

How Often Are Teens Arrested for Sexting? Data From a National Sample of Police Cases



WHAT'S KNOWN ON THIS SUBJECT: Media reports suggest that adolescents are being charged with sex crimes and even placed on sex offender registries because of participating in the “sexting” of sexual images, but the nature and outcomes of such incidents have not been described empirically.



WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS: This is the first study to examine types of sexting cases handled by police. It informs clinicians by identifying characteristics of “aggravated” versus milder incidents and finding that most youth were not arrested. Sex offender registration was rare.

abstract

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OBJECTIVE: To examine characteristics of youth sexting cases handled by police and their outcomes in response to clinical and other concerns about the risks of sexting behavior.

METHODS: Mail surveys were sent to a stratified national sample of 2712 law enforcement agencies followed by detailed telephone interviews with investigators about a nationally representative sample of sexting cases handled by police during 2008 and 2009 ($n = 675$). The cases involved “youth-produced sexual images” that constituted child pornography under relevant statutes according to respondents.

RESULTS: US law enforcement agencies handled an estimated 3477 cases of youth-produced sexual images during 2008 and 2009 (95% confidence interval: 3282–3672). Two-thirds of the cases involved an “aggravating” circumstance beyond the creation and/or dissemination of a sexual image. In these aggravated cases, either an adult was involved (36% of cases) or a minor engaged in malicious, non-consensual, or abusive behavior (31% of cases). An arrest occurred in 62% of cases with an adult involved, in 36% of the aggravated youth-only cases, and in 18% of the “experimental” cases (youth-only and no aggravating elements). Most of the images (63%) were distributed by cell phone only and did not reach the Internet. Sex offender registration applied in only a few unusual cases.

CONCLUSIONS: Many of the youth sexting cases that come to the attention of police include aggravating circumstances that raise concerns about health and risky sexual behavior, although some cases were relatively benign. Overall, arrest is not typical in cases with no adults involved. *Pediatrics* 2012;129:4–12

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Sexual images produced and disseminated by youth, or what has come to be called “youth sexting,” have prompted considerable worry and controversy among law enforcement, public health officials, pediatricians, and psychologists. To some, the concern is that young people are adding unknowingly to the already daunting supply of illegal online child pornography and compromising futures with images that could be permanently available to colleges and employers. Others are concerned that youth are being charged with serious sex crimes and placed on sex offender registries for impulsive teenage indiscretions.^{1,2} Furthermore, pediatricians may be faced with questions about sexting from young people and their parents.

Unfortunately, however, not much can be said systematically about what sexting is and how it is appearing to and being handled by authorities. Some coverage in the media portrays it as children taking pictures of each other in their underwear at sleepovers.³ Other reports describe it as extremely exploitative, devastating, and associated with suicides.⁴

This research empirically examines police-investigated sexting cases based on data gathered from interviews with investigators about a nationally representative sample of 675 sexting cases in 2008 and 2009. Although cases that come to the attention of police are not indicators of the overall prevalence or characteristics of sexting, they provide some of the best data that can be systematically accessed for details about this phenomenon, and data from such cases directly address questions about the criminal ramifications of sexting. We estimate the number of sexting incidents that reached police and, using a typology of sexting cases, describe the circumstances in which sexting images were created and distributed and whether youth were criminally charged and required to register as sex offenders.

METHODS

Overview

We surveyed a stratified national sample of 2712 law enforcement agencies by mail asking whether they had handled sexting cases during 2008 or 2009. Detailed telephone interviews were then conducted with investigators about specific cases reported in the mail surveys. In addition, interviewers wrote narrative descriptions of cases, which were coded to construct a typology of sexting cases handled by police.⁵

Sample

The data about sexting cases were collected as part of the Third National Juvenile Online Victimization Study, a study of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation crimes. The sample of law enforcement agencies was designed to yield a nationally representative sample of such cases. A 3-frame stratified sample of agencies was used because technology-facilitated cases do not occur with equal probability among the more than 15 000 US law enforcement agencies. The first frame included agencies mandated to investigate Internet-related child sexual exploitation crimes ($n = 176$); these agencies were sampled with certainty. The second frame consisted of agencies with staff trained in such cases ($n = 1636$), about half of which were randomly selected for the study ($n = 815$). The third frame included all other local, county, and state law enforcement agencies in the United States ($n = 13 572$), identified from an annually updated directory of law enforcement agencies⁶; ~12% were randomly selected for the sample ($n = 1662$).

