been in a relationship for a while. However, 23.5% were neutral while 38.4% were of the perception that this behaviour was abusive. These respondents were of the opinion that this act was perpetrated by insensitive, insecure and obsessive partners who were out to harass their partners.

4.1.2 Direct aggression behaviours

Descriptive statistics indicated that of the three behaviours involving direct aggression, posts to elicit jealousy were more common as 30.2% had been victims of this act. 16.8% reported that their partners had shared screenshots of their private information while 17.5% had received threatening messages from their partners.

The study went further to seek the respondents' perception of these three behaviours. Over half of the respondents reported that they did not perceive these acts as being abusive but rather quite normal. Respondents also reported that they perpetrated them innocently with no intention of hurting their partners. Males in the FGD revealed that whenever they received threats from partners they were casually dating they just ignored them. According to a male respondent "When it comes from a girl am not serious with, it doesn't even bother me". On the contrary, some participants indicated that whenever their partners sent such threats, they responded with even worse messages. One respondent reported that after receiving threats of breakup, "I texted her back and sarcastically told her 'ahsante' translated to mean 'Thanks'. The victim in this pronouncement implies that they were ironically welcoming the breakup. Another added "For me, I just told her 'nilikuwa nimekuwacha kitambo wewe ndio unaniacha saa hii' translated to mean 'I had already broken up with you; it is you who is breaking up with me now...'" (Male, FGD). It is clear that such messages were insulting, humiliating and intimidating aimed at causing the partner emotional distress. Yet according to the discussants, not much thought was given to their effect on the victims.

On the contrary, over a third of the respondents reported that they perceived these acts which were likely to happen after conflicts and breakup as being abusive. Respondents were of the view that the acts were maliciously perpetrated to cause a partner or ex-partner social embarrassment and emotional distress hence constituted abuse. Besides, participants opined that an act such as sharing of intimate information with close friends and peers even when deemed innocent was an infringement on one's privacy and hence was abusive. Threats of physical harm, which fortunately were rare among this sample, were also abusive as they were meant to cause a partner fear and anxiety. It was also reported that partners many a times posted statuses that were emotionally distressing.

A clear example of how devastating sharing of intimate information can be is captured in the story of a young university lady. Cherise, (pseudonym) a victim of revenge porn recounted the harrowing experience she underwent in the hands of her ex-boyfriend. The lady reported that they had been dating for over two years with her boyfriend before they broke up. Their relationship had always been a happy one until their second year when seemingly the lady started to note changes with her boyfriend. He was no longer interested in her and would pick unnecessary quarrels with her. This made her to suspect something was wrong. She started to snoop on his online accounts, text messages and call logs. She did not uncover anything suspicious making her to resolve into hacking his social media accounts. Cherise recounted, "Eventually my fears were confirmed...he was cheating on me. Not with one girl, but many girls".

After this discovery Cherise reported that she decided to break up with her boyfriend who however was not for the idea. Although he asked for forgiveness and promised never to do it again, she was not ready to continue with the relationship. It is then that the unexpected happened. "The next thing I knew was that he had shared my nudes on our class WhatsApp groups...the nudes spread so fast. It was the worst moment of my life". Cherise went ahead to narrate how devastated she was after this incident. She was ashamed of herself, confused and depressed. She was suddenly the talk of campus. Most of her friends and classmates avoided her, and she was met by stares from everyone on campus. "For a week I just locked myself in my room. I constantly cried and kept to myself most of the time. I avoided going to class... I even thought of killing myself... however, my best friend was so supportive". With her best friend's support she sought counselling from a peer counsellor. After a while she was able to come to terms with her situation, though she reported that she was not entirely healed of the nasty experience. Cherise narrated how her academic engagement was affected. The incident had made her skip classes for some time due to the shame and embarrassment of facing her classmates. Her self-

confidence was eroded, and she even entertained suicidal thoughts. This adversely affected her academic performance that semester.

4.1.3 Sexual Coercion behaviours

The study sought to find out the victimization prevalence on sexual coercion. The responses indicated that this kind of abuse was the least common. 21.6% reported to have been pressured to sext or engage in sexual activities online with partner while 14.3% had been pressured to send their partners sexual photos or videos or receiving such from their partners without them asking for them.

The study further sought to find out the respondents' perception on their partners pressuring them to sext or engage in sexual activities online. Findings indicate that 50.8% of the respondents did not perceive this behaviour to be abusive. In the focus group discussion, males expressed their opinions that sexting was a means of spicing up a relationship among exclusively dating partners. One respondent said: "Sexting is a check... (with a thumb up) ...but it has to be with a partner one trusts and must be consensual". This was reiterated by other male respondents who felt partners had a right to share what they wanted including a demand for sex or sexting as long as it was consensual. A few had a different opinion as they felt that though the act was not abusive, it could be problematic when partners fell out with each other.

