

# MEDIA EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF SEXTING PREVENTION

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** The study aims to identify and compare the sending of own and somebody else's intimate photos and videos and to point out the importance of media education as a meaningful way of preventing sexting.

**Methods.** The research tool was an online self-designed questionnaire. 250 respondents aged 15 to 19 participated in the research.

**Results.** The research has shown that sending their own photos and somebody else's photos are equally frequent. Differences are only noticeable in average values. The findings offer an overview of sending sexually explicit photos and indicate decreased shyness, and a greater desire to attract attention through their own naked photos or videos. In the case of sending somebody else's photos, it is a matter of ridiculing the victim without his/her consent.

**Conclusion.** Primarily, the importance of media education ought to be pointed out, as it provides information about the dangers of publishing such photos and videos, and develops critical thinking and media literacy in children, which is key for the safeguarding of online space. We see the importance and significance of the study especially in the prevention of sexting through media education, which could be the primary means of eliminating it.

**Key words:** media education, sexting, prevention, adolescent

## INTRODUCTION

As well as other online threats, *sexting* is nowadays considered to be widespread. This is also proved by research conducted by René Szot-



kowski and Iveta Komárková (2017). Out of 421 students surveyed, 83.80% of students sent an intimate photo to another person, and 63.40% of students shared their video or photo with intimate content.

The EU Kids Online Slovakia survey of 969 pupils aged 9-17 found that 10% of children and adolescents have experienced sexting, especially at the age 15-17. Almost one in ten children have experienced being asked for intimate photos in the last year, with girls more likely to be asked for such photos (Izrael et al., 2020). Sexting appeared in the media at the end of 2005 in connection with the whims of fashion. In 2008, an article was published describing the popularity of explicit pictures, especially among young people (Rosenberg, 2011). Sexting as a type of online threat has been addressed by several researchers in Slovakia and abroad. In Slovakia in particular Slovakia (Hollá, 2013; Hollá, et al., 2017; Poláčková et al., 2020) and abroad (Burić et al., 2020; Calvert, 2009; Döring, 2014; Manning, 2020; Patchin & Hinduja, 2019; Rosenberg, 2011; Szotkowski & Komárková, 2017; Szotkowski et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2021) and many others. Sexting is a medium that provides external validation and desirable or undesirable feelings for young vulnerable people. It is associated with negative health and welfare (Milton et al., 2019). We consider it a phenomenon of today's youth. With excessive time spent online, adolescents are looking for alternative ways of entertainment. It may bring desirable and satisfactory feelings if their photo or video is appreciated, or undesirable feelings related to shame if a photo or video reaches the wrong people.

René Szotkowski et al. (2020) define sexting as electronic distribution, dissemination of one's own sexually suggestive or explicit material, which takes place via the internet and mobile phones. It also includes the receiving of material with the same content.

Elizabeth Englander (2012) argues that sexting is not universal behaviour. People with the tendency of sexting are more sexually active and tend to be vulnerable to risky behaviour, such as alcohol. Young people experience the greatest risk in the form of forced sexting.

Sexting is the sending or receiving of sexually explicit or sexually suggestive images or videos, usually via mobile devices (Patchin & Hinduja, 2019). Sexting is a widespread online threat with no fixed definition. The authors understand it differently and offer various explanations. They particularly agree that it is about sending and receiving of intimate photos or videos. In our view, the power of sexting is mainly in the boom of new apps that are based on posting photos or videos, and the adolescents' goal is to attract as many followers as possible.

The matter is being discussed as a new high-risk behaviour among young people that should be prevented by better education about the potentially serious risks it poses. Children and adolescents use the mobile phone as the most direct and easiest way to post photos or videos. When purchased, it is equipped with a camera, which is mainly used to take photos. In general, it is important to allocate space for media education both in families and

schools, which has a preventive impact that is particularly relevant because of the widespread influence of sexting and misinformation (Döring, 2014).

