

## CHAPTER 8

# SEXTING – A NEW DANGER AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS

## INTRODUCTION

New technologies have become more widespread recently. Mobile phones and the Internet play a significant role in people's lives, especially in adolescents' lives. Communication via technology has become an inherent part of human functioning, even in romantic relations (Delevi, Weisskirch, 2013). Nowadays, 89% of adolescents and young adults (ages 15-24) have their own mobile phone, compared with 48% of people aged 59 or more (On Board Public Relations Ecco Networks, 2012). The number of Internet users has also developed very quickly in the past decade: in 2002 17% of Poles were the Internet users, in 2010 – 51%, and in 2013 it is over 60% of Poles. In 2014 it is going to exceed 66%. Interestingly, over 93% of adolescents are the Internet users (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2013).

Nowadays, living without mobile phones, the Internet and new technologies is unimaginable. But such omnipresent access to these conveniences can be very harmful. Some of the recent studies have indicated a lot of dangers happening within the new technologies: cyberbullying, hacking, pornography, easy access to sexually explicit media and sexually related sites, and many others (Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaita, Rullo, 2013). Latest reports from different studies revealed a new danger among adolescents – sexting (a play on the words “sex” and “texting”). It is associated with dangers mentioned above. There is a plethora of definitions of sexting, but almost every definition has similar content: exchanging sexual contents via mobile phones or the Internet. Sexting is particularly dangerous for children and adolescents, their development and learning about the world, other people and social functioning. They are in the

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prime time of their lives (also sexual lives), so engaging in sexting may distort their beliefs and opinions in this area. A strong proof of the immense popularity of this phenomenon is the fact that the word “sexting” took the first place in Technology category of the annual competition called “the word of the year” set up by the New Oxford American Dictionary (Stanglin, 2009). It was also the number one word in The Top 10 Everything of 2009 – Top 10 Buzzwords category in Time Magazine (Stephey, 2009).

In spite of being a rather new issue, it has already become a globalized social phenomenon, as it was labelled by Agustina and Gomez-Duran (2012). Studies carried out in Spain, USA and Canada provide the most important findings about sexting rates, its prevalence, differences between men and women and its connection with some personality traits. According to our knowledge, there is no research on sexting in Poland. We recognize the need to carry out such research in Poland, check its prevalence, differences between men and women, especially between adolescents, and provide a clear definition of sexting. One, detailed definition of sexting would facilitate further researchers’ work and subsequent comparisons of results of the next studies.

The aim of this article is to provide the current definitions of sexting, which are used in contemporary research. The second aim is to provide prevalence rates of sexting among adolescents and young adults, originated from current findings. Presentation of research on the relationship of some personality traits with engaging in sexting is the third aim of this article. Finally, there are given the latest information about sexting in Poland, its possible sources, danger related to sexting, and ways to prevent it.

## A PLETHORA OF DEFINITIONS OF SEXTING

The popularity of sexting, as a boundless social phenomenon, has increased recently.<sup>2</sup> As it was mentioned above, this word was almost the most popular word of the year 2009, overtaken only by the word “unfriend” and “hashtag” (Stanglin, 2009). Moreover, in 2008 the Online Macquarie Dictionary included the word “sexting” among 85 new words. This indicated its permanency in English informal language (Walker, Sancu, Temple-Smith, 2013). According

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<sup>2</sup> According to personal statement by dr Bogusław Habrat from Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology in Warsaw sexting existed in a few decades ago. In the 80-ties he watched a TV cable channel in a hotel in New York in which he observed sexual organs of people who wanted to present them. It was a private channel and there were advertisements proposing such behaviours.

to this dictionary, sexting is understood as sending and receiving of sexually explicit images via mobile phones (Walker, Sancı, Temple-Smith, 2011).

There are a lot of studies conducted by many researchers, but almost in every study sexting is defined in different ways. Definitions of sexting analyzed in this article are more and less detailed, depending on an author and aims of research. Such unclear definitional terms, different descriptions, other elements highlighted when describing this phenomenon, may lead to heterogeneous results of most studies. It can also hinder comparison of these results, and may entail misperception and subsequent disregard for sexting (Agustina, Gomez-Duran, 2012).

