



# Teens and “sexting” in New Zealand: Prevalence and attitudes

DECEMBER 2017

PREPARED BY DR. EDGAR PACHECO AND NEIL MELHUISE



TEENS AND “SEXTING” IN NEW ZEALAND: PREVALENCE AND ATTITUDES

Wellington, New Zealand, December 2017

[www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz)

[research@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:research@netsafe.org.nz)

Cite as: Netsafe. (2017). *Teens and “sexting” in New Zealand: Prevalence and attitudes*. Wellington, NZ: Netsafe.

ISBN: 978-0-473-42410-7



**ATTRIBUTION-NONCOMMERCIAL-SHAREALIKE**

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> [English]

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/legalcode.mi> [Te Reo Māori]

## Foreword

Over the last ten years the sharing of nude images or videos by young people has emerged as a concern. We were therefore surprised to find that in New Zealand, no research had been conducted on the prevalence of the sharing of nudes among young New Zealanders. This study addresses this and raises important questions for all those with a role in supporting young people's healthy development.

On one hand, the findings are reassuring. They challenge preconceptions we may hold about young people's behaviour and attitudes. On the other, they suggest young people find themselves part of a culture of sharing nudes whether they like it or not. It also highlights how different groups of teens experience the sharing of nudes; including by gender, ethnicity and disability.

We believe this report makes an important contribution to the overall understanding of young people's experience of these behaviours. However, it only provides a snapshot, and more work is required to understand how best to support young people as they navigate the challenges and potential risks. The imperative comes from the majority of young people that indicate their concern about the outcomes and impact of these behaviours.

This report is being released as part of a larger project exploring young people's experiences of digital risk and harm, carried out by a partnership between Netsafe and the Ministry for Women. We deeply value the contribution of the Ministry for Women team whose encouragement and insights have helped shaped this study.

We would also like to acknowledge the input of our international partners, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner (Australia), the UK Safer Internet Centre and University of Plymouth (UK). This collaboration has enabled the comparison of young people's experiences in New Zealand, Australia and the UK, published in a separate report.

Netsafe is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation. Netsafe provides online safety education, advice and support for New Zealand internet users. Taking a technology-positive approach to the challenges digital technology presents, Netsafe works to help people in New Zealand take advantage of the opportunities available through technology by providing practical tools, support and advice for managing online challenges.

Netsafe invites any organisation with an interest in this topic to contact Neil Melhuish, Director of Policy and Research - [neilm@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:neilm@netsafe.org.nz).

Martin Cocker  
Netsafe CEO

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the first quantitative study conducted in New Zealand about the sending, receiving, and requesting of nude or nearly nude images or videos through digital technology by young people. The study focused on teens aged 14-17 years old. Currently, public attention centres on the potential risks faced by young people sharing nude content online, and the apparent pervasiveness of this behaviour. However, statistical evidence explaining its extent among young people is non-existent. Arguably, this lack of reliable research about sexting contributes to the sense of alarmism in media coverage of the topic. This study helps to address this by undertaking a survey-based research project that collected data from a representative sample of New Zealand teens.

The sharing of nudes, commonly referred to as “sexting”, is a complex and evolving behaviour. The rapid-changing nature of digital technologies is reflected in the ways people have adopted and adapted these tools for their everyday life activities. What started in the early to mid-2000s as the sending of explicit text-only phone messages has evolved to the sharing of mostly images and videos of nude content through different digital tools and platforms. Thus, the term “sexting” does not capture the scope of context and motivations surrounding these behaviours. This report uses variations of the term “sharing of nude content” defined in the following way:

*Any act or practice related to sending, receiving, requesting or being asked for mostly, but not always, self-generated nude or nearly nude images or video through digital tools and/or platforms. Such behaviour may arise for a range of reasons and contexts (e.g., consensual or non-consensual creation or sharing, relationship building, sexual self-exploration, volunteering an image, being asked for one, peer pressure, flirting, sexual exploration, coercion or extortion of content, intimidation and other abuse).*

Two specific objectives guided the study. The first objective was to gain an understanding of the prevalence and extent of sharing of nudes among teens aged 14-17 years old. Second, the study sought to identify differences in terms of gender, age, disability, and ethnic groups.

The results of the study provide significant insights into New Zealand teens’ experiences of the sharing of nudes. Strikingly, young people perceive that sharing nudes is a more common practice than it actually is. The findings also reveal some relevant differences in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, and age groups. In some cases, these differences seem not only to confirm, but also to challenge, previous assumptions about teens’ experiences and behaviours regarding the sharing of nude content. For example, the findings indicate a majority of young people are questioning these behaviours, and do so on the basis of an understanding of the motivations behind them. The findings suggest that teens find themselves part of a culture of sharing nudes; whether they are active, passive or peripheral participants.

These findings should provide government agencies, NGOs and service providers, educators, and researchers with a useful source of evidence to guide future research and inform policy discussion and interventions aimed at educating young people, and supporting their healthy development into adulthood.

## Key findings

- 4% of teens say they have sent nude or nearly nude content of themselves in the last 12 months. The percentage nearly doubles among older teens aged 17 years old (7%).
- 1 in 5 have been asked for nude or nearly nude images of themselves in the last year.
- Nearly a quarter of all girls (24%) surveyed have been asked for nude images of themselves in the last 12 months compared to boys (14%). The percentage of those receiving unsolicited nude content in the last 12 months is slightly higher in girls compared to boys as well.
- 5% of all boys surveyed have asked someone for nude images or videos of them. In contrast, the percentage for girls is 2% in the last 12 months.
- For Māori and Pacific teens it is more common to be asked for nude content of themselves than other ethnic groups.
- Nearly 1 in 4 Māori teens have received unsolicited nude or nearly nude content. This figure is higher than NZ European/Pakeha and Pacific teens.
- Teens with disabilities were more likely to be asked for nude content of themselves and receive unsolicited nude content than those without impairments.
- Almost 4 in 10 say they know someone who has shared nude pictures or videos with someone else at some point in the past.
- About half of those who have personally experienced or know someone involved in the sharing of nude content say this happens 'often or very often'. Perceptions are higher among female respondents, and Pacific teens.
- Almost 3 in 10 are aware of someone else who has received nude or nearly nude content they did not ask for, and almost a quarter are aware of someone being asked for nude or nearly nude content of themselves.
- Almost three-quarters agree that people should be punished for threatening to share images while a third think that available information and advice tackles issues related to the sharing of nude content well.
- The majority disagreed with the following statements:
  - Adults overreact about the sharing of nudes;
  - Sharing nudes is a good way to explore things about yourself;
  - It is OK to keep nudes that have been sent to you long after you received them; and
  - Sharing nudes is not a problem because everyone does it.
- Views are mixed on the degree of pressure to send nude content. Just over half of young people (54%) think that nude images or videos are sent by their peers to seek attention, gain social approval, or because of peer pressure. While views are mixed on the degree of pressure to send these types of images, females are more likely to report such pressure than males.

## Summary

The finding that around 1 in 20 teens have shared a nude of themselves in the last year suggests a difference between public perception and the reality. Simply, while many teens feel a lot of pressure to share nudes, it does not automatically follow that they do. This reflects international experience, and should help to debunk any idea that “everybody is doing it”.

However, when the definition of behaviours or the timeframe asked about is expanded, the number of young people reporting involvement increases. This suggests that while young people sharing nudes of themselves is not standard behaviour it is common enough to have entered the culture.

Young people understand these behaviours happen as part of growing up as a person. In their view, it is a forming identity, sexual exploration and building trust in a relationship. However, they consider other factors, such as peer pressure, explain this behaviour too. They are aware of the risks and most of them think that a young person is responsible for what they do online. Their attitudes to sharing nudes suggests they generally do not like the practice. However, some teens don't see sharing nudes as a problem, arguing that if adults can do it, they can too.

Not all young New Zealanders have the same experiences with these behaviours; with differences between ages, genders, ethnicities and those with a long-term disability. Among those who have sent a picture of themselves in the last 12 months, older teens are more active than younger. New Zealand girls are more likely than boys to be the target of requests for their nudes, or receiving them from other people without request. This finding reflects international research and confirms gender is an important element in explaining this behaviour. This study also revealed some significant characteristics in experiences based on participants' ethnicity; and those with a disability. Both groups are more likely to be asked for nudes of themselves, and receive unsolicited nudes, compared to others their age.

While the findings are representative of 14-17 year olds, they only provide a snapshot of their experiences. Further research into how they navigate risks and deal with potential harm caused by this behaviour is needed; and to explore the relationship between sharing nude content and other digital challenges such as online bullying, harassment, and sexual violence and abuse.