Our study aims to point out the difference between sending their own intimate photos and videos and somebody else's intimate photos and videos and to highlight the importance of including media education in the content of teaching, as the threats and cyberaggression in virtual space are constantly increasing. Researchers offer several sexting typologies. In connection with our study, it is important to mention primary and secondary sexting. Primary sexting is the sending of one's own intimate photos and videos, while secondary sexting is the sending of photos and videos of a person from the surrounding (Calvert, 2009).

The latest typology was introduced by the authors Arta Dodaj and Kristína Sesar (2020), who proposed 4 forms of sexting, based on previous research of theoretical and empirical results. They also consider findings related to sexting motives. Their typology is partly based on the crime opportunity theory, while also considering the use of the internet as a tool for maintaining an intimate relationship. They are the first to propose the conceptualization of sexting and emphasise the important role of motivation and individuality. There is relational, forced, reactive, and violent sexting (Dodaj & Sesar, 2020).

*Relational sexting* involves seeking intimacy and building a relationship. This form of sexting is considered desirable and normal, especially as regards maintaining intimacy and communication in a partnership. It is a tool to keep your partner without unwanted consequences. It is mainly about exchanging photos or videos, on which they themselves are displayed.

*Reactive sexting* can be defined as experimental, in the context of experimenting with one's sexuality. This form is used to exchange all types of intimate content.

*Forced sexting* arises from pressure from one of the partners.

*Violent sexting* is a form that uses violence as the main means to harm victims. It often has a form of blackmailing, harassing minors to send an intimate photo. In a way, it is considered a crime. The development of sexting and constant research by experts have revealed new results, forms, ways, and types of this online threat, which require more attention. The continual rise of virtual aggression should not be disregarded.

In Slovakia, insufficient attention is paid to media education. "Media education is one of the most modern trends nowadays. It is a multidisciplinary category that integrates knowledge from a wider range of social sciences. It is a subject of interest in journalism, psychology, sociology, pedagogy and, to a greater or lesser extent, attracts the attention of governmental and non-governmental institutions" (*Koncepcia mediálnej výchovy*, 2009). Its significance is addressed by many experts: in Slovakia, especially Jana Čuvalová (2014), Viera Kačínová & Viktória Kolčáková (2012), Darina Orbánová (2015), Paľa (2009) or Norbert Vrabc (2013). Abroad, especially David Buckingham (2003), Alexander Fedorov (2003, 2005, 2008), László

Hartai (2014), Henry Jenkins (2009) and many others who consider media education an important means of education.

The simplest definition of media education is education for media literacy (Brestovanský, 2010). Media literacy helps to understand the media content that we come across in a virtual environment. A person is considered media literate when he/she can work with the media and use them as a way of entertainment, but is aware of the boundaries to abide (Petranová, 2013).

Media education represents an alternative approach to education and the most modern trend of our time (Orbánová, 2015).

An important aspect of media education is addressing current issues and topics in the media. It can provide not only information about the media, but it also has preventive and systematic impact on children and adolescents in developing their media literacy.

The aim of media education is “to teach all age groups to access media and media content responsibly, teach them to use new communication technologies and protect minors from illegal and inappropriate content” (*Koncepcia mediálnej výchovy*, 2009).

Jana Čuvalová (2014) defined the goals of media education and divided them into the following parts:

- understanding of the rules of media and adapting their orientation in terms of age category,
- ability to critically evaluate media content and derive the valuable, meaningful, positive, and personality-forming aspects from it,
- distinguishing negative media content and eliminating it through a responsible and conscious approach,
- creating media products.

The objectives of media education are based primarily on understanding, evaluation, selection, responsibility, and prevention. Through long-term exposure and inclusion of media education, we ensure protection from online threats and proper evaluation of each type.

