

The Predictors, Motivations and Characteristics of Image-Based Sexual Abuse: A Scoping Review

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Loren E. Parton¹ and Michaela M. Rogers¹

Abstract

Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) is a form of sexual violence and abuse that is facilitated by the use of technology. The array of different technologies, ever-changing behaviors, and varied terminology have created challenges in terms of appropriate response, legislation, and the protection of victims as well as difficulties in establishing the extent and harms of this behavior on a wider scale and context. This scoping review examines and synthesizes the current literature which focuses on predictors, the motivation of perpetrators, and the characteristics of both victims and perpetrators in relation to IBSA. The databases *Web of Science*, *ASSIA*, *ProQuest*, and *StarPlus* were searched in December 2023. A supplementary search was conducted in *Google Scholar* and hand-searching of two key journals within the topic area. The search focused on five geographical locations that share some cultural background (United Kingdom/Ireland, United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia). A total of 60 studies and reviews were included which meet the inclusion criteria. The main findings were: (a) diverse populations and marginalized groups are not represented in the current literature; (b) there is a vast number of interchangeable terminologies used; (c) there are limited studies that examine the predictors of victimization of IBSA; (d) the United States and Australia are the dominant countries of study of IBSA.

Keywords

cyber abuse, nonconsensual intimate image dissemination, revenge porn, cyberflashing, sextortion, technology-facilitated sexual violence and abuse

Introduction

The ever-growing and developing world of technology brings challenges particularly when this technology is used to cause harm and destruction. One form of technology-facilitated violence which has been characterized in scholarship is image-based sexual abuse (IBSA). It has been suggested IBSA is situated on the continuum of sexual violence (Kelly, 1988) and is facilitated by digital forms of communication technologies (McGlynn et al., 2017). Image-based sexual abuse has been defined as the “non-consensual creation and/or distribution of private sexual images” (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017a, p.1). Furthermore, Walker and Sleath (2017) define image-based sexual abuse as “The sharing of sexually explicit images (including photographs) and/or videos, without the consent of those depicted, where the motivation is unclear or is not linked to revenge” (p. 5). Furthermore, non-consensual intimate image dissemination is defined as the distribution of sexually explicit images without the consent of the individual depicted (Maddocks, 2018). This term is more commonly recognized as “revenge porn” which has a specific definition suggesting the motivation for the behavior. Sullaway (2022) suggests this term “refers to images

posted with deliberate and malevolent intent to hurt, punish and humiliate” (p.228); however, there are additional motivations and challenges of this terminology to consider, and these are discussed further within this article. It is important to note the definition of IBSA also includes the creation of intimate images without consent; therefore, it can include behaviors such as “Upskirting” which is when a perpetrator would take images up a woman’s skirt and distribute them without consent, usually on porn websites (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017b). Another form of nonconsensual IBSA is the creation of “deepfakes” using artificial intelligence and facial mapping to create images and/or videos to include people doing or saying things they did not (Lucas, 2022). Two further concepts that are particularly relevant to the distribution of images are firstly “downstream distribution” which is when images are re-posted by third parties (Souza,

¹University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

Corresponding Author:

Loren E. Parton, Department of Sociological Studies, The University of Sheffield, The Wave, 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield S10 2AH, UK.

Email: l.parton@sheffield.ac.uk

2016). The second concept, “doxing” (or “doxxing”), relates to when an individual’s personal details are shared, such as an individual’s name, social media profile, and telephone number to name a few (Franklin, 2014). These practices make it very difficult for the individual to remove or erase this content as they may have been shared to other sites or saved by internet users (Kamal & Newman, 2016). Two additional terms which are also prevalent within the literature are “sexting,” defined as the sharing of sexually explicit messages or images (Rollero et al., 2023). Compliant sexting occurs within consensual intimate or sexual relationships is considered normal practice and can contribute to relationship maintenance by improving intimacy (Beckmeyer et al., 2022). Alternatively, coercive sexting is considered a harmful sexual behavior in which individuals engage in deceptive or coercive behaviors of demanding, sharing, or sending images, in order to cause harm to victims (Walker & Sleath, 2017). Finally, cyberflashing relates to an individual sharing an intimate image, usually of their genitals to an unsuspecting individual (Sparks et al., 2023). Within this current review, “sexting” has been considered as a nonconsensual behavior, as the behaviors within the included articles relate to cyberflashing and coercive sexting. A final term is “sex-tortion” which is defined as the threat of explicit or intimate images being shared without consent, usually for the purpose of procuring additional images, financial gain, or sexual acts (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020).

