

Master thesis



ALWAYS A STEP AHEAD: THE PROCESS OF HANDLING ESCALATED SEXTING

An explanatory study of intervention and
prevention actors and measures handling
escalated sexting

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ABSTRACT

Sexting has received increasing media and scientific attention. An aggravated form of sexting, escalated sexting, however, has not been subject of many studies. Furthermore, these few studies focused solely on reasons for and consequences of escalated sexting. This study, therefore, focused on exploring the process of handling escalated sexting that consists of both prevention measures and ad hoc reactions and the actors involved in the process. Interviews based on the critical incident technique were held with 23 participants, who were involved in the process of handling escalated sexting based on their profession or role as victim or relative. This study showed that the process of handling escalated sexting can be divided into two different stages: reacting ad hoc and prevention. Reacting ad hoc at escalated sexting situations occurs in seven phases. All of these phases consist of various ad hoc reactions, which can be combined for one intervention method to handle a specific situation. When preventing, actions are targeted at three groups: students, parents and school staff. This explorative study has made the first steps into discovering aspects of handling escalated sexting and therefore has multiple scientific and practical implications.

Keywords: escalated sexting - actors – intervention - prevention – effectiveness

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Technology plays an increasingly important role in our lives, especially in the lives of teens who have made a growing use of technology for social activities such as courtship and sexual exploration. Parents, educators and lawmakers are increasingly concerned with the role of smart phones in the sexual lives of teens. The past years, a growing body of press coverage, policy discussions and scientific research has been addressing the expanding use of smart phones for the sexual lives of teens and the negative consequences that can arise. One of these negative consequences, escalated sexting, occurs when a photograph or video is forwarded or placed online. Despite the negative consequences escalated sexting can have, little attention has been paid to the process of handling this phenomenon. This study, therefore, focused on exploring the process of handling escalated sexting in both the prevention and intervention stage and the actors involved in the process.

To conduct this study, 23 participants involved in the process because of their profession or role as victim or relative were interviewed. The semi structured interviews were based upon the critical incident technique and strived to map all performed actions and involved actors in the critical incident described by the participant. Afterwards, a qualitative analysis using the program Atlas.ti was performed. To ensure the reliability of the study two coders independently coded around ten per cent of the data, with a more than sufficient Cohen's Kappa of 0.81 as a result.

The results show that the process of handling escalated sexting can be divided into two distinct stages: reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting situations and preventing escalated sexting. The ad hoc reactions take place when the situation of escalated sexting already happened, while the preventative actions are undertaken to avoid escalated sexting. The actions discovered in the stage of reacting ad hoc can be divided into seven distinctive phases: (1) the situation comes onto the surface; (2) investigation; (3) requesting help; (4) taking action; (5) informing other involved actors; (6) providing care for victim; (7) evaluation. Each phase has a different goal and contribution to the process of reacting ad hoc. Most actions have specific advantages and disadvantages that influence the effectiveness of the action. Therefore, no sole perfect reaction to escalated sexting exists. To the contrary, an ideal reaction to escalated sexting consists of various actions stemming from (all) different phases that suit the situation. The preventative actions can be divided into the target groups of these actions: teens, parents, both teens and parents and staff at school. Each target group is targeted with different actions, although these actions all have the goal to educate the target group, signal escalated sexting situations or facilitate actions in the different categories. Furthermore, the results provide a list with actors involved in the stage of reacting ad hoc and prevention. These actors all fulfil different roles in the process, such as care, punishment or coordination.

It can be concluded that this study made a new interesting contribution to the current knowledge on escalated sexting and the process of handling this phenomenon. Various suggestions for future research are made, such as a further development of the seven phases model of reacting to escalated sexting and an objective and long term measurement of the effectiveness of the various actions. The overviews of the (prevention) actors and their roles, the ad hoc reactions and prevention actions are useful tools for all actors involved in the process of handling escalated sexting. Another suggestion for practice is creating awareness among managers at schools and external organisations that have to deal with escalated sexting of the potential negative consequences and the importance of the process of handling escalated sexting.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology plays an increasingly important role in our lives (Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaita & Rullo, 2013) and especially in the lives of teens. Almost all teens have access to the Internet and use it on a daily basis, or at least more than once a week (CBS, 2014). Furthermore, many teens own a smart phone, through which they access the Internet. Smart phones enable teens to communicate with whom they like at any time, and enable the sharing of stories, photographs, videos and more. Therefore, teens have increasingly been using smart phones for their social activities via social media or texting (Chalfen, 2009; CBS, 2012; Lenhart, 2009; Strassberg, Rullo & Mackronis, 2014). Online and offline social activities therefore have become more intertwined. One of these social activities, courtship and sexual exploration is being performed at online media and smart phones as well (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014).

Parents, educators and lawmakers are increasingly concerned with the role of smart phones in the sexual lives of teens (Lenhart, 2009). The past years, a growing body of press coverage, policy discussions and scientific research has been addressing the growing use of smart phones for the sexual lives of teens (Lenhart, 2009; Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones & Wolak, 2012; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014). Various stories of girls whose private photographs were forwarded or placed online by their ex boyfriend after a break up, or stories about suicide attempts after cyberbullying make adults concerned about this increasing importance of the smart phone and Internet. The greatest amount of concern recently has focused on “sexting”. Sexting can be defined as the creating, sharing and forwarding of sexually suggestive or provocative nude or nearly nude images (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Dir & Cyders, 2014; Lenhart, 2009; Strassberg et al., 2013) or sexual or provocative texts (Mitchell et al., 2012). Sexting can exist in several forms based on various contextual factors, such as age and gender. One of these forms is an aggravated form of sexting and occurs when a sext is forwarded or placed online so the sext reaches unintended recipients. In this study, this is defined as escalated sexting.

When comparing this definition of escalated sexting with that of cyberbullying, *“the use of information and communication technologies [...] to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others.”* (Li, 2005), many similarities appear. Therefore, cyberbullying studies can be used to obtain a bigger understanding of escalated sexting. However, also differences between escalated sexting and cyberbullying exist. Accordingly, studies focusing on sexting and escalated sexting are necessary for a complete understanding of the phenomenon.

Using previous studies of sexting and escalated sexting, it is almost impossible to reach this understanding, because most studies about sexting focus only on certain aspects of the behaviour, such as motivations for engaging in it, consequences or legal issues. Studies discussing methods of preventing or tackling sexting are scarce. Moreover, the escalated form of sexting is an underdeveloped research theme as well; especially the methods of action when the escalated form of sexting has happened and prevention actions have not been subjected to academic research. Therefore, the following research question is formulated:

What ad hoc reactions and prevention actions are undertaken and could best be undertaken by relevant actors to handle escalated sexting?

To conduct this study, first an overview of the literature of sexting, escalated sexting and cyberbullying will be given. After this overview specific research questions will be formulated. Second, the research method will be discussed, after which the results of the study are described. Finally, the discussion and conclusion of the study are provided.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this theoretical framework, the theoretical perspective and most important constructs of escalated sexting are discussed. However, as only few studies about this phenomenon have been conducted yet, important concepts of sexting and cyberbullying research will be reviewed as well. For every topic, first an overview of sexting research will be given. Subsequently and where possible, escalated sexting research will be discussed and after this, the knowledge of escalated sexting will be complemented with results of cyberbullying studies.

1. Definition sexting

Sexting is the combination of the words “sex” and “texting”, and can be defined as the creating, sharing and forwarding of sexually suggestive and provocative nude or nearly nude images (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Dir & Cyders, 2014; Lenhart, 2009; Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaita & Rullo, 2013), texts (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones & Wolak, 2012) or videos (Gamez-Guadix, Almendros, Borrajo & Calvete, 2015). The person that creates and sends the photograph, video or text is called the sexter, and the one that receives the sext is called the sextee (Chalfen, 2009). To narrow the scope of this study, only sexual or provocative (nearly) nude photographs and videos will be addressed, because in most sexting situations videos or photographs instead of texts are sent. Furthermore, the impact of sending photographs and videos could be bigger because the sender is depicted more clearly.

The definition of sexting described above is not exhaustive. There are multiple (contextual) factors that could affect the severity, frequency and content of sexting. These factors are for example level of involvement of the sextee or sexter (Chalfen, 2009), the age of sexter and sextee (Chalfen, 2009) and relationship between sexter and sextee (Bauman, 2015; Wolak, Finkelhor & Mitchell, 2012). Furthermore, age (Lenhart, 2009; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2014), gender (Chalfen, 2009; Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Ferguson, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2012; Strassberg et al., 2014) and personality characteristics (Dir & Cyders, 2014; Ferguson, 2010; Strassberg et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, Ponnet & Walrave, 2014) and smart phone possession and use (Lenhart, 2009; Strassberg et al., 2013) affect the engagement in and frequency of sexting.

Studies show that a considerable amount of teens engage in sexting, with percentages ranging from 10 per cent to 39 per cent (Chalfen, 2009; Ferguson, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2012; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg, Rullo, & Mackronis, 2014; Van Ouytsel, Van Gool et al., 2014). A recent Dutch research by television programme “EenVandaag” showed that 45% of the teens has ever sent a sexually suggestive and provocative text, and that 23% has ever sent a sexually suggestive and provocative photograph or video (EenVandaag, 2015). Another Dutch study, however, concluded that considerably less teens have sent a sexual explicit photograph or video, with percentages ranging from 2 till 5 percent (Rutgers WPF, 2014). Most research shows that more teens have received a photograph than sent one and this indicates that sexually explicit photographs are often viewed by multiple viewers (Bauman, 2015).

2. Reasons for engaging in sexting

Several studies have strived to uncover the motives of teens to engage in sexting. One of the most general explanations for sexting behaviour is that it could be part of the natural development of teens. During adolescence, the rising level of hormones causes sexual awakening and exploration, rebelliousness, identity seeking and construction, pushing normative boundaries and seeking privacy and intimacy (Bauman, 2015; Chalfen, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, Ponnet & Heirman, 2014). Being oblivious for the consequences of their actions, teens therefore engage relatively easy in sexting (Dir & Cyders, 2014; Chalfen, 2009). Combined with the emerging integration of the online world into the offline world, sexual exploration, among others, increasingly occurs on digital media, such as smart phones and social networking sites. Besides this general explanation, there are several other reasons why teens engage in sexting. These explanations could be divided

into two categories: reasons to engage voluntarily in sexting and reasons to engage involuntarily in sexting. These reasons are presented in table 1.

Table 1

Reasons for sexting

Base of sexting	Reasons
Voluntary	<p>Flirting or seeking someone’s attention (Bauman, 2015; Chalfen, 2009; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2014; Walker, Sanci & Temple-Smith, 2013)</p> <p>Sexting with a friend because you are hoping to become romantically involved (Lenhart, 2009)</p> <p>Part of a relationship or extension of sexual life (Bauman, 2015; Ferguson, 2010; Lenhart, 2009; McDaniel & Drouin, 2015; Perkins et al., 2014; Strassberg et al., 2014; Temple et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, Walrave et al., 2014)</p> <p>Enables teens to practice ‘safe sex’ (Chalfen, 2009; Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Van Ouytsel, Walrave et al., 2014)</p> <p>Just to have fun (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Walker et al., 2013)</p> <p>Seeking feedback about looks (Chalfen, 2009)</p>
Involuntary	<p>Replying to a received sext (Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2014).</p> <p>Pressure from peers (such as friends, boy- or girlfriends, peers in general) (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; Perkins et al., 2014; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Temple et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, Van Gool et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2013).</p> <p>Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol (Mitchell et al., 2012).</p>

3. Consequences of sexting

Sending sexually suggestive (nearly) nude pictures is not without consequences. When the picture is sent, the sender loses control of it. This loss of control can have several consequences, and one of the most well-known consequences is the forwarding of the images to friends, classmates or other receivers, or placing the photograph or video online (Chalfen, 2009; Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012; Perkins et al., 2014; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2013). In this study, this consequence of sexting is called ‘escalated sexting’. The forwarding of sexts is also one of the biggest fears of teens who engage in sexting (Renfrow & Rollo, 2014). The other consequences of sexting could be divided into three categories: psychological, legal and indirect consequences.

Psychological consequences that are described are having regret (Chalfen, 2009), feeling embarrassed (Chalfen, 2009; Ferguson, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2012; Perkins et al., 2014; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2014) or feeling humiliated (Dir & Cyders, 2014). The fear of the reactions of others (Mitchell et al., 2012; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014) and a damaged reputation (Chalfen, 2009; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, Walrave et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2013) are also seen as potential consequences of sexting. Furthermore, sexting can lead to a damaged self-esteem (Strassberg et al., 2014), depression symptoms (Temple et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, Van Gool et al., 2014) and can, in the worst cases, even lead to attempting or committing suicide (Ferguson, 2010; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2013; Strassberg et al., 2014).

Sexting can have legal consequences as well. Creating, possessing, or sending an image that depicts a sexual act of someone who evidently has not reached the age of 18 is seen as making, possessing and/or sending child pornography, which is illegal according to the Dutch law. Therefore, teens who are engaged in sexting, can be prosecuted (Bauman, 2015; Chalfen, 2009; Diliberto &

Mattey, 2009; Dir & Cyders, 2014; Ferguson, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2012; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2013; Strassberg et al., 2014; Wastler, 2010). According to art. 240b Wetboek van Strafrecht, the offender is charged with imprisonment of a maximum of four years or a fine of a maximum of 78.000 Euros.

However, some studies also show prudent positive consequences of sexting. All of these studies were conducted among adults, but showed positive relationships between sexting and several relationship factors. Sexting can improve relationship satisfaction under certain circumstances (McDaniel & Drouin, 2015; Stasko & Geller, 2015) and has a positive influence on sexual satisfaction (Stasko & Geller, 2015). Sexting, therefore, is not only a negative phenomenon, but can also improve a relationship when executed safely and under certain circumstances.

4. Escalated sexting

As discussed above, when a teen sends a photograph or video to another teen, the sender loses control of the sext. Consequences of this loss of control can be the forwarding of the photograph or video, or placing it online. In this study this phenomenon is called escalated sexting. More specifically, escalated sexting takes place when a receiver of a sext (un)intentionally forwards the photograph or video to local or distinct others, or places the photograph or video online (Chalfen, 2009; Diliberto & Mattey, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012; Perkins, Becker, Tehee, & Mackelprang, 2014; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2013). The photograph or video then reaches an audience that was not intended by the sexter that first sent the sext.

Exact prevalence rates of escalated sexting vary heavily per study. Mitchell et al. (2012) conclude that only 3 per cent of sexted images are forwarded by teens and Strassberg et al. (2014) mention a percentage of 18.7. Perkins et al. (2014) even report percentages of 36 up to 39 of forwarded photographs. Whether a teen forwards a sexually explicit photograph or video is associated with personality characteristics such as age (Morelli, Bianchi, Baiocco, Pezutti & Chirumbolo, 2016), gender (Morelli et al., 2016; Strassberg et al., 2014), lack of empathy (Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Cappadocia, Pepler, Cummings & Graig, 2012, Salmivalli, Voeten & Poskiparta, 2011) and upbringing (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Berk, 2009; Brendgren & Troop, 2015).