Two Spanish researchers in their review of main research findings, highlighted the plethora of definitions of sexting. They presented the most important and popular results (Agustina, Gomez-Duran 2012). Prevalence rates varied widely. It may be caused by lack of a general, detailed definition of sexting. Such clear definition should be established and should be used by every researcher conducting a research on sexting. They presumed that the results differed significantly because of the size of the samples – they consisted of different number of people. Some researchers studied teenagers, others – adults, so age of participants ranged from 10 to 29 and more. Place and method of testing (questionnaires placed online, talking on the phone or answering questions in a direct conversation) could also be considered as the reason of such heterogeneous results.

Further on, we want to introduce our suggestion of division of definitions of sexting due to a way of communication between the sender and the recipient of sexual contents. We distinguished five groups of definitions, each of them highlights another way of communication or a specific combination of some ways.

The first group of definitions emphasizes sending sexual contents electronically. According to Phippen (2009, p. 1), sexting is “the sharing of explicit images electronically”. Some Spanish researchers carried out a survey, which referred to the safety and privacy in the use of mobile services by Spanish minors (Perez, Fuente, Garcia, Guijarro, Blas, 2010). They defined sexting as receiving photos or videos of their peers in provocative or inappropriate poses, or: pictures or videos have been taken of them in provocative or inappropriate poses. Next study was conducted by Ferguson (2011). It concentrated on sexting behaviours among young Hispanic women and their co-occurrence with additional high-risk sexual behaviours. The author defined sexting as “sending erotic or nude photographs of oneself to another person or receiving erotic or nude photographs from another person” (Ferguson, 2011, p. 240). Wolak, Finkelhor and Mitchell (2012) are another researchers concerned with

sexting, but they took up a different issue. They wanted to estimate how often teens are arrested for sexting. Their sample consisted of 2712 law enforcement agencies. They defined sexting as “sexual images created by minors (age 17 or younger), that were or could have been child pornography under the statutes of your jurisdiction” (Wolak et. al., 2012, p. 5). This definition was created during their interviews with investigators regarding sexting cases caught by the police. Agustina and Gomez-Duran (2012, p. 1327) defined sexting as “sending, posting, receiving or sharing a sexually suggestive message to someone using electronic media or involving a self-nude or semi-nude picture/video”. Fleschler Peskin, Markham, Addy, Shegog, Thiel, Tortolero, (2013, p. 454) characterized sexting as “sending and/or receiving a nude or semi-nude picture/video or sexual text-only message”. These authors gave a shorter name to this kind of messages: “a sext”. Temple et al. (2014, p. 33) defined sexting as “electronically sending sexually explicit images from one adolescent to another”.

The second group of definitions that we distinguished highlights mobile phones as the most important way of communication. There are at least four studies in which sexting is defined in this way. Lenhart (2009, p. 4) defined sexting as “sending or receiving sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photos or videos of yourself or someone you know on your cell phone”. In the second survey, which was conducted by Strassberg et al. (2013, p. 17), sexting is described as “sending and receiving sexually explicit cell phone pictures, defined as pictures depicting the genitals or buttocks for both sexes and/or the breasts for females”. The third group of researchers defined sexting as “sending or receiving sexually explicit or suggestive photos via text message” (Benotsch, Snipes, Martin, Bull, 2013, p. 308). In the next study, the definition of sexting included two texting behaviours: sending sexually suggestive texts and texts propositioning sexual activities, and three progressively risky, image based behaviours: sending sexually suggestive photo, sending a photo in underwear or lingerie, sending a nude or nearly nude photo (Delevi, Weisskirch, 2013).

Mobile phones and online way of communication are considered as the means of communication between senders and receivers of erotic contents emphasized in the third group of definitions of sexting. There are two interesting studies confirming the relevance of sexting defined in this way. Associated Press-MTV (2009) carried out the survey concerning digital abuse. The sexting issue was also included in this study – it was explained as sending or forwarding nude, sexually suggestive or explicit pics on cell phones or online. Second research, conducted by National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com (2008), aimed to better understand the intersection between sex, technology and cyberspace. In this study, the authors wanted to explore the proportion of adolescents and young adults engaged in sexting.