Mail and Telephone Survey Procedures

We sent mail surveys to the heads of agencies with cover letters explaining

the research. Reminder postcards and 2 follow-up mailings were sent to nonresponding agencies; we then called or faxed nonresponders to remind them of the survey. The response rate to the mail surveys was 87%.

If agencies reported sexting cases, the survey asked for contact information for the investigating officer. Trained interviewers then contacted investigators to schedule interviews. Interviewers used a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system to gather details about reported cases. Data were collected between March 2010 and March 2011. The response rate to telephone interviews was 65%. Figure 1 provides details about the dispositions of the mail survey and telephone interview samples. Study procedures were approved by the University of New Hampshire Human Subjects Review Board.

Measures

Because the term “sexting” is imprecise in its meaning, we use a more specific expression, “youth-produced sexual images” (shortened in this article to “sexual images” or “images”). The mail survey included the following question, which we used to identify sexual image cases: “During 2008 or 2009, did your agency handle any cases that involved sexual images created by minors (age 17 or younger) AND these images were or could have been child pornography under the statutes of your jurisdiction? Please include cases in which minors took pictures of themselves OR other minors, including ‘sexting,’ such cases that may have been crimes, but were not prosecuted for various reasons, [and] cases handled as juvenile offenses.”

To determine how sexually explicit the images were, the follow-up telephone interview asked whether pictures “focused on genitals or showed explicit sexual activity.” The interview also

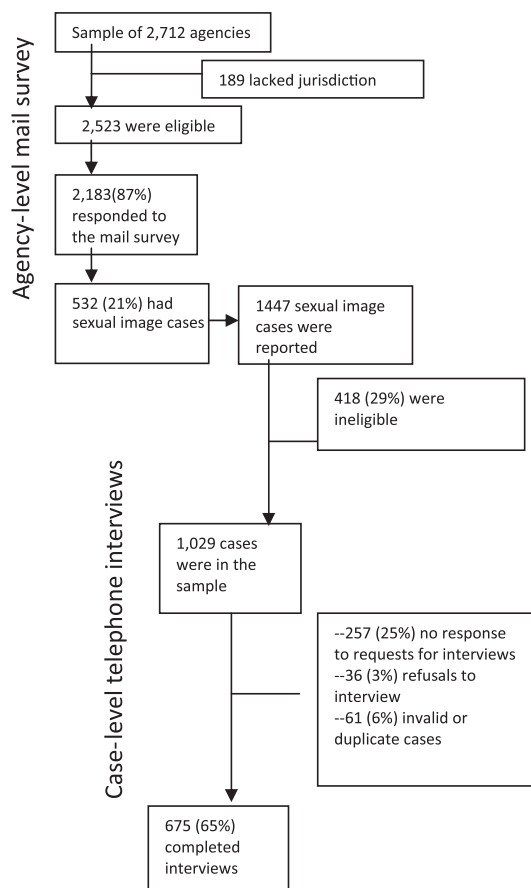


FIGURE 1 Youth-produced sexual image cases handled by law enforcement agencies during 2008 and 2009: dispositions of the mail and telephone surveys.

included questions about who created and distributed images and their behavior and how police handled cases.

Statistical Analyses

We conducted weighted descriptive analyses using Stata SE11 survey data analysis procedures. Data were weighted to reduce bias resulting from variations in selection probabilities, response propensity, and nonresponse.⁷

Typology of Sexual Image Cases

We use a typology of sexual image cases⁵ to categorize findings (see Fig 2). The typology divides cases into 2 broad categories: “aggravated” and “experimental.” Aggravated incidents involved additional criminal or abusive elements beyond the creation, sending, or possession of sexual images.

These additional elements were divided into 2 subcategories: (1) adult involved (ie, adults were recipients or solicitors of images) or (2) youth only. The youth-only cases involved either intent to harm (eg, extortion, sexual abuse, maliciousness) or reckless misuse (ie, creating or distributing images without the knowledge or against the will of a minor who was pictured).