4.1 Escalated sexting and cyberbullying

Escalated sexting is an underdeveloped research theme and as a consequence little is known about this phenomenon. Hence, studies of similar phenomena should be used to gain more knowledge about escalated sexting. Since escalated sexting is an aggravated form of sexting, sexting literature could be used for this purpose. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, escalated sexting shows many similarities with cyberbullying. Therefore, in this study cyberbullying literature will be used to explore escalated sexting as well. Cyberbullying is defined by Bill Belsey, cited in Li (2005), as

“the use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others.”

When comparing this definition with that of (escalated) sexting, it becomes clear that both behaviours are enabled by the use of technology, such as social media and smart phones. Furthermore, both cyberbullying and escalated sexting are hostile behaviour that is performed by an individual or group, and both escalated sexting and cyberbullying (could) have several harmful consequences. However, it can be questioned whether harm is intended with every escalated sexting situation and whether the behaviour is always deliberate and repeated. The characteristics related to repeating acts with the intention to harm, however, usually do not correspond with cyberbullying situations in practice as well. Many teens that participate in cyberbullying instances engage only once, by forwarding a picture once or giving one comment. Furthermore, some teens that are engaged in cyberbullying are not aware of the harm they do.

4.1.1 The group process and participant roles

The dynamics of cyberbullying and escalated sexting appear to be similar to some extent as well. Many studies of cyberbullying identify cyberbullying not as an isolated incident between victim and cyberbully, but as a group process that depends on multiple (social) factors (a.o. Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Cappadocia et al., 2012; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman & Kaukiainen, 1996; Wachs, 2012). Additionally, Salmivalli et al. (1996) and Wachs (2012) state that every member of a group is participant in the bullying and that every member takes a different participant role. These roles are: victim, bully, assistant of the bully, reinforcer of the bully, defender of the victim and outsider (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Wachs, 2012). In this study, we argue that escalated sexting is, similar to cyberbullying, a group process in which the involved teens can adopt different roles as well. These roles are somewhat similar to cyberbullying literature, however some roles have a different name. This study distinguishes the following roles in escalated sexting: victim, offender, forwarder, commentator, defender of the victim and outsider. The terms and descriptions of the different roles in cyberbullying and escalated sexting are depicted in table 2. Most of the terms for escalated sexting are an 'update' of the terms described by Salmivalli et al. (1996) and Wachs (2012).

Looking at table 2, several similarities can be found. In both cyberbullying and escalated sexting, the subject of the bullying or forwarding is named the *victim*. Furthermore, the *defender of the victim* and the *outsider* have the same term and description in both phenomena.

However, differences exist as well. The teen that is called *bully* in cyberbullying literature is called *offender* in this study. We choose for this term because forwarding (nearly) nude photographs or videos of teens (under the age of 18) is illegal according to art. 240b Wetboek van Strafrecht. Therefore, the teen that first forwards the photograph or video is illegal and an official offender. The group of teens that is involved in the situation is called *bystanders* in cyberbullying literature. For this study, the name of *unintended audience* is chosen, because this group does receive a photograph or video which is not intended by the victim that sent the sext to the offender. Therefore, the group is an unintended audience of the sexting. According to cyberbullying literature, when bystanders choose the side of the bully, they can become *assistant of the bully* (by actively participating in the bullying) or *reinforcer of the bully* (by more passively participate in the bullying). In this study, we give these roles a different name. The assistants of the bully will be called *forwarders*, for these teens participate in the situation by forwarding the sext to a new unintended audience. The reinforcers of the bully, as they are called in cyberbullying studies, will be called *commentators*, because they do not forward the sext but do engage in the situation by commenting on it (both online as offline).

Table 2

Terms and description participant roles in situations of cyberbullying and escalated sexting

Cyberbullying studies	This study
<i>Victim</i> The teen who is being bullied	<i>Victim</i> The teen whose sext is forwarded or placed online
<i>Bully</i> The teen who bullies	<i>Offender</i> The teen who first forwards the sext or places it online first
<i>Bystanders</i> The group that is involved in the bullying as well, but is not the bully or victim	<i>Unintended audience</i> The teens who receive or see the sext that is forwarded by the offender or, in a later stage, forwarder
<i>Assistant of the bully</i> The teen who helps the bully with the bullying	<i>Forwarder</i> The teen who intentionally decides to forward the sext
<i>Reinforcer of the bully</i> The teen who passively participates in the bullying by watching or laughing	<i>Commentator</i> The teen who watches the photograph or video and comment on it (both online and offline)

Cyberbullying studies	This study
<i>Defender of the victim</i> The teen who steps up for the victim	<i>Defender of the victim</i> The teen who steps up for the victim
<i>Outsider</i> The teen who (un)intentionally is not involved in the bullying	<i>Outsider</i> The teen who (un)intentionally is not involved in the escalated sexting

5. Reasons for engaging in escalated sexting

Reasons for engaging in escalated sexting are less described in literature than the reasons to engage in 'ordinary' sexting. Chalfen (2009) and McLaughlin (2010) mention that angry ex-boyfriends forwarded nude photographs of their ex-girlfriends as a payback. Richards and Calvert (2009) conclude that group pressure or the group norm could also play a role. If other peers forward the photograph, the pressure on an individual to forward the picture as well can be bigger. Furthermore, if it is accepted by the group norm to forward a sexted photograph, then it could be easier for an individual to forward the picture him- or herself as well. Other reasons uncovered are forwarding a photograph to embarrass or harass another (Cooper, Quayle, Jonsson & Svedin, 2015), just for fun or to impress friends (Morelli et al., 2015). Cyberbullying literature adds another reason for engaging in similar situations, which is a high strive for status (Gumpel- Zioni-Koren & Bekerman, 2014; Huising & Veenstra, 2012; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli, 2010). So when a teen want to increase its place on the social ladder, it can engage in forwarding a sext as well.

6. Consequences of escalated sexting

Many studies of sexting view escalated sexting as a negative consequence of sexting, and not as an act on itself. Therefore, little research addressed the consequences of escalated sexting. However, it is expected that the consequences that are related with sexting, could also be applied to escalated sexting. It is even likely that the consequences are more severe, because the amount of involved teens is increased and the offender(s) can stay anonymous. The consequences of escalated sexting can be divided into three categories: psychological, social and legal consequences.

6.1 Psychological consequences

The loss of control of the sent photograph or video could have several psychological consequences, such as serious embarrassment (Ferguson, 2010; Perkins, Becker, Tehee & Mackelprang, 2014) and a damaged self-esteem (Strassberg et al., 2014).

Looking at cyberbullying studies, various consequences could be added to the list of psychological consequences of escalated sexting. These consequences are: anxiety (Cassidy, Faucher & Jackson, 2013; Smith, 2004; Wachs, 2012) and feelings of insecurity (Smith, 2004). These consequences could lead to having trouble focusing and worse grades at school (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross & Isava, 2008; Smith, Pepler & Rigby, 2004; Swearer, Espalage, Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2012). These psychological afflictions could even result in victims that attempt or commit suicide (Ferguson, 2010; Strassberg et al., 2013).

6.2 Social consequences

Escalated sexting could result in being (cyber)bullied (Chalfen, 2009; Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Gamez-Guadix et al., 2015; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Reyns, Burek, Henson & Fisher, 2013) and having a damaged reputation (Strassberg et al., 2014). Being vulnerable for online sexual predators, potential kidnapping and physical harm (Chalfen, 2009) and being blackmailed (Dir and Cyders, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2013) are potential social consequences of escalated sexting as well. Furthermore, these social consequences could, in combination with the psychological consequences, also result in victims that attempt or commit suicide (Ferguson, 2010; Strassberg et al., 2013).

Based on cyberbullying research, it is expected that having a photograph or video forwarded leads to more social consequences. Merrell et al. (2008), Smith et al. (2004) and Swearer et al (2012) mention a decrease of trust in peers, which could result in less ability to form friendships. The lack of

friendships could result in a greater feeling of loneliness, social withdrawal or peer rejection (Wachs, 2012). Other potential social consequences are staying away from school (Cross, Lester & Barnes, 2015) or engaging in (problematic) drinking (Rospenda, Richman, Wolff & Burke, 2013).

Having a sext being forwarded or placed online can not only have the former, more immediate consequences, but can have consequences for the future of the victim as well. For example, when a college admission agent or employer would see the sexually suggestive (nearly) nude pictures, there is a chance the subject of the picture would not be considered as a candidate (Diliberto & Mattey, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012; Perkins et al., 2014).

6.3 Legal consequences

As discussed in paragraph 3 engaging in (escalated) sexting is occasionally compared with creating, possessing and/or sending child pornography (Bauman, 2015; Chalfen, 2009; Diliberto & Mattey, 2009; Dir & Cyders, 2014; Ferguson, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2012; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2013; Strassberg et al., 2014; Wastler, 2010). Teens that are engaged in escalated sexting, either by making, sending or forwarding the sext, therefore, have the risk to be prosecuted for creating, possessing or sending child pornography.

7. Handling (escalated) sexting

As previously discussed, sexting and escalated sexting could have multiple consequences for the minors involved. Therefore, studying the possible solutions and actions that could be undertaken to minimize (escalated) sexting and its negative impact is of great importance. This knowledge could decrease the occurrence of (escalated) sexting and diminish its negative impact. Previous studies of handling (escalated) sexting, however, are scarce. The studies that do discuss handling (escalated) sexting distinguish two stages of handling: reacting ad hoc and prevention. Reacting ad hoc happens when a situation of (escalated) sexting has already happened and prevention actions occur in order to prevent situations of (escalated) sexting. Because studies of handling (escalated) sexting are scarce, these studies will be complemented by performing a literature review of cyberbullying studies.

7.1 Reacting ad hoc to (escalated) sexting

Ad hoc reactions that are discussed in (escalated) sexting and cyberbullying studies can be divided into three groups that perform the ad hoc reaction: teens, schools and parents.

The majority of (escalated) sexting studies focusing on ad hoc reactions regarding teens discuss the criminal charges sexters and sextees (potentially) face for creating, possessing or sending child pornography (Bauman, 2015; Chalfen, 2009; Diliberto & Mattey, 2009; Dir & Cyders, 2014; Ferguson, 2010; Lenhart, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2014; Wastler, 2010). Some lawmakers use these charges and harsh penalties in order to set an example for youth (Ferguson, 2010). Furthermore, cyberbullying studies state that teens could react in various ways: with passive strategies, active strategies or technical solutions. Passive strategies that are suggested for victims are doing nothing, ignoring the situation and avoiding the website where the cyberbullying or escalated sexting is happening (Cassidy et al., 2013). Victims, however, could also intervene by using an active strategy such as confronting the offender, tell him or her to stop or to tell a teacher or parent about the situation (Cassidy et al., 2013; Slonje et al., 2012). Technical interventions that could be performed by victims are blocking the offender, implementing privacy settings, changing ones email address, username or passwords and saving evidence of the situation (Cassidy et al., 2013; Slonje et al., 2012). Additionally, peer led interventions seem suitable for reacting ad hoc as well. These peer led interventions could be student mentors (Cassidy et al., 2013; Slonje et al., 2012), who listen to the victims' experiences and give advice and could refer them to counsellors for further support (Slonje et al., 2012). Another form of peer led interventions is peer mediation, where a student that is not involved in the situation helps solving the situation (Van Rooijen- Mutsaers & Udo, 2013). Another intervention directed towards students could be in the form of cognitive behavioural therapy, which appears to be a highly effective coping strategy for children who suffer from trauma (Bianchini et al., 2013).

Ad hoc reactions performed by schools are in (escalated) sexting literature only discussed by Diliberto and Matthey (2009), who advice schools to undertake three steps. First, schools should gather a team of specialists and invite administration, the school nurse, the school counsellor, and the school psychologist to join this team. Second, the chain of command should be followed so that the highest level of administration is notified and, last, schools should notify law enforcement. This list of ad hoc reactions performed by school can be supplemented using cyberbullying research. In particular, schools and school personnel could also react by punishing the offender (Cassidy et al., 2013; Huang & Chou, 2013; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2007; Stauffer et al., 2012; Tangen & Campbell, 2010; Van Veen & Mutsaers, 2012; Veenstra, Lindenberg, Huitsing, Sainio & Salmivalli, 2014), or teaching offenders the legal and personal consequences of their negative behaviour (Chibarro, 2007) and striving to increase the offender's empathy and understanding of the situation (Slonje et al., 2012). These strategies are obviously targeted at the offender, the forwarders and/or commentators. School personnel could also focus on the victim, by offering training in increasing assertiveness skills, developing a more positive self-concept, increasing social skills and reducing social isolation, and practicing positive behaviours that reduce the risk of further victimization (Chibarro, 2007). School personnel could also offer both victim and offender counselling and support (Chibarro, 2007). Zidack (2013) mentions three concise steps schools could undertake when intervening in an (escalated) sexting situation: ensure the safety of all students, involve parents and inform law enforcement.

To our knowledge, ad hoc reactions by parents are only discussed in cyberbullying literature. Parents have various options: they can partner with schools in finding appropriate solutions (Cassidy et al., 2013), or may even contact an attorney about suing the (parents of) the offender (Beale & Hall, 2007). Parents could also punish their children when they found out they are involved as offender, forwarder or commentator.

7.2 Preventing (escalated) sexting

Preventative actions that are discussed in (escalated) sexting and cyberbullying studies can be divided into the same three groups as well: teens, schools and parents. However, in prevention studies these groups mostly are target groups of the prevention actions instead of the actors.

Studies of (escalated) sexting suggest several prevention actions that are targeted at teens, such as educating and empowering teens about their control of their own image and body (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009) and educating teens about the possible dangers of (escalated) sexting (Mitchell et al., 2012) and the illegality of the action (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009). This education can be accomplished by educating teens in a personal manner (Mitchell et al., 2012; Wastler, 2010), by a public education campaign (Ferguson, 2010; Karaian, 2013; Van Ouytsel, Van Gool et al., 2014) or releasing an educational movie (Shields Dobson & Ringrose, 2016). According to Mitchell et al. (2012), having a "norms-based" approach, that tries to change the belief of teens that sexually risky behaviour is the group norm, in the education is useful. Pressure from peers appears to be the most mentioned reason by teens to explain their engagement in (escalated) sexting (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Temple et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, Van Gool et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, Walrave et al., 2014), and therefore a "norms-based" approach would be a useful approach. The education about (escalated) sexting could also include discussing Internet safety (Bauman, 2015; Diliberto & Matthey, 2009). Furthermore, cyberbullying studies suggest other inclusions of (escalated) sexting education: an emphasis on fostering empathy and a positive self-esteem (Bhat, 2008; Cassidy et al., 2013) and on positive behaviour of the unintended audience (Cassidy et al., 2013).

