

LEAKED

Understanding and Addressing Self-Generated Sexual Content Involving Young People in Thailand

Insight
Paper

2.

How Gender Impacts
Young People's
Attitudes and
Experiences of
Self-Generated
Sexual
Content



Leaked is a rare opportunity to listen to young people in the Global South about child digital safety. The survey of 1,916 young people between the ages of 9-17 in Northern Thailand amplifies the perspectives of young people in the discourse about how they are impacted by self-generated sexual content in the digital contexts they inhabit.



**Insight
Paper:**

2.

How Gender Impacts Young People's Attitudes and Experiences of Self-Generated Sexual Content

Child online safety requires attention to nuances. Exploring attitudes and experiences of self-generated sexual content through the lens of gender helps us to elucidate the similarities and differences in the experiences of different young people. Understanding this critical influencing factor allows for targeted and fit-for-purpose prevention and response activities.

Child digital safety is a topic where hard quantitative data from young people is scarce, and policy is therefore often heavily informed by expert opinion. There is indisputable value in adding hard evidence from young people to inform policy and develop evidence-based programming.

Gender Interactions in the Leaked Data

This paper briefly presents some of the most fascinating Leaked data relating to gender. Some highlights **differences between genders**. Further shows a **lack of difference between genders**. Some data is unexpected and challenges assumptions we have about young people, their lives online and gender norms in society. Overall, it can give us confidence in building evidence-based, targeted prevention, and response activities.



Digital Safety

Less than half of the Leaked sample of young people reported receiving any explicit digital safety education. Of those who had, girls were statistically significantly more likely than boys to have learned about digital safety from parents (51% vs 42%), or at school (50% vs 44%).

This may suggest that adults are more proactive in guiding girls, perhaps based on perceptions that girls face greater risks or greater harm when things go wrong online.¹ However, the data simultaneously shows that exposure to sexual content is widespread across genders. The fact that girls receive more safety education, while exposure levels are broadly similar, challenges the assumption that boys are less in need of structured guidance.

1. UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office & Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention. (2020). Our lives online: Use of social media by children and adolescents in East Asia – opportunities, risks and harms. UNICEF.

Yet the content of any digital safety education is still unlikely to be meeting the needs that young people expressed. The digital safety education that participants named – which is still only reaching half of them – is often focused on **hard digital skills**. These hard skills are “the more technical or functional risk-reducing actions that young people can take, like adjusting privacy settings, enabling two-factor authentication, or blocking and reporting unwanted content”².

Conversely, teaching young people **soft digital skills** was less visible. Soft digital skills are “the ability to assess risks, recognize red flags in online interactions, maintain healthy digital boundaries, refuse pressure, or know when and how to disengage from uncomfortable or unsafe interactions.”³

Neglecting soft digital skills is problematic given that over a quarter of all Leaked survey respondents (27%, n=524) said that they used the internet for dating or building romantic relationships.

Furthermore, teaching hard digital skills may be wasted investment. The Leaked respondents confirmed that they already

had high levels of hard digital skills. For example, only 4% of older and 22% of young respondents didn’t already know how to access privacy settings on common platforms.

There is a disconnection with what adults think young people need from digital safety training and what young people say that they need.