In contrast to the aggravated cases, experimental incidents did not involve adults or appear to include any intent to harm or reckless misuse. These experimental incidents are not a normative youth behavior. Only a small proportion of youth have created or been pictured in sexual images.⁸ However, these incidents appear to grow out of typical adolescent impulses to flirt, find romantic partners, experiment with

sex, and get attention from peers. We found 3 subcategories of experimental cases. In romantic incidents, the sexual images were created for established boyfriends or girlfriends. In attention-seeking incidents, they were created to generate romantic interest in other youth or for more general attention-seeking. There was also a small group of miscellaneous “other” incidents. Examples of cases in each category of the typology are described in the Appendix.

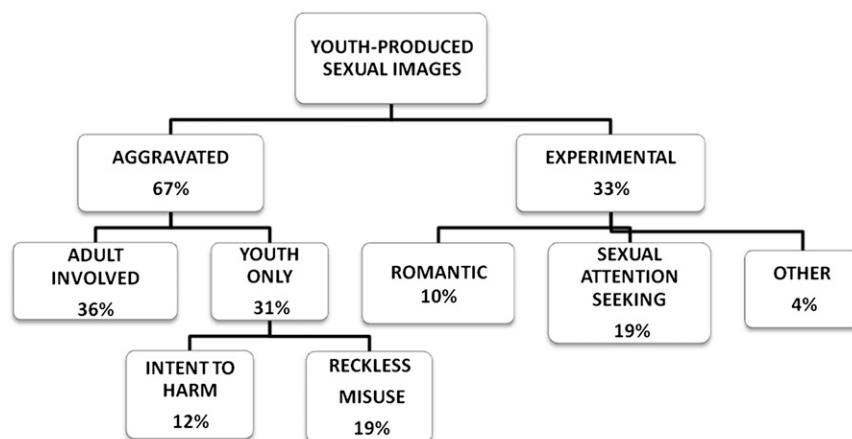
RESULTS

Estimated Number of Sexual Image Cases Handled by Law Enforcement

US law enforcement agencies handled an estimated 3477 cases of youth-produced sexual images during 2008 and 2009 (95% confidence interval: 3282–3672). Approximately 2291 law enforcement agencies saw at least 1 such case during that time (95% confidence interval: 2269–2314).

Aggravated Sexual Image Cases and Experimental Cases

Table 1 shows case characteristics that resulted in incidents being categorized as adult involved, youth-only aggravated, or youth-only experimental (eg, age of offender, criminal behavior, lack of consent) and describes case outcomes. Of cases known to police, 36% involved adults. Although adult-involved aggravated cases generally featured child sexual abuse or exploitation, the cases varied considerably. For example, 38% involved adults aged ≥ 25 , but in 50%, the offenders were young adults, aged 18 to 24. In 10% of cases, the adults were 18- or 19-year-old high school students who legitimately belonged to adolescent peer groups that included minors. Also, 5% of adult-involved cases included minors who were sending sexual images to adults to solicit them for sex.

**FIGURE 2**

Typology of youth-produced sexual image cases known to law enforcement. To create the typology we reviewed the narrative case descriptions prepared by interviewers to identify the themes that were used to describe the case types and subtypes. We then circulated the initial typology among researchers in the field and revised it on the basis of their comments. We used quantitative data and narrative case summaries to categorize cases as to type. The quantitative data included variables that described whether various aggravating circumstances occurred (eg, adult involvement; criminal behavior such as blackmail or violence; lack of consent to being photographed or to distribution, including images forwarded by a recipient). Cases that could not be classified on the basis of such variables were coded using the narrative case descriptions. All cases were double-coded by project staff with discrepancies resolved by the study director.

Thirty-one percent of cases were “youth-only” aggravated because youth behaved in a nonconsensual, malicious, exploitative, or criminal way. Among these cases, 19% involved criminal behavior in addition to the creation, dissemination, or possession of sexual images, for example, blackmail or sexually abusing a younger minor. The most prevalent aggravating factor in the youth-only aggravated cases was distribution of images without consent (57%).

The remaining cases (33%) were what we termed experimental. By definition, experimental cases involved no apparent aggravating factors. Thirty-two percent of experimental cases occurred in romantic relationships (10% of total cases). The majority (57%) involved sexual attention-seeking (19% of total cases). The rest (11%) were incidents with no apparent sexual motivation, for example, adolescents who took pictures of themselves out of curiosity (4% of total cases). About two-thirds of all cases, whether aggravated

or experimental, involved images that showed genitals or sexual activity.

