



A Study of the Consequences of Image-Based Sexual Abuse Victimization among BIPOC Youth Survivors

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Introduction

Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) is the “disclosure of sexually explicit images without consent and for no legitimate purpose” (Franks 2017). IBSA, more commonly known as revenge porn, is an emerging form of sexual abuse negatively impacting the quality of life, mental health, wellbeing, and reputation of survivors (Eaton 2020; Franks 2015). Growing research shows IBSA is rampant among minors, women, and the LGBTQIA community.

- This form of sexual abuse victimizes an average of more than 71 million people a year not including the impact it has on the families of those who are victimized.
- Survivors experience significant mental distress such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, anorexia, body dysmorphia, trust issues, lower self-esteem, somatic-symptom disorder, shame, guilt, harassment, and cyber-bullying (Ruvalcaba & Eaton 2019).
- When youth are victimized, they are sexually objectified and taught their worth derives from their body or sexual functions.
- IBSA victimization teaches youth they're objects accessible for the gratification of everyone else, making them alarmingly vulnerable to sexual violence and re-victimization.
- This study assesses how victimization distorts youths' understanding of consent and whether youth victimized by IBSA are vulnerable to sexual violence in the future.

Research Questions

- 1) The primary objective of this research is to contribute to our understanding of image-based sexual abuse victimization and the consequences of this victimization among BIPOC & queer youth.
- 2) Are victimization outcomes impacted by the perception or understanding survivors have of this occurrence as sexual abuse rather than a normal or warranted occurrence?
- 3) How did/do survivors perceive victimization?
- 4) How have survivors chosen to cope or heal with victimization?

Methods

- Completed an extensive academic literature review.
- Obtain IRB approval.
- Recruit 8 to 10 survivors of IBSA throughout the state of Florida.
- Distribute informed consent form from the sample and conduct qualitative interviews with survivors of IBSA among the ages of 18-26 with a thematic interview guide.
- Comparative analysis assessing the consequences of IBSA victimization among adults in comparison to the consequences of sexual violence, rape, and child sexual abuse among adults.

Current Legislation in Florida

“Sexually cyberharass” means to publish to an Internet website or disseminate through electronic means to another person a sexually explicit image of a person that contains or conveys the personal identification information of the depicted person without the depicted person’s consent, contrary to the depicted person’s reasonable expectation that the image would remain private, for no legitimate purpose, with the intent of causing substantial emotional distress to the depicted person. Evidence that the depicted person sent a sexually explicit image to another person does not, on its own, remove his or her reasonable expectation of privacy for that image.

- A person who willfully and maliciously sexually cyberharasses another person commits a misdemeanor of the first degree
- A person who has one prior conviction for sexual cyberharassment and who commits a second or subsequent sexual cyberharassment commits a felony of the third degree
- An aggrieved person may initiate a civil action against a person who violates this section to obtain all appropriate relief in order to prevent or remedy a violation of this section, including the following:
 - (a) Injunctive relief.
 - (b) Monetary damages to include \$5,000 or actual damages incurred as a result of a violation of this section, whichever is greater.
 - (c) Reasonable attorney fees and costs.

Florida Statutes 784.049: Sexual cyberharassment

Preliminary Findings

- IBSA survivors are often publicly humiliated throughout & after victimization and have similar symptoms to those who are sexually abused and/or raped.
- Survivors IBSA have a distorted sense of consent.
- Children who experience image-based sexual abuse victimization are more vulnerable to revictimization in the future as a result of having a distorted understanding of consent.
- This is an ongoing study and aims to uplift the experiences of queer, Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Latinx survivors.
- Preliminary findings indicate survivors were significantly impacted after victimization and may be vulnerable to sexual violence after victimization.

Potential Reform

- Amend current legislation to recognize “sexual cyber harassment” to IBSA.
- Including image-based sexual abuse in secondary sex education courses to provide youth with tools to protect themselves from victimization
- Advocating for consent education that empowers youth to implement and enforce boundaries.
- Informing youth of red flags to better recognize abuse and prevent victimization.

Discussion

- IBSA largely targets children (specifically young girls and LGBTQIA youth), women, and the LGBTQIA community.
- Youth who are victimized by image based sexual abuse are commodified by their bodies as they develop their identity, self awareness, and sense of self.
- IBSA is especially harmful to BIPOC youth since they are often hyper-sexualized at a young age, making them more susceptible to IBSA victimization.
- Children who experience sexual violence are more vulnerable to revictimization in the future as a result of having a distorted understanding of consent.
- Preliminary findings indicate the same takes place with youth who are victimized by IBSA since the impact on mental health overlap.

Future Directions

- Investigate how IBSA victimization impacts youth in their adolescence and adulthood.
- Investigate how IBSA victimization among youth differs from the experience of youth subjected to sexual violence.
- Investigate effective measures preventing youth from being victimized by IBSA.

References

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