“All of Me Is Completely Different”: Experiences and Consequences Among Victims of Technology-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse

# Details

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Risks and harms

## Sample

Seven young women (aged 17–24) in Sweden with experience of TA-CSA before the age of 18.

## Implications For Policy Makers About

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

Need to challenge the assumption that technologically assested child sexual abuse is a less severe form of sexual abuse

## Implications For Stakeholders About

* Researchers
* Healthcare
* Other

## Other Stakeholder Implication

Short and long-term impact of technologically assisted child sexual abuse on victims' lives and health

# Abstract

The aim of the present study was to gain a first-person perspective on the experiences of technology-assisted child sexual abuse (TA-CSA), and a deeper understanding of the way it may affect its victims. Seven young women (aged 17–24) with experience of TA-CSA before the age of 18 participated in individual in-depth interviews. The interviews were teller-focused with the aim of capturing the interviewee’s own story about how they made sense of their experiences over time, and what impact the victimization had on them in the short and long terms. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed a broad range of abusive experiences that had profoundly impacted the individuals’ lives, health and self-concepts. Three dominant themes emerged from the analysis – From thrilling to abusive, Negative effect on health and wellbeing, and A new self after the abuse. From thrilling to abusive captures the wide range of experiences described, starting from the child’s own sexual curiosity to descriptions of having been manipulated or threatened into engaging in sexual activity, as well as the sometimes long and complex process of understanding the severity of one’s experiences. Negative effect on health and wellbeing describes the victimization’s comprehensive impact on the life and health of the participants, how they blamed themselves for what had happened, and the struggle of having to live with the constant fear of pictures from the abuse resurfacing. A new self after the abuse depicts how the victimization impacted the way participants viewed and thought about themselves in relation to others, and distorted their views of their bodies. The findings are discussed in relation to previous research on both offline CSA and TA-CSA, as well as theoretical and practical implications.

# Outcome

"Despite the participants’ different experiences (from being abused by a single offender, to several years of repeated abuse by numerous offenders), they all provided detailed accounts of how their victimization had a negative effect on their health and wellbeing, not seldom of extremely serious proportions. The abuse impacted on several aspects of their lives, such as their relationships with others, their self-respect, and their ability to cope with everyday life. Research has shown CSA to be predictive of internalizing outcomes (Muniz et al., 2019), and many of the consequences described in the interviews match those that several decades of research on offline CSA have reported, namely general depressive symptoms, re-victimization, sexual problems, anxiety, poor self-esteem, and interpersonal problems (Paolucci et al., 2001; Maniglio, 2009).
The impact of the abuse could be both direct and delayed, depending on the participant’s understanding of the abusive situation and the time taken to realize its severity....
The fact that the abuse took place online ('should have been able to turn off the computer') and required the participants to be active in the acts ('felt like I subjected myself to the abuse') led to further self-blame. Professionals have also noted that victims of TA-CSA are more often blamed by others and seen as participating in the abuse than victims of offline CSA (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2017). Higher levels of self-blame among CSA victims have, in turn, been associated with increased psychological distress (Coffey et al., 1996). This illustrates the importance of professionals dealing with abused children working to counter feelings of blame (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2017).
Another consequence of the abuse being conducted via digital technology was the constant fear of pictures resurfacing."
(Authors, 11)