How Police Handled Cases

When adults were involved, arrest occurred in 62% of cases. Arrest occurred in 36% of youth-only aggravated cases. In the experimental cases, 18% involved an arrest. Five percent of youth-only aggravated offenders ($n = 10$) were subjected to sex offender registration. Seven of the 10 had sexually assaulted and photographed victims. Two used the Internet to entice victims to send them images. The only juvenile offender subject to sex offender registration who did not commit crimes beyond the creation and distribution of sexual images was a 14-year-old boy who sent a picture of his penis to a schoolmate. He had an extensive criminal history, including a burglary conviction.

Distribution of Sexual Images

Sexual images were distributed in 84% of all cases. In the other cases, images

were not made for distribution or they were discovered before distribution (Table 2). Cell phone was the most common mode of distribution (78% of distribution cases), and importantly, in 63% of cases, cell phone was the only mode of distribution, meaning that no online distribution appeared to have occurred.

DISCUSSION

This study suggests that youth production of sexual images, or what has come to be called sexting, is a diverse phenomenon. Some episodes involve serious criminal dynamics, such as adults interacting sexually with underage youth or young people engaging in blackmail or other criminal or malicious behavior, or recklessly circulating images. However, sexting also involves episodes, an estimated 33%, with no malicious elements, that were better characterized as experimental romantic and sexual attention-seeking among adolescents.

We estimated the total number of such cases coming to police attention was 3477 in 2008 and 2009, or about 1750 per year. This is a relatively small number for a category of crime nationally. For example, homicides involving juvenile victims numbered 1675 in 2008, roughly the same size.⁹ Nonetheless, our findings suggest that a substantial number of law enforcement agencies, ~2290 nationwide in 2008 and 2009, are dealing with sexting incidents. The study says little, however, about the frequency of sexting among the youth population because the vast majority of incidents likely never come to police attention. A recent telephone survey of a national sample of youth aged 10 to 17 intended to estimate the activity more directly found that only 1% reported creating or appearing in sexually explicit images.⁹ Nonetheless, 1 out of every 100 youth adds up to a considerable number of incidents, so the

TABLE 1 Youth-Produced Sexual Image Cases Handled by Law Enforcement Agencies During 2008 and 2009: Characteristics of Cases by Case Type^a

| Characteristics of Cases | Case Type | | | |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| | Adult Involved Aggravated <i>n</i> = 278 % (<i>n</i>) | Youth-Only Aggravated <i>n</i> = 183 % (<i>n</i>) | Experimental <i>n</i> = 214 % (<i>n</i>) | All Cases <i>n</i> = 675 % (<i>n</i>) |
| Age of offender, adult-involved cases | | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| ≤17 ^b | 5 (17) | | | |
| 18–24 | 50 (119) | | | |
| ≥25 | 38 (118) | | | |
| Unknown | 7 (24) | | | |
| Youngest minor involved in case | | | | |
| 5 or younger | <1 (2) | <1 (2) | 1 (3) | <1 (7) |
| 6–10 | 1 (7) | 4 (8) | 1 (4) | 2 (19) |
| 11 or 12 | 13 (31) | 10 (21) | 8 (19) | 10 (71) |
| 13–15 | 60 (165) | 62 (113) | 69 (140) | 64 (418) |
| 16 or 17 | 24 (71) | 24 (39) | 21 (48) | 23 (158) |
| Case involved criminal behavior ^c | | | | |
| Blackmail or attempts to blackmail | 7 (22) | 9 (18) | 0 | 5 (40) |
| Other coercion (eg, bullying) | 4 (13) | 6 (9) | 0 | 3 (22) |
| Threats of violence or actual violence | 2 (8) | 5 (11) | 0 | 3 (19) |
| Sexual abuse/exploitation by a minor | 0 | 5 (11) | 0 | n/a |
| No criminal behavior ^d | 0 | 81 (114) | 100 (214) | n/a |
| Case involved interpersonal conflict | 0 | 16 (38) | 0 | 5 (38) |
| Photograph was taken ^e | | | | |
| By surprise | <1 (2) | 8 (12) | 0 | 3 (14) |
| Using deception | 2 (12) | 4 (6) | 0 | 2 (18) |
| Over objection of subject | 4 (7) | 2 (5) | 0 | 2 (12) |
| While subject was asleep/unconscious | <1 (2) | 2 (4) | 0 | 1 (6) |
| With hidden camera | <1 (1) | 1 (2) | 0 | 1 (3) |
| Other lack of consent | 0 | 1 (2) | 0 | <1 (2) |
| No apparent lack of consent | 92 (253) | 82 (152) | 100 (214) | 91 (619) |
| Images were distributed ^e | | | | |
| Without the knowledge of a subject | 11 (30) | 57 (100) | 0 | 22 (130) |
| Over the objection of a subject | 5 (15) | 13 (24) | 0 | 6 (39) |
| No apparent lack of consent | 86 (236) | 38 (73) | 97 (211) | 75 (520) |
| Images were forwarded by a recipient | 8 (19) | 54 (90) | 0 | 20 (109) |
| Images showed genitals or explicit sex ^e | 70 (208) | 62 (115) | 68 (150) | 67 (473) |
| There was an arrest | 62 (172) | 36 (71) | 18 (47) | 39 (290) |
| Suspect was charged ^f | | | | |
| With federal crimes | 8 (35) | 0 | 0 | 3 (35) |
| With state crimes | 57 (146) | 18 (38) | 5 (17) | 28 (201) |
| In juvenile court | 2 (5) | 29 (54) | 17 (41) | 15 (100) |
| Felony plea or conviction | 35 (103) | 5 (13) | 1 (7) | 14 (123) |
| As a result of this case, suspect will or will likely be a registered sex offender | 45 (128) | 5 (10) | 0 | 17 (138) |