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Key findings .....	5
Summary.....	6
<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>List of Figures and Tables</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Background .....	9
Methodology .....	11
Survey tool.....	12
Sample.....	12
Research ethics .....	13
Limitations.....	13
<b>Findings</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Knowledge of others ever having shared nude pictures or videos.....	14
Personal experience of sharing nudes in the past 12 months .....	17
Awareness of others’ experiences of the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months .....	20
Level of agreement with statements regarding the sharing of nudes .....	23
In their own words: Why some teens send nudes .....	26
Attention, social approval, and social pressure.....	27
Moral stance about the behaviour .....	28
Sexual exploration/relationships .....	29
Sharing nudes as an unproblematic behaviour.....	30
<b>Discussion and Conclusion</b> .....	<b>32</b>
Why this study, why now?.....	32
What do the findings tell us? .....	32
<b>References</b> .....	<b>35</b>

## List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Knowledge of someone who has ever shared nudes or nearly nudes. ....	14
Figure 2: Knowledge of someone who has ever shared nudes or nearly nudes by gender.....	15
Figure 3: Perceived frequency of sharing nudes or nearly nudes. ....	16
Figure 4: Perceived frequency of sharing nudes or nearly nudes by gender. ....	16
Figure 5: Personal experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing nudes in the past 12 months.....	18
Figure 6: Awareness of others' experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months. ....	21
Figure 7: Level of agreement with statements regarding the sharing of nudes.....	24
Figure 8: Grouping net agreement/disagreement with statements regarding the sharing of nudes.....	26
Table 1: Knowledge of someone who has shared nudes or nearly nudes by age. ....	15
Table 2: Perceived frequency of sharing nudes and nearly nudes by ethnicity. ....	17
Table 3: Personal experiences of sharing nudes behaviours in the past 12 months by gender. ....	19
Table 4: Personal experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months by disability. ....	20
Table 5: Awareness of others' experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months by gender. ....	22
Table 6: Awareness of others' experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months by age. ....	23



## Introduction

This report on the sharing of nude or nearly nude images and videos among New Zealand teens is part of a larger project exploring young people's experiences of digital risk and harm carried out by Netsafe in partnership with the Ministry for Women. Preliminary findings, comparing New Zealand's experience with those of Australia and the UK, were presented along with figures from the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and UK Safer Internet Centre at the Online Safety on the Edge conference in Sydney Australia in November 2017.

Netsafe's extensive operational experience dealing with cases of non-consensual sharing of nude content and related other digital challenges, and international research (Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012) show that the term sexting is misused and can be misleading. Teens do not use the term sexting to describe the different dimensions of this behaviour; instead they use words such as "nudes", "nudies", "dick pics", and "naked pics" to describe their experiences. It is important to take this into account if we are to develop research and policy that reflects young people's needs and worldview, and to help narrow the gap between adults' perceptions and young people's experiences of this phenomenon. Therefore, in this report we limit the use of the term sexting, preferring "sharing of nudes" as shorthand for the broad range of behaviours related to sending, receiving and requesting of nude or nearly nude images and videos.

This section presents an overview of current research and issues around the sharing of nude content overseas and in New Zealand. The focus is on studies that have attempted to measure the prevalence as this reflects the type of study conducted by Netsafe. Then, it describes the research methodology applied in the study including sample characteristics, and matters related to ethics and limitations of the project.

## Background

The expression "sex messaging" emerged in the media in early 2000s to describe a new form of technology-mediated behaviour involving the exchange of explicit messages (Vogels, 2004). Initially limited to text-only messages sent via Short Message Systems or SMS (Albury, Funnell, & Noonan, 2010), technology rapidly evolved to allow the creation and sharing of visual content such as images and videos. As more people have access to a range of digital technologies and the capacity of devices to store and transfer large amounts of data in varied electronic formats has increased, the sharing of explicit content has evolved to refer to the electronic transfer of nude and/or nearly nude images or videos via mobile phones and other digital means. Nowadays, not only media outlets but also researchers use the term "sexting" to describe this behaviour.

While public interest in the sharing of nudes has increased, particularly among parents, educators, and law enforcement officials (Lounsbury, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2011), two competing approaches have emerged to explain the so-called sexting phenomenon (Kosenko, Luurs, & Binder, 2017). On the one hand, the sharing of nude content is seen as a high-risk behaviour that requires intervention and prevention, especially through education. Some argue this behaviour deserves greater policy consideration (Nash et al., 2015) and, reflecting this call to action, in some countries legal remedies have been adopted to sanction it (Crofts, Lee, McGovern, & Milivojevic, 2016). On the other hand, the sharing of nudes is

understood as a normal practice of intimate communication taking place mainly within romantic and sexual relationships (Döring, 2014). While the former explanation has dominated research and discussion, the latter is gaining space within the research community (Kosenko et al., 2017).

Research on the sharing of nudes has mainly relied on surveys to measure its prevalence. A review of 31 quantitative studies on the topic, for instance, found that the sharing of nude content is more frequent amongst adults than adolescents, that older age is predictive of sexting for adolescents but not adults, and that more individuals report receiving this type of content than sending it (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014). However, studying the prevalence of this behaviour can be challenging. Recently, researchers have pointed out that sexting, as a concept, has been operationalised differently across studies (Drouin, Vogel, Surbey, & Stills, 2013), meaning that it is hard to make comparisons across studies. Another challenge is that differing research methodologies are used, especially regarding sample selection, making it difficult to compare young people's engagement with the sharing of nudes (Temple et al., 2012).

One of the first nationally representative studies on sexting was conducted by the Pew Research Center in the USA (Lenhart, 2009). The study, a telephone survey, focused on teens aged 12-17 years old. The survey asked about the sending and receiving of nude or nearly nude images or videos via mobile phones, excluding text-only messages, and the use of email or online social networks. The study found that 4% of respondents had sent nude or nearly nude images of themselves to someone else, and 15% of participants said they had received images of someone they knew. In terms of comparing age groups, the study found that older teens were more likely to send and/or receive sexting-related content. The study also highlighted that teens paying their own mobile phone bills were more likely to be involved in some form of sharing practice, with 17% of those surveyed saying they sent nude or nearly nude content. In contrast, 3% of teens who did not pay for, or only paid for a portion of the cost of their mobile phones, sent these type of images (Lenhart, 2009).

A survey-based study conducted in the UK also explored online experiences and risks, including sexting, among children and teens aged 11-16 years old (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2010). The study found 12% of participants in this age group had seen or received a sexual message (text, image or video) online, with 2% receiving them more than once a week. However, sending a sexual message online was a less common practice with only 4% of participants reporting they had done this. While the evidence from this study shows that sending nudes was not prevalent, additional research in the UK suggests that sexting was more frequent among teens in a romantic relationship (Wood, Barter, Stanley, Aghtaie, & Larkins, 2015). The study reported teens' experiences of sexting across five European countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, England, Italy, and Norway). Survey participants, aged 14-17 years old, were asked if they have ever sent a sexual text message or picture to any of their partners. The highest proportions of teens taking part in this kind of behaviour were found in England (38%) and Norway (30%). Bulgaria, Italy and Cyprus followed with 28%, 22% and 10%, respectively.

In Australia, a national survey of the sexual health of secondary students (Mitchell, Patrick, Heywood, Blackman, & Pitts, 2013) collected relevant data on sexting. The study combined paper-based and online surveys to collect data from 2,136 high school students aged 16-18

years old. The study found that 1 in 4 respondents had sent a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude picture or video of themselves, and over 40% reported receiving nude content of someone else. When asked about the use of social media for sexual reasons, over 1 in 5 said they have used online tools for this purpose, with teenage males' responses double that of their female peers. Also, half of all sexually active students reported sending a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo or video of themselves, while 70% reported receiving such content. The study's definition of sexting also included sending or receiving sexually explicit text-only messages. In this respect, the findings revealed that just over 42% and 54% of respondents had sent or received this type of content, respectively (Mitchell et al., 2013).

While the international body of knowledge is growing, in New Zealand no research has been conducted on the prevalence of the sharing of nudes among young people. Available research has focused on technology-mediated challenges and harm. For example, Fenaughty and Harré (2013) compared the prevalence of mobile phone and internet harassment, and the level of distress caused by both experiences. Others (see Jose, Kljakovic, Scheib, & Notter, 2012) have looked at the relationship between face-to-face and online bullying as well as victimhood. A study by Marsh, McGee, Nada-Raja, and Williams (2010) measured the frequency of different categories of bullying among 15 year old teens, including bullying through text messages. With no research evidence about the prevalence of the sharing of nudes, public discussion and reflection on this topic has been guided by anecdotal information and single cases reported in the media. The findings in this study make a contribution to closing this gap in evidence by directly considering the question of prevalence of behaviours related to the sharing of nudes by New Zealand teenagers.

However, as research interest in the topic increases overseas, academics and analysts are moving towards the study of specific aspects of related behaviours while applying qualitative and mixed methodologies. The literature, for example, shows that some of these studies include the role of coercion on sexting practices (Drouin, Ross, & Tobin, 2015), gender inequities and sexual double standards around the sharing of nudes (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013), sexting practices in the context of teens' romantic relationships (Wood et al., 2015) and their relationship with the early sexual activity of teens (Brinkley, Ackerman, Ehrenreich, & Underwood, 2017). These studies indicate that teens' experiences of sharing nudes are not only a relevant research topic but also an issue of public interest and concern.

## Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach to gain an understanding of the nature and extent of nude images and videos being shared by, and among, teens aged 14-17 years. Current analysis and discussion about the phenomenon of sharing nudes is guided by anecdotal cases reported in the media rather than evidence-based research. As no previous study in New Zealand has investigated this topic, a quantitative study based on representative data was the appropriate approach to obtain general characteristics of the prevalence and extent of this matter.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What is the prevalence and extent of sending, receiving, and requesting nude or nearly nude images or videos among teens in New Zealand?
2. Are there any differences in terms of gender, age, disability, and ethnic group?

In the following sub-sections, we describe the technique for data collection used for the study, the characteristics of the research sample, issues related to research ethics, and the limitations of the study.

---

## SURVEY TOOL

We decided to conduct an online survey. Surveys are useful in providing statistical descriptions by asking questions about a topic to a specific group of people (Fowler, 2014). The high internet penetration in New Zealand and the embeddedness of a range of digital tools and devices in the everyday activities of NZ users, including teens, enable the use of online surveys as a useful data collection technique for social research (Crothers, Smith, Urale, & Bell, 2016). In addition, data collected from online surveys can be administered easily which facilitates analysis and reporting of findings (Wright, 2006).