Through media education, we can show students the potential pitfalls of a virtual environment before they experience being a victim of an online threat themselves. With an increasing number of inappropriate photos published, the quality and adaptation of media education should also increase. Through research comparing the sending of one's own and somebody else's photos, we want to draw attention and point out the importance and significance of sexting prevention through media education. In Slovakia, the school curriculum reform in the years 2008 - 2009 enabled the inclusion of media education as a subject in the content of education. It can be introduced as a stand-alone subject, as part of another subject, or as a project or course. Within the course or project, students can learn through practical and experiential activities how to use the media correctly, how to distinguish and verify media content, etc. (Vrabec, 2013). A teacher should try to encourage students to express their thoughts, experiences with the

media, and their content. The main point is to get closer and get to know students' thinking about the media and try to create real situations that students might encounter. It is appropriate to use mainly activation methods or to invite experts to discussions in schools (Pa'la, 2009). Through practical and real experiences, they can better understand the importance of media education, be more empathetic, develop critical thinking and, above all, be aware of possible pitfalls of the media and online threats like sexting.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Participants

The research sample consisted of adolescents aged 15–19 years. There was a total of 250 respondents, of which 194 were girls (77.60%) and 56 were boys (22.40%). Of these, 40 (16.00%) were 15-year-olds, 63 (25.20%) were 16-year-olds, 50 (20.00%) were 17-year-olds, 64 (25.60%) were 18-year-olds, and 33 (13.20%) were 19-year-olds. Participants were included in the research based on age. Adolescents aged 15–19 are an age group that takes full advantage of the online world and, therefore, they are considered key to data collection.

### Methods

In the research, the online questionnaire method, literary-historical methods, mathematical and statistical methods and logical thinking processes were used. The primary method was an online self-designed questionnaire, through which we obtained the necessary information.

### Procedure

While carrying out the research, we primarily chose the age category with which we wanted to work. The online self-designed questionnaire contained two areas. One focused on cyberbullying and the other on sexting. It was sent directly to students who belonged to the age category selected for data collection. The questions mainly concerned students' experience with individual online threats. A simple selection of answers was used. We processed the results using mathematical and statistical methods.

### Research Goal

The goal was to identify and compare the sending of one's own and somebody else's intimate photos and videos and to point out the importance of media education as a meaningful means of preventing sexting. In the research, the following hypotheses were proposed:

**H0:** Sending their own and somebody else's intimate photos will be on the same level for all respondents.

**HA:** Sending their own and somebody else's intimate photos will not be at the same level for all respondents.

RESULTS

In the results, we first present descriptive statistics, in which we introduce in more detail the mean, standard deviation, and interval estimates in terms of age and gender when sending their own and somebody else's photos and videos. Then the Pearson correlation coefficient is presented in order to inspect the relationship between sending their own and somebody else's photos and videos. The results show an individual difference in sending and publishing intimate photos and videos.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics for All Respondents*

Sending and Publishing		Total	Girls	Boys	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18	Age 19
	M	.45	.36	.86	.13	.59	.88	0.16	.52
Of Their Own Intimate Photos and Videos	SD	1.28	1.04	1.84	.65	1.54	1.86	.44	1.12
	Interval Estimate	.29	.19	.36	.01	.16	.35	.05	.12
		<M < .62	<M < .48	<M < 1.35	<M < .33	<M < .66	<M < 1.41	<M < 0.27	<M < .91
	M	.35	.20	.88	.45	.35	0.54	.22	.18
Of Somebody Else's Intimate Photos and Videos	SD	1.14	.76	1.86	1.22	1.26	1.34	.98	.64
	Interval Estimate	.21	.09	.38	.06	.15	0.16	.03	.01
		<M < .49	<M < .30	<M < 1.37	<M < .84	<M < .63	<M < .92	<M < .46	<M < .40

