

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

RELATIONSHIP OF SEXTING BEHAVIOUR WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

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Anjum Ara Jahangir, Rana Shahzad Qaiser, Ammad Zafar. Relationship Of Sexting Behaviour With Psychological Distress-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 18(7), 3424-3437. ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords: Cyberbullying And Mental Health, Cyberbullying, Mental Health, Sexting, Cyberbullying And Its Effect On Psychological Well-Being.

ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is considered as the transformed version of traditional bullying by the help of social media and web-based platforms. Cyberbullying can have an everlasting effect on the mental health of both the aggressor and the victim. University students have the most vulnerable mental state since they leave home, families, loved ones and above all, they face the shift of age from teenage to adult life and cyberbullying makes them feel more stressed, anxious and depressed. The objective of the present study was to determine the relationship of sexting behaviour with psychological distress. It was hypothesized that sexting behaviour has a positive relationship with psychological disturbance of youth, anxiety, depression and emotional control. To test these hypotheses, the sample consisted of 150 university students whose age ranges from 20-27 years. They were approached for data collection with the consent of the university authorities. After the consent of the sample, the demographic data sheet was filled up with details like name, age, gender etc. Then they were requested to fill questionnaires of, The Sexting Behaviors Scale (SBS) which consisted of 9 closed-ended questions with a Likert scale of five points and The Mental health inventory (MHI) which had 22 items. Scoring was done according to the standard procedures of the scales. For statistical analysis of the data, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of relation is changing in our day-to-day life, which is the result of introduction of internet in our lives. Also, social networking sites are increasing day by day, but among so many, some are getting more fame like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, etc. Due to these social web sites the rate of

texting and process of sharing images with posts has become more common as compare to the old era and youngsters are main users of these social applications for example most of the time they are involved in texting their friends or their point of attractions (whom they usually name as their crushes or their lover) for monitoring and keeping in touch to significant others, approximately 60 texts sent per day, as per data suggests (Vandenbosch, 2015). The success rate of technological devices and applications in the domain of e-communication has been increasing on regular basis and with that, the things which used to be done in a long time, are now being done within no time. Due to these advancements many modes of contact are being too easier than before; now we are able to contact our friends and family members as quickly as the technology allow us; means no time. Therefore, these networking sites are making youth more vulnerable to develop problematic relationships.

However, early adulthood is the formative period that starts in the mid-twenties and keeps going through the thirties. It is a period of setting up close to home, monetary autonomy, choosing a mate, figuring out how to live with somebody in a personal/secret way, beginning a family, and raising youngsters. As, most discover a mate and starts a family, therefore they have to move far from friend's gatherings. Moreover, numerous passionate anxieties identified with profession, new relations and so on. In general, this is the period in which emotional and social connections appear. The youthful grown-up turns into a completely working social being, expecting the responsibilities of a wedded family (Boyce & Bowers, 2018). As the trend of communication with friends through social networking sites is increasing rapidly. So, it is conceivable that internet has made young people's entrance to openly unfiltered media, emerging adulthood population are sensation/attention seekers on social sites through pictures, vides or chatting, they share their confidential information on their profiles, status so the cyber offenders can easily bully them.

Access to obscene digital social networking sites by young people has been contemplated by various scientists (Madigan, et al., 2018; Cookingham & Ryan, 2015), and even more up to date, this online activity i.e., sharing obscene pictures, open door for youth to end up their lust by means of sexting (McGlynn, et al., 2019). Sexting, a growing concern in society, which depicts allocation of explicitly suggestive photographs or messages through mobile devices and other versatile media (Song, Song, & Lee, 2018). Basically, now it has become a part of all love affairs that to send and receive sexually explicitly unequivocal texts and pictures with deep sexual meanings and logics (Koroleva, 2016). It has been noted in National Poll arranged for health of children that sexting was amongst top tenth concerned health issue in 2011 (Krieger, 2017). Studies also indicate that beginning and maintaining a romantic relationship are the main reasons for youngsters to indulge in sexting (Ballester-Arnal, Castro Calvo, Gil-Llario, & Gil-Julia, 2017). Despite the importance of technology, narrow vision and immediate access to these gadgets are harmful and leads the population to dangerous consequences. Utilizing the applications like WhatsApp, Facebook content is transmitted over the Internet permitting anybody on Internet can take access. Though these apps offer on account of the secrecy of the applications, there have been a few situations where emerging adults have upload photographs over these applications, anticipating that they should vanish or be

seen by the beneficiary just, yet are spared and circulated, conveying social and legitimate ramifications (Drouin M. , 2018; Halverson, 2018).