It has been suggested that IBSA behaviors can be divided into three different dimensions: the taking or creation of content without consent, second, the distribution of content without someone’s consent—nonconsensual image sharing, and finally, the threat to distribute intimate content (Powell et al., 2022). Highlighted above, the umbrella term IBSA encompasses a wide range of behaviors with differing motivations and predictors. The literature has demonstrated that there is rarely a single motivating factor for image-based sexual abuse (Henry et al., 2020b; Powell et al., 2019). This has made it challenging for governments to legislate in this context as legislation requires that there is a single identifiable intent for a perpetrator to be convicted and prosecuted (Rackley et al., 2021). For this article, IBSA will be the adopted terminology, and this will encompass the above behaviors discussed.

There is currently one systematic review published in 2023 that focuses on factors associated with IBSA in terms of victimization and perpetration (Paradiso et al., 2023). This appears to be the most comprehensive and related review to the current research questions for this scoping review; however, it did exclude evidence reviews which the current review does include to explore the full range of knowledge around IBSA. Furthermore, there were limitations in relation to the search terms utilized, for example, although the article was titled “*Image-Based Sexual Abuse Associated Factors: A Systematic Review*” the term “Image-based sexual abuse” was not utilized as a term within the

chosen databases and this differs from the current scoping review. Additionally, the search was completed by May 2022 with the current review expanding on this search until December 2023. Finally, the focus of the research questions with the review conducted by Paradiso et al. (2023) focuses on the predictors and consequences/implications of IBSA in relation to victims and perpetrators. The current review expands on the predictors and additionally considers the characteristics of victims and perpetrators as well as the proposed motivation behind IBSA.

Additionally, two further literature reviews focusing upon issues relating to terminology and concepts of domestic and sexual violence and a review of technology-facilitated domestic and sexual violence have been conducted (Henry & Powell, 2018; Henry et al., 2020a). The majority of literature and/or systematic reviews within this area are not specifically focused upon IBSA and the range of behaviors it encompasses and do not consider the predictors, motivators, and/or characteristics of victimization and perpetration of this type of behavior. Therefore, a number of the above-mentioned reviews have not been included in this scoping review due to not fully satisfying the inclusion criteria.

Research conducted within the area of IBSA has predominantly been based in the United States and Australia (Henry & Flynn, 2019; Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2020) as well as other countries such as Canada and Portugal (Champion et al., 2022; Murça et al., 2023). The previous systematic review conducted by Paradiso et al. (2023) did not exclude results based on the location of the research and found only two of the articles included were outside of the big five regions, thus providing further rationale for the exclusion criteria within the current review. Although IBSA is a widespread phenomenon within a range of disciplines such as criminology, sociology, psychology and law, research and empirical studies are lacking. The purpose of this review is to identify the current evidence within the aforementioned disciplines and aims to build theoretical knowledge around the phenomenon of IBSA within the context of Western society. It is essential to understand this type of offense from the perspectives of both victims and perpetrators with the hope of being able to provide appropriate support and treatment.

Research Questions

This scoping review presents an overview of the current body of literature in relation to IBSA across five countries (United Kingdom/Ireland, United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia) focusing on the predictors, motivation, and characteristics of this form of sexual violence. The scoping review questions are:

1. What are the suggested predictors of IBSA?
2. What are the motivating factors of IBSA?
3. What are the characteristics of IBSA perpetrators and victims?

Methods

A scoping review methodology was adopted in this case to explore the current state of academic literature in relation to the proposed research questions. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) suggest that the aim of a scoping review is to examine the extent, range, and nature of scholarship in a particular field, to summarize and disseminate research findings, and to identify research gaps in the existing literature.

Due to the limited available literature within this topic area from a preliminary search, it was determined that a scoping review was appropriate and necessary and the area proposed is broader in focus than the aforementioned reviews highlighted above (Henry & Powell, 2018; Henry et al., 2020a; Paradiso et al., 2023), thus satisfying the above criteria to conduct this type of review. The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018). Studies have not been excluded on the basis of quality (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) due to this review aims to explore the current landscape around IBSA, and excluding relevant articles and data will impact the validity of the results.

