

National study reveals how and why teenagers sext

October 16 2014, by Luke O'Neill

The majority of sexting by young Australians takes place in the context of a romantic relationship, according to a national study of more than 1400 teenagers.

The University of Sydney study of young people aged mostly between 13 and 18 found [sexting](#) is not a marginal behaviour. A significant proportion of young people have sent a sexual image of themselves by the time they are 13-15 years old.

In only a small minority of cases, teenagers reported sending an image on to a third party without consent. About six per cent of those who had sent a sext had ever sent an image on again. Most young people send sexts to very few sexting partners, the study found.

Some 61 per cent of 13-18 year olds who have sexted did so with one person or less in the past 12 months.

"Most sexting by young people takes place in the context of a [romantic relationship](#)," said research lead Dr Murray Lee, an Associate Professor in Criminology at the University of Sydney.

"Only very small numbers of girls report being coerced or pressured into sending an image, even though the perception amongst [young people](#) is that pressure is a strong motivator. Rather, most report they sext to be 'fun and flirty', 'as a sexy present', or 'to feel sexy and confident'," he said.

Key findings include:

- some 47 per cent of those surveyed have sent or received a sext
- just under 40 per cent of 13-15 year olds have sent a sexual image
- 50 per cent of 16-18 year olds have sent a sexual video
- males overall were likely to send to more sexting partners than females
- males aged 13-15 were most likely to have sent images and videos to more than five people

The study has a number of significant implications for policymakers, said Dr Lee.

For example, education campaigns must be nuanced enough to recognise that most sexting occurs safely within relationships. Abstinence messages are unlikely to be successful, while there is a need for the development of sexual ethics around sexting.

Provided by University of Sydney

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