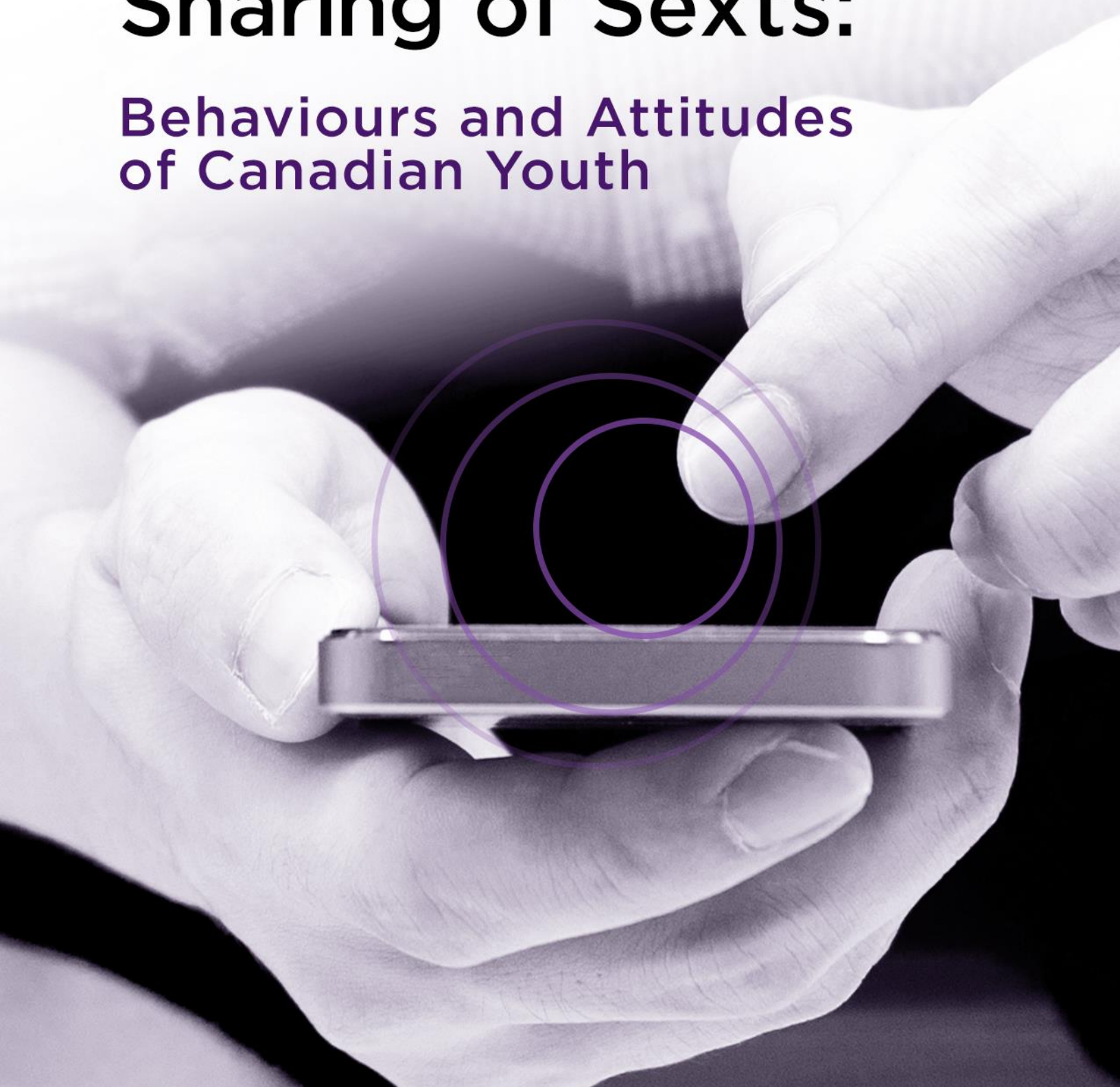




# Non-Consensual **Sharing of Sexts:**

**Behaviours and Attitudes  
of Canadian Youth**



This report can be downloaded from: <http://mediasmarts.ca/research-policy>

**Cite as:** Johnson, M., Mishna, F., Okumu, M., Daciuk, J. *Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexts: Behaviours and Attitudes of Canadian Youth*, Ottawa: MediaSmarts, 2018.

---

**Authors:**

**Matthew Johnson**, Director of Education, MediaSmarts.

**Faye Mishna**, Professor and Dean, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Chair in Child & Family, University of Toronto.

**Moses Okumu**, MSW, Ph.D. Student, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.

**Joanne Daciuk**, Research Manager, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.

*The authors wish to acknowledge the research contributions of Lauren Middlemiss, University of Ottawa, and Roderick Hayes, University of Ottawa.*



MediaSmarts  
205 Catherine Street, Suite 100  
Ottawa, ON Canada K2P 1C3  
T: 613-224-7721 F: 613-761-9024  
Toll-free line: 1-800-896-3342  
[info@mediasmarts.ca](mailto:info@mediasmarts.ca)  
[mediasmarts.ca](http://mediasmarts.ca)  
@mediasmarts

*Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexts: Behaviours and Attitudes of Canadian Youth* was made possible by financial contributions from TELUS.

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Executive summary.....	5
Prevalence of sexting behaviours: Sending and receiving.....	5
Non-consensual sharing of sexts.....	8
Factors associated with non-consensual sharing of sexts.....	12
Gender stereotyping.....	13
Moral disengagement.....	13
Homophily and social norming.....	14
Parents, educators and legal consequences.....	15
Implications for interventions, research and policy.....	16
Overall prevalence of sexting behaviours.....	18
Sending sexts.....	18
Receiving sexts.....	21
Having sexts you sent shared.....	24
Non-consensual sharing of sexts: Associated factors.....	27
Prevalence of sharing.....	28
Age.....	30
Gender.....	31
Behaviours.....	32
Gender stereotyping.....	33
Moral disengagement.....	36
Homophily and social norming.....	39
Parents, educators and legal consequences.....	44
Parental involvement.....	44
Education.....	45
Legal consequences.....	47
Implications for interventions, research and policy.....	48
Methodology.....	50

# Non-Consensual Sharing of Intimate Images: Behaviours and Attitudes of Canadian Youth

## Introduction

Few issues capture our anxiety about young people's participation in digital media so perfectly as sexting, sitting as it does at the intersection of cyberbullying, sexual exploitation and pornography. As with technologies at least as far back as the telegraph,<sup>1</sup> much of this anxiety has focused specifically on girls and women.<sup>2</sup> Such focus makes sense to a certain extent: though boys and girls send sexts at roughly the same rate,<sup>3</sup> and sexts sent by boys are more likely to be forwarded,<sup>4</sup> there is undoubtedly more social disapproval of girls who send sexts<sup>5</sup> and, as a result, more harm done to them when sexts they have sent reach a wider audience than intended.<sup>6</sup> That harm, however, is itself the result of the way girls who participate in sexting are framed – in media coverage and the popular imagination – both as guardians of their sexual innocence and, if they should stray from that role, as responsible for any consequences they might suffer as a result of their actions.<sup>7</sup>

This gendered view of sexting appears to be common among Canadian youth: MediaSmarts' *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III* study, one of the first research projects to measure rates of sending, receiving and sharing sexts by Canadian youth, identified an apparent "moral blind spot" with regards to sharing sexts. While the young people surveyed were less likely to engage in other forms of cyberbullying if there was a rule in their homes about treating people online with respect, the presence or absence of this rule had no effect on how likely youth were to share sexts.<sup>8</sup> This finding was corroborated in a recent Canadian study which found that almost half of youth interviewed felt it is a girl's fault if

---

<sup>1</sup> Cassell, J, Cramer, M (2008) High tech or high risk: moral panics about girls online. In: McPherson, T (ed.) *Digital Youth, Innovation, and the Unexpected*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 53–75.

<sup>2</sup> Draper, N. R. (2012). Is Your Teen at Risk? Discourses of adolescent sexting in United States television news. *Journal of Children and Media*, 6(2), 221-236.

<sup>3</sup> Steeves, V. (2014) *Sexuality and Romantic Relationships in the Digital Age*. MediaSmarts.

<sup>4</sup> Steeves, V. (2014) *Sexuality and Romantic Relationships in the Digital Age*. MediaSmarts.

<sup>5</sup> Lippman, J. & Campbell, W. (2014) Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't...If You're a Girl: Relational and Normative Contexts of Adolescent Sexting in the United States. *Journal of Children and Media*, 8:4, 371-386

<sup>6</sup> Livingstone, S., & Görzig, A. (2014). When adolescents receive sexual messages on the internet: Explaining experiences of risk and harm. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 33, 8–15.  
doi:10.1016/j.chb.2013.12.021

<sup>7</sup> Lippman, J. & Campbell, W. (2014) Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't...If You're a Girl: Relational and Normative Contexts of Adolescent Sexting in the United States. *Journal of Children and Media*, 8:4, 371-386

<sup>8</sup> Steeves, V. (2014) *Cyberbullying: Dealing with Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats*. MediaSmarts.

her boyfriend shared sexual photos she had sent him,<sup>9</sup> and in another Canadian study in which interviews with students in grades four to twelve revealed that the students tended to blame the girl for sending a photo while minimizing and not identifying the (typically male) person who had shared the photo publicly.<sup>10</sup>

Rather than being challenged, these attitudes are often reinforced by educational efforts related to sexting. A review of ten widely-adopted campaigns found that nearly all focused exclusively on the creator and initial sender of the sext and that half contained only abstinence messages, ignoring the point at which the most harm is done – when sexts are *shared* without the sender's consent<sup>11</sup> – and eliding the responsibility of those who share them.<sup>12</sup> Three of the campaigns contained explicit victim-blaming content, such as the following exchange from the video *Exposed*, produced by the UK National Crime Agency's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command, as part of its ThinkUKnow program:

"Si shouldn't have gone and sent them [her pictures] to Jay."

"Stop blaming everyone else. You sent 'em first."<sup>13</sup>

While many scholars agree that educational efforts should abandon abstinence and victim-blaming approaches,<sup>14</sup> it is less clear with what we should replace these. A number of researchers and policymakers have advocated a harm-reduction approach,<sup>15</sup> which would involve teaching youth how to minimize the effect of having sexts shared through means such as making sure not to include any elements (such as facial features or distinctive tattoos) that would conclusively identify them. There is likely some merit to this approach, and MediaSmarts' previous research suggests that youth are, in many cases, taking these steps even with mundane photos to provide a sort of "plausible deniability."<sup>16</sup> Since these programs still focus on changing the behaviour of the creator and initial sender of the image, however, the responsibility continues to be placed with the originator of the sext, consequently absolving the recipient or third party who made it public.

---

<sup>9</sup> Shariff, S. (2014). Sexism Defines the Lines between Fun and Power. *Sexting and Cyberbullying*, 36-74.

<sup>10</sup> Mishna, F., Schwan, A., Birje, A., Van Wert, M., McInroy, L., Lacombe-Duncan, A., Attar-Schwartz, S., & Daciuk, J. (in press). Gendered and sexualized bullying and cyber bullying: Spotlighting girls and making boys invisible. *Youth & Society*.

<sup>11</sup> Van Ouytsel, J., Van Gool, E., Walrave, M., Ponnet K & Peeters E (2017) Sexting: adolescents' perceptions of the applications used for, motives for, and consequences of sexting, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20:4, 446-470

<sup>12</sup> Döring, N. (2014). Consensual sexting among adolescents: Risk prevention through abstinence education or safer sexting? *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 8(1). doi:10.5817/cp2014-1-9

<sup>13</sup> "Exposed." <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/exposed/>

<sup>14</sup> Döring, N. (2014). Consensual sexting among adolescents: Risk prevention through abstinence education or safer sexting? *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 8(1). doi:10.5817/cp2014-1-9

<sup>15</sup> See for instance Hunt, J. (2016). *Beyond 'Sexting': Consent and Harm Minimization in Digital Sexual Cultures*. YFoundations; and Crofts, T., Lee, M., MCGovern, A., & Milivojevic, S. (2015). Perceptions and Practices of Sexting. *Sexting and Young People*, 129-143..

<sup>16</sup> Foran, G., Johnson, M., Shade, L.R. & Steeves, V. (2017) To Share or Not to Share: How Teens Make Privacy Decisions about Photos on Social Media. *MediaSmarts*.



With regards to the non-consensual sharing of sexts, in order to successfully intervene with those youth who share sexts non-consensually, it is essential to understand how and why they decide to do so – and, in particular, to identify the “blind spot” that prevents them from seeing it in the same moral terms as other forms of cyberbullying or privacy invasions. While jurisdictions such as Canada, California and the United Kingdom have enacted legal consequences for the non-consensual sharing of sexts, to date there has been little research on the characteristics or motivations of youth who engage in this practice.<sup>17</sup> To remedy that, this study examines the relationship of non-consensual sharing of sexts with four factors:

***Adherence to traditional gender stereotypes:*** What little scholarship exists on the non-consensual sharing of sexts has generally found that gender roles, and attitudes towards them, play an important role in decision-making.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, holding traditional attitudes on gender has been consistently found to be associated with the belief in “rape myths” that excuse perpetrators and place blame on victims of sexual assault.<sup>19</sup> Given the similarity between these myths and attitudes towards sexting, our intent was to investigate whether there was a similar relationship between holding traditional views on gender roles and participants’ views towards, and participation in, non-consensual sharing of sexts.

***Moral disengagement:*** The “moral blind spot” identified above suggests that moral sensitivity and moral disengagement may be a factor as well. Moral disengagement is well-established as a factor in cyberbullying,<sup>20</sup> sexual harassment<sup>21</sup> and rape-supportive attitudes,<sup>22</sup> and past research has found that men are likely to engage in the moral disengagement tactics of victim-blaming and disregarding consequences in the context of sexting.<sup>23</sup> It seems probable therefore that those youth who share sexts non-consensually may be engaging in moral disengagement to absolve themselves of responsibility.

---

<sup>17</sup> Junco, R. (2016) Resharing of Images or Videos Without Consent: A Form of Relationship Violence and Harassment. Perspectives on Harmful Speech Online. Perspectives on Harmful Speech Online. Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society Research Publication.

<sup>18</sup> See in particular Ringrose, J., Harvey, L., Gill, R., & Livingstone, S. (2013) Teen girls, sexual double standards and 'sexting': gendered value in digital image exchange. *Feminist Theory*, 14 (3). pp. 305-323. ISSN 1464-7001, and Morelli, M., Bianchi, D., Baiocco, R., Pezzuti, L., & Chirumbolo, A. (2016). Not-allowed sharing of sexts and dating violence from the perpetrators perspective: The moderation role of sexism. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 56, 163-169.

<sup>19</sup> King, L. L., & Roberts, J. J. (2011). Traditional Gender Role and Rape Myth Acceptance: From the Countryside to the Big City. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 21(1), 1-20.

<sup>20</sup> Perren, S., & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, E. (2012). Cyberbullying and traditional bullying in adolescence: Differential roles of moral disengagement, moral emotions, and moral values. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(2), 195-209. doi:10.1080/17405629.2011.643168

<sup>21</sup> Page, T. E., & Pina, A. (2015). Moral disengagement as a self-regulatory process in sexual harassment perpetration at work: A preliminary conceptualization. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 21, 73-84. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2015.01.004

<sup>22</sup> Carroll, J. A. (2009). Impact of moral judgment and moral disengagement on rape-supportive attitudes in college males (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).

<sup>23</sup> Henry, N., Powell, A. & Flynn, A. (2017). Not Just 'Revenge Pornography': Australians' Experiences of Image-Based Abuse. A Summary Report. Melbourne: RMIT University.

**Homophily and social norms:** Young people’s perceptions of how common sexting is have been identified as one of the strongest factors influencing whether they *send* sexts<sup>24</sup> – regardless of the accuracy of those perceptions.<sup>25</sup> To see whether this applied to sharing sexts as well, we measured participants’ perceptions of how common sending and sharing sexts was – both in terms of their general sense of how common sending and sharing sexts is among youth their age, and how many of their peers they knew for certain had engaged in either behaviour – to determine whether those who perceived such behaviours to be common were more likely to share sexts non-consensually. Beyond simple views of prevalence, however, *homophily* – the pressure or tendency to conform to the norms of one’s peer group – has been associated with behaviours such as sending sexts or sexual text messages as well as engaging in verbal and physical sexual harassment.<sup>26</sup> Because past research has suggested that boys, in particular, experience pressure from male peers to share sexts,<sup>27</sup> we asked participants whether they thought their close friends would expect them to share a sext if they received one and, conversely, whether they would expect a close friend who received a sext to share it with them.

**Rules, education and awareness of legal consequences:** We wanted to revisit the initial finding that sparked this research by returning to the question of whether there was a rule in the home about treating people with respect online, and also by asking more specifically about rules regarding both sexting and forwarding sexts. To obtain a general sense of whether current educational efforts have any impact on sharing sexts, we asked participants whether they had participated in any lessons, workshops or assemblies in school on the subject of sending or sharing sexts. Finally, we measured participants’ awareness of the relatively recent law against non-consensual sharing of “intimate images”<sup>28</sup> in order to determine whether knowing the possible legal consequences of this behaviour had any relationship with whether youth would engage in it.

MediaSmarts and researchers at University of Toronto’s Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work conducted this study to examine how attitudes, experiences, knowledge and moral beliefs of young people impact their decisions to share or not share sexts they have received. The findings are significant not only in helping us to understand the motivating factors behind teens’ decisions either to share or not share sexts without the original sender’s consent, but also to inform development of more effective interventions to discourage young people from sharing sexts non-consensually. Funding for this study was provided by TELUS.