Evidence suggests that those who engage in sexting are so used to off it so much that they are not able to leave their worst habit, also they even do not realize what exactly they are doing. Due to these habits, they start looking weird in the thoughts of others who know them as they demonstrate socially inappropriate behaviors like texting during communication with others or during working hours. Sexters creates new etiquette to texting in many situations whether these practices breach social norms but they do it anyway. The data also support that the dramatic increase in sexting and sexuality has additional negative causes social isolation and depression, older adolescents are losing their identity and core values, also they even not realize the sensitivity of their relationship to the outside world (Caceres-Reche, Hinojo-Lucena, Navas-Parejo, & Romero-Rodriguez, 2019; Gamez-Guadix, Almendros, Borrajo, & Calvete, 2015). Health, is simply a condition of nonattendance of infection and a man is considered to be normal, when he is able to look after himself in all aspects of his life both at its work and with its family (Compton & Shim, 2015). A significant ramification of this definition is that emotional wellness is something other than the nonappearance of mental issues and to achieve prosperity in mental, physical and social life.

Whereas Mental health, a significant indicator in a population for its health condition the person is recognized to be healthy by its mental thoughts, variations and conditions. A mentally healthy individual shows feelings of joy, happiness and satisfaction with life, and the traditional symptoms of depression and anxiety are absent in a healthy person (Weiss, Tint, Paquette-Smith, & Lunsy, 2016; Walker & Sleath, 2017). Definition of Mental health has been recently proposed by WHO according to which it is a state where a person knows his or her abilities and disabilities and have that ability to understand themselves and knows very well how to cope up with their daily stressors without the help of a psychologist or any such doctor. Moreover, he helps the needy ones, also gives them positive energy to fight with their disabilities in order to contribute in their society (Walker & Sleath, 2017). Mental health has two features that are Psychological Distress (which clarifies negative emotional wellness) and Psychological Well-being (which portrays positive emotional wellness (Bore, Kelly, & Nair, 2016)

Sexting has a significant effect on mental health and wellbeing. It is associated with many detrimental consequences that can lead to negative internalizing and externalizing behaviors. It has been seen that young adults are becoming victims of sexting which in turn leads to be the victim's other psychological consequences like depression, anxiety, mood swings, suicidal ideations and their complications (Krieger, 2017). According to the researches sexting and loving interactions have negative and unfavorable relations with personal well-being variables like positive effect, emotional ties and life satisfaction. Various authors have noted that young adults primarily students of university are prey of traumatic and problematic behaviors (Smith, et al., 2016; Drouin M. , 2018). However, among older adults' empirical evidence regarding sexting is scant (Wiederhold, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

When evaluating young adults and other population in this era, it is highly advisable to monitor healthy and unhealthy usage of smart phones and technology. Sexting, a fragile topic is simply contraction of sex and texting. It might similarly include the consumption of a PC or any other smart device which can send and receive text, picture and videos to individual or group of people. The term was first promoted from the get-go in this era and is a multiple of sex and messaging, wherever the last is implicit in the extensive emotion of sending content perhaps with pictures (Hamilton, Stange, Abramson, & Alloy, 2015; Hudson & Fetro, 2015).