Netsafe worked on the planning and design of the research instrument. In developing the questionnaire, we consulted with key partners specifically the Ministry for Women | Minitatanga mō ngā Wāhine, Australia's Office of the eSafety Commissioner, the UK Safer Internet Centre, and the University of Plymouth (UK). We also drew from the extensive operational experience of Netsafe's contact centre team in dealing with reported cases where the sharing of nude content has gone wrong. The questions were cognitive tested and piloted by Colmar Brunton, NZ and then refined in consultation with partners before going live. Data collection started at the end of July 2017 and continued for five weeks.

---

## SAMPLE

The study collected data from teens aged 14-17 years old. Colmar Brunton sampled participants using its online research panel. As children are not panel members, a representative sample of 30-65 year old adults were asked whether they have children in the target age group. To provide benchmark data for sampling and weighting, Colmar Brunton used 2017 population projections for children in the age range. Projections are more useful than 2013 Census data because the ethnic composition of New Zealand children has changed significantly since 2013.

A total of 1,001 New Zealand teens completed the online survey. Data collected from this representative sample allowed the analysis of sub-groups with a margin of error of +/- 3.1% on total results. Just over half (51%) of respondents were males and 48.7% females, while 0.3% identified as gender diverse.

In terms of age distribution, 14 and 15 year old participants each represented 24% while 16 and 17 year olds each encompassed 26% of the total sample. In terms of ethnicity, participants were distributed as follows: NZ European/Pakeha (66%), Māori (24%), Pacific (13%), Asian (13%), and Other (4%).

15% of participants identified themselves as experiencing a long-term disability related to sight, hearing, learning, walking, and/or communicating.

---

## RESEARCH ETHICS

Because of the sensitive nature of the study, Colmar Brunton, in discussion with Netsafe, ensured that participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected. To this end, the market research company also followed industry standards including the Research Association's Code of Practice. Parental permission was obtained online for all participants at the beginning of the online survey. The participants and their parents/caregivers received information about the purpose of the project, the name of the institutions behind the study, and an explanation about use and protection of the data provided. As mentioned, the questions were cognitive tested to identify whether there was any risk of causing distress to the respondents. Links to relevant services were also included in the survey support material. In the parental permission email we asked parents to allow their children to respond to the survey privately. The email was also tested and refined during the cognitive interviews and during the first 100 online survey interviews. In addition, an on-screen warning message recommended respondents to complete the questions on their own while no-one else was watching the screen.

---

## LIMITATIONS

As previously mentioned, this study is based on a representative sample of New Zealand teens aged 14-17 years old. The data provides significant statistical evidence about prevalence, motivations and attitudes to the sharing of nude content online among teens. It does not provide a full picture of the different and complex dimensions and contexts surrounding these behaviours. Personal experiences and views of New Zealand teens need to be explored in more detail through other methodological approaches. It is anticipated that the insights from this study will provide a valuable source of information for researchers seeking to build the knowledge base around this topic.

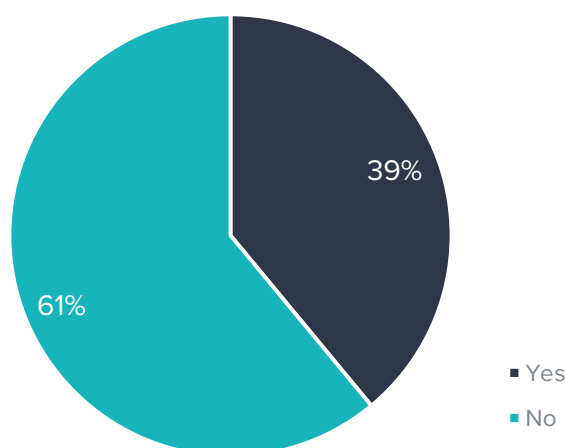
In addition, 30% of participants completed the online survey with a parent/caregiver close to them. This occurred despite asking parents to allow their children to respond to the survey privately. A potential limitation to the study is that results could be skewed as some teens may have felt embarrassed to admit that they have sent/received nude or nearly nude content online. However, this is not a surprise as similar percentages have been reported in other studies asking personal questions to young people.

## Findings

This section describes the key findings from the online survey. It presents insights about the prevalence and extent of sharing nudes among New Zealand teens. It also describes relevant differences in terms of gender, age, disability, and ethnic group. In addition to the measurement of the prevalence of these behaviours, this section provides insights into participants' views of them.

### Knowledge of others ever having shared nude pictures or videos

To start with, the respondents were asked whether they know anyone who has ever shared nude or nearly nude pictures or videos with someone. As Figure 1 shows, 39% (nearly 1 in 4) responded 'Yes' compared to 61% of those who answered 'No'.



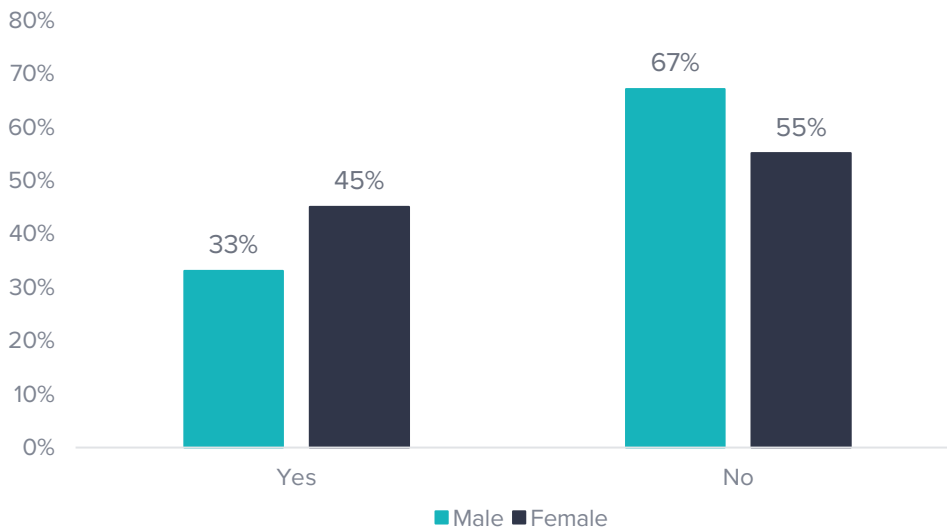
**Figure 1: Knowledge of someone who has ever shared nudes or nearly nudes.**

*Base<sup>1</sup>: All respondents excluding those who preferred not to answer (943)*

A closer look at the results in terms of gender shows that the percentage of female teenagers who responded 'Yes' was higher than that of their male peers. In this respect, 45% of girls said they know someone who has ever shared nude or nearly nude pictures or videos, compared to 33% of boys (see Figure 2).

---

<sup>1</sup> The total number of people responding to each question



**Figure 2: Knowledge of someone who has ever shared nudes or nearly nudes by gender.**

*Base: All respondents excluding those who preferred not to answer (943)*

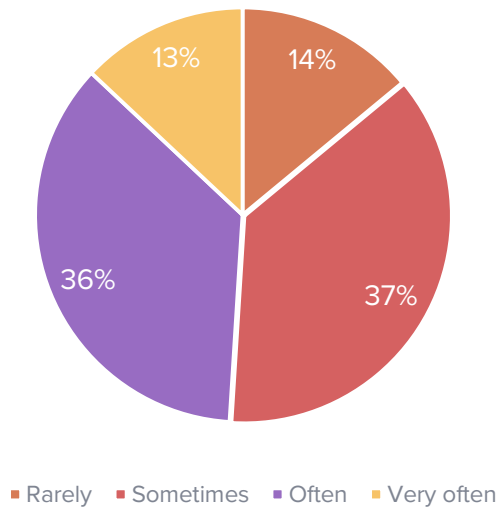
The findings also provide relevant insights in terms of age (see Table 1). Compared with their younger peers, a relatively higher proportion of older New Zealand teens, those aged 16 or 17 years old, said they know someone who has shared nudes or nearly nudes. Teens aged 14 years old (30%) were less likely to know someone involved in this kind of practice.