Prevention measures that can be implemented in schools are similar in (escalated) sexting studies and cyberbullying studies: creating and/or updating school policies about (escalated) sexting and/or cyberbullying and monitoring whether these policies are complied to (Bauman, 2015; Barnes, Cross, Lester, Hearn & Epstein, 2012; Cassidy et al., 2013; Chibarro, 2007; Kiriakidis en Kavoura, 2010; Li, 2008; Stauffer et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2004; Zidack, 2013). Furthermore, schools should found prosocial school norms that promote helping and encourage civility and courage in the unintended audience (Bauman, 2015; Cassidy et al., 2013). Cyberbullying studies also discuss prevention actions specifically targeted at school personnel. Training about the issue of (escalated) sexting, its impacts, the best way to report the behaviour and to respond to it are suggested

(Chibarro, 2007; Hirschstein, Van Schoiack Edstrom, Frey, Snell & MacKenzie, 2007; Li, 2008; Smith et al., 2004; Stauffer et al., 2012; Willard, 2007b; Zidack, 2013). Educating personnel about the online world could also help preventing (escalated) sexting (Cassidy et al., 2013). Furthermore, several cyberbullying studies suggest or studied whole school programmes, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Cassidy et al., 2013; Van Rooijen-Mutsaers & Udo, 2013), the KiVa programme (Cassidy et al., 2013; Slonje et al., 2012; Van Rooijen-Mutsaers & Udo, 2013), the method of shared concern, community conferencing and the no blame approach (Van Rooijen-Mutsaers & Udo, 2013). When adjusted for (escalated) sexting, these programmes potentially could also aid in the prevention of (escalated) sexting.

Prevention measures suggested in (escalated) sexting studies are monitoring and parental restriction of text messaging (Cassidy et al., 2013; Chibarro, 2007; Lenhart, 2009). Moreover, cyberbullying studies discuss being trained to recognize (escalated) sexting (Chibarro, 2007) and providing an environment where their children feel safe and feel free to talk openly about their experiences online and should model the right behaviour (Cassidy et al., 2013).

7.3 Effectiveness of handling (escalated) sexting

In accordance with the few studies that discuss ad hoc reactions or prevention actions targeted at (escalated) sexting, little research has been conducted to examine the effectiveness of these actions. The few studies that discuss effectiveness just discuss what ad hoc reactions potentially could be effective, but do not measure whether actions are effective. According to Diliberto and Matthey (2009) and Tungate (2014), imposing criminal charges is not always effective. In some cases, criminal charges are “too harsh to fit the crime” (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009) or not effective because the victim made the photograph or video itself, so is the creator of the child pornography and therefore punishable as well (Tungate, 2014). Furthermore, even when the victim wins the case, removing a photograph or video from the internet is extremely difficult (Tungate, 2014). Besides, reacting immediately, consequently and determined is suggested by Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2007) and Van Veen and Mutsaers, (2012) as effective aspects of ad hoc reactions.

The effectiveness of prevention measures against (escalated) sexting and cyberbullying is hardly examined, as mentioned by Scheithauer and Tsorbatzoudis (2016), who state most prevention programmes are still based on practical beliefs instead of scientific evidence. Van Ouytsel et al. (2014), however, conducted one of these scarce studies, and state that the effectiveness of an education programme depends on the susceptibility of the receiver of the programme. Furthermore, only suggestions for effective prevention measures are made. Diliberto and Matthey (2009) suggest that campaigns against sexting should empower teens to resist the influence of other peers and to encourage personal image control in order to become successful. Cyberbullying studies have more extensively examined prevention measures. These studies, however, provide varying results. Some studies show the effectiveness of prevention measures (Merrell et al., 2008; Ttofi & Farrington, 2010), while others show no (Hirschstein et al., 2007) or varying effects (Smith et al., 2004; Swearer et al., 2012). Hirschstein et al. (2007) state too little studies have been conducted to draw absolute conclusions about the effectiveness of prevention programmes and suggest more research should be conducted to be able to draw these conclusions.

Present study

Sexting and especially escalated sexting are receiving increasing media and scientific attention, but are still relatively new fields of research. Studies of these concepts have merely addressed motivations to engage in and consequences of sexting. Many studies show that teens engage in sexting mostly for relational reasons, or because they are coerced to do so. The consequences of sexting and especially escalated sexting could be severe, both for the psychological and physical health of the victim.

Considering all these negative consequences and the increasing concern of parents, educators and lawmakers related to these negative consequences, it is of great importance to study which strategies are suitable for reacting ad hoc to and preventing escalated sexting.

Despite the importance, these studies, however, have barely been conducted. Furthermore, little is known about other aspects of handling escalated sexting such as the involved actors, effectiveness of actions and preferences of victims. By studying all of these aspects, a better insight into reacting to and preventing escalated sexting can be obtained. Therefore, this research shall address the performed and potential strategies by relevant actors to handle escalated sexting. Therefore, the following research question is formulated:

What ad hoc reactions and prevention actions are undertaken and could best be undertaken by relevant actors to handle escalated sexting?

In order to answer the research question, the following sub questions are formulated:

- Who are relevant actors and what is their role in the process of handling escalated sexting?
- What actions are taken or could be undertaken by relevant actors to react ad hoc to escalated sexting?
- What actions are taken or could be undertaken by relevant actors to prevent escalated sexting?
- What influences the effectiveness of ad hoc reactions and prevention actions and what struggles are encountered by actors during the process?

METHOD

In this study the process of handling escalated sexting and all its aspects is examined by using semi structured interviews based on the critical incident technique. In total, 23 actors involved in the process of handling escalated sexting were interviewed.

1. Method and procedure

The critical incident technique focuses on critical events, incidents or factors that had influence on the performance of the participants, on experiences of participants in specific 'critical' situations (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio and Amundson, 2009; Kain, 2004), or on participants' behaviour in specific critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954). Therefore, the critical incident technique was a suitable method for this research, for the research questions focused on uncovering experiences with, and methods of handling and preventing of escalated sexting. Based on the critical incident(s) that were described by the participants, their experiences with and actions to handle the escalated sexting situation could be discussed.

Interviews are a common method of data collection within the critical incident technique (Butterfield et al., 2009) and the organic nature of interviews enabled elaborating on a subject and discovering underlying behaviour and attitudes (Downs & Adrian, 2004; Baarda, De Goede & Teunissen, 2009). Hence, interviews were suitable for discovering experiences and handling tactics used by relevant actors involved in escalated sexting. By conducting a semi structured interview, the participants were not restricted in their answers. Additionally, the researcher had more opportunities to elaborate on the answers of the participants (Baarda et al., 2009).

The research procedure was as follows: first, the goal and research question of the research were explained. Then the participants received information about their participation with the research: they remained anonymous, they always had the possibility to quit and they were not obliged to respond to a question. Then permission to conduct the interview and to record the interview was asked. After the introduction, the interview started. The interviews took place in quiet areas, preferably the offices of the participants, so the interview was not disturbed by people passing by. The interviews lasted from 37 minutes to 1 hour and 34 minutes, with an average length of 1 hour.

2. Research sample

The study was held among 23 Dutch participants who were involved in escalated sexting in different ways. Amongst them were eight men and fifteen women. The average age of the participants was 38. Most of the participants (18 in total) were involved in escalated sexting because of their profession. The other participants were involved in escalated sexting as a parent, victim or classmate of a victim. The participants lived all throughout the Netherlands, but most participants lived or worked in the cities Doetinchem, Leeuwarden, Utrecht or Valkenswaard. Three participants lived in Germany. In table 3, a description of the professions and numbers of participants is depicted.

Participants practicing the professions mentioned in table 3 were included because they all have to deal with escalated sexting, although in a different way. Furthermore, based on different studies, these professions seem to be dealing the most with escalated sexting (Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012; Wagner, 2012). Moreover, because victims, their parents and students are involved in escalated sexting as well, these groups were also selected.

2.1 Sampling methods

The participants were selected by two methods of sampling: stratified sampling and snowball sampling. Following the stratified sampling method (Passmore & Baker, 2005), the research population (everyone involved in handling escalated sexting) was divided into different participant groups. Based on these groups, a maximum of five participants was selected per group. The researcher used social networking sites to select these participants and called schools to ask whether they wanted to participate. Furthermore, the snowball method was used to find other participants in the same or other participant groups. The participants that were already selected were used as start of

the snowballs and were asked whether they knew additional participants that met the same criteria as them (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003; Wayne, 2013). The additional participants should have a similar job or should be partners of the participant in handling escalated sexting, and should have had experiences with escalated sexting.

Table 3

Professions or roles participants

Professions or role	Account
<i>External organisation</i>	
Social worker	4
Community worker	2
Sexologist and psychologist	1
Coordinator of a covering organisation specialised in youth care	1
Police officer	3
<i>School</i>	
Teacher	2
Tutor	1
Student counsellor	1
Student coach	1
Head of school department	1
Head of care department school	1
Classmate victim	1
<i>Victim or relatives</i>	
Parent	2
Victim	2

3. Instrument

The topic list used for the semi structured interviews consisted of topics derived from the literature and topics based on the research questions. The topics that were derived from these main topics are listed below and depicted in appendix I.

3.1 Introductory topics

The interview started with questions to let the participant introduce himself. The introductory topics that were discussed were:

- Demographic information
- General experience with sexting
General experience of participants was added to the topic list, because the researcher was interested to study to what extent professionals, parents and teens in the Netherlands have had experiences with escalated sexting.

3.2 Critical incident

After the introductory topics, the interview started. The interview was based upon the critical incident the participant described, which was asked under the topic 'situation'. Based on this incident, the process of handling escalated sexting was discussed. The following topics were discussed:

- Role participant
It is expected that the role and reason to be involved differs per actor (a.o. Cassidy et al., 2013; Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Slonje et al., 2012). Therefore, this topic is added to the topic list to study whether this distinction could also be made in practice.

- Intervention

Literature showed many intervention measures could be undertaken to react ad hoc to escalated sexting (a.o. Cassidy et al., 2013; Chibarro, 2007; Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Slonje et al., 2012; Stauffer et al., 2012). The aim of the interview was to create an overview of all the actions the participant took to handle the escalated sexting and the experiences with these actions. Therefore, this topic is divided into several subtopics, such as cooperation, struggles and learning process.

3.3 Prevention

Based on literature, it can be stated that handling escalated sexting is not only reacting ad hoc when a situation occurs, but also striving to prevent situations of escalated sexting (a.o. Bauman, 2015; Cassidy et al., 2013; Diliberto & Matthey, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; Stauffer et al., 2012). This topic was divided into several sub categories such as prevention actions and role in prevention to examine all aspects of prevention.

3.4 Additional topics for victims, students and parents

When interviewing a victim, student or parents, some additions were made to the topic list. These participants were asked to describe which other parties were involved in the process and asked to reflect on these parties and their actions. The following topics were added to the topic list:

- Intervention by other parties

Sub topics related to this topic were 'other parties involved', 'actions other involved parties' and 'effectiveness actions other parties'.

- Experience with intervention other parties and preferences

This topic was added to obtain insight into the experiences of victims during the process of handling escalated sexting and their preferences regarding the actions performed in this process. This enabled the researcher to reflect upon the actions discussed by the participants based on the experiences of victims and relatives.

4. Data analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were analyzed by both deductively and inductively coding the transcriptions in the program Atlas.ti. The codes were based on the topics on the topic list described in paragraph 3, but whenever it was not possible to code a piece of text with the prevailing codes, a new code was created. Furthermore, to be able to identify all aspects of an ad hoc reaction and prevention action, a specific code for each ad hoc reaction or prevention action was created. Each time a participant discussed an aspect of a specific action (e.g. the effectiveness of expelling the offender), this discussion was coded with the related code (e.g. 'effectiveness') and the action-specific code (e.g. 'expelling the offenders'). This specific code for each particular ad hoc reaction or prevention action enabled the researcher to search for all aspects (disadvantages, advantages, effectiveness and struggles) related to a certain action after the coding. The coding scheme is included in appendix II.

To preserve the reliability of the research, two coders independently coded around ten per cent of all data. Based on their analyses, the Cohen's kappa was calculated. Reaching a Cohen's kappa of at least 0.7 was strived for. The calculated kappa of 0.81, therefore, was more than sufficient.

RESULTS

The aim of this study was to identify the various actors involved in the process of handling escalated sexting and the actions they perform during this process. Furthermore, examining the effectiveness of these actions was an aim of this study as well. This chapter starts with a description of the situations of escalated sexting described by the participants. This paragraph creates the context that is needed to understand which actors are involved and what actions they perform. Hereafter, the process of handling escalated sexting is described, in which a distinction between two stages is made: reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting and the prevention of escalated sexting. The ad hoc reactions take place when the situation of escalated sexting already happened, while the preventative actions are undertaken to avoid escalated sexting. Per stage the involved actors and performed actions are examined. The paragraph about ad hoc reactions to escalated sexting is complemented by a description of the struggles encountered by the actors during the process.

1. Situations of escalated sexting

Every interview focused on one critical incident of escalated sexting the participants experienced. These experiences can be distinguished in multiple categories, divided into several sub categories (depicted in table 4). Some of the experiences of escalated sexting that the participants described consisted of multiple sub categories of situations. One participant, for example, described a situation in which a boy was forced to forward a photograph of his girlfriend, which was spread via social media. The teens who forced the boy to forward the photograph also forced the girl to send them more photographs. Three participants described such compiled situations of escalated sexting. Every sub category mentioned in an interview was counted as one experience with that category. That means that one interview could consist of multiple situation descriptions. Nonetheless, multiple participants explained the same situation (for example a victim and her social worker). These situations are counted as one situation, instead of multiple. Hence these considerations, the total of table 4 does not equal the number of participants.

Table 4

Situation descriptions escalated sexting

Situation description	Amount of mentions
Boyfriend forwards photograph or video	6
Boyfriend forwards photograph or video for fun	3
Boyfriend is forced by others to forward photograph or video	2
Boyfriends cell phone is snatched and used to forward photographs or videos	1
Being seduced by someone who forwards the photograph or video	5
Being seduced by a boy	3
Being seduced by friends who pretend to be a love interest	1
Being seduced by an adult	1
Structurally collecting and spreading photographs and videos via social media	2
Being asked to send photograph or video by boys who make a game out of it	1
Being forced to do sexual actions, which is videotaped and forwarded	1
Sending own picture to a lot of people	1
Being blackmailed or forced to perform undesired actions as a result of having a photograph or video being forwarded	3
Sexual actions	1
Pay money	1
Send more photographs or videos	1
Other (situation not specified by participant)	2

2. Reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting

In this paragraph the intervention stage based on ad hoc reactions to escalated sexting are described by reviewing the involved actors and potential actors, the actions and potential actions, the preferences of (the parents of) the victim and, lastly, struggles of actors while handling escalated sexting.