Youth and young adults regularly feature a few purposes behind sexting, including for the sake of entertainment, to escape weariness, to get a kid/young lady's consideration; to acquire optimistic input; sexual investigation or to start sexual activity, to be a tease, to impression hot, as a type of self-portrayal, to appropriate in, in light of somebody's post; or incidentally or accidentally (Villacampa, 2017; Gamez-Guadix, Almendros, Borrajo, & Calvete, 2015). A few specialists have detailed that identity factors, for example, higher sensation chasing, the lower feeling of lucidness (individual's capacity to deal with unpleasant life circumstances), and impulsivity are huge corresponds of young population's sexting (Morelli, Bianchi, Baiocco, Pezzuti, & Chirumbolo, 2016). More prevalent reason for sexting is to begin or to maintain a romantic relationship as to belong with someone is a common human need, other reasons for sexting include loneliness or an absence of intimacy and support in social interactions. Moreover, if a person has a long history of being bullied by their parent teachers and peers that is weak affectional bond and rejection by primary caregivers also leads to sex plus texting (sexting) that in turn make youth more vulnerable to psychologically and emotionally dependent (Paolini, 2018; Hudson & Fetro, 2015; Gamez-Guadix, Almendros, Borrajo, & Calvete, 2015).

An ongoing explosion was directed with optional school understudies in different cities of country Belgium utilized the theories relating to social learning and their structures to comprehend this conduct. Creators revealed that young who legitimize sexting; hold uplifting frames of mind towards sexting; see peer endorsement of sexting; and see optimistic enthusiastic outcomes of sexting, for example, rush and energy; were bound to participate in sexting. Nonetheless, in that equivalent examination, youth were neither impacted by watching big names situation provocative images of them nor influenced by an apparent partner's frame of mind toward sexting (Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2014).

But otherwise, different variations have been seen in multiple age groups and in pancultural studies. According to the survey in 2009, cross sectional investigations has found that the occurrence and prevalence of sexting is more common among the teenagers and youthful grownups (Koroleva, 2016). Again, according to the research about 13 percent are of matured ages between 18 to 29 are being sharing sexually exposed pics to their partners. And these types of messages are about 31 percent. Researchers additionally discovered that men were bound to have gotten sexts twenty percent and the ratio females is

comparatively low only 11 percent, in America, Africa and specially those of central and south American grownups are mostly among wrong doings as compare to people of north America the whites are only 12 percent. Visit to client's mobiles, internet data revealed receipt of unlimited sexually suggestive pictures among grownups (Rodriguez, 2019). According to one report before the rate of sexting was just 15 percent and now being increased to 57 percent. And the ratio between senders is just 57percent, lower as compare to those who them are accepting it are 48 percent before it used to be just 13 percent (Chaudhary, et al., 2017).

Consistent with the above findings in different population, sexting in higher schools is associated with range of immature wellbeing practices. Reliable with research connecting high school students are involved in wrong acts and deeds of sexting and unethical physical conducts (Rice, et al., 2015; Lu, Baumler, & Temple, 2021). It is conceivable that sexting is an augmentation of youths' disconnected lives. As ongoing proof proposes, it might likewise be those teenagers, particularly pre-adult young ladies, feel constrained to send a sext (Lu, Baumler, & Temple, 2021), which might be affected by their psycho-social wellbeing. Then again, adolescent sexting may work as a high-chance or incautious conduct predictable to bunch with other dangerous practices, for example, substance use; and, similar to these different practices might be related with less fortunate mental wellbeing (Lu, Baumler, & Temple, 2021).

Past any drastic outcomes of sexting, there are additionally conceivably noteworthy mental results to consider. For example, the adolescent young lady who had sent bare pictures of herself to her beau and had those equivalent pictures appropriated to others by him after they separated (Kreimer, 2015; Ricciardelli & Adorjan, 2019; Lorang, McNiel, & Binder, 2016). Furthermore, on the other hand, consider the youngster who called topless pictures of herself to a schoolmate in anticipation of standing out enough to be noticed. An outsider obtained the photos and sent them to understudies at her school and different schools in the encompassing region. The young ladies in both these models, at last, ended it all (Ibtesam, 2017; Kreimer, 2015; Ricciardelli & Adorjan, 2019; Lorang, McNiel, & Binder, 2016). Likewise, another finding shows that sexting suicide and other psychological disorders are the result of sexting for its victims (Krieger, 2017).