They defined it as sending or posting online nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves, or sending/posting sexually suggestive messages (e-mail, text and messages sent via Instant Messenger – IM).

In the fourth group of definitions of sexting, there are descriptions accentuating the significance of e-mails and mobile phones included. There is at least one study, in which this phenomenon was defined as above. Thomas (2009, p. 34) conducted a survey, in which he tried to assess the prevalence of sexting, defined as “sending, receiving or forwarding sexually suggestive emails or text messages with nude or nearly-nude photos”.

The fifth group of definitions consists of definitions emphasizing the importance of e-mails, mobile phones and Internet websites as a way of interaction between senders and receivers of sexual contents. Mitchell, Wolak and Finkelhor (2007, p. 118) in their study tried to evaluate the ubiquity of sexual solicitations, harassment and unwanted exposure to pornography on the Internet. They studied the phenomenon of sexting, defined as “unwanted exposure to pornography: being exposed to pictures of naked people or people having sex without seeking or expecting such pictures, when doing online searches, surfing the web, opening e-mail or instant messages or links in messages”. In the next study, another authors revealed the prevalence and characteristics of youth sexting in USA. They defined it as follows: “the transmission via cell phone, the Internet, and other electronic media of sexual images” (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones and Wolak, 2012, p. 13). This study revealed three dimensions of incidents reported by youth. The first dimension concerned appearing in or creating images versus receiving them. The second involved adolescents that have ever appeared in or created images with sexual contents and informed of: creating image of self by respondents, creating image of respondent by someone else or creating image of someone else by respondent. The third dimension gave information of sexual explicit contents of images sent or received by youth, which could be considered as a child pornography or not.

One of our aims is to present clear and detailed definition of sexting, to organize and integrate current knowledge about this social phenomenon. We recognize the need to provide such definition, because it would facilitate researchers’ work and subsequent comparisons of further results. Our definition of this phenomenon consists of fundamental components included in the definitions mentioned above in this article: Sexting (sex + texting) is a phenomenon of exchanging sexually explicit content, i.e. nude or semi-nude photographs or videos on the phone, on the Internet or by the use of new technologies. These photographs or videos depict the breasts for females and the genitals or buttocks for both women and men. Sexting also applies to sexually suggestive text messages and unwanted exposure to pornography by receiving,

sending, sharing or forwarding e-mails or links in a message with web addresses of erotic Internet sites.

## STUDIES ON SEXTING

Sexting is a relatively new phenomenon, so there are only a few studies which deal with this topic. The number of researchers interested in this phenomenon, its sources and consequences has increased substantially during last months. The number of studies has risen – they concern not only the prevalence of sexting among adolescents and young adults, but they also inquire into the relationships of some personality traits with engaging in sexting. First, we want to present some data concerning its prevalence in different countries, among different groups of participants.

The first survey was conducted by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com (2008). It revealed that 20% of teenagers (ages 13-19) reported having sent or posted online nude or semi-nude photograph or video of themselves to someone else and 31% of participants admitted having received such photograph or video from someone else. Furthermore, 33% of young adults (ages 20-26) reported having sent or posted online such contents, and 46% of young adults have received such contents from someone else.

The Associated Press-MTV (2009) poll digital abuse survey conducted by Knowledge Networks is another study to some extent concerning sexting. Results of this study revealed that among youth (ages 14-24) 13% of females and 9% of males admitted ever having sent a nude photograph or video of themselves to someone else. 9% of females and 14% of males reported having ever received such explicit contents from someone else.

In a nationally representative survey of adolescents (ages 12-17;  $N=800$ ) conducted on landline and cell phones, the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project found that 4% of cell-owning teens reported ever having texted a sexually suggestive image or video of themselves to another person, and 15% of teenagers admitted having received a sexually suggestive image or video of someone they know. In addition, older participants were more likely to engage in sexting: 8% of 17-year-old participants have ever sent such image, and 30% have ever received such message (Lenhart, 2009).