n/a, not applicable.

^a Results are weighted to reflect selection probabilities. *ns* and percentages may not be proportionate because some cases have more influence than others. Some totals do not round to 100% because of rounding or missing data. Missing data are shown when they exceed 5%.

^b Police considered some minors to be offenders because they aggressively pursued sexual contacts with adults.

^c Categories are not mutually exclusive.

^d By definition, all adult-involved aggravated cases and no experimental cases involved criminal behavior.

^e We used a question based on the federal definition of child pornography to determine whether images were sexually explicit (ie, images showed genitals or sexual activity). Cases with no sexually explicit images involved nude or seminude images that were not sexually explicit.

^f Some minors who were charged in state court also had juvenile court cases.

potential exists for growth in cases coming to official attention.

The diversity of cases identified in the study clearly undermines some reports

that suggest sexting is relatively harmless or confined to dating behavior. Only 10% of cases involved images created for or sent to established adolescent

girlfriends or boyfriends. At the other extreme, youth-produced sexual images played a role in criminal sexual relationships between adult sex offenders and minors. Such cases can be challenging to pediatricians, parents, and authorities because underage victims may have strong attachments to adult offenders and may not perceive themselves as having been victimized.^{10,11} To manage these cases effectively, clinicians must be sensitive to the perceptions of victims and not assume that youth will be eager to cooperate or see the situation as criminal.¹²

Even when no adults were involved, a notable minority of cases involved criminal activities. Close to 10% of the youth-only aggravated cases included blackmail, and smaller percentages involved violence and sexual abuse. Other incidents were motivated by malice arising from conflicts between individuals, often after breakups of relationships. Additional cases involved the misuse of images that were taken or sent without the consent of a pictured minor.

However, one-third of episodes, the experimental incidents, lacked aggravating elements and appeared to be voluntary. Such incidents were comparatively benign and may best be viewed as adolescent sexual experimentation rather than as matters for police. Nonetheless, many of these incidents raise concerns about risky behavior by, for example, very young adolescents or youth who appeared to be using sexual images to garner inappropriate attention. Thus such experimental incidents may raise clinical issues even if they are not matters for police.

One of the key issues prompting concern about youth sexting is the vulnerability of youth to arrest and prosecution for child pornography. In fact, at least two-thirds of the cases did appear to involve images that would