Source: own research

In Table 1, we specify two areas, namely sending their own and somebody else's intimate photos and videos. On average, girls proved to have sent their own photos and videos more frequently  $.19 < M < .48$  ( $M = .34$ ). This fact can be perceived in girls as a means to captivate the opposite sex. Virtual space provides possibilities that remove the barrier of shyness and fear of rejection. Through the chat room, they can easily send a photo or video and wait for a response from a secure environment, but this perception can be false or distorted. In the worst case, the photo or video may be misused and redistributed without permission to ridicule the victim. In boys, sending somebody else's photos and videos  $.38 < M < 1.37$  ( $M = .86$ ) has proved to be more frequent on average, but we must note that sending their own photos and videos is at a very similar level. Boys may not perceive things as sensitively as girls, which may mean that when they spend time online, they may look for ways of entertainment that result in inappropriate photos being forwarded to other friends and acquaintances. This kind of behaviour can often cause another person to be ashamed and lose their self-confidence. We can also see differences in the age of the respondents. On average, 15-year-old  $.06 < M < .84$  ( $M = .45$ ) and 18-year-old  $.03 < M < .46$  ( $M = .22$ ) respondents have sent somebody else's photos and videos

more frequently. For 16-year-old  $.16 < M < .66$  (.59), 17-year-old  $.35 < M < 1.41$  ( $M = .88$ ) and 19-year-old  $.12 < M < .91$  ( $M = .52$ ) respondents, it was sending of their own photos and videos.

The dominance of sending their own photos and videos may be a means of captivating the opposite sex, or in adulthood, we can assume that it is a way of retaining a partner and attracting his/her attention. In case of sending somebody else's photos and videos, it can be fun or a fad from the person in the photo or video. For more accurate results, the p-values and the Pearson correlation coefficient are presented.

**Table 2**

*P-Values for All Respondents (Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test)*

Sending and Publishing	Total	Girls	Boys	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18	Age 19
Of Their Own Intimate Photos and Videos	P-Value	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01
Of Somebody Else's Intimate Photos and Videos	P-Value	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01	<< .01

Source: own research

We checked the normality of the data before starting to select the correct test (Table 2). The Shapiro-Wilk test showed us the rejection of the normal distribution of the data. Based on this test, we further chose the Nonparametric test - Mann-Whitney test, which can show us the existence of statistically significant differences (at the significance level of 0.05).

**Table 3**

*P-Values for All Respondents (Non-parametric test, Mann-Whitney test)*

	Total	Girls	Boys	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18	Age 19
P-Value	.29	.14	.87	.14	.40	.53	.43	.16

Source: own research

At the significance level of 0.05, we confirm the null hypothesis. The result is verified by the Mann-Whitney test (non-parametric test). Sending their own and somebody else's photos is at the same level. The Pearson correlation coefficient is presented to clarify the relationship between sending their own and somebody else's photos and videos.