There is another study conducted by Lenhart (2010). She revealed that 13% of adolescents and young adults (ages 18-29;  $N=2252$ ) have ever sent a sexually suggestive nude or semi-nude photograph to someone else via text message, and 31% have received sexts. There were no differences in sending sexual contents

by gender among adults, but this survey revealed, that males were more likely to have received sext than women. 21% of male respondents received it compared to 11% of females.

A Spanish researcher conducted an interesting survey among 207 Hispanic women. He revealed that 20,5% of them admitted ever having sent sexually provocative photograph or video, and 34,5% of them have ever received such contents. He did not find a significant correlations between sexting and selected sexual risk behaviours (for example: number of sexual partners or unprotected sex with new partner), with the exception of having sex without use of birth control methods when do not want to get pregnant. Moreover, sexting behaviours were minimally more common in women with histrionic personality traits. Results also indicated that behaviours defined as sexting did correlate significantly with pleasure in sex and with positive attitudes toward the phenomenon being analyzed (Ferguson, 2011).

The next study was conducted by Mitchell et al. (2012). The results revealed that 2,5% of participants admitted that they have ever appeared in or created sexually provocative photograph or video and sent it to other people, and 7,1% of participants reported ever having received such contents from others.

In another noteworthy study, the authors (Benotsch et al. (2013) emphasized the public health implications of sexting by analyzing associations between this phenomenon, substance use and sexual risk behaviours among adolescents. 44% of overall number of 763 participants (ages 18-25) reported ever having engaged in sexting. 62% of them had both sent and received at least one explicit photograph, 32% had only received such contents, and 6% of participants engaged in sexting had only sent a sexual photograph. Compared with youth that have never engaged in sexting, they were more likely to admit substance using (several recreational drugs, for example: alcohol, marijuana, ecstasy and cocaine) and getting involved in health-jeopardizing behaviours and high-risk sexual behaviours, for example unprotected sex and having multiple sexual partners. Furthermore, almost 32% of participants engaged in sexting had sex with a new partner after exchanging explicit or provocative photographs or videos with him or her via mobile phone.

Some other researchers conducted a study concerning the association between sexting, sexual behavior and psychological well-being. It yielded different results than findings provided by Benotsch et al., mentioned above. Their results revealed that sexting is not associated to sexual risk behaviours or psychological well-being (depression, anxiety and self-esteem). The authors created four categories of sexting: nonsexters, receivers, senders and two-way sexters. They called it a lifetime sexting behaviour status variable. Nonsexters have neither sent nor received a sexual message, senders have sent but never

received a sext, receivers have received but never sent a sext, and two-way sexters have both sent and received a sexual message. Among participants from United States (ages 18-24;  $N=3447$ ), 57% were nonsexters, 28,2% were two-way sexters, 12,6% were receivers, and 2% were senders. Interestingly, it was more likely for males than for females to receive a sext without sending one. There were significant differences between sexually active and non-sexually active participants – among sexually active participants there were more two-way sexters. Presumably, sexting is an usual element of adolescents' and young adults' sexual relationships, due to its lack of correlation with riskier or safer behaviour (Gordon-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski, Zimmerman, 2013).

Strassberg et al. (2013) conducted a survey concerning sexting among high school students in the United States (ages 14-18;  $N=606$ ). Almost 20% of participants had ever sent a sexually explicit photograph of themselves via cell phone. Nearly 40% reported ever having received such contents. According to this results, it was more likely for the students to admit that they had received than had sent a sext. More males (49,7%) than females (30,9%) reported having received such a photograph, and approximately 25% of receivers had forwarded it to other person. Furthermore, 50,4% of females and 33,9% of males declared that it is always wrong to send or forward such picture, while 5,1% of females and 12,2% of males declared that sending, receiving or forwarding such pictures is ok. Over 30% of students who reported ever having sent sexually explicit images, did so even though they were aware of serious legal consequences of sexting behaviours. This study also showed that participants engaged in sending and/or receiving sexually explicit photographs or videos, reported sending and receiving significantly more regular text messages.