Ample evidence suggests that sexting is not just limited to send only messages that contains sexually aroused material (Babchishin, Hanson, & VanZuylen, 2015; Morelli, Bianchi, Baiocco, Pezzuti, & Chirumbolo, 2016) but other results suggests that it further led to dating and risky sexual behaviors (Krieger, 2017). In particular, consequences arising from their experiences further connected with internal (anxiety and depressive conducts, limited autonomy etc.) and external (aggressive and/or delinquent behaviors etc.) behavioral issues (Olson & Crosnoe, 2017; Kansky, Allen, & Diener, 2019; Furman & Rose, 2015). Anyhow, constrained research material on sexting has demonstrated a connection between sexting and substance use (Smith, et al., 2016), however not among sexting and mental prosperity (Gamez-Guadix, Almendros, Borrajo, & Calvete, 2015). With respect to positive findings, (Van

Ouytsel, Van Gool, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2014) reported an association between sexting and depression symptoms.

Researchers and broadcasting digital information (picture, videos, chatting data) disclose a negative connection between sexting and mental prosperity (Smith, et al., 2016; Song, Song, & Lee, 2018). Some researchers recommend that emotional well-being linked with youth's and adult's impulse to sext. Individuals with collective uneasiness may slope toward messaging to voice calls as a vehicle for personal interaction and may likewise lean toward sexting as a model used for sexual interaction (Enez Darcin, et al., 2016). Other cyber-crime investigators and the media increase worry over the mental results of sexting (Rodriguez, 2019), that is identified with consequent mental misery accompanying with emotional distress that lean towards poor grades and university dismissal for both preparator and victim (Morelli, Bianchi, Baiocco, Pezzuti, & Chirumbolo, 2016; Cookingham & Ryan, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Sample Size:

A total of 150 participants were selected for this study. Simple random sampling has been done and participants were selected on the basis of the convenience of their availability from diverse universities in Karachi. The age range of the participants was between 20-27 years (university students).

Measures:

Demographic data sheet.

Demographic information comprised of questions regarding the participant's age, gender, education, and socioeconomic status.

The Sexting Behaviors Scale (SBS):

The Sexting Behavior Scale (SBS) consists of 9 items: Ten items are measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (frequently) and measures frequency of sexting behaviors (sending and receiving texts and pictures via mobile phone or social-networking site) (Jeanfreau, Wright, & Noguchi, 2019).

Mental health inventory (MHI):

The Mental Health Inventory (MHI) consist of 38 items in it measuring mental health and the age range of this scale is 13 or above. The Psychological Distress subscale consists of 22 items (2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36 and 38). The statements are rated on a 6-point rating scale, ranging from all of the time (1) to none of the time (6). Psychological Distress Subscale has reverse scoring, hence high scores on this subscale are indicative of poor mental health. Psychological distress has three components

i.e., Depression, anxiety and loss of emotional/behavioral control (Bore, Kelly, & Nair, 2016).

Procedure:

Sample was approached for data collection with the consent of the university authorities. After taking consent, demographic data sheet was given. Then they were requested to fill questionnaires, of: The sexting behavior scale (Jeanfreau, Wright, & Noguchi, 2019), The Mental Health Inventory (Bore, Kelly, & Nair, 2016).

Limitation of the Study

Some inclusion and exclusion criteria were adopted in order to keep the research reliable and authentic. All the researches published after the year 2009 were considered to extract the relevant data, moreover for the questionnaire only those participants were selected who were enrolled in a university and were of age between 20-27 years. All the researches published before the year 2009 and all the participants who are not enrolled in a university were excluded from the research.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between sexting behavior and psychological disturbance of youth.

It was found that sexting behavior has significant positive correlation with psychological disturbance of youth ($r = 0.259$, $N = 150$, $df = 149$, $p = 0.001$)

Table 1. Relationship between Sexting Behaviors and Psychological disturbance of youth

Correlations			
		Psychological disturbance	Sexting Behaviors Scale
Psychological disturbance	Pearson Correlation	1	0.259**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.001
	N	150	150
Sexting Behaviors Scale	Pearson Correlation	0.259**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.001	
	N	150	150
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between sexting behavior and anxiety.

