“Sexting” and Substance Use Among Delaware High School Students

“Sexting” – sending or receiving a revealing or intimate photo through text or email – has become a serious concern among youth that may have an impact on their health and wellbeing. At times, sexting occurs without the permission of the person receiving the sext message, or without the permission of the person whose photo is being sent. The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey findings indicate that 26% of Delaware high school students reported receiving a sext message. As the chart below illustrates, students who had received a sext message were also more likely to report substance use in the past 30 days. For example, 80% of those who received a sext message also reported drinking within the previous month, while the percentage drops to 48% for those who did not receive a sext message. Although we cannot draw conclusions about the direction of the relationship between sexting and substance use, it is important to consider that these co-occur, which may have implications for prevention strategies.

Receiving Sexts and Substance Use Among Delaware High Schoolers (in percentages)

Drinking in the past 30 days
- Receiving sexts in the past 30 days: 80%
- Not receiving sexts in the past 30 days: 48%

Smoking pot in the past 30 days
- Receiving sexts in the past 30 days: 44%
- Not receiving sexts in the past 30 days: 17%

Source: 2017 Delaware High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Funding for this project has been provided by the Department for Health and Social Services, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health - State of Delaware through a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, SP020704). DDATAgrams may be copied without permission. Please cite SEOW as the source. Additional DDATAgrams are available at: https://www.cdhs.udel.edu/seow/publications.