Another interesting study was conducted in the United States. Fleschler Peskin et al. (2013) examined the prevalence and patterns of sexting among ethnic minority urban high school students (black and Hispanic students) in the United States (ages 15-16;  $N=1034$ ). The results show that 21% of respondents declared ever having sent either a nude or semi-nude photograph or video, and almost 25% of students reported ever having sent a sexually suggestive text-only message. 31% of students reported ever having received a nude or semi-nude pictures or videos, and almost 32% of respondents admitted ever having received a sexually suggestive message from someone. 10% of students admitted sharing sexts with other people, not originally intended to be recipients of such contents, and 20% of participants were the recipients of sexts originally sent to someone else. Hispanic males were less likely to engage in sexting behaviours than black males and females, and Hispanic females were the least likely to participate in all sexting behaviours mentioned in this study.



To sum up, prevalence rates of sexting vary considerably, according to the information mentioned in this paragraph. Almost every study provided another estimates. This discrepancies may have appeared due to different population assessed, large range of participant's age, the accuracy of definition and its more or less detailed elements, time of the survey, methodology: way and methods of carrying on the study (Mitchell et al., 2012). Furthermore, the prevalence data revealed in some studies may underestimate the participants' sexting behaviours, because some of the interviews were realized via landline or cell phones, during their parents' presence in the next room (Strassberg et al., 2013). Because of vague findings, it is essential to verify how sexting is related to sexual behaviours. It should become the aim of intervention to prevent many risky sexual behaviours, but on the other hand, it could be adapted as a safer, independent sex behavior, especially if it is used instead of physical contact (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013).

## **PERSONALITY FACTORS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH CONNECTED WITH SEXTING**

Unfortunately, there is still insufficient amount of studies on sexting and its connections with some selected personality factors. Delevi et al. (2013) conducted a study in which they wanted to check if some personality factors may be considered as predictors of sexting. There is a limited number of studies conducted to check how some selected personality factors are linked to the use of technology in relationships, but this is probably the first concerning a sexting issue. The aim of this study was to examine personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and intellect/imagination (Mini-International Personality Item Pool – Mini-IPIP), sensation seeking, and problematic cell phone use as relating to engagement in sexting behaviour. There were 304 participants (males = 126, females = 178; ages 18-30) from the United States. In this study, 75,7% of the participants have ever sent a sexually suggestive text message, 67,4% sent a sexual proposition, 45,7% have ever sent a sexually suggestive photograph, 43,7% have ever sent a photograph of their underwear, and 28,9% have ever sent a nude picture of themselves. Overall, more than 89% of participants have ever engaged in sexting behaviour. This study revealed that low levels of agreeableness and high levels of neuroticism was connected with sending a sexually suggestive picture or video, sending a picture in underwear or lingerie, and sending a nude or nearly nude picture. Sexting by sending visual images may be some kind of risky, impulsive behaviour, rooted in this combination of personality traits. Interestingly, being male, in a relationship, being extraverted, and being neurotic, predicted sending

sexually suggestive text. Being male and extraverted predicted sending a text propositioning sexual activity. What is more, sending a sexually suggestive text was predicted by being male, in a relationship, and problematic cell phone use. Sending a text propositioning sexual activity was predicted by being male and problematic phone use. Moreover, participants in current relationships indicated sending more sexually suggestive text messages but also requiring a greater degree of commitment in relationship in order to engage in sexting.

The aim of the next study was to examine whether adolescents engaged in sexting report more psychosocial health problems, compared to their non-sexting counterparts. Participants included 937 adolescents from Texas, USA. The authors measured self-report of sexting, impulsivity, alcohol and drug use, and depression and anxiety symptoms. This examination revealed that teen sexting was notably associated with symptoms of depression, impulsivity, and substance use. When adjusted for prior sexual behaviour, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and parent education, sexting was only related to impulsivity and substance use. These results suggest that sexting may correlate with impulsive and high-risk behaviours, it cannot be regarded as a marker of mental health (Temple et al., 2014).