---

<sup>24</sup> Walrave, M., Heirman, W., & Hallam, L. (2013). Under pressure to sext? Applying the theory of planned behaviour to adolescent sexting. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 33(1), 86-98.

<sup>25</sup> Jewell, J. A., & Brown, C. S. (2013). Sexting, Catcalls, and Butt Slaps: How Gender Stereotypes and Perceived Group Norms Predict Sexualized Behavior. *Sex Roles*, 69(11-12), 594-604.

<sup>26</sup> Jewell, J., Spears Brown, C. and Perry, B. (2015), All My Friends Are Doing It: Potentially Offensive Sexual Behavior Perpetration Within Adolescent Social Networks. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 25: 592–604.

<sup>27</sup> Walker, S., PhD, & Temple-Smith, M., D.H.Sc. (2013). Sexting: Young Women’s and Men’s Views on Its Nature and Origins. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, (52), 697-701.

<sup>28</sup> Bill C-8: *Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act*. (2015)

[http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2015/gazette/SP2-11-37-3.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/gazette/SP2-11-37-3.pdf)

## Executive summary

*Note: In this report:*

- *The word “sex” means a sexy, nude or partially nude photo. (Though this term may not always be used by youth and, when it is, sometimes includes sexual text messages as well, it is the one most often used in scholarship and media coverage and therefore is used here for convenience.)*
- *“Sending” sexts in this report always refers to the creator of a sext sending it to the recipient.*
- *“Solicited sexts” are those which the recipient has requested, while “unsolicited sexts” are those which the recipient has not asked for.*
- *“Sharing” sexts refers to distributing them to unintended audiences without the original sender’s consent, either by forwarding them electronically, showing them to one or more people in person, or posting them to a public space such as a social network or photo-sharing site.*

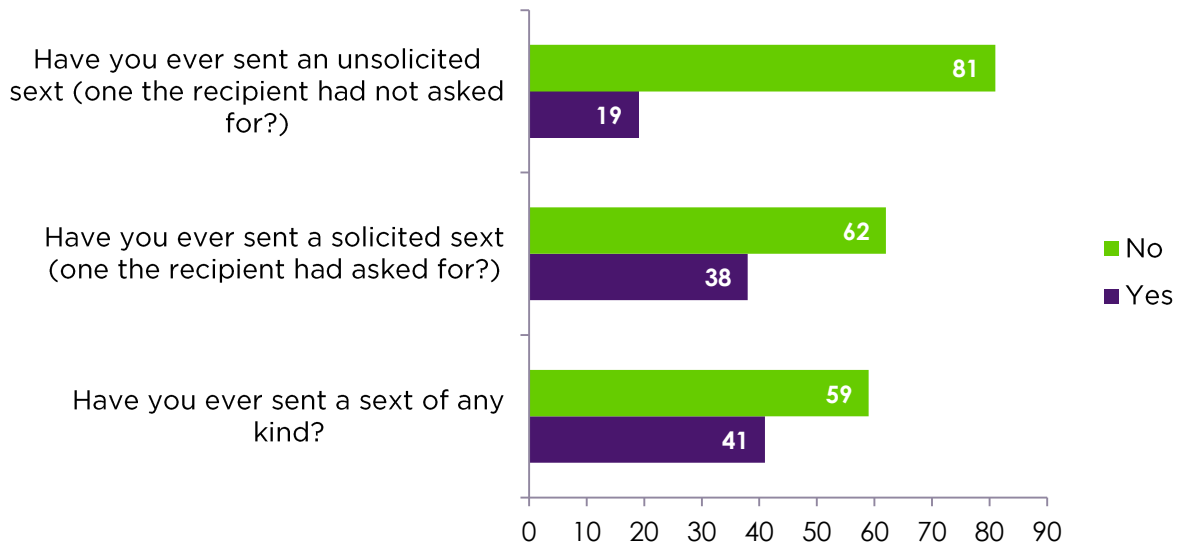
### Prevalence of sexting behaviours:

#### Sending and receiving

1. **Sending sexts is less common than many people, including youth themselves, believe.**
  - Although 93 percent of youth *think* people their age send texts at least occasionally, just four in ten (41%) have ever sent a sext.
  - Sixty-two percent of youth have never sent a *solicited* sext (one that the recipient had asked for).
    - Thirteen percent have sent sexts 1-2 times, 11 percent 3-5 times, and four percent 6-9 times.
    - One in ten participants, however, have sent sexts 10 times or more, suggesting that there may be a small subset of youth who frequently sext.
  - Eighty-one percent have never sent an *unsolicited* sext (one that the recipient had *not* asked for).

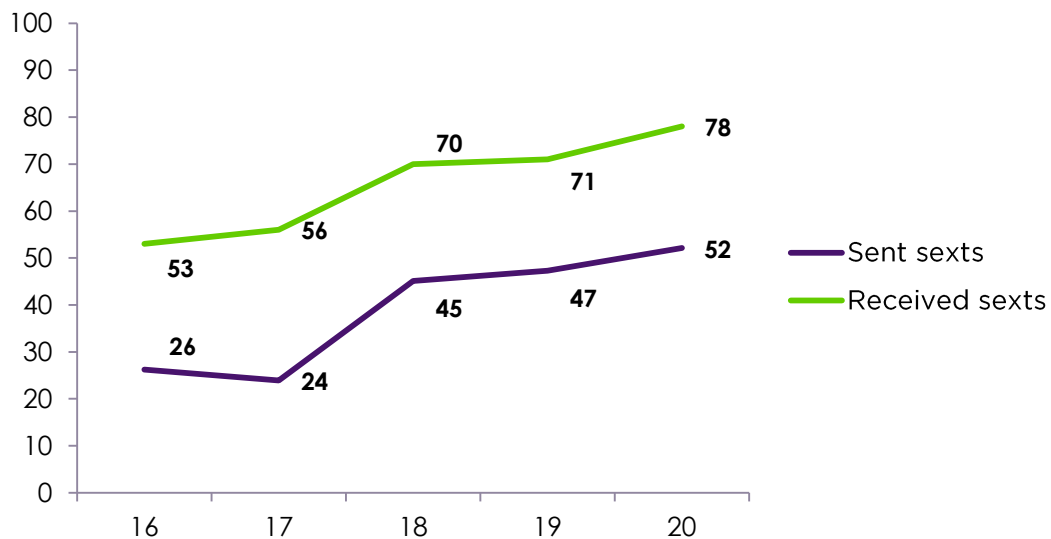


Figure 1: Sending Sexts



There was a consistent relationship between age and the number of youth who had sent and received sexts. In both cases there was a significant jump between those who were 17 and those who were 18 years old:

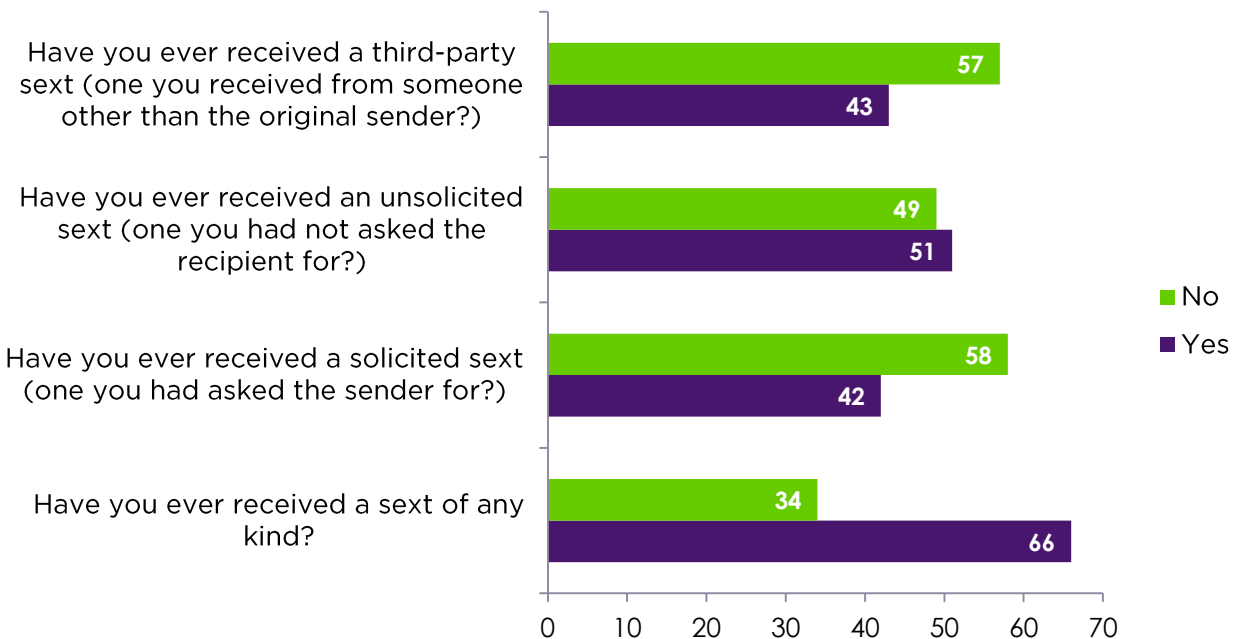
Figure 2: Sending Sexts by Age



2. **More youth have received than sent sexts. The percentage of youth that have received sexts (unsolicited and solicited) and third-party sexts (shared by people other than the original sender) combined with the lower percentage of youth that have sent at least one or two sexts suggests that the phenomenon of sexting (receiving and sending) is not universal but also not uncommon among youth.**

- Two-thirds of youth (66%) have received a sext.
- Unsolicited sexts from the original sender are received most often: fifty-one percent of youth have received an unsolicited sext at least once.
- Roughly the same number of youth have received third-party sexts (those which were shared with them by someone other than the original sender – 43%) and solicited sexts (42%).

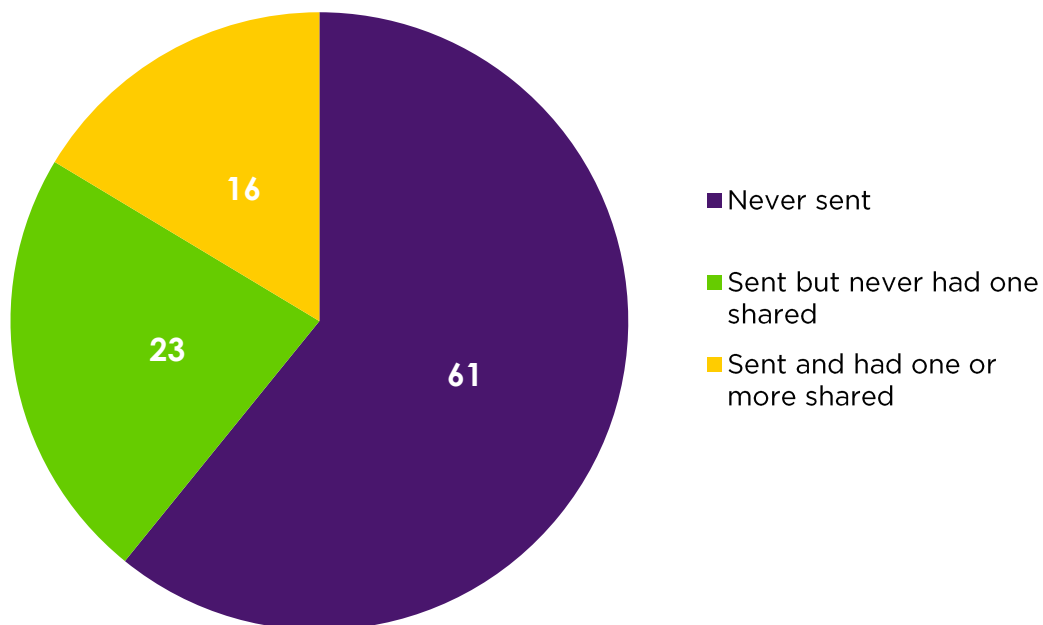
Figure 3: Receiving Sexts



## Non-consensual sharing of sexts

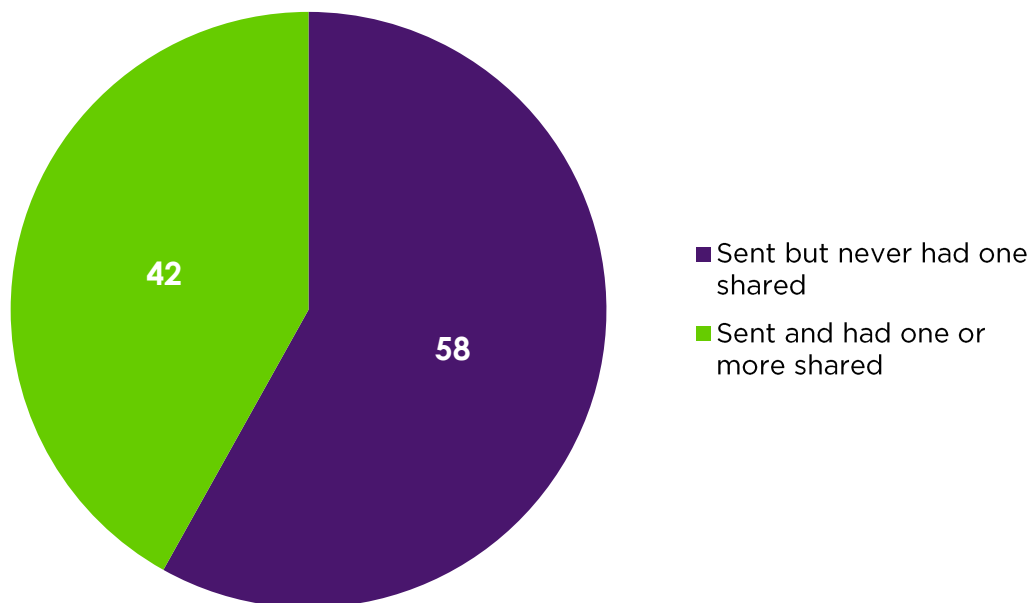
3. **How often youth have sent sexts does not strongly predict how likely they are to have had a sext shared.**
  4. **The most frequent way for sexts to be shared is by showing them to someone else in person. Having them posted to a public space was the least frequent.**
- Overall, one in six youth have had a sext shared. Between five and ten percent of the participants, however, did not know whether or not sexts they had sent had been shared.

Figure 4: Experiences with having sexts shared (full sample)



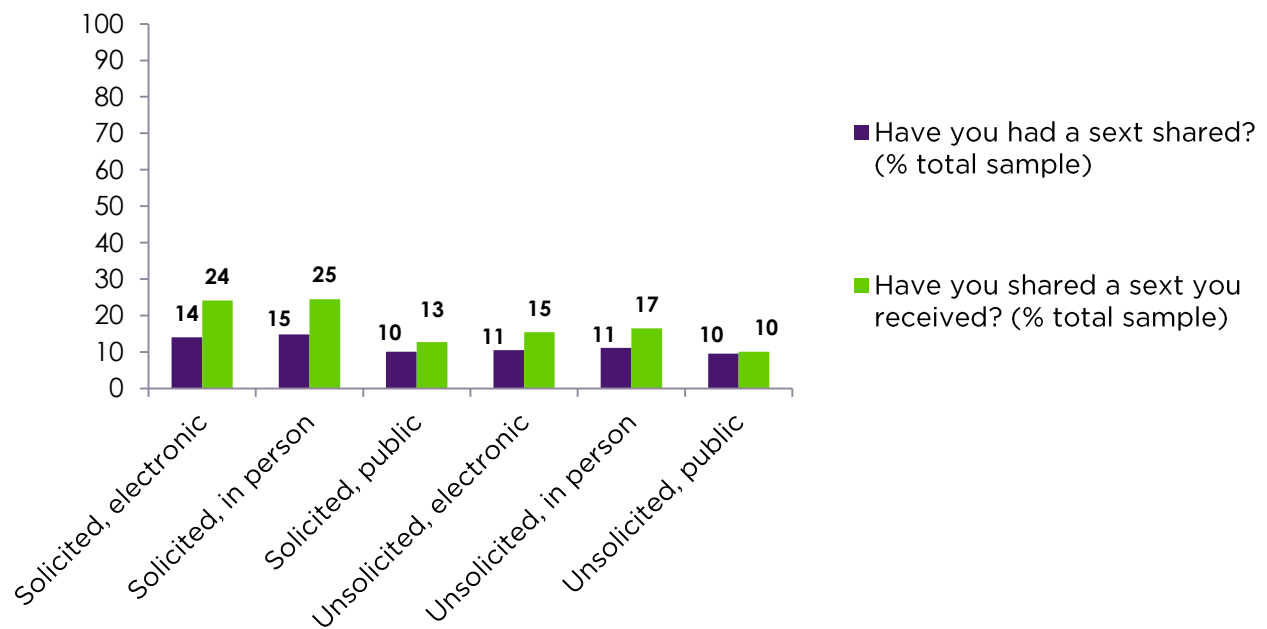
- Of those youth who have sent sexts:
  - Four in ten (42%) have had a sext shared.
  - Where a solicited sext has been shared, it is most likely to have been shown to someone else in person (39% of senders of solicited sexts say this had happened to them) or forwarded to someone else (37%). Least likely is the person who received the sext posting it publicly (28%).
  - Though fewer youth send unsolicited sexts, these are proportionally more likely to be shared: 59 percent of those who have sent unsolicited sexts say the recipient has shown it to someone in person, 55 percent say that it was forwarded electronically, and 50 percent say that it was posted to a public space.