17.5% of the respondents were neutral and findings from the FGD indicate that there were those who felt that even when sexting was consensual, there was still a risk of a partner exposing the chats in cases of revenge porn. However, 31.7% of the respondents were of the perception that this act was abusive. Some discussants were of the opinion that coercion to sext by a dating partner was immoral and hence abusive. Some reported that coercion to engage in sex and/or sex related activities before marriage contravened their religious beliefs hence was abusive.

Finally on sexual coercion, respondents were asked to what extent they thought the act of their partners pressuring them to send them their sexual photos or videos or them sending them theirs without being asked was abusive. 60 % indicated that they did not perceive the act to be abusive. As revealed from the focus group discussion, the respondents reported that this depended on the type of relationship one was involved in. In exclusive relationships where partners were serious with their relationship, this was deemed to be quite the norm. This was not a problem so long as the two partners were both comfortable with it. However, some stated that though the act was not abusive it was uncomfortable. One respondent expressed their discomfort:

"If my partner sent me such a picture or video I have not asked for, I would be wary of them. I will ask myself, if they can send me this, how many other people do I know they are sending to? In fact, this would just make me very suspicious of them and make me think of them as being 'loose'." (Male, FGD).

Males were in support of this assertion and expressed their discomfort especially with girlfriends they were newly dating. Because of this many said in such situations they were hesitant to demand for such pictures and videos until when they became committed to the relationship.

However, 8.3% were neutral while 31.7% perceived this kind of behaviour not only as being uncomfortable but also abusive. This was especially so in relationships lacking commitment or in which partners were newly dating. Most female respondents in the FGD expressed their discomfort in sharing their intimate photos or videos with their partners. They were also cautious of doing so because of the risks of such photos and videos being leaked. In support of these views, respondents asserted that coercion from a partner to do this was nothing short of abuse and in any case such a partner was up to no good and were suspect. Some respondents reiterated that in the first place sharing such stuff was against their religious beliefs and they would be offended if their partner demanded for such or even sent them theirs without their consent.

4.1.4 Discussion on undergraduate students' perceptions of CDA and its prevalence

The study sought to find out the prevalence of CDA among undergraduate students. Findings indicated that CDA was prevalent as 90.2 % were perpetrators while 87.3% were victims. Also the study sought to find out the various forms of Cyber dating Abuse experienced by the respondents in line with Johnson's typology of intimate partner violence. The findings showed that the most common form of violence experienced was coercive control violence consisting acts meant to monitor and control partners. The regular use of digital media among the youth provided opportunities for individuals to control their partners. This agrees with Melander (2010) who asserted that technology made it easy for partners to perpetrate coercive control violence. Monitoring and control abuse was reflected in acts like snooping on partner's messages, call logs and contacts without their permission to check whether they were behaving correctly (spying); sending partner too many messages with expectation of immediate response and pressuring partner for passwords to access their phones, SMS or online accounts to check on what they were up to.

Additionally the study sought the respondents' views on such behaviours. Findings revealed that most of the cyber dating abuse behaviors seemed to be embedded in habits and attitudes that normalized such behaviors among undergraduate students. Consequently, over half of the respondents did not perceive

behaviours constituting direct aggression and sexual coercion to be abusive. About two fifths of the respondents did not think behaviours that constitute monitoring and control were abusive. The results show that 43.2% of the respondents did not think accessing SMS, calls and online accounts to monitor and control their partner was abusive but rather deemed it to be an indication of lack of trust from a partner. Moreover, it was believed that minimal to moderate monitoring was a sign of love and care. However, too much was thought to be annoying and uncomfortable. This agrees with findings by Borrajo et al., (2015) who reported that adolescents in their study perceived CDA to be a “proof of love” and confused it with care. Moreover, acts to do with control and intimidation were ‘justified by a romanticized view of love’ (Borrajo et al., 2015).

Females in this study professed that snooping on their partner’s communication was a norm among them as they had to be sure if their boyfriends were being true to them. These findings are consistent with the findings in a study by Lucero et al., (2014) who established that equally adolescents in their study did not perceive these acts to be abusive but rather found them to be annoying. It also agrees with findings from the same study in which girls reported that monitoring was an important component of their intimate relationships. The findings in this study show that mistrust was a major issue among young dating adults. As reported, this phase among undergraduate students was characterized by a desire to experiment and have fun. With this understanding, it is no wonder that many respondents were naturally distrustful of their partners. Consequently, they felt the need to monitor their partners to ensure that they were behaving correctly. This behavior which was quite common and deemed to be normal among both males and females can be attributed to gender mistrust.