Two researchers from Canada conducted a study, which purpose was to examine the relationship between sexual attitudes (permissive and conservative) and the practice of sexting, and whether men had more positive attitudes towards sexting than women (Samimi, Alderson, 2014). Of the 525 participants (males = 263, females = 262; ages 18-50), 60,8% told that they are currently engaging in the practice of sexting or have engaged in this practice in the past. Of the 319 participants who practice sexting, 62,4% were male, and 59,2% were female. In this study, questions about sexting and attitudes toward it were divided into six components (with the help of principal component analysis, using Varimax rotation): Openness to Sexuality, Entertainment and Relationship, Control and Prevention, Negative Consequences, Sharing and Expectations, Legality. With regard to the differences between males and females, results revealed that males scored higher on following components: Openness to Sexuality, Entertainment and Relationship, and Sharing and Expectation. Females scored higher on following components: Control and Prevention, and Negative Consequences. Males' ratings on the last component: Legality, were very similar to females' ratings. The principal finding of presented study is that the differences between males and females on the components extracted from component analysis are not due to their gender, but due to their relationship status. Participants who were single but were dating someone were more likely to engage in sexting than those who were single and had no commitments. Participants who were in a relationship were more likely to engage in sexting than those who were single

and had no commitments. There were no significant differences between single participants dating someone, and those who were in a relationship, in terms of sexting practices. Relationship duration also had a significant connection with the sexting practice: participants who were in a relationship for one year or less, or more than one year, were more likely to engage in sexting than those who were single and had no commitments. Moreover, although females engage in the practice of sexting, they are more likely to declare that sexting has negative consequences and parents should control and prevent their children from engaging in this kind of practices. Interestingly, participants with permissive, liberal sexual attitudes were more likely to engage in the practice of sexting than those who had conservative sexual attitudes.

Klettke, Hallford and Mellor (2014) collected and synthesized recent findings of the prevalence of sexting, its correlates, and the context in which it occurs. They conducted a systematic research of databases and choose 31 studies that met inclusion criteria. This examination revealed that sexting is more prevalent amongst adults than adolescents, older age is predictive of sexting for adolescents but not adults, and more individuals report receiving sexts than sending them.

## **SEXTING IN POLAND**

At present, there are no research that have examined sexting among Polish adolescents or young adults empirically. According to our knowledge, sexting is a serious and dangerous issue among Poles, but reliable survey is necessary to be conducted. This kind of solid study is necessary to figure out the contexts in which sexting occurs, associations between this social phenomenon and sociodemographic factors, motivations for sexting, emotions arising from it, its relationship to risk behaviours and the intent (for bullying, as a joke, in the relationship, etc.). It is crucial to determine the impact of sexting on other diverse behaviours and health outcomes in relevant age groups, and check its direction. This kind of survey should also find out the degree to which sexting behaviours are assented or coerced, and estimate the adolescents' sense of awareness of the potential consequences of sexting (Fleschler Peskin et al., 2013; Strassberg et al., 2013).

## **DANGERS AND CONSEQUENCES RELATED TO SEXTING**

Nowadays, adolescents and young adults are the largest group of mobile phones and Internet users. They cannot imagine living without these facilities. Mobile

phones, the Internet and new technologies are an integral part of people's functioning at school, at work, or in their leisure time. What is more, adolescents are in the prime time of their sexual lives (Levine, 2013). Given the increasing prevalence of mobile phones, there is a possibility for new technologies to play a great role in sexuality of adolescents. Some people may say that excessive reactions to the sexting may be exaggerated, there are a lot of serious, real social, psychological and legal consequences to sexting that partly justify the concerns (Forbes, 2011). The term "sexting" is misleading – it does not make distinctions between sending text or images, and whether the image sent is of yourself or someone else. Moreover, sexting may be considered both as something good, and as something bad. As a good form, it may be an inherent element of romantic relationship, but as a bad form it can cause harm and may lead to serious consequences (Slane, 2013). Engaging in sexting may create inappropriate norms connected with dating, sexual behaviours and various rules in relationships. It can also popularize the belief that sex is necessary after exchanging sexual contents via mobile phones or the Internet (Fleschler Peskin et al., 2013).

