

# Negative ideas about sexting encourage unwanted distribution of photos

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Sexting is 'not done.' That's a widely shared opinion. It's considered as unwise and even dangerous to make and share sexual photos or videos of yourself. If a photo leaks, the photographer is quickly blamed. But instead of preventing the unwanted distribution of sexual material, this approach actually worsens the problem. This was shown in a research report by Marijke Naezer (Radboud University) and Lotte van Oosterhout (youth communication agency Jong & Je Wil Wat), which was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and Safety.

The unwanted distribution of digital sexual visual material by young people is a major concern for parents, teachers and professionals. Up to now, information and interventions have been especially targeted at the victims. Hardly anything is known about the perpetrators. Naezer and Van Oosterhout were the first to study the motives of young people who spread sexual visual material of others without their consent. For their report, they interviewed 21 young people (15 to 21 years old): victims, bystanders and especially perpetrators.

## Crucial role of adults

Van Oosterhout says, "Our study shows that young people adopt the negative associations of the media and adults about sexting." For some perpetrators, opposing sexting was even an important motive for sharing the victim's images. "I had to teach her a lesson so she wouldn't send any more photos," said a [perpetrator](#). Van Oosterhout: "In this way, the

opinion of adults about sexting plays a crucial role in the unwanted distribution of sexual visual material."

In addition, victims are often blamed if the visual material is distributed, bystanders remain passive and the perpetrators are often not called to account. One perpetrator said: "The team leader just sent me home without any punishment. He told me to go home and have a good weekend."

Naezer says, "This sort of reaction confirms and encourages the perpetrator's behaviour, and victims don't get the support they need. This worsens the problem of unwanted distribution rather than preventing it."

## From problem to solution

The gap between [young people](#) and adults is sometimes a wide one. Victims often don't dare ask for help from [adults](#) when their material is being distributed without their permission because they are afraid of being misunderstood, blamed and shamed. Naezer says, "We think that the solution lies in interventions that aim to develop a more balanced idea of [sexting](#) and more understanding for the victims, and that focus on potential perpetrators rather than potential victims."

Provided by Radboud University

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