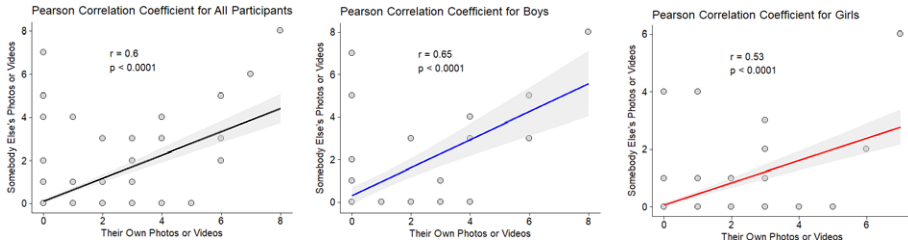


Figure 1  
*Pearson Correlation Coefficient – Gender*

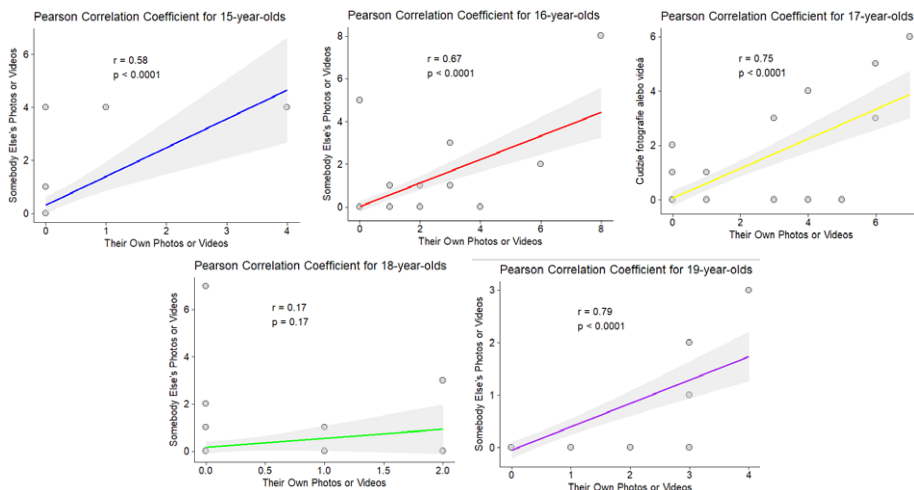
Source: own research

Statistical analysis using the Pearson correlation coefficient found that the relationship between sending their own and somebody else's photos in all respondents is moderately strong  $r = .60$  ( $df = 248$ ;  $p < .01$ ). For girls, we found that the Pearson correlation coefficient is  $r = .53$  ( $df = 192$ ;  $p < .01$ ), which means that the relationship is moderately strong. For boys, the Pearson correlation coefficient is  $r = .65$  ( $df = 54$ ;  $p < .01$ ), meaning that the relationship is equally moderate. Both boys and girls showed a moderately strong relationship, but as proved by descriptive statistics, boys' relationship is a bit stronger. For boys, are the average value when sending their own photos and videos ( $M = .86$ ) and when sending somebody else's photos and videos ( $M = .88$ ), which proves almost the same frequency of sending their own and somebody else's intimate photos and videos.

From the above findings, we can claim that sending their own and somebody else's photos have a moderately strong relationship, as there are statistically insignificant differences between them, which was also confirmed by the previous t-test. A strong relationship is mainly due to frequent answers "never." If the answer "never" was disregarded, their own photos and videos would prevail, which can be seen in the graph. From this correlation, it is clear that the respondents who do not send their own photos and videos do not tend to send somebody else's intimate photos and videos.

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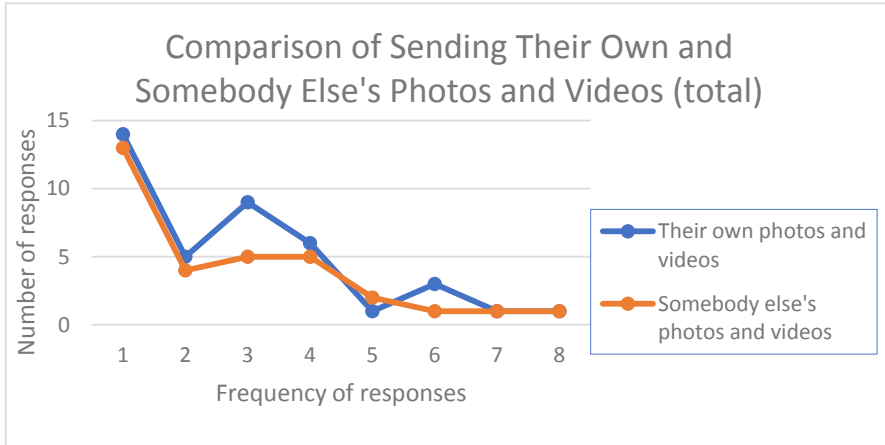
**Figure 2**

