



2009 AP-MTV DIGITAL ABUSE STUDY

Objectives/Background

As part of its multi-year public affairs campaign to address the emerging issue of teen digital abuse, MTV partnered with the AP on a study that provides an in depth look at the prevalence of digital abuse among young people today. This research was designed to quantify how young people are affected by and respond to issues like sexting, digital harassment and digital dating abuse.

Methodology

Respondents were recruited from KnowledgePanel®, the only online panel that is representative of the U.S. population, bringing unprecedented reliability and statistical projectability to online survey research. KnowledgePanel members are randomly recruited by telephone through Random-Digit Dial (RDD) sampling and by mail through Address-Based Sampling (ABS), which better accounts for the growing number of cell-phone only households in the U.S. To capture the full range of consumers, KN provides non-Internet recruits with access to the Internet via a laptop.

In total 1,247 respondents, ages 14 to 24, were interviewed. The survey was fielded online from September 11 through September 25, 2009, and the mean survey length was approximately 15 minutes.

KEY FINDINGS

I. PERVASIVENESS AND FREQUENCY OF DIGITAL ABUSE

HALF OF ALL YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE BEEN THE TARGET OF SOME TYPE OF DIGITAL ABUSE

50% of people age 14-24 have experienced digitally abusive behavior.¹

- People age 18-24 are slightly more likely than teens to have been targeted – 52% vs. 47%.
- Among teens, females are more likely to have been targeted than males – 53% vs. 42%.

Young people regularly encounter digital abuse - from the mild to the extreme.

- Young people indicate that they are most likely to have experienced the following types of digital abuse:
 - o Spreading lies – someone wrote something about them online or in a text message that wasn't true (22%).
 - o Violation of trust – someone forwarded an email or IM they had sent without permission (20%).
 - o Digital disrespect – someone wrote something about them online or in a text message that was really mean (19%).
- Among those who have experienced these types of harassment, more than half report that it has

happened more than once.

- Nearly half of young people (45%) report that they see people being mean to each other on social networking sites.
- Some of the more extreme forms of digital abuse, such as impersonation, blackmail or pressure to sext occur less frequently, but still affect a number of young people.
 - o More than 1 in 10 have been the victim of impersonation, either by someone logging into their profile without permission (12%) or by someone making a fake profile (6%).
 - o 11% report that they have been pressured to send a naked photo or video of themselves to someone else.
 - o 8% say that they have been threatened with digital blackmail.

II. SEXTING

ROUGHLY ONE-THIRD HAVE ENGAGED IN SEXTING RELATED ACTIVITIES

3 in 10 young people report having been involved in some type of naked sexting.

- Incidence overall is higher among 18-24s (33%) than 14-17s (24%).
- Similar numbers (29%) report receiving messages “with sexual words or images” by text or on the internet.

1 in 10 has shared a naked image of themselves.

- Females are slightly more likely to have shared a naked photo or video of themselves (13%) than males (9%).
- Those who have shared a naked photo or video mostly report that they initially sent the photo to a significant other or romantic interest. However, 29% of those who have sent sexts report sending them to people they only know online and have never met in person. 24% sent sexts to people they wanted to date or hook up with.
- While females are more likely to share naked photos or videos of themselves, males are more likely to report receiving a naked photo or video of someone else that has been passed around – 14% vs. 9% of females.
- 61% of those who have sent a naked photo or video of themselves have been pressured by someone else to do so at least once.

Almost half of sexually active young people report being involved in sexting.

- 45% of young people who report having had sex in the past 7 days also report at least one sexting related activity.

- Sexually active young people are also twice as likely to have shared naked photos of themselves – 17% vs. 8% of non-sexually active young people.

Sexts often have unintended viewers and are often forwarded as a form of social currency by those looking to show off or be funny.

- Nearly 1 in 5 sext recipients (17%) report that they have passed the images along to someone else. More than half (55%) of those who passed the images to someone else say they shared them with more than one person.
- The most popular reasons given for forwarding sexts include the assumption that others would want to see them (52%), a desire to show off (35%), and boredom (26%).
 - Teens also report that they have shared sexts as joke (31%) or to be funny (30%).
- 14% of young people who have shared a naked photo or video of themselves suspect that the recipient probably shared the image with someone else without permission.