Search Strategy

The following databases were searched; *Web of Science*, *ASSIA*, and *StarPlus*. Supplementary searches were conducted using *Google Scholar* and *ProQuest* to ensure an exhaustive search of unpublished dissertations and grey literature. Finally, two key journals within this area of research, "Violence Against Women" and "Gender and Society," were hand searched to identify any further relevant literature. The search terms used to explore the literature in relation to the defined research questions were; "Image based sexual abuse" OR "revenge porn*" OR "non consensual porn*" OR "non consensual intimate image abuse" OR "technology facilitated sexual abuse" AND "characteristic*" AND "predict*" AND "perpetrator*" AND "victim*" AND "motivat*."

The selection criteria used to include literature from the review were studies/reviews published between 2000 and 2023; written in English; primary research, case studies, and reviews, and research to be in relation to the big five countries. The search generated 923 articles, with 636 articles remaining after initial duplicates had been removed. The software Rayyan was utilized between two researchers and blind reviewing was conducted with the initial number of articles ($n=636$). This involved screening the titles and abstracts in order to determine the relevance to include in the full-text reading. Any further duplicates were removed ($n=54$), and discrepancies were then discussed prior to the next stage of the review. In the case of discrepancies, a third reviewer was consulted if necessary. Four hundred and forty-seven articles were excluded based on titles and abstracts

screening, and 75 were excluded following full-text reading. Following the initial screening process, both researchers screened the same 10 articles to ensure inter-rater reliability across the decision-making process and then equally screened half of the remaining articles to determine if they should be included or excluded from the final review. Again, discussion resolved conflicts, and all decisions made were appropriately recorded. At both stages, the research questions served as screening questions enabling inclusion or exclusion. Sixty articles were retained in the final analysis. The PRISMA flow chart (Figure 1) represents the stages of data selection for the scoping review.

Data Extraction

A data extraction template was developed in order to analyze the relevant articles, this was completed for each included article. The extracted data included: Author(s), Year of publication, Origin/country of origin (where the source was published or conducted), population and sample size within the source of evidence, methodology, and key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s. There are some articles that have been included which contain duplicate data by the authors, therefore this has been noted in the data extraction table for transparency to ensure all relevant information has been included.

Results

This section of the article begins with a description of included studies as well as a summary of the range of terminology authors have adopted in relation to the subject of IBSA. Following this, each subsequent section will focus on each of the research questions and be split under the following themes: Predictors of IBSA with two sub-themes of "Personality" and "Online behaviors"; Motivations of IBSA; and Characteristics of victims and perpetrators. Due to the volume of articles included, it was not possible to include the full data extraction table within this article; for this information, please refer to the Supplemental File accompanying this article.

Description of Included studies

The included studies/reviews (for brevity, hereafter "studies") have been examined to determine the range of methodologies used as well as the years the research has spanned and the most prevalent countries the research has been conducted in. In the 60 included studies, 54 articles were empirical and 6 were reviews. The split of the articles in terms of methods suggested a preference for quantitative methods in relation to IBSA with $N=30$ of the included articles adopting this type of methodology, $N=14$ adopted qualitative methods, followed by $N=10$ mixed methods. A high proportion of the articles adopted online surveys and/or questionnaires