2.1 Actors reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting

In the process of reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting, multiple actors are involved. These actors all fulfil their own role in the process, and often multiple actors are involved in one situation. Each profession and corresponding perspective of the different actors adds a different dimension to the handling process, which can make cooperation an effective way of reacting. In general, four roles can be distinguished: providing care for the victim, punishing the offender(s) (potentially by law enforcement) and coordination. Lastly, the victim, offender(s) and relatives have a distinctive role in the process of reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting. A visual overview of the involved actors and their roles is depicted in figure 1.

The listing of the different actors below is a listing of all actors that are at least once mentioned in a situation description. How many and which actors are involved in a specific situation, however, differs per situation and implies that not all actors are always involved in a situation of escalated sexting.

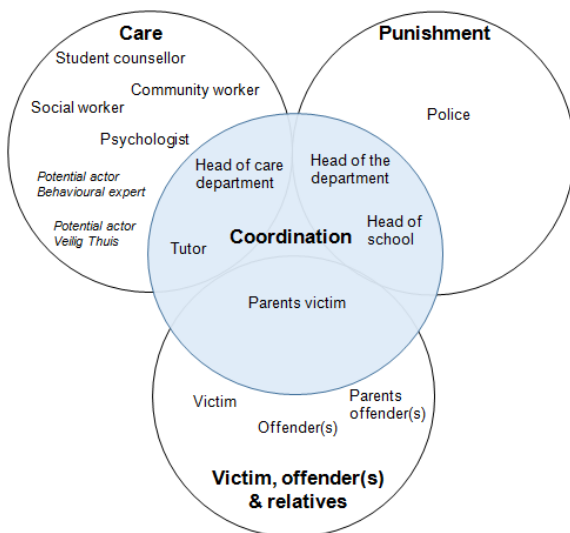


Figure 1. Actors and potential actors in handling escalated sexting

Actors involved in providing care for victim

Actors who fulfil the role of providing care for the victim are the student counsellor, community worker, social worker and psychologist. Furthermore, the tutor and head of care department also play this role. These actors are employed at school or at an external organisation.

The *student counsellor* mostly has the role of conversation partner of the victim at school and offers the victim an opportunity to talk freely about the situation, feelings and thoughts. The *head of the care department* at school also has a role of conversation partner of the victim. However, this actor is in charge of the whole 'care process' at school as well, and thus is the conversation partner of multiple colleagues. Tutors or teachers, for example, request help or ask the head of the care department to be a sparring partner for them. The *tutor* is also a care providing actor and mostly is longer involved in the process of handling sexting, because the tutor cares for the victim long after the incident as well. Having conversations with or without the attendance of parents, the tutor checks upon the wellbeing of the victim.

A care provider from an external organization is the *social worker*, who is involved in the process when the care providers at school cannot handle the situation anymore, or when (the family of) the victim specifically asks to be redirected to a social worker. Some social workers are specialized in family contexts. These social workers observe the family situation and have an advising role towards parents. This role can also be fulfilled by a *community worker*, who works in a specific community and therefore has a close view on the victim and its family. When the victim suffers from a trauma after the incident, a *psychologist* can take care of the dealing with the trauma.

Actors involved in punishing the offender(s) or imposing law enforcement

Actors with the role of punishing the offender(s) or imposing law enforcement are the police, head of department and head of school. These actors are also employed at school or an external organisation. The most important actor fulfilling this role is the *police*, which investigates the situation and strives to arrest the offender(s). Furthermore, because of its role as law enforcer, other actors include the police in their actions. The attendance of the police sends the message that the situation is severe and, frequently, illegal. However, this role can also be perceived as negative: requesting help from the police is a big step because it immediately sounds severe.

Actors at school concerned with punishing the offender(s) are the *head of department of the school* and the *head of school*. These actors are mostly involved in the process when the situation exceeds a classroom or even a school and are concerned with both punishing the offender(s), but also keeping an eye on the reputation of the school. However, occasionally the head of department or head of school is involved in the process because they have a broader perspective and this can help to solve the situation.

Actors involved in coordination

The coordination of actions and actors at school is frequently in the hands of the *head of the care department*, the *head of the department* or the *head of school*. Furthermore, the *tutor* has a leading role in the coordination of all actions as well, often being the messenger for both school and the victim and its parents. Outside school, the *parents of the victim* have to (and do) pick up this role.

Actors with the role of victim, offender(s) or relative

The victim, offender(s) and their parents have a distinctive role in the process of handling escalated sexting. This group of actors does not perform many actions, but are more the target group of the actions. However, despite being the target of the actions, the *victim* and *its parents* are given a leading role in the process by the other actors, because these actors consult the victim and its parents before any actions are performed. *Offenders* and their *parents* mostly have a minor role, and frequently are just the target of most actions.

2.1.1 Potential actors

Besides the actors that are already involved in the process and the roles they play, the participants mentioned two other actors they would like to be involved as well. These are behavioural experts and Veilig Thuis. A *behavioural expert* could assist the care providing actors to gain more insight in the causes for the students' behaviour. Additionally, the behavioural expert could help as a sparring partner. The organisation *Veilig Thuis* is also mentioned by participants to be a potential actor. This organisation is specialized in domestic violence and child abuse. If a specific situation for a victim or its relatives is unsafe, the organization can assist the social or community workers in providing care for the victim and its family.

2.2 Actions: the seven phases of reacting to escalated sexting

To react ad hoc to escalated sexting, various actions can be and are performed. From our study it appeared these actions can be divided into seven distinctive phases, which are depicted in figure 2 and table 5. The seven phases appear to occur in a chronological and linear order. This assumption, however, can be questioned because several aspects of the model are not chronological or linear. For example, not every participant executed actions of every phase and several participants executed these actions in a different order than depicted in the model. Moreover, there is a possibility of

feedback in the phases that is not depicted. Despite these arguments, most participants stated they followed a process alike this model, which was the base of this model.

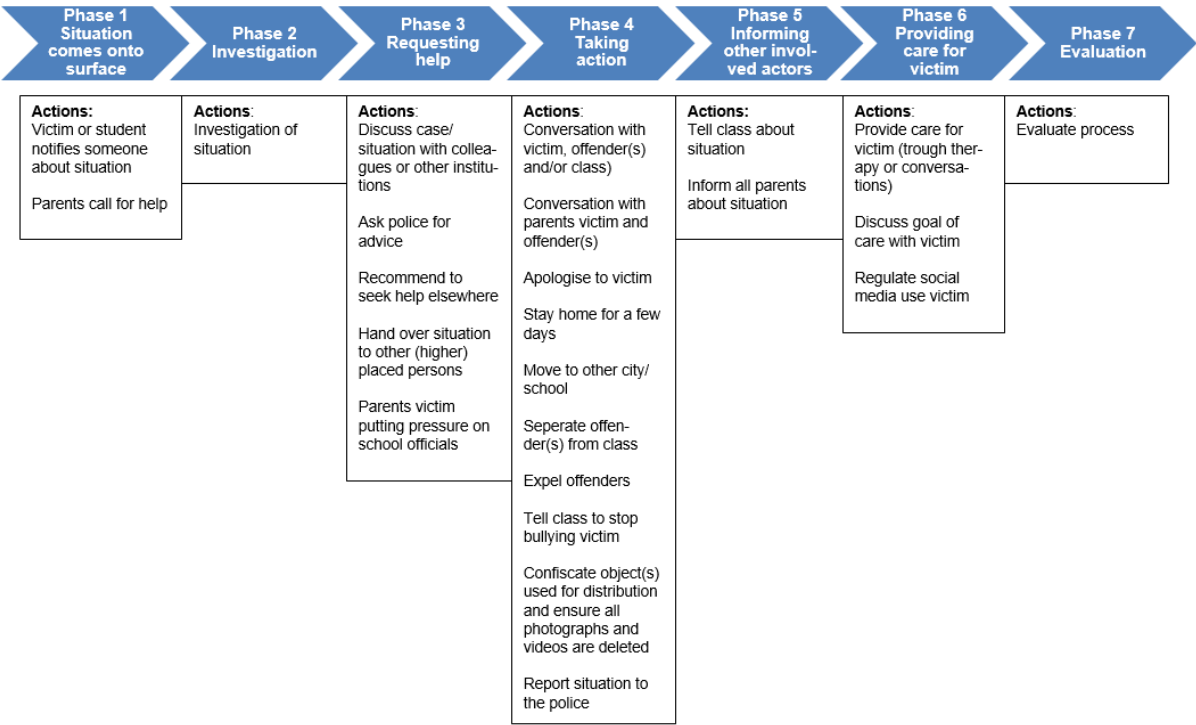


Figure 2. The seven phases model of reacting to escalated sexting

Each phase consist of one or multiple actions that are aimed at solving a specific part of the situation. Most of the ad hoc reactions are part of phase 4 ‘taking action’. These actions, however, also have the most remarks that should be taken into account while performing the actions. Nevertheless, each individual action in the process has its advantages and disadvantages (all depicted in table 5) that should be taken into account before or during the process, for according to the participants in this study, the undertaken actions differ in effectiveness.

With all advantages and disadvantages in mind, an effective reaction to a situation of escalated sexting could consist of various different combinations of actions belonging to the different phases. This combination depends on the preferences of the victim and the characteristics and background of the actor, such as his or her knowledge about and experience with escalated sexting and access to necessary means. Contextual factors of the situation also influence the choice for actions, such as severity of the situation and amount of involved students. Therefore, there is no one sole perfect reaction to escalated sexting, but many potential combinations of actions stemming from (all) different phases that are potentially effective.

Next to the description of the actions that are undertaken in order to react ad hoc to escalated sexting, the participants described potential actions as well. These potential actions were not performed in the process, but could have been executed to ensure a better result in the process. The potential actions are depicted in table 5 as well. Below table 5, a summary of the table will be provided.

Table 5

Phases and actions in process handling escalated sexting

Phases and actions	Action meant to or used for	Advantage of action	Disadvantage of action	Effectiveness of action	Important aspects of action
Phase 1 Situation comes onto surface					
Action: Victim or student notifies someone about situation	Victim wants situation to be solved and notifies someone itself. Victim confronted by school or parents about situation. Victim decides to explain situation.		Due to reluctance or shame, it can take a while before victim or student decides to notify someone about the situation.	Action is effective. After notification, most actors undertake one or multiple actions to solve the situation, despite their shock or emotions regarding the situation.	The victim or student should notify someone as soon as possible. The victim or student should feel safe to talk about the situation.
Action: Parents call for help	Actor hopes that notification will lead to actions to solve the situation. Parents do not know what to do anymore and need assistance in reacting to the situation. Actors that are asked for help do not know about situation yet.			Action is effective. As a result of the call for help, other actors provide help and start a new process of reacting to the situation.	Take the situation serious.
Phase 2 Investigation					
Action: Investigation of situation through conversations with victim, offender(s), and/or class	To gather as much information as possible about the situation. Answer the questions who, what, when, where and how? Gather evidence that could be used in trial.	Action provides opportunity to uncover underlying reasons for engaging in sexting, but also to uncover more about situation victim. This provides the opportunity to help the victim with more than just the sexting situation.	Both offender and victim could be reluctant to tell the truth or to explain their own role in the situation. This hinders the process of information gathering.	Action is only effective when all involved teens give an honest explanation of the situation.	Action should be executed on a structural, fair manner. Further actions based on the information gathering phase should only be based on facts that are discovered, not on assumptions or rumours.
Phase 3 Requesting help					
Action: Discuss case/situation with colleagues or other organisations	To gather more information in general, or to gather more specialised information.	For everybody has his or her own speciality, this action could lead to new perspectives on the situation. Working together can increase the amount of impact actors have on the situation and their reach among involved parties.		Action is effective when the actor needs more information or specialised information about escalated sexting.	
Action: Ask police for advice	To obtain more information about the legal aspects of the situation.	Information or advice of the police is seen as reliable. The police has knowledge of		Action is effective when there is a need for legal information or advice.	

Phases and actions	Action meant to or used for	Advantage of action	Disadvantage of action	Effectiveness of action	Important aspects of action
	To receive advice about potential (legal) actions.	other situations in the city or neighbourhood. Asking advice from a reliable actor could function as a back-up for you own actions.			
Action: Recommend to seek help elsewhere	Other person or organisation has more experience with or knowledge of similar situations than actor that has been asked to help in the first place.	Other person or organisation could have a better contribution to process of reacting to situation.		Action is effective when organisation or other person has more experience with or knowledge of escalated sexting.	
Action: Hand over situation to other (higher placed) person	Other person has more experience with or knowledge of similar situations or is in a better position to solve the situation.	The problem could be solved in a more adequate manner, for a more experienced or knowledgeable person is involved.	Getting too many actors involved will not help solving the situation.	Action is very effective when the situation is handed to the right person.	Do not get too many actors involved.
	First actor involved in situation could not handle it on his or her own. Handing over situation releases pressure for him or her.	A person with a better (higher) position has more influence to reach a goal.			
Action: Parents victim put pressure on school officials to take action	Going to your manager is protocol at many schools. School official was first reluctant to undertake any actions.	School gave in and undertook actions. School officials can reach more students than the parents of the victim.		Action is effective. Due to action, school undertook multiple actions.	
Phase 4: Taking action					
Target: victim					
Action: Conversation with victim	To discuss potential actions and the preferences of the victim regarding these actions.	Insight in wishes and feelings victim.			Preferences victim are leading in the rest of the process and this action can help in getting insight in these preferences.
Action: Apologize to victim	To check the wellbeing of the victim. To confront offender(s) with victim, as a sorts of punishment. Offenders could be forced to do so by a school official or	Victim gets opportunity to release some stress and tell story. The action works both ways: punishment for offender(s) and healing for victim.	Victim is not always susceptible for apologies, only wishes that situation ends.	Action is effective on long run. At the short run, victim is not interested in apologies but in the long run this could be effective for the healing process of the victim.	