**Table 1: Knowledge of someone who has shared nudes or nearly nudes by age.**

Answer	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old
Yes	30%	39%	45%	42%
No	70%	61%	55%	58%

*Base: All respondents excluding those who preferred not to answer (943).*

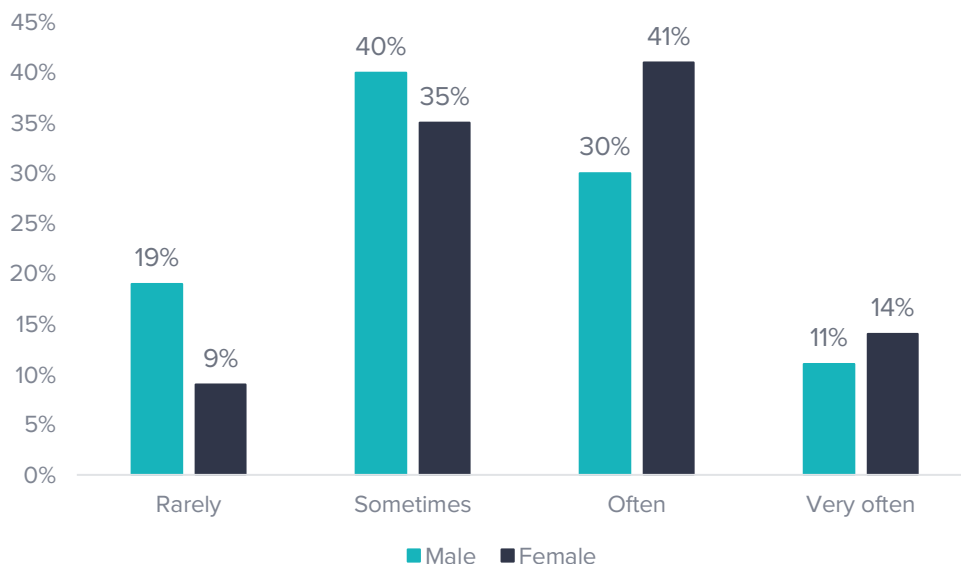
We also wanted to measure the perceived frequency of sharing nudes among New Zealand teens. Those respondents who have personally experienced or are aware of someone who has dealt with the issue (n=522) were asked the following question: In general, how often do people your age do these kinds of things? A sum of responses shows that about half of the group of participants perceived that sharing nudes occurs ‘Often’ (36%) or ‘Very often’ (13%). On the other hand, those who answered ‘Sometimes’ and ‘Rarely’ represented 37% and 14%, respectively (see Figure 3). A total of 86% replied at least ‘Sometimes’.



**Figure 3: Perceived frequency of sharing nudes or nearly nudes.**

*Base: Respondents who report being aware of the sharing of nudes among others or have personal experience (522)*

However, differences can be found when the findings are compared in terms of gender (Figure 4). Female teens perceived that sharing nudes is an issue that occurs more often. Specifically, most female respondents said that the sharing of nudes happens ‘Often’ (41%) or ‘Very often’ (14%). In contrast, a lower percentage of young males considered that this kind of online practice occurs ‘Often’ (30%) or ‘Very often’ (11%).



**Figure 4: Perceived frequency of sharing nudes or nearly nudes by gender.**

*Base: Respondents who report being aware of the sharing of nudes among others or have personal experience (522).*



In terms of ethnicity, the findings show that a significant percentage of Pacific teens reported that they think the sharing of nudes occurs ‘Often’ or ‘Very often’: 63% of Pacific teens responded in this way (Table 2). They were followed by Māori teens (58%). Still significant but at a lower percentage was the result from those within the group NZ European/Pakeha (51%). Finally, 38% of those with an Asian background indicated that sharing nudes happens ‘Often’ or ‘Very often’.

Answer	NZ European/Pakeha	Māori	Pacific	Asian	Other ethnicity
Rarely	12%	15%	19%	16%	8%
Sometimes	37%	28%	18%	46%	36%
Often	39%	38%	49%	21%	36%
Very often	12%	20%	14%	17%	20%

**Table 2: Perceived frequency of sharing nudes and nearly nudes by ethnicity.**

*Base: Respondents who report being aware of the sharing of nudes among others or have personal experience (522).*

## Personal experience of sharing nudes in the past 12 months

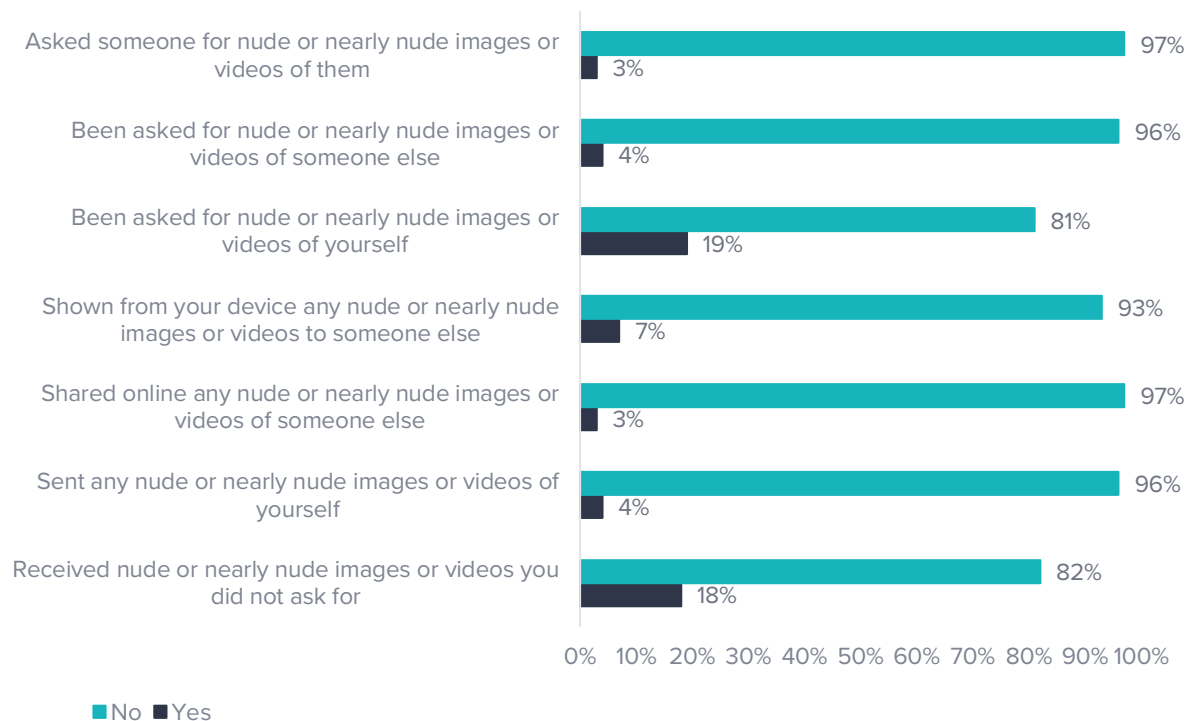
As shown in Figure 5, we asked participants a set of questions regarding their individual experiences with different aspects of sharing nude content in the last year. As previously explained, we define the sharing of nude content as encompassing a number practices and behaviours that are not limited to people creating and sending explicit content of themselves through digital platforms and tools but also include requesting and distributing explicit content that they might not necessarily have created. The survey data show some relevant insights on this matter.

A surprising finding reveals a large majority of New Zealand teens are not actively engaged in the sharing of nudes. Specifically, when asked if they have sent a nude or nearly nude picture or video of themselves, 96% of participants responded ‘No’ while the remaining 4% reported to have sent content of themselves. This finding contrasts with the perceived prevalence of sharing nude content among young people previously described in this report.

A closer look at the data in terms of age shows that 7% of older teens (17 year olds) have sent nude images or videos of themselves in the last 12 months. This percentage is higher compared to 14 year olds (1%), 15 year olds (4%), and 16 year olds (3%). While there is public concern about younger children sending such content of themselves, our data does not show they have a higher level of involvement in this behaviour compared with their older peers. On the other hand, nearly 1 in 5 responded that they have been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves (19%). The data also show a similar percentage regarding receiving unsolicited content. In this respect, in the last 12 months 18% of participants said that they had received nude or nearly nude images or videos they did not ask for.

We also asked respondents whether they have shown from their device nude or nearly nude content to someone else. 7% responded ‘Yes’. Other questions about aspects of sharing nudes included asking whether the participants have been asked for nude or nearly nude

content of someone else (4%); whether they have shared online nude or nearly nude content of someone else (3%); and whether they have asked someone for nude or nearly nude content of them (3%).



**Figure 5: Personal experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing nudes in the past 12 months.**

*Base: All respondents excluding refusals.*

A closer look at the data regarding teens’ personal experiences with the sharing of nudes reveals some relevant gendered differences (Table 3). For example, more female participants (24%) reported being asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves in the past 12 months than their male peers (14%). A similar trend was found in terms of receiving unsolicited nude or nearly nude content, with 20% of female participants reporting receiving content they did not ask for, compared to 17% of male respondents.

As previously shown, overall the percentage of all teens who asked someone for nudes or nearly nudes of them was around 4%. However, a gender comparison shows that more boys (5%) requested nudes than girls (2%) in the last 12 months.

Have you...	Answer	Male	Female
Received nude or nearly nude images or videos you did not ask for?	Yes	17%	20%
	No	83%	80%
Sent any nude or nearly nude images or videos of yourself?	Yes	4%	4%
	No	96%	96%
Shared online any nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone else?	Yes	3%	2%
	No	97%	98%
Shown from your device any nude or nearly nude images or videos to someone else?	Yes	6%	7%
	No	94%	93%
Been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of yourself?	Yes	14%	24%
	No	86%	76%
Been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone else?	Yes	4%	5%
	No	96%	95%
Asked someone for nude or nearly nude images or videos of them?	Yes	5%	2%
	No	95%	98%

**Table 3: Personal experiences of sharing nudes behaviours in the past 12 months by gender.**

*Base: All respondents excluding refusals.*

In the context of ethnicity, the data also provide some noteworthy insights. For example, the percentage of Māori respondents (24%) who received unsolicited nudes or nearly nudes was higher than other groups such as NZ European/Pakeha (18%) and Pacific teens (18%). In addition, in the last 12 months, 27% of Māori teens were asked for nude or nearly nude content of themselves, compared to 24% of Pacific, and 21% of NZ European/Pakeha respondents. On the other hand, compared with other ethnic groups, a slightly higher percentage of NZ European/Pakeha teens reported to have sent nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves (5%) or have shown from their devices nude content to someone else (8%).