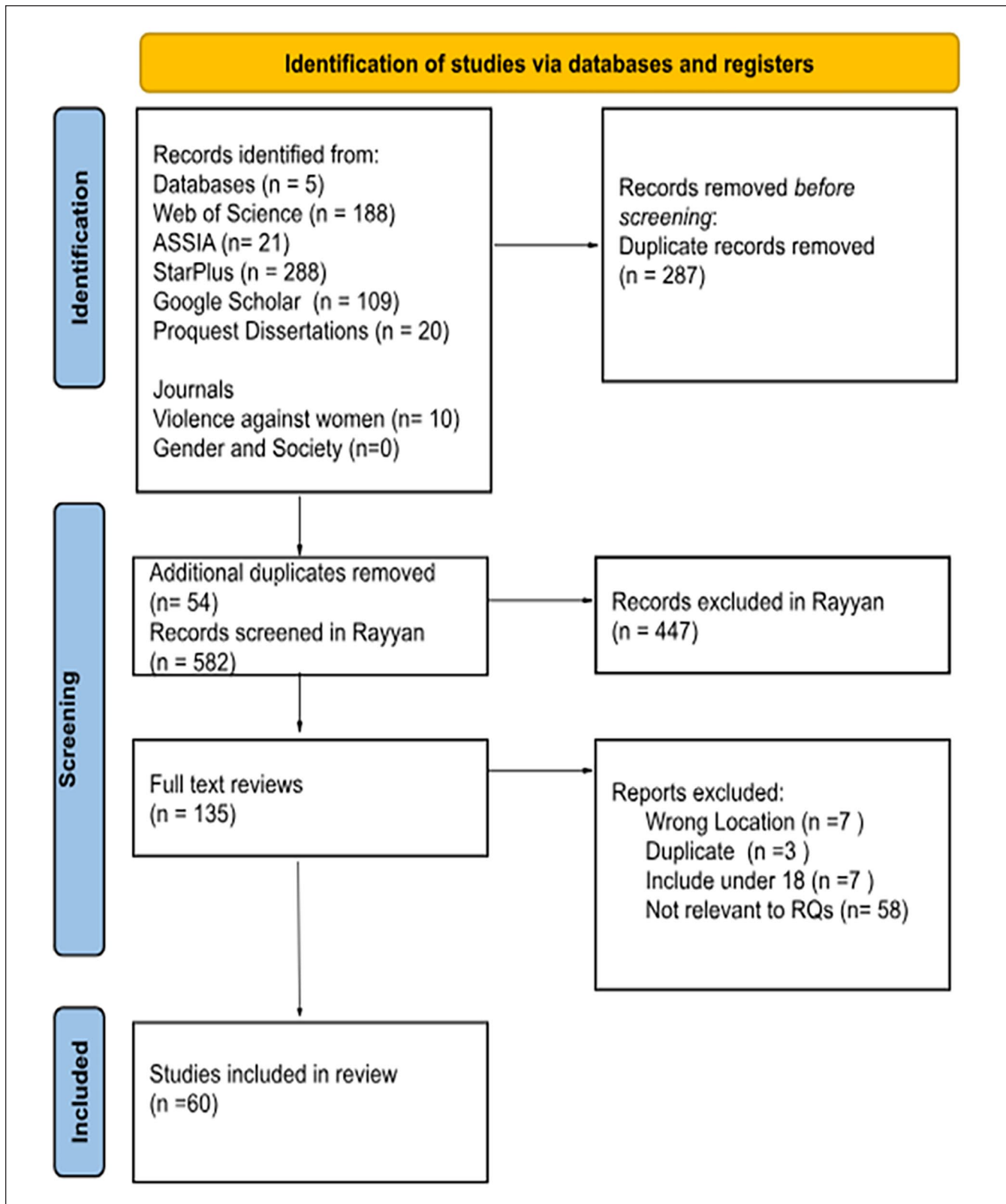


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram of included studies in the current review.

Table 1. The Range and Frequency of Terminology Used in the Included Scoping Review Articles.

Dominant Terminology Used in the Included Articles			
Cyber sextortion	I	Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA)	I
Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)	IIIIIIIIIIII	Technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV)	III
Image-based sexual harassment and abuse (IBSHA)	I	Unsolicited sexual images (USI)	II
Nonconsensual porn (NCP)	III	Sext dissemination	I
Nonconsensual distribution of sexually explicit images (NCD)	I	Nonconsensual sexually explicit Image distribution	I
Nonconsensual sharing of personal sexually explicit imagery	I	Sexual violence and abuse	I
Nonconsensual sharing of private sexually explicit media	II	Online abuse	I
online image-based evaluative voyeurism (OIBEV)	I	Cyberbullying	I
Revenge porn	IIIIIIII	Nonconsensual distribution of intimate images (NCDII)	I
Sexting	IIIIII	Technology-facilitated intimate partner violence (TFIPV)	I
Sextortion	II		

