LEAKED

Understanding and Addressing Self-Generated Sexual Content Involving Young People

in Thailand

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Financially Supported By

Evident

HUG PROJECT

CHILDHOOD
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Evident makes evidence work for social change. We are a small Bangkok-based company focused on research projects and translating evidence into concrete actions to improve the way we look after children around the world.

HUG Project is a Chiang Mai based foundation that exists to protect, prevent, and restore at-risk children as well as youth who have been exploited online, sexually abused, or trafficked. The HUG Project supported Evident in primary research through identifying participating schools of their networks in Northern provinces and facilitating the data collection.

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Childhood prevents child sexual abuse and exploitation. They do so in partnership with passionate pioneers, grassroots organizations, companies, foundations, and other stakeholders who share their vision of a world where no child is sexually abused. They invest in innovations, methods, and partnerships that enhance protection and reduce risks for particularly vulnerable groups. Childhood was founded in 1999 by HM Queen Silvia of Sweden.

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FOREWORD

The digital world is not a place young people occasionally enter — it is a constant part of their social, educational, and personal realities. They grow up, learn, build friendships, shape their identities, and express themselves online. These digital spaces foster creativity, connection, and a sense of belonging. But they also expose young people to evolving risks — risks that many adults, institutions, and systems struggle to understand or address. When it comes to being online, young people are usually one step ahead of the adults in their lives.

There are many conversations about how to keep children safe online, but too few of these begin with, or even include the most important voices of all: the children themselves. Without their input, even the most well-intentioned laws, policies, and prevention programs risk missing the realities of their everyday lives. Listening to children is not an optional step; it is the foundation for solutions that truly work.

The Leaked project was conceived to fill that gap. In Thailand and across much of Asia, young people are among the most connected in the world, yet research, policy, and programming that reflect their lived experiences remain rare. Leaked offers new insights into one of the most sensitive areas of their digital lives – their sexual expression and experience online. Leaked takes a nonjudgmental approach, asking young people to share their perspectives on why self-generated sexual content is created, who it is shared with, and what happens when things go wrong. Importantly, it also asks them what kinds of support they want and need.

Some of the Leaked findings challenge assumptions made in child protection circles on this critical issue. They show that responses to these issues cannot be limited to simple advice to avoid risks. The reality of young people's online lives is far more complex. The Leaked findings told us that digital spaces can feel both freeing and dangerous. The same tools that allow young people to connect, create, and be seen can also expose them to pressure, manipulation, and harm. But they also reiterate that not engaging is not a realistic option.

What stands out most from Leaked data is the clear need for responses that meet young people where they are. This means recognizing the influence of gender norms, cultural expectations, and social dynamics that shape how risks are experienced. It also means moving away from fear-based approaches and toward strategies that build trust, digital agency, and resilience. It also means taking a close look at fast-evolving platform design features that are frequently unregulated, and that can clearly be seen to influence young people's online engagements.

We are deeply grateful to our partners at Evident, the HUG Project, as well as to every young person who took part in this research. The young people's honesty and courage are captured clearly in this report. Now, we look forward to the dissemination of this report, its use in advocacy, and the development of a pilot intervention that will do justice to their inputs.

Together, we must use these insights to create practical and culturally relevant solutions that reduce harm, support healthy young relationships, and give young people the tools they need to navigate both their online and offline worlds with safety, dignity, and confidence. 2024 marked World Childhood Foundations 25th anniversary. Since the beginning, we have partnered with passionate pioneers, grassroots organizations, companies, and foundations around the world. We remain committed to driving innovation, strengthening partnerships, and creating a future where no child is sexually abused.

Paula Guillet de Monthoux
Secretary General
World Childhood Foundation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first and most important acknowledgement goes to the **1,916 young people** who gave their time to complete our survey. Their willingness to contribute openly and honestly to the conversation about young people's decisions, behaviors and safety in online settings is critical to how we all work to improve the situation.

Furthermore, thanks also to the **twenty people** who sat with us for key informant interviews that helped elaborate on the context of these issues. Those conversations helped to fill gaps, explain unusual findings, and bring depth to the quantitative data. The backgrounds of these participants as youth leaders; survivor-advocates; law enforcement, social work and education professionals were identified through the extensive networks of our friends at HUG Project.

From **HUG Project**, thanks to **Kanitha Taluang** and **Salakchit Kaewkham** who brought the sampling strategy for this research to life, securing participation from twenty diverse schools in urban and rural parts of seven Northern Thailand provinces. Kanitha and Salakchit partnered with schools to carefully explain the sensitive research, convince their leadership to take part and then manage logistics, and even some serious flooding, to collect the survey data. **Yanisa Malainak** joined the team later and supported data management and collection processes.

Such robust and reliable data would not have been possible without the expertise of **Jonathan Mundell** who supported the quantitative design elements of the survey to ensure data was conducive to rigorous analysis. Jonathan's work crunching the numbers to meet our analysis plan was also invaluable.

Two fascinating consultation sessions with young people were held, both to input to (and correct) our initial survey tool (May 2024), and to confirm and validate the initial analysis of data (March 2025).

Finally, we thank our Thai expert group and our global advisory group for their guidance, reviews and advice since the beginning of the research phase.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the support of World Childhood Foundation, the Leaked project explores how young people in Thailand engage with self-generated sexual content in the context of their digital lives. It was designed to move beyond fear-based narratives and adult assumptions by centering the voices, realities, and perspectives of young people themselves. It consisted of a large-scale, representative survey involving 1,916 young people aged 9 to 17 across seven provinces in Northern Thailand, together with consultations with youth leaders and interviews with frontline professionals. Leaked uncovers the motivations, patterns, risks, and consequences shaping nude-sharing among young people.

Young people today grow up in an environment where digital and offline life are deeply intertwined. Social media platforms are key spaces for identity formation, connection, and experimentation but they also bring risks. Features like disappearing messages, anonymous chats, and instant sharing lower the perceived threat threshold for risky digital behaviors. At the same time, online visibility is rewarded by platforms through interactions, shaping young people's decisions in powerful ways.

In Thailand, globally influenced internet culture can conflict with conservative local norms around sex and modesty, which can leave young people feeling isolated or ashamed when problems arise.

Key findings in the report include:

- **Prevalence and Exposure:** 36% of 14–17-year-olds reported having received or been shown sexual content involving someone believed to be under 18. Among 15-year-olds, this figure rose to over half (51%). Exposure to sexual content was higher among LGBT youth (49%), youth from ethnic minority backgrounds (49%), urban respondents (46%), and those with social media profiles set to public rather than private settings (43%).
- **Motivations:** Young people described sharing sexual content for many reasons including gaining social status (48%), earning money or in-game gifts or credits (45%), emotional validation (40%), showing trust in a relationship (27%), or wanting to feel visible (24%). Some were motivated by curiosity, while others were pressured, tricked, or coerced.
- **Technology as an Enabler:** Features like disappearing messages, public profiles, and minimal identity verification lower the threat threshold for young people regarding sharing sexual content. 56% of older survey respondents said technology makes it too easy to share nudes without thinking. Girls were especially likely to agree (62%). High-quality phone cameras, messaging apps with disappearing features, and the absence of strong age verification on many platforms all lower potential barriers to young people sharing. At the same time, platforms poorly support users when things go wrong. Only 22% of young people reported sexual content they believed was to be of someone under the age of 18, and many expressed frustration with slow or ineffective response systems.
- **Perceptions of Harm:** Most young people recognized that harms stem not from sharing sexual content itself, but from losing control of content. Older teens overwhelmingly believed sharing nudes could lead to problems (95%), with top concerns including further non-consensual sharing of the content (81%), regret (76%), bullying (70%), and emotional distress (68%). Girls and LGBT youth were more likely to anticipate harmful consequences. While some young people saw content-sharing as a form of trust or intimacy, most feared the consequences if content spread beyond the intended audience.

- **Gender and Cultural Norms:** In interviews, frontline professionals noted that Thai norms such as "boys don't lose" and "girls deserve shame" shape how harm is experienced and reported. Social expectations and gender stereotypes shape how young people understand and experience consequences from these behaviors. Boys were more likely to take no action when receiving something that they considered harmful content, while girls were more likely to block or report users. Many young people internalized blame.

- **Help-Seeking and Silence:** Many young people felt unsure what to do when something went wrong. Fear of judgment or punishment kept them from seeking support from adults. Even when harm occurred, blame from young people was often attributed to the person in the content—rather than those who violated trust or consent.

- **Reluctance to Report:** When receiving sexual content involving someone under 18, 44% of respondents said they blocked the sender — but a further 44% said they'd do nothing. Boys were more likely to save (18%) or forward (11%) the content, while girls were more likely to block (56%) or report it to the online platform (31%). Many young people showed patterns of internalizing blame. Nearly half (44%) believed the person in the content was responsible if a nude was leaked.

- **Blurred Lines and Legal Tensions:** Many young people did not distinguish clearly between consensual and coerced sharing. Some content began as consensually shared but was later non-consensually shared or used for manipulation. One in four respondents said they believed consensual nude-sharing was acceptable if both parties agreed, yet a third were unsure. This ambiguity clashes with Thailand's legal framework, which criminalizes all forms of sexual content involving those under 18, even when shared consensually between peers. This legal framing contributes to fear, silence, and underreporting and real risks of legal prosecution.

The Leaked project shows that self-generated sexual content among children and young people cannot be addressed through simplistic risk avoidance messaging or punitive responses. The data shows this is increasingly an everyday part of growing up online. Nude-sharing is shaped by a broad system of influences: choices, coercion, and norms are certainly in play. But importantly, young people are also saying that platform design features have a big influence on behavior. Yet messaging on this topic frequently focuses only on young people's behaviors, failing to acknowledge the powerful influences that they are up against. The Leaked data shows a tendency for young people to internalize blame when things go wrong showing they feel responsibility is entirely on their shoulders.

Young people are largely navigating this complex system without guidance that recognizes the pressures they are under. As digital settings will increasingly be central to young people's lives, there is an urgent need for responses that reflect their realities.

This report calls for a shift away from fear-based messaging and one-size-fits-all prevention approaches towards more honest, harm-reduction approaches that meet young people where they are. It calls on educators, policymakers, and caregivers to listen without judgment and to support young people in building digital agency, healthy relationships, and culturally relevant tools for navigating intimacy and consent in a connected world.

The data presented in this report will be used in the second phase of the Leaked project to co-create an intervention with and for young people in Thailand. It will focus on harm reduction, digital agency, and culturally sensitive approaches to consent, connection, and care that reduce self-blame and acknowledge all the pressures young people are under as they navigate their complex digital systems.

The digital world is here to stay. It is time our safety approaches grew up with the young people who are already living in it.

INTRODUCTION

The digital world is not separate from young people's lives. It is where they grow up, build friendships, explore identity, and express themselves. In Thailand, as in many parts of the world, young people are engaging in relationships via technology in increasingly intimate and complex ways. Sharing of sexual content, including self-generated sexual content, is a poorly misunderstood part of online lives. Like many sexual behaviors, it is rarely discussed openly, especially when it involves children and young people.

Over the past two decades, the rapid advancement of technology has been remarkable. Children and young people's presence in digital spaces has prompted conversations about their safety. Most of these discussions have focused on threats posed to young people from nefarious adults; such as grooming, trafficking, or creation and dissemination of child sexual abuse material. But as online and offline life continues to merge, young people are increasingly growing and developing within digital spaces and that development, self-expression, and associated explorations has become more visible and more complicated.

The Leaked project was designed to sit with this complexity. Rather than starting with a framework of adult-defined threats and harms, it set out to non-judgmentally explore the context in which young people in Thailand experience and navigate self-generated sexual content. It asked why young people are sharing content, who they are sharing with, what happens when things go wrong, and how the social, legal, and technological systems around them influence and respond to these behaviors.

At its core, the project puts young people's voices at the center. It recognizes that most current approaches to research and interventions on child online safety are shaped by adult assumptions, not by the lived experiences of the young people affected. It consisted of a large-scale, representative survey involving 1,916 young people aged 9 to 17 across seven provinces in Northern Thailand, together with consultations with youth leaders and interviews with frontline professionals. Leaked uncovers the motivations, patterns, risks, and consequences shaping nude-sharing among young people.

Young people described digital spaces that feel both freeing and dangerous. For some, platforms offer the opportunity for connection, affirmation, and a place to be seen. Yet these same spaces are also filled with pressure, manipulation, and the risk of being exposed. Many said they felt both the positives and the negatives at the same time. Their motivations for sharing self-generated sexual content ranged from curiosity and connection to emotional validation, pressure from partners, financial incentives, or following what they saw others doing. While some felt confident and in control, some also reported feeling uncertain, unsupported, or unsure where to turn when things went wrong.

Technology plays a powerful role in all of this. Platforms are designed to make sharing fast, easy, and rewarding. Disappearing messages, anonymous accounts, and algorithms that boost visibility lower the threat threshold for risky behavior. The same platforms offer little support when harm occurs with reporting systems viewed as confusing or ineffective. Many young people told us they did not expect reporting to work or feared being punished themselves. In these conditions, even when they feel something is wrong, many young people feel helpless to act and do nothing.

Thailand's cultural context adds another layer of complexity. Conservative norms dictate gendered expectations for behavior, particularly in regard to sexuality. Norms also discourage open conversations about sex, intimacy, or digital expression. While young people may encounter liberal values and global trends via internet culture, these can clash with norms that encourage silence, self-blame and shame in their offline lives. This disconnection can make it harder to ask questions or seek help and can reinforce self-blame when things go wrong.

Girls, LGBT young people, and ethnic minorities reported especially high levels of vulnerability, judgment, and fear of exposure. 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.

Child online safety messaging tends to focus on young people's behaviors. It promotes 'self-protective' actions like completely avoiding risks, abstaining from certain behaviors, promotes blocking or reporting anything or anyone that creates discomfort. This does not reflect the realities of existing in online spaces. For example, blocking – and essentially cutting off a connection for good – for a single post may be impractical. These messages to young people also fail to acknowledge the social, emotional, and technological systems that deeply shape their interactions. Platforms are designed to nudge and prompt user interactions but these messages don't acknowledge the power being exerted over young users through platform design. This focus only on young people's behavior serves to ingrain a sense of self-blame when things go wrong.

The Leaked survey sought to non-judgmentally explore these issues. It was constructed to recognize that self-generated sexual content involving young people can be shared consensually, can be the result of pressure, manipulation, or outright coercion. In many cases, the lines between these categories are blurry, and young, still developing minds can struggle to name or understand these complexities. What started with reasonable trust can later be violated. What felt like a private moment can become public without agreement.

BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, increasing attention has been given to how young people engage with digital technology in ways that intersect with their sexual development. Although this practice is often sensationalized or narrowly defined in policy and discourse, a growing body of research has begun to unpack its complexities. Research suggests that self-generated sexual content involving young people that is both consensually created and shared, and that is created and shared via coercion, is increasing: Thorn has documented a sustained increase in self-reported nude-sharing by children in the United States over a three-year period.[1] In their European surveys, Thorn found that 8% of children in Germany[2] and 6% in France[3] believed it was normal to share self-generated sexual content. Similarly, in Thailand, the Disrupting Harm study found that 9% of internet-using children had shared naked images or videos of themselves in the past year.[4] A national survey by Thai Hotline and Child Online Protection Action Thailand (COPAT) found that 26% of children reported they had shown themselves naked over video calls, and 6% had sent or forwarded child sexual abuse material (CSAM) to others.[5]

While prevalence estimates are increasingly available, less is known about the motivations behind this behavior. Thai data from Disrupting Harm showed that common reasons for sharing self-generated sexual content included fear of losing a relationship, being in love, or being threatened.[6] In another study, focus groups conducted by WeProtect Global Alliance in Thailand with 73 children highlighted a wide range of motivations like excitement, connection, social media influence, affirmation, pressure, and even financial exploitation.[7]

Importantly, those who pressure or force someone to share sexual content without consent are not always adults seeking to create CSAM for their own sexual gratification. Perpetrators can also be peers, acquaintances, or partners, and their motives may include revenge, control, bullying, or peer pressure rather than the production of CSAM. A major US study found that teens and young adults often pressure their peers to share sexual content, sometimes within romantic relationships or friendships.[8] These peer interactions can involve power imbalances, such as age or social status differences, yet these examples challenge binary conceptions of offender and victim.[9]

Not all self-generated sexual content results from manipulation or coercion. Some young

1 Thorn & Benson Strategy Group (2023). **Youth Perspectives on Online Safety, 2022: an Annual Report of Youth Attitudes and Experiences**.

2 Thorn. (2024). **Youth Perspectives on Online Safety in Germany**.

3 Thorn. (2024). **Youth Perspectives on Online Safety in France**.

4 ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). **Disrupting Harm in Thailand: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse** Global Partnership to End Violence against Children.

5 Thai Hotline and Child Online Protection Action Thailand. (2022). Child Online Protection Guideline 3.0. Internet Foundation for the Development of Thailand.

6 ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). **Disrupting Harm in Thailand: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse** Global Partnership to End Violence against Children

7 WeProtect Global Alliance and Praesidio Safeguarding (2023). **Child 'self-generated' sexual material online: children and young people's perspectives**. WeProtect Global Alliance.

8 Finkelhor, Turner & Colburn. (2022). **Prevalence of Online Sexual Offenses Against Children in the US**. JAMA Network Open. 5(10):e2234471.

9 ECPAT Sweden. (2020). **"Everything that is not a Yes is a No": A report about children's everyday exposure to sexual crimes and their protective strategies** [Translated from Swedish]. ECPAT Sweden.

people choose to share self-generated sexual content within trusting relationships, as a form of exploration or connection. A UK study of 15,000 children aged 11–16 found that most youth who had shared such content said "nothing bad happened," and that their most common motivation was being in a relationship.[10]

This growing body of data raises key questions about how we characterize adolescent agency and define harm associated with the sharing of self-generated sexual content. Black and white categorization does not account for the nuances increasingly being identified by young people. For example, characterizing harm by distinguishing between consensual behaviors that remain private and situations where consent is breached and trust is broken is needed.[11] The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the principle of 'evolving capacities'; put simply, the idea that as children grow and mature, they increasingly gain the abilities to exercise their own rights to privacy, decision-making, and autonomy.[12] An exclusively protectionist characterization that flatly describes all such content as equally harmful may contradict this principle.

Harm from shared self-generated sexual content exists on a continuum. A single image shared with a peer may have little lasting impact, while non-consensual redistribution can lead to bullying, mental health crises, or blackmail. A study in Sweden found that some youth took measures to minimize harm such as not showing their face in content so that low-level exposure of it was then seen as manageable.[13] Harms can be physical, psychological, social, or legal, and the severity is influenced by context, relationships, and the young person's ability to seek support.[14] Victim-blaming is a persistent and dangerous dynamic. Surveys show that many adults and children alike believe that it is the child's fault if their content is shared, even when that sharing was non-consensual. In Thailand, young people often lack confidential or trustworthy avenues to report incidents, fearing legal consequences or social judgment. Law enforcement professionals acknowledge that victims who report can be criminalized under Thai law, where any sexual content involving children qualifies as CSAM.[15] Criminalizing all self-generated sexual content ignores the nuances of adolescent behavior and can cause further harm.

Many professionals in Thailand and globally have adopted abstinence-style digital safety messages "never send nudes" which lack credibility for youth and deter disclosure when things go wrong. Data shows that even occasional or one-off sharing can lead to harm; reducing frequency of this behavior alone does not guarantee safety.[16]

The social context cannot be ignored. In Thailand, conversations about sex, consent, and digital safety remain largely taboo. Research in Southeast Asia has found that many young people see current sex education as outdated and irrelevant to their digital lives.[17] Cultural values around modesty, karma, and gender roles influence how children view themselves and their actions. This leads to silence, shame, and an inability to seek help. A social-ecological model that understands these broader systems platform dynamics, peer cultures, family norms is needed to fully address the issue.

10 Internet Matters. (2020). Look At Me Teens, Sexting and Risks. Kingston University, London.

11 Witting, S. & Skelton, A. (2024). **A child rights-based approach to adolescents' sexuality**, Leiden Law Blog, February 22, 2024.

12 Lansdown, G. (2005). The Evolving Capacities of the Child. UNICEF Innocenti.

13 ECPAT Sweden. (2020). **"Everything that is not a Yes is a No": A report about children's everyday exposure to sexual crimes and their protective strategies** [Translated from Swedish]. ECPAT Sweden.

14 Schmidt, F. et al., (2023). **The Mental Health and Social Implications of Non-consensual Sharing of Intimate Images on Youth: A Systematic Review**, Trauma, Violence & Abuse: 15248380231207896.

15 ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). **Disrupting Harm in Thailand: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse**. Global Partnership to End Violence against Children.

16 Finkelhor et al., D. (2024). **How Risky is Online Sexting by Minors?** Journal of Child Sexual Abuse 33(2): 169-182.

17 Watson, K., & Singh, A. (2020). **Shifting the SRHR Narrative in Asia Pacific: A civil society perspective on advocating for and generating evidence**. Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (APA).

THE CURRENT STUDY

Thanks to the generous support of the World Childhood Foundation, the Leaked survey and consultations sought to directly listen to young people in real and non-judgmental ways about self-generated sexual content. It represents a large-scale, representative survey involving 1,916 young people aged 9 to 17 across seven provinces in Northern Thailand, together with consultations with youth leaders and interviews with frontline professionals. Rather than starting with a framework of adult-defined threats and harms, it set out to non-judgmentally explore the context in which young people in Thailand experience and navigate self-generated sexual content. It asked why young people are sharing content, who they are sharing with, what happens when things go wrong, and how the social, legal, and technological systems around them influence and respond to these behaviors.

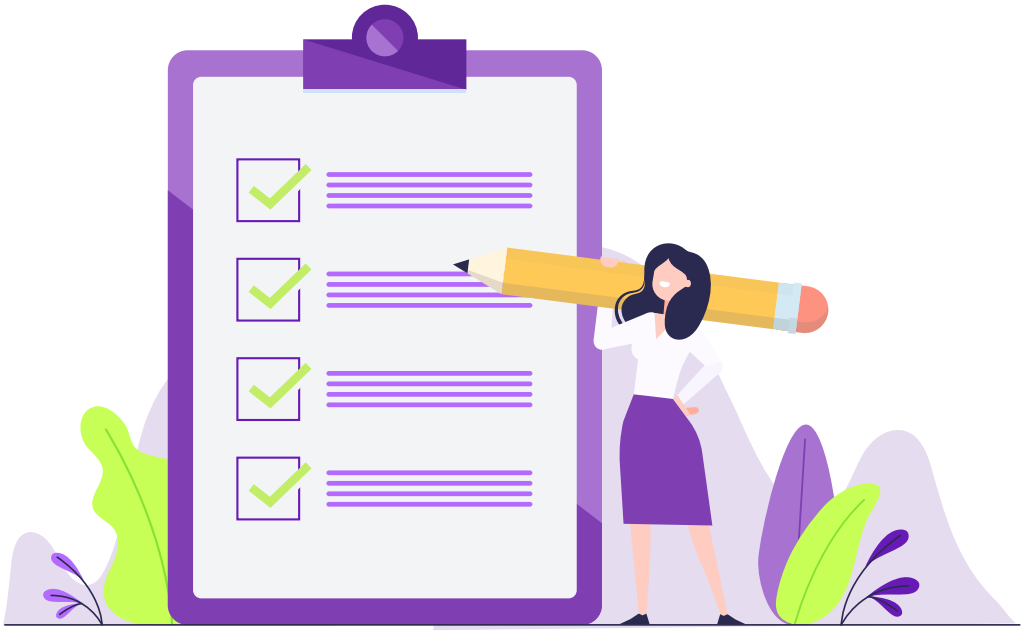
The second phase of the project will then use the data to co-create an intervention with and for young people in Thailand. It will focus on harm reduction, digital agency, and culturally sensitive approaches to consent, connection, and care that reduces self-blame and acknowledges all the pressures young people are under as they navigate their lives online.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The guiding questions for research phase were:

- What self-generated sexual content are young people in Thailand producing?
- How do young people in Thailand perceive self-generated sexual content, including their attitudes and motivations towards creating and sharing it?
- How do socio-cultural norms, peer pressure, media and other influences contribute to shape perceptions and behaviors regarding self-generated sexual content?
- How is harm related to self-generated sexual content understood? What reduces or exacerbates harm?
- How is coerced and non-coerced content distinguished or overlapping? What tech factors are impacting this? How do children perceive the distinctions?
- How is 'consensual sharing' amongst those under 18 being conceived? Does this align/ contrast with current Thai law?
- What are the profiles of 'offenders' involved in the coercion or non-consensual sharing of self-generated sexual content of children?
- What social and contextual factors are helping or hindering young people to negotiate uncertainties emerging from technology and their online lives clashing with current social norms?
- How do various actors in a child's support network, including caregivers, educators, social workers, law enforcement, and legal professionals, understand and react to the issue of self-generated sexual content? Which type of support do children access, and which helps or hinders help-seeking?
- Are there instances of laws intended to protect children having negative impacts on their interests and rights instead?

