

Prevalence of Multiple Forms of Sexting Behavior Among Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

- This study examined the prevalence of 'sexting' among youth, or the sharing of sexually explicit images, videos, or messages through electronic means.
- Before this study, it was not known how often sexting was happening among youth, and whether sexting varied by age, gender, location, or method of sexting.
- It is important to understand the prevalence of sexting among youth, so we can inform policy and prevention efforts.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

- A substantial minority of youth engage in sexting, which may mean it is a normal part of sexual behaviour and identity formation.
- Sexting should not be criminalized. Instead, we should create educational programs on the responsible use of technology and healthy relationships.
- Policymakers should create legislation to address non-consensual sexting for adolescents.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

- In this study, the researchers searched for articles that examined sexting among youth. 39 articles that met the criteria for the study were identified.
- The authors then summarized the results from the 39 studies (conducted a 'meta-analysis'), which included a sample of 110,380 adolescents.



Prevalence of Multiple Forms of Sexting Behavior Among Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

- 14.8% of youth had sent a sext
- 27.4% of youth had received a sext
- 12.0% of youth had forwarded a sext without consent
- 8.4% of youth had a sext forwarded to them without consent
- Rates of sexting increased with age, and increased over time
- Sexting was more likely to happen on mobile devices as compared to computers

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

- Sexting may be a normal part of sexual behaviour and identity formation in the digital age; because of this, sexting should not be criminalized.
- Educational programs that focus on the responsible use of technology and healthy relationships should be created.
- Discussions with youth by parents, educators, and health professionals should start when children are in middle school, given that on average, children receive their first smartphone at 10.3 years old.
- Policymakers should create legislation to address non-consensual sexting for adolescents.
- Future research should examine why youth engage in non-consensual sexting.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Sheri Madigan, PhD, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada

Anh Ly, MA, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada

Christina L. Rash, BA, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada

Joris Van Ouytsel, PhD, Universiteit Antwerpen, Antwerp, Belgium

Jeff R. Temple, PhD, The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, USA

KEYWORDS

Sexting, youth, sexual behaviour, risky sexual behaviours, intervention

FULL REFERENCE

Madigan, S., Ly, A., Rash C. L., Ouytsel, J.V., & Temple, J. R. (2018). Prevalence of multiple forms of sexting behavior among youth: A systemic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 172(4), 327-335. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.5314>