Figure 5: Experiences with having sexts shared  
(Sext senders only)



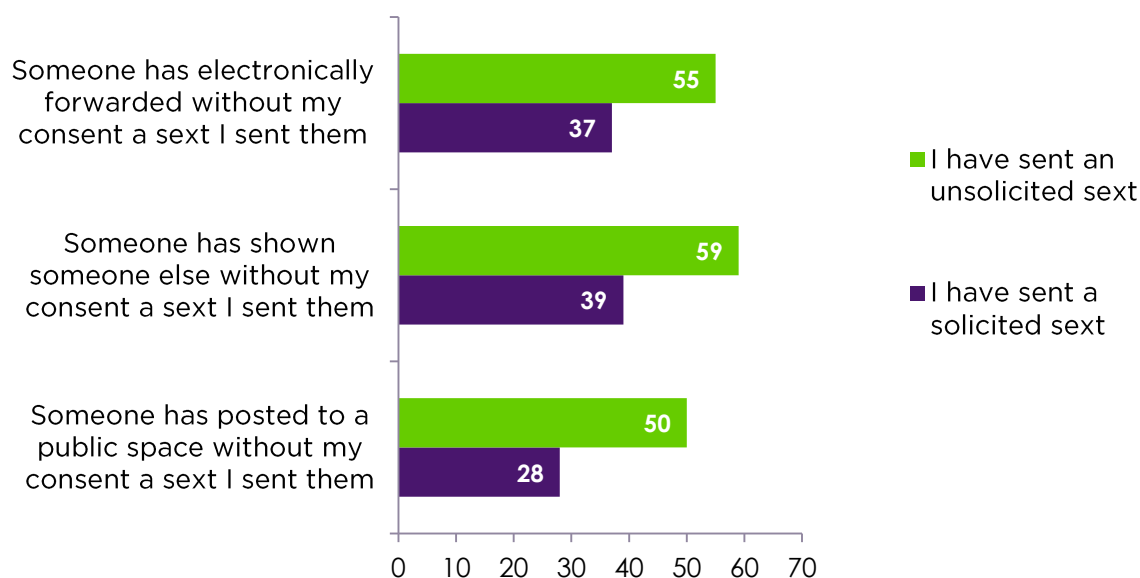
- Between 14 and 25 percent of youth who have sent sexts do not know if their sexts have been shared. Given the difference between the number of youth who report sharing sexts and those who report having had their sexts shared, it seems likely that more sexts are being shared than their senders are aware of.

Figure 6: Sext senders' sharing experiences vs. sext sharers' sharing behaviours



- Overall, the two most common contexts for non-consensual sharing were showing a solicited sext to someone in person (25% of participants had done this and 15% were aware of it having been done to them) and sharing a solicited sext electronically (24% had done this and 14% were aware that it had been done to them).
- Sharing solicited sexts – which the recipient had requested from the sender – might be considered to be the most troubling type of sharing, since it involves an explicit betrayal of trust.
- However, while solicited sexts were more likely to be shared overall, this is mostly a function of the higher frequency at which participants sent them. When only those who have sent solicited sexts (38% of the total sample) and those who have sent unsolicited sexts (19% of the total sample) are considered, the rate at which unsolicited sexts are shared is significantly higher:

Figure 7: Having sexts shared  
(Sext senders only)



(Note that there is a significant overlap between sending solicited and unsolicited sexts: among those who have sent sexts, 53% have sent only solicited sexts, 2% have sent only unsolicited sexts, and 45% have sent both.)

**5. Boys are more likely than girls to have shared a sext.**

Based on data explored further below, the difference seems to be mostly due to a disproportionate impact of gender stereotyping on boys.

**6. Sharing sexts in one context is strongly associated with sharing them in other contexts.**

- Overall, sharing sexts is not a mainstream activity: Seventy percent of youth have never shared a sext in any method or context. However, it is concerning that almost a third of youth are engaged in harming their peers, apparently with little sense that what they are doing is wrong.



- Of youth who have received sexts:
  - Sharing sexts that they had solicited – either in person (42% of those who had received solicited sexts) or electronically (41%) – make up the two most common sharing behaviours.
  - Youth are most likely to share third-party sexts (36%) in person, as opposed to forwarding them electronically (30%) or posting them publicly (25%).

Gender:

- Overall, girls are much less likely than boys to have shared sexts they have received in any context and through any method.
- Like boys, girls are most likely to have shared sexts that they have solicited in person (48% boys versus 37% girls) or electronically (51% boys versus 33% girls).

**These findings provide support for making a distinction between sending or receiving sexts and non-consensual sharing of sexts. This has implications for education and interventions with youth, parents and teachers.**

## Factors associated with non-consensual sharing of sexts

7. **How strongly youth believe in traditional gender stereotypes, how susceptible they are to using moral disengagement mechanisms, how frequently they think their peers share sexts, their perceived peer pressure to share sexts, and whether they expect their friends to share sexts with them are all significantly associated with non-consensual sharing.**

Based on the strong association between the nine sharing behaviours that were studied, it seems likely that there is a subgroup of youth who were surveyed for whom sharing of all types is normalized.

How this subgroup may have come to see sharing sexts as normal and acceptable was explored through four factors: adherence to traditional gender stereotypes; moral disengagement; homophily and social norms; and rules, education and awareness of legal consequences.

## Gender stereotyping

### 8. Youth – especially boys – who believe in traditional stereotypes are significantly more likely to share sexts.

This study used a previously-validated scale to measure participants' belief in gender stereotypes that asked them to agree or disagree with questions such as “men should be more interested than women in sex” and “a woman cannot be truly happy unless she is in a relationship.”

- Youth who have received sexts and who scored high on gender stereotyping are significantly more likely to have shared sexts than those with medium or low scores: half of high scoring youth (53%) have shared sexts they have received, compared to 18 percent of those with medium and nine percent of those with low scores. For three of the nine types of sharing, not a single participant who scored low on gender stereotyping had shared a sext.
- Although the correlation between adherence to gender stereotypes and sharing behaviour is significant for both boys and girls, it is considerably stronger for boys.

## Moral disengagement

### 9. Youth who share sexts appear to be engaging in moral disengagement to justify or excuse their behaviour. Moreover, responses to some of the four moral disengagement mechanisms suggest that even youth who did not share sexts nonetheless provided support and endorsement for the sender's non-consensual sharing of sexts.

In this study, participants were asked to agree or disagree with 16 statements to measure four different moral disengagement mechanisms:

- **Cognitive restructuring**, by which an act is made acceptable by comparing it with something worse (“Sharing a sext isn’t as bad as cheating on someone”) or contriving a reason why it is actually morally justified (“When a girl’s sexts get shared, it shows other girls the risks of sending sexts”);

- ***Distortion of consequences***, in which we deny or ignore the harm done by the action (“Having a sext shared happens so often nowadays, nobody really cares about it”);
- ***Displacement or diffusion of responsibility***, in which the guilt for the action is shifted onto someone else or shared with a group (“If a boy shares a girl’s sext with just one of his friends, and that friend shares it with others, it’s not really the first boy’s fault”); and
- ***Victim-blaming***, in which responsibility for the action is laid directly on the victim (“A girl shouldn’t be surprised if her boyfriend shares her sexts after they break up”).
- Some of these attitudes are held by a worryingly large number of youth:
  - Forty-six percent agree or strongly agree that it is the original sender’s fault if a sext gets shared around.
  - Just over one quarter (29%) believe that nobody should be surprised if boys share sexts with each other.
  - Youth who scored high on the moral disengagement scale are significantly more likely to have shared sexts than those with medium or low scores: half (53%) have shared sexts overall, compared to 17 percent of those with medium and 11 percent of those with low scores.
- Unlike gender stereotyping, there is little or no gender difference between males and females in the relationship between moral disengagement and sharing sexts.

## Homophily and social norming

### **10. Social norms (how common youth think sharing sexts is), homophily (whether they think their friends would expect them to share a sext), and reciprocity (whether they would expect their friends to share a sext with them) are all associated with sharing sexts.**

In this study, perceived social norms and social bonds between peers were measured against non-consensual sharing of sexts.

- Although general perceptions by youth about how often their peers share sexts influence sexting behaviours, it is the number of close friends whom youth think they know for certain have shared sexts that has the stronger

effect on whether they share sexts themselves.

- There is an even stronger association between participants sharing sexts sent to them and their expectation that their friends will share any sexts they receive.
- These expectations were strongly associated with girls as well as boys.

Social distance also plays a factor in decisions regarding sharing sexts: youth say they are less likely to share sexts of close friends (90% unlikely/very unlikely) than people at their school (87% unlikely/very unlikely) or strangers (80% unlikely/very unlikely). Those who say they would probably share sexts of either friends or schoolmates are considerably more likely to share sexts in all contexts, while there is a weaker but still significant correlation between how likely youth say they are to share sexts of strangers and all types of sharing.

## Parents, educators and legal consequences

### **11. Rules or discussion in the home, educational programs and awareness of criminal law relating to non-consensual sharing have little or no relationship with sharing behaviours.**

- While a sizable majority of participants have a rule in the home about treating people with respect online (76%), fewer than half have a rule specifically related to sexting, and just over a third have talked to their parents about either sending or sharing sexts.
  - The only one of these, however, that is associated with whether youth actually share sexts is having had a discussion with parents/guardians about non-consensual sharing, which was weakly associated with having shared sexts. It seems most likely that this correlation exists because parents whose children have shared sexts are more likely to discuss the issue with them, but it is not clear from the data whether the discussion came before or after the sharing incidents.
  - Education at school about sexting in general, or about sharing sexts, has no significant association with sharing behaviour.
  - Knowing that sharing a sext of someone without their permission is a crime does not generally have a significant relationship with sharing, suggesting

that knowing that sharing intimate images is a crime does not deter sharing behaviours.

## Implications for interventions, research and policy

Findings from this survey have considerable implications for developing prevention and intervention programs for young people on sexting and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images:

1. Interventions, curriculum and policy must distinguish between *sending* sexts and *sharing* sexts non-consensually, and should take different approaches to each. Parents and other adults who have youth in their care should be supported in understanding the differences and the importance of addressing both issues.
2. Parents and other adults require education and information about sexting among youth, including the frequency, which suggests that this behaviour is becoming more common or normalized among young people. Programming must include support for parents and teachers to be able to have discussions on this topic with youth.
3. Interventions related to *sending* sexts should take a sex education approach, recognizing that sending sexts to willing recipients is not by itself a harmful activity. More research should be conducted to examine associated risks and protective factors, to better identify the one-sixth of girls who send solicited sexts at a high frequency, and to further explore the contexts in which unsolicited sexts are sent.
4. Greater awareness needs to be raised among parents, educators and the general public about the *non-consensual sharing of sexts* by youth. Parents and educators should be offered more, and more targeted, support to help them discuss the issue of non-consensual sharing of sexts with children and youth:
  - a. Interventions should avoid victim-blaming and focus on minimizing the non-consensual sharing of sexts.
  - b. Parents should be encouraged to talk to their children specifically about the moral aspects of sharing sexts (in particular, the moral disengagement

mechanisms identified in item six below) and the ethical obligation to resist pressure from peers to share sexts.

- c. Resources for educators should be evaluated thoroughly to ensure they are effective before being widely adopted.
5. More research is needed to better identify the one-third of youth who share sexts frequently.
6. Interventions for both parents and educators should involve confronting the four moral disengagement mechanisms – cognitive restructuring, distortion of consequences, displacement/diffusion of responsibility and victim-blaming – in the context of sharing sexts.
7. Interventions should include a component on confronting gender stereotypes and countering social norms and expectations of reciprocity in relation to sharing sexts.
8. Interventions should include accurate data on sharing rates among youth. If they include information on criminal law, it should be presented as a tool available for those whose sexts have been shared, rather than a risk or consequence of sharing them.
9. Mixed-group interventions should focus on moral disengagement primarily but include specific material on gender stereotyping. Interventions delivered to single-sex male groups should have a stronger anti-stereotyping component.
10. Targeted interventions should be delivered to youth who have shared sexts, aimed at de-normalizing sharing by confronting gender stereotypes and helping them to recognize and avoid moral disengagement.



## Overall prevalence of sexting behaviours

*Note: In this report:*

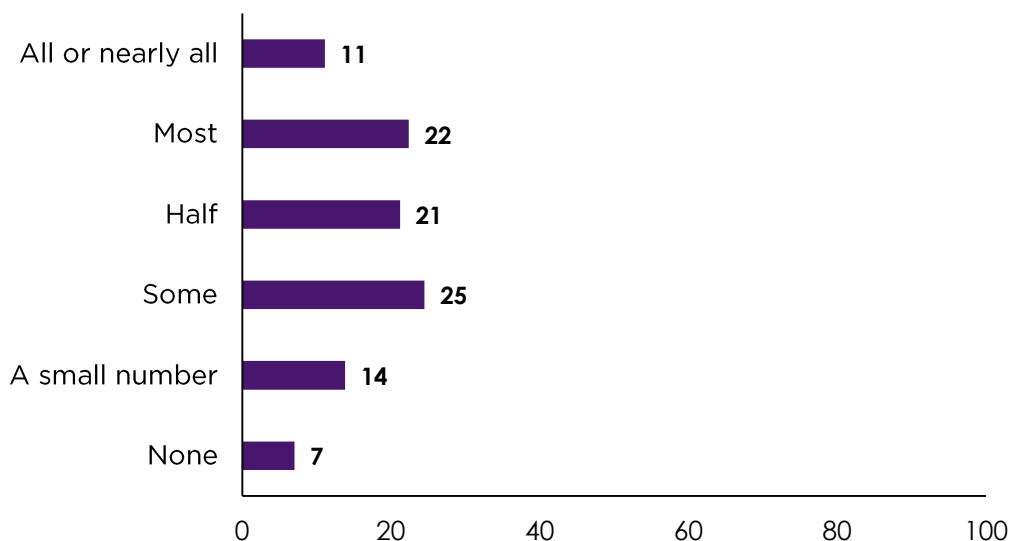
- *The word “sext” means a sexy, nude or partially nude photo. (Though this term may not always be used by youth and, when it is, sometimes includes sexual text messages as well, it is the one most often used in scholarship and media coverage and therefore is used here for convenience.)*
- *“Sending” sexts in this report always refers to the creator of a sext sending it to the recipient.*
- *“Solicited sexts” are those which the recipient has requested, while “unsolicited sexts” are those which the recipient has not asked for.*
- *“Sharing” sexts refers to distributing them to unintended audiences without the original sender’s consent, either by forwarding them electronically, showing them to one or more people in person, or posting them to a public space such as a social network or photo-sharing site.*

### Sending sexts

***Sending sexts is less common than many people, including youth themselves, believe.***

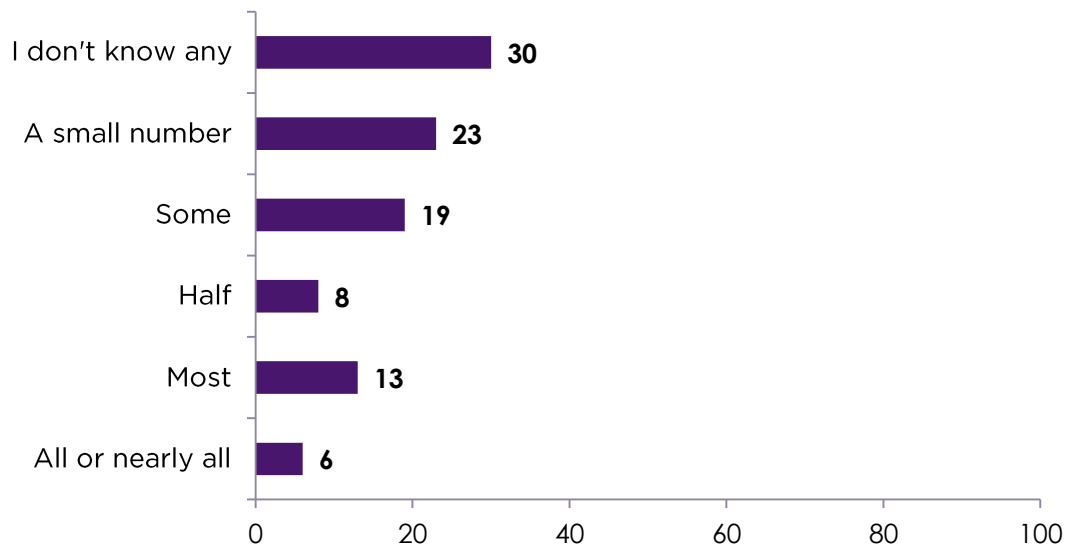
Nearly all participants think that at least some youth their age send sexts, with a majority thinking that at least half or more do this:

Figure 8: How many people your age do you think have sent a sext to someone? (%)



When asked about friends whom they know for certain have sent sexts, the number is smaller:

Figure 9: How many of your close friends do you know for certain have sent a sext to someone? (%)

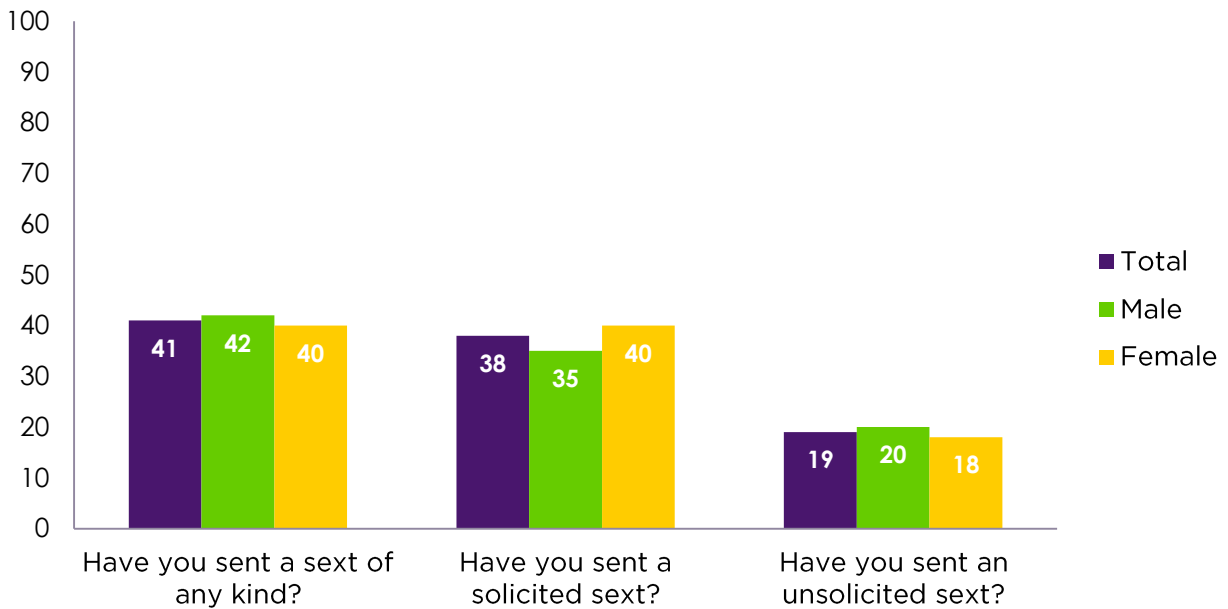


These numbers, too, seem to be higher than actual behaviour: six in ten participants (59%) had never sent either a *solicited* sext (one that the recipient had asked for) or an *unsolicited* sext (one the recipient had not asked for). These numbers were similar for both boys (60% had never sent a sext) and girls (58%).