($N=33$) with some articles using discourse/content analysis on media sources ($N=8$) followed by interviews ($N=5$). Publication dates ranged from the year 2015 until 2023. It is interesting to note that the majority of studies were published more recently in the years 2019, 2021, and 2022. This increase in publications is likely due to a wider funded research project which was conducted initially in Australia but has since expanded to the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Canada. The team involved in this project has a number of publications included in the review (Flynn et al., 2021; Henry et al., 2019, 2022; McGlynn et al., 2019; Powell & Henry, 2019). The content of each of these studies has been checked to ensure there has not been any double reporting within the review. In the 54 empirical articles included, a high proportion of the studies were published by authors within the United States ($N=20$), followed by Australia ($N=12$), Canada ($N=9$) and the United Kingdom ($N=5$). In the six review articles, these have been classified as online/international as each of the reviews did not filter their search criteria to exclude particular countries.

Terminology

Across the included studies, there appears to be ambiguity and interchangeable definitions which relate to the same concepts and range of behaviors associated with IBSA. $N=21$ different terms or concepts were used in the articles, including nonconsensual porn ($N=4$), revenge porn ($N=8$), technology-facilitated sexual violence ($N=4$), and most commonly used was image-based sexual abuse ($N=16$). Some articles used more than one term dominantly: for example, in the title (see Table 1). Some of the terminology adopted focused on the overarching concept (e.g., Technology-Facilitated abuse) as a whole, whereas others focused on specific behaviors (e.g., Sextortion).

Predictors of IBSA

$N=22$ studies were identified as reporting a range of predictors of individuals perpetrating or becoming a victim of IBSA. Some articles did focus on predictors of both victimization and perpetration; however, predominantly, they were discussed separately.

Victimization

There were limited studies that directly reported on the predictors of being a victim of IBSA ($N=11$), and when this was examined, it was often linked to perpetration as a predictor of victimization (Karasavva, 2020; Sparks et al., 2023). Marcum et al. (2022) suggested engagement in coercive sexting behavior as well as using dating apps made it more likely for an individual to become a victim of IBSA. Similarly, Waldman (2019) found individuals who used dating apps were more likely to be victims of revenge porn. Some research has focused on the link between being a victim of intimate partner violence (IPV) in an offline space and whether this predicts online victimization. Research by Eaton et al. (2022) found that experiencing sexual IPV increased the likelihood an individual would become a victim of sextortion. However, they also found that it was specifically sexual IPV that was predictive and not physical or psychological IPV.

Perpetration

Personality. A key area of exploration by various researchers has focused upon personality traits, specifically whether an association occurs between “dark” personality traits and the proclivity to engage in IBSA (Sparks et al., 2023). The “Dark Triad” of personality (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) has been adopted by researchers as a framework to describe those who

engage with IBSA perpetration. The Dark Triad includes the following traits: Machiavellianism is a trait characterized by interpersonal manipulation, a disregard for morality, and a drive to gain power by whatever means necessary; psychopathy is characterized by antisocial behavior, disinhibited behavior, and lack of empathy and remorse; and, finally, narcissism is characterized by egotistical admiration of one's own attributes and appearance (Muris et al., 2017). Research by Phipps (2022) suggests scoring high on Machiavellianism was significantly associated with greater IBSA proclivity. Similarly, research by Clancy et al. (2020) suggested that individuals who disseminate sexts scored higher on dark personality traits. Additionally, Ruhland (2019) suggested predictors of IBSA perpetration did have a gendered aspect: for example, in men, psychopathy and acceptance attitudes of nude images were predictors of sharing unsolicited intimate images, whereas for women, narcissism and liberal attitudes were predictors. Buckles et al. (2013) suggested the concept of the "Dark Tetrad" of personality this includes sadism as an additional dimension to the "Dark Triad." Sadism is defined as an individual with low empathy and experiences enjoyment from observing the suffering of others, both psychologically and physically (Tsoukas & March, 2018). This research concluded there was significant correlation between the Dark Tetrad traits and the proclivity to engage in IBSA and this was further supported by Thomason-Darch et al. (2021). Specifically, it was found that sadism was the only independent predictor of an individual engaging in IBSA. This was further supported by Bonfá-Araujo et al. (2022) who have suggested that sadism is the best predictor of aversive online behaviors.