METHODOLOGY



The Leaked project runs from October 2023 to September 2026 and includes two distinct phases. The findings in this report encapsulate the results of the first research phase. The project will then utilize this rich data to design, pilot and deliver a unique intervention for young people in Thailand's North.

Research phase:

- Two linked quantitative surveys of knowledge, motivations, attitudes, and practice relating to self-generated sexual content with 1,916 young people. To ensure age-appropriateness, surveys differed for the young people aged 9-13 years and for those aged 14-17 years.
- Key informant interviews with twenty experts including youth leaders, young survivor-advocates; and law enforcement, social work and education professionals.
- Two group consultation meetings with young people to inform and refine the survey tool (May 2024) and to confirm and validate the initial analysis of data (March 2025).

Intervention phase:

- The research data will be used to develop an intervention that prioritizes harm minimization and is deeply informed by the perspectives of young people. It is expected to cover topics like negotiating consent, socio-cultural pressures regarding tech usage, and the role of tech in modern relationships.

The results in this report consolidate the data from the activities completed in the research phase between August 2024 and March 2025.

Formal ethical review of the research was completed during early 2024 by the Institute for the Development of Human Research Protection under the Thailand Ministry of Public Health and clearance to proceed was granted in June 2024 (COA No. IHRP2024074).

PARTICIPANTS

The project sampled participants from seven out of nine provinces in Thailand's Northern Administrative Region: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampang, Nan, Phrae, Lamphun, and Phayao. A stratified, partially randomized sampling methodology identified participants using a series of characteristics to simulate representativeness of the general target population of young people aged between 9 and 17 years old.

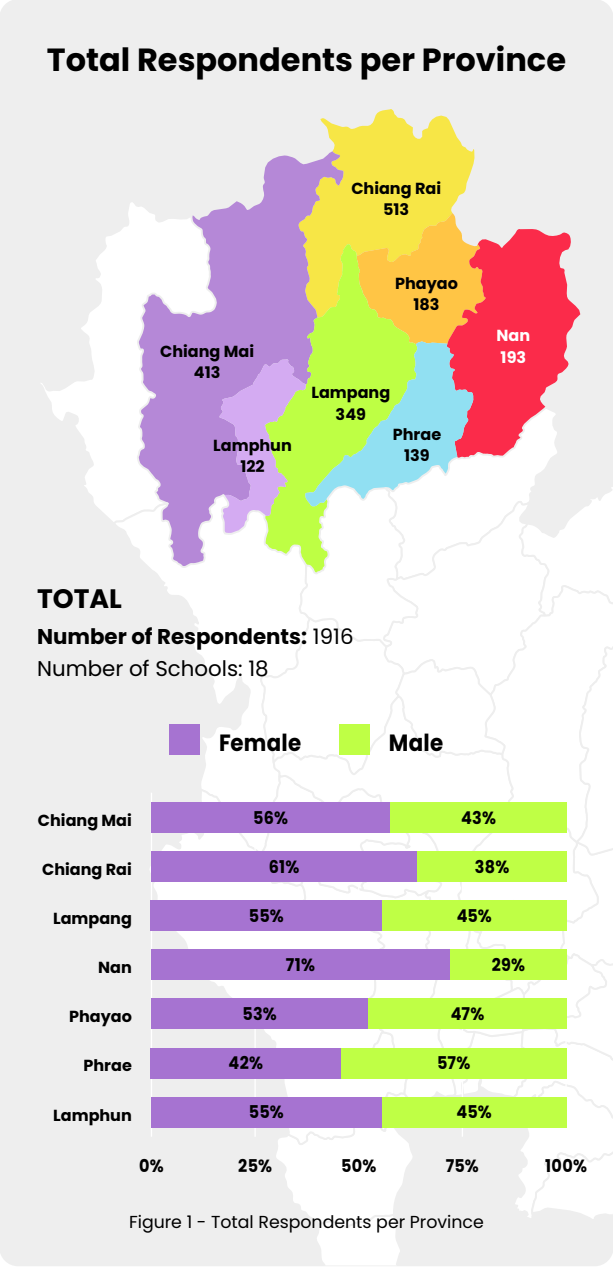


Figure 1 - Total Respondents per Province

According to 2022 census data from the Thailand National Statistics Office[18] there are approximately 1.2 million young people between the ages of 9 and 17 residing in Thailand's Northern Administrative Region. The distribution of these individuals across age groups and genders is fairly even. To reflect and represent the age distribution of the 2022 census, a sample of 1,116 individuals in the 9-13 age cohort and 884 individuals from the 14-17 age cohort was calculated.

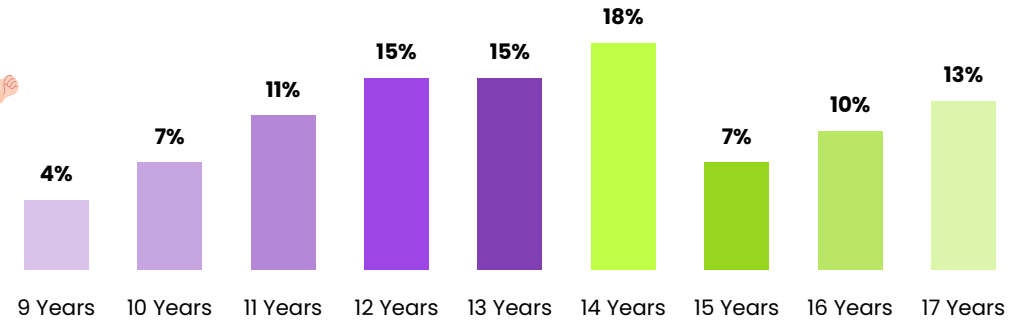
The research team identified all the rural and urban, public and private schools in the Northern region using public data. Twenty schools were then identified from this list, with schools selected based on a) school size b) urban/rural location and c) public/private status to reflect the reference data. School leaderships were asked to allow their students to be invited to participate. In total, 43 schools were contacted; however, many declined due to time constraints. Each school that declined was replaced with another school of similar characteristics from the reference list. Ultimately, students from 18 schools were invited to participate to gather the sample.

Target numbers within each school for the two age cohorts were calculated based on the size of the school in proportion to the total sample. These targets were used as a rough guide for when to cut-off recruitment. All participants had to indicate that they used the internet at least once per day, were able to read and write Thai, and had to provide signed caregiver consent forms and their own individual signed assent forms before being included in the study.

The table below depicts the breakdown of ages in the final sample. The sample included 979 children aged 9–13 (51%) and 937 aged 14–17 (49%), ensuring adequate sample sizes per age category for age-based comparative analysis.

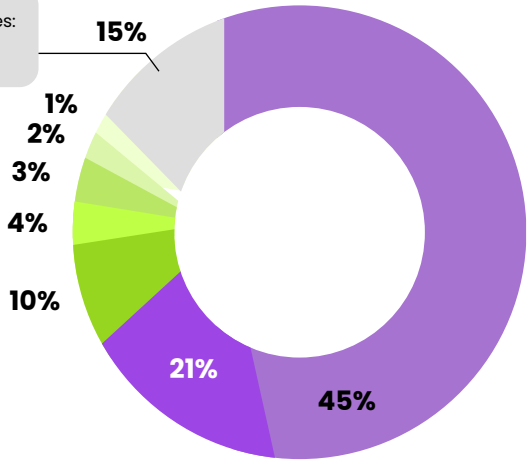
[18] National Statistical Office. (2022). The 2022 Population and Housing Census. National Statistical Office of Thailand. https://www.nso.go.th/nsoweb/main/summano/aE

AGE DISTRIBUTION



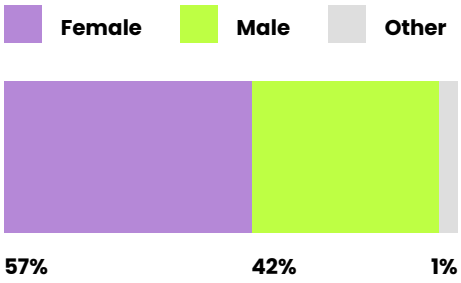
Ethnicity

Most common responses:
7% Thai 4% Hmong

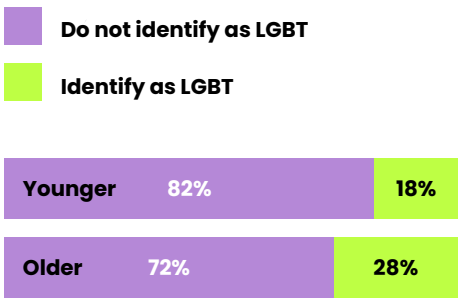


- I'm not from ethnic groups
- Prefer not to say
- Thai Yai
- Akha
- Lahu
- Karen
- Dara-ang
- Other (Please Specify)

Gender



LGBT Identification



Urban Rural Split

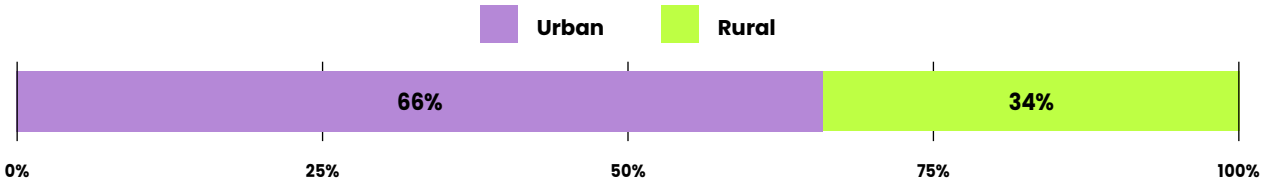


Figure 2 - Sample Description

SURVEY

The survey tool was designed to measure knowledge, motivations, attitudes, behaviors and context regarding self-generated sexual content involving children in Thailand. It sought to explore cultural, social, and technological factors that can influence this behavior in Thailand.

The survey was consulted with a group of youth leaders from the Children and Youth Council at a half-day workshop in May 2024, where participants provided feedback on the framing, language, and priorities of the proposed approach. Inputs were also sought from the Thai Expert Group and the Global Advisory Group to ensure the approach was contextually relevant, ethically sound, and aligned with international best practices.

Two versions of the survey were developed with specific characteristics appropriate for each age cohort.

The survey for the younger cohort (9-13 years) had a total of 17 items, with a majority of multiple choice, Likert scale and closed question items. Items constituted short sentences using simple Thai language that avoided jargon and avoided any borrowed English terms. Taking account of natural attention spans at this age as well as reading difficulties, survey completion took a mean of 28 minutes completion time for the younger cohort. Items were limited to collecting data on demographics, technology use and young people's experiences of online interactions (with some exploration of risky interactions and disclosures). More sensitive items were withheld from younger respondents and asked only of the older cohort.

The survey for the older cohort (14-17) was more complex, with a total of 64 items, which were still majority multiple choice, likert scale, or closed question items. However, this version also included a small number of opportunities for further open text inputs – though these were always optional. Administering the survey on tablets via an online platform allowed logic features to be built in that dynamically adapted the survey. The platform added or removed items based on a respondent's answers to certain items. The mean completion time for the older cohort was 32 minutes. Additional to the same topics covered in the survey for the younger cohort, further items sought responses regarding experiences with seeing and sharing sexual content, attitudes and motivations towards sexual content, and perceptions of harm from sexual content.

Administration was completed in groups of 10-20 respondents on school premises; school staff was sometimes present but didn't contribute to data collection. All respondents completed the survey on an individual, internet-enabled tablet provided by the researcher once the consent form was received.

Facilitation was led by trained social workers from the HUG Project, whose expertise in handling sensitive topics ensured interactions were carried out with empathy, cultural sensitivity, and built-in safeguarding support. Facilitators verified consent and assent, assisted with technical issues, and monitored for signs of distress. Data was completely deidentified (with paper consent forms remaining separate from survey completion via tablets). Storage of the paper consent and assent forms complied with Thailand's Personal Data Protection Act. Participation was voluntary, and students could skip questions or exit the survey at any time.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Qualitative interviews were conducted with 20 participants to help elaborate on the context of these issues. Those conversations helped to fill gaps, explain unusual findings, and bring depth to the quantitative data. The backgrounds of these participants included youth leaders; survivor-advocates; law enforcement, social work and education professionals.

The interview participants offered first-hand knowledge about self-generated sexual content involving young people in Thailand. Their insights provide perspectives both about the data gathered by the survey, and their own

experiences and insights of more sensitive areas of the issue - such as commercial aspects of self-generated sexual content and example cases that have reached support services and the justice system. These important qualitative insights are weaved through the quantitative data in this report to tell a full-framed story of this complex issue. Where interviews were conducted in Thai, the original Thai quote is included in text along with the English translation.

YOUTH CONSULTATIONS

A small group consultation meeting was held in May 2024 with young people to inform and refine the draft survey tool. Nine young people from the Children and Youth Council of Thailand (**สภาเด็กและเยาวชนแห่งประเทศไทย**) were invited to join the project launch event and following the launch participated in a closed-group consultation, where they were consulted on the first version of the survey tool. Selected questions were presented to the young people to feedback on to check in on the language used in the survey but also whether the scenarios capture the actual experiences young people today are facing. Following the consultation, a raft of changes were made to the Thai language phrasing of items, flow of questions and response options for multiple-choice questions.

A further small group consultation with young people aged 14-18 was held in March 2025 to discuss and validate the research team's initial analysis of the data, seek inputs on unusual findings and add depth to the analysis. Discussions during this session led the research team to re-analyze some data and understand trends in new ways, occasional explanations are also included within the report as qualitative inputs.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Safeguarding procedures were embedded throughout the research at all stages. Survey facilitators were experienced social workers and were also trained in child safeguarding procedures related to research practices. The facilitators supported participants before, during, and after data collection. Young people identified as at-risk by school staff were offered additional brief check-ins following completion of the survey. Any disclosures of abuse were planned to be escalated within the HUG Project's safeguarding procedures (however no case had to be escalated during data collection). Because the issues explored are sensitive, having HUG Project staff as facilitators of the survey and youth consultations was highly beneficial. As experienced social workers, HUG Project staff brought essential expertise in managing sensitive topics, ensuring that interactions with participants were conducted with empathy and cultural sensitivity. Their expertise and familiarity with the complexities of child sexual exploitation and abuse enabled facilitators to discuss difficult and sometimes culturally uncomfortable topics adeptly, fostering an environment where participants felt safe and understood.

In-depth research and survey facilitator training, alongside a facilitator guide was provided to the HUG Project team by Evident. This training encompassed ethical procedures, recruitment and consent process, and detailed instructions for survey facilitation.

A continuous consent model was adopted, particularly given the sensitivity of the topic, with facilitation processes stressing that participants could skip items, pause or withdraw at any time. The research prioritized voluntary, confidential participation and aimed to minimize the risk of distress.

Respondents for the key informant interviews were aged 15 years old and above. The interviews with adults were completed by Rangsima Deesawade from Evident, a researcher with many years of experience working on sensitive topics. The three interviews with young people (aged between 15 and 18 years old) were conducted by Kanittha Taluang, a social worker with HUG Project with experience working with survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

RESULTS

FIGURING OUT DIGITAL AGENCY

Always Online

The Leaked data illustrates that young people in Thailand mostly have private and unrestricted internet access. In our Northern Thailand sample 91% (n=1770) of young people aged between 9 and 17 years of age had their own personal device with internet access. Ownership increases dramatically with age: while two-thirds of 9-year-olds reported having their own devices, that was as high as 97% of 17-year-olds. As they get older, shared devices almost disappear entirely. Slight divisions remain across geography: 84% of rural children under 14 owned their device, compared to 90% of their urban peers. Among the older 14–17-year-olds we surveyed, those differences disappear.

Other existing research has shown that Thai young people are growing up very much online. Even in early childhood, electronic devices are common playthings, with 62% of under 5-year-olds in Thailand having access, many of them using these devices for several hours a day.[19] An 18-year-old interviewed for Leaked observed that **"เราต้องยอมรับว่ายุคนี้เป็นยุคที่โซเชียลมีเดียเข้าถึงเด็กเยอะมาก แล้วบางคนเด็กป.2 มีโทรศัพท์เป็นของตัวเองแล้ว ซึ่งก็ได้รับการสนับสนุนจากพ่อแม่นั่นแหละครับ"** ("We have to admit that kids today have pretty easy access to the internet. And they often have their own devices from a very young age, such as in grade 2, usually provided by their parents.") (K-1706-18).

Yet in Thailand, policy and research have typically portrayed the internet as a phenomenon separate from everyday life - rather than deeply intertwined. Policy makers talk of 'going on the internet' and research may count 'hours spent online' - this divide is obsolete. Young people are not occasional users of technology; they are immersed in it throughout their waking hours, and boundaries between online and offline life are deeply blurred.[20] Online environments shape how they learn, communicate, and express who they are. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube serve not just as places to visit, but as cultural and social arenas where norms are formed and absorbed, identities crafted, relationships conducted, and visibility becomes a form of value.[21] Young Thais do not have a digital presence separate from their offline life; their digital presence is integral to how they understand the world and their place in it.

While young people are navigating online environments, the social, educational and legal systems that may guide and protect them have not always kept pace. In Thailand, formal digital safety education in the school system remains limited. A teacher from a remotely located government school expressed concern in their interview over the lack of a standardized curriculum and professional training on online safety; **"ยังไม่มีหน่วยงานไหนเคยมาอบรมให้ความรู้เรื่องภัยออนไลน์ที่โรงเรียนผมเลยครับ"** (My school has never received any training on this subject) (K-1403-09). This concern was echoed by NGO staff supporting child victims of online sexual abuse in the region: **"เด็ก ๆ ขาดความตระหนักและความรู้ว่าอะไรควรส่งต่อหรือไม่ควรส่ง"** (Children lack awareness and knowledge of what to share or not to share [online] (K-1209-03). An 18-year-old interviewee also emphasized the gaps in digital safety

19 UNICEF Thailand. (2024, June). Addressing the gaps: Ensuring every child in Thailand has an equal chance to thrive. Bangkok, Thailand: UNICEF Thailand.

20 Naezer, M., & Ringrose, J. (2018). **Adventure, intimacy, identity and knowledge: Exploring how social media are shaping and transforming youth sexuality**. In C. McDaniels-Wilson, N. J. S. Brown, & L. S. Harkins (Eds.), The Cambridge handbook of sexuality: New directions and approaches (pp. 419–439). Cambridge University Press.

education. While her school had introduced the topic, she felt the instruction was neither comprehensive nor timely: **“ที่โรงเรียนเก่าหนูมีสอนวิชาเกี่ยวกับออนไลน์อยู่ แต่มันไม่ได้เข้าถึงแกนกลางในการสอน หรือมันสอนช้าไป จริง ๆ มันต้องสอนตั้งแต่เด็กเริ่มใช้มือถืออย่างป.1 หรือ ป.2 ค่ะ ไปสอนตอน ป.5 หรือ ป.6 แล้วมันก็อาจจะไม่ทัน”** (“At my old school, we did learn about digital safety, but it was not enough and came too late. I think this kind of teaching should start earlier, like for children in grades 1 or 2. Starting in grades 5 or 6 is too late.”) (K-1706-19).

When young people do receive online safety training in Thailand, NGOs have largely taken the lead in providing it. However, these efforts are often described as short-term and limited in scope due to constrained funding or project timelines. (K-1009-01). The training approach is **เป็นการสื่อสารทางเดียว เชิญวิทยากรมาพูด พูดเสร็จก็จบ** (typically one-way, with external speakers delivering information while children passively receive it.) As one staff member from an international NGO based in Thailand noted, **“ปีหนึ่งทำครั้งเดียว ไม่มีความต่อเนื่อง ไม่มีแรงดึงดูดมากพอที่จะทำให้เด็กเกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลงในเชิงพฤติกรรม”** (These sessions are often one-off events with little follow-up or continuity. [Therefore], they are not engaging enough to actually influence children’ behavior.) (K-2603-10).

Around the world, many of today’s parents grew up with the internet as part of their own childhoods. This is certainly the case for Thailand, where the parents of primary school aged children in 2025 likely completed their high school education between 2000 and 2010 and were themselves at least partly online as young people. Yet quality, explicit, digital safety education is still lacking and parents largely rely on their own experiences and organically learned skills to guide young people. At the same time technology is changing remarkably fast and the skills gained during the early days of Facebook and social media may not transfer entirely as the emergence of ChatGPT and other Generative AI is remaking the internet. Capacity gaps are particularly evident in **‘ครอบครัวแหว่งกลาง’** (skipped generation families’) where children are left in the care of grandparents while their parents migrate to cities for work, as highlighted by the manager of a government shelter in Chiang Rai (K-0710-07). In such arrangements, grandparents often struggle to relate to or keep pace with the experiences, interests, and digital lives of today’s young people. An NGO leader explained, **“พ่อแม่ส่วนใหญ่ก็ต้องออกไปทำงาน หาเงินเลี้ยงครอบครัว ก็เลยปล่อยให้ลูกอยู่กับปู่ย่าตายาย ซึ่งช่องว่างระหว่างวัยมันเยอะมาก ปู่ย่าตายายก็พยายามจะสอน แต่เด็กไม่ฟัง เพราะเขารู้สึกว่าผู้ใหญ่ไม่เข้าใจ”** (“Most parents have to go out and work to earn a living, so they leave their children with their grandparents. There’s a big generation gap. Many children feel that their grandparents don’t fully understand them or the online world they are part of, which can make it harder for grandparents to connect with or influence them.”) (K-2304-13).

Without quality, explicit digital safety education for caregivers and young people, Thailand’s younger generation must navigate online contexts - characterized by platforms using sophisticated persuasive design features to influence behavior, increasing deployments of generative AI, emotionally charged content, and shifting social dynamics - alone.