Phases and actions	Action meant to or used for	Advantage of action	Disadvantage of action	Effectiveness of action	Important aspects of action
Action: Stay home for a few days	parent or offender genuinely wants to apologise for his behaviour. Soothing for victim. Victim is too ashamed to go to school.	Soothes victim.	The longer the victim stays home, the more difficult it is to return to school.	Action is effective, but the victim should not stay home for too long.	
Action: Move to other city/school	To protect victim from bullying. To make a fresh start.	This way victim can go to school again.	Some schools have waiting lists. Some situations are also known at other schools. Beginning all over at a new school is difficult as well.	Action is effective if situation is not known at other school.	Most important thing is that victim picks up normal life (as much as possible). Actors should think carefully whether moving to another city or school is the true solution for the problem.
Target: offender(s) Action: Conversation with offender(s)	To stop their actions. To create awareness among the offender(s) that they made a mistake and have committed a crime.	Message of illegality and child pornography scares offenders, because most offenders do not realize they committed a crime.	Offenders can deny that they have done it and, therefore, not listen to message.	The action is fairly effective. If the offenders are susceptible for the message, it scares the offenders when they find out they helped spreading child pornography. Therefore, after this conversation the spreading of the photographs or videos stops.	
Action: Separate offender(s) from class	To create safe feeling for victim in class.	Soothing for victim and calms atmosphere in class.		Action is effective and twofold, provides quietness in class and punishes offender(s).	
Action: Expel offender(s)	To punish offender(s). To punish offender(s). To restore calmness at school.	Gives some rest at school and gives the actors some time to think about their next actions.		Action is effective.	
<i>Potential action: Using law enforcement on offender(s)</i>	<i>To punish offender(s).</i>	<i>Possibility to influence (social) development of offender to prevent similar situations.</i> <i>Sends message to offender(s) that what they did was wrong.</i>	<i>Effectivity of action differs per offender.</i> <i>Law enforcement is not equal to crime: most teens only engage in sexting as means of sexual experimentation. Moreover, a sexual crime will always be visible on your criminal record, even as</i>	<i>Action could be effective, although the disadvantages and advantages should be both thoroughly considered before using law enforcement.</i>	

Phases and actions	Action meant to or used for	Advantage of action	Disadvantage of action	Effectiveness of action	Important aspects of action
			<i>minor.</i>		
			<i>Gathering enough evidence is difficult.</i>		
Target: victim and offender(s)					
<i>Potential action: Mediate between victim and offender(s)</i>	<i>To start a conversation between victim and offender(s).</i>	<i>Face to face interaction makes message victim or apologies offender(s) more effective.</i>	<i>Action is only possible when situation is cooled down and both actors are capable of and willing to having conversation.</i>		
Target: class or other teens					
Action: Conversation with class	To explain situation and to prevent the spreading of rumours. To create awareness of seriousness and illegality of situation in order to make teens stop spreading more photographs or videos. To create a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom.	The awareness of the seriousness and illegality of the situation scares the students, this results in most of them erasing all photographs and videos almost immediately.	It is difficult to reach all students, some students are not susceptible for message.	Action is effective. The students get more understanding of the (seriousness of) situation and stop spreading (other) photographs and/or videos.	Do not make the situation bigger than it is. Keep in mind preferences of victim before undertaking this action.
Action: Tell class or specific students to stop bullying victim	Out of empathy for the victim, the goal is to stop the bullying.		Some students are not susceptible for the message and can react by starting to bully the actor.	Action is effective, but only if the bullies are susceptible for the message.	
Action: Confiscate object(s) used for distribution	To ensure that spreading of photographs or videos stops. To create awareness among teens that they have cooperated with something illegal.	Students get scared, this can increase their awareness.	Spreading of photographs and videos can only be partly dealt with. Not every cell phone can be checked.	Action is fairly effective. Among involved students the spreading stops. However, the spreading of photographs and videos can only be partly dealt with.	Focus on leaders of the group. When they are confronted and scared, others will follow them and will delete photographs and/or videos.
Target: parents					
Action: Conversation with parents victim	To inform parents and gather information about situation at home. To ensure that parents victim also provide support in process of handling situation To contact parents is part of most protocols.	Conversation provides actors also a possibility to give parents tips about how to deal with the situation. Parents have possibility to influence and to decide what actions are undertaken.	Some parents do not want other actors to be involved and react negatively to the conversation. Some victims do not want their parents to know about situation and oppose this action.	Action is often effective, however sometimes negative reactions from parents could hinder effectivity of action.	This is an important action. To increase impact of other actions, support from the parents is important. Not all victims want their parents to be involved, try to make them realise the importance of this step.
Action: Conversation with	To inform parents about	Is even more shameful for	Some parents react negatively	Action is effective and helps	

Phases and actions	Action meant to or used for	Advantage of action	Disadvantage of action	Effectiveness of action	Important aspects of action
parents offender(s)	situation and to involve them in process. To soothe situation if parents are angry.	offender, which can increase impact of action.	to conversation.	soothe the situation.	
Target: police Action: Report situation to the police (or give a testimony)	The situation is escalating: the situation involves many other victims (sometimes even from multiple schools). Reporting situation to the police is protocol at several schools. The illegality of escalated sexting obliges actors to file a report at the police.	After a conviction, the offender(s) will be punished for their actions.	Going to police is an enormous step, this can result in reluctance of victim to file a report. Besides, when filing a report, the victim has to relive the whole situation. After reporting situation to the police, police can have great difficulties gathering all evidence that is needed for a lawsuit.	The action could be effective, although the actors should seriously consider the advantages and disadvantages before performing this action.	As victim, gather as much evidence as you can: save screenshots and other evidence. Realise that filing a report is a serious thing and can damage a (falsely accused) offender badly.
Phase 5: Informing other involved actors					
Action: Tell class about situation	To explain situation. To raise awareness among class of illegality of the situation.	Class can deliver message of conversation 'through the grapevine' across entire school.	Conversation could be embarrassing for victim. Rumours can spread easily after this conversation.	The action could be effective in creating awareness among the class and the school, however, it should not be done without the permission of the victim. The effectivity of the action is increased when performed by an actor with authority.	First ask permission of victim. An actor with authority will have a positive effect on the impact of the message.
Action: Inform all parents about situation	To inform all parents about the situation and to activate parents to have conversations with their children about the situation and sexting in general. To send a signal that school is handling this actively, and takes its responsibility to solve the situation.	Action provides possibility to give a statement of the schools perspective about situation and sexting in general.	This action makes a big deal of the situation and can blow the situation out of proportion.	Action could be effective, however before undertaking this action, the disadvantages of the action should be seriously considered.	Do not blow situation out of proportion.
<i>Potential action: Inform all colleagues</i>	<i>To ensure all colleagues are aware of situation.</i>	<i>More actors to observe the spreading of the photographs.</i>	<i>Draws more attention on victim, victim is placed in an even bigger spotlight.</i> <i>Could blow situation out of proportion.</i>	<i>Action could be effective, because all colleagues can aid in the process, however, the disadvantages should also be seriously considered.</i>	

Phases and actions	Action meant to or used for	Advantage of action	Disadvantage of action	Effectiveness of action	Important aspects of action
Phase 6: Providing care for victim					
Action: Provide care for victim (through therapy or conversations)	<p>To provide support and (psychological) aid for victim and to aid victim to deal with the trauma.</p> <p>To uncover underlying reasons why victim was involved in escalated sexting.</p> <p>To increase self-confidence of victim.</p> <p>To keep an eye on victim after the incident.</p>	<p>The victim gets feeling that he/she does not have to solve the situation on its own.</p> <p>Actors can help the victim process the situation.</p>	<p>Multiple social workers have a long waiting time.</p> <p>Before being able to provide care, permission of the victim is needed. With no permission, no care can be provided.</p>	<p>Effectivity depends on the preferences, susceptibility and willingness victim.</p>	<p>Keep an objective point of view and be open minded and not judgemental and give victim a feeling of support.</p> <p>Keep an systemic point of view.</p> <p>Let victim decide what he or she wants.</p> <p>Be aware of relapse in behaviour.</p>
Action: Discuss goal of care with victim	<p>To discuss what victim and actor want to achieve during the process.</p>	<p>Gives victim feeling of control in process and make it more committed to reach the goals.</p>		<p>Action is effective, for victim feels in control and will be committed to reach goals.</p>	
Action: Regulate social media use victim	<p>To keep an eye on social media usage victim and to prevent a similar situation.</p>	<p>Care fits the preferences and needs of victim.</p> <p>Parents have opportunity to intervene when it goes wrong again.</p>	<p>Victim could react negatively and become angry.</p>	<p>Action could be effective, but cooperation of victim is essential.</p>	
Phase 7: Evaluation					
Action: Evaluate process	<p>Evaluate the process and its effectiveness.</p>	<p>Could be confirmation of positive actions or could provide suggestions for future actions.</p>	<p>Costs extra time.</p> <p>Every situation is different, so reacting to other situations is also different.</p> <p>Actors do not know the protocol by heart, do not know the necessary steps.</p> <p>Every specific situation needs a specific reaction.</p>	<p>Action is effective, for it provides insight in possible improvements, but also a confirmation of actions that are already adequate.</p> <p>A protocol is not effective for every situation, because every situation is different. However, a protocol could be used by actors as back-up when they are uncertain about certain actions</p>	<p>Evaluate also midway the process, for it gives the opportunity to adjust actions.</p>
<i>Potential action: Create protocol for escalated sexting situations</i>	<p><i>Reacting to every escalated sexting situation in a similar and structural manner.</i></p>	<p><i>Provides information about who to contact for what.</i></p>			

Phase 1 Situation comes onto surface

In this first phase the victim (or another student) notifies a parent, school official or friend about the situation. Parents can call for help as well, if they know about the situation but do not know what they have to do. The main goal of these two actions is to activate other actors to start the process of problem solving. Reluctance or shame of the victim or student, however, can lead to their indecisiveness of notifying someone. This disadvantage influences the effectiveness of the actions to some extent. However, the actions are classified as effective, because after this phase, most notified actors performed actions to solve the situation.

Phase 2 Investigation

In this phase, the actors have conversations with all involved parties (victim, offender and classmates) to gather information and to gain an understanding of the situation. An advantage of this thorough gathering of information is that the actors can receive more information about the wellbeing of the victim as well, through which the actors can help the victim with more than just the escalated sexting situation. However, a disadvantage of this action is that offenders and victims sometimes are reluctant to tell the truth, which hinders the information gathering. Therefore, the effectiveness of this action is affected by the willingness of victims and offenders to cooperate and to tell everything they know.

Phase 3 Requesting help

After the actors have been notified and obtained an understanding of the situation, some actors might think they cannot handle the situation on their own. These actors can undertake multiple actions with varying degrees of intensity, from discussing the case with colleagues to handing the situation over to other (higher placed) persons. The main goals of these actions are gathering more information about how to react to the situation or being able to intervene better because other (higher) placed actors have more experience with or knowledge of escalated sexting. The advantages of the actions in this phase are that everybody has its own specialty, so the actions could lead to new perspectives and a better method of working. Furthermore, working together can lead to a bigger impact of the performed actions. However, actors should be aware for not involving too many others into the situation, for then a diffusion of responsibility or indecisiveness can occur. When the right actors are involved, the actions in this phase can be very effective.

Phase 4 Taking action

In this phase, the actual actions performed to solve the situation are performed. These actions can be divided into six groups based on their target group: the victim, the offender(s), both victim and offender(s) the class or other teens, parents and the police.

Actions targeted at the victim are mostly aimed at checking the wellbeing of the victim, apologising to the victim or taking away the victim from school for a while or permanently. Because the victim is most affected by the situation, actions directed at the victim are extremely important. Advantages of these actions are getting insight into the wishes and feelings of the victim and soothing the victim. However, disadvantages are that not every victim is always susceptible for receiving apologies and that when a victim stays home for a while, the return to school could be difficult. When these disadvantages are taken into account, these actions, however, can be effective according to the participants.

Actions targeted at the offender(s) are aimed at stopping their behaviour or punishing them (by separating the offender(s) from the class or expulsion). The biggest advantages of these actions are soothing the victim and class. Furthermore, some offender(s) are not aware of the negative consequences their behaviour caused and a conversation or punishment can raise this awareness. A disadvantage is that when the offenders are not susceptible for the message, the effectiveness of the actions is limited. However, participants perceived these actions mostly as effective. A potential action that is mentioned by some participants is using law enforcement on offender(s). With this action, the offenders are prosecuted and punished for their involvement in the situation. This action sends a strong message to other teens: escalated sexting is illegal and involved teens will be punished. However, some participants questioned whether the consequence of the action (receiving a criminal

record that can influence a future job search) is equal to the actions of the offender. Therefore, actors are strongly urged to think about the advantages and disadvantages thoroughly before undertaking the action.

Participants mentioned a potential action that encompasses a new category of actions, for it is targeted at both victim and offender(s): mediate between victim and offender. The goal of this potential action would be to start a conversation between victim and offender(s). This mediation could create a bigger impact of the message of the victim and/or the apologies of the offender(s). However, the action is only possible when the situation is cooled down and both actors are willing and capable of having the conversation.

Other actions in phase four are targeted at the class of the victim and/or offender(s) and other teens. These actions are aimed at explaining the situation, raising awareness of the severity of the situation or ending the spreading of the photographs or videos. Main advantage of the actions is that most students are not aware of the illegality of their actions and, therefore, get scared and stop with the spreading immediately. However, a serious disadvantage of all actions in this phase is that not all teens will be susceptible for the message and therefore the impact of this message will be decreased. The effectiveness of the actions therefore is dependent on the susceptibility of the targeted persons.

Parents are a target group in this phase as well and are targeted with two actions that are aimed at informing them about the situation and involving them in the process of reacting to the situation. Advantages of these actions are the possibility to provide parents with tips how to deal with the situation and the possibility for parents to decide what actions should be undertaken. However, disadvantages are the fact that some parents react negatively because they do not want other actors to be involved, or dissatisfied victims because they do not want their parents to be involved. Despite the disadvantages, the actions appear to be effective.

One action in phase four is targeted at the police and is aimed at reporting the situation to the police. The goal of this action is to convict the offender. An advantage of the action is that after a conviction the offender gets punished for his actions, which sends a clear message to other teens about the illegality of escalated sexting. Disadvantages of reporting the situation to the police is that it is a major step for the victim and is often not taken and that reporting to the police does not directly leads to a conviction of the offender(s), because proving the crime appears to be difficult. The effectiveness of the situation, therefore, is difficult to determine.

Phase 5 Informing other involved actors

In this phase, other involved actors such as the classmates of the victim and/or offender(s) and parents are informed. Main goals of the two actions in this phase are explaining the situation, raising awareness about the severity of the situation and sending a signal that the school is handling the situation actively. The possibility of the spreading of the message through the grapevine and the opportunity to give a statement about the situation and escalated sexting in general are viewed as advantages. However, by involving more actors the situation can get blown out of proportion, which is aggravating for the victim and hinders the process of solving the situation. Therefore, the effectiveness of these actions differs per situation and actors should always consider the advantages and disadvantages before performing one of these actions.

Participants also mentioned the possibility of informing all colleagues of the situation. This potential action could ensure the awareness of all colleagues of the situation, so these colleagues could keep an eye on the victim and offender(s) as well. However, involving even more actors could blow the situation out of proportion, which could be hindering for the process of reacting ad hoc.

Phase 6 Providing care for the victim

This phase consists of multiple actions that are aimed at providing support for the victim, increasing the (psychological) wellbeing of the victim or preventing a similar situation. Because of these actions, the victim does not feel alone anymore and can work on its wellbeing, and actors can intervene when something goes wrong again. However, before the process starts the victim has to give its permission. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the actions depends on the susceptibility of the victim to the care. Moreover, actors should be aware of potential relapses in behaviour or psychological wellbeing.

Phase 7 Evaluation

The sole action in this last phase is evaluating the process, with the aim to seek the advantages and disadvantages of the method of working that is used to react to the escalated sexting situation. This action could lead to a better insight into what actions are useful for a potential next situation and which actions should be improved. Disadvantages of the action are that it takes a lot of time and does not guarantee a subsequent situation will be solved perfectly, for every situation is different and calls for different intervention actions. Despite the disadvantages, evaluating the process is highly recommended by the participants and appears to have value for the process of reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting situations.