According to Nomaguchi, Giordano, Manning, & Longmore (2011) gender mistrust includes individuals’ negative attitudes towards the other gender. It encompasses behaviors aimed at controlling and manipulating a partner and is anchored on stereotypical beliefs about sexual conduct and the concept that men and women cannot be trusted to sexually commit to one partner. This mistrust amongst the respondents made them to be wary of their partners and to harbor suspicions against them. Hence to them, monitoring and controlling a partner wasn’t perceived as abusive but as a necessary precautionary security measure against cheating.

Apparently based on findings of this study, gender mistrust affected the level of trust among partners in intimate relationships leading to conflicts amounting to situational couple violence. Ironically while 47.9% respondents indicated that intrusive acts like pressuring a partner for passwords was normal and hence not abusive, some respondents in the FGD pointed out that this act was a source of conflict in their relationships. Moreover, some respondents in the FGD intimated that when asked for passwords they also demanded for the same from their controlling partners in what Johnson (2005) refers to as violent resistance. Furthermore, females reported that when they suffered from sexual coercion victimization, some of them resorted to block their partner’s access to themselves by preventing them from reaching them.

Behaviours involving direct aggression like threats to a partner and posts or comments that were hurtful were considered by some respondents to be a norm in their relationships and were deemed to be harmless. Nevertheless they at times ended up being a source of conflict among partners as some partners chose to retaliate against controlling partners in revenge by making worse posts on their social media. Respondents reported that sharing intimate information with friends (which at times ended up becoming public) was common among friends and was done without malice just as was the sharing of posts or making comments to make a partner jealous. This is consistent with the findings in a study by Kellerman et al., (2013) who found out that their respondents did not ascribe hostile intentions to their abusive acts. It also agrees with Rodriguez and colleagues study (2013) which found that adolescents perceived jealousy as a normal part of intimate relationships and a reflection of love.

Sexual coercion involving making demands for sexual photos and videos or sending them without being asked and pressure to ‘sext’ or engage in sexual activities online was perceived as normal especially by males. This kind of abuse according to Johnson (2005) results from the patriarchal tradition that men have legal and social right to control their partners. Males are thus socialized that they have power over their partners. The males in this study exhibited their dominance over the females as they clearly reported that they believed partners were free to do what they wanted with each other. This made some males to perceive it as a norm in their romantic relationships. The males therefore demonstrated their subscription to this gender socialization which gave them power to start controlling their girl friends right from their dating.

However sexual coercion was not so common among the respondents in this study. This is in contrast with Lucero and colleagues’ study which found sexting to be quite common. This was not the case in this study as only 68 (21.6%) reported to have been a victim of this. This finding can be attributed to cultural differences and socialization. In most African cultures talk about sex is a taboo and so some respondents may have feared being stigmatized and hence under reported or they simply could not have been doing it.

Whereas the reviewed studies were all from Europe and their respondents were teenagers, the two population samples had a lot of similarities with only negligible contradictions noted in their perceptions regarding behaviors comprising CDA. In this respect, despite the age, geographical and cultural differences

between the respondents in the reviewed studies and this study, not much difference was noted in their perceptions. The study established just like in the reviewed studies, majority of the respondents in this study demonstrated ignorance as they did not quite understand what constitutes CDA. The respondents perceived the abusive behaviors to be quite normal or they interpreted them to be annoying, uncomfortable or attributed them to mistrust and jealousy.

On the contrary, over a third of the respondents in this study were of a different opinion that the acts discussed above were abusive. These respondents felt that these acts were carried out as a form of harassment or to simply cause their partner emotional distress or social embarrassment and hence were perceived to be abusive. The respondents believed behaviors like the sharing of a partner's intimate information; sending posts or making comments on another person's profile to make a partner jealous and sending threatening messages were acts of direct aggression meant to cause a partner psychological harm and hence were abusive. This supports the assertion by Reed et al., (2016) that an important feature of CDA is the intention to cause the other harm.