*Pearson Correlation Coefficient – Age*

Source: own research

Using Pearson correlation coefficient, we also examined the relationship between sending their own and somebody else's photos in terms of the age of the respondents. For 15-year-old respondents, the Pearson correlation coefficient is  $r = .58$ ;  $df = 38$ ,  $p < .01$ , meaning that from the statistical perspective the correlation is moderately strong. For 16-year-old respondents, the Pearson correlation coefficient is  $r = .67$  ( $df = 61$ ;  $p < .01$ ), which means a moderate correlation. For 17-year-old respondents, the Pearson correlation coefficient is  $r = .75$ ; ( $df = 48$ ;  $p < .01$ ), which can be interpreted that the correlation between sending their own and somebody else's photos is strong. For 18-year-old respondents, the Pearson correlation coefficient is  $r = .17$  ( $df = 62$ ;  $p < .01$ ), showing a weak relationship between sending their own and somebody else's photos and videos. For 19-year-old respondents, the Pearson correlation coefficient is  $r = .76$  ( $df = 61$ ;  $p < .01$ ), which demonstrates a strong correlation. In terms of age, there was a moderately strong and strong correlation. The weak relationship dominates only in 18-year-old respondents. From the findings, it is evident that the majority of the respondents were either inclined towards sending both their own and somebody else's photos and videos or neither. We recorded all responses in the correlations.

If we disregarded the response 'never', sending own photos and videos would be prominent. For better clarity, we present a graph including all respondents (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3**

*Graph – Comparison of Sending Photos and Videos*

Source: own research

In the graph, we can observe a comparison when sending their own and somebody else's photos and videos after removing the response "never". From the graph, more frequent sending of their own intimate photos and videos can be seen, but the result is not very different compared to sending somebody else's photos or videos. From the results, we can note that respondents are equally likely to send both somebody else's and their own photos or videos. There are statistically insignificant differences in terms of age or gender, which are considered self-evident.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research aimed to find out which intimate photos and videos are sent most often. We focused on sending their own and somebody else's intimate photos and videos. Sexting has become increasingly prominent in the context of the development of information and communication networks, which mainly use photographs and videos. The sending and publishing of their own and somebody else's photos and videos have been proven to be equally frequent; hence, H1 can be rejected. The differences are only slight and can be observed in average values in connection with differences in age or gender. Girls were on average more likely to send their own intimate photos and videos. The sending of somebody else's photos and videos had higher average values for boys. In terms of the age of respondents, the sending of somebody else's photos and videos were on average more frequent for 15- and 18-year-old respondents. The sending of their own photos and videos was more prevalent on average for 16-, 17-, and 19-year-old respon-

dents. It can be argued that as long as respondents tended to send their own photos and videos, they had no problem sending somebody else's photos and videos as well, which is confirmed by the Pearson correlation coefficient. In connection with our results, we also present the results of research by other experts in order to provide better clarity and anchoring in the topic.

Sex and Tech's research within the Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy national campaign (2008) can be considered the first research on sexting. It was conducted with 1,280 respondents aged 13-26. If the respondents have sent sexually explicit photos, it was mainly to a girlfriend/boyfriend (71% of girls and 67% of boys). Girls (39%) and boys (21%) also sent their photos to people they wanted to date and thus required their attention.

Englander (2012) conducted research involving first-year college students. She studied their behaviour in an online environment during high school. She demonstrated that adolescents who posted a photo or video of themselves were coerced to do so. The person who pressured them was usually an enemy and the girls succumbed the most. She recommends educating adolescents in this area and pointing out the possible dangers, but in a very sensitive and moderate manner. She also suggests presenting to students the pressure that may be exerted on them, encouraging peers to help each other, talking carefully about the prosecution so that students are not afraid to talk about sexting. From the above recommendations, we feel it is important to foster a positive climate in schools and develop an environment that will act as a preventative measure before the actual sexting occurs.