Participants were more likely to send solicited than unsolicited sexts: 62 percent had never sent a solicited sext compared to 81 percent who had never sent an unsolicited one. Boys were slightly less likely to send solicited sexts (65% had never done so) than girls (60%) and both boys and girls sent unsolicited sexts at roughly the same rate (80% of boys and 82% of girls had never sent one).

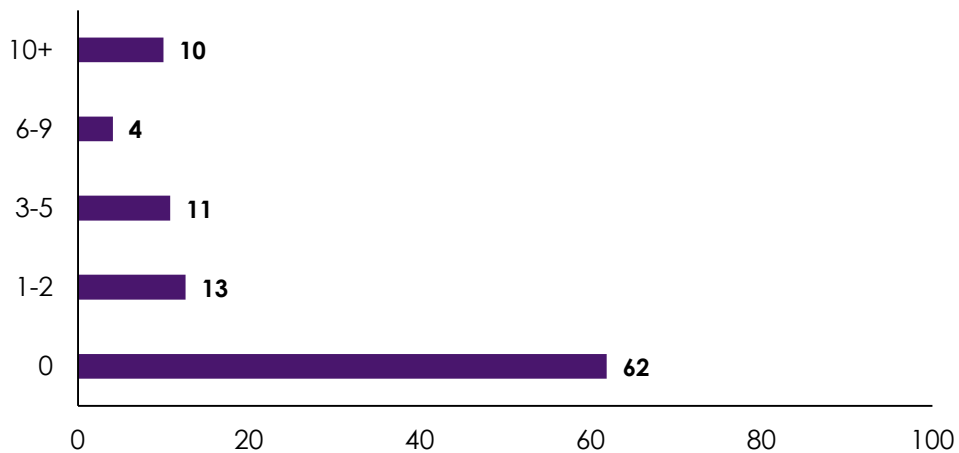
There was a fairly strong correlation (.569) between sending solicited and unsolicited sexts. Considering the lower numbers of youth who have sent unsolicited sexts, this suggests that many of those who do send solicited sexts as well.

Figure 10: Have you sent a sext of any kind? (%)



Roughly ten percent of those who had sent solicited sexts, however, had sent them ten or more times, suggesting that there may be a small subset of youth who frequently sext. (This pattern did not occur with unsolicited sexts.)

Figure 11: How many times have you sent someone a sext that they asked for? (%)



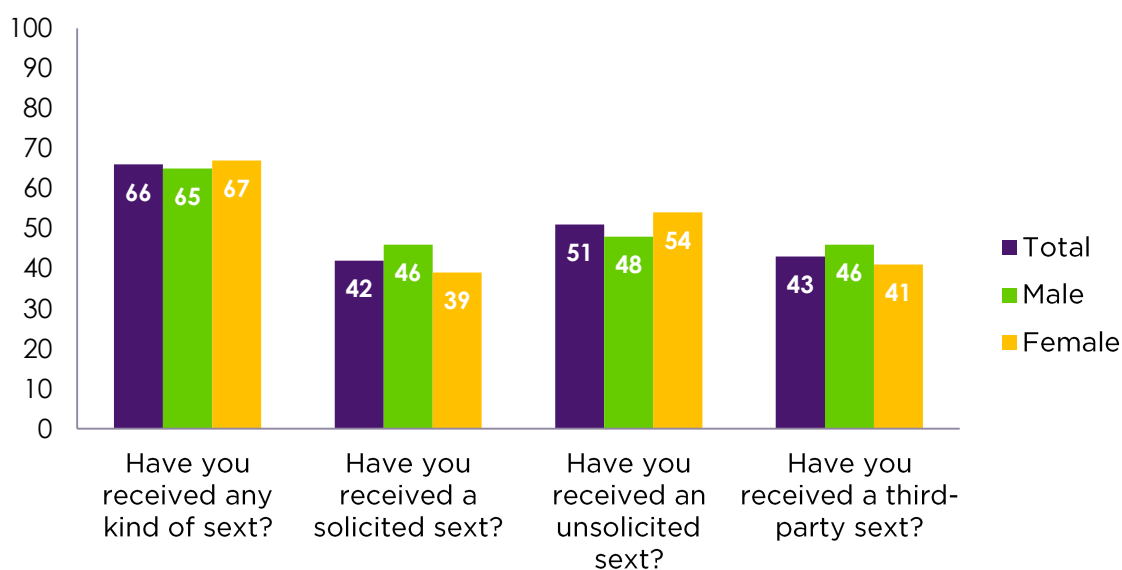
## Receiving sexts

### *More youth have received sexts than have sent them.*

Two-thirds of participants (66%) said that they had received at least one sext. The number of boys and girls who had received sexts was virtually identical (65% of boys vs. 67% of girls).

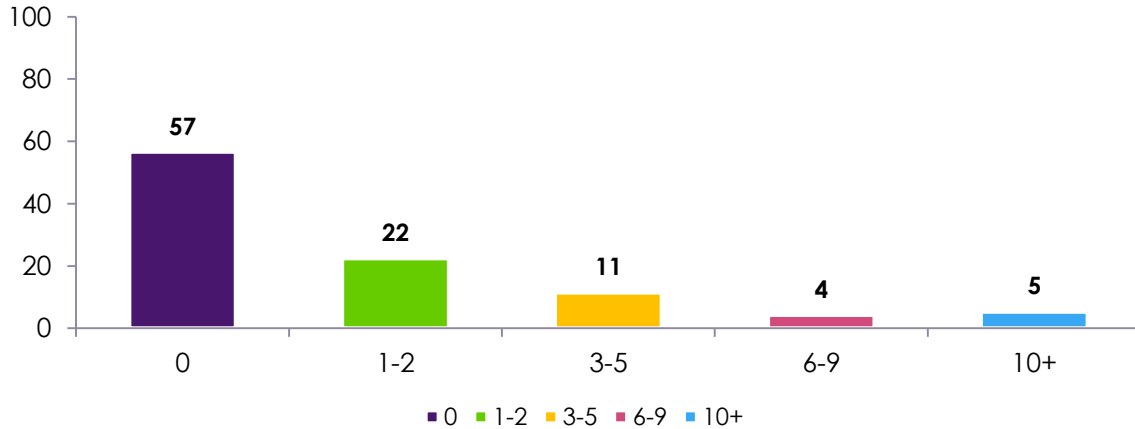
Gender differences were not large: boys were slightly more likely to have received solicited sexts (46% had done so) than girls (39%) while girls were somewhat more likely to have received unsolicited sexts (54% had done so, compared to 48% of boys). Boys were also more likely to have received sexts from someone other than the person in them (46% had done so compared to 41% of girls).

Figure 12: Have you received a sext?



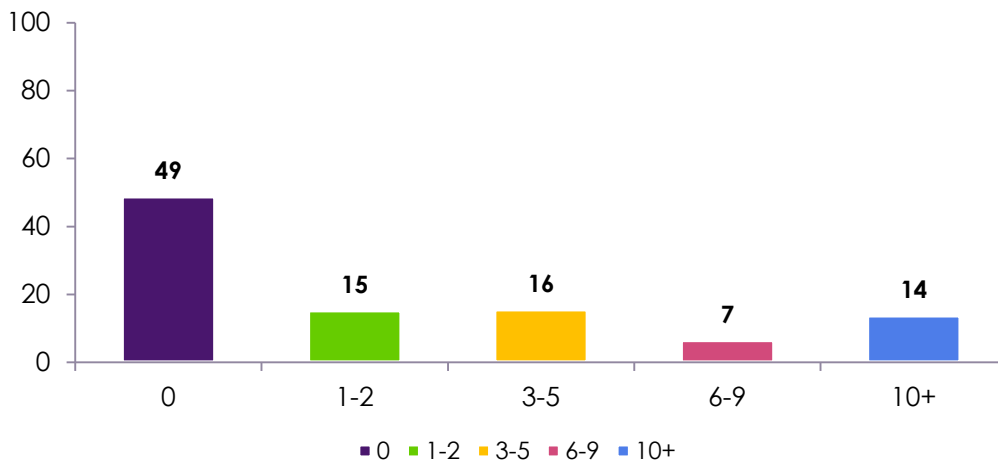
There is a considerable difference in frequency between the three contexts (sexts that the recipient had asked for, sexts that they had not asked for, and sexts shared with them by someone other than the person in the sext). Those who had received sexts from a third-party were most likely to have seen these just once or twice and least likely to have seen ten or more:

Figure 13: How many times have you seen a sext that was shared with you by someone other than the person in it?



Participants were most likely to have seen unsolicited sexts compared to the other two contexts, and were also more likely to have seen them ten times or more:

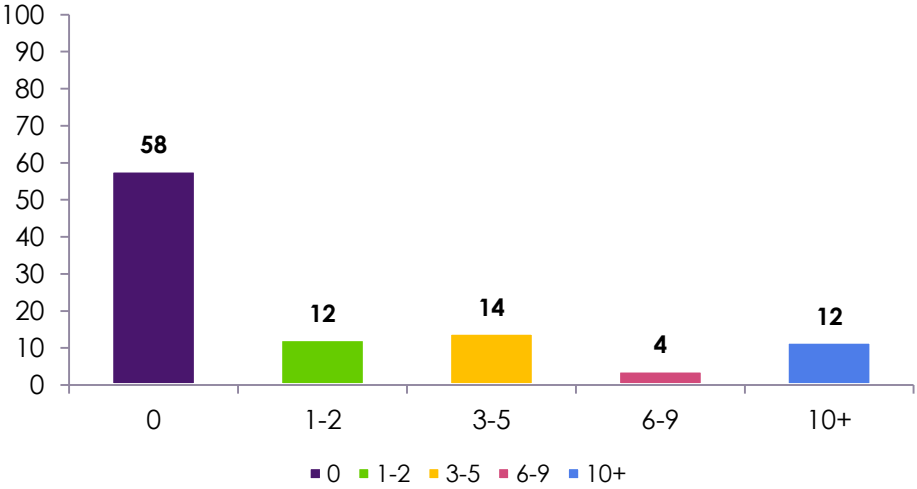
Figure 14: How many times has someone sent you a sext of themselves that you did not ask for?



There was a significant gender difference in the frequency of receiving unsolicited sexts, with twice as many girls (18%) as boys (9%) having received them ten or more times.

Participants were least likely to have seen solicited sexts, but the number who had seen ten or more was still significant:

Figure 15: How many times has someone sent you a sext that you had asked for?





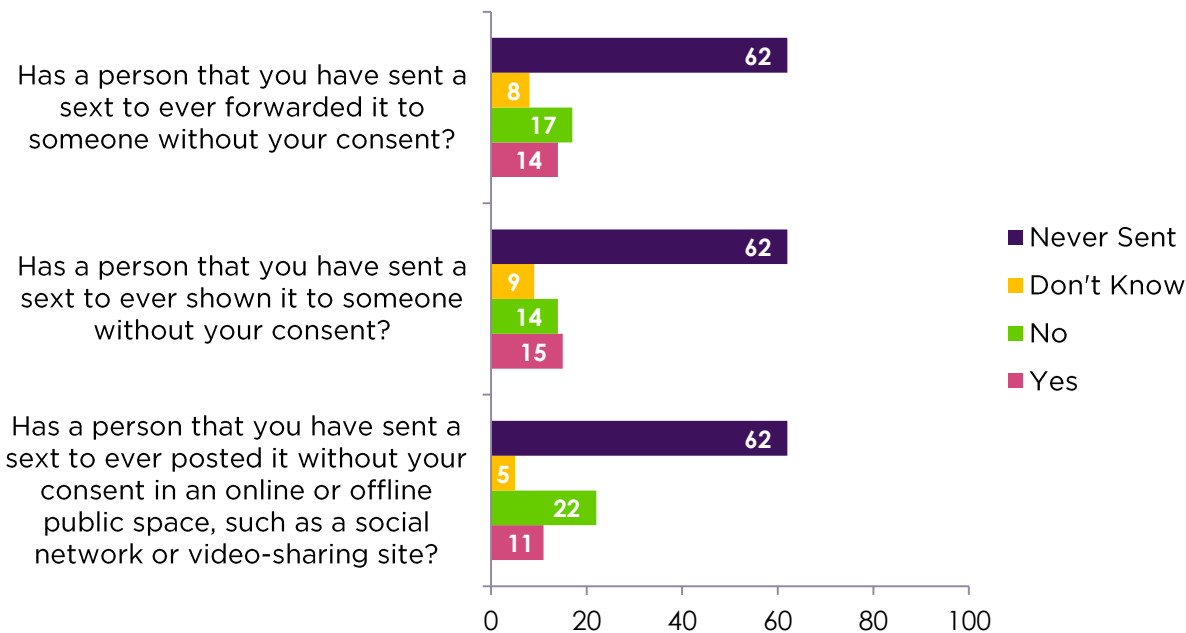
## Having sexts you sent shared

*How often youth have sent sexts does not predict how likely they are to have had a sext shared.*

The most frequent way for sexts to be shared was by showing them to someone in person. Having them posted to a public space was the least frequent.

Because the number of participants who had sent sexts is relatively low, a fairly small number of the total sample reported having had a sext they had sent someone shared in any context:

Figure 16: Having solicited sexts share (% Full sample)

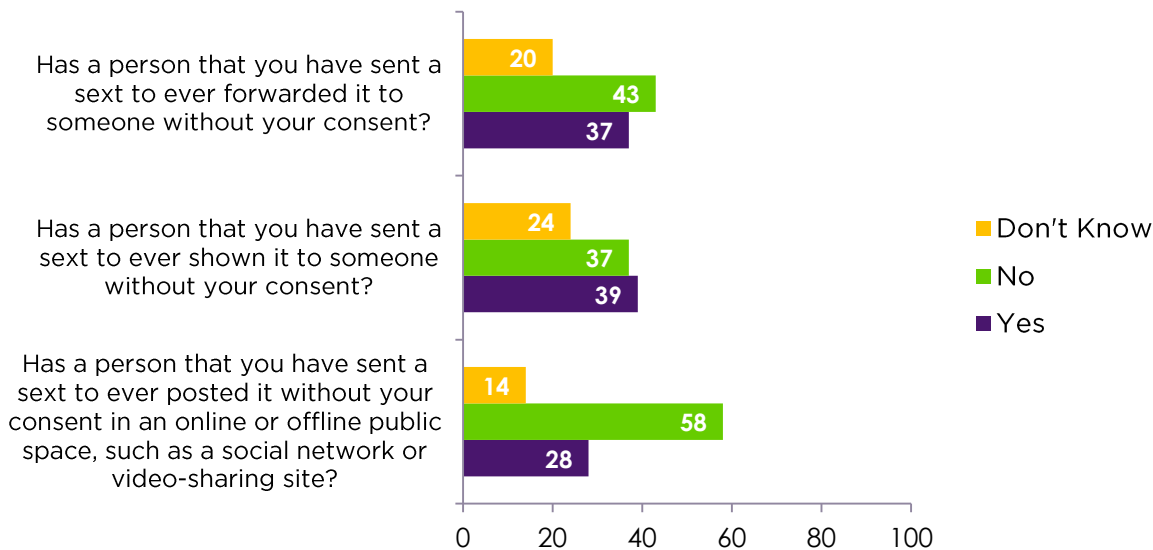


Overall, roughly one in six participants had a solicited sext they'd sent forwarded electronically or shown to someone in person without their consent, and just over one in ten had one posted to a public space. Between five and ten percent of the participants, however, did not know whether or not any of these had been done to a sext they had sent.