There are a lot of advantages of using new technologies, but doing it the wrong way may lead to many disadvantages and dangers. It is possible that sexting results in many adverse, and sometimes unexpected outcomes for its participants, which include embarrassment, feeling upset, feeling bothered, mental health problems, public dissemination of explicit photographs or videos and other serious psychological and social consequences. Furthermore, lack of control after an explicit or sexually suggestive photograph or video is sent or pressure by someone's partner to sext, may lead to psychological distress and other mental and physical health concerns. In recent years, there have happened a lot of cases of suicide attempts and committed suicides due to distribution of somebody's naked pictures or videos to unintended audience or due to blackmailing the victims (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013; Samimi et al., 2014).

It is documented, that people seeking sexual partners via Internet are at significantly higher risk of engaging in dangerous sexual behaviours. As we mentioned above, there are many social and legal consequences of sexting. In the Unites States there were a lot of legal cases in which adolescents were accused of child pornography distribution after sending, receiving or forwarding nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves or somebody's else (Ferguson, 2011; Benotsch et al., 2013).

## POSSIBLE SOURCES OF SEXTING

Sexting has become a real danger for people involved in this kind of behaviour. It is generally considered as bad and wrongful behaviour. This phenomenon constitutes a real threat to children, adolescents, young adults, and to the whole society. There is probably no simple and clear answer to the question of its possible sources. Many different reasons should be taken into consideration. Levine (2013, p. 257) recalled Klein's quote: "The same thing happens repeatedly whenever a new technology is introduced into Western popular culture: It becomes an instrument with which to terrify ourselves and others about sex". Currently, almost every adolescent possesses his or her own mobile phone and a computer with an access to the Internet, which enables them to contact with others instantly. Their romantic relationships are partly based on telephone contact. They live different lives than their parents and grandparents, and learn about each other and the whole world in a different way. It is possible for them to find explicit media easily, including pornography (Strassberg et al., 2013).

Erotic contents enters almost every sphere of human lives, so adolescents, which are in their prime time of their sexual lives, may consider sharing with other people naked photographs or videos as something typical for all society. Moral norms have also changed dramatically over the past decade. Adolescents engaged in sexting may be convinced that sex with his or her partner is obligatory after sharing with each other nude or semi-nude photographs or videos. Presumably, this phenomenon arose from widespread, inappropriate, obscene norms in the context of dating and sexual behaviours (Fleschler Peskin et al., 2013). Some Australian researchers (Walker et al., 2013), who conducted a qualitative study among 33 young people (ages 15-20), concluded that young people's understanding of the meaning of sexting for boys may be in contrast to that of girls. For males, engaging in sexting behaviours was often of positive significance and even considered as a means to status. Some young men claimed that generally boys experience pressure from one another to show each other images of girls – they do it to impress their friends and avoid being ignored. For girls it was rather a means to the destruction of her reputation.

When considering possible sources of sexting, one more reason for engaging in sexting should be taken into account: lack of parents' time spent with their children, especially on talking about current, family issues. Nowadays, working and concentrating on everyday problems may be so absorbing, that parents cannot spend much time with their children. Lack of parents' and teachers' control of adolescents, as well as their boredom, need of entertainment, need of new experiences and a desire to follow new technology trends as well as their usage, may lead to youth's engagement in sexting behaviours.

## PREVENTION OF SEXTING

Sexting, as a social phenomenon, has become widespread recently. Unfortunately, it is often used as a catchy issue, when it is linked to a suicide of a young girl or boy (especially a girl). According to prevention of sexting, we have to consider its harmful effects on children, adolescents and adults. It is not indifferent to people's physical and mental health. Its effects on people's functioning may be very harmful and long-lasting. There should be provided separate solutions for children and adolescents, their parents, teachers and the whole society, because each of this groups requires focusing on slightly different thoughts, emotions and behavior.

Children and adolescents need special treatment, especially due to their ongoing development of different spheres of functioning. Specialists have to provide them with detailed information about the phenomenon of sexting. Specially trained in this field: psychologists and teachers, should participate in meetings, during which they would tell young people about how dangerous and risky are behaviors described as sexting. Such meetings should take place in every school, so that adolescents would have an easy access to people knowledgeable about how to work with victims and perpetrators of sexting. Moreover, students should be taught and trained how to use new technologies safely. They also should be taught that the Internet is a specific kind of virtual world, in which every information, every photograph and video is stored forever. Children and adolescents should be aware that every information may be used without their agreement or even without their awareness, by their future employers.