Young people have complex views of sexting, with respondents characterizing it as everything from “hot” and “trusting” to “uncomfortable” and “slutty”.

- Those involved in sexting are likely to use words like “flirty”, “exciting”, “hot”, “fun” and “trusting” to describe the practice.
- Those who don’t sext find it “gross”, “uncomfortable” and “stupid”.
- Interestingly, boys are more likely to describe sexting as “hot” than girls, while girls are more critical. More than half of girls call sexting “slutty”, “stupid” and “dangerous”.

III. DIGITAL DATING ABUSE

TECHNOLOGY OPENS NEW AVENUES FOR MANIPULATION AND CONTROL AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN RELATIONSHIPS

- Almost a quarter of young people currently in some sort of romantic relationship report that their boyfriend or girlfriend checks up with them multiple times per day, either online or on a cell phone, to see where they are, who they’re with or what they’re doing.
 - 22% say they feel like their significant other checks up on them too often, while 15% say that their significant other complains that they check up too often.
- More than 1 in 4 say their boyfriend or girlfriend has checked the text messages on their phone without permission.
- 12% have had a boyfriend or girlfriend call them names, put them down, or say really mean things to them on the Internet or cell phone.
- Other ways digital platforms are changing the dynamics of youth relationships and creating new forms of dating abuse include:
 - More than 1 in 10 have had a boyfriend or girlfriend demand passwords.
 - Roughly 1 in 10 have also had a significant other demand that they “unfriend” former boyfriends/girlfriends on social networks.

IV. CONSEQUENCES AND RESPONSES

FEW CONSIDER THE MORE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES AND RISKS OF THEIR DIGITAL BEHAVIOR, AND IN SOME CASES ARE UNWILLING TO INTERVENE OR REPORT ABUSE WHEN IT HAPPENS

Young people recognize that digital abuse is a problem, but the real risks and consequences are far from top of mind.

- Roughly 7 in 10 (69%) say that digital abuse is a serious problem for society that should be addressed, while 76% say that it is a serious problem for people their age.
- Despite their general concern about this problem, young people are unlikely to worry about the potential for serious consequences of their actions in the digital sphere.
 - Only about half (51%) of young people say they have thought about the idea that things they post online could come back to hurt them later.
 - Fewer still are aware of the types of problems that could arise from their digital actions:
 - Just 1 in 4 have given at least some thought to the idea that things they post online could get them in trouble with the police.
 - Only 28% of students have considered that they could get in trouble at school for things they do online, while just 29% of those with jobs had considered that they could get in trouble with their boss.

Most young people are okay with reporting group bullying, but are ambivalent towards how to respond to instances of individuals abusing others.

- More than half of young people feel that if they witness someone being picked on by a group of people, it is “always” okay to report it to an authority (55%).
- Physical harm is also a deal breaker, as 78% indicate that it is always okay to report when someone harms another person physically.
- When it comes to instances of individual bullying with emotional consequences, what is and is not okay becomes less clear.
 - Fewer than 3 in 10 feel that it is always okay to report when someone is embarrassing or upsetting another person.
 - Young people are split as to how they would react if they witnessed someone being bullied on a social network, with half reporting they would ask the bully to stop (47%) and half reporting they are likely to do nothing (54%).

If harassed, asking the bully to stop is the first line of defense; consulting a friend is second.

- Slightly more than 6 in 10 indicate that they are likely to ask the bully to stop if they find themselves the victims of digital abuse or harassment (62%).
- Similar numbers also report that they would ask a friend for help (59%), while a little over half say that they would ignore the harasser or bully (56%).
- Among teens, parents are also a top resource. Nearly 6 in 10 teens (58%) indicate that they would tell their parents, compared to 36% of 18-24s.

Sharing passwords associated with digital abuse.