When we focus on just the participants who had sent sexts, participants were most likely to have had a sext shown to someone in person; this may be seen as less of a violation of

privacy since, unlike in the other two contexts, there is less potential for the image itself to be copied and shared (though the knowledge that the photo exists certainly can spread and the person who sent the sext may be left with worry about whether the sext will be shared in future). Participants who had sent sexts were also most likely not to know if one of their sexts had been shown to someone in person, presumably because, unlike the two electronic sharing methods, there is no record created.

Figure 17: Having solicited sexts shared  
(% Senders)

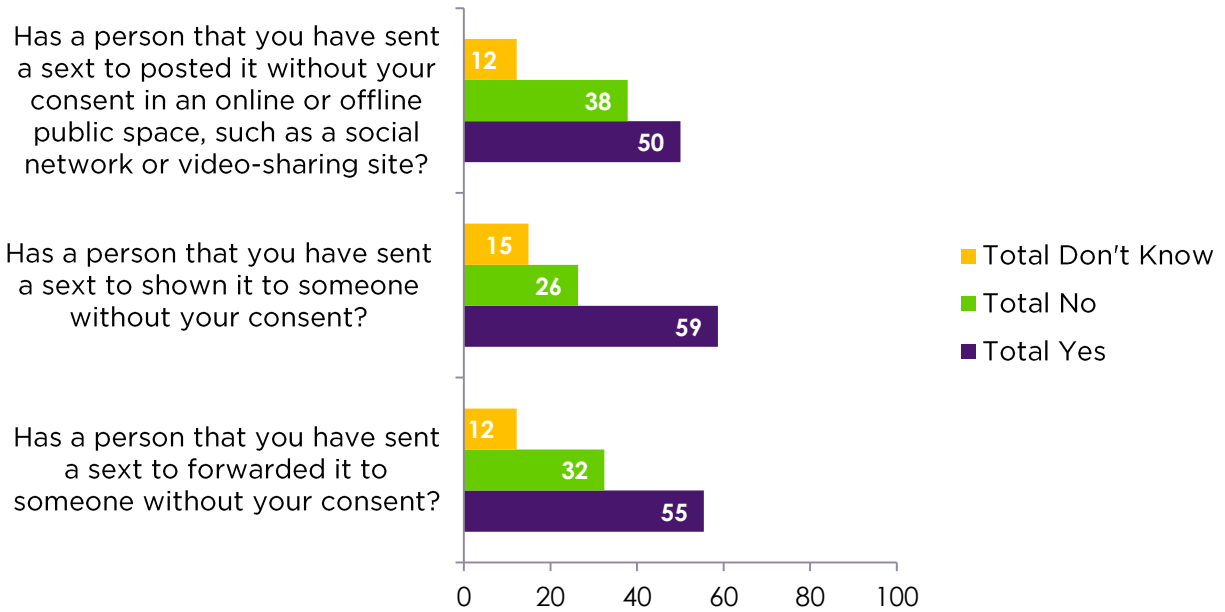


Conversely, participants who had sent sexts were both least likely to have had a solicited sext shared in a public space – perhaps because this is seen as the least defensible form of sharing – and least likely to say they did not know whether this had been done or not, perhaps assuming that word would have gotten back to them if this had happened.

Finally, there is an important difference in frequency between sending solicited sexts and having them shared. While a considerable number of participants had sent solicited sexts ten or more times, this was not the case with those that had solicited sexts shared.

While fewer participants had sent unsolicited sexts, those that had were more likely to report having had them shared. This difference is partly because they were also less likely to say they did not know whether or not their sexts had been shared. It is unclear why senders of unsolicited sexts are more certain about whether or not those sexts have been shared: it is possible that these are shared more widely than solicited ones, making it more likely for the recipients to know for certain that they have been shared.

Figure 18: Having unsolicited sexts shared (Senders)



How often youth send sexts is associated with how often they have had sexts shared, but not strongly (the highest correlation, between sending unsolicited sexts and having them forwarded electronically, is only .209\*\*, while the frequency of sending solicited sexts did not correlate at all with having had a sext posted in a public space). Therefore, it seems likely that other factors have a more significant association than how often youth send sexts with whether, and how often, participants' sexts are shared. Further research and analysis is recommended to identify those factors.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## Non-consensual sharing of sexts: Associated factors

As noted above, the primary focus of this report is the non-consensual sharing of sexts. This section will examine the overall prevalence of this behaviour; the relationship with demographics and with other sexting behaviours; and the relationship with four factors which past research suggests are likely to be associated with non-consensual sharing:

- **Adherence to traditional gender stereotypes:** Whether there is a relationship between young people holding traditional views on gender roles and the non-consensual sharing of sexts.
- **Moral disengagement:** Knowing that moral disengagement (such as victim-blaming and disregarding consequences) is a well-established factor in cyberbullying,<sup>29</sup> sexual harassment<sup>30</sup> and rape-supportive attitudes,<sup>31</sup> this research seeks to determine whether youth who share sexts non-consensually engage in moral disengagement to absolve themselves of responsibility.
- **Homophily and social norms:** Whether young people's perceptions of how common sexting is (social norms) and/or pressure or tendency to conform to the norms of one's peer group (homophily) impacts their decisions to non-consensually share sexts.
- **Rules, education and awareness of legal consequences:** Whether having rules at home about treating people with respect online and/or sexting and forwarding sexts, engaging in educational initiatives on sexting, and awareness of possible legal consequences of non-consensual sharing of sexts, impacts whether youth would engage in it.

---

<sup>29</sup> Perren, S., & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, E. (2012). Cyberbullying and traditional bullying in adolescence: Differential roles of moral disengagement, moral emotions, and moral values. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(2), 195-209. doi:10.1080/17405629.2011.643168

<sup>30</sup> Page, T. E., & Pina, A. (2015). Moral disengagement as a self-regulatory process in sexual harassment perpetration at work: A preliminary conceptualization. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 21, 73-84. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2015.01.004

<sup>31</sup> Carroll, J. A. (2009). Impact of moral judgment and moral disengagement on rape-supportive attitudes in college males (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).

## Prevalence of sharing

*Sext recipients were most likely to have shared sexts they had asked for.*

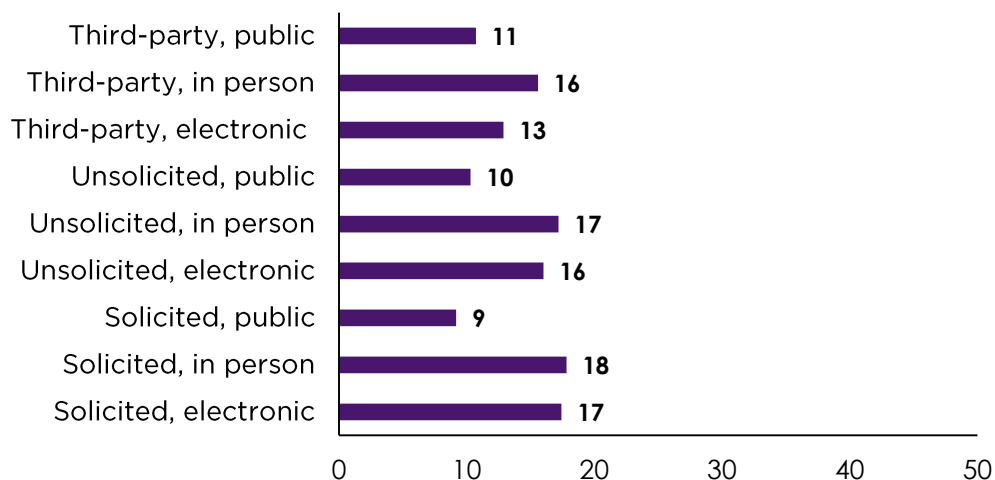
*Boys were more likely than girls to have shared a sext.*

*Sharing sexts is strongly correlated with sending unsolicited sexts, but only weakly correlated with sending solicited sexts.*

*Sharing sexts in one context is strongly associated with sharing them in other contexts.*

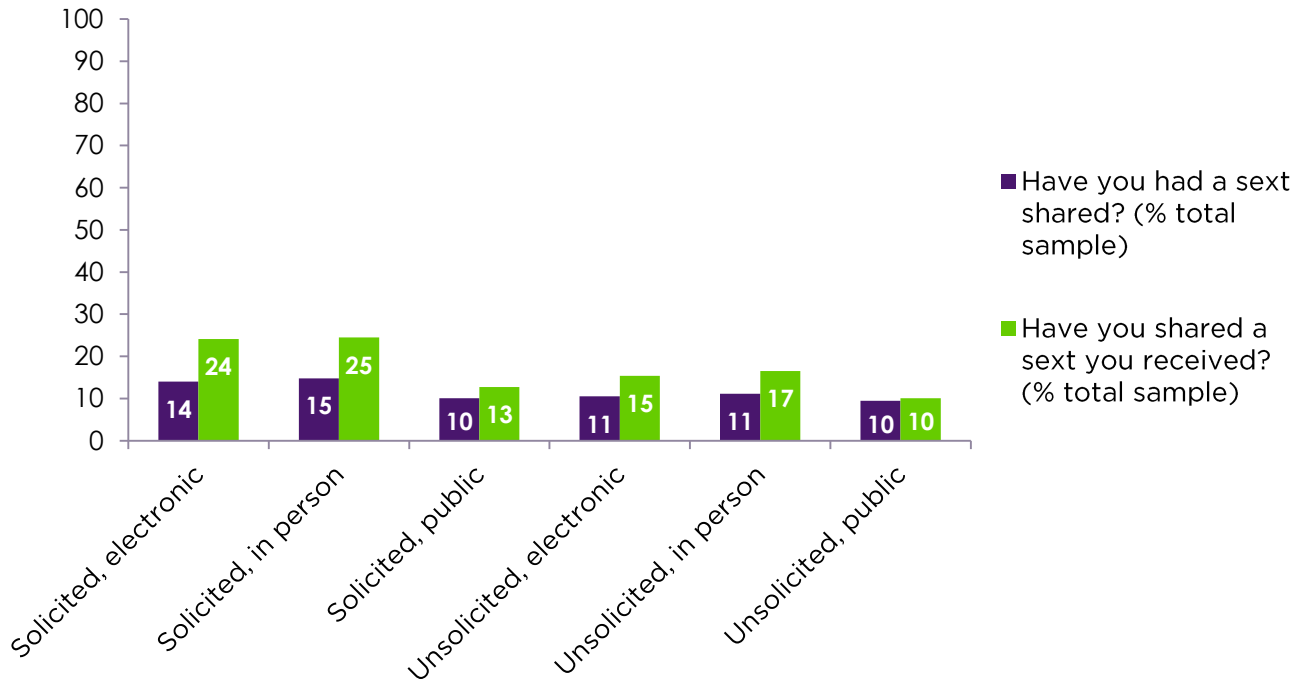
Even more than sending sexts, sharing them is not a mainstream activity: 70 percent of the participants – 65 percent of boys and 73 percent of girls – had never shared a sext in any context or through any method.

Figure 19: Have shared a sext  
(% total sample)



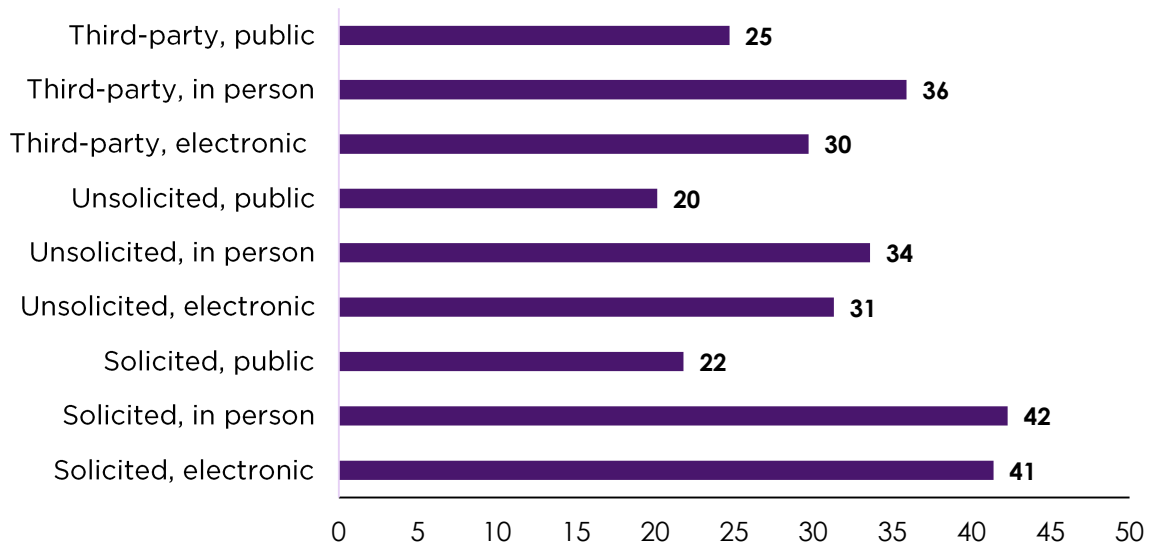
Sharing solicited sexts electronically or in person were the top two ways that participants reported sharing sexts and the top two contexts in which sext senders had them shared. Sharing solicited sexts – which the recipient had requested from the sender – might be considered to be a particularly troubling type of sharing, since it involves an explicit betrayal of trust.

Figure 20: Sext senders' sharing experiences vs. sext sharers' sharing behaviours



Sharing third-party sexts in person was the third-most common form of sharing (36% of third-party sext recipients had done so), followed by sharing third-party sexts electronically.

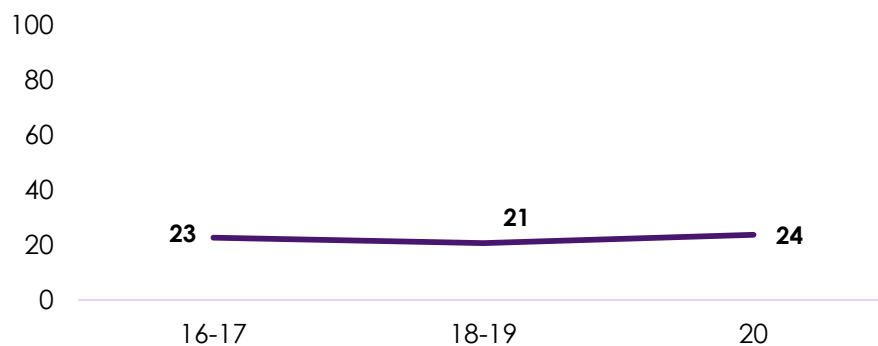
Figure 21: Have shared a sext (% sext recipients)



## Age

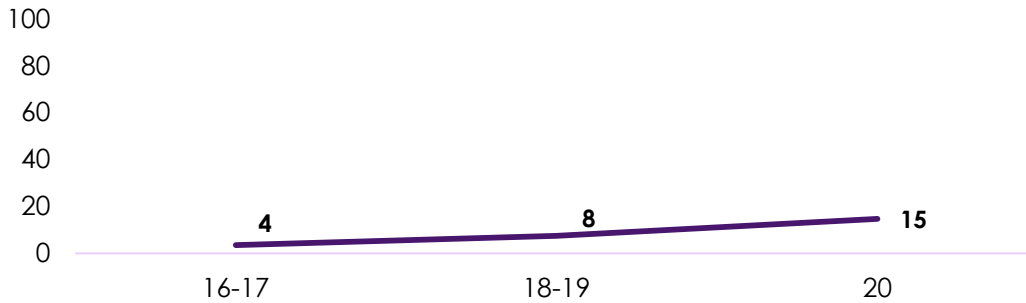
There was a small but significant association between age and some sharing behaviours, which was stronger for boys than for girls. Surprisingly, given that participants were asked whether they had *ever* shared sexts, the rate was not consistently higher for older youth than younger ones:

Figure 22: Average participation in all sharing behaviours by age (% of sext receivers)



When we look only at those who had shared sexts six or more times, however, the expected pattern appears:

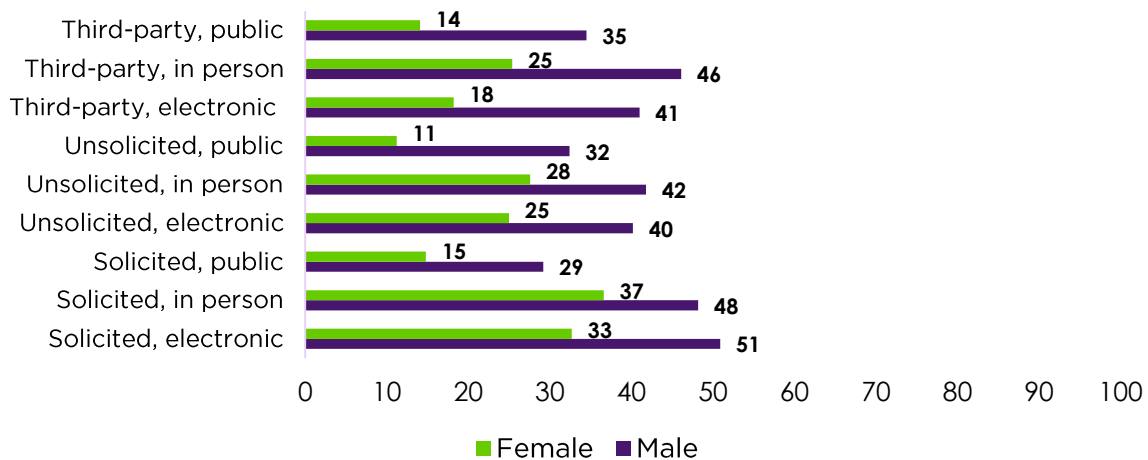
Figure 23: Frequency of sharing 6+ times by age (% of sext receivers)



## Gender

Overall, girls in the sample were much less likely to have shared sexts in any context and through any method, and while the overall patterns for electronic and in-person sharing were similar for both genders, boys were much more likely than girls to have posted a sext in a public space.