As described in the methodology section, our survey also gathered data from teens with disabilities. In this report disability is defined as a long-term condition (lasting 6 months or more) that causes a difficulty with, or stops a person from, seeing (even when wearing glasses or contact lenses), hearing (even when using a hearing aid), walking (including lifting or bending), using their hands (to hold, grasp or use objects), learning (including concentrating or remembering), and communicating, mixing with others or socialising.

The survey data reveal that the prevalence of some aspects of the sharing of nude content is higher in teens with disabilities than those without impairments (see Table 4). For instance, when asked whether they have received nude or nearly nude images or videos they did not ask for, 25% of participants with disabilities said 'Yes' compared to 17% of those teens without disabilities. A similar pattern was identified in terms of being asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves. The percentage of teens with disabilities who in the last 12

months were asked for this specific kind of content (23%) was higher than those without disabilities (18%). Also, being asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone else was more common for participants experiencing disabilities (9%) compared to non-disabled teens (4%).

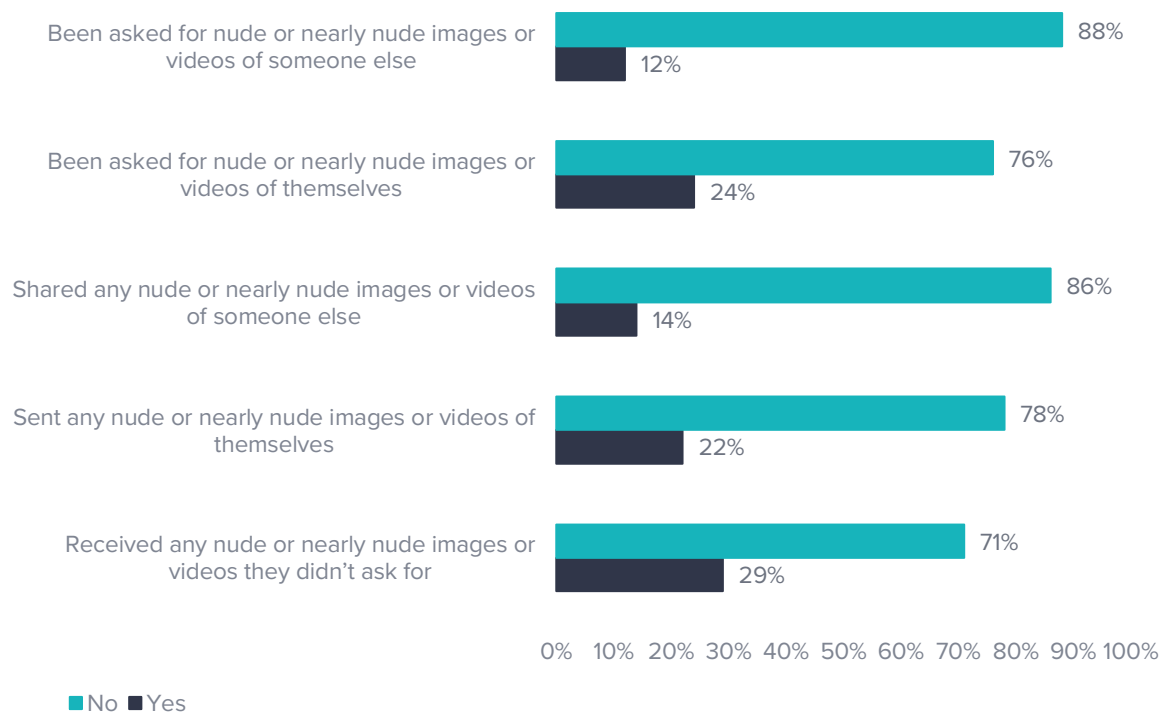
Have you...	Answer	With long-term disability	Without long-term disability
Received nude or nearly nude images or videos you did not ask for?	Yes	25%	17%
	No	75%	83%
Sent any nude or nearly nude images or videos of yourself?	Yes	4%	4%
	No	96%	96%
Shared online any nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone else?	Yes	4%	2%
	No	96%	98%
Shown from your device any nude or nearly nude images or videos to someone else?	Yes	10%	6%
	No	90%	94%
Been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of yourself?	Yes	23%	18%
	No	77%	82%
Been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone else?	Yes	9%	4%
	No	91%	96%
Asked someone for nude or nearly nude images or videos of them?	Yes	4%	3%
	No	96%	97%

**Table 4: Personal experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months by disability.**

*Base: All respondents excluding refusals.*

## Awareness of others' experiences of the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months

This sub-section reports key findings about participants' awareness of other teens who in the last 12 months have experienced different aspects of the sharing of nudes. As Figure 6 shows, 29% of respondents (almost 3 in 10) mentioned they were aware of someone they know receiving nudes or nearly nudes they did not ask for. Similarly, almost a quarter (24%) were aware of someone being asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves. In addition, 22% of respondents said they know someone who has sent nudes or nearly nudes of themselves. In contrast, the percentages of respondents aware of someone being asked for nude content of someone else, and someone who has shared nude images of someone else were lower: 12% and 14%, respectively.



**Figure 6: Awareness of others' experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months.**

*Base: All respondents excluding refusals.*

In terms of gender, there are noteworthy differences in the level of awareness between girls and boys in all sharing of nudes experiences (Table 5). These differences are particularly significant: female respondents (33%) reported knowing someone being asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves, compared to male participants (16%). Compared with boys (22%), more girls (37%) also responded that they know someone who has been sent unsolicited nude or nearly nude content. Likewise, the percentage of girls (27%) who responded that they know someone who has sent nude or nearly nude content of themselves was also higher than boys (16%).

Has anyone you know...	Answer	Male	Female
Received nude or nearly nude images or videos they did not ask for?	Yes	22%	37%
	No	78%	63%
Sent any nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves?	Yes	16%	27%
	No	84%	73%
Shared any nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone else?	Yes	12%	15%
	No	88%	85%
Been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves?	Yes	16%	33%
	No	84%	67%
Been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone else?	Yes	10%	14%
	No	90%	86%

**Table 5: Awareness of others' experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months by gender.**

*Base: All respondents excluding refusals.*

In terms of age, our survey found that it was more common for older teens to know someone who has received unsolicited nude or nearly nude content: 32% for 16 year olds and 31% for 17 year olds (see Table 6). Younger teens, aged 14 and 15 years old, reported a lower percentage (27% each).

As Table 6 shows, a similar pattern was found when older participants were asked about knowing someone who has sent nude images or videos of themselves, and shared online this type of content of someone else. Also, more participants aged 16 years old (32%) reported knowing someone who has been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves. Similarly, 28% of respondents in this age group were aware of someone who has received a request for nude content, compared to 17 year old participants, who were 3 percentile points below (25%). The figures for 14 and 15 year old teens were 20% and 22%, respectively.

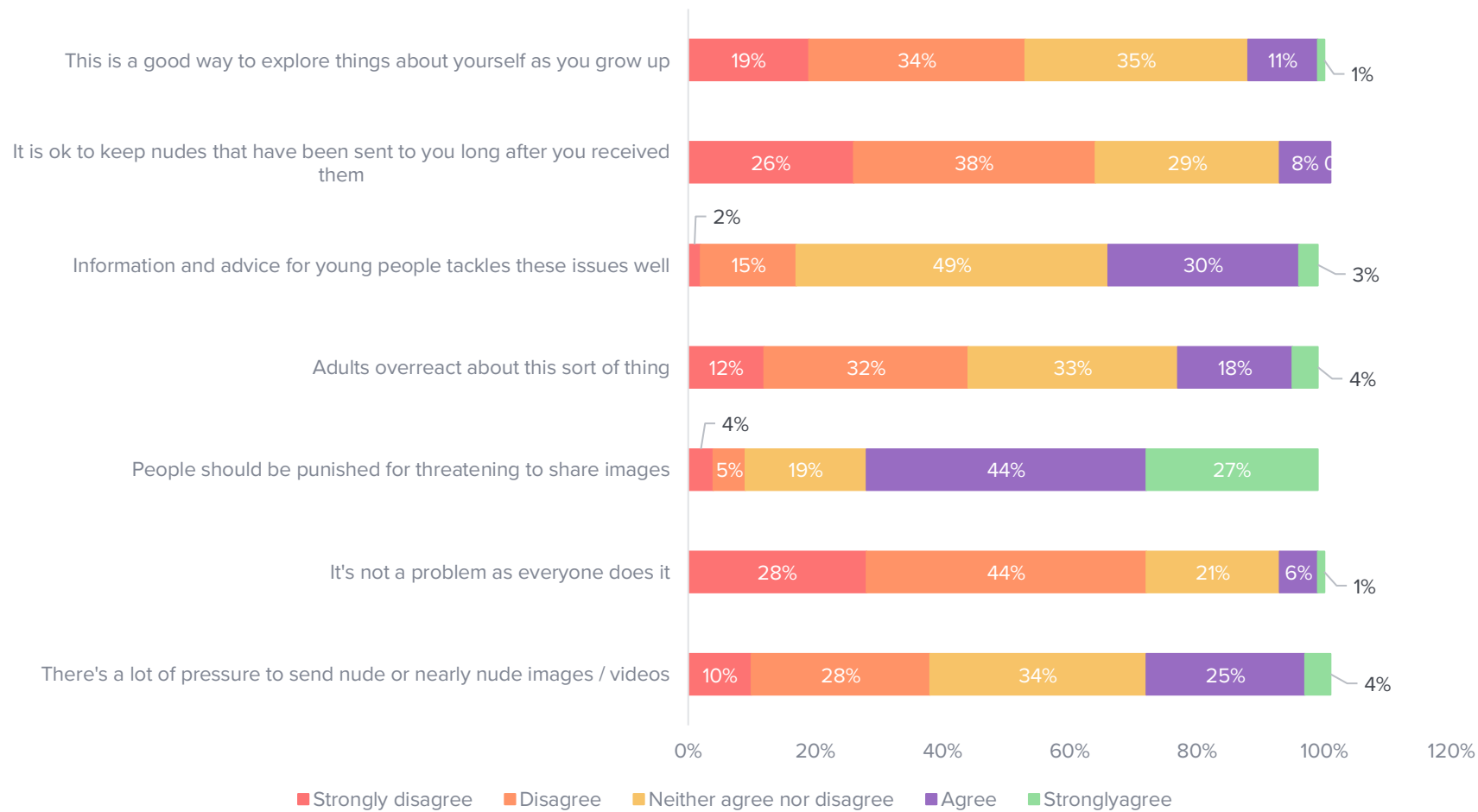
Has anyone you know...	Answer	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old
Received nude or nearly nude images or videos they did not ask for?	Yes	27%	27%	32%	31%
	No	73%	73%	68%	69%
Sent any nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves?	Yes	17%	21%	24%	25%
	No	83%	79%	76%	75%
Shared any nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone else?	Yes	11%	13%	14%	17%
	No	89%	87%	86%	83%
Been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves?	Yes	20%	22%	28%	25%
	No	80%	78%	72%	75%
Been asked for nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone else?	Yes	10%	11%	13%	12%
	No	90%	89%	87%	88%