TABLE 2 Youth-Produced Sexual Image Cases Handled by Law Enforcement Agencies During 2008 and 2009: Distribution of Youth-Produced Sexual Images by Case Type^a

| Characteristics of Distribution Cases | Case Type | | | |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| | Adult Involved Aggravated <i>n</i> = 278 % (<i>n</i>) | Youth-Only Aggravated <i>n</i> = 183 % (<i>n</i>) | Experimental <i>n</i> = 214 % (<i>n</i>) | All cases <i>n</i> = 675 % (<i>n</i>) |
| Images were distributed | 86 (243) | 83 (148) | 83 (178) | 84 (569) |
| Cases where images were distributed ^b | | | | |
| A minor took and distributed picture of self | 90 (215) | 66 (97) | 93 (169) | 84 (481) |
| How images were distributed | | | | |
| Sent to another but not posted ^c | 86 (211) | 82 (118) | 84 (148) | 84 (477) |
| Posted online, not sent to anyone | 5 (11) | 5 (9) | 11 (23) | 7 (43) |
| Both posted and sent | 9 (21) | 13 (21) | 5 (7) | 9 (49) |
| Images were found on ^d | | | | |
| Cell phone | 76 (159) | 85 (121) | 74 (134) | 78 (414) |
| Computer or computer media | 37 (113) | 21 (38) | 20 (36) | 27 (187) |
| Online site | 12 (31) | 16 (24) | 13 (28) | 14 (83) |
| Digital camera or memory card | 7 (22) | 6 (5) | 9 (10) | 7 (37) |
| Ipod or mp3 player | 1 (3) | 0 | 2 (2) | 1 (5) |
| Other place | 3 (3) | <1 (1) | 1 (2) | 1 (6) |
| Images found on cell phone only | 57 (106) | 69 (96) | 65 (114) | 63 (316) |

^a Results are weighted to reflect selection probabilities. *ns* and percentages may not be proportionate because some cases have more influence than others.

^b For distribution cases, *n* = 569.

^c Sent images were distributed via texting, e-mail, or instant message; posted images were copied to a Web site where access could have been public or limited.

^d Categories are not mutually exclusive.

have met the definition of child pornography under federal law and the laws of many states by showing genitals or sexual acts. However, our findings suggest that the nature of the images was not a crucial factor in how police handled these cases, given that relatively few youth were arrested, especially in the experimental cases.

Another important policy issue is the question of how many youth-produced sexual images are circulated online where they potentially could become fodder for the child pornography trade. Importantly, in nearly two-thirds of cases, images were confined to cell phone storage and transmission and had not been posted online. This does not mean that the images could never find their way to the Internet, but cell phone images are less accessible. Pediatricians may be able to use this finding to reassure youth and parents that images in sexting incidents usually do not become generally available online.

Another controversial issue highlighted by some widely publicized episodes³ is

whether police are treating sexting juveniles as serious sex offenders and child pornography producers. It is difficult to evaluate this issue fully without an examination of all the details of individual cases. However, it appears that most youth who simply produce or transmit images are not being treated as offenders. In >80% of the experimental cases and even 64% of the aggravated youth-only cases, there was no arrest of a juvenile. On the other hand, in 18% of the experimental cases, in which there was no other criminal or malicious activity beyond the making or transmission of images, there was an arrest. This suggests that some youth may be facing exposure to criminal treatment in cases that might be better handled informally by families and clinicians.

Law enforcement is still trying to develop a consensus about how to manage these cases, and legislators have been entertaining a variety of law reforms that reflect different views on this subject.^{13,14} Some of these efforts

propose, justifiably in our view, to decriminalize youth sexting under some circumstances. It may be useful to these discussions to know, on the basis of this research, that it was not typical for law enforcement in 2008 and 2009 to treat sexting youth as criminals and subject them to arrest and prosecution.

This research is the first to systematically gather information about a national sample of sexting cases from a wide range of law enforcement agencies. However, limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting results. First, results apply only to sexting cases handled by law enforcement agencies. These cases may not be representative of sexting cases overall. Our sample probably underrepresents the number of the less serious episodes that either never come to adult attention or are handled without police involvement. Second, some errors and biases may have been introduced because we interviewed police investigators. Although their professional responsibilities require them to gather extensive information about cases, they may not have known all that occurred in sexting incidents. Also, because of their training and professional attitudes, their perspectives on what transpired during incidents may have been different from the perspectives of the youth, parents, school authorities, or others involved. Finally, since these data were gathered, laws regarding youth-produced sexual images have changed in a number of states, and thus police responses may have changed.

CONCLUSIONS

Youth sexting is a diverse phenomenon that pediatricians, psychologists, educators, parents, and policy makers may have to respond to for some time. It is important that as much social scientific information as possible is assembled to ensure that

these responses are based on empirical information rather than fear and stereotype.

Our data show varied cases and restrained responses by law enforcement. Most youth were not arrested and, of the few youth who were subject to sex offender registration laws, most had committed additional sex crimes, such as sexual assault. However, in some cases, it appeared that youth activity that might better be termed experimental had been criminalized.