[21] Third, A and Moody, L (2021). Our rights in the digital world: A report on the children’s consultations to inform UNCRC General Comment 25. (London and Sydney: 5Rights Foundation and Western Sydney University).

Learning Alone: The DIY Approach to Digital Safety

In the absence of quality, explicit digital safety education, young people are learning these skills organically. Our research shows that 61% of respondents reported that they had learnt how to stay safe online on their own. Nearly half said parents (47%) or school (47%) had been the source of at least some information, but the quality and utility of this information is understood to be limited, didactic and once-off, rather than experiential, continuous and relevant to the online lives of young people.

Gender plays a role here. Girls (n=1100) were statistically significantly more likely than boys (n=805) to have learned about digital safety from parents (51% vs 42%), and schools (50% vs 44%)[22]. This may suggest that adults are more proactive in guiding girls, perhaps as a result of reasonable perceptions that they face greater risk and/or harmful impacts when things do go wrong online.[23]

Age and location also shaped how likely young people were to receive digital safety education. Rural respondents (n=1255) were more likely than urban young people (n=657) to report their digital safety skills as self-taught (63% vs 58%). Digital safety education in Thailand is reported to be mostly delivered by NGOs with activities therefore often concentrated in urban areas or larger, more prominent schools where such organizations operate. As a government social worker based in the North observed, **"โครงการต่าง ๆ ที่ผมเห็น ผมเห็นว่าเขาเข้าโรงเรียนดัง ๆ เป็นส่วนใหญ่ แต่พื้นที่ห่างไกลหรือชนชาติภาษาอื่น อาจจะยังขาดการประชาสัมพันธ์"** ("Speakers or organizations often focus on providing training to large or well-known schools, while schools in remote areas have limited access to such opportunities"). (K-1006-17).

Among 14–17-year-olds (n=937), 79% reported self-taught digital safety skills, compared to only 44% of 9-13 year olds(n=979). Older teens were also more likely to seek advice from friends and to express a desire to learn more. A young person from our youth consultation also pointed to clear knowledge gaps, especially among their younger peers. A 15-year-old boy in our consultation explained: **"เด็กประถมไม่มีความรู้และข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับการใช้แอป"** ("Primary school kids don't have knowledge or information about using apps."). This aligns with the perspectives of NGO staff who are supporting victims, one of whom noted that primary school students, as they frequently begin using social media without proper guidance, are particularly vulnerable to online grooming (K-2304-13).

LGBTQ+ respondents stood out for their heightened self-reliance. They were more likely to report self-learned digital safety skills but also expressed higher levels of interest in learning these skills. This may reflect a lack of tailored support that is inclusive or affirming of LGBTQ+ young people's online and offline experiences. Research has shown that LGBTQ+ young people who experience isolation, rejection, or invisibility because of their diverse identities can see online spaces as vital refuge. Namely, they seek out spaces to connect with others, explore their emerging identities, and access information tailored to their experiences that may not be available offline.[24] As they navigate these online spaces, LGBTQ young people also must grapple with managing identity disclosure, exclusion, and online hostility and abuse. These experiences may counter-intuitively lead them to acquire deeper online safety skills, nevertheless, they are also at greater risks as they embark on these pathways.[25] An NGO staff member noted during

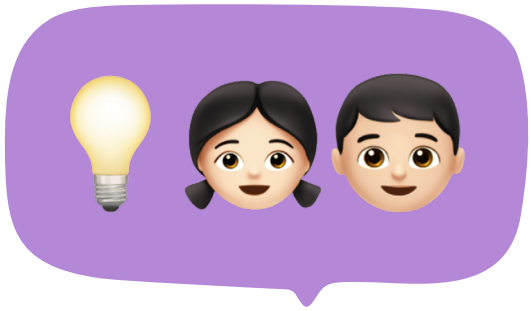
22 Result is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level ($n = 1,916$).

23 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.

24 Hillier, L., & Harrison, L. (2007). **Building Realities Less Limited Than Their Own: Young People Practising Same-Sex Attraction on the Internet**. Sexualities, 10(1), 82–100.

25 Capaldi, M., Schatz, J., & Kavenagh, M. (2024). **Child sexual abuse/exploitation and LGBTQI+ children: Context, links, vulnerabilities, gaps, challenges and priorities**. Child Protection and Practice 1 100001.

interview that; “เรามีรายงานที่ทำกับกลุ่ม LGBT เรื่องสุขภาพจิตในปี 2022 ซึ่งพูดชัดมากว่ากลุ่ม LGBT มีความเสี่ยงที่จะถูกบูลลี่รวมถึงทางออนไลน์มากกว่ากลุ่มอื่น ส่วนน้องผู้หญิงมีผลกระทบแน่ เด็กผู้ชายก็มีผลกระทบเช่นกัน เช่นถ้ารูปที่มีเพศสัมพันธ์ระหว่างชาย-ชายถูกส่งต่อออกไป ก็จะมีผลกระทบต่อความสัมพันธ์ของเด็กต่อไป การมีความสัมพันธ์ที่ดีจะเป็นไปได้ยากมาก ๆ รวมถึงความสัมพันธ์ในครอบครัวด้วย” (“The 2023 Save the Children Thailand report[26] revealed significant mental health risks faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Thailand due to online bullying. The report particularly underscores the vulnerability of boys, noting that the non-consensual sharing of images depicting same-sex activity can result in serious real-world consequences. These include not only psychological distress but also profound disruptions in family relationships. Once such images are shared, affected individuals often face challenges in maintaining or establishing healthy familial connections.”) (K-2603-10).



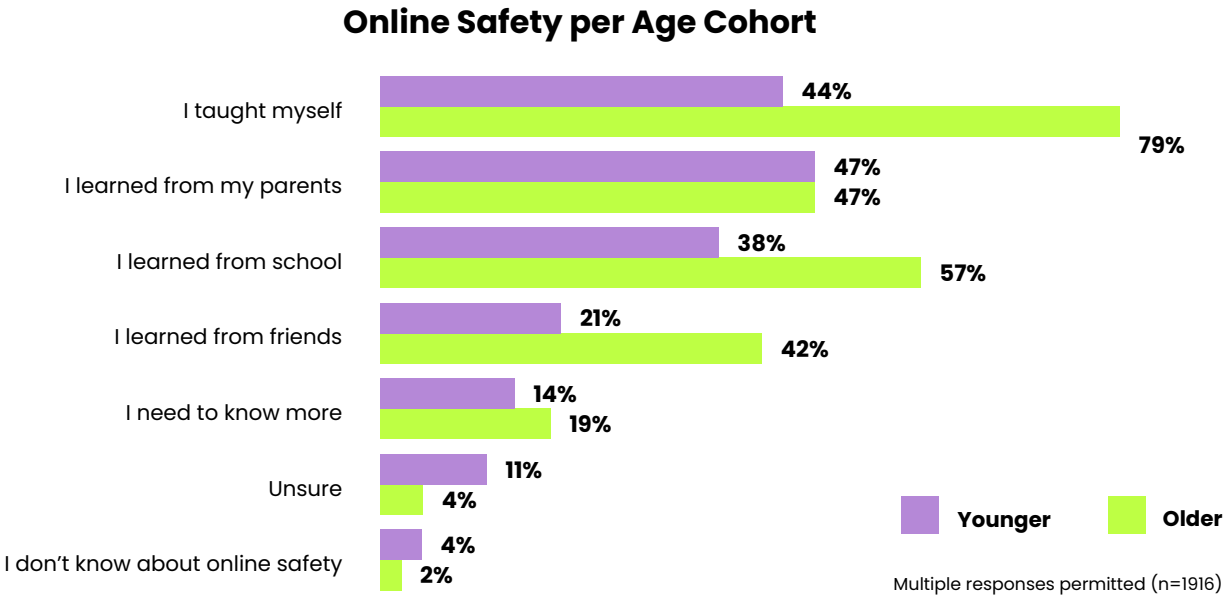


Figure 3 - Online Safety per Age Cohort

Despite the clear lack of quality, explicit digital safety education, the Leaked data shows that young people in Thailand are nevertheless building digital safety competence through their own self-learning and a patchwork of other sources (see figure 3 above). However, the Leaked data also illustrates that young people articulate the knowledge and skills that they deem necessary to be safe online in much more complex ways than digital safety skills are frequently characterized.

[26] Ojanen, T. T., Freeman, C., Kittiteerasack, P., Sakunpong, N., Sopitarchasak, S., Thongpibul, K., Tiansuwan, K., & Suparak, P. (2023). Mental health and well-being of children and youth with diverse SOGIESC in Thailand. Save the Children Thailand.

Differentiating 'Hard' and 'Soft' Digital Skills

Many digital safety campaigns and education curricula lean on naming risks and instructing young people to avoid these.[27] Campaigns are often inclined towards simplistic 'stranger danger' narratives that assume harm comes from clear, external threats. Yet risk is an inherent part of most online interactions — technically, everyone we encounter online begins as or could be a stranger. For young people navigating friendships, flirtation, identity exploration, or intimacy in digital spaces, these reductive frameworks rarely reflect their real experiences. As a result, the advice provided often fails to support the moment-to-moment decisions young people must make online, where boundaries are ambiguous, emotions are involved, and peer dynamics are influential.

Such simplistic digital safety education therefore frequently falls short in helping young people recognize nuanced forms of coercion, navigate emotionally complex situations, or develop confidence in their instincts and how these can inform their actions in online contexts.

To illustrate the point, we have distinguished between what we call 'hard' and 'soft' digital safety skills.

'HARD' AND 'SOFT' DIGITAL SAFETY SKILLS

Hard digital skills refers to 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. These are often the sort of skills that are the focus of explicit digital safety education.

But just as crucial are the **soft digital skills**: 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. Soft digital skills involve applying real-world emotional and social skills to digital contexts. Soft digital skills include exercising judgment, reading social cues, self-confidence, and emotional regulation. These are qualities that are generally still emerging during adolescence and that develop through our experiences in a range of interpersonal relationships. These skills are not specific to online contexts and are thus frequently not addressed in digital safety education.

Together, hard and soft skills form the basis of what we call **digital agency**: a young person's ability to navigate online environments with autonomy, awareness, and a sense of control.

[27] Naezer, M., & Ringrose, J. (2018). Adventure, intimacy, identity and knowledge: Exploring how social media are shaping and transforming youth sexuality. In C. McDaniels-Wilson, N. J. S. Brown, & L. S. Harkins (Eds.), **The Cambridge handbook of sexuality: New directions and approaches** (pp. 419–439). Cambridge University Press.

A focus on hard skills without support to develop soft skills is insufficient. Young people need to know how to block an account, but they also need to know when to deploy this knowledge - when to block, why, and how to handle what comes next.

In Thailand this is particularly crucial, as cultural influences towards politeness and respect for elders can exacerbate the risks for young people. Cultural norms often emphasize that children should be quiet and well-behaved, with ideal behavior defined by obedience and thankfulness. Children are viewed as holding the lowest rank within a strongly hierarchical social order, and the term เด็ก (child) reflects this structure implying a lower role rather than just denoting age or growth.[28] A counseling psychologist based in Chiangmai further explained that: **"เด็กๆขาดทักษะในการปฏิเสธ หรือเมื่อปฏิเสธแล้วแต่เพื่อนก็ยังตื๊อ...เราจึงควรสร้างความตระหนักให้เด็กรู้วิธีในการสื่อสาร และมีความ "เอ๊ะ" เช่น ตอนที่เพื่อนชวนทำสิ่งนี้ ฟังว่าหัวใจเราเป็นยังไง สอนให้เค้ามีความ "เอ๊ะ" ที่ร่างกาย ให้เขาคิดก่อน ไม่จำเป็นต้องตอบสนองในทันที และให้ความรู้เกี่ยวกับผลลัพธ์ที่ตามมา รวมถึงผลทางด้านกฎหมายและความรู้เกี่ยวกับ digital footprint"** ("Many Thai children lack the skills to say 'no' in uncomfortable or unsafe situations. It is therefore the responsibility of adults to equip children with practical tools, such as suggested phrases for refusing unwanted interactions, the ability to recognize red flags, and knowledge about body awareness and digital footprints") (K-0904-11).

Hard Digital Skills

Leaked data shows encouraging evidence of young people's hard digital skills. As figure 4 shows only 4% of older respondents, and 22% of younger ones, said they didn't know how to access privacy settings. 41% reported that they set their accounts to private. Girls were more likely than boys to opt for public profiles (44% vs 36%). These findings indicate that most young people have the knowledge and skills and do make intentional decisions about their digital boundaries. Yet they don't always choose the safest options.

When encountering unwanted content, one in three respondents of our entire sample said they would block it. This rises to nearly half (46%) who said they would block and or report content that is sexual to the platform. Most of those (71%) would take this action if the sender was unknown. For some (18%), the relationship to the sender didn't matter, the content alone justified action.

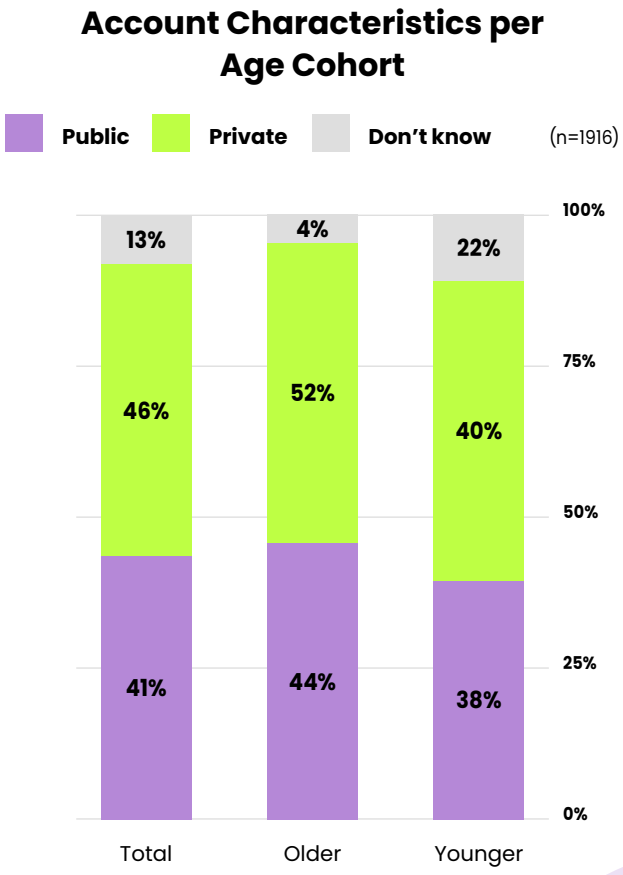


Figure 4 - Account Characteristics per Age Cohort

[28] UNICEF. (2023). Connected, Engaged and Empowered? – A Landscape Analysis of Young People's Participation in Thailand. Bangkok: UNICEF.

Reporting and blocking, however, are not always driven by fear. For some, it's also a sense of responsibility. As one girl, 18, shared: **"คิดว่าเราอาจจะเป็นอีกหนึ่งคนที่ช่วยเขาก็ได้...การที่เราเลือกที่จะรายงานก็คิดว่าเป็นทางเลือกที่ดี เพราะเป็นการป้องกันไม่ให้คนอื่นเห็น"** ("I might be helping them... reporting is a good choice because it stops others from seeing it"). This shows that for some, digital safety is also about building safer online contexts for all, not just protecting themselves.

These findings show that hard skills like blocking, reporting, and managing privacy settings are generally used and understood by young people in Thailand. These technical competencies form the scaffolding of digital self-protection. However, some gaps remain in hard skills, for instance many of the young people cited "forgotten passwords" as one of the top three reasons for why young people have multiple accounts. But overall good hard digital skills are observed. Why then are young people not consistently choosing the safest options? The answer lies in the less prioritized soft digital skills.

Soft Digital Skills

On their own, the hard digital skills cannot account for the ongoing, nuanced choices young people face in digital environments. Many young people lack access to explicit education to support the development of their soft digital skills. Yet there are signs in the Leaked data that these do develop organically with age and experience of online contexts even without that explicit guidance. The problem with this trend is that younger, more naive users are vulnerable before they strengthen these soft digital skills. As already noted, younger age cohorts are where police and support services are increasingly seeing serious harm occurring. An NGO Leader shared her experience: **"เดี๋ยวนี้คนหลอก มันไม่ได้มาหลอกเด็กวัยรุ่นที่มีนมมีหน้าอก หรือวัยรุ่นตอนปลายแล้ว แต่เป้าหมายคือ ป.5 ป.6 ม.1 ซึ่งยังเป็นหุ่นตัวตรง ๆ อยู่เลย หรือแม้แต่เคสที่เราทำกับตำรวจ แล้วเราเข้าไปในกลุ่มที่เค้ามีการแชร์ภาพของเด็ก เด็กส่วนใหญ่ก็อายุสิบต้น ๆ "** ("These days, predators aren't just targeting older teens who are already physically developed. Their targets are much younger e.g. kids in Grade 5, Grade 6, or early secondary school. These children still have very childlike bodies. In some of the cases we've worked on with the police, where we've accessed groups that share images of children, most of the kids involved are just in their early teens or even younger, around 10 years old.") (K-2304-13).

Research has shown that young people generally only fully trust online interactions with people that they also know in the real world, because they can fully verify their identity and assess their intentions.[29] In the survey, we asked all young people how acceptable it would be if an online friend turned out to be different from who they said they were, such as being older, a different gender or nationality, or using a fake profile photo. We used a scale from 1 ("not at all likely") to 10 ("completely likely"). Across all scenarios, the average ratings were low (below 3.5) meaning most young people viewed these kinds of deception as unacceptable. The most unacceptable was using a fake profile photo (average score 2.8). However, older participants and boys tended to rate these situations as more acceptable than younger participants and girls, which could suggest that as young people grow older, they become more used to or tolerant of such deceptions.

This protective cautiousness was also prominent for private online chats. Respondents were most willing to chat privately with friends under 18 that they already knew offline. They were least likely to engage in private chats with unknown adults or people whose age was unclear. Forty percent said they were 'very unlikely' to have private chats with adults they only knew online.

This affects a broader trend, where young people tend to assess the risks of online interactions by comparing them to the safety and familiarity of their offline environments. While they are generally cautious with online-only connections,

[29] Third, A., Kennedy, U., Lala, G., Rajan, P., Sardarabady, S. & Tatam, L. (2024). **Protecting children from online grooming**. Young and Resilient Research Centre, Western Sydney University and Save the Children.

especially those with no mutual friends or verifiable context, they often perceive strangers met in real life as more threatening than those encountered online. This shows a nuanced understanding of risk, where the online–offline distinction is less about platform and more about perceived control and familiarity in the personal interaction.[30] Explicit education that reinforces these instinctual responses would easily fortify these organically occurring soft digital skills.

However, risk behaviors are also observed as emerging from early ages, and this organic caution was not evenly distributed across age groups. Younger respondents (aged 9–13, n=979) showed greater willingness than older teens to chat privately with people whose age they did not know. This was measured on a 10-point scale, where 1 meant "not likely at all" and 10 meant "very likely." On this scale younger respondents gave an average score of 3.18 for chatting with someone of unknown age and 2.68 for chatting with an adult known only online. This highlights an important shift: while older youth may be more exposed to digital risk, riskier contact patterns are already forming early. It challenges the assumption that online grooming is primarily a risk for older adolescents. For younger children, especially those navigating digital spaces with less experience or critical awareness, the perceived familiarity of online interactions can mask imminent threats. Research supports this concern, noting that although children are generally aware of the risks of engaging with unknown individuals, many still do so driven by curiosity, social needs, or a desire to expand their networks. Children in this age group often value friendship and excitement and tend to make rapid decisions about which risks feel acceptable. While this may reflect growing digital agency, it can leave younger users vulnerable to manipulation before they have developed the nuanced soft skills required for safe navigation of online spaces.[31]

This concern was emphasized by a government social worker who noted that **"จากเคสที่ทำมา อายุของเด็กจะอยู่ที่ประมาณ 8–11 ปี ขึ้นไปถึงอายุ 15 ปี"** (Children who engage in producing and sharing nude images are often between the ages of 8 and 11 and not more than 15 years old" (K-0110-06). NGO staff concurred; **"เราเห็นว่าเด็กอายุน้อยลง จะเห็นเลยว่าจาก ม.ปลาย กลายเป็น ม.ต้น และอาจจะถึงประถม คือป.5 ป.6 และม.1"** ("I have witnessed a shift in the age of victims, from high school students to those in middle school, and now increasingly among primary school students in grades 5 to 7") (K-2304-13).

We saw a similar pattern of cautiousness when exploring how young people described their willingness to share different types of content online. Respondents of the older cohort (n=937) reported that they share non-sexual photos and videos far more frequently than sexual ones, especially with friends known offline. When asked to rate, on a scale from 1 ("not at all likely") to 10 ("very likely"), how willing they would be to share sexual content with different types of recipients, the average score remained below 2.2. In contrast, non-sexual content received much higher ratings, especially among younger teens, with a peak mean score of 6.52 for sharing with friends who are under 18 and known offline. These patterns were also seen across the older cohort, with younger respondents in that group reporting slightly higher willingness to share non-sexual content.

[30] Third, A., Kennedy, U., Lala, G., Rajan, P., Sardarabady, S. & Tatam, L. (2024). **Protecting children from online grooming**. Young and Resilient Research Centre, Western Sydney University and Save the Children.

[31] Third, A., Kennedy, U., Lala, G., Rajan, P., Sardarabady, S. & Tatam, L. (2024). **Protecting children from online grooming**. Young and Resilient Research Centre, Western Sydney University and Save the Children.

Taken together, these findings show that many young people, especially the older they get, are not only aware of digital risks, but also have hard and soft digital safety skills and are actively using them. They are setting boundaries, asking questions, and choosing who to engage with and how. Their approach to digital safety is not simply reactive but reflects a broader sense of agency. There are opportunities to build on these skills and influence young people's decisions to deploy them, particularly in terms of reinforcing – and explicitly teaching - soft digital skills.

Likelihood of Sharing Sexual Content and Non-Sexual Content

(Mean score of 10-point scale)

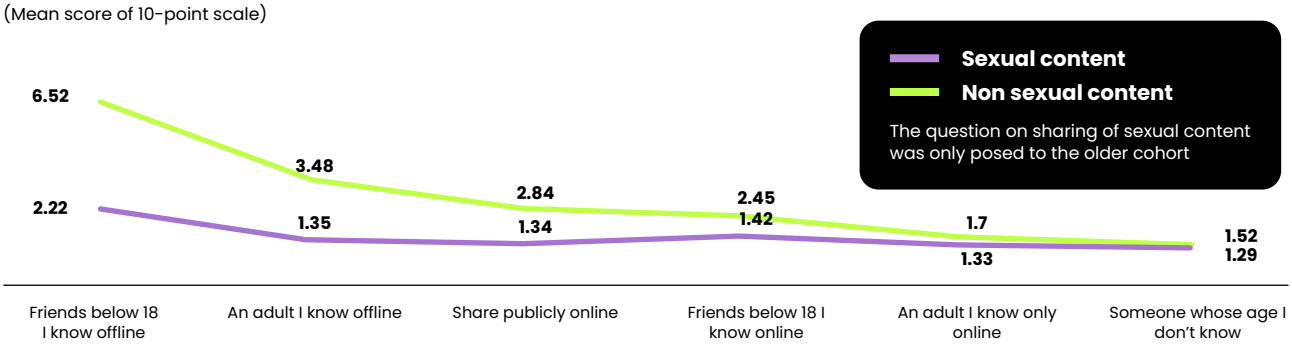


Figure 5 - Likelihood of Sharing Sexual Content and Non-Sexual Content

Power, Performativity, and Publicness

Digital safety isn't just about preventing harm; it's also about grappling with the ways that online engagements reflect and shape our identities. Therefore, from a digital safety perspective, we also need to go beyond perceiving young people only as consumers of technology - with safety approaches focused on building walls between them and malicious outsiders. Young people are active participants in online life; they are content creators and curators of their own digital identities exercising agency and navigating complex environments shaped by visibility, peer dynamics, and platform design. This has both negative and positive implications for safety education.