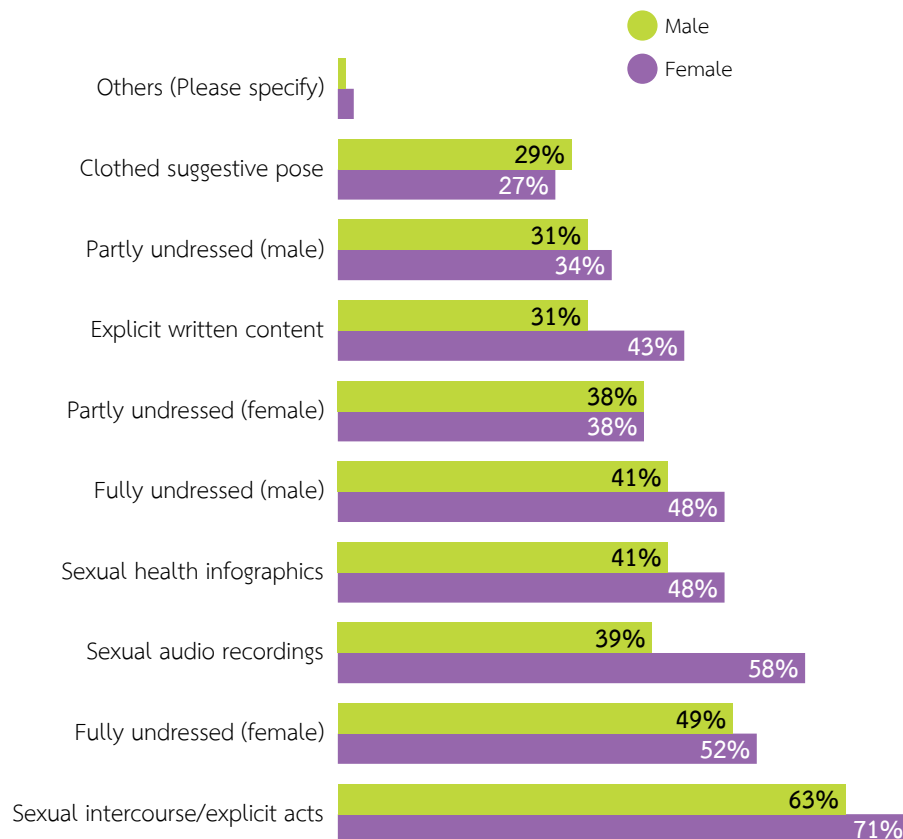
2. Schatz, J., Deesawade, R., Mosby, W. & Kavenagh, M. (2025). Leaked: Understanding and Addressing-Self-Generated Sexual Content Involving Young People in Thailand. Evident & HUG Project: Bangkok. p. 22.
3. Ibid.

Defining Sexual Content

The Leaked data showed that ‘sexual content’ was defined much more broadly by the young participants than in the ways that adults and protection experts tend to define it. While adults use technical and legal definitions, both male and female Leaked survey respondents included a far broader range of things in what they saw as ‘sexual content’.

This included things like sexual health information, partially undressed bodies, written sexts or romantic fiction, and even fully clothed individuals in sexually suggestive poses were named. Content depicting females were more likely than images depicting males to be seen as sexual.⁴

What constitutes “sexual content”?



4. Ibid.

Female respondents were significantly more likely than males to include a wider net in what they defined as sexual content. Examples of imagery depicting women (51%, n=478) were also more likely to be considered sexual content than the same examples involving men (45%, n=421). This finding aligns with research that has established our tendency to view women through a sexualizing lens more than men.⁵ This tendency to sexualize has a range of negative implications – for body image dissatisfaction, support for self-blame and justification towards problematic male behavior. An uneven gender norm disadvantages women and girls.

This data demonstrates that in their perceptions, young people feel their broad online contexts are sexually charged. The ubiquity of ‘sexual content’ in these online spaces is likely also normalizing sexualized content.

“โซเชียลเดียที่น้อง ๆ เข้าไปใช้งาน มีให้เห็นอยู่แล้วว่าการถ่ายภาพที่มีลักษณะโป๊เปลือย เป็นเรื่องที่ทำกันเรื่องปกติ ไม่ได้ผิดอะไร เป็นเรื่องที่ทำได้”

“Through these platforms, young people are frequently exposed to sexualized content, which can lead them to perceive such behavior as normal or acceptable, simply because it is so prevalent online”

- Police Officer with TICAC



Evidence to Action:

Digital safety education should assume all boys and girls may be exposed to sexual content and support them to reduce exposure and cope with the impacts. The lack of gender differences means we should approach boys and girls the same.



5. Hatton, E. & Trautner, M. N. (2011). Equal Opportunity Objectification? The Sexualization of Men and Women on the Cover of Rolling Stone. *Sexuality & Culture* 15,: 256-278

Exposure to Sexual Content

Exposure to sexual content was reported on all 18 platforms listed in the survey. Exposure was not limited to traditionally ‘risky’ platforms sometimes named by experts but included many of the digital spaces inhabited by young people – including platforms with features for posting, gaming, streaming, dating and chatting.