Although some of the experimental cases raise concerns about risky sexual behavior, most incidents coming to police attention were more serious. Many involved criminal, malicious, or reckless behavior. Although cases with these elements are probably over-represented in police data and not frequent among the general population of adolescents, these are the most concerning cases and the situations that should be most targeted for intervention by clinicians.

APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF CASES CATEGORIZED BY TYPOLOGY⁵

Aggravated: Adult Involved

- The parents of a 14-year-old girl found nude pictures of her on her computer. She admitted sending the pictures to a 37-year-old man she had met online. The girl was in love with him. He lived in another state and never met the victim face-to-face. He was communicating with numerous adolescent girls. Police were able to identify 8 or 9 victims aged 12 to 16 who had sent him sexual images. He seemed to target victims who struggled with their self-image; many were overweight and had skin problems. The police investigator we interviewed stated that “victims said he made them feel good.” The offender also had hundreds

of photographs and videos featuring child pornography on his computer. He was charged with federal crimes and sentenced to 10 years in federal prison.

- A 14-year-old girl was drawn into a sexual relationship with her step-uncle who was 38 and lived in another state. They communicated online for about a month; then he introduced sexual topics into their conversations. He sent her sexual pictures of himself, and she sent him pictures of all sorts, including sexual images. After 6 months, the offender visited the victim and took her back to his home. While they were together, they both took hundreds of sexually explicit pictures of themselves and each other. The mother reported the offender to the police. The offender received two 10-year sentences in state court.
- A 16-year-old girl used the Internet to send sexually explicit photos of herself to numerous men and solicit them for sex. She was using a stolen computer because her parents had taken her computer away from her. The police talked to 2 of the men involved but did not charge them because the girl had portrayed herself as 18 and was physically very mature. The girl’s father had asked for help in controlling her behavior with men on several occasions. Her case was handled in juvenile court, and she was mandated to mental health counseling.

Aggravated: Youth-Only, Intent to Harm

- A girl, age 13, sent a topless photo of herself to her boyfriend, who was 14. When they broke up, the boy sent the photo to numerous teenagers via cell phone and many recipients forwarded the image to others. The police found out when 1 recipient told a parent. By then

>200 students had received the picture. The police seized >150 cell phones from students. The police and prosecutor did not charge any of the parties to the incident because so many youth were involved and police did not want to “mark kids for life” over what they deemed a relatively minor incident.

- The parents of a 16-year-old contacted police because a boy was extorting their daughter. The victim said she had accidentally uploaded a nude picture of herself to a social networking site. When she realized this, she deleted the image, but a boy from her school had already downloaded it. He threatened to distribute it if she did not send him more nude pictures. When the girl refused, the boy sent the picture to ~100 people. The boy, who was a straight-A student, was charged with a felony. He pleaded guilty and was put on probation.
- Two girls, aged 15 and 16, had been friends and schoolmates but had a falling out. The younger girl created a fake identity of a boy who appeared to be interested in the other girl (the victim). The fake boy asked to have a naked picture of the victim, which she sent. The younger girl distributed this image to her friends and eventually 50 to 100 other youth saw it. The victim and her mother went to the school resource officer, who discovered the source of the picture. The younger girl was arrested and charged with felony distribution of child pornography but pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor with community service and counseling.
- A 13-year-old girl took sexual pictures of her 3 younger sisters (aged 5, 6, and 8) and touched them sexually. Police determined that she herself had been molested by her

stepfather. A child protective services agency had been involved with the family for some time. The girl was removed from the home; the agency was taking steps to remove her younger sisters as well.

Aggravated: Youth-Only, Reckless Misuse

- At a party where there was heavy drinking, 3 boys in the shallow end of a pool pulled down their swim trunks and had a “sword fight.” A girl, 17, filmed this and sent the video via cell phone to 6 other people. The 3 boys did not know she had taken the video or sent it. The girl was charged in juvenile court.
- A boy, 16, who had been bullied in school and teased about his “male anatomy” took a picture of his penis and sent it a female classmate. The classmate, in turn, but without permission, sent it to 4 other girls. The incident was disclosed when a teacher confiscated the boy’s cell phone and found he was using the picture as a screensaver on his phone. Police investigated and deleted the images. No one was charged.