Other acts like pressuring a partner for passwords and accessing their SMS, mobile phone calls and online accounts so as to monitor them; pressuring a partner to sext or engage in sexual activities online; or share their sexual photos or videos or sending them unwanted sexual photos or videos were believed to be an infringement on one's privacy and rights and hence were abusive. Respondents also expressed their feelings that controlling behaviors were suffocating, uncomfortable and curtailed one's freedom of movement and association hence were perceived to be abusive. This agrees with the assertion by Stark (2006) that coercive control hinders a victim's autonomy, equality and dignity.

In this respect, these respondents' responses differ from the perceptions expressed in the reviewed studies by Borrajo et al., (2015); Kellerman et al., (2015) and Lucero et al., (2014) discussed above. However, these perceptions uphold the views expressed in a study by Flach and Deslandes, (2017) that while an act like consensual sexting is not perceived to be a form of abuse, it becomes abusive when this information is publicly posted without a partner's consent thus infringing on their right to privacy. According to Martsolf, Colbert and Draucker (2012), this was a common form of revenge following break-ups among teenagers and was used to defame, humiliate, blackmail, and shame an ex-partner.

Based on the findings from the FGD the study established that the major factor leading to the divergence in perception was influenced by the type of relationship one was involved in. Respondents who were committed in their relationships seemed to have differing opinions from those who were dating casually or those that were newly dating. For instance, newly dating couples considered an act like sending too many messages to a partner with expectation of immediate response a sign of affection. However, those in committed relationships found it nagging and uncomfortable. A few even perceived the act to be abusive as it was considered a form of harassment by obsessive partners. Although almost a half (48.9%) of the respondents reported to dating exclusively; only over a fifth (21.6%) reported to have been in relationships that had lasted over two years. Moreover, most respondents' relationships were reported to last for short durations as almost three fifths (59%) reported that their relationships had lasted between 2 weeks to 1 year. This could probably explain why only over a third believed that these acts constituted abuse with over a half of them reporting to the contrary.

Another factor evident from the discussions above is that the context under which the acts occurred largely dictated the respondents' perception. Participants thus differentially interpreted the acts depending on their relationship and situation under which the acts occurred. Consequently, some behaviors were perceived to be the norm and harmless; some were interpreted to be acts of love and affection while others were interpreted to be distressing, intrusive and hence abusive. For instance, it was reported that sharing of private information especially chats was a norm. Both males and females shared screenshots of their conversations with their intimate partners with close friends. Some males even went ahead to share their sexual videos with close friends probably to showcase their prowess. Even when these acts seemed innocent and were shared with no malice, this sharing was an infringement of their partner's right to privacy. It was also shown that at times the same information was later used to shame partners when partners fell out with each other as in revenge porn, a form of CDA. Equally, when confidants made the information public, it became a source of social embarrassment to the victim like in cases where victim's private photos and videos were publicly shared on social media.

Although the respondents' perceptions differed, it is evident that even behaviours that seem innocent can be abusive. For instance, some respondents said sexting was used to spice up their relationships, yet the same information was capable of causing victims emotional distress when misused by a partner to shame their ex-partners. Similarly, the sharing of intimate conversations, pictures and videos with close friends was an infringement of a partner's privacy and a source of social embarrassment and psychological distress to the victims hence was abusive. This is so whether the victim is aware of the abuse or not. Ironically, in this study only 16.9% said their partner had shared their private information despite discussants in the FGD saying it was a

