

'Sexting' consequences barely faze young people

Poll: 1 in 4 have done it despite threat of serious charges

By **LIBBY QAID**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Think your kid is not "sexting"? Think again.

Sexting — sharing sexually explicit photos, videos and chat by cell phone or online — is fairly commonplace among young people, despite sometimes grim consequences for those who do it.

More than a quarter of young people have been involved in sexting in some

form, an Associated Press-MTV poll found.

That includes Sammy, a 16-year-old from the San Francisco Bay Area who asked that his last name not be used.

Sammy said he had shared naked pictures of himself with girlfriends.

He also shared naked pictures of someone else that a friend had sent him.

What he didn't realize at the time was that young people across the country have faced charges, in some cases felony charges, for sending nude pictures.

"That's why I probably wouldn't do it again," Sammy said.

Yet, "I just don't see it

as that big of a problem, personally," he added.

That was the view of nearly half of those surveyed who have been involved in sexting.

The other half said it's a serious problem — and did it anyway. Knowing there might be consequences hasn't stopped them.

"There's definitely the invincibility factor that young people feel," said Kathleen Bogle, a sociology professor at La Salle University in Philadelphia and author of the book "Hooking Up: Sex, Dating and Relationships on Campus."

"That's part of the

See Sexting, Page A6

AP-MTV POLL

'Sexting' common

Many young people have engaged in "sexting," despite sometimes grim consequences for those who share nude pictures of themselves or friends by cell phone or online.

Young people's communication via cell phone or the Internet
(Percentage of 14-to-24-year-olds)

Involved in some type of "sexting"

30%

Someone I know sent me messages with sexual words

29%

Someone sent me naked pictures or videos of themselves

18%

Someone sent me naked pictures or videos of someone else that I know personally

8%

Participated in a webcam chat during which someone else performed sexual activities

7%

The AP-MTV poll was conducted Sept. 11-22 and involved interviews with 1,247 14-to-24-year-olds; margin of sampling error ± 2.8 pct. points

SOURCE: Knowledge Networks AP

Sexting

Continued from Page A1

reason why they have a high rate of car accidents and things like that, is they think, 'Oh, well, that will never happen to me,'" Bogle said.

Research shows teenage brains are not quite mature

enough to make good decisions consistently. By the midteens, the brain's reward centers, the parts involved in emotional arousal, are well-developed, making teens more vulnerable to peer pressure.

But it is not until the early 20s that the brain's frontal cortex, where reasoning connects with emotion, enabling people to weigh consequences, has finished forming.

Beyond feeling invincible, young people also have a much different view of sexual photos that might be posted online, Bogle said.

They don't think about the idea that those photos might wind up in the hands of potential employers or college admissions officers, she said.

"Sometimes they think of it as a joke. They have a laugh about it," Bogle said. "In some cases, it's seen as flirtation. They're thinking of it as something far less serious and aren't thinking of it as consequences down the road or who can get hold of this information. They're also not thinking about worst-case scenarios that parents might worry about."

Sexting doesn't stop with teenagers. Young adults are even more likely to have sexted; one-third of them said they had been involved in sexting, compared with about one-quarter of teenagers.

Thelma, a 25-year-old from Natchitoches, La., who didn't want her last name used, said she has been asked more than once to send naked pictures of herself to a man.

"It's just when you're talking to a guy who's interested in you, and you might have a sexual relationship, so they just want to see you naked," she said, adding that she never complied with those requests.

"But with my current boyfriend, I did it on my own — he didn't ask me," she said, adding that she was confident he would keep the image to himself.

Those who sent nude pictures of themselves mostly said they went to a boyfriend, girlfriend or romantic interest.

But 14 percent said they suspect the pictures were shared without permission, and they may be right: Seventeen percent of those who received naked pictures said they passed them along to someone else, often to more than just one person.

Boys were a little more likely than girls to say they re-

ceived naked pictures or video of someone that had been passed around without the person's consent. Common reasons were that they thought other people would want to see, that they were showing off and that they were bored.

In at least two cases, sexting has been linked to suicide. Last year in Cincinnati, Jessica Logan, 18, hanged herself after weeks of ridicule at school; she had sent a nude cell phone picture to her boyfriend, and after they broke up, he forwarded the picture to other girls.

And three months ago, Hope Witsell, 13, hanged herself, after relentless taunting at her school near Tampa, Fla.

She had sent a nude photo of herself to a boy, and another girl used his phone to send the picture to other students who forwarded it along.