The second group of people who need a separate solution consists of parents. It should be emphasized that in most cases, they don't know what exactly is their child doing in his or her room, while surfing on the Internet or talking and sending messages via mobile phones. Specially trained psychologists would be the best sources of information about the essence of this phenomenon, its potential impact, threats connected with it and ways to react properly if their daughter or son becomes a victim or perpetrator of sexting. It should be noted that parent's reaction will differ in the two cases mentioned above. Their son or daughter would experience different emotions, thoughts and would behave in a different way, which will depend on being the object of ridicule or being a creator of erotic photos or videos. When parents get the professional information about sexting, it is essential to share their knowledge with their children. It is also very important to talk to their children about sexual norms and about human sexuality in general. If such conversations take place within the family, children would probably be more careful regarding the Internet and mobile phones use. Furthermore, one of the most important thing that parent can do to protect

his or her daughter or son against dangers connected to sexting, is monitoring websites visited by their children. This is an excellent opportunity to block pornographic websites – it may prevent children from sending and receiving erotic photos and videos. Every parent should be provided with information about legal consequences of sending and receiving such materials, which may be considered as child pornography. Crucial to protect children against sexting would be to provide them with such information, for example: legal aspects of this issue and consequences of involvement in sexting.

The third group consist of teachers – it is essential to provide them with information about sexting. Children and adolescents spend most of their time at school. In recent years, school environment has changed dramatically. Students have their own mobile phones and other electronic devices, such as laptops and tablets with the continuous access to the Internet, which are used by them even in the classroom. Teachers should be taught about new means of communication and many risks arising from using it in an inappropriate way. There should be organized a detailed training cycle for teachers, focused on developing skills in working with victims and perpetrators of sexting. Awareness of this phenomenon and many dangers arising from it, among teachers and students, would be the great way to improve the relationship between teachers and students. If students know that there is a person that is always ready to talk and help in case of any kind of problem, they would feel more secure and share their problems with their teachers or educators.

Information presented in this article show a huge need to publicize this relatively new phenomenon. The whole society should be provided with information about sexting, its essence, dangers and risks connected with it. People should learn about the most appropriate ways to react and help in case of meeting a victim or perpetrator of sexting. All the information listed above should be included in appropriate, detailed TV and radio programmes, printed in magazines dedicated to youth as well as to their parents and teachers. Each age group should find data on sexting in their favourite magazine or TV programme. There would be a great idea to organize a social campaign to protect children and adolescents against harmful effects of engaging in sexting – both as a sender and receiver of sexts. An obligatory part of such campaign would be a set of information aimed to promote appropriate sexual standards for adolescents, which differ significantly from current obscene sexual standards developed and broaden by TV programmes and movies, and the whole porn industry. There should also be emphasized the individual's law to refuse requests of other people, pertaining to unwanted, indecent behaviours.

## CONCLUSION

Immense growth of new technologies and means of communication can be considered as a huge advantage, challenge, but also as a threat. Mobile phones and the ubiquitous access to the Internet play an increasingly significant role in people's lives, especially in adolescents' lives, who are the largest group of mobile phones and Internet users currently. Sexting (a play of the words "sex" and "texting") is a new danger connected to current digitalized world. There are many definitions of this relatively new phenomenon, but it fundamentally means the same: exchanging sexual contents (naked or semi-naked photographs and/or videos) via mobile phones or the Internet. Its prevalence rates among adolescents and young adults vary significantly, depending on various factors. The most important studies on sexting, described in our article, were conducted in USA, Canada, Australia and Spain. There are provided main results of this studies in previous paragraphs. There are also presented results of studies on sexting and its connections with some selected personality factors, psychosocial health and high-risk behaviours (for example substance use). Unfortunately, there are no research on sexting among adolescents or young adults in Poland, so there are no information about its prevalence and connections with personality factors among Poles. To conclude, there is a huge need for such reliable research in Poland, and to regularly follow trends in new technologies and sexual behaviours in adolescents. This kind of knowledge may help us to prepare detailed preventive programs and protect youth against many damages to their health and life.

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