Many of the decisions young people make online – particularly when to comes to what to post and share - are shaped by complex social and emotional pressures that go beyond what current digital safety trainings are preparing them for. In the qualitative discussions, participants also demonstrated an awareness of the complexities of these settings and often recognized the difference between what is real and what is 'performed'. One 15-year-old girl reflected on the divide between her online and offline life, saying, **"ไม่เหมือนกัน ขนาดรูปในโซเชียลกับชีวิตจริงก็ไม่เหมือนแล้ว** ("It's not the same. Even my social media photos aren't like real life").

But even when young people are aware of the context and exercising caution, their choices are still made within commercial platforms that exert influences on them. Platforms are very much designed to reward visibility, popularity, performance and engagement.[32] Among young people in our survey who maintained publicly accessible online accounts (n=1615) rather than using privacy settings to restrict visibility, 30% said they wanted to be seen or show the world who they are, and 17% said it was because they wanted to become popular or famous. Girls (n=843) were particularly likely to cite visibility as a reason for maintaining a public profile. Thirty-four percent of girls with public accounts wanted to be seen, compared to 23% of boys. This demonstrates how social media visibility becomes entwined with identity and self-worth, particularly for girls aged 14 to 17.

[32] van der Hof, S., Lievens, E., Milkaite, I., Verdoodt, V., Hannema, T., & Liefaard, T. (2020). The Child's Right to Protection against Economic Exploitation in the Digital World. The International Journal of Children's Rights, 28(4), 833-859. https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-28040003

HOW PLATFORMS SHAPE WHAT WE SEE ONLINE

What users see online isn't random or neutral. Almost all platforms use powerful recommendation systems to decide what content shows up in feeds. These systems are designed to maximize engagement, there is no motivation to protect well-being. This means they often push content that grabs the most attention. That tends to include emotional, extreme, or sexualized posts.[33]

This is part of what's known as persuasive design. These are features like infinite scroll and autoplay.

These recommendation systems, also known as 'algorithms' learn from user behavior and use this information to keep us watching and engaged. The more a user interacts with a certain type of content – both passively (leaving it onscreen) and actively (liking and commenting), the more the system will serve similar content. Over time, this creates feedback loops where sensationalized content is more frequently recirculated, even if the person didn't search for it in the first place.[34]

Layered on top of this are dark patterns. These design tricks make it hard to opt out, change settings, or control what you're shown. These aren't accidental, platforms deploy these methods deliberately to drive engagement and limit user autonomy. The include use of vague labels, friction-filled settings menus, or defaults that quietly expose more than users might intend. Young people are especially vulnerable to these tactics, particularly when they're tied to peer validation, visibility, or reward mechanics built into the platform.[35] Even when users do try to push back against unwanted content by clicking 'not interested' or changing settings, these actions can appear to have little effect, thereby discouraging use of these tools.

Platform recommendation systems and features are not designed to protect users. They are built to maximize interaction and time on the platform. The system does not distinguish between what is beneficial and what is simply engaging.[36]

For young people still figuring out identity, intimacy, and belonging, digital environments by defined by these features can feel pressure-filled and hard to navigate. When sexualized content is everywhere and seems to perform well, it can feel normal or even expected. That doesn't mean platforms purposely cause young people to share self-generated sexual content, but platforms do influence the behavior by shaping what is visible, valued, and validated online.

33 Narayanan, A. (2023). Understanding Social Media Recommendation Algorithms. Knight First Amendment Institute.

34 Thorburn, L., Bengani, P., & Stray, J. (2022, January 21). How Platform Recommenders Work. Medium. Retrieved from https://medium.com/understanding-recommenders/how-platform-recommenders-work-15e260d9a15a

35 Smith, K., Bullen, G., & Huerta, M. (2021). Dark Patterns in User Controls: Exploring YouTube's Recommendation Settings. Superbloom. Retrieved from https://superbloom.design/learning/blog/dark-patterns-in-user-controls-exploring-youtubes-recommendation-settings/

36 Smith, K., Bullen, G., & Huerta, M. (2021). Dark Patterns in User Controls: Exploring YouTube's Recommendation Settings. Superbloom. Retrieved from https://superbloom.design/learning/blog/dark-patterns-in-user-controls-exploring-youtubes-recommendation-settings/

Younger teens were more likely to be unaware or indifferent to their privacy settings with the highest levels of uncertainty amongst the 9 year olds (43%, n=32%) and the lowest levels amongst the 17 year olds (3%, n=7), suggesting that for many, public exposure is either unexamined or normalized, a reflection of how online platforms have influenced our norms.

Constant online 'self-presentation' offers both opportunity and pressure. On the one hand, digital spaces can provide connection, affirmation, and freedom, especially for those who feel unseen in offline life. On the other hand, this pattern fuels social comparison, appearance anxiety, and the relentless need to engage via platforms and stay relevant.[37]

This culture of performance carries risks.[38] More than half of the older cohort (56%, n=520) said they would reply to a stranger offering to help grow their account if the person's account was verified. Others said they would reply if the stranger had mutual friends (40%, n=377) or appeared to be a professional adult (37%, n=345). These findings highlight how digital credibility cues emphasized by platforms as legitimate safety features - like the blue tick, follower count, or tone of professionalism - can override young people's initial instincts to exercise hard and soft digital safety skills regarding caution. This is not necessarily a bad thing in isolation, but cumulatively these experiences can erode self-protective impulses.

For many young people, the desire for popularity online is a strong drive. It reflects deeper social and psychological motivations in humans that reward visibility, connection, and affirmation.[39] Around one-third of young people in our research expressed aspirations to become influencers themselves or to grow their audience by being associated with popular accounts. Thematic open-text answers from our survey illustrate this powerful drive toward recognition:

- **"อยากให้คนอื่นเห็นตัวตนของฉัน"** ("I want others to see the real me,")
- **"เปิดให้บุคคลอื่น ที่เราไม่รู้จักสามารถดูการเคลื่อนไหวของเราได้ โดยไม่ต้องผ่านการเป็นเพื่อน"** ("So unknown others can see my posts without being friends online,")
- **"เพราะอยากให้บางคนที่อยากรู้จักว่าตัวเราเป็นใครหน้าตายังไง ให้สามารถเข้ามาดูได้"** ("I want people to see what I look like.")

This desire is certainly shaped by how online platforms reward engagement, often equating attention with success. Persuasive design features also mean that young people's engagement is being further shaped by a range of further subtle, psychological nudges. For example, variable reward schedules can be manufactured by platforms through the manipulation of post visibility, social comparison metrics like public follower counts, and the dopamine rush of going viral can reinforce behaviors even when they may contradict self-protective skills and impulses and compromise privacy or wellbeing.[40]

In this context, the line between grooming and marketing, between friendship and branding, can become blurred in these situations. Young people may not always recognize when a seemingly legitimate offer masks predatory or exploitative intent. The influencer culture that dominates platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram often reinforces the idea that being visible and desirable is a measure of worth. This can place pressure on young people, particularly girls and LGBT youth, to engage in performative behaviors online in exchange for attention, approval, or connection.

37 van der Hof, S., Lievens, E., Milkaite, I., Verdoodt, V., Hannema, T., & Liefaard, T. (2020). The Child's Right to Protection against Economic Exploitation in the Digital World. The International Journal of Children's Rights, 28(4), 833-859. https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-28040003

38 Livingstone, S. (2008). Taking Risky Opportunities in Youthful Content Creation: Teenagers' Use of Social Networking Sites for Intimacy, Privacy and Self-Expression. New Media & Society. 10. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808089415

39 Büttner, C. M., Lalot, F., & Rudert, S. C. (2023). Showing with whom I belong: The desire to belong publicly on social media. Computers in Human Behavior, 139, 107535. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107535

40 van der Hof, S., Lievens, E., Milkaite, I., Verdoodt, V., Hannema, T., & Liefaard, T. (2020). The Child's Right to Protection against Economic Exploitation in the Digital World. The International Journal of Children's Rights, 28(4), 833-859. https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-28040003

SEXUAL CONTENT

ONLINE INFLUENCE AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Children undergo many complex changes as they grow, develop capacities, and mature into responsible adults. Sexual development is part of this process and is shaped by physical and psychological characteristics of the individual in tandem with cultural, familial, and societal contexts around them.[41] As technology and online contexts increasingly feature in their lives, these influences must also be accounted for.

What young people see or learn online about sex and sexuality can clash with what adults in their lives tell them, if they're told anything at all. In Thailand, there's a strong culture of silence around openly discussing sex.[42] A commonly cited Thai proverb, **'อย่าชี้โพรงให้กระรอก'** (literally, 'do not point out the hole to the squirrel,' meaning 'do not show the way to wrongdoing'), reflects the parental concern sex education might inadvertently encourage sexual activity, as an interviewed NGO staff member noted (K-1009-01). Consequently, social norms (and taboos) surrounding discussions of sex and sexuality contribute to a culture of silence that prevents children from seeking help when they encounter harmful sexual experiences online. **"เด็กกลัวว่าจะถูกดุด่ามากกว่าจะได้รับความช่วยเหลือ"** ("Many children fear being blamed rather than supported,") a social worker noted (K-1209-03).

Comprehensive sex education is also limited in most schools. As a young person from our consultation put it: **"คิดว่าโรงเรียนมีแทรกการสอนในวิชาเทคโนโลยีหรือสุขศึกษาแต่ว่าเนื้อหาไม่ได้เข้มข้น เด็กอาจจะไม่ได้เข้าใจขนาดนั้น"** ("I think the school has included teaching in technology or health education subjects, but the content is not intensive. Children may not understand it that much."). Although the Thai government has encouraged schools to offer comprehensive sex education, the implementation of such programs varies significantly depending on the individual school.[43] A UNICEF report found that of the government-suggested topics, those most likely to be addressed were the health-related aspects, such as "reproductive organs," "how pregnancy occurs," and "sexually transmitted infections." In contrast, topics within the domain of "sexual rights and citizenship" such as "good touching for showing care and love" were less frequently covered. The report noted that many teachers emphasized the risks and negative consequences that can occur from a concern that highlighting the positive dimensions might encourage students to engage in sexual activity. As a result, the curriculum often prioritizes warnings and deterrents over a balanced and comprehensive perspective.[44]

It is not surprising that the Leaked data illustrates that many Thai young people are learning about sex online. Sometimes out of curiosity,

41 Livingstone, S., & Mason, J. (2015). Sexual rights and sexual risks among youth online: A review of existing knowledge regarding children and young people's developing sexuality in relation to new media environments. EU Kids Online, London School of Economics and Political Science.

42 Puchakanit P., & Rhein, D. (2022). **Student Perceptions of Sexual Harassment in Thailand: Origins and Impact**," Sexuality & Culture 26, no. 1: 116-135.

43 Napamas Srikwan, Pimpaporn Klunklin, Kasara Sripichyakan, Decha Tamdee, Sumalee Lirtmunlikaporn, Saifon Aekwarangkoon. (2024). Implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Primary Schools in a Province of Northern Thailand. Pacific Rim Int J Nurs Res. Vol.28, No.1, January-March 2024. pp.53-70.

44 Ministry of Education and UNICEF. (2016). **Review of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Thailand**.

sometimes to seek health-related information, and often because digital spaces have become a natural extension of where their relationships and identities are taking shape. This becomes especially clear when we look at the kinds of activities young people engage in online in the following data.

While most respondents said they use the internet for entertainment and relaxation (77%, n=1482), a significant number also reported going online to socialize with friends (61%, n=1170). During a youth consultation, an 18-year-old girl described how **"เป็นเพื่อนในเกมมากกว่าผู้ปกครองช่วงโควิด"** ("During COVID, I spent more time with online friends in games than with my parents.") This sentiment was echoed by the headmaster of a school in Chiang Rai Province, who observed that children today often spend more time in the online world than they do engaging with adults, whether parents or teachers. **"เราต้องยอมรับว่าเวลาที่เด็กให้กับสื่อออนไลน์มีมากกว่าที่เด็กให้กับผู้ใหญ่ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นพ่อแม่หรือครู ฉะนั้นการจะช่วยหยุดตรงนั้น พื้นฐานครอบครัวเป็นเรื่องสำคัญ"** ("If we wish to intervene or redirect this trend, I believe the effort must begin with strengthening the family foundation.") (K-1305-16).

Over a quarter of all respondents (27%, n=524) said they use the internet for dating or building romantic relationships. One 18-year-old girl described how experiencing her romantic relationship online is simply part of her daily life: **"เราเองก็มีแฟนออนไลน์... แชตมีคอลกัน"** ("I have had an online boyfriend... we chat and video call."). An 18-year-old boy shared his perception that: **"แอปหาคู่อยู่ในชีวิตประจำวันของเรา แต่มันก็อาจจะมีคนที่รู้วิธีการใช้ที่ถูกต้องและไม่รู้ ใช้ไปเรื่อย ๆ โดยไม่ได้คิดอะไร"** ("Dating apps are part of everyday life now, with some people approaching them cautiously, while others engage with less discretion.") (K-1706-18). Sexual exploration among young people is also reflected in their use of online dating platforms and the sharing of intimate images. **"เด็กอยากมีประสบการณ์ทางเพศ สมัยนี้เขาหาได้จากโลกออนไลน์ เด็กอาจจะอยู่ในการกำกับดูแลของพ่อแม่ตลอด การที่เขาจะไปทดสอบการมีเพศสัมพันธ์จึงทำไม่ได้ จึงต้องไปใช้ช่องทางออนไลน์"** (These behaviors may be influenced by the limited opportunities for in-person sexual experiences, as many young people are closely monitored by their parents); (K-1209-02) one NGO leader observed.

A smaller, but still notable proportion of all respondents (18%, n=345) reported that they go online specifically to seek advice or guidance about relationships and sex. One 18-year-old girl in a youth consultation described the kinds of sex and relationship issues that young people turn to the internet for: **"ปรึกษาเรื่องการอกหัก โดนเท การท้องก่อนวัย"** ("They ask for advice about heartbreak, being ghosted, getting pregnant early."). Being online provides a space to explore questions that feel too uncomfortable or taboo to speak about in real life with parents, teachers, or even close friends.

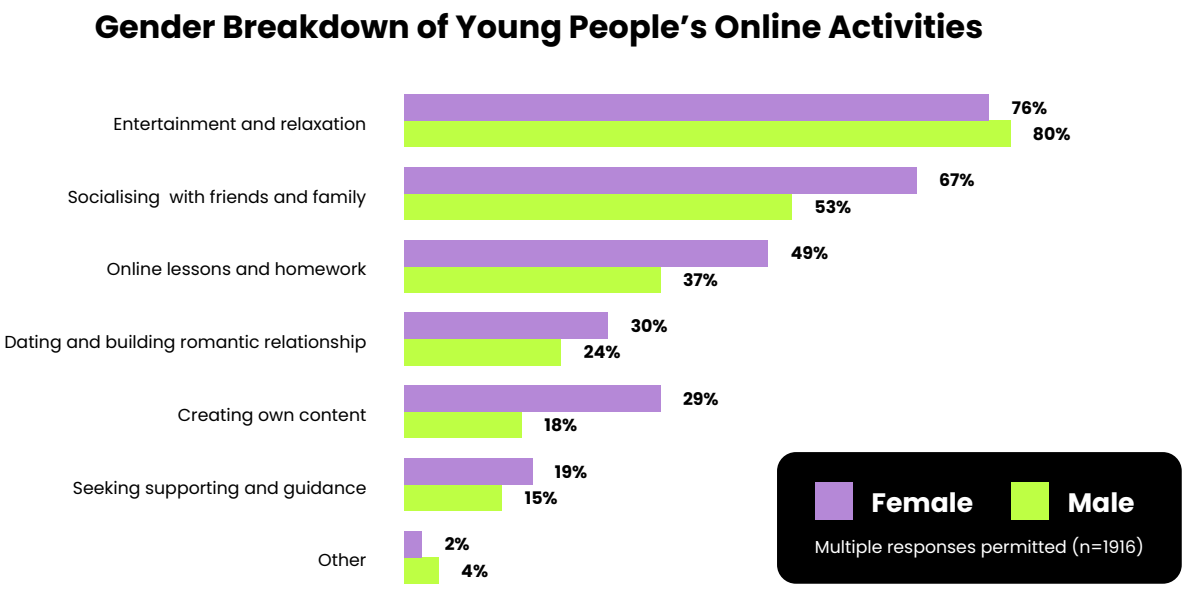


Figure 6 - Gender Breakdown of Young People's Online Activities

EVERYDAY EXPOSURE AND THE NORMALIZATION OF SEXUAL CONTENT

While some young people actively search online for answers about sex and relationships, others come across sexual content inadvertently through their engagement with the platforms they use daily. The boundaries between learning, entertainment, and exposure are often blurred. Responses indicate that young people aren't necessarily going online to look for sexual content, but that it is being fed to them as a result of algorithmic recommendations on the platforms they use. This exposure is often passive, unintentional, and shaped by a range of factors.

An insight from the survey data is that young people define "sexual content" quite broadly. They consider sexual content to extend beyond explicit images or videos of intercourse and fully nude images. Respondents also included audio that sounds sexual (like moaning), sexual health information or anatomy diagrams, partially undressed bodies, written sexts or romantic fiction, and even fully clothed individuals in sexually suggestive poses. Interestingly, examples of the above that involve women (51%, n=478) are more likely to be considered sexual content than the same examples involving men (45%, n=421). Female respondents were significantly more likely than males to consider a wider variety of content as "sexual" (these questions were only asked of the older cohort).

Algorithmic recommendations are feeding sexual content to young people on the platforms they use. While they don't allow explicit content, platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube do promote sexualized content (that meets young people's definitions of 'sexual content'). The automated architecture of these platforms (algorithmic recommendations to feeds, autoplay features, and viral content promotional loops) plays a central role in what young people see. Sexualized content is often amplified because it performs well within these engagement-driven systems.[45] Viral sounds (like **เสียงต้นฉบับ - T.O.N**) and correlated 'sexy' dances motivate young people to replicate the dances in their own content as it has higher likelihood of algorithmic promotion and thus visibility and engagement. Furthermore, young people described encountering viral trends like "bombing," in which unsolicited nudes are sent using encrypted or disappearing messaging features. As one 18-year-old girl explained, **"เพิ่งรู้เรื่องเทรนด์วัยรุ่นที่เป็นการปาระเบิด... ส่งรูปในไอจีให้เห็นแค่รอบเดียว"** ("I just learned about the teen trend of 'bombing'—sending a nude on IG that can only be viewed once.").

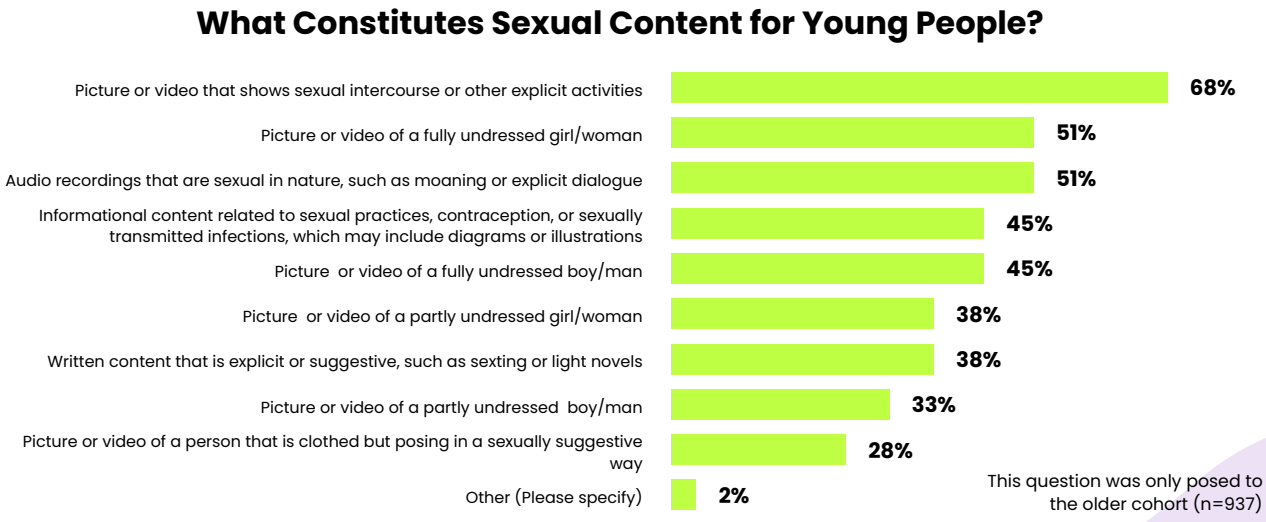


Figure 7 - What Constitutes Sexual Content for Young People?

[45] 5Rights Foundation. (2023). **Disrupted childhood: The cost of persuasive design**.

Young people's reported exposure to sexual content varied significantly depending on the platform/game being used. The most common sources were Facebook (65%, n=1245), TikTok (57%, n=1097), and YouTube (48%, n=910), which also happen to be the platforms with the highest usage rates among respondents (over 95% for each). Although fewer respondents reported using Twitter (58% overall usage), a striking 80% of those users had encountered sexual content there. Across all 18 platforms and games listed in the survey, some level of sexual content exposure was noted.

