

The New Technology Victims: Sexting and Grooming

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ABSTRACT

With Internet, there is a new way of communication. The main characteristic with no precedent is the immediate information exchange with no clear rules. The sexual content has increase during this new digital era, mainly because Internet makes possible to collect and distribute a large number of sexual content in an easiest and fastest way ever. The sexting term is usually use to the sending and receiving of sexual content messages, like photos or images mainly thought smartphones. This is quite a new way used by young kids and teenagers. The sexting attitude can end having very negative consequences for the minors, that can be expose to grooming. Grooming is a major crime, this happens when an adult wins the trust of a minor and by lying the adult gets personal information and images with sexual content from the the minor. From here, the adult can coerce the minor to meet him. The grooming and the sexting can be a vital stress factor with deep psychological consequences for the minor and even in suicide attempt.

INTRODUCTION

The term sexting was first used in 2005 by the Daily Telegraph, to unify the terms “sex” and “texting” and became an official word in 2009. It is generally known as “Sending and receiving sexual content (e.g., photos, videos) via the Internet and mobile phones” but there is no consensus around the definition of the term sexting in the scientific community. Therefore, it has been diversely defined, including from broad definitions that include the sending of any kind of sexual content to narrower definitions, which are image-based only. Some authors include coercion as part of the sexting behavior while others consider that sexting is voluntary by definition some definitions include sending text messages (non-image based) as part of the sexting behaviors while others exclude them from the definition. The existing literature on sexting also differs in the population samples used for the research and in the items used to measure sexting, which might be some of the reasons for the lack of a unified definition of the term.

The research on sexting has widely grown over the past few years, especially regarding adolescents and the negative effect it might have on their sexual development and mental health, specifically after the publication of the Sex and Tech Survey (2008) results, which was the first broad survey to examine this phenomenon.

METHOD

In previous years, the body of research regarding sexting behaviors has increased dramatically, especially research focused on adolescent and teenage population. As such, several studies have highlighted that sexting behaviors increase as adolescents grow older. Furthermore, an extended body of literature suggests that some sexting behaviors can be a risk behavior that can lead to or be seen as a form of online victimization of those depicted in the images, similarly, to cyberbullying or grooming. On the other hand, the number of studies exploring the relationship between sexting and psychological variables has been growing in the past years, focusing especially on young adults or adult population even though up to date there have been no conclusive results on the matter. For this reason, this narrative review aims to identify both empirical and non-empirical research addressing the relationship between sexting behaviors among teenagers and mental health. We consider this topic to be of considerable relevance to parents, the education community, and health care practitioners working with young people who engage in this behavior.

RESULTS

The results shown by Mitchell et al. reveal that 21% of teens appearing or creating sexually explicit images and 25% of teens that had received such images reported feeling very or extremely upset, embarrassed or afraid as a result of their actions. Livingstone and Görzig’s research focused on explaining the incidence of risk and harm reported by children and adolescents in relation to sexting behaviors. In a sample of 2036 European 11 to 16 year-olds reporting that they had received a sexual message on the Internet in the last 12 months, 24% responded “yes” when asked: “In the last 12 months, has any sexual message that you have seen or received bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you should not have seen it?”. Subjects who were younger, female, less sensation seeking, had pre-existing psychological difficulties and used the Internet less, were more likely to experience harm from the message.