The Danger of Online Dating Among University Students in The Kwazulu Natal Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore the dangers of online dating among university students in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Surveys were administered to a sample of 200 university students to assess their online dating experiences and perceptions of associated risks. Focus group discussions were held to gain deeper insights into personal encounters, perceptions of safety, and coping strategies in online dating scenarios. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to identify key trends and common themes.

The study revealed that while online dating is increasingly popular, it poses several risks to students in KwaZulu-Natal. Students reported a high incidence of catfishing, emotional manipulation, and financial scams. Many expressed concerns over the lack of physical verification in online dating, leading to feelings of vulnerability. Gender-based harassment was also highlighted, with a significant portion of female participants reporting unwanted advances. The ease of sharing personal information online was cited as a significant factor contributing to privacy risks and potential stalking. Despite these dangers, a lack of awareness and guidance on online safety measures was evident among participants.

To mitigate the risks associated with online dating, universities should prioritize educating students on online safety, particularly about dating platforms. Workshops and awareness campaigns can empower students with knowledge about privacy settings, identity verification techniques, and ways to recognize and report fraudulent behaviour. Universities could also partner with local police to offer resources or channels to report online abuse. Lastly, implementing support systems within university counselling services can assist students in coping with any emotional consequences arising from online dating challenges.

Keywords: Catfishing, emotional manipulation, financial scams, privacy risks, and University counselling services