Exposure was common. While some young people described actively seeking out sexual content, unintended exposure was more frequently reported.

Examples included:

- **In chat groups and forums:**

“เพื่อนโดนดึงเข้าไปในกลุ่มที่แชร์กันเรื่อง
ของรูปภาพโป๊เปลือย”

“A friend was pulled into a group
where nude images were shared.”

- Girl, 15 years old

- **Through targeted advertising:**

“เวลาบางทีเล่นไอจีหรือติ๊กต็อกก็มีโฆษณา
แอปหาคู่ เขาก็สอนวิธีเข้าไป สอนว่าเล่นยัง
ไง”

“Sometimes when using IG or TikTok,
there are ads for dating apps that
even teach you how to join and use
them.”

- Girl, 15 years old

- **In game play:**

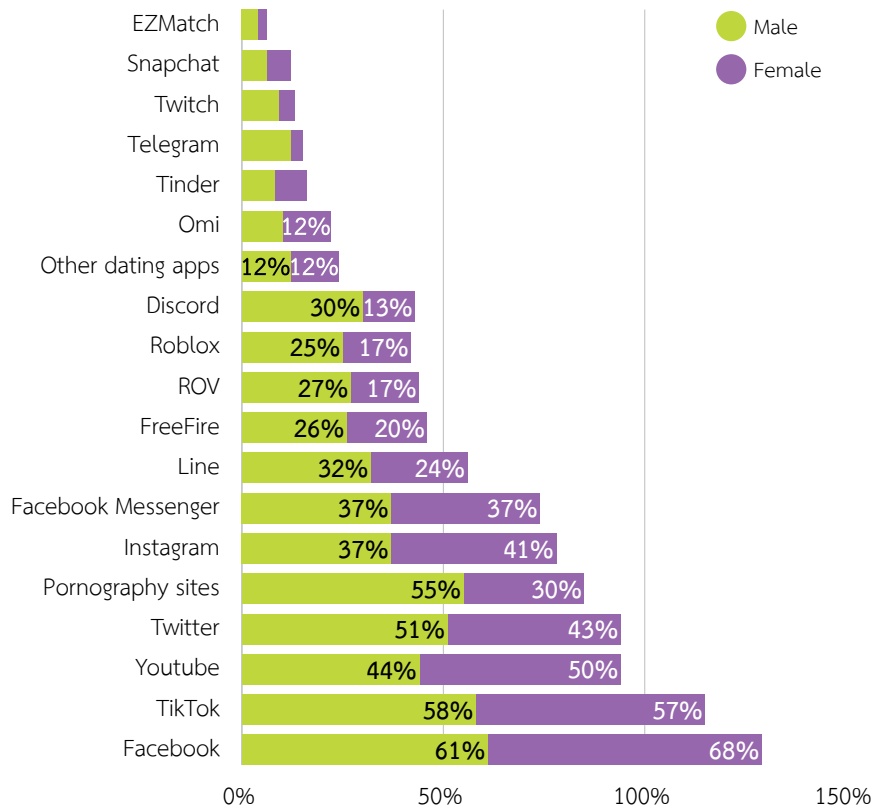
“เห็นเนื้อหาทางเพศในเกมได้ เช่น ใน
ROV [Arena of Valor] จะมีแชตหาเป็น
ข้อความเชิง 18+ หรือคุกคาม”

“You can see sexual content in games
like ROV [Arena of Valor] through 18+
or harassing messages in open chats.”

- Girl & Boy, both 18 years old

The lack of strong gender differences in exposure challenges the assumption that boys and girls inhabit fundamentally different digital risk environments. Exposure appears ambient — part of the broader ecosystem rather than confined to specific platforms or specific genders.

