UKCCIS

UK COUNCIL FOR **CHILD INTERNET SAFETY**

SW GRID for LEARNING

Sharing Personal Images and Videos Among Young People

Aims

This study defines 'sexting' as the act of sending sexually explicit photographs or videos, primarily between mobile phones.

This study aimed to measure the prevalence of 'sexting' practices among young people at key stage 4 (14-16) age in the UK. This research was motivated by a perception among management and safeguarding teams in schools that instances of 'sexting' are increasing.

Key Findings

- Young people are very confident in the use of digital technology to take and distribute images. Of the 535 respondents, 79% stated they have used digital technologies to take images and videos, and 78% of respondents say that they have distributed images and videos with a mobile device.

- Young people's attitude towards what might be considered an inappropriate image may differ somewhat from the adult population – 40% do not see anything wrong with a topless image, and 15% do not take issue with naked images.

- 'Sexting' is prevalent among young people, with around 40% saying they knew friends who carried out such a practice.

- 27% of respondents said that 'sexting' happens "regularly" or "all of the time".

- 56% of respondents were aware of instances where images and videos were distributed further than the intended recipient, though 23% believe this distribution is intended to cause upset.

- 30% of young people knew people who had been adversely affected by 'sexting'.

- 27% believe young people need more support and advice related to 'sexting' and 70% said that they would turn to their friends if they were affected by issues related to 'sexting'.

- 24% of young people would turn to a teacher for help if they were affected by issues related to 'sexting'.

Policy Context

There is increasing concern that children and young people are sharing explicit images with peers, often via a mobile device. This practice is often referred to as 'sexting'. Children and young people who take

self-generate indecent or explicit images of themselves are breaking the law. There is also concern that explicit images are shared more widely than the intended recipient, leading to bullying and its consequences for children and young people involved.

This research demonstrates that children and young people are familiar with 'sexting' as a practice among their peers while also highlighting a desensitisation of sexual content and a lack of awareness of the possible consequences of sharing explicit images with peers. It would also suggest a need for the inclusion of 'sexting' awareness lessons in schools.

Methodology

Data for this small scale, quantitative study was collected via an online survey, disseminated to schools across the south-west of England. Schools responded to confirm whether they would engage in the survey, and carried out the surveys in class. While the original intention was for anyone aged 11-18 to respond, in reality schools who responded constrained dissemination of the survey to key stage 4 students. In total, 18 schools across the South West participated in the survey with 535 respondents in total.

Background

This research was motivated by anecdotal observations of members of the eSafety group within the South West Grid for Learning that there was a growing prevalence of incidents related to 'sexting' being reported by schools. It aimed to develop the anecdotal observations into a measured piece of research that quantified the scale of the phenomenon and provided evidence to highlight the issues faced by children, young people and professionals with responsibility for their care when dealing with 'sexting'. The detail of this research was published by the South West Grid for Learning in January 2010.

RH #10 has been produced by Professor Andy Phippen for the UKCCIS Evidence Group