**Table 6: Awareness of others' experiences with different behaviours related to the sharing of nudes in the past 12 months by age.**

*Base: All respondents excluding refusals.*

## Level of agreement with statements regarding the sharing of nudes

The survey included a psychometric scale question to measure participants' level of agreement with seven statements related to the sharing of nudes. The respondents were asked to evaluate each statement by choosing from a five-point rating scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree). The overall results are presented in Figure 7.



**Figure 7: Level of agreement with statements regarding the sharing of nudes.**

*Base: All respondents (1,001).*



We decided to run an additional analysis by grouping participants' net agreement and net disagreement values. As illustrated in Figure 8, this approach provided some more insight into New Zealand teens' evaluation of the seven statements provided.

About half of respondents (53%) disagree/strongly disagree with the statement that sending nudes is a good way to explore things about themselves as they grow up, compared to 12% of participants who overall agreed with the statement. The percentage of girls (61%) that did not agree with the statement was higher than boys (46%). In terms of ethnicity, 57% of NZ European/Pakeha participants expressed their disagreement with the statement while 49% of Asian, 46% of Māori, and 37% of Pacific respondents did so.

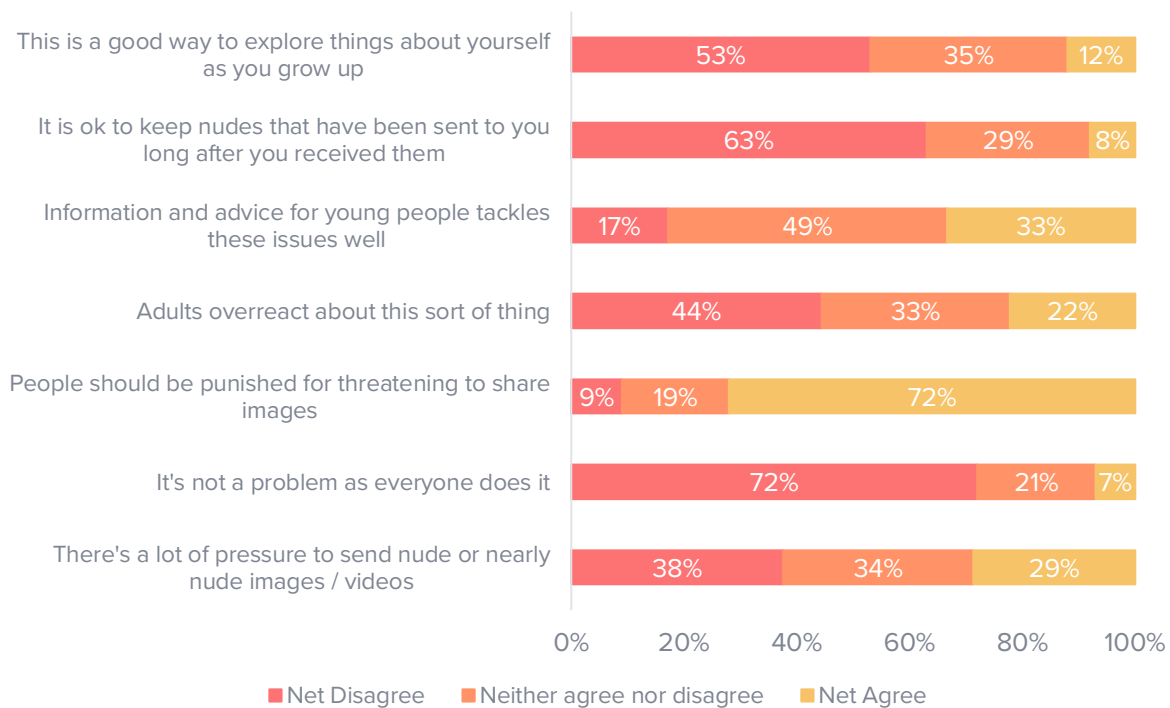
Similarly, the view against the statement that 'It is OK to keep nudes that have been sent to you long after you received them' was more prevalent. Overall, 63% of participants disagreed with the statement and just 8% agreed with it. In terms of gender, 70% of girls and 56% of boys expressed their disagreement with the idea that keeping nude content was acceptable.

When asked to evaluate the statement 'information and advice for young people tackles these issues well', nearly half of the respondents (49%) neither agreed nor disagreed with it, while a third of them (33%) expressed their agreement. On the other hand, while just over 1 in 5 teens (22%) agreed that adults overreact about the sharing of nudes, 4 in 10 thought the opposite as 44% of respondents did not agree with the statement.

Over 7 in 10 respondents (72%) agreed that people should be punished for threatening to share images. Teens that neither agreed nor disagreed represented 19% while those who disagreed with the statement only accounted for 9% of all responses. In terms of gender, more girls (75%) agreed that those threatening to share nudes should be punished compared to boys (68%).

The participants were also asked to evaluate this statement about sharing nude content: 'It's not a problem as everyone does it.' A large majority of respondents (72%) disagreed with it, compared to 7% who agreed. Just over 2 in 10 (21%) neither agreed nor disagreed. However, compared to boys (67%), more girls (76%) disagree with the statement that sharing nudes is an acceptable behaviour.

Compared with prior statements, differences were less significant when the participants were asked to evaluate whether 'there's a lot of pressure to send nude or nearly nude images/videos.' The results show that 38% of respondents did not concur with the statement, 34% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 29% were in accord with it. However, a closer look at the data in terms of gender shows that more girls (35%) agree that there is pressure to send nudes compared to boys (23%).



**Figure 8: Grouping net agreement/disagreement with statements regarding the sharing of nudes.**

*Base: All respondents (1,001).*

## In their own words: Why some teens send nudes

The survey also collected qualitative data regarding participants' views about the sharing of nude content online. We specifically asked them why they think people their age send nude or nearly nude images or videos of themselves. By including an open-ended question, we were able to obtain insights based on their own words and perceptions. An inductive analysis of the data through coding allowed the identification of four main categories:

1. Attention, social approval, and peer pressure;
2. Moral stance about the behaviour;
3. Sexual exploration/relationships; and
4. Sharing of nudes as an unproblematic behaviour.

The following sub-sections describe these categories in more detail.

---

## ATTENTION, SOCIAL APPROVAL, AND SOCIAL PRESSURE

About half of responses (54%) fell under this category. However, there were some differences regarding gender. In particular, these perceptions about why some teens send nude images of themselves were more common among females (61%) than males (47%).

A shared view between these participants was that sending nude or nearly nude content was related to young people's need for attention, acceptance, and popularity. One participant summarised this point in the following way.

*"[T]hey are desperate for the attention and are only doing it to become more 'popular'." Female, 14 years, NZ European*

Another female respondent concurred with this view, highlighting how easy is to engage in this sort of practice through digital means.

*"Teens image these days. Everyone wants to be popular. Its easily done at the click of a button." Female, 15 years, NZ European*

Participants also pointed out that self-esteem was a reason for the sharing of nude content online. Some associated this behaviour with insecurity and low levels of self-confidence among those who engage in the sharing of nudes.

*"Because they have low self-esteem and think that doing this will make people like them more or want them." Female, 16 years, NZ European*

Others, however, commented that being too self-assured can also explain why some teens send nudes of themselves.

*"Some people are confident about their bodies, and can send them for sexual gratification for themselves or someone else." Female, 17 years, NZ European*

Participants also mentioned social pressure as a significant factor that explains the sharing of nude content online among some teens. Respondents who shared this view highlighted that pressure from peers exerted a role.

*"Mostly, I think it's all to do with peer pressure If your friends are doing it then they think you should too. I think that's stupid." Female, 17 years, Māori*

One participant added that coercion can also be a factor.

*"Others may be pressured into sending nudes, due to the person threatening them, or by peer pressure." Female, 17 years, NZ European*

A few participants recalled that pressure for sending "nudies" also takes place within a romantic relationship.