Exposure to Sexual Content on Platforms

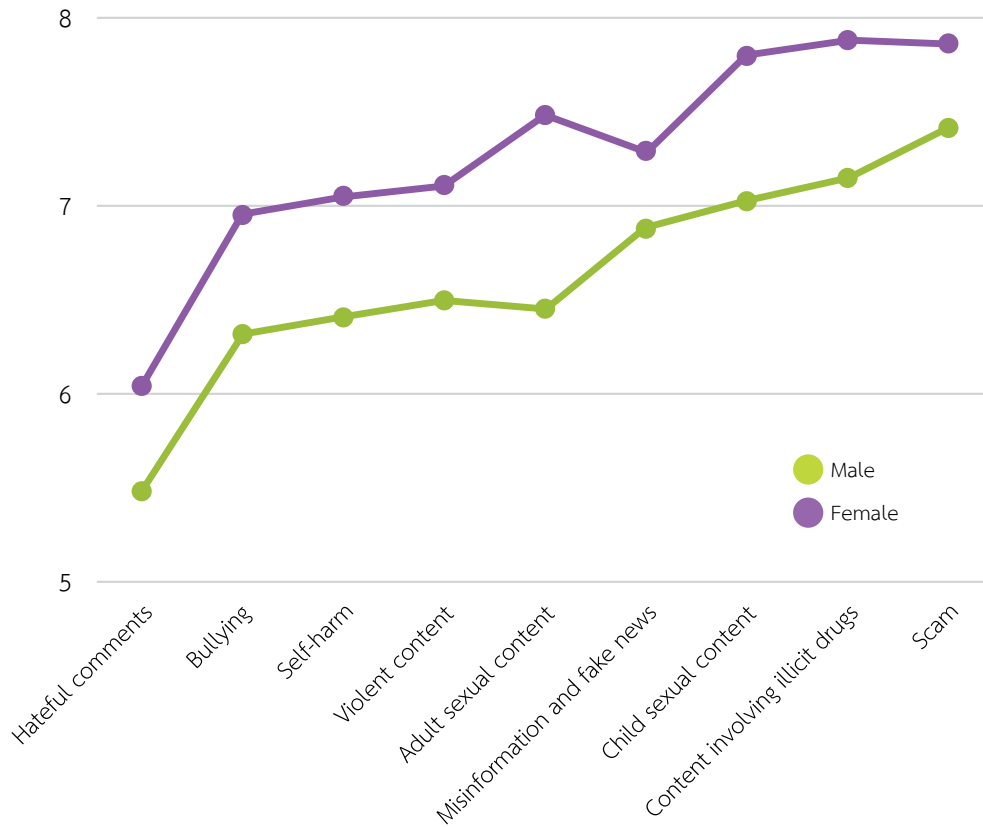


Views on Harmfulness of Sexual Content

Girls are slightly more likely to categorize content as harmful than boys. The Leaked survey respondents showed that sexual content depicting children was consistently viewed as harmful. But sexual content involving adults was seen somewhat differently. For

the older cohort, violent, bullying, and self-harm content was rated higher in terms of harmfulness than adult sexual content. This suggests that young people differentiate types of harm in more nuanced ways than adult protection narratives may assume.

Views on Harmfulness of Sexual Content



Gender Influences on the Impact of Self-Generated Sexual Content

Ninety-five percent of the older sample recognized that self-generated sexual content could create problems – with small indications of gender differences. Overall, harm was not ascribed to the practice of sharing nudes but

was described in relation to what can happen if the content is leaked – when the content owner loses control. The non-consensual aspect is at the heart of how harm is understood.

Distribution without consent was the most commonly selected concern (81%). Other concerns that followed included regret (76%) and the possibility of being bullied (70%) as well as feeling bad about oneself (68%), conflict with family and friends (67%), and being blackmailed (61%). Concerns about institutional consequences such as trouble with school or the police were mentioned less frequently (47%).

This distinction is critical, as it suggests that young people understand harm primarily through a loss-of-control and non-consensual distribution lens — not through a moral lens.

Girls were slightly more likely than boys to anticipate emotional fallout (85% vs 78%). They also placed greater emphasis on regret and school-based consequences. However, many differences were modest, suggesting that psychological and social

harms are widely recognized across genders.