Another action mentioned in this phase is the potential action of creating protocol for escalated sexting situations. This protocol could be based on the evaluation after one or more incidents of escalated sexting. The protocol could ensure handling future situations of escalated sexting in a similar and structural manner. However, it appeared that some schools already had such a protocol, but that no participant on those schools could recall the contents of the protocol. Therefore, if actors would implement such a protocol, they should consider these disadvantages.

2.3 Struggles during the process of handling escalated sexting

The process of handling escalated sexting is not a linear, clear and problem free process. Every actor encounters difficulties that have to be overcome. These difficulties influence the effectiveness of the process of reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting. This is an important aspect of the process of reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting, and actors that are involved in the process or will be involved someday should take these struggles into account, perhaps as a somewhat reassuring fact. Struggles related to specific actions are listed in table 5 as disadvantages of the action. Struggles regarding the process of handling escalated sexting in general are discussed in this paragraph.

Struggles regarding the character of escalated sexting

One of the most mentioned difficulties in the process of handling escalated sexting is the fact that escalated sexting cannot completely be prevented and handled and still is a new and unfamiliar phenomenon. Many participants stated that the youth adopts new technologies faster than adults; hence adults are always a step behind. Participant 1 (police officer) describes his frustration:

“You just know that you are always a step behind. You know that deleting such an [social media] account is not effective, for in a few minutes, a new account is created. And because of this, we are always a step behind.”

Struggles regarding responsibility among the different actors

The debate of whose responsibility it is to intervene in escalated sexting situations also causes some frustration among the participants. Because of the diffusion of responsibility, no one takes the lead in the process, which causes frustration, especially among parents. Furthermore, actors still search for their optimal role in the process of handling escalated sexting.

Multiple participants are frustrated by the length and bureaucracy of the process as well. All participants are eager to handle escalated sexting situations, but have to wait for decisions of higher placed officials. Besides, professionals both at schools and external organisations also encounter the struggle that escalated sexting is yet another phenomenon that has to be dealt with and is often not yet prioritized at schools. Participant 3 (social worker) explains:

“We thought we gave all schools a beautiful present with our project, but they did not really appreciate it. Everyone was like ‘oh no, we are already very busy, we did not ask for this’. It actually made me feel very disappointed.”

The diffusion of responsibility and indecisiveness of managers are a struggle for parents of the victim as well, as participant 22 (parent of victim) explains:

“If you ask me what was the biggest dissatisfaction in this process, then I would say that the police is eager to solve the problems, but cannot reach this goal because they cannot or may not do anything.”

Struggles regarding situations that do not come onto the surface

Other participants mention the difficulty that many situations of escalated sexting do not reach the actors. On the one hand, because victims are afraid to talk about it or are threatened not to tell anything. On the other hand, because organisations or schools try to keep the situations quiet. Actors that are eager to handle escalated sexting, therefore, are hindered to do their work and this creates a certain amount of frustration. The victims interviewed in this study strived to explain why it took a while before their situations came onto the surface:

“I did not want to go to a student counsellor myself, at that time I did not dare to do that. I was afraid people would start talking about that.” (participant 6, victim).

Participant 23 (victim) added:

“My first reaction when I heard my friend told my parents about the situation was anger. I did not want my parents to find out. But in the end, I am very grateful to her. If she hadn’t told my parents, no one would and then it would still be going on. [...] [However] it was very difficult to tell my parents about it, I made up hundreds of lies to tell them a nicer story. I know it was stupid, however, you don’t want yourself to look bad. [...] At that moment, so many things crossed my mind, I couldn’t think straight anymore.”

These statements illustrate the ambiguous feeling of both victims about the step of notifying parents or school officials about the escalated sexting they were a victim of. This ambiguous feeling could be an explanation of why many situations do not come onto the surface, or only after a long period.

Struggles regarding the intensity of escalated sexting

Other participants mention that the intensity of several cases of escalated sexting they experienced made it difficult for them to spate their job from their own private life:

“What I realized is that after a while you are so busy with it in your mind, that even when you are at home, you think about it.” (participant 9, social worker)

3. Prevention of escalated sexting

This paragraph will discuss an equal important part of the process of handling escalated sexting: the preventative stage. The prevention of escalated sexting will be discussed based on the involved actors, the potential actors, the prevention actions and the potential prevention actions.

3.1 Actors preventing escalated sexting

In the process of preventing escalated sexting multiple actors are involved. These actors all fulfil their own role in the process, but these roles can be subsumed in three general roles: an educative role, a signalling role and a facilitative role. Actors that are involved in the prevention of escalated sexting are described below and a visual overview of the involved actors and their roles is depicted in figure 3.

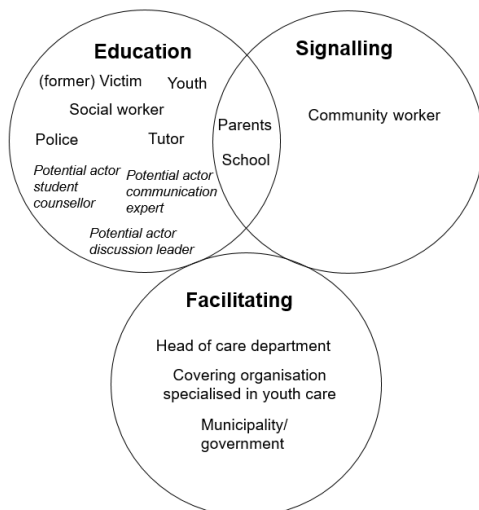


Figure 3. Actors and potential actors in preventing escalated sexting

Prevention actors involved in educating about escalated sexting

Prevention actors with the role of education about escalated sexting are: parents, school in general, (former) victims, youth in general, social workers, tutors and the police. *Parents* are the most important actor with this role, because they have to educate their children about various topics that are associated with escalated sexting: norms and values, relationships and (norms and values on) social media. Furthermore, *school* in general has a similar role, however not as important as parents. Schools teach their students social skills and educate them about the norms and values on social media. When a school is implementing education about escalated sexting, *tutors* mostly are the actors that present this education.

Actors outside school that also play a role are *social workers*. These professionals with multiple experiences concerning relationships and social media can be an extra asset in the education of teens at school. For they are professionals, teens tend to listen more careful to them. Furthermore, they can use their extensive experiences for the education. Other professionals that can add an extra dimension are *police officers*. They can increase the impact of the education by stressing the legal aspects and consequences of escalated sexting. Besides, their presence mostly emphasizes the severity of the subject.

Youth also play an important role in the education about escalated sexting. Especially *(former) victims* of escalated sexting can increase the impact of the education. For they can speak out of their own experiences, the situations come closer to the students and therefore increases the impact of the message. Besides, some participants stated that teens tend to listen more carefully to peers than to adults.

Prevention actors involved in signalling escalated sexting

Parents and *school* in general are already mentioned above, however, they both also have a signalling role. For teens spend a lot of time at home and at school, parents and schools have the responsibility to observe the teens' behaviour and signal, if necessary, a situation of escalated sexting.

Furthermore, *community workers* also have the responsibility to signal situations of escalated sexting. They are a first and easy point of contact in a neighbourhood and therefore, can function as the eyes and ears of other prevention actors.

Prevention actors involved in facilitating

Prevention actors with a facilitating role are the municipality or government, the head of care department and the covering organisation specialised in youth care. These actors mostly support the prevention of escalated sexting by financial or policy means, such as the *municipality or government*. The *head of care department* offers support by facilitating courses and meetings through which the staff at their school can learn about (educating about or signalling) escalated sexting. Furthermore,

this prevention actor mostly creates the anti-(cyber)bullying sexting protocol for all staff at school. The *covering organisation specialised in youth care* offers support that focuses on policy by mediating between organisations handling the prevention of escalated sexting and the municipality. Furthermore, the covering organisation facilitates the prevention by organizing meetings for involved parties in preventing escalated sexting.

3.1.1 Potential prevention actors

Besides the actors that are already involved in the process of prevention and the roles they play, the participants mentioned several other actors they would like to see involved as well. All of these actors have a role in the education about escalated sexting.

First, a *communication expert* could aid the providers of education about escalated sexting with their knowledge of communication, but also that of sexting and (cyber)bullying. Their scientific knowledge could shed a different light on the way other prevention actors see escalated sexting.

Furthermore, *student counsellors* could be involved in the education, for they have experiences with situations of escalated sexting or similar situations. They could tell stories based on these experiences. Besides, the presence of the student counsellor increases his visibility, and could decrease the threshold students sometimes feel before notifying the student counsellor of an escalated sexting situation.

Last, a *discussion leader*, who is independent and objective could also play a role in the education about escalated sexting. For they have an independent and objective perspective they could keep a conversation (or discussion) about escalated sexting open and pleasant for all students.

3.2 Prevention actions against escalated sexting

Preventing escalated sexting can be achieved by undertaking multiple prevention actions. These actions and their descriptions are outlined in table 6.

The prevention actions could be divided into four different target groups: teens, parents, teens and parents and staff at school. However, many participants suggested that the prevention actions targeted at teens and those targeted at parents should be combined to achieve a bigger effect. Some participants have already been combining prevention actions.

Next to the description of the actions that are undertaken to prevent escalated sexting, the participants described potential prevention actions as well, which are also depicted in table 6. These potential actions were not undertaken in the prevention stage, but could have been executed to ensure a better result in the process.

Table 6

Prevention actions for handling escalated sexting

Prevention action	Reason/goal of prevention action	Effectiveness of prevention action	Important aspects of prevention action
Target group: Teens			
Developing or presenting an education programme about (escalated) sexting at schools	To increase the knowledge of teens of (escalated) sexting and to inform teens where they can find more information about or help for (escalated) sexting.	This prevention action can be very effective, for sexting is a hot topic and the message of the education programme will be spread quickly through the grapevine. This snowball effect can cause an increase in awareness and knowledge among teens. However, sexting is too intangible for some teens (they think it will not happen to them), which can decrease the effect of the education programme.	Make the programme age appropriate and interactive, this increases the involvement during the programme. Having youth (former victims) or a high authority official (e.g. police officer) present will increase the impact of the message. A repetition of the message increases its effectiveness. Combining the education programme with an information meeting for parents could be more effective.
	To teach teens online norms and values and (online) social skills.		
	Raising awareness of phenomenon and its legal consequences among teens.		
	To initiate a discussion among teens and/or parents about sexting.		
Workshop or training about (cyber)bullying and/or sexting	To empower victims and/or vulnerable students and to teach all students online social skills.	This prevention action could be effective on the short term because of the fright amongst students. It is however questionable to what extent the workshops or trainings are effective on the long term.	Present in an interactive manner and make the students cooperate in groups. Combine these workshops with information meetings for parents to initiate discussion among teens and their parents. This way parents can continue the discussion at home.
	To educate children about incentives of victims and negative consequences of social media.		
Visiting a play about relationships	To initiate discussion among students. To inform and create awareness about escalated sexting on a humorous and relaxing manner.	This prevention action is potentially effective, because it combines sending a serious message with fun.	
Education from parents	To teach children about norms and values and boundaries in (online) relationships.	This prevention action can be effective, however, children do not always listen to their parents.	Almost all participant mentioned parents as most responsible actor for education about (online) relationships and norms and values.
Letting students mentor/tutor minor students	To provide students with an easy approachable coach that can help in case of problems.	This action can be effective, for teens look up to older teens and are more susceptible receiving a message from their peer tutors than from adults. However, the effectiveness depends on qualities and effort of the tutoring student.	
Keep in contact with schools and/or youth	To create a good and valuable relationship between prevention actor and schools and/or youth.	The effectiveness of this prevention action is difficult to measure. However, multiple prevention actors stated this prevention action is	

Prevention action	Reason/goal of prevention action	Effectiveness of prevention action	Important aspects of prevention action
Having open conversations with students	<p>To ensure the schools or youth will approach the prevention actor more easily in case of a situation.</p> <p>To teach students in an informal manner about (online) norms and values.</p> <p>To create understanding of incentives of victims, to make students realise how easily a mistake is made.</p>	<p>worthwhile.</p> <p>The effectiveness of this prevention action is difficult to measure, and depends greatly on the susceptibility of the students. The expectancy is that this prevention action will have effects on the long term.</p>	<p>Be open for every subject and do not judge will having the conversation so students feel secure to express their feelings and opinions.</p> <p>By making the conversation personal, and involving people the students can relate with, the impact of the message will increase.</p>
<i>Potential action: Course with room for discussion about societal issues</i>	<i>To initiate an open discussion about escalated sexting, but also other societal issues.</i>	<i>This potential prevention action can be effective. The interactive method will increase the involvement of the students. Besides, by discussing with peers, the students can also learn from the opinions of their peers.</i>	<i>Let the discussion be led by a discussion leader that has earned the respect of the students, and who can lead the discussion with an objective perspective.</i>
<i>Potential action: Creating a technical solution</i>	<i>To prevent that teens can post (nearly) nude photographs or videos on social media.</i>	<i>Prevents that teens can post (nearly) nude photographs or videos on social media.</i>	<i>It is questionable whose responsibility it is to develop and implement this tool.</i>
Target group: Parents			
Information meeting for parents	<p>To inform parents about escalated sexting and to provide parents tips and tricks about social media and (online) norms and values.</p> <p>To encourage parents to initiate an open conversation with their children about escalated sexting and to provide tips how to do this.</p>	<p>The effectiveness of the prevention action depends on the effort of the parents. However, the parents can continue the education about escalated sexting at home, which can increase the impact of the message that was sent to the teens.</p>	<p>Perform the meeting in an interactive manner, by initiating a discussion for example.</p> <p>By letting students present a part of the presentation will increase the turn out of the meeting.</p>
Target group: Parents and teens			
Provide parents and teens with brochure with information and tips about (the handling of) escalated sexting	<p>To raise awareness among teens and parents and inform them about escalated sexting.</p> <p>To provide parents references that provide more information and can aid them with educating their children.</p>	<p>This prevention action is effective, for parents and teens can (repeatedly) read the information after the education programme again in their own time. Furthermore, the information appeared to be an eye opener for some people.</p>	<p>Use formulations that are clear and apprehensive for both parents and teens.</p> <p>Provide contact information for those who want to gather more information or to request help.</p>
Target group: Staff at school			
Education for teachers and staff at school	To inform teachers and staff about escalated sexting and provide tips how to deal with this phenomenon.	This prevention action can be very effective, because for many teachers and staff escalated sexting is still an unknown field, so training is for many teachers and staff eye opening.	