Figure 24: Sharing behaviour (% sext recipients)





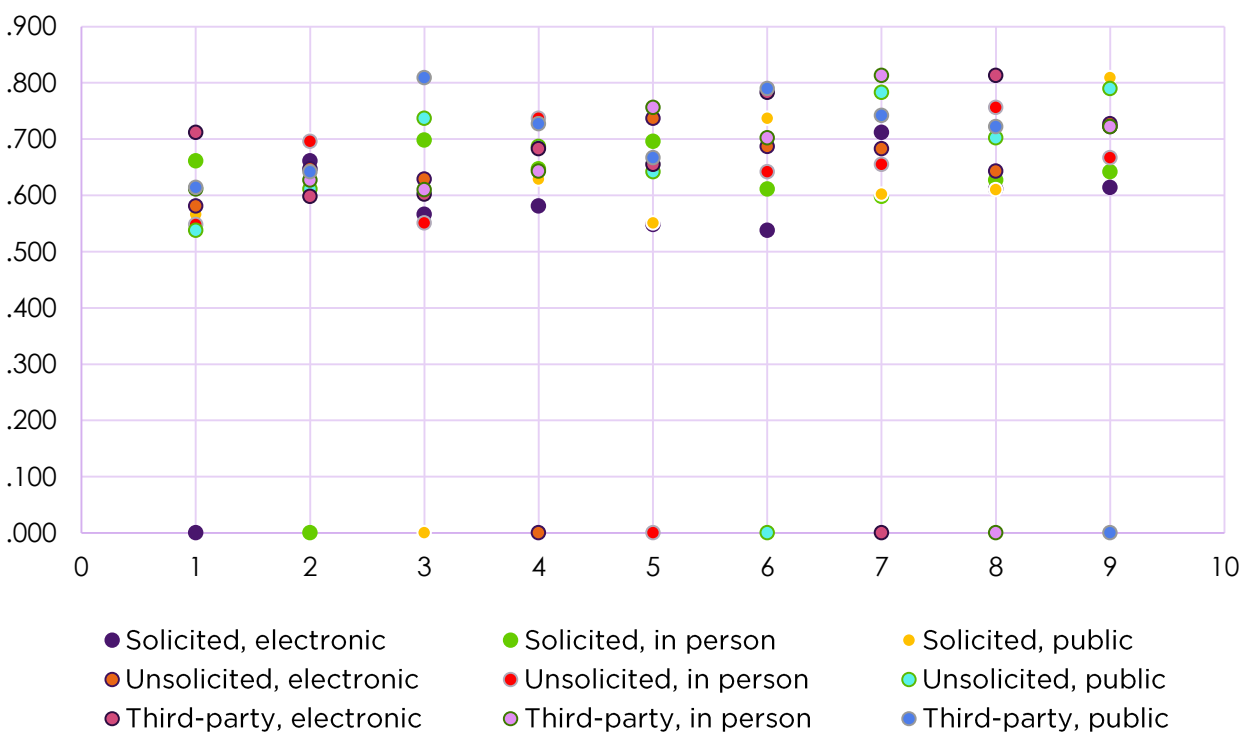
Even among girls, though, solicited sexts were the ones most often shared.

## Behaviours

Sharing sexts is not strongly associated with other behaviours, with a few exceptions: sharing third-party sexts is associated with having had an unsolicited sext that one had sent shared, and all forms of sharing are strongly associated with sending unsolicited sexts.

All of the sharing behaviours are significantly correlated with each other.

Figure 25: Correlations between sharing behaviours



Considering the strong association of all nine sharing behaviours with each other, and the overall lack of correlation between them and other behaviours, it seems likely that there is a subgroup of the sample (the 31% who reported sharing sexts) among whom sharing of all types is particularly normalized and that those participants who do share sexts do not distinguish too much between the different types and contexts of sharing. This subgroup is

more heavily male than female (35% of male participants had shared sexts in any way) but not overwhelmingly so (27% of female participants had done so). How this subgroup has come to see sharing sexts as normal and acceptable will be considered below.

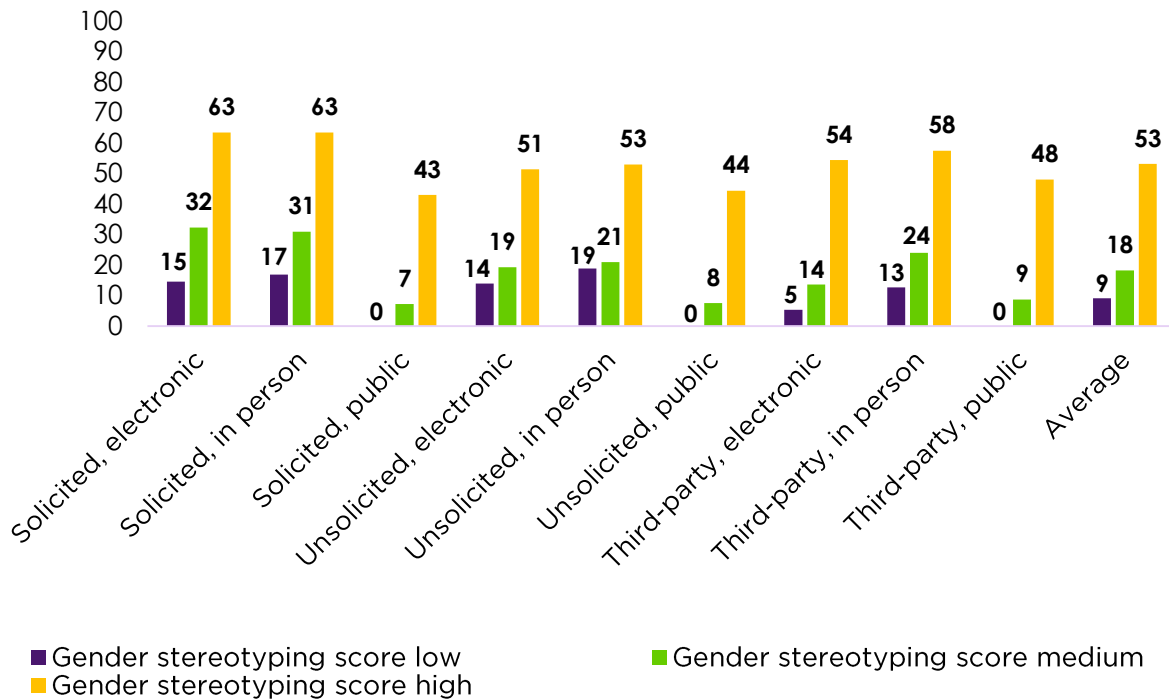
## Gender stereotyping

In this field, gender stereotyping is defined as the idea that males and females have innate, opposite and limited roles and characteristics, which generally define men as more assertive, unemotional and sexually aggressive and women as supportive, empathic and playing a “gatekeeper” role with regards to sex. Past research has shown consistently that holding these stereotypes is associated with a greater likelihood of believing in “rape myths” (a form of moral disengagement that excuses sexual assault) and participating in or tolerating various forms of sexual harassment. This study used a previously-validated scale to measure participants’ belief in gender stereotypes that asked them to agree or disagree with questions such as “men should be more interested than women in sex” and “a woman cannot be truly happy unless she is in a relationship.”

*Youth who believe in traditional stereotypes – especially boys – are significantly more likely to share sexts.*

When participants were scored on their belief in these gender stereotypes and then divided into low, middle and high categories, the association with all forms of sharing behaviour is striking:

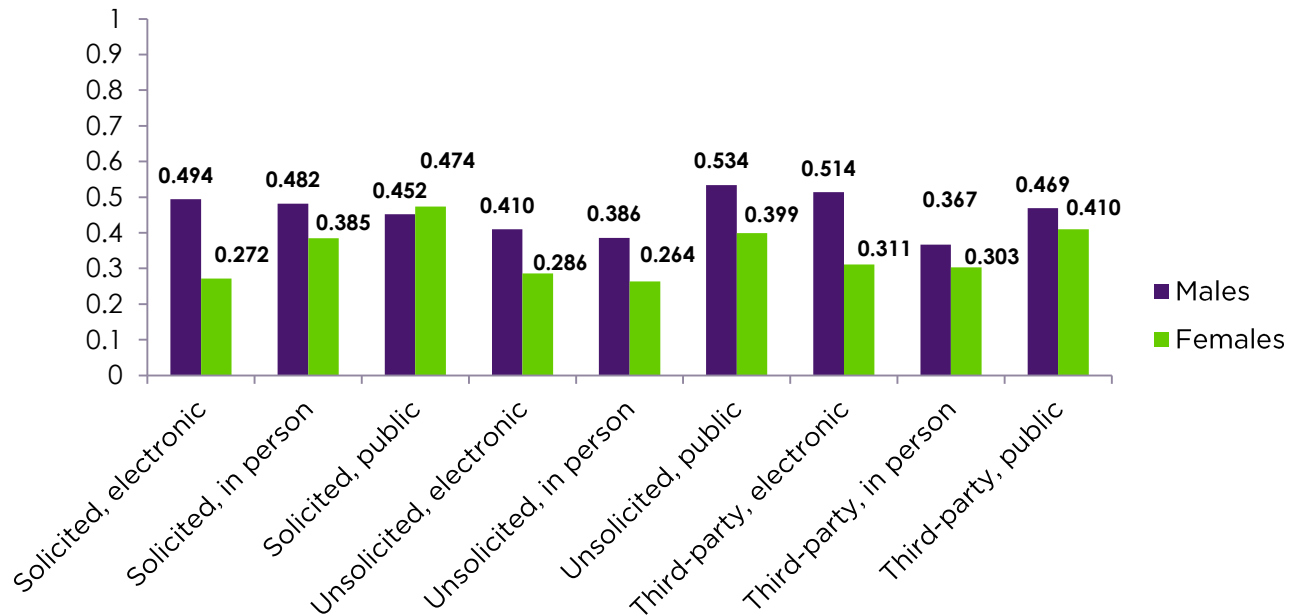
Figure 26: Sharing by gender stereotyping score  
(% of sext recipients)



On average just under one in ten (9%) of the participants in the lowest third had shared sexts, and none of them had shared a solicited, unsolicited or third-party sext publicly. One in five (18%) of those in the middle third had shared sexts in any context, and a full third (32%) had shared solicited sexts electronically. By contrast, half of those in the top third (53%) had shared sexts overall, and almost two-thirds (63%) had shared solicited sexts electronically or in person.

Adherence to gender stereotypes does not, however, have the same association with sharing behaviour for both boys and girls. Although the correlation was significant for both genders across all sharing types, in several cases it was considerably stronger for boys than for girls:

Figure 27: Gender stereotyping score and sharing behaviour correlation (gender comparison)



All correlations significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Believing in gender stereotypes has been shown to make both men and women more likely to blame victims in contexts such as sexual harassment and sexual assault, and it seems that this is at work here as well: girls who send sexts are seen as having transgressed gender boundaries and as a result “earned” the consequences.

## Moral disengagement

Moral disengagement refers to the ways in which we can prevent ourselves from feeling guilty about things that, according to our own values, we would normally consider to be wrong – or to judge that something we are witnessing is not wrong and therefore does not need our intervention. Because our literature review did not find any existing research that directly correlated moral disengagement and non-consensual sharing of sexts, a scale was developed for this study based on existing validated scales that had been used in the contexts of sexual harassment, cyberbullying and traditional bullying. This scale asked participants to agree or disagree with 16 statements that were divided into four groups to assess the four different moral disengagement mechanisms:

- ***Cognitive restructuring***, in which an act is made acceptable by comparing it with something worse (e.g. “sharing a sext isn’t as bad as cheating on someone”), or contriving a reason why it is actually morally justified (e.g. “when a girl’s sexts get shared, it shows other girls the risks of sending sexts”);
- ***Distortion of consequences***, in which we deny or ignore the harm done by the action (e.g. “having a sext shared happens so often nowadays, nobody really cares about it”);
- ***Displacement or diffusion of responsibility***, in which the guilt for the action is shifted onto someone else or shared with a group (e.g. “if a boy shares a girl’s sext with just one of his friends, and that friend shares it with others, it’s not really the first boy’s fault”); and
- ***Victim-blaming***, in which responsibility for the action is laid directly on the victim (e.g. “a girl shouldn’t be surprised if her boyfriend shares her sexts after they break up”).

Taken individually, some of these attitudes were held by a worryingly large number of youth. Further, such attitudes being held by youth who did not share sexts points to strong support and endorsement for the behaviour shown by the sender who shares non-consensual sexts.

Figure 28: It's the original sender's fault if a sext gets shared around. They shouldn't send sexts if they don't understand the risks

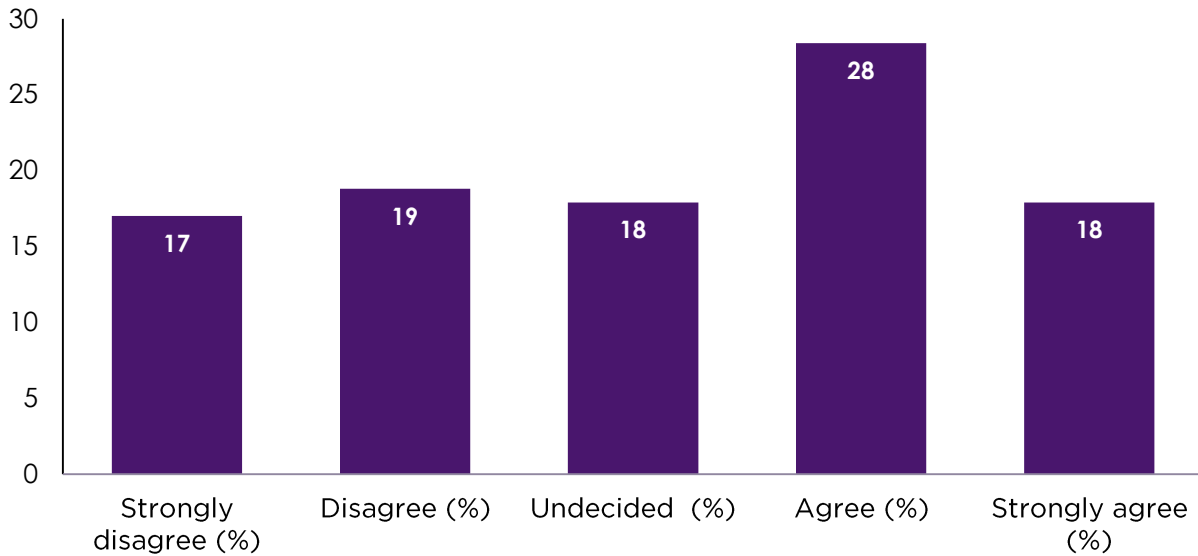
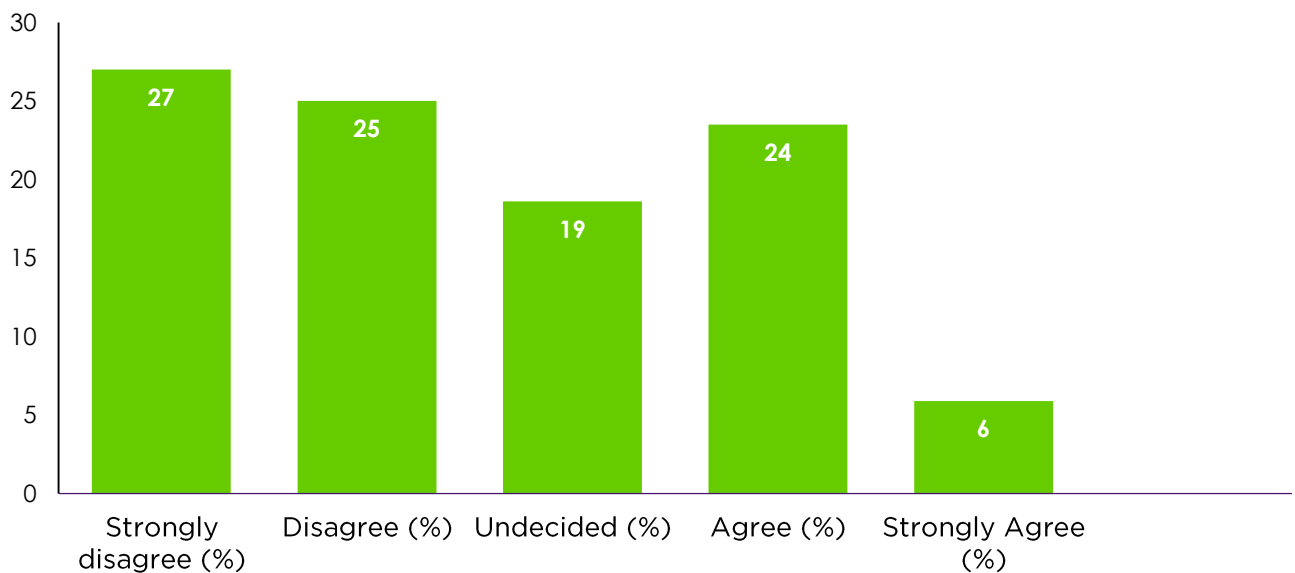