Exposure patterns also differed across age groups. Younger respondents reported higher exposure on platforms like YouTube, Roblox, and Free Fire which are platforms that are often considered more child-friendly. Older respondents were more likely to encounter sexual content on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Discord. This suggests that exposure is not limited to traditionally 'risky' platforms but is embedded even in spaces widely used by younger children. This trend was underscored by the account of an 18-year-old informant participating in Leaked, who reflected on her experiences with content on YouTube:

"ในยูทูบ พี่อาจจะคิดว่าเป็นแอปธรรมดาใช่ไหมคะ แต่มันมีเนื้อหาเช่น GTA หรือคอนเทนต์ที่ล่อแหลมมาก ๆ ทั้ง ๆ ที่เป็นช่องของเด็ก เช่นเกี่ยวกับเกม แต่การพูดของเขาสอดแทรกไปด้วยคำใหม่ ๆ เนื้อหาเกี่ยวกับเพศ ใช้คำสแลงที่เกี่ยวกับอวัยวะเพศ หรือภาษาที่ใช้ในคุก แล้วมันเป็นช่องที่ต้องการตีตลาดกลุ่มเป้าหมายเด็กด้วย" (On YouTube, there are many channels made for kids that adults might overlook. Some of these channels actually include inappropriate content, like reviewing GTA games. The creators sometimes use slang or new words that hint at sexual stuff. They even use language from prisons that talks about sex or violence. The problem is that these channels are made to attract kids.) (K-1706-19)

Exposure to Sexual Content on Apps, Websites and Games

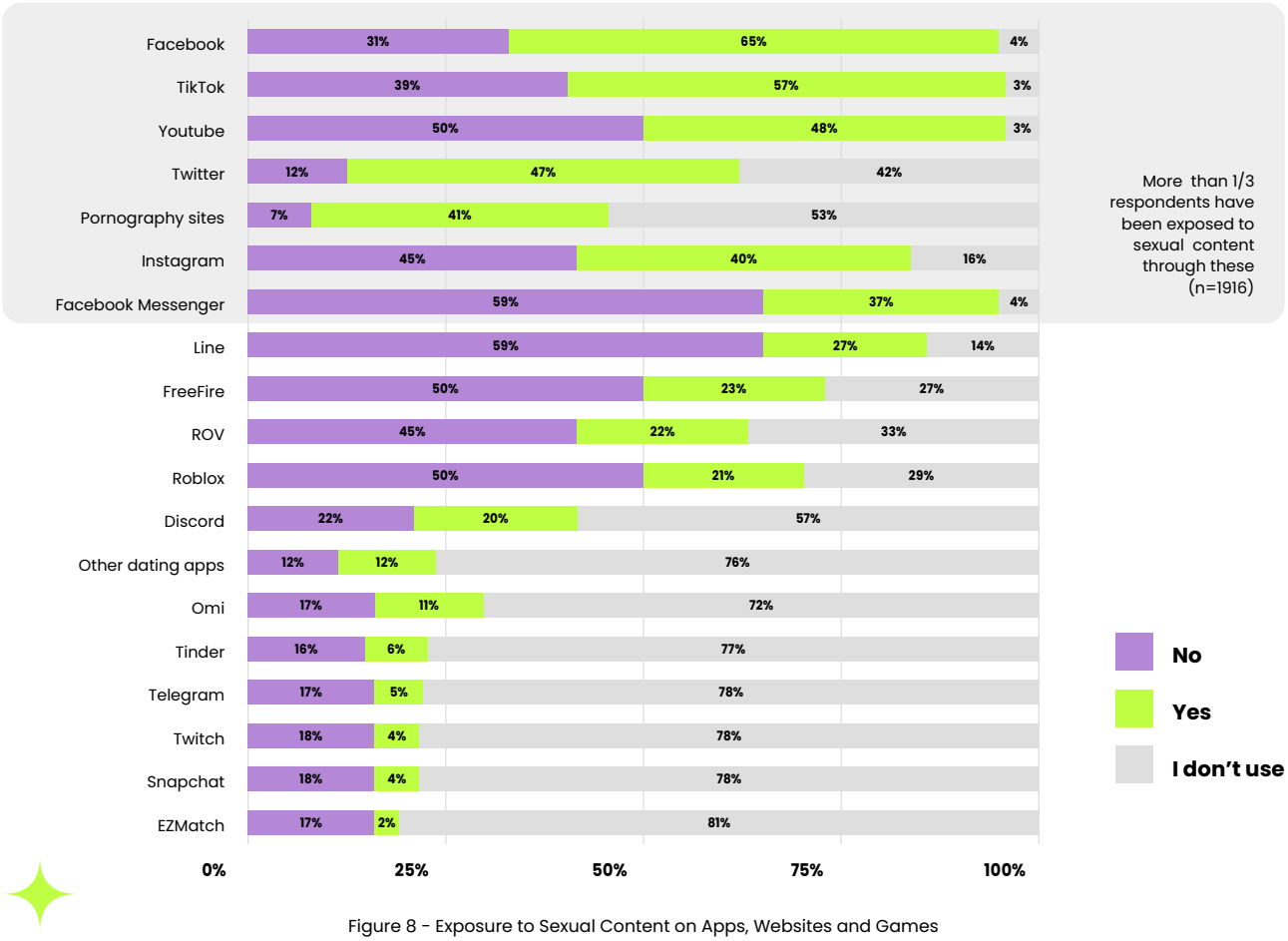


Figure 8 - Exposure to Sexual Content on Apps, Websites and Games

User-uploaded sexual content is likely one of the most common forms of sexual content young people encounter online. This is content created and shared by other users including peers and other adults. Aligned with young people's broad definitions of sexual content, it can appear in comments, live streams, group chats, private messages, fan forums, and multiplayer game interactions.

Youth consultation made clear that exposure to sexual content through online chat groups is commonplace. This can include fandoms, or other sub-culturally relevant forums. A 15-year-old girl explained, **"เพื่อนโดนดึงเข้าไปในกลุ่มที่แชร์กันเรื่องของรูปภาพโป๊เปลือย"** ("A friend was pulled into a group where nude images were shared."). Another 15-year-old girl shared, **"มีคนส่งภาพ 18+ มาในเกม ทั้งที่ไม่รู้จักกัน"** ("Someone sent me an 18+ picture in the game even though I didn't know them."), illustrating how unsolicited sexual content shows up during ordinary digital activity.

Young people are also being exposed to sexual material through targeted advertising. Ads for dating apps were noted during youth consultations. As one 15-year-old girl shared: **"เวลาบางทีเล่นไอจีหรือติ๊กตอกก็มีโฆษณาแอปหาคู่ เขาก็สอนวิธีเข้าไป สอนว่าเล่นยังไง"** ("Sometimes when using IG or TikTok, there are ads for dating apps that even teach you how to join and use them."). A 15-year-old boy explained that targeted advertising is one of the main reasons primary school children become aware of dating apps. **"เป็นเพราะโฆษณา อย่างเวลาเล่นเกม โฆษณาที่จะเข้ามาได้ คือแอปหาคู่เยอะมากเลยครับ ภาษาที่ใช้ก็เป็นภาษาของผู้ใหญ่ แล้วมีเด็กเล่นเกมเยอะ แล้วโฆษณาก็ชอบโผล่ขึ้นมา แอปที่หารายได้จากการเติมเกมไม่ได้ เขาจะรับโฆษณาเพื่อเพิ่มรายได้ ผมเคยกดเข้าไปดูอยู่ เราก็เล่นตามพี่ ๆ "** ("It's mostly because of the ads. Like, when I play online games, especially the less popular ones—I've seen a bunch of ads for dating apps pop up. It happens pretty often. I think those game developers allow dating apps to advertise so they can make more money. The ads show up while you're playing, and sometimes they're kind of hard to skip.") (K-2106-20).

In other cases, sexual content is embedded into the apps directly through gameplay or in-app features. A 15-year-old boy referenced Grand Theft Auto (GTA): **"เกม GTA ถ้าเราขับรถไปที่สถานที่อโคจรและใช้บริการก็จะเห็น"** ("In GTA, if you drive to certain red-light areas and use the service, you'll see it."). Two further young people (female and male, 18) in our consultation confirmed that **"เห็นเนื้อหาทางเพศในเกมได้ เช่น ใน ROV [Arena of Valor] จะมีแชตหาเป็นข้อความเชิง 18+ หรือคุกคาม"** ("You can see sexual content in games like ROV [Arena of Valor] through 18+ or harassing messages in open chats."). Another 18-year-old shared that she learned about GTA through her high school friends. **"เพื่อนหนูส่วนใหญ่ที่โรงเรียนมัธยมเล่นเกมส์นี้กันเยอะ"** (Most of my friends were talking about it) she said. **"ในเกมมีตัวละครที่สามารถใช้บริการทางเพศจากตัวละครผู้หญิงได้ สามารถแต่งตัวโป๊เปลือยได้ ล่วงละเมิดได้ ในเกมนี้เค้าจะเปิดไมค์คุยกันได้ มีคำพูดที่ส่อถึงเรื่องเพศ มันเป็นเหมือนเมืองที่ให้เราไปเดินเล่นได้ค่ะ หนูเห็น streamer ที่พูดจาลามก ๆ แล้วก็เล่น GTA แล้วก็บอกว่าเล่นกันสนุก ๆ แบบนี้ค่ะ"** (In the game, players can buy sex, and some characters wear inappropriate clothing—or are even nude. I also didn't like how women are sexually harassed in the game. Players can use an open mic to talk to each other; it's like walking around a virtual town. Some of the conversations include very explicit talk about sex) (K-1706-19).

While sexual content is often discussed as

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

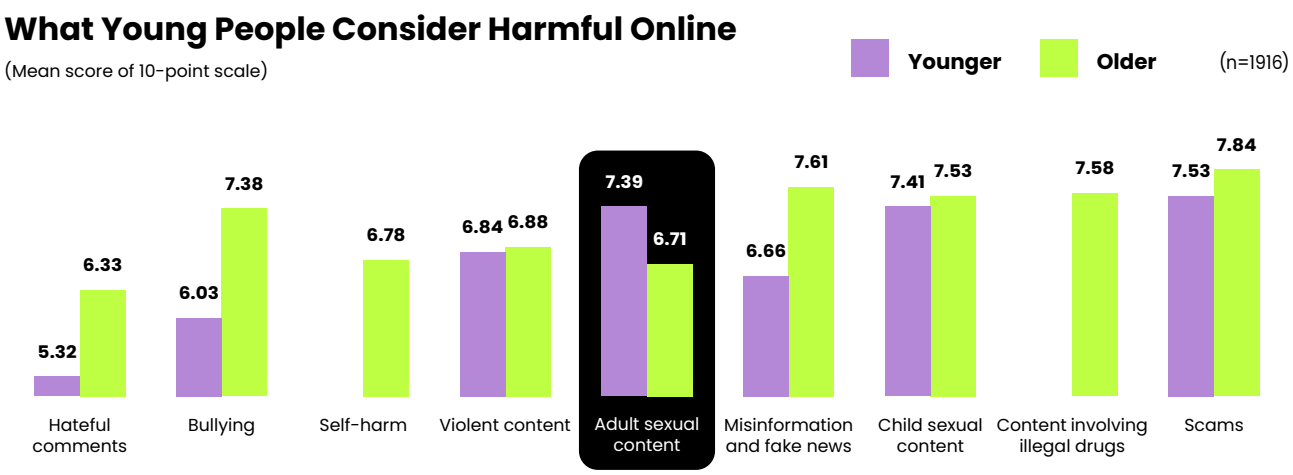


Figure 9 - What Young People Consider Harmful Online

inherently harmful or extreme, our data suggests that for many young people, it has also become a normalized part of the online environment. As seen in figure 9, when asked to rate the potential harm of different types of online content, respondents in our survey consistently scored all items above 5 out of 10, suggesting that they see each category as carrying some level of risk. However, content like scams, misinformation, and child sexual content were rated as more harmful than adult sexual content, which received a lower, but still notable, average harm score of 7.06. Interestingly, younger respondents rated adult sexual content as more harmful than the older ones (7.39 vs. 6.71), hinting at a possible While sexual content is often discussed as inherently harmful or extreme, our data suggests that for many young people, it has also become a normalized part of the online environment. As seen in figure 9, when asked to rate the potential harm of different types of online content, respondents in our survey consistently scored all items above 5 out of 10, suggesting that they see each category as carrying some level of risk. However, content like scams, misinformation, and child sexual content were rated as more harmful than adult sexual content, which received a lower, but still notable, average harm score of 7.06. Interestingly, younger respondents rated adult sexual content as more harmful than the older ones (7.39 vs. 6.71), hinting at a possible process of growing desensitization or increased familiarity with this type of material over time. These findings highlight how exposure to sexual content online is not always experienced as shocking or unusual. Instead, for many young people, it is embedded in the platforms they use most, shaping and reflecting the digital norms they navigate every day.

Interviews with experts underscored the normalization of sexual content among young people. A police officer from Thailand Internet Crime Against Children Taskforce noted, **"โซเชียลมีเดียที่น้อง ๆ เข้าไปใช้งาน มีให้เห็นอยู่แล้วว่ามีการถ่ายภาพที่มีลักษณะโป๊เปลือย เขาก็เลยมองว่าเป็นเรื่องปกติ 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) (K-1704-12). Experts further observed that young people may imitate what they see online—whether it be celebrities and influencers wearing revealing clothing or content encountered on pornography websites (K-1209-02; K-2603-10).

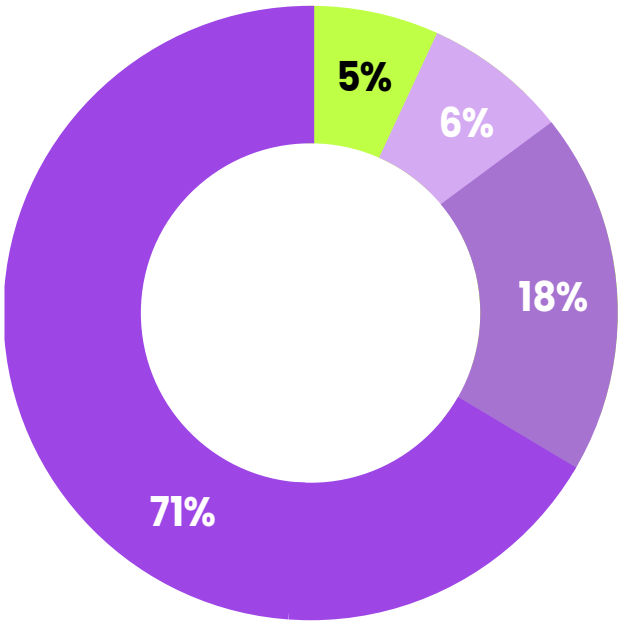
Another clear indicator of this normalization can be gleaned from how young people react when they encounter sexual content online. The majority of respondents reported that they ignore such content or do nothing (70%, n=1340), suggesting that for many, encountering sexual material is neither surprising nor unusual. A smaller group said they would save the content either to share with friends (8%, n=155), because they found it entertaining (7%, n=135), or in rare cases to try and recreate it (3%, n=59).

[46] Result is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level ($n = 1,916$).

Girls (n=1100) were more likely than boys to rate adult sexual content as harmful, with an average score of 7.48 (out of 10) compared to 6.46 among boys (n=805). These gender differences were reflected in behavior: one-third of all respondents (n=1916) said they would block (33%, n=636) or report to the platform (33%, n=626) sexual content when they encountered it. Girls were significantly more likely than boys to take protective action when receiving sexual content from someone they did not know. Among girls, 40% said they would block the sender and 36% said they would report the content. Among boys, 25% said they would block and 28% said they would report. Boys were also more likely than girls to engage with such content, with 12% of boys compared to 4% of girls saying they would save it for fun, and 10% of boys compared to 7% of girls saying they would share it with friends.[46] This is especially the case when young people received sexual images from people unknown to them.

As displayed in figure 10, among those who had blocked or reported sexual content, 71% said they were most likely to block or report accounts of people they didn't know at all. While this illustrates a reasonable awareness of the risks posed when such content is coming from unknown sources, the far reduced likelihood towards blocking sexual content from known accounts is a concern. For the young person, this content and these interactions may still be uncomfortable and unwanted, but their uncertainty or fear of upsetting or offending known others could be contradicting their instincts or digital skills and their best interests in terms of digital safety.

Together, these findings paint a picture of young people who are increasingly navigating a digital environment where sexual content is ever-present, but certainly not universally welcomed and is frequently even being fed to them despite them not active seeking it. While young people appear to have grown accustomed to seeing such material, the fact that so many still take steps to avoid or report it, especially when it comes from unfamiliar sources, shows that young people are still fighting to maintain a boundary with the pressure towards normalization.



Types of Accounts that Young People Block

- Accounts of people I only know online
- Accounts of people I know offline and online
- It makes no difference if I know them or not
- Accounts of people I don't know at all

This question was only posed to the older cohort who have blocked/reported accounts online (n=412)

Figure 10 - What Young People Consider Harmful Online

SHARING AND ENGAGING WITH SEXUAL CONTENT

PATTERNS OF SHARING SEXUAL CONTENT

Survey items regarding sexual content were only posed to the older cohort. These items were intentionally constructed for respondents to refer to observed behaviors within peer groups, rather than self-reporting their own behavior. While this is less specific data, it was felt it would lead to more honest responding.

A sizable proportion of the older cohort were aware of peers who had shared sexual content – which included general sexual content and self-generated content. One-third of respondents (34%, n=323) said they knew someone at their school who had sent or received some form of sexual content in the past month. Receiving this content was more frequent than sending. Unsolicited receipt of self-generated sexual content was the most commonly reported (18%, n=164), followed closely by the sending or reposting of sexual content of an adult (17%, n=162). In contrast, behaviors indicating intent, such as pressuring others to share, trading sexual content, or live-streaming sexual content, were far less common as figure 11 below reflects.

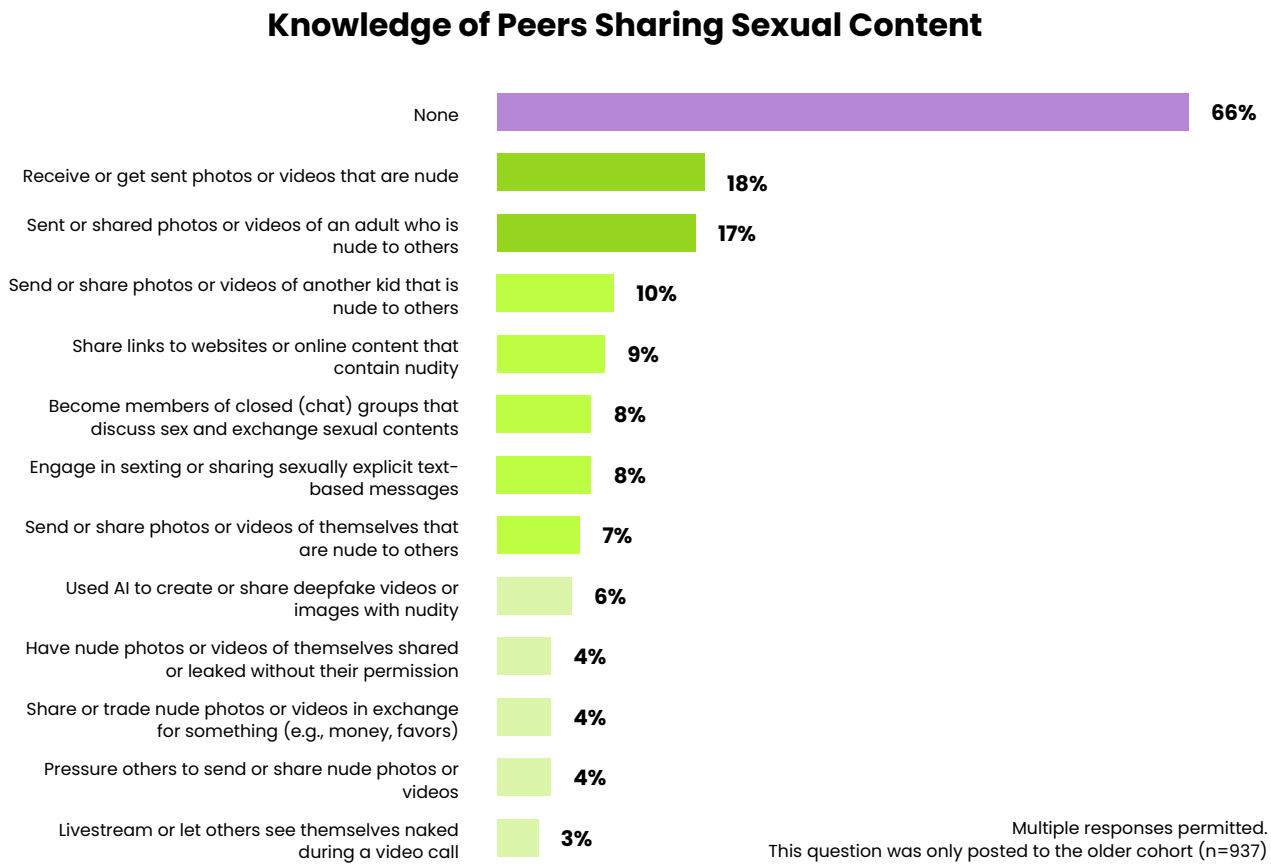


Figure 11 - Knowledge of Peers Sharing Sexual Content

Within this prevalence indication, there were a range of small differences. Some gender differences were evident, though a pattern was not consistent. Boys were slightly more likely than girls to say that they knew someone who had sent or received nude images with 21% of males (n=82) saying they knew someone who had, compared to 15% of girls (n=78).[47] Boys were also more likely to report peers who had shared sexual content depicting adults (20% vs 15%)[48], while girls were slightly more likely to report awareness of peers sharing nude images of someone under 18 (11% vs 9%).[49] Regardless of the differences, roughly one in five young people reporting they knew someone who had shared such content is a higher proportion than was expected.

Among LGBT respondents (n=258), the reported prevalence of these behaviors was higher still: 44% of young people who identified as LGBT said that they knew someone at their school who had sent or received nudes in the past month, compared with a prevalence of 31% amongst non-LGBT respondents.[50]

A fascinating finding was that self-reported account settings correlated with differences in reported exposure to sexual content. Respondents with public account (n=410) settings were significantly more likely to be aware of sexual content being shared among peers. Forty-one percent (n=170) of the respondents with public accounts said that they had encountered sharing of sexual content amongst their peers, compared to 29% of those with self-reported private settings (n=143).[51]

Young people with public account settings are much more likely to be approached by unknown people online – simply because they are visible to strangers. As already presented in earlier data, many young people purposely choose public settings for a range of reasons – like growing their follower count, and increased chance of interactions with their content. And given the high levels of hard digital skills, its likely they are making this choice with some knowledge of the greater risks. Yet it is likely they are not fully aware of the extent of the risk. Experts in the interviews consistently noted the sheer numbers of approaches being made to these young people – to the point where it's almost somewhat expected. Interviewees reported a range of examples – like frequent promises of financial compensation for images or invitations to meet in person (K-0605-15).

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE SHARE SEXUAL CONTENT?

While there has been frequent expert analysis of the reasons for these behaviors, the Leaked survey is somewhat unique in having asked young people what they think are the reasons that their peer group are sharing sexual content.

Their answers paint a very diverse and complicated picture. What emerged are different motivations shaped by a number of the contextual factors presented already in earlier data: seeking visibility, connection, reward and, sometimes, just what felt normal in that moment. Of the 323 who reported that they knew someone who had shared sexual content at their school, six core drivers came up: to be seen, to earn, to feel good, to show trust, because they were tricked, or because everyone else was doing it.

47 Result is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

48 Result is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

49 Result is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

50 Result is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

51 Result is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

To be seen

The most frequent reason was visibility. Nearly half (48%, n=155) of respondents who said they had been sent sexual content said they believed that the person who sent it had shared it to gain likes, followers, or increase their audience. This aligns with earlier findings where young people with public settings on their accounts said their reason for going public were things like 'to be seen' or 'to show who I am' or wanting to become popular or famous. In digital spaces where attention can quickly translate into status, nude-sharing can be framed as a shortcut to recognition, especially by those already more exposed to such behaviors from the accounts in their feeds (that they follow or are being algorithmically fed to them by platforms). This suggests a growing normalization of nude-sharing as part of being seen, accepted, or desirable online.