Experimental: Romantic

- A 14-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl who were boyfriend/girlfriend for a couple of weeks sent sexual pictures and videos to one another, including pictures showing masturbation. The girl’s mother found the pictures of the boy on her daughter’s cell phone and told the school resource officer that she wanted the boy prosecuted to the full extent of the law. When she found out that her daughter had also sent images, she wanted her daughter prosecuted as well. Both went to juvenile court and were assigned 20 hours of community service.
- Parents called the police when they discovered their son, 16, had received

a video of a 17-year-old boy masturbating. Their son was gay and in a relationship with the other boy. His parents were upset about his sexual orientation. The 17-year-old was put on probation and required to write an essay about what he had done.

Experimental: Sexual Attention-Seeking

- A father checked his 13-year-old daughter’s cell phone and found that a boy, 14, had sent her a picture of his penis. The father contacted the school, and the school resource officer interviewed the boy and girl. They were friends and had been texting late at night. The boy sent the picture “out of nowhere.” The girl was not particularly offended. The boy told the police he did it to be funny, but the police believed he had feelings for the girl. The teens’ parents had spoken with each other about the incident and were very cooperative. The police took no action.
- An “unpopular” girl, 15, had a crush on a classmate. She sent him videos of herself doing a striptease and playing with her breasts. He talked about these in school, but there was no evidence he showed them to other kids or that the videos were sent to others or posted. However, the girl was taunted and cyber-bullied as a result. The police talked to the teens and their parents. The girl received counseling. No one was arrested in this case.
- A girl, 15, sent unsolicited naked pictures of herself to 3 boys in her school using her cell phone, including to 1 boy who was 18. Then she and a friend went to the school resource officer because they were concerned the images would be sent around the school. However, none of the pictures were ever found, and the case was dropped.

- A girl, 17, posted nude pictures of herself on a social networking site. The Web site identified the images as possible child pornography, removed them, and reported the incident to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which forwarded the report to the local police department. The police talked with the girl, but she was not charged.

Experimental: Other

- A 10-year-old boy sent a picture of his penis to a classmate, 11, to “gross her out.” The girl showed the picture to her mother, who told the police. The boy cried when he was questioned. The police believed he did not understand the magnitude of what he had done. They left the matter to his parents.
- An 11-year-old girl took naked pictures of her breasts with her cell phone. Her grandparents discovered the images, did not think they were of the girl, and brought the phone to the police. The girl, when interviewed, admitted she took the pictures of herself but said she had not sent them to anyone, and there was no evidence to the contrary.

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CRYSTAL CLEAR SOUND: *Similar to most members of her family, my mother has had poor hearing for years. She has tried a variety of hearing aids but none seem to work particularly well. I still cannot talk to her on the phone easily and she has not been to a music concert or a movie in more than 20 years. As a pianist, she misses the opportunity to listen to live performances. Now, however, she may finally have a chance to enjoy a concert. According to an article in The New York Times (Science: October 23, 2011), more concert halls and other venues are installing loop technology to ensure that the hearing impaired can enjoy crystal clear sound. The technology is not new and has been used in Europe for quite some time. A hearing loop consists of a strand of copper linked to a microphone and installed along the edge of a room. Receivers built into hearing aids and cochlear implants pick up electromagnetic signals from the copper strand. Because the copper strand is transmitting the signal from a particular microphone, the hearing aid is only receiving the sounds from the microphone and not also amplifying other noises in the background. The loop can be installed in concert halls, auditoriums, and even ticket booths with the same effect. The loop has dramatically altered the experiences of the hearing impaired and individuals are stunned by the clarity and richness of the sound. Venues in the U.S. have been slow to adopt the technology because until recently, most hearing aids sold in the U.S. did not always include telecoils, the specialized receivers. Now, however, more than two-thirds of hearing aids and all cochlear implants sold in the U.S. come with telecoils. There is also the cost to installing the loop, which in an auditorium may cost \$10 to \$25 per seat. Still, with baby boomers aging and many adults suffering from hearing loss secondary to years of listening to loud music, more and more venues are installing the devices. While the technology has yet to arrive in our area, I may have to surprise my mother and take her on a road trip to a venue with an installed loop. It will be a concert she won't forget.*

Noted by WWR, MD

How Often Are Teens Arrested for Sexting? Data From a National Sample of Police Cases

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