



Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Section - 2014

I21 Forensics Implications: Adolescent Sexting and Cyberbullying

Stephen B. Billick, MD*, 901 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021-4157; and Panagiota Korenis-Rios, MD*, 485 White Plains Road, Apt 3B, Eastchester, NY 10709

The goal of this research is to alert forensic psychiatrists to the extensive prevalence of sexting and cyberbullying and what various roles they may play in the legal context.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by educating attendees about the prevalence of adolescent sexting and cyberbullying and the potential legal consequences.

Adolescence is marked by establishing a sense of identity, core values, a sense of one's relationship to the outside world, and heightened peer relationships. In addition, there is also risk-taking, impulsivity, self-exploration, and a dramatic increase in sexuality. The dramatic increase in the use of cell phones and the internet has additional social implications of sexting and cyberbullying. Sexting refers to the practice of sending sexually explicit material, including language or images, to another person's cell phone. Cyberbullying refers to the use of this technology to socially exclude, threaten, insult, or shame another person. Studies of cell phone use in the 21st-century report well over 50% of adolescents use them and that text messaging is the communication mode of choice. Studies also show a significant percentage of adolescents send and receive sex messaging, both text and images. This presentation will review this expanding literature. Various motivations for sexting will also be reviewed.

Bridging the gap between adolescents and adults has forever been a societal challenge. Characterized by a period of individuation, rebellion, and changing bodies and hormones, adolescence can be a smooth transition or tumultuous. However, failure to understand the dangerous implications of the current trends in adolescent sexual behavior can lead to detrimental consequences for all involved. The challenge for psychiatrists is to recognize adolescent trends and the potential repercussions of these trends in order to be able to ask appropriate questions during psychiatric evaluations.

Adolescents who are at risk for victimization also are at risk for psychiatric consequences. Depression, suicide, mood disorders, adjustment reactions, and anxiety disorders are some of the potential psychiatric sequelae of falling victim to sexting and cyberbullying.

Sexting can entangle a child in the criminal justice system. The potential circulation and permanence of the image introduces a range of troubling legal questions. The legal implications are extensive and psychiatrists may play an important role in evaluation of some of these adolescents in the legal context. Currently, the charges in most states range from misdemeanors to Class B felonies. The legal implications are extensive and psychiatrists may play an important role in evaluation of some of these adolescents in the legal context. This presentation will also make suggestions on future remedies and preventative actions.

In summary, sexting is a widespread problem that requires the attention not only of parents but also of psychiatrists. More than ever, psychiatrists need to be increasingly diligent about exploring these topics in detail with adolescent patients. Not only must psychiatrists educate patients of the potential dangers and victimization of sexting and cyberbullying, but psychiatrists must also educate parents, guardians, and the community. Preventive methods, including educational seminars and screening, would be the best approach to educating preteens and young adolescents.

Sexting, Adolescent, Forensic