It was found that sexting behavior has significant positive correlation with Anxiety ($r = 0.223$, $N = 150$, $df = 149$, $p = 0.003$)

Table 2. Relationship between Sexting Behavior and Anxiety

Correlations			
	Anxiety	Sexting Behaviors Scale	
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	0.223**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.003
	N	150	150
Sexting Behaviors Scale	Pearson Correlation	0.223**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.003	
	N	150	150
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between sexting behavior and depression.

It was found that sexting behavior has significant positive correlation with Depression ($r = 0.204$, $N = 150$, $df = 149$, $p = 0.006$)

Table 3. Relationship between Sexting Behavior and Depression

Correlations			
	Depression	Sexting Behaviors Scale	
Depression	Pearson Correlation	1	0.204**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.006
	N	150	150
Sexting Behaviors Scale	Pearson Correlation	0.204**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.006	
	N	150	150
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between sexting behavior and emotional control.

It was found that sexting behavior has significant positive correlation with Emotional Control ($r = 0.224$, $N = 150$, $df = 149$, $p = 0.003$)

Table 4. Relationship between Sexting Behavior and Emotional Control

Correlations			
	Emotional Control	Sexting Behaviors Scale	
Emotional Control	Pearson Correlation	1	0.224**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.003
	N	150	150

Sexting Behaviors Scale	Pearson Correlation	0.224**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.003	
	N	150	150
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			

DISCUSSION

Cyberbullying can take many forms with a simple motive of bullying a victim. It can be anything from posting an embarrassing picture of someone or blackmailing someone against a personal data. Sexting is becoming a common trend in university students which later turns into harassment or black mailing. It was in 2005 when the term “sexting” was first used by a British Newspaper known as Daily Telegraph in order to unify terms “sex” and “texting”. The word sexting is used to represent receiving and sending of sexual contents over an electronic gadget through different smart phone apps or via emails or other sources. Over the past few years, the research on the topic of sexting and its impact on student’s mental health have been widely increased. There are a number of psychological effects of sexting over university students. A number of researches have depicted that habit of sexting can make students psychology habitual of such content and they tend to enjoy it more often. Once the student gets used to of such content, absence of it makes them feel stressed and frustrated. Principal results of other researches suggests that individuals who have high scores in sexting will lean towards detrimental psychological effects (Choi, Van Ouytsel, & Temple, 2016; Smith, et al., 2016). And it has also been evident from our findings that sexting has significant positive correlation with psychological distress and it has also significant positive correlation with anxiety, depression and emotional control.

Though, in one-way, social media facilitate communication and relationships but this also cast alarming situation on the other hand by engaging population (youth and adult) in useless and destructive activities like gaming, sexting etc. Sexting, in accordance with our research particularly, has made people victims to life stolen habits and now these people depend over others to console. These wrong and indecent habits make adults whole life in danger of depression, anxiety and complications of mood swings. That is why; Sexting has increased across the broad media consideration and worry because of the harming social and psychological effects, and lawful ramifications of sexting elevated by development of new technology. Concentrates have tended to destructive effects on social and passionate wellbeing (Kim, Martin-Storey, Drossos, Barbosa, & Georgiades, 2020). Different experts have noticed that sexting can be measured as a type of sexual brutality (Krieger, 2017). Moreover, express messages that have been sent and received can continue some portion of one's computerized impression inconclusively (Drouin M. , 2018). These pictures and messages can possibly reemerge whenever and might be spread and distributed to unintended gatherings (Walker & Sleath, 2017). This obscene pictures/videos/text could be made accessible to parents, teachers, scholastic foundations, and relatives (Halverson, 2018). Therefore, there are noteworthy destructive results that may emerge due to sexting practices.