Online Behaviors. Within the review, a number of studies focused on visiting "revenge porn" sites or "slut pages." These have been defined by Maas et al. (2021) as digitally created groups or websites that are intended to share nude and intimate images without knowledge and/or consent. The websites allow others to comment on the appearance, sexuality, and sexual experiences of the individuals shown in the images. Predominantly, the research adopted a content analysis methodology to review the engagement and contributions of individuals on these types of sites. Clancy et al. (2021) suggested that the perpetration of cyberbullying was associated with lower levels of site visitation. In a different study, Maas et al. (2021) surveyed undergraduate college students and found being a man, drinking alcohol, and using pornography were associated with engaging with "slut pages." Clancy et al. (2019, 2020) found that normalization of sexting behavior in believing that images are often shared and seen by others and having received a sext (unsolicited or not intended for them) increased the likelihood of engaging in the dissemination of nonconsensual intimate images.

Motivations of IBSA

As discussed, there are varying definitions of IBSA that can suggest a motivation for the perpetrated behavior: for example,

the term revenge porn suggests the motivation behind the offense of being primarily revenge. In contrast, Davidson et al. (2019) and Gauthier (2023) suggest various motivations for IBSA, including amusement, financial gain, sexual gratification, and blackmail or extortion. Others have suggested motivations linked to coercive control and other forms of sexual violence (Henry et al., 2023; Woodlock et al., 2020).

Walker et al. (2021) found that motivations for perpetrating IBSA were mainly explained in a humorous manner such as fun or as a joke. However, they also found that there was some negative intent: for example, for revenge or to cause distress to the victim. Furthermore, sexual gratification and social status were suggested to be motivators behind perpetrating IBSA with revenge not being identified as a key motivation (Henry & Flynn, 2019). Similarly, Clancy et al. (2020) found the most frequently used reason for sharing intimate images was due to the perceived attractiveness of the individual in the image and as a joke. Additionally, further reasoning was suggested such as to increase social status and to brag, gossip, or make fun of the individual. A review conducted by Filice et al. (2022) suggested many perpetrators were motivated by the need to cause discomfort to their victims for reasons often related to masculine identity. Specifically, this behavior was motivated by men wishing to exert power over women by sharing and sending unsolicited images with this being intrinsically rewarding and feeding into the need for men to undermine women's power in society and courtship.

Hearn and Hall (2019) conducted discourse analysis on online content posted on "revenge porn" websites. They found the existence of discourses that relate to motivations of perpetration such as risky sex, sexual dissatisfaction, and sexual trophism. Furthermore, Huber (2023) and Giordano (2018) suggest differing motivations across two online platforms that allows the sharing of intimate images, this was focused on "slut shaming" as well as for sexual gratification and achieving status among the online community by providing images that are requested and desired by others.

There have been links suggested in relation to IBSA and other forms of gender-based violence including IPV and coercive control (McGlynn et al., 2019). Like domestic abuse (DA), in the case of IBSA, it appears the perpetrator strives for power and control over the victim; therefore, one of the psychological explanations suggested was based upon the eight domains of the Power and Control wheel (Eaton et al., 2021). The eight domains include: the use of intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing, denying, and blaming, children, male privilege, economic abuse, and coercion and threats (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Eaton et al. (2021) found within their research that all eight factors within the Power and Control wheel had been adopted during the perpetration of abuse, the most common ones being emotional abuse, coercion, and threats. Research by Havard and Lefevre (2020) suggested an adaptation to the current Duluth power and control wheel, to include the use of technology as a means of surveillance, manipulation, and control. They

found some of the strategies of control used by perpetrators with their digital devices correspond to this already existing model. Furthermore, research focused on the self-reported accounts of perpetrators confirmed that one of the main motivations was control (Henry et al., 2021). Research has strengthened this suggestion and found that control was found to be a main motivation for IBSA in a study conducted in 2023 (Henry et al., 2023). Woodlock (2017) suggested further motivations which characterize an abusive relationship such as sharing images or threatening to share in order to isolate, punish and even humiliate the victim. This links in closely with the idea of power and control as a means of maintaining an abusive relationship.