Edgar Pacheco and Neil Melhuish (2017) focused on sexting in New Zealand. One finding was that young people were more likely to receive than send nude photos. Their study confirms the results of several studies claiming that older teenagers are more active in sending nude photos. Girls are more likely to request intimate photos and also receive more intimate photos than boys, which has also been confirmed in our research. They see the increase in sending intimate photos as a disparity between the perception of reality and society. Adolescents feel pressured to send such photos. Their research also recommends educating young people about media and its threats.

Kristina Sesar et al., (2019) conducted research where the results of the study showed that out of a total of 440 students, 23.64% of respondents participated in receiving and sending sexually suggestive or provocative content and 10.23% posted such content publicly. The authors noted that sexting can be prevented through the development of emotional skills and competencies. In our view, these competencies can be developed through media education, which sensitively approaches the current needs of children and youth and systematic skill development.

In her research, Katarína Hollá (2020) examined sexting in terms of different types. One of the findings is that adolescents aged 16 - 18 are more

inclined to primary sexting than younger adolescents. Out of a total of 790 adolescents, 17.5% of adolescents engage in primary sexting. She pointed out that the protection of children in the online environment should become a primary concern for support professions and institutions.

Also related to the sending of their own photos and videos are the results of the research by the Czech author Szotkowski et al. (2020), who focused on mapping sexting in the Czech Republic. Their research involved 5.68 respondents. 15.68% of Czech children send their own photos and videos. When sending their own photos, girls dominate with 51.82% compared to boys – 48.18%. 5.90% of respondents send their own intimate videos. Boys are the most frequent senders of videos.

Research results by other experts suggest frequent sending and receiving of intimate photos. It is important to be aware of the consequences of sending or receiving a photo or video with inappropriate content. It is very easy for a photo or video to be misused, even if it is sent to a close person in a relationship. Adolescents often do not consider the possibilities of action and do not think about future difficulties. Therefore, we consider it important to take a responsible approach to the prevention of online threats. The easiest and most effective way is media education, which can help or even save lives.

Daniela Čupková (2013) examined the impact of teaching media education on her students. She offered it as an optional subject in order to examine the positive effects on her students. Before she started teaching the subject, she created a questionnaire. She found that students spend a lot of time in front of the television and online. Students spend up to 180 minutes a day using the media. The teaching of media education was managed through creative project tasks. At the end of the school year, they also conducted a survey to find out how the teaching itself affected students. Students were more informed, acquired new knowledge, and were able to better discuss the media. Time spent on print media increased and the internet and television use decreased. Students were also able to evaluate how appropriate the program on television was for them. One of the findings was that students who had media education as a separate subject had much better knowledge compared to students who only had media education as a cross-curricular topic.

Through media education, we can directly influence students and instill in them the necessary skills to use the media. We can teach them to use information and communication technologies that will help them, not control them. At the same time, it is good prevention against online threats, such as sexting and many others. As a means of sexting prevention, it can be used to:

- eliminate sending inappropriate intimate photos and videos,
- eliminate the reception of inappropriate intimate photos and videos,
- eliminate inappropriate ways of using the internet and social networks,
- teach students how to react and help others in case of cyberbullying,

- strengthen students' courage in solving the problem of sexting,
- increase and improve critical thinking,
- provide options in case of a virtual aggressor attack,
- provide ways and possibilities of quality use of information and communication technologies.

The study suggests that adolescents are active in sending intimate photos and videos, which can pose a threat of sexting. The study emphasises the importance of addressing the issue of sexting and developing students' knowledge through media education. The strong point is the comparison of two types of sexting that adolescents use and also the preventive aspect highlighting media education as the primary element of protection against online threats. We see limitations mainly in a smaller research sample and not between boys and girls, which can have a distorting effect, but we also present the results of other research, the results of which coincide. Sexting is a relatively new online threat that is gaining momentum, so it is important to examine its impact on adolescents' personality and provide opportunities to protect and help students prevent it.

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