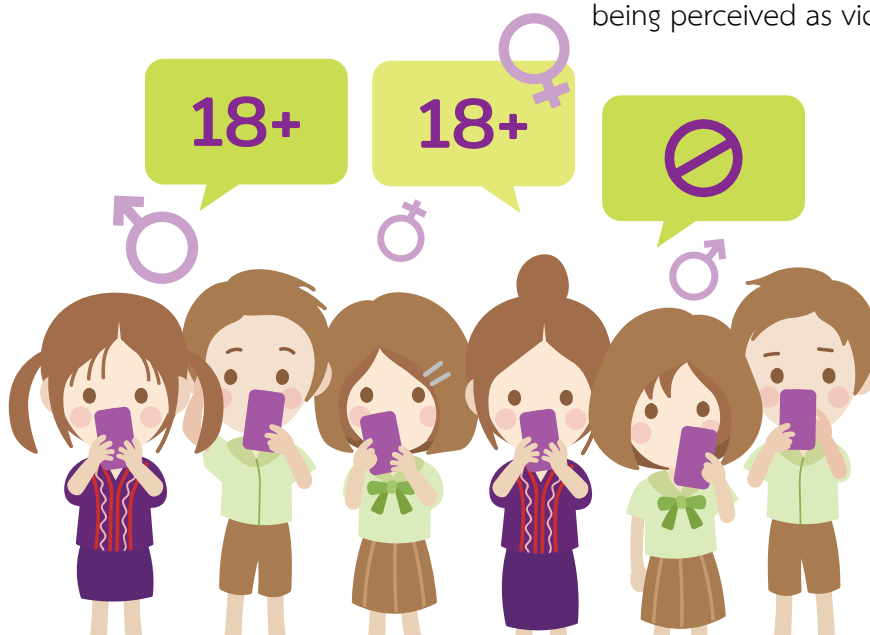
Psychological and social impacts were most frequently noted (n=886). Young people described shame, gossip, and humiliation — and the lasting reputational consequences of circulation.

- “โดนสังคมว่าและอับอายจากสังคมภายนอก”

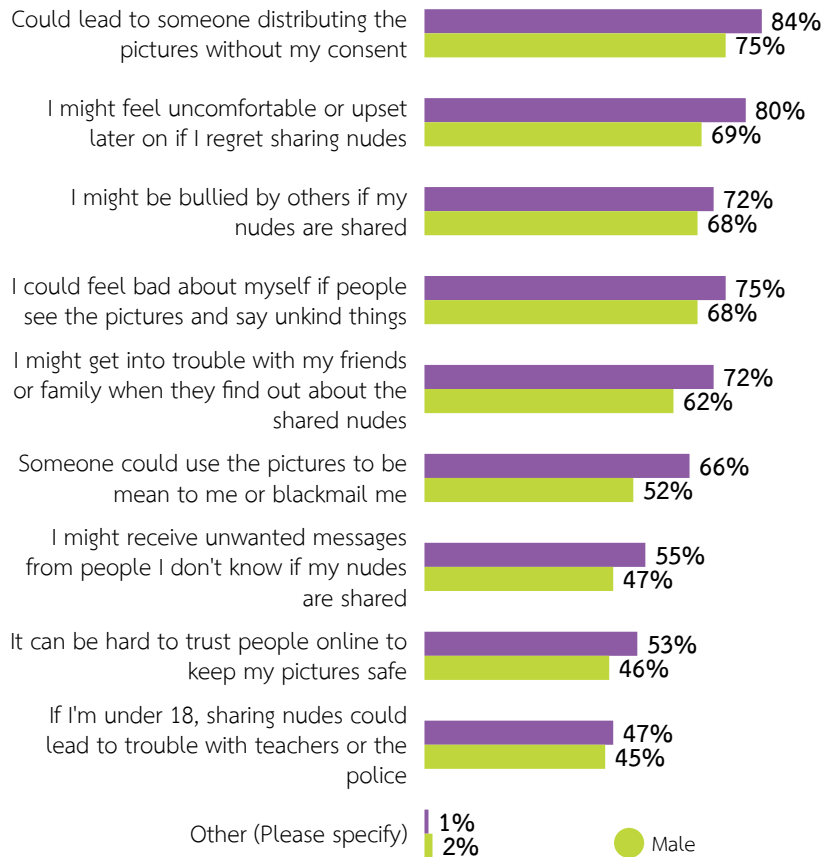
“Being blamed and shamed by society.”

