



Victimisation, and Non-Consensual Dissemination of Intimate Images in Adolescents

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Introduction

Childhood victimization has been shown to exert a detrimental influence on victims' lives across multiple domains (Dias et al., 2015). Specifically, it may compromise social functioning, as feelings of insecurity and uncertainty often emerge, undermining individuals' overall well-being (Wu et al., 2021). Furthermore, young people who experience one form of victimization are at heightened risk of encountering additional types of victimization throughout their lives (Finkelhor et al., 2013). One form of victimization that has witnessed a marked increase in prevalence is the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images (NCDII), a phenomenon largely facilitated by contemporary communication technologies (Stonard, 2020). NCDII involves the distribution of sexually explicit material (e.g., photographs or videos) without the consent of the depicted individual (McGlynn et al., 2017). Perpetrators are typically former romantic or intimate partners motivated by desires for retaliation (Sousa & Alberto, 2022; Attrill-Smith et al., 2021). Given its significant psychological and social repercussions, particularly among younger populations, this phenomenon has increasingly drawn attention within the academic community (Citron & Franks, 2014; Powell et al., 2017).



This study aims to examine the prevalence of NCDII and other forms of victimization during childhood and adolescence, and to explore the differences between these variables.

Participants

Procedure

The sample comprised 246 Portuguese adolescents aged between 12 and 19 years (*M* = 15.43, *SD* = 1.89). Most participants were enrolled in regular secondary education (n = 133, 54.1%) and lived in the Lisbon and Vale do Tejo regions (*n* = 108, 43.9%).



Instruments

- Sociodemographic Questionnaire- used to collect participants' personal and contextual information.
- Checklist of Victimization Experiences Related to **Non-Consensual Dissemination of Intimate Images** (NCDII) - Assessed participants' exposure to incidents involving the non-consensual sharing of intimate images.
- Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ; Finkelhor et al., 2005; Portuguese version by Almeida et al., 2020) - For this study, the following modules were used: Child Maltreatment, Peer and Sibling Victimization, and Sexual Victimization.

Descriptive analysis of Childhood victimization

Among participants who did not report NCDII victimization:

Child Maltreatment was the most frequently reported

- The project was approved by the Scientific Committee and the Ethics Committee of the Egas Moniz School of Health & Science.
- Schools were contacted to obtain permission from their directors to conduct the study, and the informed consent forms were provided to parents or legal guardians. Adolescents were also asked to provide their assent to participate.
- The sample was collected in schools.

Results

Descriptive analysis of NCDII

25.2% of participants reported experiencing NCDII.

The most frequently reported types of NCDII in the study were:

Dissemination of intimate photographs online by an

acquaintance (n = 44, 71%)

Threat to disseminate sexual content by an acquaintance

Group Differences

Victimisation by NCDII was more prevalent among older

- participants, with those aged 18–19 reporting the highest levels [F(1,243) = 7.253, p < .001].
- Victims of NCII report higher levels of:
 - Childhood Maltreatment (t = -3.99, p < .001)
 - Peer and Sibling Victimization (t = -4.35, p < .001)
 - Sexual Victimization (t = -3.18, p = .002)

Discussion

- form of victimization (M = 0.49, SD = 0.88),
- Followed by Peer and Sibling Victimization (M = 0.46, SD = 0.92)
- And Sexual Victimization (M = 0.34, SD = 1.07).
 - Among participants who reported experiencing NCDII: Peer and Sibling Victimization was the most frequently reported form of victimization (M = 1.27, SD = 1.37) Followed by Sexual Victimization (M = 1.05, SD = 1.63)
 - And Child Maltreatment (M = 1.03, SD = 1.07).

- (*n* = 41, 66.1%)
- Threat to disseminate sexual content by a former intimate
- partner (n = 41, 66.1%)
- Dissemination of intimate photographs online by a former intimate partner (n = 37, 59.7%)
- Threat to disseminate sexual content in exchange for something (*n* = 37, 59.7%)
- Dissemination of intimate videos online by a former intimate partner (n = 33, 53.2%)
- The findings indicate that 25.2% of young people experienced at least one incident of NCDII. The most frequently reported act among victims was the sharing or online posting of intimate images by either an acquaintance or an intimate partner. Existing literature supports these findings, showing that dissemination is typically carried out by former romantic partners (Bloom, 2014). However, it can also occur in other relational contexts, such as friendships (Rallan & Vig, 2019).
- Participants aged 18 to 19 exhibit higher levels of NCDII victimization. These results align with previous research indicating that individuals within the 16 to 19 age range are more frequently affected by this type of victimization compared to adults (Powell et al., 2017). This may be related to the greater acceptance of both the creation and sharing of intimate content among this age group (Attrill-Smith et al., 2021).
- Threats to disclose sexual content were also found to be more prevalent when the perpetrator was an acquaintance or intimate partner. In these cases, intimate partners often resort to blackmail when they suspect infidelity (Henry & Powell, 2015), to assert power and control over the victim (Citron & Franks, 2014), or as a form of revenge (Bloom, 2014).
- The results also showed that NCDII victimization can occur at the hands of strangers (e.g., Rosenberg, 2021), although these cases appear to be less common. All forms of NCDII victimization are facilitated by the widespread use of information and communication technologies (Goulart & Kafure, 2019), which foster intimate interactions among young people (Morelli et al., 2016). • Concerning childhood victimization, it was found that NCDII victims reported higher mean levels of childhood maltreatment, peer and sibling victimization, and sexual victimization compared to non-victims. These findings align with prior research, which demonstrates that young people exposed to multiple forms of violence are more likely to experience further victimization (Almeida et al., 2020) and are particularly vulnerable to abuse in intimate relationships (Stover et al., 2018), as may be the case with NCII victimization (Sousa & Alberto, 2022).

Conclusion

This study concludes that childhood victimization is highly prevalent among young individuals who have experienced NCII. Future research should continue to focus on this age group, as they are the primary users of digital devices, which increases their exposure to online risks (Goulart & Kafure, 2019). Additionally, it is recommended that schools implement awareness programs that address the risk factors associated with sharing intimate content. Early intervention with young victims is essential to mitigate the long-term emotional impact resulting from NCII victimization.

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