common practice. This though was expected, as it was likely done behind the partner's back. It therefore remained largely unknown except in cases where the shared messages were made public and went viral like instances of revenge porn. Nonetheless, the sharing of private information whether with close friends or the public is abusive and should not be done at all costs. Not only is it risky as the information can be misused against the partner like in cases of revenge porn but is also a betrayal of a partners' trust and can lead to trust issues once it is known. Equally, high levels of monitoring and control behaviors were abusive as they were found to be detrimental to a relationship and resulted to negative effect in the form of fear and anxiety and negative mental health in the form of depression among victims.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study found that CDA is prevalent among dating undergraduate students from selected universities in Nairobi County. The findings indicate that coercive control violence manifested in monitoring and control behaviours was the most widespread. Ironically majority of the respondents normalized these behaviours and did not perceive them to be abusive but just annoying and sometimes considered them as a sign of love. Apparently, this perception explains why coercive control violence was accepted as a normal part of dating experience by undergraduate students. The study therefore recommends that there is need to create awareness on CDA and to debunk the held beliefs. Intervention should aim at educating young adults to recognize all kinds of CDA so as not to view them as normal behavior in romantic relationships. This will have an implication on its prevention to enhance healthy dating so as to promote better learning outcomes among undergraduate students.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Ali, P. A., Dhingra, K., & McGarry, J. (2016). A Literature review of Intimate Partner Violence and its classifications. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, doi:10.1016/j.avb.2016.06.008.
- [2]. Borrajo, E., Gámez-Guadix, M., Pereda, N., & Calvete, E. (2015a). Cyber Dating Abuse: Prevalence, context, and relationship with offline dating aggression. *Psychological Reports*, 116, 565-585.
- [3]. Borrajo, E., Gámez-Guadix, M., Pereda, N., & Calvete, E. (2015b). The development and validation of the Cyber Dating Abuse questionnaire among young couples. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 48, 358-365.
- [4]. Flach, R. M. D. & Deslandes, S. F. (2017). Cyber Dating Abuse in affective and sexual relationships: a literature review. *Cadernos De Saude Publics. CSP. Reports in Public Health*. <https://doi: 10.1590/0102-311x00138516>.
- [5]. Gamez-Guadix, M., Borrajo, E., & Calvete, E. (2018). Partner abuse, control and violence through internet and smartphones: Characteristics, evaluation and prevention. *Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos de Madrid*
- [6]. Gitonga, W. (2014). The prevalence of internet crimes on women students at the University of Nairobi. Master's Thesis. U.O.N Repository.
- [7]. Johnson, M. P. (1995). Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 57 (2):283-294.
- [8]. Johnson, M. P. (2005). Domestic violence: It's not about gender--Or is it? *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67 (5):1126-1130.
- [9]. Johnson, M. P. (2006). Conflict and control: Gender symmetry and asymmetry in domestic violence. *Violence against women*, 12, 1003-1018. doi: 10.1177/1077801206293328
- [10]. Kellerman, I., Margolin, G., Borofsky, L.A., Baucom, B.R., & Iturralda, E. (2013). Electronic aggression among emerging adults: Motivations and contextual factors. *Emerging Adulthood* 1(4) 293-304. DOI 10.1177/2167696813490159.
- [11]. Kline, K.E. (2009). Collegiate dating violence: A quantitative analysis of attachment style and help seeking behaviors by gender and sexual orientation. PhD Thesis. Walden University.
- [12]. Lucero, J. L., Weisz, A. N., Smith-Darden, J., & Lucero, S. M. (2014). Exploring Gender Differences Socially Interactive Technology Use/Abuse Among Dating Teens. *Affilia*, 29 (4), 478-491.
- [13]. Martsof, D.S., Colbert, C. & Draucker, C. B. (2012). Adolescent dating violence prevention and intervention in a community setting: Perspectives of young adults and professionals. *The Qualitative Report* v17 1-23.
- [14]. Melander, L.A. (2010). College students' perceptions of intimate partner cyber harassment. *Cyberpsychology, behaviour, and social networking*, 13, 263-268.
- [15]. Nomaguchi, K.M., Giordano, P.C., Manning, W.D. & Longmore, M.A. (2011). Adolescents' gender mistrust: Variations and implications for quality of romantic relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 73(5): 1032-1047

- [16]. Reed, L. (2015). Digital dating abuse: Digital media as a gendered context for dating violence in the digital world. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Michigan
- [17]. Reed, L. A., Tolman, R. M., & Safyer, P. (2015). Too close for comfort: Attachment insecurity and electronic intrusion in college students' dating relationships. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 50, 431-438.
- [18]. Reed, L. A., Tolman, R. M., & Ward, L. M. (2016). Snooping and Sexting: Digital media as a context and tool for dating violence among college students. *Violence Against Women*.
- [19]. Rodríguez-Castro, Y.; Lameiras-Fernández, M.; Carrera-Fernández, M.V.; Vallejo-Medina, P.(2013) The reliability and validity of the Myths scale toward love: Adolescents' beliefs . *International Journal of Social Psychology*, 28:157-168,
- [20]. Stark, E. (2006). Reply to Michael P. Johnson's conflict and control: Gender symmetry and asymmetry in domestic violence. *Violence Against Women*, 12, 1019–1025.
- [21]. Francis, L., & Pearson, D.(2019). The recognition of emotional abuse: Adolescents' responses to warning signs in romantic relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* , 1–25.
- [22]. Malonda, E.; Tur-Porcar, A.& Llorca, A. (2017). Sexism in adolescence: Parenting styles, division of housework, prosocial behaviour and aggressive behavior. *International Journal of Social Psychology*, 32:2, 333-361, DOI: 10.1080/02134748.2017.1291745

Nancy Mayoyo, et. al. "The Prevalence and Perceptions of Cyber Dating Abuse among Undergraduate Students in Nairobi County, Kenya." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(9), 2020, pp. 31-39.