Consideration of the fact that sexting is a cause of depression, there is an ample proof in the online literature database that sexting has a positive relationship with the symptoms of depression. According to some researchers, sexting is an addictive behavior and it can lead towards various bad habits. Morelli et al. (2016) included 1334 participants in their study to observe the relationship between online dating violence, psychological distress and sexting. It was concluded from this research that sexting has a vital role in offline and online dating violence. Sexting has many other cons as well, sharing private content with other can be a blackmailing asset for someone in the future. Harassment and cyber bullying come in to the picture with such content. Bullying in any form is a real threat to the psychological health of an individual and consequently sexting does affect the mental health in one way or another. According to the research by Mori et al. (2020) almost 80% of the university students were involved in sexting with various activities like sending nudes and semi nudes, which later turned out to be the things which were used against them.

Another reason behind such activities is; less parental surveillance and rejection, which results in young adults turn out to be intolerant and violent and instead of being socially connected, they get isolated and seclude from their own families. Need for privacy and intimacy increase youth prefer to spend much time with their online friends. For example, a research finding suggests that even when they are with their families, they are accompanied with cyber friends (Heim, Brandtzaeg, Kaare, Endestad, & Torgersen, 2007). This further elevate the issue; habit of sexting slowly becomes an emotional need and destroys the person emotionally. Individuals starts to find mental peace in such activities and makes them addictive to sexting. This addiction raises problems like lack of emotional stability, depression, stress and above all poor psychological well-being. This addiction makes them choose wrong paths of cyberbullying to achieve what they want and affects both, the aggressor and the victim, mentally. Trend of portraying physical appearance as a symbol of perfectness has made things worse. Young adults draw information from environment that contain sexually explicit material like in daily television shows, magazines, advertisements (including public posters), websites, and so on which gives loud and clear message to be influence by physical appearance and to more focus on how one should look. Moreover, they are also surrounded by people wearing sexually appealing dresses in universities that awakens their sexual thoughts and curiosity and activity that pushes them to look for indecent content and break normative boundaries. This has become an alarming issue on a global level and achievement of peace through indecent content can lead to various psychological issues. Normalizing wrong and unnecessary trends leads to a number of problems just like the problem which has been discussed in this study.

Positive co-relational results of the survey conducted in this study clearly demonstrates that university students are getting affected by cyberbullying and especially from sexting. Where at one end it is harder for them to avoid these activities, on the other hand they cannot get rid of the side effects this activity is causing to them. In addition to these issues social media has made it even more difficult to minimize these issues, all those small gadgets which make it

difficult for peers to keep surveillance on the activities. Where this internet and these social media platforms are a source of societal betterment, on the other hand these platforms are the real causes of issues like cyberbullying and sexting activities. Regardless of all the researches and proofs, the matter of sexting and its relationship with psychological health remains heterogeneous, inconclusive and scarce. The evidence to prove either the effects are long term or short term is still not enough and more research needs to be done on the topic for the better understanding of this issue. From many reasons, one reason of this uncertainty in the results can be the lack of differentiation between non-consensual (aggravated) and consensual (experimental) sexting. However, from this research it can be concluded that sexting has a positive relationship with psychological distress, depression and anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Cyberbullying has become one of the biggest problems for this generation which not only makes them feel weak but it also makes it easier for a bully to hide its identity. Cyberbullying can take a form of blackmailing as well; it all depends upon the activity of the aggressor and this form of bullying has no limits because one only needs an active internet connection to target anyone. This research aimed at finding the effects of sexting behavior over psychological health. It has been found that sexting behavior has a positive co-relation with psychological disturbance of youth, anxiety, depression and emotional control. The results achieved from the survey carried out for this study clearly demonstrate that university students are actively involved in sexting activities and have a bad influence on their psychological health due to this activity. Most of the participants were found psychologically disturbed along with depression and stress. It was found that most of the participants were not able to control themselves emotionally. The results of this research propose a need to control such activities which can be done by better monitoring from peers and guardians along with the policy making and monitoring of cyberspace from governing bodies of cyberspace. An active monitoring system should be introduced to avoid such problems and to stop these activities to further affect this generation.

Implication of the Study

Through the research understanding we are able to observe multidimensional historical roots and social precedents for this like; university students have limited vision, poor judgement and decision-making skills so they are unable to envision near or far future side effects which makes them more vulnerable towards making wrong decisions.

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