*"Pressured into it by others such as boyfriends wanting nude pic of their girlfriend". Male, 15 years, NZ European*

Among those who mentioned social pressure, there was also a group of respondents who pointed out that the demands for nudes were gendered. Several female respondents agreed with this point.

*"I think for females they are often badgered to send nudes by males because "it's not a big deal" but once you've sent it. It's out forever."*  
Female, 17 years, NZ European

---

## MORAL STANCE ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR

17% of participants hold a moral stance against teens who send nudes of themselves. Participants in this category used words such as "gross", "disgusting", "stupid", "dumb", and "immature" to express their disapproval of those teens involved in this kind of behaviour. The findings show that a higher percentage of participants with an Asian background considered the sharing of nudes morally wrong (27%).

Overall, there was no significant statistical difference in terms of gender. However, the percentage of younger participants, those aged 14 years old, condemning the behaviour was slightly higher than older respondents. In the view of a female respondent, the sharing of nudes is a widespread behaviour and it must stop.

*"I think it's disgusting because we're only like 13 - 15 and we're already exposing our precious body to others, and it happens so much. I hear about people exposing nudes and others and trying to get back at them by exposing theirs. It needs to stop but I doubt it will. That's just how things are these days to be honest."* Female, 14 years, NZ European

Another participant had a different opinion. While he considered the sharing of nude content as "disgusting", he pointed out that this behaviour was not the norm within his personal social network. He remembered a situation that involved his peers.

*"It's disgusting, I can't think why someone would do it. Once on the bus a boy from our school air dropped a photo of his penis to everyone on the bus. Everyone deleted except one boy who kept it and then showed the Dean at school the next day. The boy who air dropped it got into serious trouble."* Male, 14 years, NZ European

As described above, the qualitative data show that most participants gave different reasons for blaming those who send nude or nearly nude pictures or videos of themselves. For some respondents, however, sharing nudes was not the sole responsibility of teens. They also considered other factors. One participant, for instance, commented that young people's attitudes are influenced by popular culture, in particular celebrities.

*"[B]ecause famous people have done it first and they want to copy them!! and some people don't have the guts to stick to their standards and say no when asked for this stuff."* Female, 16 years, Asian

The role of family was also highlighted by a few participants.

*“Because most adults accept this as normal and don’t warn their children about the dangers so teens see it as normal even fun.” Male, 15 years, NZ European*

One participant commented that sharing nudes is the result of society’s declining moral values.

*“[S]ocial pressure, a result of dropping standards of behaviour/respect for others, sexual liberalism resulting in pressure to get into sexual behaviour before mature enough/ready, lack of human and self-respect/discipline, no/hardly any punishment for perpetrators, social acceptance of lewd behaviour in public/online, internet/Telco providers allowing such content to be exchanged etc etc.” Female, 16 years, NZ European*

---

## SEXUAL EXPLORATION/RELATIONSHIPS

15% of comments fitted into the sexual exploration/relationships category. These views were more common among teens with an Asian background (22%), followed by those participants identifying as NZ European/Pakeha (17%). In terms of age, the proportion of older teens, 16 or 17 years old, who commented in this way was higher than younger teens. On the other hand, there was a minimal percentile difference between males (16%) and females (15%).

The qualitative data show that for most boys and girls the sharing of nudes was a way to explore and express the changes that teens are going through, physically and emotionally.

*“Because in this stage of their lives they want to experience what it’s like to have sex and see body parts of the opposite gender. Some just do it so they can meet up.” Female, 17 years, NZ European*

Another participant reflected on the matter in the following way.

*“We are still growing up and we’re unsure about our bodies and sexuality and our preferences. It’s also a good way to gain trust in a relationship.” Male, 16 years, NZ European*

As shown above, some participants considered that sending nudes was another way to explore, express attraction and flirt.

*“We’re at an age where we want to explore new things, and that includes sexual interactions such as flirting or sending nudes. Some people do it for attention, and some do it because they feel like they have to in order to keep the other person interested.” Female, 16 years, NZ European*

While teens commented that sharing nudes online was, to an extent, part of growing up as a teenager, they had different opinions about the implications of engaging in this behaviour through digital means.

*“Hormones are crazy when you're a teenager. A lot of teenagers are trying to figure out their sexuality at this time, which is a normal thing, and doing so online can be less scary than doing face to face.” Gender diverse, 17 years, Samoan*

In contrast, another participant highlighted the risk of engaging in this practice.

*“I think because they are at the point of puberty where they want to find someone to love and when they are at that point of their relationship where they do that kind of stuff or they are just being stupid and not thinking of the consequences.” Male, 15 years, NZ European*

Some comments put the sharing of nudes in the context of teens seeking to develop and maintain romantic relationships but also as a mechanism to forge trust with their partners.

*“To show how much you trust someone or like/love someone for them to see your nude body. Sometimes people of the same sex who are neither gay or lesbian just do it as a joke and know the receiver will take it as a joke.” Male, 17 years, NZ European*

*“It's usually because they like the boy/girl who asked for the nude pics and they'll do whatever he/she says just to make him/her like them or ask them out. That's what happens with girls at my school, don't know if it's the same elsewhere.” Female, 14 years, Māori*

*“A lot of the time (in situations I have heard of) it is a one-off type of thing. That two people trusted each other to do it one time. Otherwise when people are in relationships it's something special they want to share with one another.” Female, 15 years, NZ European*

---

## SHARING NUDES AS AN UNPROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOUR

The findings also show that a small percentage of participants (6%) did not consider the sharing of nude content online as a problem. However, the percentage was higher among teens from one ethnic group: 9% of NZ European/Pakeha teens responded that this behaviour was not an issue of concern, compared to Māori, Pacific, and Asian participants (3% each).

Respondents had different reasons to support their views. Some considered that sharing nudes was a personal choice as well as the individual's prerogative.

*“Because it's their own right and responsibility and if that's what they want to do then that's their choice.” Male, 17 years, NZ European*

This type of responses was more common among male teens, including younger ones.

*“Because we can, we are nearly adult and we are exploring. its harmless as long as it’s what you want to do.” Male, 14 years, NZ European*

Several participants did not think that sharing nudes was an issue to be worried about because it has become a “normal” thing to do.

*“[Be]cause sending nudes has been normalised by our generation. people see sending nudes as a normal thing to do so they just accept it.” Male, 17 years, NZ European*

One female participant, for example, reflected on how the apparent normalisation of this behaviour is affecting her.

*“I feel like it’s become a bit of a norm, I’ve definitely considered it but I’m just to worried about how they could be shared to people don’t know. I feel like people do things like that online but they wouldn’t do it in real life, because online it ‘doesn’t really count’ as its not real or physical, its ‘just’ a photo.” Female, 17 years, NZ European.*

Male teens surveyed not only perceived the sharing of nudes online as a normal practice but also fun and attractive.

*“I have received nudes myself and I know that it was just some casual fun with a friend, I do think that adults take things such as this too seriously though I can understand why there are issues, i.e. one’s nudes being shared without their permission, or shared on social media where anyone has access to it.” Male, 15 years, NZ European*

*“People find it attractive/arousing to send and receive these type of images.” Male, 15 years, NZ European*

## Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the prevalence and extent of sharing nude or nearly nude images and videos among teens aged 14-17 years old in New Zealand, and identify relevant characteristics and/or differences in terms of gender, age, disability, and ethnic group.

### Why this study, why now?

Despite public attention, research on this specific topic in New Zealand has been absent. This is particularly surprising considering that young people are typically regarded as a vulnerable population group, and the opportunities afforded by digital technologies are accompanied by challenges and risks. While the international body of knowledge on the prevalence of the sharing of nude content through digital means is growing, in New Zealand reflection and discussion about this topic have been based on anecdotal information. This study is the first in its kind in the country and contributes to closing the gap in knowledge of this important topic by providing evidence-based insights from a representative sample of New Zealand teens. In addition to the value the insights from this study have for policy makers and practitioners it is anticipated it will provide a valuable source of information for researchers seeking to build the knowledge base around this topic.

### What do the findings tell us?

#### **NZ teens sharing nudes of themselves is not as prevalent as the public might believe**

Only 4% of participants reported sharing a nude in the last year. This suggests there is a difference between public perception and the reality of how many young people are actively engaged in this practice. This finding is interesting because digital tools, particularly smartphones, and their use are pervasive among young people, making it technically very straightforward for them to create, copy and share nude content if they so wish. Further, while many New Zealand teens (3 in 10) agreed that there is a lot pressure to share nudes, it does not follow that they choose to do so.

Further, this result is similar to international experience. Early representative research conducted in the United States (Lenhart, 2009) and the UK (Livingstone et al., 2010) revealed similar rates of this behaviour to ours, albeit with some differences in the age of study participants. In addition, a study conducted this year by Australia's Office of the eSafety Commissioner, using a methodology similar to ours, found 5% of Australian teens have sent nude content of themselves (Lavoipierre, 2017). Simply, this finding should help to debunk any idea that "everybody is doing it".

#### **Understanding teens' behaviours and experiences requires a deeper look into the different dimensions of this phenomenon**

The findings also highlight other aspects of the sharing of nude content that require consideration and discussion. Young people are more likely to receive than send nude content with nearly 1 in 5 teens (18%) reporting to have received unsolicited content in the last 12 months. This pattern is reflected in other international research (Klettke et al., 2014). In addition, 1 in 5 participants have been asked for nudes of themselves while about 3 in 10



know someone who has received unsolicited content. Thus, when we expand the definition of the behaviours involved, the number of young people involved increases. This is supported by the increasing prevalence of sharing nudes as age increases through adolescence. So, while sharing nudes of themselves is not normative (i.e., standard behaviour) it is widespread enough to have entered the culture as a norm (i.e., a commonly accepted behaviour). This suggests young people find themselves part of a culture around the sharing of nudes, whether they are active, passive or peripheral participants.