Figure 29: Nobody should be surprised if boys share sexts with each other

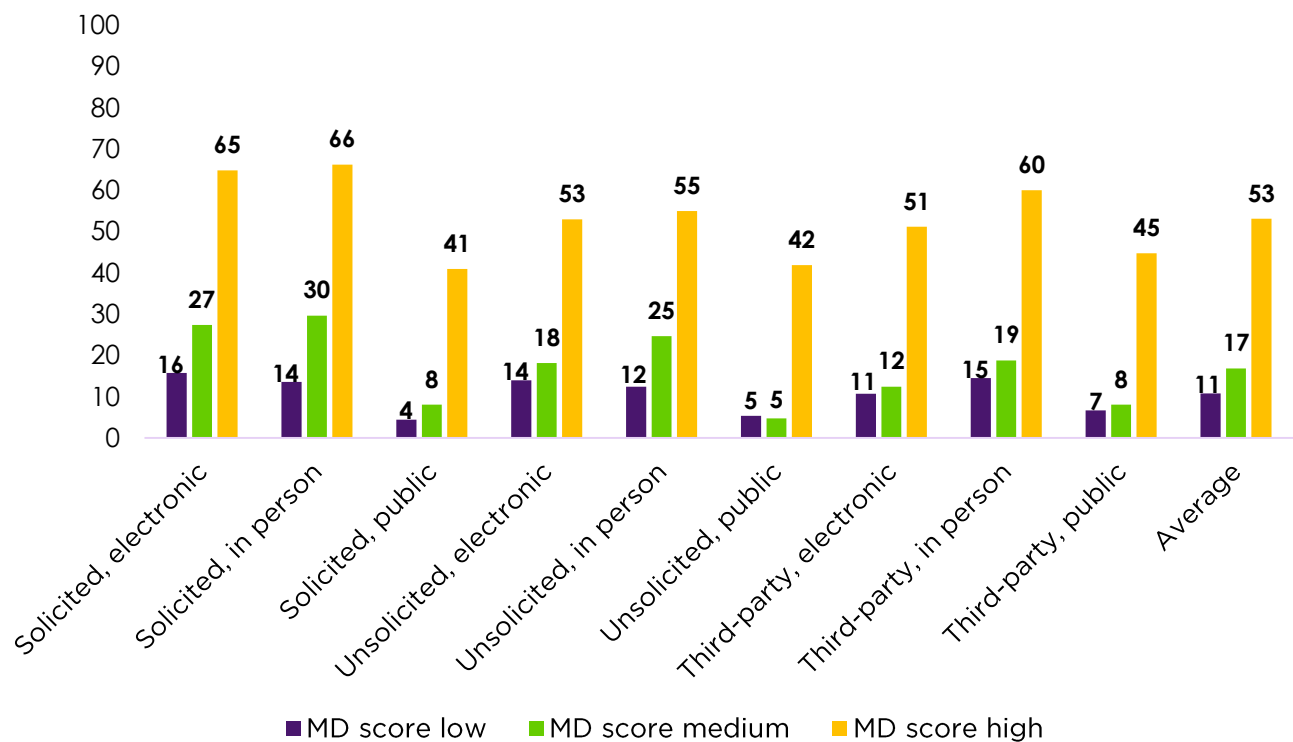


**Youth who share sexts appear to be engaging in moral disengagement to justify or excuse their behaviour.**

Overall, there is a significant association between moral disengagement and sharing sexts. This association is consistently as strong, or stronger, than the association with adherence to gender stereotypes.

Youth who scored high on the moral disengagement scale are significantly more likely to have shared sexts than those with medium or low scores: half (53%) have shared sexts overall, compared to 17 percent of those with medium and 11 percent of those with low scores.

Figure 30: Sharing by moral disengagement score (% of sext recipients)



Unlike gender stereotyping, there was little or no gender difference between male and female participants in the relationship between moral disengagement and sharing sexts. In particular, moral disengagement was more strongly associated than gender stereotyping with all types of sharing behaviour among girls, while among boys, there were a few types

of sharing behaviour that were more strongly associated with gender stereotyping than with moral disengagement.

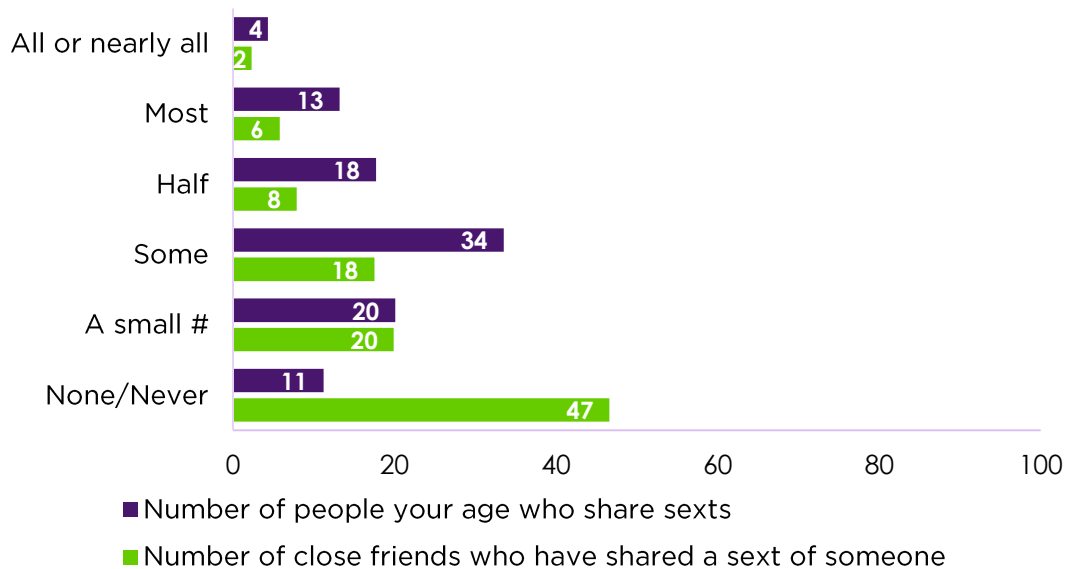
In the same way that girls who violate stereotyped gender norms by sending sexts can be perceived by their peers as being justly punished when their sexts are shared, so too can those who send sexts be seen as having given up their right to determine whether those sexts are shared. This, perhaps, is the best explanation for why sharing of solicited sexts – which one might think of as involving the worst breach of trust – is also the most common.

## Homophily and social norming

*How common youth think sharing sexts is, whether they think their friends would expect them to share a sext, and (especially) whether they would expect their friends to share a sext with them are all associated with sharing sexts.*

There is a greater difference between participants' perceptions of the frequency of *sharing* sexts among youth in general and among their close friends than there is for *sending* sexts:

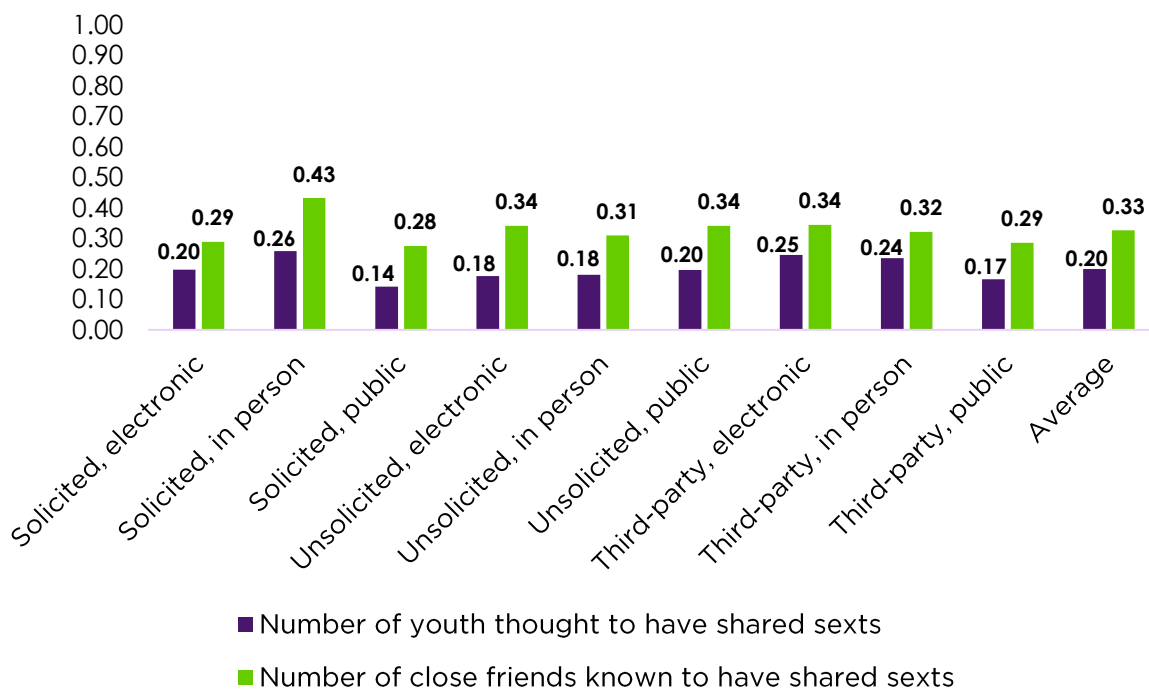
Figure 31: Perceived frequency of sharing sexts by peers and close friends





Both perceived social norms and homophily (the social bonds between peers, particularly those of the same gender) have been shown in past research to be associated with similar behaviours such as bullying and sexual harassment. The perceived rate at which youth in general shared sexts had a small but significant correlation with most types of sharing. The number of close friends whom participants thought they knew for certain had shared sexts, however, had a considerably stronger effect:

Figure 32: Correlations between perceived prevalence and sharing sexts

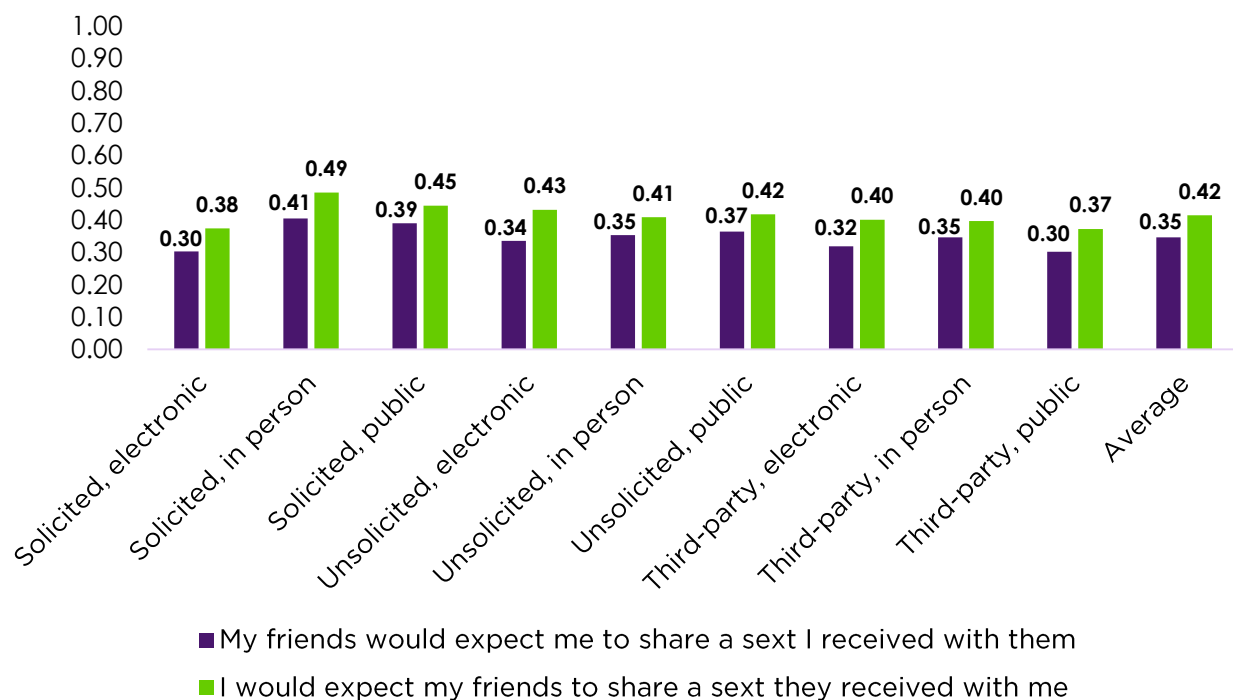


It is perhaps not surprising that the behaviour of close friends – which participants would feel they had a more certain knowledge of – would have a stronger association with sharing sexts than vaguer notions of how their peers in general behave. Given the clear influence of factors such as gender stereotyping, though, it is also possible that sharing behaviour indicates a subgroup of youth with social norms which make it seem normal and acceptable.

This suggests that homophily has a greater influence on sharing behaviour than general perceptions of prevalence. The two questions designed to measure this – whether the

participants thought their friends would expect them to share a sext they received, and whether they would expect friends to share sexts they've received with them – had a stronger average association with sharing behaviour than perceived frequency among either youth in general or close friends. Peer pressure has often been cited as a reason for sharing sexts with friends, and while these data do support that, they also suggest that reciprocity – taking an action in hopes of being rewarded in the future – is at least as important, since the strongest association was with participants expecting to see sexts that their friends received.

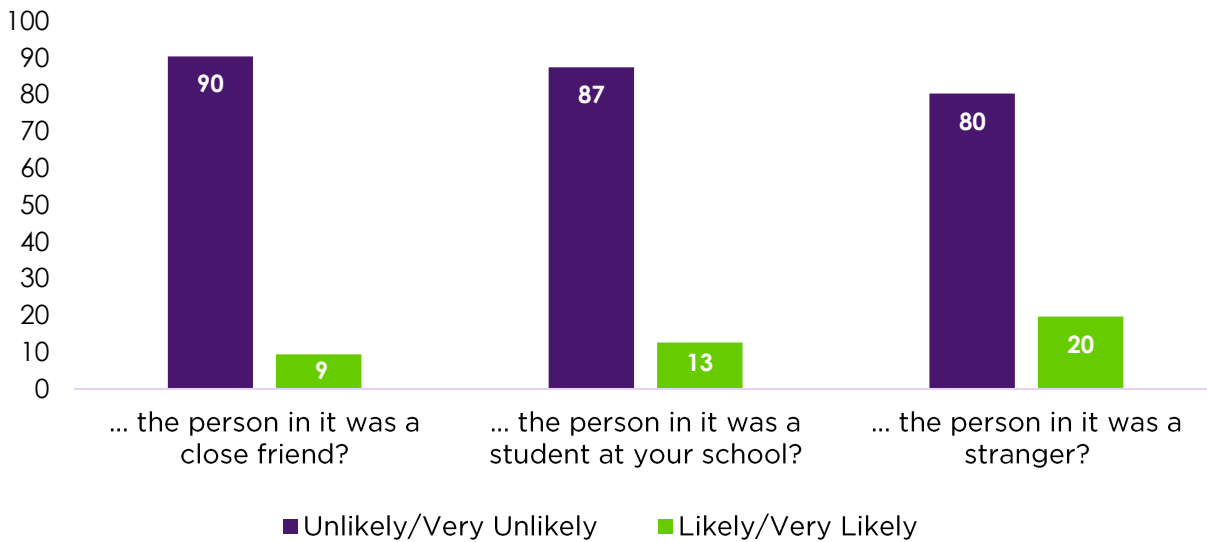
Figure 33: Correlations between homophily and sharing sexts



Interestingly, there were not consistent differences between male and female participants in this context – indeed, several types of sharing were more strongly associated with homophily for girls than for boys. This suggests that while gender stereotypes are definitely associated with sharing, the social bonds that in some cases normalize it are not exclusive to or even consistently more powerful amongst boys.

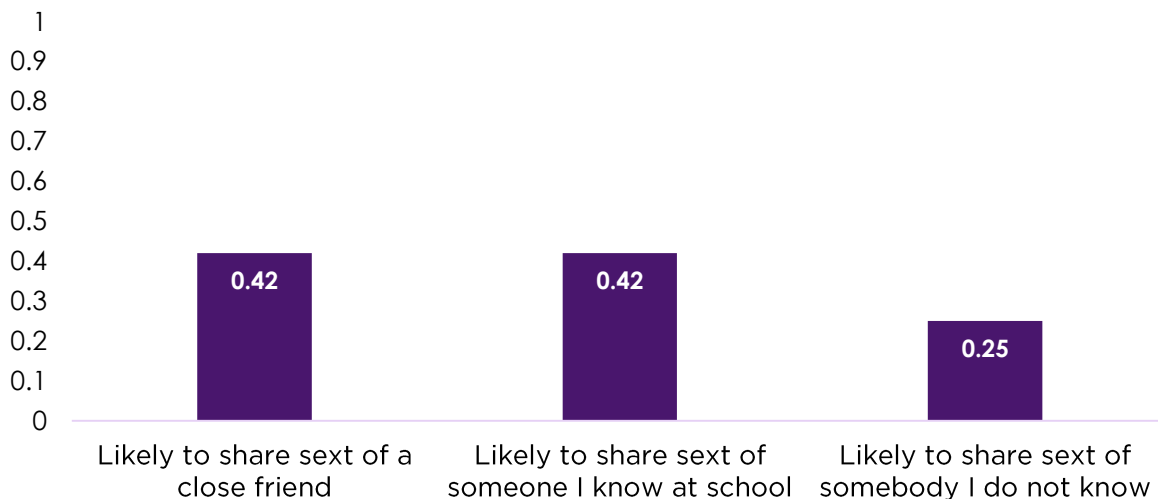
A related factor that participants indicated would affect their sharing decisions was how well they knew the subject. As in MediaSmarts' research on witness responses to cyberbullying, participants' moral qualms varied depending on their social distance from the victim:

Figure 34: How likely would you be to share a sext if...