These findings are consistent with the views expressed by frontline experts. Gaining interactions and followers on social media is perceived by many young people as a form of acceptance and belonging. **"เด็กอยากได้รับการยอมรับและอยากเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของกลุ่ม"** (Children want to be accepted and be part of the group)(K-0710-07). A counseling psychologist noted, **"เด็กรู้สึกว่าตัวเองมีคุณค่าเมื่อได้รับความสนใจ"** (Children feel they are valued when they receive interest) (K-0904-11). An 18-year-old informant reflected: **"มีเพื่อนและรุ่นน้องที่ลงภาพนู้ดของตนเอง ซึ่งผมได้คุยกับเขา เขาบอกว่าเขาต้องการการยอมรับ ต้องการความสนใจ สิ่งที่เขาลงไปเนี่ย เขาก็ไม่ได้ด้อยกว่าคนอื่นนะ เขาก็มีความภูมิใจในรูปร่างของตนเอง แต่การแสดงออกอาจจะขาดตกบกพร่องไปบ้าง คือไม่รู้ว่าผลที่ตามมาจะเกิดอะไรขึ้นบ้าง คนเหล่านี้มีความสามารถและมีความกล้าแสดงออก แต่ว่าอาจจะยังไม่มีพื้นที่หรือโอกาสให้เขาได้แสดงออก เขาจึงเลือกใช้วิธีนี้เพื่อให้ได้การยอมรับจากสังคม"** (Some of my friends and younger acquaintances have also shared nude images. When I asked about their motivations, they said they were seeking acceptance. They felt confident in their bodies but had not fully considered the potential consequences. These individuals are talented, yet they lack sufficient space and opportunities for self-expression. As a result, they engaged in this behavior as a way to attract attention.) (K-1706-18)

Staff from Childline Thailand, which provides support to both children active online and those residing in its drop-in center, have observed that vulnerable children, particularly children who have experienced neglect or a lack of emotional support within their families, may see their bodies as one of the few ways in their power that they can express or receive love. Consequently, some may engage in the sharing of intimate images as a way of gaining attention, validation, or a sense of connection that is missing in other places. As one Childline staff member explained, "They want love but have nothing else to show apart from their body. Their perception is that they will be accepted when they show their bodies to other people" (K-0605-15).

To earn

Forty-five percent cited money, gifts, phone credits, or in-game perks as motivations for sharing self-generated sexual content. While the items didn't specifically ask about commercial exchange, the idea of self-generated sexual content-as-currency came up strongly in consultations. A 15-year-old girl described the link between gaming status and nude-sharing:

"การเล่นเกมออนไลน์จนติดเกมนำมาซึ่งความอิจฉา ริษยา อยากได้อยากมี อยากมีเงินเติมเกม เติมสกิน จึงยอมถ่ายภาพ ถ่ายคลิปเพื่อแลกเงิน" "Being addicted to online games brings jealousy and desire; wanting things, wanting money to top up games or buy skins. So, they agree to take photos or videos in exchange for money." This perspective aligns with the experiences shared by a government social worker who noted that when young people want to play online games but cannot afford to level up, they may go to great lengths to obtain virtual items, and they feel pressure to keep up with others in their gaming community. Progress in games often requires tokens, coins, or other in-game currencies. **"ผมเห็นว่าแพลตฟอร์มเกมมันเป็นเหมือนชุมชนหนึ่งที่เด็กเข้าไปคุยกัน จับกัน สร้าง**

ความสัมพันธ์ หรือบางทีก็ขิงกัน เช่นคนหนึ่งอาจจะบอกว่า เลเวลของฉันเพิ่มขึ้นแล้วนะ ทำไมเลเวลของเธอยังไม่ขยับอีก" ("I see them (gaming platforms) as a kind of social community, where children can chat, flirt, socialize, and compete with one another. For example, they might say, 'My level has increased, why are you still at the same level?'") (K-1006-17).

The connection between the pursuit of social media popularity and the desire to earn income was highlighted by an 18-year-old informant. As she explained, "หนูคิดว่าเยาวชนไทยต้องการเป็นที่ยอมรับในสื่อโซเชียล [มีเดีย] อยากมีผู้ติดตามเยอะ ๆ พอมีผู้ติดตามเยอะ ก็สามารถรีวิวสินค้าได้ ได้รับปัจจัยเป็นเงินเป็นของ ถูกปลูกฝังด้วยความเชื่อว่า ใครที่มีผู้ติดตามเยอะ ๆ เป็นคนดัง เป็นคนสำคัญ" ("Young people want to be accepted on social media. If you have a lot of followers, you can make money and get to review products online. Many are influenced by the idea that having lots of followers means you're important" (K-1706-19). Her perspective was echoed by other NGO staff who emphasized the growing monetization of online presence among young people: "แรงจูงใจของการได้ยอดไลก์และยอดฟอล ไม่ใช่แค่ต้องการการยอมรับทางสังคม แต่เป็นเส้นทางไปสู่ชื่อเสียงและเงินทองด้วย คือการมีคุณภาพชีวิตที่ดีขึ้น เช่น ถ้าคุณมีผู้ติดตามหนึ่งหมื่นคน เจ้าของสินค้าอาจจะติดต่อมาให้คุณโชว์สินค้าสักครั้งหรือสองครั้ง คุณก็อาจจะได้เงิน 1,000-2,000 บาทแล้ว" (The drive to gain likes and followers is not only about wanting social acceptance, but also about access to money and fame, which are seen as pathways to a better life. For example, if you have 10,000 followers, product owners may reach out to you. Just showing a product once or twice could earn you 1,000–2,000 baht") (K-2304-13).

Nevertheless, the desire among young people to earn money should not be misunderstood as greed, "การชนะเช่นการได้เงินได้รางวัลเป็นความภูมิใจแบบหนึ่ง อาจจะทดแทนบางอย่างที่เขาไม่ได้ในโลกของความเป็นจริง เพราะฉะนั้นเด็กที่เล่นเกมหรือต้องการหาเงิน มันไม่ใช่ความโลภ แต่เขาอยู่ในโลกของการเรียนรู้ เขากำลังเติบโต ยิ่งเขาชนะได้แต้ม ได้เหรียญอะไรต่าง ๆ มันหมายความว่าเขามีคุณค่ามากขึ้น มันไม่ได้ตรงไปตรงมาว่าเป็นเรื่องของการเห็นแก่เงิน จริง ๆ แล้วเด็กแต่ละคนมีข้างหลังที่ไม่เหมือนกัน" ("It is more about pride, about achieving something, gaining recognition, and feeling valued. Every child has their own background. They may want to prove to themselves and others that they are capable, that they can become someone or accomplish something meaningful.") (K-0402-08). This perspective highlights the importance of understanding the deeper psychosocial and emotional drivers behind young people's behavior, particularly in contexts where financial independence is tied to self-worth and identity.

To feel good about themselves

Forty percent said that they thought sending sexual content was linked to emotional motivations such as wanting validation, affirmation, or a boost in self-esteem. Another 24% specifically said it was about receiving compliments or feeling validated by others. However, this assessment of why others had shared self-generated sexual content didn't align with their personal beliefs about the impacts of sharing nudes. Only 3% said that they believed that nude-sharing would boost their self-esteem, while 48% disagreed and 13% selected neutral. This reflects a gap between recognizing the behavior in others and identifying with it personally. This incongruence is a critical point. While young people believe that others are sharing sexual content with the express intention to boost their self-esteem, they themselves don't believe (or are unwilling to say that they believe) that this would be the impact of them sharing their own nudes. Encouraging young people to pursue – and trust - their own thinking on this issue above the narrative they think is held by peers could be an effective behavior modifier. While it seems that the peer group narrative is that this behavior brings benefits, when individual people are asked, they overwhelmingly say it would not boost their self-esteem.

Particularly girls disagreed with the self-esteem statement (88% of girls), admitting that sending nudes would feel too exposing or socially risky. Sharing for attention may be common, but that doesn't mean it's widely perceived as affirming.

It is evident that social media frequently promotes idealized portrayals of life—emphasizing beauty,

perfect body, wealth, and material success; "ค่านิยมบนโลกอินเทอร์เน็ตให้ความสำคัญกับการดูดีหรือมีรูปร่างที่สมบูรณ์แบบ โดยมีรางวัลเป็นเหรียญ ยอดไลก์ หรือการยอมรับในโลกออนไลน์ สิ่งเหล่านี้ส่งผลต่อทัศนคติของเด็ก ที่อาจเชื่อมโยงการถ่ายภาพส่วนตัวกับความมั่นใจและคุณค่าของตัวเอง" ("The online value placed on physical appearance is reinforced through coins, likes, and other forms of digital validation. This environment can shape the mindset of some young people, leading them to associate sharing nudes with increased self-worth and confidence") (K-0402-08). A shelter manager noted that some young people in her care appear increasingly preoccupied with their appearance: "จากประสบการณ์ของเรา สาเหตุที่เด็กรู้สึกดีเกี่ยวกับตัวเองมาก่อนแรงจูงใจอย่างการมีชื่อเสียงในโซเชียลมีเดีย การได้ของขวัญหรือการเล่นเกม น้องคนหนึ่งที่เราดูแลอยู่ เขาจะภาคภูมิใจในรูปร่างของเขามาก และมักจะพูดว่าเขาชอบหุ่นของเขาเองโดยเฉพาะหน้าอกมาก เราไม่แน่ใจว่าน้องแชร์ภาพเพื่อให้ได้รับการยอมรับหรืออะไร แต่มันชัดเจนว่าเขาให้ความสำคัญกับการที่รูปลักษณ์ภายนอกมากที่สุด" ("The reason 'they feel good about themselves' comes before other motivations like popularity on social media, gifts, or games in my experiences. One girl I spoke with seemed to believe her body is perfect. She expressed pride in her figure and said she especially liked her breasts. I'm not sure whether she shares images for external validation, but it's clear she places significant value on her physical appearance") (K-2504-14).

Because they were tricked by someone online

34% (n=109) of respondents said that they knew people who had been tricked into sharing nudes. Another 25% (n=80) said they knew individuals who were pressured by someone to share. This pressure can come in subtle forms, such as fake profiles, emotional manipulation, or repeated requests framed as jokes, dares, or tests of trust. Overall, only 8% of respondents agreed that it is "normal" to be pressured by peers or romantic interests to share nudes. While both 8% of girls and boys agreed with the statement, 13% of LGBT respondents agreed compared to 6% of non-LGBT peers.[52] These patterns suggest different thresholds for what is recognized as pressure, and while it is encouraging to see pressure is not seen as 'normal', it is clear that young people are still facing a range of intersecting subtle and not-so-subtle pressures to share nudes.

That one-third of the young people proposed that their peers may be coerced into sharing such images through online grooming or manipulation is remarkable. It illustrates a much higher awareness amongst young people of the risk of coercion than many child protection practitioners tend to suggest is the case. Awareness-raising and digital safety training frequently articulates the need to make children aware of the risks of coercion to share images. While 33% is not everyone, it is a sizeable proportion of young people who are already well aware of this risk. In the open-text survey responses, participating young people highlighted the risks and negative consequences associated with nude sharing among young people. These included:

- "อาจจะโดนหลอกให้ส่งภาพอนาจารณ์แล้วนำไปแบล็กเมล" ("They might be groomed to send nude images for blackmailing.")
- "อาจถูกข่มแหงให้ทำเรื่องที่ไม่ดี" ("They might be coerced into doing something bad.")
- "การส่งภาพโป๊เป็นสิ่งที่ไม่ดีอยู่แล้ว ไม่ว่าจะเป็นเด็กหรือผู้ใหญ่ เป็นผลเชิงลบทั้งคนที่ส่งและคนที่ได้รับภาพนั้น คนที่ได้รับภาพ จะเกิดความสนใจอยากได้รูปภาพนั้นเพิ่มอีก จึงอาจจะส่งผลกระทบถึงหลอกหลวง ส่งต่อให้กับผู้อื่น ข่มขู่บุคคลที่ไม่ยินยอมจนกลายเป็นเรื่องใหญ่ต่าง ๆ การใช้ชีวิตการเรียน ส่วนบุคคลที่ส่งภาพ อาจจะพบเจอผู้ไม่หวังดี นำภาพไปปล่อยในโลกออนไลน์ เกิดการอับอายไม่อยากใช้ชีวิต" ("Sharing nudes is a bad thing, whether children or adults, causing negative impact to both the senders and receivers. The receivers will want to get more images and thus groom people, reshare images, and threaten those who are not willing to do it. This can escalate and affect the study of kids. For the sender, they might meet ill-intended person who disseminate their images online, causing shame and not wanting to live their life.")

[52] Result is significant at $p<0.05$.

Although this reason ranked fourth in terms of perception among young survey responses, it was the most frequently cited concern among frontline professionals interviewed for the Leaked study. As a social worker explained: **"เด็กที่ติดต่อเรามามักถูกล่อลวงให้ถ่ายและแชร์ภาพส่วนตัว ไม่ใช่เด็กที่ตั้งใจถ่าย"** ("Young people reporting to us are mostly groomed to take and share photos, not children who intentionally sell images" (K-1209-03). Another noted: "For online cases, perpetrators are most likely to be strangers, but for sexual abuse cases, perpetrators are often within the circle of trust") (K-1209-02). This difference between the adult workers expected motivations and those of young people might result from the reality that frontline staff are overwhelmingly confronted with the serious cases in which young people are seeking interventions and support and are thus accustomed to seeing the worst. **"สำหรับโครงการ Leaked เป็นเด็กที่คุณตั้งใจไปหา แต่ในงานของเรา เด็กติดต่อเรามา จึงมีข้อแตกต่างกัน เพราะเราฟังเรื่องราวของเด็กที่เจอกับปัญหา และยอมที่จะเปิดเผยเรื่องนั้นแก่เรา ไม่ใช่เด็กที่เล่าเรื่องราวของเด็กคนอื่น เด็กที่คุณสำรวจความคิดเห็นในโครงการ Leaked ไม่ต้องเปิดเผยตัวตน จึงสามารถแสดงความเห็นได้อย่างอิสระ แต่เด็กที่ติดต่อสายเด็กเข้ามา เป็นเด็กที่ต้องยินยอมเล่าเรื่องของตนเอง"** ("For Leaked, it is children you went to meet. In our work, it is children who came to us. It is different because we listen to stories from children who encounter problems themselves, and who are willing to disclose—not children who retell stories of other kids. Children you worked with in the survey are anonymized, and they can share their opinions freely because they know it doesn't have to be their own stories. For children who approached Childline, they have to be willing to tell their stories.") (K-0605-15)

Frontline professionals described a range of grooming patterns through which children are coerced into producing nude images or videos online. According to NGO social workers **"เด็กผู้ชายแสดงความสนใจในเรื่องเพศมากกว่า จึงมักจะถูกล่อลวงโดยคนแปลกหน้าทางออนไลน์ให้ถ่ายภาพโป๊ และถูกแบล็กเมลในภายหลัง เด็กชายยังถูกหลอกโดยคนไม่รู้จักที่ปลอมตัวเป็นรุ่นพี่ผู้หญิง โดยมักจะเรียกตัวเอง 'พี่สาว' ค่านิยมของสังคมที่ว่า 'ผู้ชายไม่เสียหายอะไร 'ทำให้เด็กผู้ชายตัดสินใจง่ายกว่าที่จะส่งภาพลับของตัวเอง ตรงกันข้ามกับเด็กผู้หญิงที่มักจะได้รับการติดต่อผ่านทางโซเชียลมีเดีย และถูกชักชวนให้ย้ายไปคุยแบบส่วนตัวหรือคุยเรื่องเพศในแอปอื่น มักเป็นการพูดคุยแบบเต็มใจในตอนแรก โดยไม่ได้ตระหนักถึงผลกระทบในทางลบที่อาจตามมา"** (Boys have shown more interest in online content related to sex, and some have been lured into taking nude photos and subsequently blackmailed. Boys are also groomed by strangers who disguise themselves as older peers, often pretending to be 'sisters.' Social norms may make it easier for boys to decide to send nudes, as they are perceived to have less to lose. In contrast, girls are typically contacted through their social media accounts and then persuaded to move to private chats or engage in sexually explicit conversations on chat apps. Often, the initial sharing is consensual, without full consideration of the potential consequences." (K-1209-03).

A police officer from TICAC outlined common strategies used by perpetrators: **"เริ่มจากหลอกจะให้เงิน เชิญเป็นดารา ชวนให้แก้ผ้า และท้าให้เปิดกล้อง"** ("First, they promise money or in-game items; second, they persuade the child that they could become a star; third, they coax the young person into removing their clothes; and finally, they challenge them to turn on the camera.") (K-1704-12).

To show trust

Aligned with similar data from studies from the US[53] and Sweden[54], a quarter of the survey respondents (27%) said that they thought other people share nudes to show trust or closeness in a relationship, but this idea was not as widely accepted socially as was expected. Only 4% of respondents agreed that for themselves "sharing nudes is a way to express trust," while 81% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Girls were more likely to reject this statement outright (86% disagreement), but boys were not far behind (75% disagreement). This could represent a disconnection between pre-conceived intentions and actual actions in the moment, or much like the prior point regarding emotional rewards, could be a discrepancy between the dominant narrative and young people's individual self-perceptions.

The data does contrast with views expressed in interviews, including by young people. who emphasized the central role of trust in young people's decisions to share nude images. An 18-year-old male informant observed: **"เด็กเชื่อว่าภาพเหล่านั้นจะเป็นความลับระหว่างคนสองคน"** ("Many young people believe that the images will stay private between just two people.") (K-1706-18). A social worker said: **"มันเกี่ยวกับความรู้สึกและความไว้วางใจกัน เด็กผู้หญิงจะต้องคบเป็นแฟนกันก่อนที่จะตัดสินใจส่งภาพโป๊ โดยมองว่าการแลกภาพส่วนตัวเป็นเครื่องหมายของความรัก"** ("It is more about feelings and trust. Girls usually need to be in a relationship before deciding to send nudes. For them, exchanging nudes is seen as a sign of love.") (K-1209-03). A school headmaster added: **"เมื่อเด็กชายและเด็กหญิงเป็นแฟนกัน พวกเขามักจะไว้ใจซึ่งกันและกันและส่งภาพส่วนตัวให้กันดู พอเลิกกัน ภาพเหล่านั้นอาจจะถูกแชร์ต่อได้"** ("... when boys and girls are dating, they trust each other and share nudes. After they break up, those private photos might be circulated.")(K-1403-09) An 18-year-old female informant further elaborated on how emotional attachment can influence decision-making in online interactions: **"มันมักจะเริ่มจากการคุยกับใครสักคนบนโลกออนไลน์ ที่เราไม่เคยเจอกันมาก่อน พอคุยไปทุกวัน ๆ ก็กลายเป็นความผูกพัน ถ้าอีกคนหนึ่งขอภาพส่วนตัว เด็กบางคนอาจจะรู้สึกว่าถ้าไม่ส่งให้ คนที่คุยด้วยอาจจะหายไป เพราะเขาเคยชินที่ต้องคุยกับคนนั้นทุกวัน ก็เลยไม่อยากเสียคนนั้นไป เลยยอมส่งภาพให้เพื่อรักษาความสัมพันธ์ไว้"** ("It often starts with chatting with someone online whom we've never met in real life. But after talking or calling every day, it creates a kind of bond. So, if that person asks for nudes, some kids feel like if they don't send them, the person might leave. Because they've gotten used to chatting with that person every day, they don't want to lose them. They end up sending the images just to keep the relationship.") (K-1706-19)

These perspectives suggest that for many young people, the decision to share intimate images is less about impulsiveness or manipulation alone, and more deeply rooted in relational dynamics, emotional dependence, and the perceived need to maintain trust in developing or romantic relationships. No matter the exact situation, this inconsistency again presents possible in-roads for nuanced conversations that empower informed decision making, as part of preventative programming.

Because others were doing it

The last frequently cited motivation that young people noted was the impact of peer influence. Many said that they thought that young people shared nudes because they had seen other people do it. But the implications of this influence extended beyond mere imitation. Thirty-one percent said people shared nudes to follow what their friends were doing, 23% said young people may feel the need to share because they had received similar content, and 22%

53 Thorn. (2020). **Self-generated child sexual abuse material: Youth attitudes and experiences in 2019**. Thorn.

54 ECPAT Sweden. (2020). **"Everything that is not a Yes is a No": A report about children's everyday exposure to sexual crimes and their protective strategies** [Translated from Swedish]. ECPAT Sweden.

linked the behavior to following idols, celebrities or influencers that they follow or who are being algorithmically promoted to them by platforms. These results point to a broader ecosystem of influence, where personal relationships, social media trends, behaviors of influential people, and platform-promoted culture all interact to shape young people's decisions.

Peer dynamics have always influenced young people's behaviors, and decisions to share explicit images are likely no different: **"เด็กแสวงหาการยอมรับจากกลุ่มเพื่อน เมื่อมีการทำพฤติกรรมบางอย่างเป็นเรื่องปกติภายในกลุ่ม เช่นการแชร์ภาพส่วนตัว คนที่ไม่ทำอาจจะรู้สึกว่าตนไม่ได้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของกลุ่ม ความกดดันนี้ไม่ได้สะท้อนความต้องการที่แท้จริงของเด็กเสมอไป แท้จริงแล้วเด็กกลัวการถูกปฏิเสธ ในกลุ่มวัยรุ่น การคุยข่มกันในเรื่องเพศเป็นเรื่องปกติ เด็กบางคนอาจแต่งเรื่องขึ้นมาเพื่อให้ดูว่าตนเองมีประสบการณ์มากกว่า สิ่งนี้เป็นเรื่องของจิตวิทยาสังคม เด็กวัยรุ่นกลัวว่าตัวเองจะไม่มีสถานะทัดเทียมกับเพื่อน"** ("Children seek acceptance and validation from their peers. When certain behaviors become normalized within a group—such as sharing intimate images—those who choose not to participate may feel excluded. This pressure does not necessarily reflect a genuine desire to engage in such behaviors, but rather a fear of social rejection. Among adolescents, it is common for those with sexual experiences to boast about them, while others may fabricate such stories in order to appear more experienced. This is a matter of social psychology, young people fear falling behind or being seen as unequal to their peers.") (K-1209-04).

Contrary to the dominant protectionist narratives, young people sending nudes isn't only about being pressured or coerced. There is a broad and nuanced set of factors that are interacting to impact young people's actions. For many, a combination of motivations is likely in play: wanting to be noticed, earn money or rewards, feel good, connect with someone, or keep up with what influential others are doing. These active choices happen in complex, largely unregulated contexts, dominated by profit-driven platforms that are constructed to maximize engagement and reward attention. These digital spaces blur the lines between private and public and make it easy to share without thinking about the consequences. Concerningly we also see that much sharing may happen without clear intention, but as the result of a range of 'nudges' and intersecting influences.