### **NZ teens' attitudes to, and motivations for, sharing nude content are more mature than adults may believe**

Other findings from the study support this idea. Answers to questions that explored young people's attitudes to sharing nudes indicate that while the different aspects of sharing nudes are experienced more frequently, they are generally not accepted by New Zealand teens. Basically, the participants clearly indicate that they do not like this practice. However, they also understand why these behaviours are happening. For them, it is all part of growing up as a person, which includes the emotional and physical changes this involves. As they commented, sharing nudes can be "gross" and "stupid" but is also part of teens' need for social acceptance and attention. In their view, it is a means of identity formation and sexual exploration, even a way of building trust within a romantic relationship. They are also aware of the risks and most of them think that a young person is responsible for what they do online. However, they also consider that other factors, such as peer pressure, explain this behaviour. Some teens even see the sharing of nudes as an unproblematic issue, arguing that adults also "sext" and that, it follows, they have the right to do it as well. Clearly, these views of New Zealand teens unveil a disconnection between what they are experiencing and thinking, and the current public and media discourse and debate around the topic.

### **The number of young people sharing nudes differs with age**

Recently, public attention has centred on younger teens who are believed to be increasingly sending nude content of themselves. This study shows that among those who have sent a picture of themselves in the last 12 months, older teens are more active than the younger ones. This finding is consistent with previous research that concludes that older age is predictive of sexting for adolescents (Klettke et al., 2014). However, as this is the first study of its kind it is not possible to comment on trends in incidence of sharing nudes. Further, as our study focused on 14-17 year old teens, we do not have direct evidence for those aged under 14 sending nudes of themselves as reported in the media (Corcoran, 2017; Ford, 2017). Thus, more research on the prevalence of this behaviour among younger children is still required.

### **Not all young New Zealanders have the same experience, with differences between genders, ethnicities and those with a long-term disability.**

The relationship between the sharing of nude content and gender has attracted research attention in the last few years (Ringrose et al., 2013; Sevcikova, 2016). This study has found some relevant gender differences in how young people experience the sharing of nudes in the New Zealand context. Girls are not only being asked for nude or nearly nude content of themselves but also receiving more unsolicited nude pictures or videos than boys. While the overall percentage of teens who have asked for nude content is low, boys are more likely to request it than girls. In essence, New Zealand girls are more likely than boys to be the target

of requests for their nudes, or receiving them from other people without request. This finding mirrors international research (Ringrose et al., 2013; Salter, Crofts, & Lee, 2012) and confirms that gender is an important element in explaining this behaviour. Perhaps unsurprisingly, girls agree more often than boys that there is pressure to send nudes.

The sharing of nudes is a complex phenomenon. As highlighted above, age and gender are important aspects that help to understand the sharing of this type of content among teens. However, this study also revealed some significant characteristics in experiences based on participants' ethnicity; and those with a disability. Both groups are more likely to be asked for nude content of themselves, and receive unsolicited nude content compared to other ethnic groups and those teens without disabilities.

**This study contributes to the understanding of NZ teens' sharing of nudes, but more research is required**

While the findings are representative of the targeted population, they provide a snapshot of the topic. Further in-depth exploration of the way New Zealand teens navigate risks and deal with potential harm caused by this behaviour is needed. Similarly, research to date mostly centres on teens' individual behaviour, while little is known about the role of contextual factors (socio-cultural, technical and legal) on the sharing of nude content. For example, what is the role of the algorithms that operate online platforms in the distribution of nude content?

In addition, as this is a niche area of research in New Zealand, further research is required to explore the relationship between sharing nude content, whether consensual or not, and other digital challenges such as online bullying, harassment, and sexual violence and abuse.

## References

- Albury, K., Funnell, N., & Noonan, E. (2010). The politics of sexting: Young people, self-representation and citizenship. Retrieved from <http://www.anzca.net/documents/2010-conf-papers/466-the-politics-of-sexting-1/file.html>
- Brinkley, D. Y., Ackerman, R. A., Ehrenreich, S. E., & Underwood, M. K. (2017). Sending and receiving text messages with sexual content: Relations with early sexual activity and borderline personality features in late adolescence. *Computers in Human Behavior, 70*, 119–130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.CHB.2016.12.082>
- Corcoran, K. (2017, July 11). Police are investigating children as young as five for sexting. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/police-investigate-children-as-young-as-five-for-sexting-uk-2017-7?r=UK&IR=T>
- Crofts, T., Lee, M., McGovern, A., & Milivojevic, S. (2016). *Sexting and young people*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crothers, C., Smith, P., Urale, P. W. B., & Bell, A. (2016). *World Internet Project New Zealand. The internet in New Zealand in 2015*. Retrieved from [http://icdc.aut.ac.nz/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/635835/WIPNZ-Report-060515.pdf](http://icdc.aut.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/635835/WIPNZ-Report-060515.pdf)
- Döring, N. (2014). Consensual sexting among adolescents: Risk prevention through abstinence education or safer sexting? *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 8*(1). <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2014-1-9>
- Drouin, M., Ross, J., & Tobin, E. (2015). Sexting: A new, digital vehicle for intimate partner aggression? *Computers in Human Behavior, 50*, 197–204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.04.001>
- Drouin, M., Vogel, K. N., Surbey, A., & Stills, J. R. (2013). Let's talk about sexting, baby: Computer-mediated sexual behaviors among young adults. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.030>
- Fenaughty, J., & Harré, N. (2013). Factors associated with distressing electronic harassment and cyberbullying. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(3), 803–811. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.11.008>
- Ford, R. (2017, November 6). Children as young as ten are sexting. *The Sunday Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/children-as-young-as-ten-are-sexting-2rjmss990>
- Fowler, F. J. (2014). *Survey Research Methods* (Fifth edit). London: SAGE Publications.
- Jose, P. E., Kljakovic, M., Scheib, E., & Notter, O. (2012). The joint development of traditional bullying and victimization with cyber bullying and victimization in adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 22*(2), 301–309. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2011.00764.x>
- Klettke, B., Hallford, D. J., & Mellor, D. J. (2014). Sexting prevalence and correlates: A systematic literature review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 28*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2013.10.007>
- Kosenko, K., Luurs, G., & Binder, A. R. (2017). Sexting and sexual behavior, 2011-2015: A critical review and meta-analysis of a growing literature. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 22*(3), 141–160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12187>
- Lavoipierre, A. (2017, November 7). Number of teenagers sending nude images of themselves less than first thought, government data reveals. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-07/fewer-teenagers-than-first-thought-send-nude-photos-research/9126538>
- Lenhart, A. (2009). Teens and Sexting. Retrieved October 10, 2017, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2009/12/15/teens-and-sexting/>

- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K. (2010). Risks and safety for children on the internet: The UK report: Full findings from the EU Kids Online survey of UK 9-16 year olds and their parents. Retrieved October 19, 2017, from <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33730/>
- Lounsbury, K., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D. (2011). The true prevalence of "Sexting". Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <http://scholars.unh.edu/ccrc/64>
- Marsh, L., McGee, R., Nada-Raja, S., & Williams, S. (2010). Brief report: Text bullying and traditional bullying among New Zealand secondary school students. *Journal of Adolescence*, *33*(1), 237–240. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.06.001>
- Mitchell, A., Patrick, K., Heywood, W., Blackman, P., & Pitts, M. (2013). National survey of Australian secondary students and sexual health 2013. Retrieved March 1, 2017, from [https://members.youthcoalition.net/sites/default/files/articles-external/National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health.pdf](https://members.youthcoalition.net/sites/default/files/articles-external/National%20Survey%20of%20Australian%20Secondary%20Students%20and%20Sexual%20Health.pdf)
- Nash, V., Adler, J. R., Horvath, M. A. H., Livingstone, S., Marston, C., Owen, G., & Wright, J. (2015). Identifying the routes by which children view pornography online: implications for future policy-makers seeking to limit viewing. Retrieved November 23, 2017, from <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/65450/>
- Ringrose, J., Gill, R., Livingstone, S., & Harvey, L. (2012). A qualitative study of children, young people and "sexting": A report prepared for the NSPCC. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/44216/>
- 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), 305–323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700113499853>
- Salter, M., Crofts, T., & Lee, M. (2012). Beyond criminalisation and responsabilisation: Sexting, gender and young people. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, *24*(3), 301–316. Retrieved from <http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/cicj24&id=331&div=&collection=>
- Sevcikova, A. (2016). Girls' and boys' experience with teen sexting in early and late adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.06.007>
- Temple, J. R., Paul, J. A., van den Berg, P., Le, V. D., McElhany, A., & Temple, B. W. (2012). Teen sexting and its association with sexual behaviors. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, *166*(9), 597–605. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpediatrics.2012.835>
- Vogels, J. (2004, May 3). Textual gratification: Quill or keypad, it's all about sex. *The Globe and Mail*.
- Wood, M., Barter, C., Stanley, N., Aghtaie, N., & Larkins, C. (2015). Images across Europe: The sending and receiving of sexual images and associations with interpersonal violence in young people's relationships. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *59*, 149–160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.CHILDYOUTH.2015.11.005>
- Wright, K. B. (2006, June 23). Researching Internet-based populations: Advantages and disadvantages of online survey research, online questionnaire authoring software packages, and web survey Services. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00259.x>