It seems likely that, as with the moral disengagement mechanisms discussed above, greater social distance can act as an “empathy trap,” making participants less able (or willing) to think about the possible harms done to those whose sexts they have shared. Though more participants said they would be likely or very likely to share strangers’ sexts than those of a close friend or schoolmate, there was a strong correlation between the latter two and actual sharing behaviour:

Figure 35: Correlation between social distance and sharing sexts



In other words, sharing sexts of friends or acquaintances seems to require some degree of advance intention, while there is a substantially weaker connection between whether youth are expected to share sexts of people they do not know and whether they actually do so.

There was no consistency between the context in which participants imagined themselves likely to share sexts and the contexts in which they actually did it:

- being likely to share a sext of a close friend was most strongly correlated with sharing an unsolicited sext (.44) and most weakly with sharing a solicited one (.39),
- being likely to share a sext of someone they knew at school had a similar correlation in all three contexts (between .4 and .42),
- and being likely to share sext of someone they did not know was actually most weakly correlated with sharing third-party sexts (.22) and most strongly with sharing unsolicited sexts (.277).

## Parents, educators and legal consequences

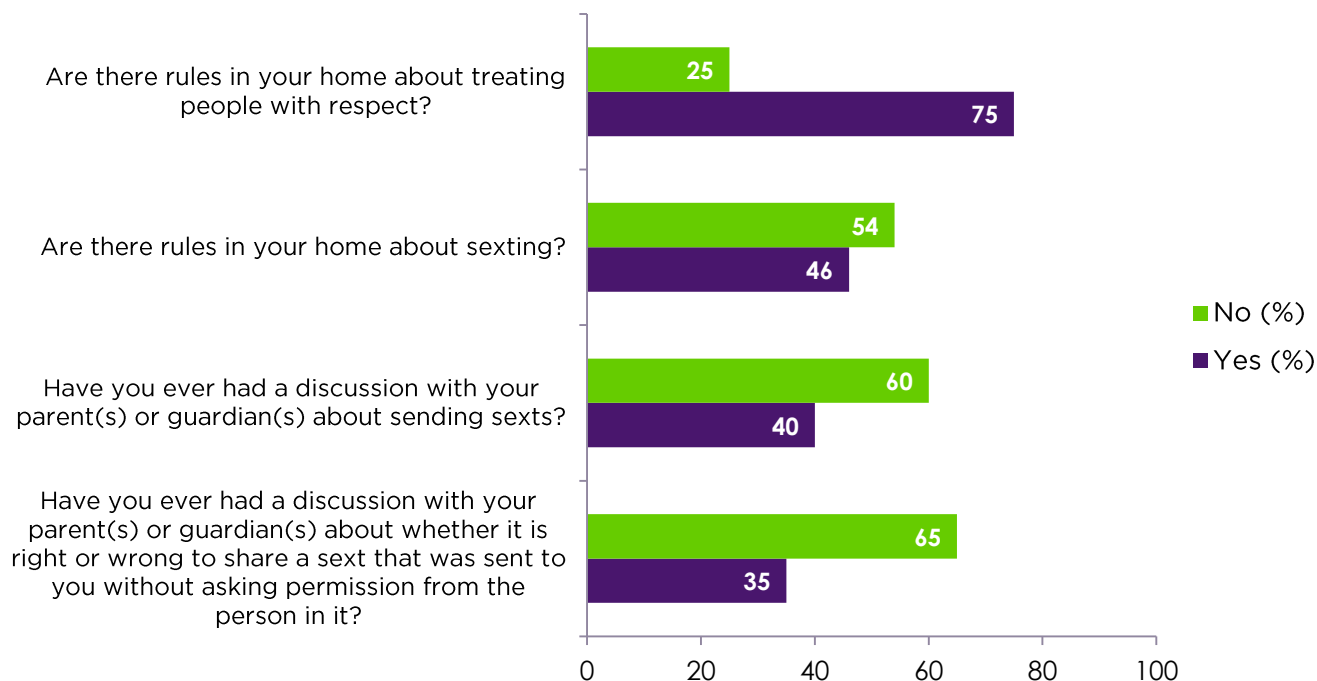
*Rules or discussion in the home, educational programs, and awareness of criminal law relating to non-consensual sharing have little or no association with sharing behaviour.*

Sending or receiving a sext should be seen as distinct from non-consensual sharing of sexts.<sup>32</sup> This has implications for education and intervention with youth, parents and teachers.

## Parental involvement

While a sizable majority of participants had a rule in the home about treating people with respect online, fewer than half had a rule specifically relating to sexting, and just over a third had talked to their parents about either sending or sharing sexts.

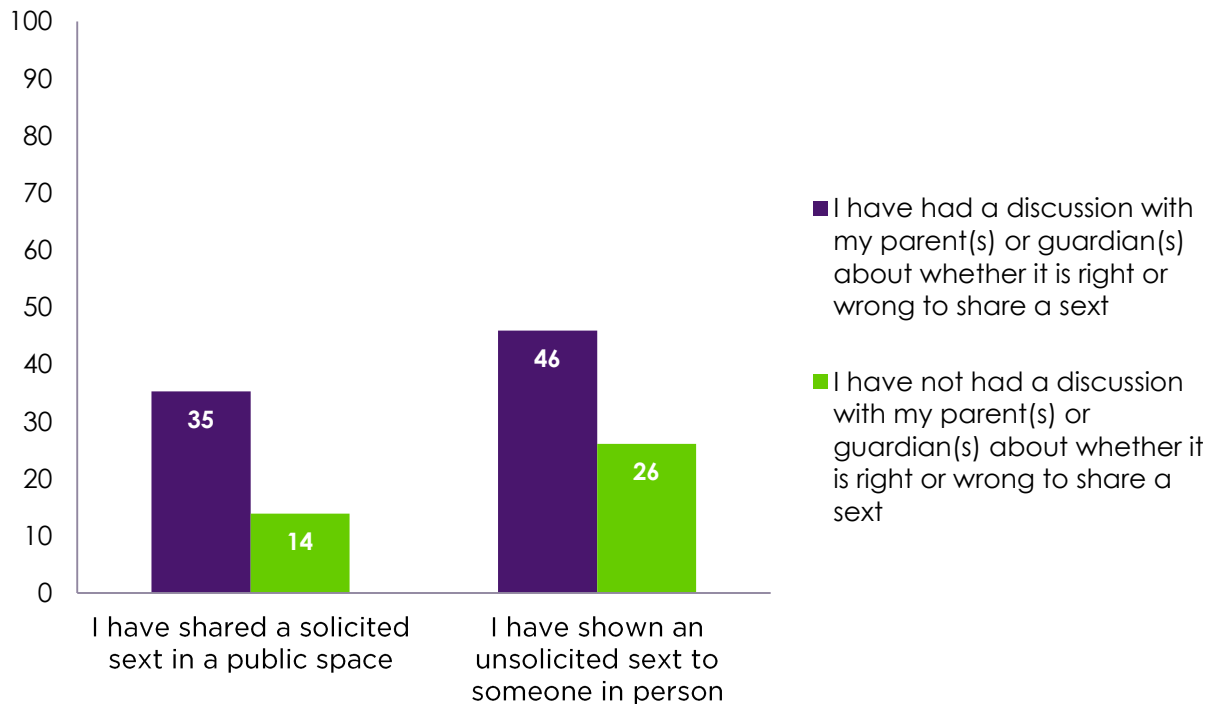
Figure 36: Parental Involvement



<sup>32</sup> Krieger, M.A. (2017). Unpacking “sexting”: A systematic review of non-consensual sexting in legal, education, and psychological literatures. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 18*(5), 593-601.

There were few associations, however, found between these rules and sharing behaviour. The only exception was that those participants whose parents had discussed the morality of sharing sexts were somewhat more likely to have done so in two contexts:

Figure 37: Association between sharing discussion and sharing sexts (% of sext recipients)

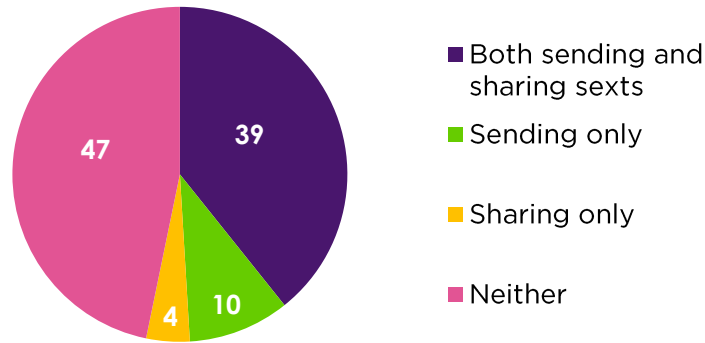


It should be noted that in both of those cases, the correlation was only significant for one of the genders surveyed (girls for sharing solicited sexts in a public space, and boys for showing unsolicited sexts in person) and that, as with all correlations, there is no way to know how the two factors influence one another: it may be that parents are more likely to discuss the morality of sharing sexts if they are aware that their children have already done so. As a result, this finding should be interpreted with caution.

## Education

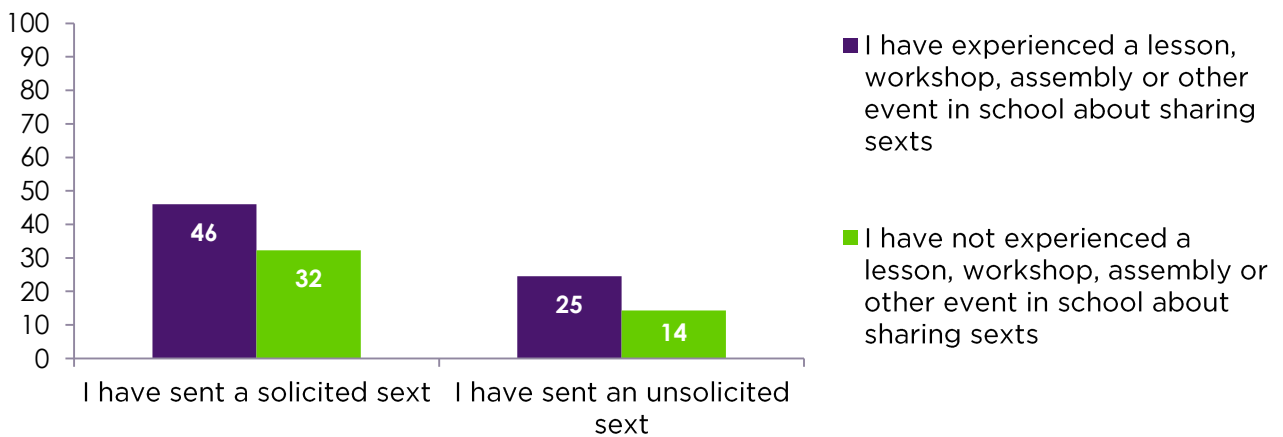
Just over half of participants had engaged in some sort of school program about sexting. Of these, most covered both sending and sharing sexts, while a smaller number only covered sending and an even smaller number only sharing:

Figure 38: I have experienced a lesson, workshop, assembly or other event in school about sexting



Neither education about sexting in general, or about sharing sexts in particular, had any association with sharing behaviour. Those who had experienced lessons about sending or sharing sexts were slightly more likely to have *sent* sexts:

Figure 39: Association between sharing education and sending sexts (% of total sample)

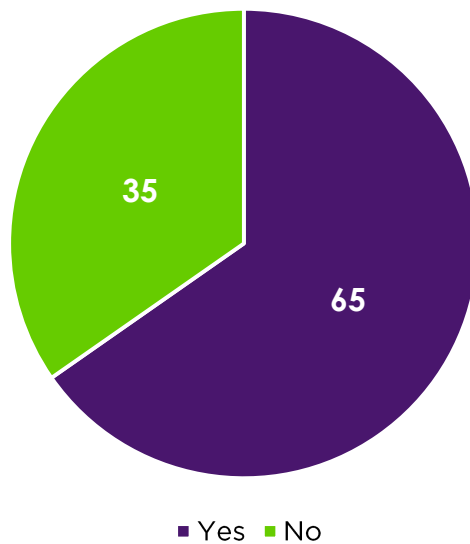


This association was stronger for boys than for girls in both cases and, as with parental discussion, may reflect an increased intention by educators to address this once it has already become an issue.

## Legal consequences

Nearly two-thirds of participants were aware that non-consensual sharing of intimate images is against the law in Canada:

Figure 40: Did you know that sharing a sext of someone without their permission is a crime in Canada?



Girls who were aware of the law were slightly less likely to have shared a solicited sext electronically, but otherwise no relationship was found between knowledge of the law and sharing behaviour.



## Implications for interventions, research and policy

*These findings provide important guidance for parents, educators and policymakers in discouraging non-consensual sharing of sexts.*

Based on these findings:

1. Interventions, curriculum and policy must distinguish between *sending* sexts and *sharing* sexts non-consensually and should take different approaches to each. Parents and other adults who have youth in their care should be supported in understanding the importance of addressing both issues.
2. Parents and other adults require education and information about sexting among youth, including the frequency, which suggests that this behaviour is becoming more common or normalized among young people. Programming must include support for parents and teachers to be able to have discussions on this topic with youth.
3. Interventions relating to *sending* sexts should take a sex education approach, recognizing that sending sexts to willing recipients is not by itself a harmful activity. More research should be conducted to examine associated risks and protective factors, to better identify the one-sixth of girls who send solicited sexts at a high frequency, and to further explore the contexts in which unsolicited sexts are sent.
4. Greater awareness needs to be raised among parents, educators and the general public about *non-consensual sharing of sexts* by youth. Parents and educators must be offered more, and more targeted, support to help them discuss the issue of non-consensual sharing of sexts with children and youth:
  - a. Interventions should avoid victim-blaming and focus on minimizing the non-consensual sharing of sexts.
  - b. Parents should be encouraged to talk to their children specifically about the moral aspects of sharing sexts and the ethical obligation to resist pressure from peers to share sexts.
  - c. Resources for educators should be evaluated thoroughly to make sure they are effective before being widely adopted.
5. More research should be conducted to better identify the one-third of youth who share sexts frequently.

6. Interventions for both parents and educators should involve confronting the four moral disengagement mechanisms – cognitive restructuring, distortion of consequences, displacement/diffusion of responsibility, and victim-blaming – in the context of sharing sexts.
7. Interventions should include a component on confronting gender stereotypes and countering social norms and expectations of reciprocity in relation to sharing sexts.
8. Interventions should include accurate data on sharing rates among youth. If they include information on criminal law, it should be presented as a tool available for those whose sexts have been shared, rather than a risk or consequence of sharing them.
9. Mixed-group interventions should focus on moral disengagement primarily, but include specific material on gender stereotyping. Interventions delivered to single-sex male groups should have a stronger anti-stereotyping component.
10. Targeted interventions should be delivered to youth who have shared sexts, aimed at de-normalizing sharing by confronting gender stereotypes and helping them to recognize and avoid moral disengagement.

## Methodology

For this study, in August and September 2017, an anonymous, Internet-based survey was administered by Environics Research Group to 800 young people aged 16-20 years across Canada.

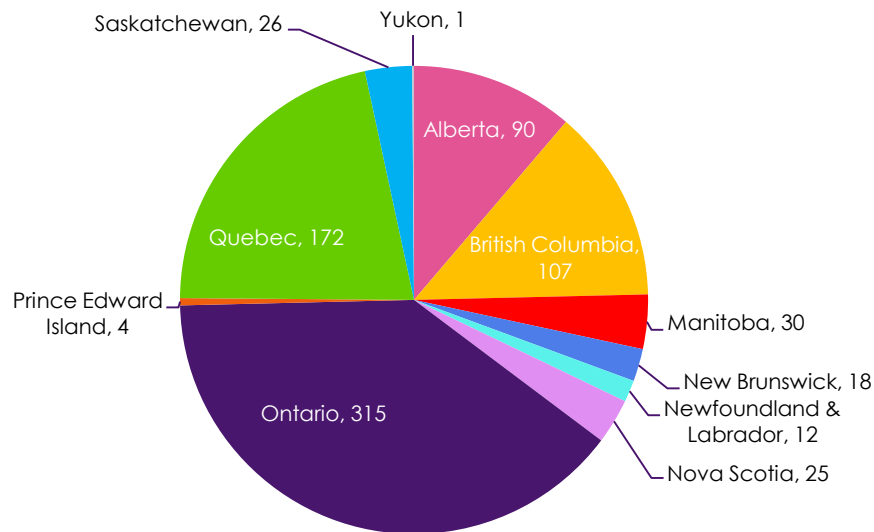
Table 1

Gender	
Males	366
Females	419
Trans	8
Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming/Non-binary	5
Other (Please specify)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>800</b>

Table 2

Age	
16-17	325
18-19	262
20	213
<b>Total</b>	<b>800</b>

Participants were selected to be representative of the geographic distribution of Canada's population. All 10 provinces were represented, and one of the three territories.



The questionnaire asked about a range of sexting behaviours, but our analysis focused primarily on three different ways of *sharing* sexts in three different contexts:

*Solicited* sexts which the recipient had asked the sender for,

- shared electronically (e.g. by forwarding or sending an electronic image)
- shared in person (e.g. by showing someone an image on a digital device)
- posted in public space (e.g. website or social network)

*Unsolicited* sexts, which the recipient had not asked the sender for,

- shared electronically
- shared in person
- posted in public space

And *third-party sexts* that the recipient received from someone other than the original sender,

- shared electronically
- shared in person
- posted in public space.