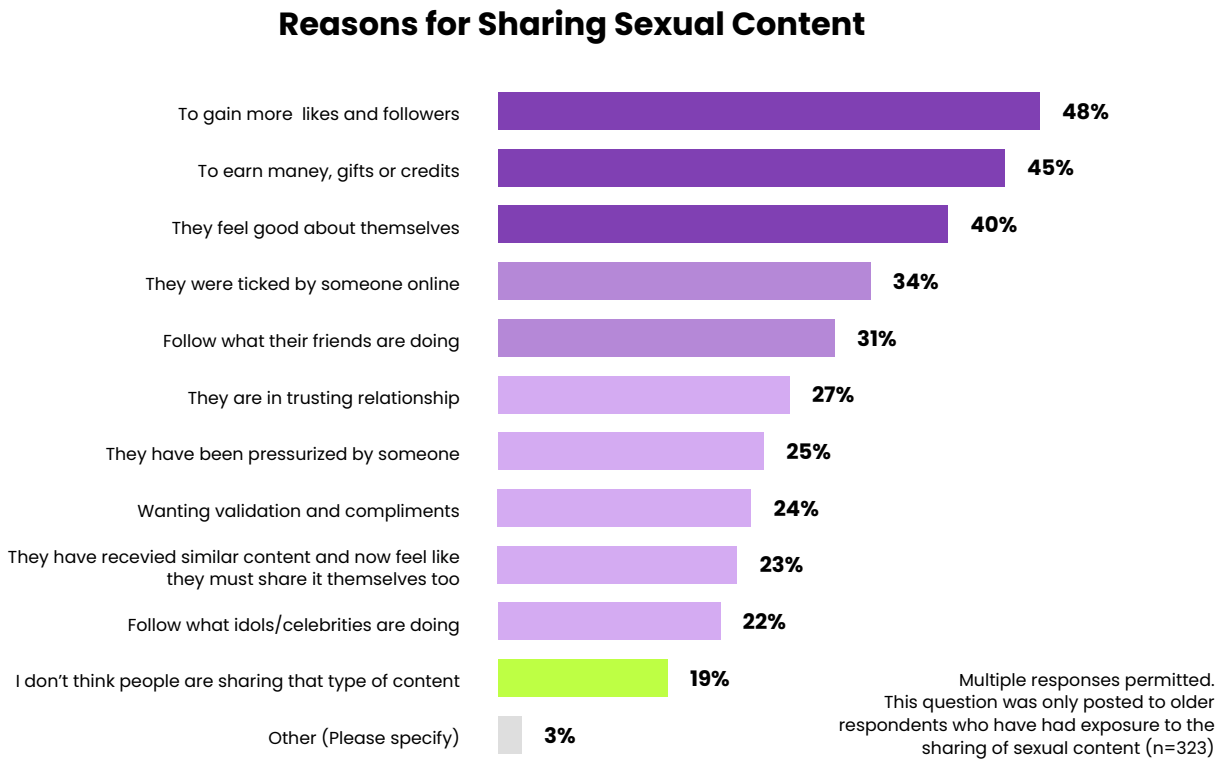


Figure 12 - Reasons for Sharing Sexual Content

RECEIVING SEXUAL CONTENT OF OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE AND HOW THEY REACT

While the majority of young people (56%, n=528) reported that they had never seen sexual content involving young people under 18, 36% (n=341) said that they had been shown or sent sexual content of someone believed to be under 18 (7% chose not to respond). Exposure to this content varied by age. Among 15-year-olds, just over half (51%) reported receiving this type of content. This is much higher than other age groups in the same cohort, where rates ranged between 30–38%.

Nearly half (49%; n=126) of LGBT respondents said they had received or been shown such images, compared to their non-LGBT peers (32%). Similarly, respondents from ethnic minority groups (49%) and urban areas (46%) were more likely to report exposure than those from non-minority (34%) or rural backgrounds (32%). Respondents with public settings on social media accounts also stood out: 43% said they had received or been shown this type of content, significantly higher than those with private (33%) or unknown account settings (18%).

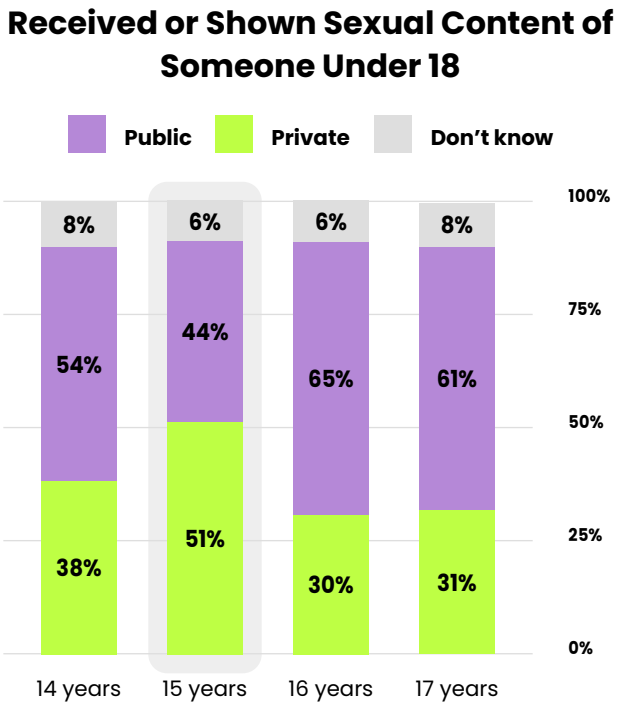
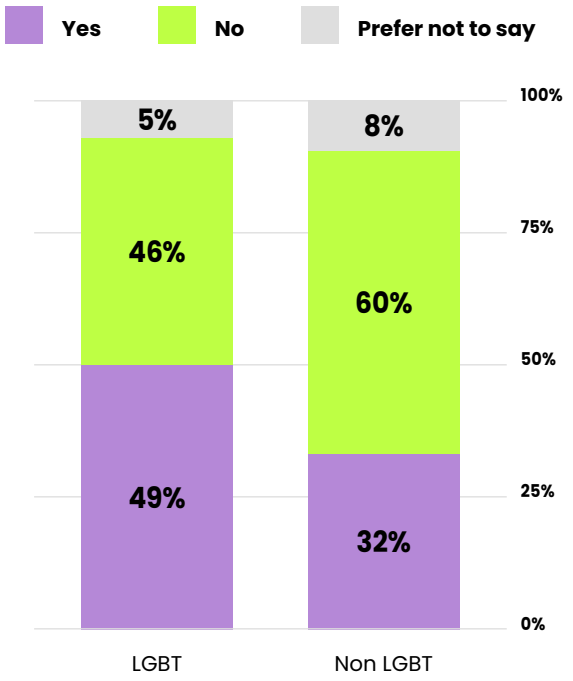


Figure 13 - Received or Shown Sexual Content of Someone Under 18

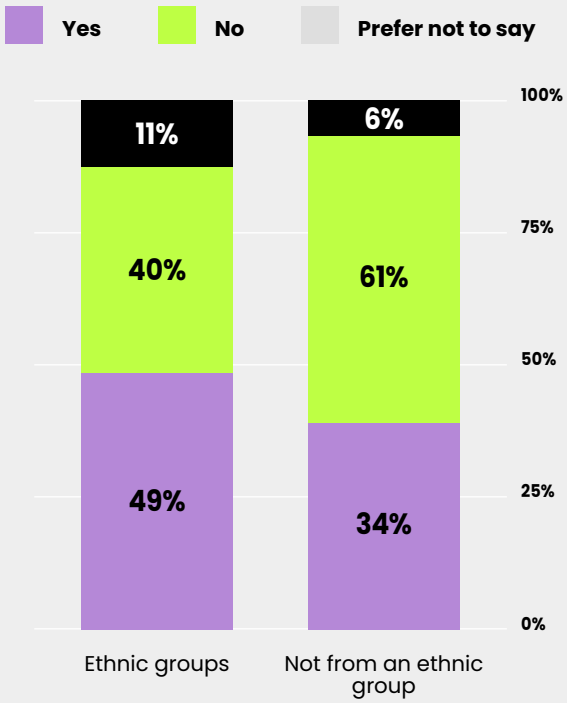
Received or shown Sexual content of someone under 18

LGBT Status



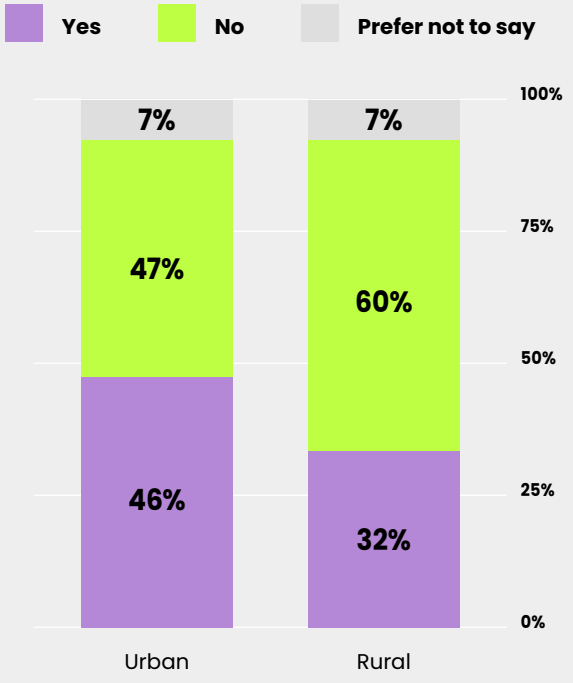
This question was posed to the older cohort (n=928)

Ethnic Minority Status



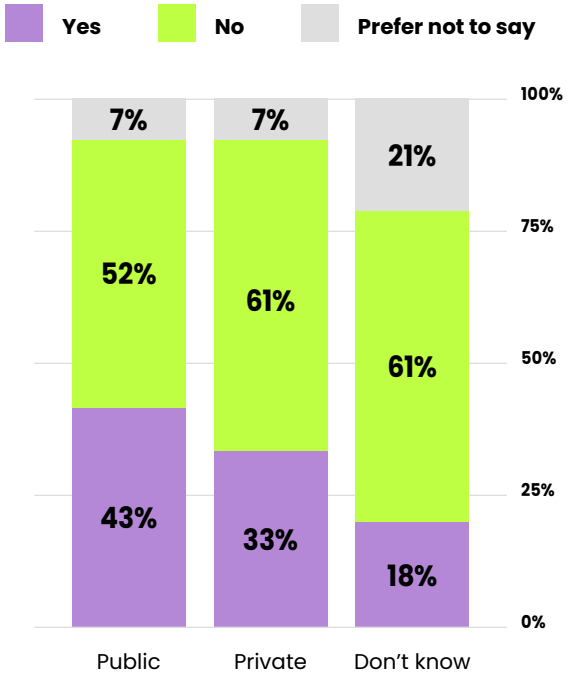
This question was posed to the older cohort (n=717)

Urban/Rural Location



This question was posed to the older cohort (n=935)

Account Privacy Setting



This question was posed to the older cohort (n=937)

Figure 14 - Sample Breakdown of Those Who have Received or Shown Sexual Content of Someone Under 18

This self-reported exposure closely mirrors perceived peer-group prevalence: 34% said they knew someone at school who had shared or received sexual content in the past month. The alignment in these numbers illustrates that young people are not just hearing about these behaviors, they're likely seeing the same images circulating within their peer networks. In other words, the sexual content they receive and the content they know is being shared at school may often be the same. This reinforces how quickly and widely sexual content, particularly depicting people under 18, can spread through school-based or friendship-based networks.

When asked how they responded after receiving sexual content involving those under 18, reactions were mixed. Just under half (44%) of respondents said that they blocked the person who sent the content, and an equal share (44%) admitted they did nothing. A smaller portion (22%) reported the content to the platform, while others told a friend or sibling (14%). Notably, 10% reported that they saved the content, and 8% said they reshared it.

Gender differences here were stark. Girls were significantly far more likely to respond with self-protective responses: 56% said they blocked the sender, and 31% reported the content compared to just 28% and 11% of boys, respectively.[55] Boys, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to take no action (53%),[56] save the content (18%),[57] or forward it to someone else (11%).[58]

LGBT respondents displayed a broad range of reactions comparable to their non-LGBT peers to block (44%), report (24%), but also to report saving the image (13%), suggesting both exposure and more complex decision-making around what to do next.

The fact that almost half of respondents who received a sexual image of someone under 18 said they did nothing in response is revealing. It points to the before-mentioned normalization of this kind of content, where receiving such material no longer triggers alarm, action, or even discomfort for many. This reflects patterns identified earlier in the report, such as the frequent appearance of sexual content across platforms, the blurred boundaries between public and private digital spaces, and the way exposure often begins at a young age and becomes part of the digital background. Over time, as people become accustomed to encountering sexualized content, whether unsolicited or shared through trends and humor, it can start to feel ordinary. Yet doing nothing does not necessarily mean these young people approve, but it may show that they have become desensitized or feel powerless in the face of the sheer onslaught of it. In this context, inaction can be read as a reflection of shifting digital norms - where sexual content is common and ignoring it feels easier and more practical than responding.

55 Results are significant at $p<0.001$

56 Results are significant at $p<0.05$

57 Results are significant at $p<0.001$

58 Results are significant at $p<0.05$

CONSEQUENCES, HARM AND RESPONSIBILITY

RECOGNIZED HARMS

The discourse regarding harms in online contexts is frequently simplistic and tends towards a protectionist dichotomy of 'harmful/not harmful.' The Leaked survey intentionally sought to create space for young people's responses to provide a more multi-faceted and complex picture. The Leaked dataset indicates a clear recognition by young people that nude-sharing, whether self-initiated, requested, or without consent, can lead to a range of harms. Yet, their responses indicated some graduations and complexities in how harm can occur; young people named emotional, social, legal, and safety consequences, and many reflected critically on how these consequences unfold within peer, platform, and personal systems.

The harm is also not ascribed to the exact practice of creating and sharing the nudes, but to what can happen if these are leaked - the owner loses control of them. The non-consensual aspect is at the heart of how harm is understood. This fits with prior evidence indicating that sharing nudes can be seen positively by young people who engage in it.[59] But it is when images are non-consensually shared that negative impacts are prominently ascribed.[60],[61]

The Leaked data similarly shows that when recognizing harms that can occur, young people were consistently focused on harms that could occur if they lost control of their content. Overwhelmingly, older respondents (95%, n=886) believed that sharing nudes could cause problems, and as seen in figure 19 when asked to name specifics, 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%), suggesting that social and emotional harms loom larger than formal sanctions in the minds of most, or that young people aren't as aware of the potential formal or legal consequences of their actions.

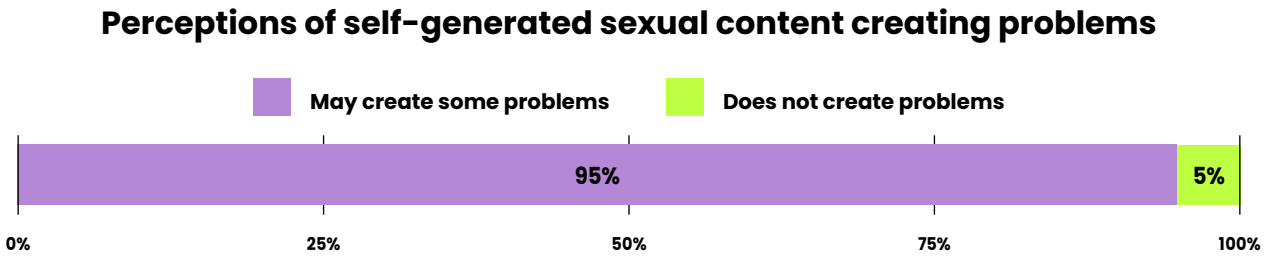


Figure 15 - Perceptions of Self-Generated Sexual Content Creating Problems

59 Van Ouytsel, J., Lu, Y., & Temple, J. R. (2022). **An exploratory study of online early sexual initiation through pressured and unwanted sexting**. Journal of Sex Research, 59(6), 742–748.

60 Mori, C., Temple, J. R., Browne, D., & Madigan, S. (2019). **Association of Sexting with Sexual Behaviors and Mental Health among Adolescents: A systematic review and Meta-analysis**. JAMA Pediatrics, 173(8), 770–779.

61 Van Ouytsel, J., Lu, Y., & Temple, J. R. (2022). **An exploratory study of online early sexual initiation through pressured and unwanted sexting**. Journal of Sex Research, 59(6), 742–748.

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

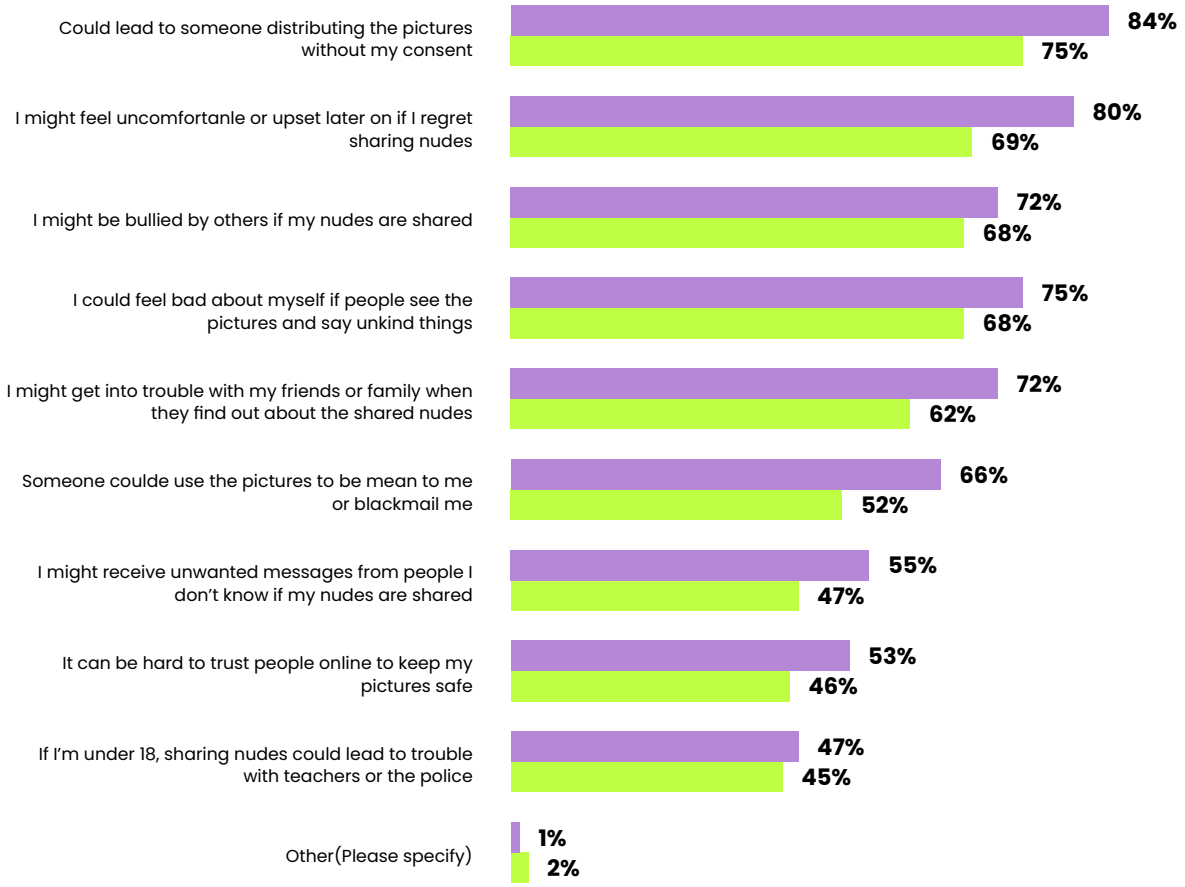


Figure 16 - Gender Breakdown of Perceptions of Potential Consequences of Sharing Self-Generated Sexual Content

Psychological and social impacts were most frequently noted when asked about harms (n=886). Among those who expanded on perceived harms, 94% pointed to emotional distress, and 94% to social damage. Responses described shame, embarrassment, stress, and even suicidal thoughts emphasizing the toll on self-worth and confidence when self-generated sexual content was indicated to have resulted in harm. Many referenced the weight of judgment from others, the risk of gossip or humiliation, and the long shadow these experiences can cast, especially if images circulate widely.

> "มีคนเอาเรื่องของเยาวชนคนนั้นมาพูดอย่างเสียๆ หายๆและะทำให้อับอาย อาจส่งผลถึงการคิดสั้น หรือการฆ่าตัวตาย" ("Their stories might be retold by somebody else in a bad way, leading to suicidal thoughts.")

> "เช่น อับอายต่อสังคม ซึมเศร้า เป็นต้น" ("Feeling ashamed, depressed.")

> "โดนสังคมว่าและอับอายจากสังคมภายนอก" ("Being blamed and shamed by society.")

Perceived harms differed across groups. As displayed in figure 16, girls were slightly more likely than boys to anticipate emotional fallout, with 85% believing someone whose image had been shared would feel bad, compared to 78% of boys. Girls also placed greater emphasis on regret and school-based consequences (such as missing classes or impact on grades). LGBT respondents were more likely to select almost every consequence listed, 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.

GENDER DYNAMICS AND THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF HARMS RELATED TO SELF-GENERATED SEXUAL CONTENT YOUNG PEOPLE

Experiencing the non-consensual sharing or coercive creation of self-generated sexual content can lead to similar emotional and psychological consequences for young people, regardless of gender. These include shame, anxiety, school absence, and, in severe cases, suicidal attempts. Frontline professionals highlighted how gender norms and societal expectations shape how affected 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. As two experts noted in the interviews, **"เด็กผู้ชายรู้สึกอับอายและไม่อยากบอกใครว่าเกิดอะไรขึ้น"** (Boys feel too ashamed and do not want to tell anyone about what has happened to them" (K-1209-04). And **"เด็กผู้ชายมักจะพยายามแก้ปัญหาด้วยตัวเองก่อน ก่อนที่จะตัดสินใจขอความช่วยเหลือจากคนอื่น"** ("They often try to solve problems themselves before deciding to reach out for help.") (K-1009-01).

In most cases involving boys, parents are generally less concerned about leaked images. However, this often depends on their socio-economic background. **"ถ้าเป็นเด็กผู้ชายที่มาจากครอบครัวที่มีฐานะ พ่อแม่จะค่อนข้างซีเรียสกับเรื่องภาพหลุดมากกว่า"** ("For boys from wealthier families, parents tend to take such incidents more seriously"), a government social worker added (K-0110-06). 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, with comments suggesting that **"เด็กผู้หญิงเป็นฝ่ายเสียหาย"** ("girls are the ones who lose") and that they **"สมควรแล้วที่ต้องอับอาย เพราะประพฤติตัวไม่เหมาะสม"** (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 (K-0605-15). LGBT young people face double vulnerabilities. **"น้อง LGBT บางคนกลัวทำให้พ่อแม่ผิดหวัง หรือกลัวถูกดุด่าถ้าเพศสภาพของตัวเองถูกเปิดเผย 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).

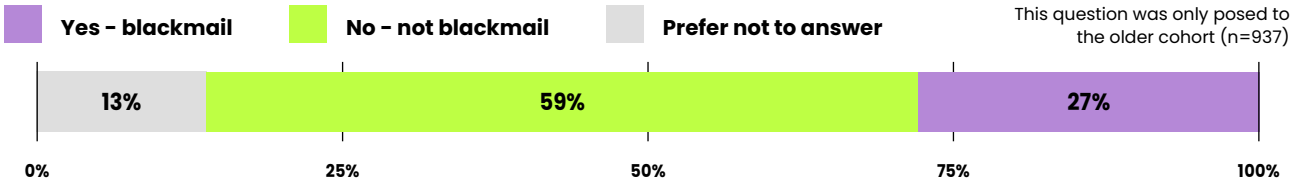
Despite the gender differences in perceptions and consequences, children of all genders share similar concerns and support needs: **"เด็กทุกคนมีต้องการคล้ายๆกัน คือต้องการให้ช่วยลบภาพออกจากระบบ กลัวว่าผู้ปกครองจะรู้ หรือกลัวจะมีผลกระทบกับการเรียนหรือที่โรงเรียน และกลัวว่าจะเสียชื่อเสียง โดยเฉพาะเด็กที่มีโปรไฟล์ดี เช่นเด็กที่เรียนเก่งหรือมีความสามารถโดดเด่น"** ("Young people want support for images to be taken down. They are afraid their parents will find out, or that it will impact their education at schools. And they are afraid it will affect their reputation, especially among those who have good personal and academic profiles.") (K-2304-13).