Prevention actions with teens as target group

Prevention actions targeted at teens are developing or presenting an education programme at school, providing a workshop or training about (cyber)bullying and/or sexting and education from parents. Keeping in contact with schools and/or youth and having open conversations are also prevention actions targeted at teens. These prevention actions are mostly aimed at raising the awareness about and increasing the knowledge of sexting of teens and create a good and vulnerable relationship between the prevention actor and the schools and/or youth. Most of these prevention actions appear to be effective, however, the susceptibility, interest and cooperation of the teens are of great influence on the effectiveness of the prevention actions.

Multiple participants mentioned potential prevention actions that could be targeted at teens. The first potential prevention action is setting up a course with room for discussions about societal issues, among others sexting. This course could initiate discussion among the teens about several societal issues, such as (norms and values regarding) sexting. Participants perceived this potential action as potentially effective, because the teens could learn from peers during the discussion. However, participants perceived it as important that the discussions would be led by a discussion leader that had earned the respect of the students and who could lead the discussion with an open mind. Furthermore, one participant mentioned creating a technical solution that could be applied to social media disabling the placement of (nearly) nude photographs and videos on these social media. However, the question that arose with this potential action was whose responsibility it is to develop this technical tool; the social media companies, the police or other prevention actors?

Prevention actions with parents as target group

One prevention action is targeted at parents, which is an information meeting. During the information meeting, parents are informed about escalated sexting and receive tips and tricks about social media and online norms and values. The effectiveness of the prevention action depends upon the effort and interest of the parents. The turnout of and interest during the information meeting can be increased by letting students present a part of the meeting.

Prevention actions with parents and teens as target group

Targeting both parents and teens is also strived by only one prevention action, which is providing a brochure. The goal of this action is to raise awareness of and inform about escalated sexting. Furthermore, the brochure could be used by the target group at any time if they want more information about escalated sexting. This prevention action is more of a supportive action for all other prevention actions. The brochure facilitates the goals of the other prevention actions and is mostly distributed after an education programme or information meeting.

Prevention actions with staff at school as target group

Staff at school is also targeted by one prevention action, which is education about escalated sexting and tips how to deal with it. Many teachers and staff at school stated they were in need for such an education, for they thought they lag behind teens regarding knowledge of social media and escalated sexting. The goal of this prevention action, therefore, is purely educating and informing teachers and staff at school about escalated sexting and all its aspects. This prevention action can be very effective, for escalated sexting is for many staff and teachers an unknown field.

DISCUSSION

This study has made a first step into uncovering the different aspects of the process of handling escalated sexting. Previous studies exploring escalated sexting have examined various aspects, such as reasons to engage in escalated sexting or its consequences. However, only few studies have examined the process of handling escalated sexting. The aim of this explorative research, therefore, was to map all actors and actions related to the process of handling escalated sexting in both the stage of reacting ad hoc and prevention.

Reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting

Actors

In the process of reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting various actors are involved. These actors work as professionals at school or external organisations or are (relatives of) the victim and/or offender(s). They fulfil four roles in the process: (1) providing care for the victim, by being a conversation partner or keeping an eye on the victim, (2) punishing the offender(s), through suspension or expulsion or imposing law enforcement, (3) coordinating all ad hoc reactions, and (4) the distinctive role of the victim, offender(s) and their parents who are mostly targets of an intervention measure, although are sometimes leading in the process by being consulted before any actions are executed. Providing this leading role is important to continue, because victims indicate that they prefer receiving support from actors. By putting the victims in a leading role in the process, victims will get the feeling of support and being in control and are more likely to cooperate during the process.

No previous studies have addressed and compared the different roles of actors in the process of handling escalated sexting. The listing of actors and corresponding roles resulting from this study, therefore, reduces this gap in current knowledge of the process of handling escalated sexting. Furthermore, requesting help from other actors appears to be a separate phase (namely phase 3 'requesting help from other actors'), which implicates cooperation is an important step in reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting. The overview of potential actors to cooperate with resulting from this study, therefore, provides a useful practical tool that can aid actors who want to request help. Using the overview, actors know who they could cooperate with and why. However, as many participants stated they struggled with a diffusion of responsibility, further research of actors and corresponding roles is suggested. Further investigation of the roles of intervention actors, by e.g. focusing on perspectives of actors of their own roles or an expansion of the current list, could provide useful information, by which the diffusion of responsibility could be decreased.

Actions

Reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting occurs in seven phases: (1) the situation comes onto the surface; (2) investigation of the incident; (3) requesting help from other actors; (4) taking action; (5) informing other involved actors about the performed actions; (6) providing care for the victim; and (7) evaluation of all performed actions. Each phase consists of one or more various actions that are performed to solve the escalated sexting situation.

The numbering of the phases and the use of the word phase in itself implicate that the process of handling escalated sexting is a chronological and linear process. However, not every participant went through all phases and differences exist between the order of the phases the participants went through as well. Furthermore, several actions could be ascribed to multiple phases and multiple participants simultaneously undertook actions that belonged to different phases. Next, the process of handling escalated sexting could be an on-going process with a possibility of feedback. Therefore, the order of the phases presented in the seven phases model of reacting to escalated sexting is a suggestion in which order actors can undertake their actions and is based on the structure of most situation descriptions discussed during the interviews.

Although multiple previous studies of (escalated) sexting focused on separate actions that could be or are undertaken to react ad hoc to escalated sexting (a.o. Cassidy et al., 2013; Chibarro,

2007; Diliberto and Mattey, 2009; Slonje et al., 2012; Zidack, 2013), no study has strived to categorize or group actions into different phases. Hence, this study contributes to the current knowledge of handling escalated sexting. Furthermore, the categorization of the actions into seven phases reveals that reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting is not just undertaking some actions, but a more thoughtful process in which several phases arise and multiple actions can be undertaken. This new classification provides multiple suggestions for future research. Future studies could, for example, validate the model by studying the impact of each phase and effectiveness of phases and actions. In addition, using the seven phases model of reacting to escalated sexting can be a practical tool for actors that supports them to react ad hoc to escalated sexting in a clear and structural manner. This potentially increases the effectiveness of ad hoc reactions.

Factors influencing effectiveness

Reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting is not a linear, clear and problem free process. Which action is effective in a specific situation depends on several factors, namely: (1) disadvantages and advantages of the specific action, (2) contextual factors of the situation, and (3) struggles encountered by actors.

First, various actions have specific (dis)advantages that should be taken into account before performing the action. The most frequently mentioned disadvantages are a reluctance of the target (victim, offender or parents) to cooperate or a low susceptibility of the target group for the message of the action and the probability that the situation gets blown out of proportion. Besides reluctance to cooperate, victims indicated they were reluctant to notify actors about their situation as well, out of shame or fear for the consequences of their notification. This reluctance influences the whole process of reacting ad hoc to escalated sexting, for when actors are not notified of the situation, they cannot solve the situation. Furthermore, keeping the victimization secret can have a negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of the victim, as appeared in other fields of research, such as cyberbullying (Duarte, Pinto-Gouveia, & Rodrigues, 2015) and sexual abuse (Feiring and Taska, 2005). This reluctance, therefore, is an important struggle that should be dealt with in practice. Prevention actions such as keeping contact with schools or youth and having open conversations with students are valuable to reduce the reluctance of victims to notify others about the situation. Because of these prevention actions, (future) victims could feel safer with an actor and less reluctant to notify someone, which could result in higher notification rates of victimization of escalated sexting. Nonetheless, multiple actions had several advantages that increased their effectiveness as well. Frequently mentioned advantages are cooperation with more specialised or experienced actors, reaching an expanded audience, soothing the situation and increasing the awareness of teens and the impact of the message.

Second, contextual factors of the situation that influence the effectiveness of the performed actions are the intensity of the situation, the amount of involved students and the work environment of the (prevention) actors. Future research is suggested to gather more knowledge of the impact of the different contextual factors.

Third, actors are also struggling with bureaucracy and indecisiveness among managers, which decreases the effectiveness of the process as well. While not every participant experienced these struggles, all struggles were mentioned multiple occasions. Therefore, it can be concluded that these struggles should be dealt with to increase the effectiveness of actions. Participants ascribed the origin of the bureaucracy and indecisiveness among managers to the belief that sexting is yet another phenomenon that has to be dealt with. This belief should be transformed by stressing the potential negative consequences of (escalated) sexting and the importance of the process of handling the phenomenon. By providing education about these factors not only for school staff or employees of an external organisation, but also for the managers in these schools and organisations as well, this opinion could be altered and the process accelerated.

Effective ad hoc reactions

As all mentioned factors have an influence on the effectiveness of an ad hoc reaction, there is no such thing as a perfect reaction to escalated sexting. Ideally, an effective reaction to a situation should consist of a combination of the different ad hoc reactions from all phases. This relativized view

contributes to existing literature as it provides an interesting new insight into the process of handling escalated sexting by providing a broader context and showing that this process is not a linear, clear and problem-free process. Currently, little is known about the effectiveness of intervention and prevention actions. Furthermore, effectiveness measures are only focused on whole school programmes, workshops or trainings instead of individual intervention or prevention actions (a.o. Hirschstein et al., 2007; Merrell et al., 2008; Nickerson et al., 2014; Smith, 2004). Moreover, many of the previous studies objectively measured the effectiveness with quantitative measures. Because this study used a qualitative method, a comparison between the results of the current study and previous studies cannot be made. Hence, future studies could focus on measuring effectiveness of ad hoc reactions in similar ways to the studies of e.g. Hirschstein et al. (2007) and Smith (2004).

Prevention of escalated sexting

Actors

Actors involved in preventing escalated sexting fulfil three roles: (1) education through workshops, training or education programmes about escalated sexting; (2) signalling, by keeping an eye on the (online) behaviour of teens to signal situations of escalated sexting; and (3) facilitating by supporting prevention actors engaged in the other two roles with financial, practical, and/or policy means. Previous studies of escalated sexting and cyberbullying do not directly discuss (the roles of) prevention actors. Accordingly, this study contributes to literature by providing a list of prevention actors and their corresponding roles. This listing provides useful knowledge for practice, for actors can use the list to examine whom to cooperate with in order to increase the impact of the message, to reach a more extensive audience or to ensure combining the multiple potential roles that are part of preventing escalated sexting. Because this study is the first step in mapping all prevention actors with their roles, future studies are suggested to complement or adjust the results of this study.

Actions

The preventative stage of handling escalated sexting consists of different actions that are divided into four categories based on the target group: (1) teens, (2) parents, (3) both parents and teens and (4) staff at school. In line with previous studies (Cassidy et al., 2013; Chibarro, 2007; Kiriakidis en Kavoura, 2010; Smith et al., 2004), these results show that teens, parents and school staff are the most important target groups of prevention of escalated sexting. Future research could focus on the preferences and susceptibility of these target groups regarding the prevention actions, in order to make the prevention measures even more target group suitable and effective. Each category of prevention actions contains different actions, although all preventative actions have the aim to educate the target group, signal situations of escalated sexting, or to facilitate the other prevention actions. Differences between the results of this study and previous studies exist as well. While most prevention actors in this study recommended and some stated to combine prevention actions targeting different target groups, only Cassidy et al. (2013) and Chibarro (2007) provide suggestions for a combination of multiple prevention actions and/or target groups. Despite the scarce attention for this combination in previous literature, it is recommended to combine actions targeted at different groups, as Boer (2006) states groups (in)directly connected to a main target group have potential influence on the actual target group, which makes these other groups interesting targets as well. Therefore, when striving to reach teens while preventing escalated sexting, multiple other target groups (parents or school staff) could be targeted as well, which makes combining multiple target groups interesting in the prevention of escalated sexting.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of preventative actions appears to be influenced by several factors. First, characteristics of the prevention actors, such as expertise, authority and commitment have a possible influence on the effectiveness of a specific prevention action. Second, characteristics of the target group, such as susceptibility and involvement influence the effectiveness. Last, the characteristics of the message, such as repetition and interactivity influence effectiveness of a prevention action. All

these factors appeared to be important factors to consider when undertaking a prevention action as different participants mentioned them at least once. Hence, this study made a first step into uncovering the factors that influence effectiveness of prevention actions, but further research is suggested to examine the impact of the different factors.

Furthermore, it appeared that some prevention actors struggled with the speed of adoption of technology of teens. Teens are, as stated by participants, always a step ahead in the adoption and use of new technology. This struggle could be overcome two-sidedly: first, teens should be taught online norms and values and social online behaviour. These norms and values and social behaviour codes are not dependent on the changing technology and online world, and could, therefore, be applied to all new technologies and social media, which makes the prevention action valuable for multiple years. The prevention actors, therefore, do not need to frenetically keep up to date with new technology. This education could occur in a discussion form; initiating an open conversation between discussion leader (e.g. a tutor or police officer) and students through which the students can learn from the discussion leader, but also from peers. Moreover, in this conversation, students could teach the discussion leader about the ins and outs of new technology, so this prevention actor will also be up to date with new technologies. Second, the development of a technical prevention measure, such as a 'firewall' that prohibits teens to post (semi-)nude photographs on social media, could be a valuable prevention measure. This releases some pressure from prevention actors who struggle to keep up to date with technology. However, the question arises whose responsibility it is to develop and implement this technical solution.

Future research

While this research has provided an extensive insight into the process of handling escalated sexting, future research could be conducted to deepen or broaden this insight. Although throughout the discussion several suggestions for future studies have been made, many other suggestions still remain. The overview of ad hoc reactions and prevention actions, the description of the effectiveness of the actions and the overview of actors and their roles could all be subject to more thorough and specific scientific research. For example, future research regarding the ad hoc reactions could focus on the development of the seven phases model of reacting to escalated sexting. While the actions that belong to the different phases are similar to existing literature, dividing the actions into different phases has not been done before. Future studies could further validate this model. The effectiveness of the ad hoc reactions and prevention actions appeared to be difficult to compare with existing literature. Future research could provide more insights in the effectiveness of intervention and prevention actions, combinations of these actions and the phases as a whole. Measuring (long term) effectiveness with an objective measure could also be subjected to future research. Furthermore, it can be questioned whether the list of actors and their roles as a result of this study is exhaustive. Moreover, since escalated sexting is a relative new phenomenon that is still evolving, a potential need for the involvement of new actors with different roles is not inconceivable. Therefore, future studies could explore more cases of escalated sexting and examine the actors and their roles in those cases to add the list of actors of this research. Moreover, future research could examine the perception of participants of their own roles and roles of others and whether these perceptions match the list which is the result of this study.

Practical implications

This study provided several implications for practice as well. First of all, the list of actors and their roles in both the stage of reacting ad hoc and prevention could be a useful tool for all actors that are involved in handling escalated sexting. The list provides information which actors could be cooperated with and why. This cooperation is strongly suggested, for it appears to be effective. Moreover, the results show that a diffusion of responsibility exists among the actors, which increased confusion among the different actors about their own role. Actors are suggested to look for the boundaries of their role and their responsibilities, to increase the effectiveness of their actions.