- More than 1 in 4 (26%) report that they have shared an online password with someone.
 - Females (31%) are more likely to have shared passwords than males (22%).
 - Among those who have shared online passwords, more than half (54%) report sharing it with a “close” friend.
- Those who have shared passwords are more likely to report having been a target of digital abuse – 68%, compared to 44% who have not shared their passwords.

V. IMPACTS AND RISK FACTORS

VICTIMS OF DIGITAL ABUSE ARE MORE LIKELY TO ALSO ENGAGE IN HIGH RISK BEHAVIORS AND CONTEMPLATE SUICIDE

More than half of those bullied report being upset by it. Rumors and untruths are deemed most hurtful.

- 56% of those who have been bullied report that they were “very” or “extremely” upset the most recent time they were targeted.
- Those who were the victims of rumors or untrue gossip seemed most upset by the bullying, as 63% of those who said untrue rumors about them had been spread digitally admit that this upset them.

Association seen between digital abuse and mental health.²

- Young people who have been the target of digital bullying are twice as likely to report having received treatment from a mental health professional, 13% to 6%, and are nearly three times more likely to have considered dropping out of school, 11% to 4%.
- Digital abuse can also be linked to risk of suicide; 8% of targets and 12% of sexters have considered ending their own life in the past year compared to 3% of people who have not been bullied and are not involved in sexting.

Other risky behaviors are linked to digital abuse.

- Young people who have reported smoking a cigarette, drinking alcohol, using illegal drugs or stealing/shoplifting in the past seven days are more likely to have been the target of digital abuse – 60%, compared to 48% among those who have not done any of those things in the past seven days.
- Sexually active young people are also more likely to have been the target of digital abuse – 62% of those who have had sex in the last seven days have been target compared to 49% who have not.

DIGITAL ABUSE AND SEXTING AFFECT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE, WITH CERTAIN YOUTH APPEARING MORE AT RISK

Whether rich or poor, black or white, digital abuse touches young people from all parts of society.

- Digital abuse is as much an issue in the city as the suburbs, and targets young people of all races, socio-economic backgrounds, and regions of the country.

- Academic achievement also does not have an effect – A students are just as likely as C students to be targeted.

Teens in single-parent households run a higher risk of being targeted.

- 63% of teens living in single-parent households reported being a target of digital bullying, compared with 45% of those who live with two or more adults.³
- Teens in single-parent households are also more likely to be sexting – 47%, compared to 21% living with two or more adults.

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¹ Targets report having had at least one of the following happen to them: 1) Someone wrote something about you on an Internet page that wasn't true 2) Someone shared/sent to another person an email or IM you had sent them that you didn't want shared 3) Someone wrote something about you on an Internet page that was really mean 4) Someone used email, IM or cell phone text messages to spread rumors about you that weren't true 5) Someone used an e-mail message, IM or cell phone text message or post on an Internet page to threaten to harm you physically 6) Someone impersonated you by logging into your email account or Facebook, MySpace, Twitter or other Internet account without your permission 7) Someone spied on you by logging into your email account or Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, or other Internet account without your permission 8) Someone put embarrassing pictures or videos of you on an Internet page without your permission 9) Someone used email, IM, text messaging or a site like Facebook or MySpace to say they were interested in dating you, and later told you they were only pretending 10) Someone found embarrassing information about you on the Internet and used it to tease you in person 11) Someone videotaped or photographed you doing something embarrassing without your knowledge and shared it with other people 12) Someone threatened to send e-mail, text messages or post things on sites like Facebook or MySpace telling other people private things about you, true or untrue, if you didn't do as they demanded 13) Someone found some embarrassing information about you on the Internet and shared it with other people without your permission 14) Someone sent you email, IM or cell phone messages encouraging you to hurt yourself 15) Someone impersonated you by creating a fake Facebook/MySpace profile for you 16) Someone took photos or videos of me in a sexual situation that I was not aware were taken and shared them with others 17) Was pressured by someone to send them naked pictures or videos of myself

² Though an association has been observed, it does not prove causation in these cases

³ Small base size, but differences are statistically significant