- Open-ended survey response

Frontline professionals highlighted that gender norms and societal expectations shape how young people experience and respond to such incidents. A prevailing social norm in Thai society that “เด็กผู้ชายไม่เสียหายอะไร” (boys do not lose) often leads to boys avoiding disclosure of harms and internalizing shame to avoid being perceived as violating this norm.



Gender Breakdown of Perceptions of Potential Consequences of Sharing Self-Generated Sexual Content



- Multiple responses permitted
- This question was only posed to the older cohort who believe that sharing nudes may create some problem (n=886)

“เด็กผู้ชายรู้สึกอายและไม่อยากบอกใครว่าเกิดอะไรขึ้น”

“Boys feel too ashamed and do not want to tell anyone about what has happened to them”

- Protection expert

“เด็กผู้ชายมักจะพยายามแก้ปัญหาด้วยตัวเองก่อน ก่อนที่จะตัดสินใจขอความช่วยเหลือจากคนอื่น”

“They [boys] often try to solve problems themselves before deciding to reach out for help.”

- Protection expert

In most cases, parents are less concerned about leaked images involving boys. However, this can depend on their socio-economic background.

“ถ้าเป็นเด็กผู้ชายที่มาจากครอบครัวที่มีฐานะ พ่อแม่จะค่อนข้างซีเรียสกับเรื่องภาพหลุดมากกว่า”

“For boys from wealthier families, parents tend to take such incidents more seriously”

- Government social worker

While some boys described feeling more confident in digital spaces, others felt unable to speak up about concerns because of cultural messages that boys should be unaffected or always in control. Many of the most powerful findings in this report are not about risks, but about how isolated and unsupported young people feel in navigating and managing risks they face.

In contrast, there is heightened societal concern when intimate images of girls are leaked, reflecting the consequence that such incidents are more damaging to girls' reputations. Within this context,

girls are frequently subjected to victim-blaming.

“เด็กผู้หญิงเป็นฝ่ายเสียหาย”

“girls are the ones who lose”

- K-0605-15

“สมควรแล้วที่ ต้องอับอาย เพราะประพฤติตัวไม่เหมาะสม”

“Girls deserve the shame because they were not behaving properly”

- K-1009-01

According to an NGO worker, due to gender stereotypes, more girls tend to report such incidents—possibly because they feel more able or permitted to do so.



Evidence to Action:

Current digital safety frameworks often fail to reflect these complexities. Our responses must consider the unique pressures facing boys and girls and tailor responses that counteract these barriers to help-seeking and social responses that blame and shame.

Furthermore, digital safety education will often depict girls as passive victims and boys as aggressors. This reinforces harmful gender norms and fails to dismantle the problem. Adult support and responses should take practical steps to disrupt problematic situations, rather than being concerned with assigning blame or pathologizing young people.



What is Different for LGBTQ Young Folks?

LGBTQ young people reported especially high levels of vulnerability, judgment, and fear of exposure.

“น้อง LGBT บางคนกลัวทำให้พ่อแม่ผิดหวังหรือกลัวถูกดุด่าถ้าเพศสภาพของตัวเองถูกเปิดเผย กลายเป็นเพิ่มความเครียดและความเปราะบางเข้าไปอีกชั้นหนึ่ง”

“Many fear disappointing their parents or being scolded if their sexual identity is revealed—adding another layer of stress and silence”

- K-1009-01

LGBT respondents were more likely to indicate negative consequences, particularly the possibility of images being shared without consent (89%, compared to 77% of non-LGBT peers) and being bullied (76% vs. 68%). These patterns suggest a higher perceived vulnerability among certain groups perhaps because they are more targeted or more aware of the possible consequences.



Evidence to Action:

Given that LGBT young people face higher exposure to risks and negative consequences, as well as barriers to seeking help, digital safety education needs to be tailored for these vulnerable young people to specifically counteract these barriers and keep them safe.