Current digital safety frameworks often fail to reflect these complexities and approaches often depict girls as passive victims and boys as aggressors. This reinforces harmful gender norms and fuels moral panics, framing technology as the problem while neglecting the broader social and platform-driven dynamics that shape behavior. In this framing, young people's digital expressions are often pathologized, and opportunities for ethical or empowering engagement are overlooked.

COERCION, EXPLOITATION AND BLAME

While emotional pain and social exclusion were front of mind, many young people also identified exploitation, blackmail, and digital safety consequences in characterizing harms from self-generated sexual content. Twenty-seven percent (n=255) of respondents said that it was common for it to be used for blackmail. Among these, 60% (n=153) said the intent of the blackmail was to get money, while others described coercion to share more content or to comply with other demands. This was especially pronounced among LGBT respondents (35%, n= 90 vs. 25% of non-LGBT), suggesting they may be disproportionately exposed to image-based blackmail.

How Commonly Young People Believe Self-Generated Sexual Content Is Used for Blackmail



Most Common Forms of Blackmail

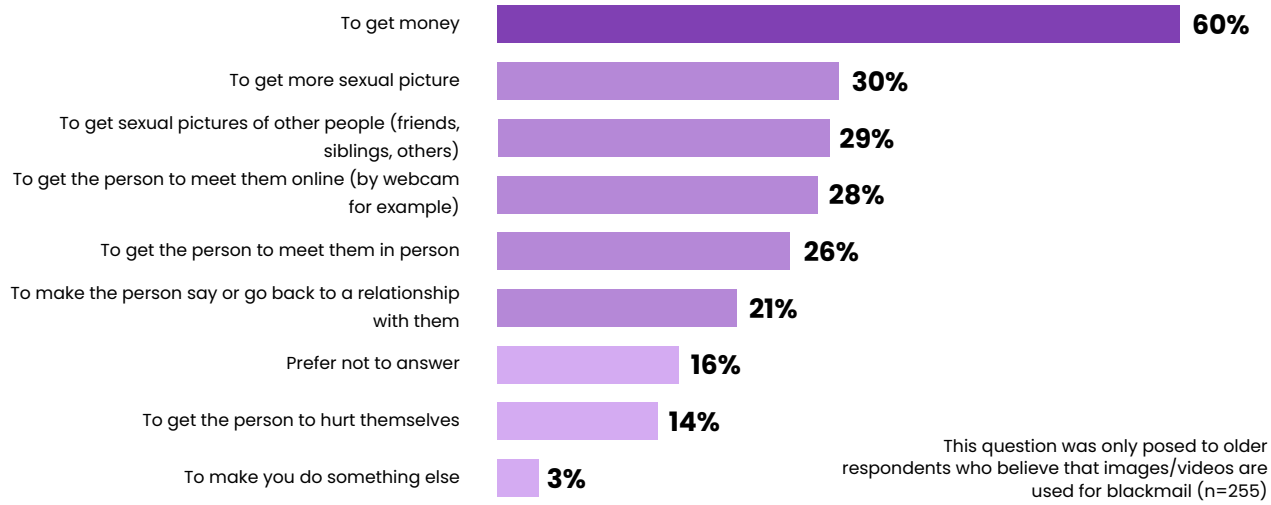


Figure 17 - How Commonly Young People Believe Self-Generated Sexual Content Is Used for Blackmail

JUDGING SEVERITY

When asked who should be held responsible when nude images are leaked, young people gave surprisingly mixed responses. Nearly half (44%, n=149) said the person in the image should be held responsible because it was their decision to create or (initially) share the content. Another 31% (n=105) blamed the person who reshared it, while only 6% pointed to caregivers, and even fewer mentioned platforms or onlookers. These findings illustrate that young people are internalizing responsibility when they are victimized, even when that person may have been betrayed or exploited. As previous research has noted,[62] it is likely that the preponderance with digital safety messaging that emphasizes 'self-protective' behaviors is almost certainly

62 ECPAT International (2022). **Disrupting Harm – Conversations with Young Survivors about Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse**. **Global Partnership to End Violence against Children**.

feeding this self-blame amongst young people.

This response pattern sits in tension with how young people assess harm. When asked to rate the seriousness of different scenarios involving nude sharing on a 10-point scale (n=937), the situations considered most harmful were those involving clear violations by others. The highest-rated was "my ex-partner leaks my private images" (mean = 6.68), followed closely by "someone blackmails me with my nudes" (mean = 6.65). Legal consequences such as being charged with possession of CSAM were rated significantly lower.[63] Girls and LGBT respondents rated all scenarios more seriously than boys,[64] reflecting heightened sensitivity to the relational and reputational risks involved and likely experiences of more severe consequences.

This contradiction is revealing. While young people recognize that serious harm arises from breaches of trust, manipulation, or coercion by others, many still place blame on the person who originally created or shared the content. This suggests that norms around personal responsibility and shame remain powerful, even when the actual harm is explicitly acknowledged to have been caused by others. It reflects a wider cultural narrative in which victims of digital harms are often held accountable for their own vulnerability. Disrupting this dominant narrative is critical. Shifting the focus from blaming the victims to a focus on the breaches of consent, trust, and malicious actions of offenders is necessary in order to foster more supportive and less judgmental environments for young people navigating digital relationships.

During the youth consultation, a 15-year-old girl expressed that if her intimate images were shared without consent, she would bear sole responsibility. She referred to this as **"เป็นกรรมของหนู"** ("Law of Karma"), suggesting that she must accept the harm as a consequence of her own actions. This sense of resignation was echoed by a 15-year-old boy who participated in Leaked as a key informant, who said: **"ผมคงบอกเพื่อนให้ทำใจ เพราะภาพมันหลุดไปแล้ว มันแก้ไขอะไรไม่ได้แล้ว ง่ายที่สุดคือให้เขาปิดเครื่อง[โทรศัพท์]ไปเลย แล้วไม่ต้องเปิดอีก หรืออาจจะบอกให้เขาบล็อกคนๆนั้นไปเลย เผลอๆแค่ไม่เกิน 1-4 ปี ภาพก็หายไปหมดแล้ว ไม่มีใครจำได้หรอก แต่ก็ไม่คิดว่าจะแนะนำให้เขาบอกพ่อแม่หรือครูด้วย ปกติเราไม่ได้คุยเรื่องแบบนี้กับผู้ใหญ่"** ("I'll probably just tell my friends to **ทำใจ** (like, accept it), because their images are already leaked and there's nothing, we can really do to undo it. Or honestly, the easiest thing might be to just tell them to turn off their phone and never turn it back on.... Probably I'd tell my friends to just block the person. Honestly, in like 1 to 4 years, those images will probably disappear, and no one will even remember. I don't think I'd tell them to go talk to their parents or teachers either, that's not really something most of us would do.") (K-2106-20).

These perspectives show how social norms, including popular interpretations of cultural and religious concepts (like karma), are leading young people to internalize blame and avoid seeking help. While the concept of karma typically promotes ethical living, in this way it is effectively being misapplied to discourage resistance or action against an injustice. Such circumstances contribute to the culture of silence around violence against children. Many young people, especially those affected by such non-consensual harms, experience shame and feel morally responsible for what has happened to them. This normalization of violence not only reinforces stigma but also undermines and contradicts their understanding of digital rights and privacy. Failing to address these incidents when they occur extends those experiences to any young people bearing witness – further reinforcing the culture of silence and stigma. Addressing these issues requires culturally sensitive approaches that challenge victim-blaming norms and excuse offender behavior, while affirming young people's rights, agency, and access to protection and support.

63 Results are Significant at $p<0.001$

64 Results all Significant at $p<0.001$

UNCERTAINTY AND PERCEIVED CONTROL

Despite the widespread recognition of potential negative consequences, many young people still expressed uncertainty about the overall impact of sharing nudes. When asked whether sharing sexual images has positive or negative outcomes (n=937), 73% of respondents said they were unsure. Only 24% clearly said it led to negative outcomes; 3% of respondents said outcomes of sharing nudes could be positive. Among the 51 respondents who reported benefits, the most common was building trust (29%), 24% (n=12) described it as a normal way to communicate, and 22% (n=11) said they were careful not to show their face or identifying features, which helped them feel in control.

Beyond their peer group, only 8% (n=66) of older respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is normal for adults to share nudes as part of dating, while 45% (n=419) selected neutral. This suggests that many young people are unsure where the line falls between what is acceptable in adult relationships and what feels risky or inappropriate. The large proportion of neutral responses points to broader uncertainty about this issue. Although online dating is not a new phenomenon, and many adults today likely met this way and may even have shared nudes, nobody is talking to young people about these digital spaces and behaviors. Without this information, young people have no model and are forced to make things up as they go along.

This uncertainty also shows up in other responses. A quarter of respondents (26%, n=243) agreed or strongly agreed that it is acceptable to share nudes if both parties consent, while 36% (n=337) were neutral and 40% disagreed to some extent. These numbers reflect how many young people are still navigating mixed messages around intimacy, privacy, and consent in digital spaces.

TECHNOLOGY AS AN ENABLER

Technology plays a central and often underexamined role in enabling the sharing of sexual content among young people, and the young people we surveyed are very aware of this: The statement with the highest overall agreement was that technology makes it too easy to share nudes without considering the consequences. A total of 56% (n=524) of the older respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Among girls, this proportion rose to 62% (n=333).

Hence, the dynamics of nude sharing cannot be separated from the design features, cultures and social norms being built (both purposively by platforms and organically by users) within the platforms where these behaviors occur.

Cheaply and widely available smartphones with high-quality cameras are a remarkably recent, yet normal-feeling part of life. When we combine this technology with, for example, encrypted instant messaging services, this lowers the thresholds for sexual content creation and ease of sharing. When we combine this with the developmentally appropriate identity -forming risk-taking of adolescence, there are multiple enabling factors for regrettable actions. Platforms like Instagram, Line, and Messenger facilitate intimate one-on-one interactions with minimal friction. They often do not require identity or age verification. Furthermore, features such as disappearing photos, vanishing messages, encryption, and in-app editing tools appear to lean into the possibilities of these uses for the services. These features contribute to a sense of control, spontaneity, and impermanence, even though the underlying risk of permanence endures. This perception of control is reflected in the Leaked data. Of the older respondents who said that sharing nudes may not be problematic, 14% (n=7) specifically said this was because they use ‘safe’ apps or messaging services to share. Platform design features influence how young people assess risk when sharing sexual content.

Combine this with the aforementioned incentivization of visual self-presentation that is rewarded with likes, reactions, follower counts, and algorithmic visibility. Within this

environment, nudes may function as a form of valuable digital capital: quick ways to demonstrate attractiveness, deepen intimacy, or gain validation.

Aspects of technology also facilitate the unauthorized distribution of nudes. Tools like screenshots, screen recordings, and a plethora of third-party apps make it easy to capture and share images without the sender's knowledge. In some cases, images are saved, traded, or reposted in private groups, compounding the harm.

Interviews with frontline experts highlight ongoing concerns regarding the insufficient efforts by digital platforms to counteract these uses of design features or even to screen for or moderate reported harmful content effectively: **"เราก็ยังไม่เห็นหลักฐานว่าเขากรองเนื้อหายังไงโดยเฉพาะบนแพลตฟอร์มเกมต่าง ๆ "** ("We still cannot see the evidence of how they have attempted to filter inappropriate content, especially on online gaming platforms.") (K-2603-10) Similarly, police reported that links to nude images involving children are frequently shared on X, presenting significant challenges for law enforcement in prosecuting such cases under child sexual abuse material (CSAM) possession laws. (K-1704-12). A 15-year-old informant also emphasized the need for greater accountability among gaming companies, particularly in relation to advertisements shown within games: **"อย่างพวกแอปหาคู่ในเกม มีเด็กๆเล่นเกมเยอะ ควรจะมี AI หรือเทคโนโลยีบางอย่างในการดักจับหรือบล็อกเนื้อหาทางเพศในเกม เพื่อให้เป็นที่ปลอดภัยสำหรับทุกคน"** ("...Like those dating app ads—because a lot of kids play online games. There should also be AI or some kind of tech that can catch and block nudes being shared on gaming platforms to keep things safer for everyone.") (K-2106-20)

Finally, reporting tools and content moderation systems are often poorly understood, inconsistently enforced, difficult to navigate, or simply ineffective when used. Many young people lack confidence that reporting a violation will lead to meaningful consequences. An 18-year-old informant shared her frustration with the difficulty of reporting leaked images to social media platforms, especially when children are involved. **"ตอนนี้เราต้องกดรายงานหลาย ๆ ครั้งหรือหลาย ๆ คนต้องกดรายงานพร้อม ๆ กันจากหลายแอ็กเคานต์ ไม่อย่างนั้นพวกเขาก็จะไม่ทำอะไร ถ้าเด็กคนหนึ่งต้องการรายงานเรื่องภาพหลุด มันจะใช้เวลานานมากก่อนที่แพลตฟอร์มจะทำอะไรสักอย่าง เด็กบางคนกดรายงานครั้งแล้วครั้งเล่า ก็ยังไม่มีอะไรเกิดขึ้น ทำให้เด็กรู้สึกเครียดและสิ้นหวังมาก"** ("Right now, you have to report so many times before the platform actually does anything. Or a lot of people have to report it at once, or they just ignore it. If a kid wants to report their image being leaked, it can take forever before the platform responds. Sometimes they report it over and over, and still nothing happens. It makes kids feel really anxious and helpless.") Her experience highlights gaps in platform accountability and the emotional toll placed on young users trying to protect themselves online.

Some fear being blamed, punished, or banned from the platform themselves if they report. The data (n=341) reveals a low rate of formal reporting, with only 22% of respondents who received sexual images of a person under 18 saying that they reported it to the platform. Meanwhile, some (44%) chose to block the sender, and an equal share, 44%, did nothing at all. This pattern reflects more than just desensitization. It suggests uncertainty, discomfort, or skepticism about reporting systems themselves. Many young people report self-learning about digital safety, which may help explain why confidence in formal mechanisms such as content moderation or reporting is low. While the survey did not ask directly about personal experiences with platform reporting tools, these behavioral patterns point to digital infrastructure that not only enables image sharing but may also inhibit effective action when things go wrong.

WHO THEY ARE SHARING WITH

When asked who people are most likely to share sexual content with, the most common answer was "I don't know." Among older cohort respondents who were aware of nude-sharing in their peer group, 38% (n=122) said they weren't sure who the recipients typically were.

Among those who did give a response, the most common response was that people shared nudes with someone they knew in person (30%, n=98). This was followed by people they met online and had never met in person (23%, n=74), and a much smaller proportion (9%, n=29) who said the recipient is typically someone they initially met online but later met in person. The least-selected category was "met online and later met in person," reinforcing that young people are less likely to assume offline meetups occur after digital introductions. This subtle but consistent pattern suggests that while online contact is normalized, many still draw a line between digital and in-person intimacy.

Gender differences were also notable (n=323). Boys were significantly more likely than girls to understand that nudes were shared with people known in person (35% vs 26%),[65] while girls were more likely to expect that the recipient was someone met only online (29% vs 16%).

Age patterns were equally telling (n=323). Those aged 14-16 were the most likely to select "I don't know," while 17-year-olds were more confident in their answers and showed an even split between known-in-person contacts (29%) and online-only contacts (28%). This shift suggests that as digital experiences and social lives expand with age, so too does awareness of how content travels.

Another noteworthy finding emerged when looking at the small subset who said the recipient is someone, they met online but later met in person. This group, though a minority (9%, n=29), reflected a very different profile: when those connections do move offline, the proportion believed to be adults increases significantly. In this group, 31% (n=9) believed the recipient was an adult, and another 31% (n=9) said they didn't know the recipient's age. This is in stark contrast to those who selected "people known in person," (n=98) where 63% (n=62) believed the recipient was under 18, and only 9% (n=9) said they were adults. This shift in age perception is meaningful: it suggests that when offline interaction enters the picture, particularly after meeting online, young people become more alert to the possibility that the other person may be an adult.

[65] Results are significant at $p<0.05$

CONCLUSIONS

We set out in our research thinking that sharing nudes was a normal part of sexual exploration today, but the findings from the Leaked project painted a slightly different picture. While some young people do engage in nude-sharing as part of curiosity, flirting, or relationships, most described it as something shaped by pressure, manipulation, or a sense of inevitability. Even those who knew the risks often found themselves caught up in moments where the cost of saying no to a friend, a partner, or a trend felt higher than the risk of sharing.

One thing came through clearly: technology makes it too easy. Too easy to send something without thinking. Too easy to lose control of it. Too easy for others to save, reshare, or exploit that content. Platforms are designed to encourage spontaneity and visibility, not safety or reflection. Features like disappearing messages, anonymous accounts, and algorithms that reward sexualized content create an environment where boundaries are hard to hold and harm can escalate quickly. Reporting tools, when used, are often confusing or ineffective, leaving young people to navigate fallout largely on their own.

What emerged was a far more complex reality than adult narratives often allow. Young people are navigating blurred lines between agency and coercion, self-expression and shame, and connection and risk. Their decisions to create or share intimate content are rarely impulsive. More often, they reflect emotional needs, peer dynamics, social media influence, or moments of vulnerability. When things go wrong, it's not the act of sharing that they describe as harmful but the loss of control, the breach of trust, and the judgment that follows.

Many internalised blame. Some believed they deserved the fallout. Others thought they had no one to turn to. Cultural narratives around karma, modesty, and gender reinforced silence. Girls, LGBT youth, and ethnic minority youth reported especially high levels of shame, social exclusion, and fear of being judged. Few felt they could speak openly to parents, teachers, or authorities, highlighting the urgent need for safe spaces where they can ask questions and seek help without fear of punishment or moralizing.

Despite this, most are not reckless. They are cautious, critical, and reflective. But they are also uncertain navigating a digital world that offers few clear boundaries and even fewer trusted sources of support. Current digital safety efforts, often built around abstinence, fear, or blocking, fall short of meeting young people where they are.

If we want to build meaningful digital safety responses, we have to start by listening to young people and acknowledging the realities they face.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. RIGHTS-BASED COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

Every child has the right to education that equips them for real life, including about their bodies and relationships, and this now needs to encompass digital experiences.

1.1. **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) must be embedded from an early age, not just as a means of preventing harm but as a proactive foundation for understanding self-worth, autonomy, boundaries, desire, and empathy.** This education should encompass diverse experiences of gender and sexuality, include discussions of pleasure and consent, and equip children to build healthy, respectful relationships both online and offline.

1.2. **Critically, CSE must intersect with digital rights and citizenship education.** As children increasingly form relationships, express identity, and encounter risks in digital spaces, education must reflect these everyday digital realities. This includes building awareness of platform design features (e.g., persuasive algorithms, visibility settings), understanding data privacy, consent in content-sharing, digital footprints, and the right to withdraw consent. It must also include navigating peer pressure, handling online dating or gaming interactions, and recognizing manipulative, coercive, or exploitative behavior.

1.3. **Lessons should be age-appropriate, inclusive, and grounded in human rights and gender equality.** They should acknowledge that many children already use the internet to seek support, explore attraction, or conduct relationships. Education should provide them with judgment-free tools to assess risks, exercise agency, and ask for help before harm occurs.

1.4. **CSE must be institutionalized by government,** integrated within the Ministry of Education's core curriculum, and mandated rather than recommended and at the discretion of individual school leaders. Genuine integration must also include investment to train, coach, and support the school staff responsible for CSE to ensure adults can respond comfortably without shame, stigma, or punishment – not leaving them to grapple with a government mandate alone.

1.5. **Consistent, equitable access to CSE is essential**, particularly for children in under-resourced communities, informal education systems, or those most at risk of exclusion.

2. REGULATE PLATFORMS

Children have a right to be protected from harm, including harm caused as a result of the design features and recommendation systems implemented by digital platforms. These systems often expose children to sexualized, sensational, or manipulative content. Platforms are primarily designed to maximize engagement, not prioritize safety so regulation that requires child safety by design is indisputable. To uphold children's rights online:

2.1. **Platforms must be accountable for how their systems surface sexualized or age-inappropriate material**, even when children are not explicitly searching for it. This includes taking steps to purposively limit children's exposure through algorithmic recommendations, search auto-complete, and targeted advertising. Robust, age-appropriate content filters must be in place by default for children.

2.2. **Platforms should provide accessible and age-appropriate ways for children to report harmful content and experiences**. These tools must be visible, easy to use, and responsive to children's reports and concerns in meaningful ways.

2.3. **Recommendation systems should be reviewed regularly by independent researchers** to assess how they affect children. Audits must evaluate whether algorithms are amplifying harmful or misleading content and consider the impact on different age groups.

2.4. **Features that encourage comparison, shame, or compulsive use – such as publicly visible follower counts, streak counts, and filters that sexualize appearance must be unavailable to young people.** Platforms should be required to demonstrate features that support self-esteem, empathy, and healthy online habits for children.

3. FROM PUNISHMENT TO PROTECTION

Children impacted by sharing of self-generated sexual content need protection and support, not punishment. A dramatic cultural shift is needed with systemic changes to social, legal, and institutional responses to these behaviors in young people:

3.1. **Shifting from blame to care. Harmful social norms that shame or stigmatize children (especially around sexuality) must be actively challenged.** Adults, including caregivers, teachers, law enforcement, and health professionals, must respond to a young person raising concerns with empathy and understanding, not judgment or blame. Support must reflect children's lived realities, not adult discomfort or moral panic.

3.2. Under current Thai law, any sexual image of a person under 18 can be treated as child sexual abuse material, even if it is self-generated and shared consensually. This legal framing fails to distinguish between exploitative abuse and developmental behaviors, such as adolescents exploring intimacy or relationships. It is not suggested to change the definition of CSAM; however, **protection from prosecution for children must be enshrined in regulation**. Children who create or share sexual content of themselves should not be criminalized or labeled as offenders; instead, welfare responses rooted in protection, education, and support recognize their vulnerability and the social and technological pressures they face.

3.3. **Greater investment is urgently needed to build the capacity of agencies like the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), public schools, health services, and child protection workers** to respond with a trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and child rights-based lens. This includes training on child development, online safety, consent, digital behaviors, and the legal framework

to ensure responses are proportionate, child-centered, and avoid blame and re-traumatization.

4. LET THEM SPEAK: CREATE SAFE, JUDGMENT-FREE SPACES FOR CHILDREN

Children have the right to express themselves, raise concerns and be heard in environments that are free from fear, shame, or punishment. Safe spaces for dialogue about these risky behaviors and the contexts of interrelated influences that they occur in are necessary to support young people navigating these decisions.

As one 18-year-old participant put it, "Many children these days suffer from depression mainly because they are not able to talk to their parents and in turn seek out advice from online friends."

To honor children's right to participation and protection:

4.1. Support parents and caregivers to create open and empathic homes where children feel comfortable talking about sensitive issues such as relationships, identity, and online experiences without fear of being judged or punished.

4.2. Equip schools to respond with restorative, not punitive, approaches. Teachers should be carefully trained and supported themselves to listen, support, and guide students through challenges in a constructive way.

4.3. Foster a culture that acknowledges mistakes as part of growing up. Instead of labeling or isolating children, society should respond with compassion, accountability, and guidance.

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