It is recommended to pay attention to both stages of the process of handling escalated sexting: prevention and reacting ad hoc. The overviews of all possible prevention actions and ad hoc reactions provide useful tools for all (prevention) actors. The broad examination of the advantages, disadvantages and effectiveness of each action provides the actors insight in which action suits the situation they have to handle. For reacting ad hoc it is recommended to pick actions from all phases and combine these actions into one, situation suitable intervention measure and education and signalling are suggested as effective prevention actions.

Limitations

Several limitations regarding the structure and method of the study are worth noting. First, this study is based on self-reported behaviour. The participants were asked to retrospectively describe a situation and actions they performed to handle the situation. This subjective research method could implicate that participants forgot to describe actions or purposely described actions or situations differently. This potential social desirability to only describe actions that were effective could have biased the results. The researcher strived to decrease this potential social desirability by informing the participants about the goal of the research and by stressing that there were no good or bad answers. Moreover, the researcher strived to pose questions about the negative aspects of the actions as well.

The use of the critical incident technique is also a limitation of the study. By making participants describe a situation with a big impact, most participants described severe incidents that were handled with severe actions as well (such as law enforcement or expelling the offenders). This potentially created a bias towards severe actions, because when participants had to describe general situations of escalated sexting, the performed actions potentially would have been less severe.

Furthermore, the research sample is not a perfect representation of the research population. Although the researcher strived to select enough representative participants, some participant groups are more represented than others. Victims and parents, for example, are not as good represented as police officers or social workers. This makes it difficult to draw solid and general conclusions and to generalize the findings for all actors involved in the process of handling escalated sexting.

Lastly, it should be stated, that the description of the effectiveness of the ad hoc reactions and prevention actions were based on the perceptions of the participants. This subjective manner of studying the effectiveness could have influenced the results. Furthermore, this research only studied the short-term effectiveness of the performed actions, for most incidents happened recently and thus the participants could not say anything about long term effects.

CONCLUSION

This study provided interesting new insights into the process of handling escalated sexting. This study complements previous studies by providing an overview of actors involved in preventing or intervening in escalated sexting and their roles in these processes. Furthermore, an extensive description of performed and potential ad hoc reactions and prevention actions is given, with an overview of advantages, disadvantages and effectiveness per action. The ad hoc reactions can be divided into seven distinctive phases as depicted in the seven phases model of reacting to escalated sexting, each with a different goal and specific related actions. Prevention actions can be divided based on the target group of the action. The explanatory nature of this study ensured placing an emphasis on the process of handling escalated sexting as a whole, instead of focusing on one sole aspect of the process. Because few studies of (escalated) sexting have focused on the process of handling, this study provided new insight into different aspects of escalated sexting and exposed multiple starting points for future research and practical implications.

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APPENDIX I TOPIC LIST

Topic	Sub topics
<u>Introductory topics</u>	
Demographic information	Age Place of residence/working Employment Sex Education
General experience with escalated sexting	General experience
<u>Critical incident</u>	
Situation	Situation description
Role participant	Role participant in process Timing participant
Intervention	Intervention measure(s) Goal Results Different targets Cooperation Struggles Choices Learning Effectiveness
<u>Prevention</u>	
	Prevention critical incident Role in prevention critical incident Prevention in general Role in prevention in general
<u>Topics for victims, students and parents</u>	
Intervention by other parties	Other involved parties Intervention actions other parties Goal intervention actions Result intervention actions Effectivity intervention actions
Experiences with intervention other parties	Desired and undesired intervention actions Experience intervention actions

APPENDIX II CODING SCHEME

Topic	Code	Explanation
Situation description	1. Situation description	This code includes the situation description (the critical incident) that is asked at the beginning of the interview.
	2. Timing	This code does not include the description of the intervention. When did the sexting situation become onto the surface? When did the participant hear about the situation?
Reacting to sexting Reactions to sexting	3. Actions	What actions are undertaken to handle the sexting? What did the participant do to handle the situation?
	4. Action_target	Who was the target of the intervention? For example: the victim or offender.
	5. Action_reason	Why was the action performed? What made the action suitable for the situation?
	6. Action_goal	What was the goal of the action?
	7. Action_result	What was the result of the action?
	8. Action_effective	Was the action effective? What made the action effective?
	9. Action_adv	What is an advantage of the action? What is good about it?
	10. Action_disadv	What is a disadvantage of the action? What is negative about it?
	11. Action_important	When performing this action, what is important to keep into account? What should you keep in mind? For example: always keep into account the preferences of the victim.
	12. Action_feeling	Only relevant in interviews with victims or parents. What did they think about a specific action? How did they feel when the action was undertaken? Did they agree with the action? Why not?
Potential actions	13. Potential_action	What actions could/should have been undertaken to handle the sexting? Every action is coded with a different number.
	14. Potential_action_target	Who would be the target of the intervention?
	15. Potential_action_reason	Why should the action be performed? What made the action suitable for the situation?
	16. Potential_action_goal	What should/could have been the goal of the action?
	17. Potential_action_adv	What should be an advantage of the action? What is good about it?
	18. Potential_action_disadv	What should be a disadvantage of the action? What is negative about it?
	19. Potential_action_feeling	Only relevant in interviews with victims or parents. What would they think about

Topic	Code	Explanation
Difficulties	20. Struggle(s)	a specific action? How did they feel if the action was undertaken? What struggles did the participant have during the intervention? And what created these struggles?
	21. Solving struggle(s)	What did the participant do to solve/minimize the struggles?
Learning	22. Lessons learned	What has the participant learned from the intervention and/or situation? What will the participant keep in mind for the next time when a sexting situation occurs?
Improvement	23. Improvements own actions	Which parts of its own actions does the participant want to change or improve?
	24. Improvements actions others	What actions should/could others change or improve?
Prevention Actions prevention	25. Prevention_action	What actions are undertaken to prevent (escalated) sexting situations?
	26. Prevention_action_content	What was the content of the prevention action? What topics were emphasized?
	27. Prevention_action_target	Who was the target of the prevention action?
	28. Prevention_action_goal	What was the goal of the prevention action?
	29. Prevention_action_result	What was the result of the prevention action?
	30. Prevention_action_feeling	Only relevant in interviews with victims or parents. What did they think about a specific action? How did they feel when the action was undertaken? Did they agree with the action? Why not?
Potential prevention actions	31. Prevention_potential_action	What potential prevention actions should or could be undertaken? What did not happen but could have been a good choice to do?
		X is number, first action is prevention_potential_action_1, second is prevention_potential_action_2, etc. This applies for codes 41-49.
	32. Prevention_potential_action_target	Who could/should be the target of the potential prevention action?
	33. Prevention_potential_action_goal	What could/should be the goal of the potential prevention action?
	34. Prevention_potential_action_result	What would be the result of the potential prevention action?
	35. Prevention_potential_action_feeling	Only relevant in interviews with victims or parents. What would they think about a specific action? How would they feel if the action was undertaken?
	36. Prevention_potential_action_content	What should/could be the content of the potential prevention action?
	37. Prevention_potential_action_adv	What would be an advantage of the potential prevention action?
	38. Prevention_	What would be a disadvantage of the

Topic	Code	Explanation
Action	potential_action_disadv Action 1 Investigation	potential prevention action? This code includes everything that is connected to one action (so it includes codes action - action_feeling).
	Action 2 Tell someone about the situation	
	Action 3 Care for victim	
	Action 4 Making sure Instagram account is deleted	
	Action 5 Making sure photographs are deleted/cell phones taken	
	Action 6 Visiting after report to the police	
	Action 7 Conversation with offender(s)	
	Action 8 Putting pressure on school official(s)	
	Action 9 Conversation with victim	
	Action 10 Tell a higher official	
	Action 11 Conversation with class	
	Action 12 Report it to the police	
	Action 13 Conversation with parents victim	
	Action 14 Inform class about situation	
	Action 15 Pass on situation to other (higher placed) person(s)	
	Action 16 Evaluation	
	Action 17 Conversation with parents offender(s)	
	Action 18 Separate offender(s) from class	
	Action 19 Continue with lesson, pick up normal day	
	Action 20 Start own project group	
	Action 21 Parents call for help	
	Action 22 Move to other city/school	
	Action 23 Meeting for parents (oudergroep)	
	Action 24 Special training for victim	
	Action 25 Discuss case/situation with colleagues or other institutions	
	Action 26 Discuss goal of care	
	Action 27 Tell class to stop calling victim names	
	Action 28 Convincing victim to report it to the police	
	Action 29 Conversation with network victim	
	Action 30 Say sorry to victim	
	Action 31 Gain trust victim	
	Action 32 Expel offender(s)	
	Action 33 Ask police for advice	
	Action 34 Inform all parents about situation	
	Action 35 Discuss topic with higher official	

Topic	Code	Explanation
Potential action	Action 36	Give a testimony to the police
	Action 37	Stay home from school for a few days
	Action 38	Forbid victim to use social media
	Action 39	Encourage victim to step out of victim role
	Action 40	Keep an eye on victim on social media
	Action 41	Ask help from school
	Action 42	Recommend to go to police
	Action 43	Recommend to go to jongerencentrum
	Potential action 1	Technical solution
	Potential action 2	Convincing victim to report it to the police
	Potential action 3	Imprisonment offender(s)
	Potential action 4	Tell someone about it immediately
	Potential action 5	Confiscate cell phones/let students delete photos
	Potential action 6	Have contact with parents offender(s) and have conversation
	Potential action 7	Punish involved students
	Potential action 8	Create protocol for sexting situations
	Potential action 9	Pass on situation to (higher placed) person(s)
	Potential action 10	Evaluation
	Potential action 11	Have contact with parents victim and victim
	Potential action 12	Move to other city/country
	Potential action 13	Have conversations with social work/zorgco/vertrouwenspersoon
	Potential action 14	EMDR method
	Potential action 15	Forbid to engage in sexting
Potential action 16	Increase self-confidence victim	
Potential action 17	Mediate between victim and offender(s)	
Potential action 18	Conversation with victim	
Potential action 19	Conversation with offender(s)	
Potential action 20	Involve police	
Potential action 21	Inform colleagues	
Potential action 22	Forbid using social media	
Potential action 23	Expel offender(s) for good	

Topic	Code	Explanation
Actor	Potential action 24 Intensive, longitudinal care for victim Actor Buurtcoach	Name of the actor, for example police, tutor, parent or victim This code also includes the role of the actor: why was the actor involved in the situation? For example: because of his/her authority, or because he/she was present when the situation happened.
	Actor Care department Actor Coordinator covering organisation Actor Covering organisation Actor Friend of victim Actor General practitioner Actor GGD Actor GGZ Actor head of care department Actor Head of department Actor Head of school Actor Jongeren werker, community worker (hulpvelener) Actor Leerlingbegeleiding Actor Leerplichtambtenaar Actor Offender(s) Actor Parents (in general) Actor Parents offender(s) Actor Parents victim Actor Police Actor Psychologist Actor Public Prosecutor Actor School Actor School counselor Actor Sexologist Actor Social work Actor Teacher Actor Tutor (mentor) Actor Victim Actor Youth	
Potential actor	Potential actor Behavior expert	Fill out the name of the actor, for example police, tutor, parent or victim Why could/should the potential actor be involved?
	Potential actor Head of care department Potential actor Head of school Potential actor Head of care (overkoepelend) Potential actor Parents victim Potential actor Police Potential actor School counselor Potential actor Tutor (mentor) Potential actor Organisation Veilig Thuis	

Topic	Code	Explanation
Prevention action	Prevention action 1 (develop) Educational programme	This code includes everything that is connected to one prevention action (so codes prevention_action – prevention_content)
	Prevention action 2 Send a letter	
	Prevention action 3 Develop flyer about sexting	
	Prevention action 4 Information meeting for parents	
	Prevention action 5 Keeping contact with schools	
	Prevention action 6 Education from teachers/tutors at school	
	Prevention action 7 Project for passions and talents	
	Prevention action 8 Having open conversations with students	
	Prevention action 9 A play about sexting	
	Prevention action 10 Education from parents	
	Prevention action 11 Inform parents and teens	
	Prevention action 12 Education from a covering organisation	
	Prevention action 13 Keep contact with (potential) offender(s)	
	Prevention action 14 Education from special organisation (Bureau Jeugd en Media)	
	Prevention action 15 Project Bloedlink	
	Prevention action 16 Workshop, training about (cyber)bullying and/or sexting	
	Prevention action 17 Education from police	
	Prevention action 18 Keep contact with youth	
	Prevention action 19 Education about dangers social media	
	Prevention action 20 Education for teachers and staff at school	
	Prevention action 21 Record video for education	
	Prevention action 22 Education about loverboys	
	Prevention action 23 Letting students mentor/tutor students	
	Prevention action 24 Encourage victim to see more nuances, instead of black and white	
Potential prevention action	Prevention potential action 1 Keep up with friends of offender(s)	
	Prevention potential action 2 Education from police	
	Prevention potential action 3	

Topic	Code	Explanation
	Workshops or education about sexting Prevention potential action 4 Information meeting for parents Prevention potential action 5 Supply information for parents after information meeting Prevention potential action 6 Forbid sexting Prevention potential action 7 Education about fun things but also risks Prevention potential action 8 Education with positive focus Prevention potential action 9 Education that also addresses boys as victims Prevention potential action 10 Have open conversations about sexting Prevention potential action 11 Course that has room for discussion about societal issues Prevention potential action 12 Raising awareness amongst parents	
Actor prevention	Prevention actor Buurtcoach Prevention actor Child psychologist Prevention actor Covering organisation Prevention actor Employee e-learning programme Prevention actor Former victim Prevention actor GGD Prevention actor Government Prevention actor Head of care department Prevention actor Janitor Prevention actor Jeugdtoezicht Prevention actor Jeugdwerker, community worker Prevention actor Koran expert Prevention actor Leerplichtambtenaar Prevention actor Municipality Prevention actor Parents Prevention actor Parents victim Prevention actor Police Prevention actor Pretty Woman Prevention actor Psychologist Prevention actor Receptionist Prevention actor School Prevention actor School counsellor (vertrouwenspersoon)	This code also includes the role of the actor: why was the actor involved in the situation? For example: because of his/her authority, or because he/she was present when the situation happened.

Topic	Code	Explanation
Potential actor prevention	Prevention actor Sexologist	This code also includes the role of the actor: why was the actor involved in the situation? For example: because of his/her authority, or because he/she was present when the situation happened.
	Prevention actor Social work	
	Prevention actor Teachers	
	Prevention actor Tutor	
	Prevention actor Victim	
	Prevention potential actor Buurtcoach	
	Prevention potential actor Communication expert	
	Prevention potential actor Covering organisation (JIT)	
	Prevention potential actor Discussion leader	
	Prevention potential actor Everybody	
	Prevention potential actor Expert through experience/former victim	
	Prevention potential actor Experts on sexting	
	Prevention potential actor GGD	
	Prevention potential actor Municipality	
	Prevention potential actor Police	
	Prevention potential actor School counsellor	
	Prevention potential actor Teacher	
Prevention potential actor Tutor		
Prevention potential actor Youth		