Some articles within the review have specifically defined the individuals who perpetrate various behaviors within IBSA and have focused on the concept of “typologies” of offenders. O’Malley and Holt (2022) examined crime characteristics in relation to cyber sextortion and identified different types of offenders. For example, intimately violent cyber sextortion (those operating within the context of an intimate relationship) was linked to control as motivation; and transnational criminal sextortion offenders (often operating in a group as a business) were motivated by financial gain. Cross et al. (2023) adopted O’Malley and Holt’s (2022) typology framework in relation to romance fraud. Their study examined complaints made to Scamwatch and often sextortion was referenced as a key characteristic of experiences of romance fraud. In doing so, Cross et al. (2023) identified that two of the proposed typologies: intimately violent cyber sextortion and transnational criminal cyber sextortion could be applied specifically to the romance fraud context.

Mortreux et al. (2019) described five typologies within their report that were determined from analyzing interview data collected on image-based abuse (IBA). The authors suggested these typologies could be utilized as a useful structure to examine the range of behaviors associated with this type of abuse. The typologies they suggested were relationship-based IBA linked to DA, sharing identifiable images, sharing unsolicited non-identifiable images, child exploitation-based IBA, and taking images of strangers that is, upskirting. The data collected from participants around their motivation for engaging in particular behaviors could be commonly associated with the different suggested typologies, for example, participants who engaged in taking images of strangers suggested motivations of sexual gratification and power; thus, there were some motivations which were more commonly disclosed for particular behaviors. Similarly, O’Hara et al. (2020) looked specifically at retribution style offenders who commit IBSA, on conducting crime script analysis they found three distinct typologies or crime scripts, these included threats, sextortion and dissemination, unauthorized access of a victim’s mobile device and dissemination and covert intimate filming. Again, these were linked closely to the perpetrators’ motivation for committing this type of offense.

To summarize, the typologies defined within the included articles relate to the suggested motivation of the perpetrator as well as the actual behavior, for example, the typology of transnational criminal sextortion offenders is characterized by the motivation of financial gain, whereas sharing identifiable images is outlining a behavior. However, many of the articles have suggested that the motivation behind the behavior underpins the basis of the typologies, for example, Mortreux et al. (2019) found that there were commonly associated motivations with the different behaviors/typologies they defined. Overall, the typologies suggested in each of the included articles does suggest some commonality as generally similar typologies/behaviors were found across each of the studies in that they reflect the motivation behind the offence or the range of behaviors that is encompassed by IBSA.

Characteristics of Victims and Perpetrators. Within this research, characteristics relate to the individual demographic factors associated with victims and perpetrators, for example, gender, age, and sexuality. Previous research suggests factors which are more likely to put someone at risk of being a victim of IBSA pertain to age (with higher risk for those between the ages of 18–29 years) and to identify as sexual minorities (Powell & Henry, 2019).

Gender and Sexual Identities. The debate around IBSA being a gendered phenomenon has been discussed in scholarship in relation to women representing the most common victims, whereas men are predominantly perpetrators of this type of offence (Bates, 2017; Eaton et al., 2017; Pina et al., 2017, 2021). Pina et al. (2021) argue that IBSA is a gendered violence as not only were women more likely to be victimized, but the impact on women is significantly worse than for men, particularly since they experience secondary harms in the forms of further abuse and harassment (Cole & Cole, 2022; Henry & Powell, 2016). However, this scoping review found mixed results. For example, Yang (2023) suggests gender is a nuanced predictor of IBSA in that they found opposing results to other published research (Branch et al., 2017; Powell et al., 2019). Yang (2023) suggested men may be less likely to be perpetrators than the literature has suggested and that gender did not significantly predict perpetration or victimization. In contrast, research by Dardis and Richards (2022) and Branch et al. (2017) found victims were mainly women. Furthermore, a study by Champion et al. (2022) concluded IBSA is not exclusively a gender-based harm, and Walker et al. (2021) and Storey et al. (2021) suggested there was no association between gender and perpetration or victimization. This suggests a twofold conclusion can be drawn from this review; first, a high proportion of literature supports the idea that IBSA is a gendered phenomenon, with women being predominantly victims and men being perpetrators of this kind of sexual violence. Second, although IBSA is gendered, there is still the acknowledgement that

both men and women can equally be victims and perpetrators.

Despite significant implications in research on IBSA in terms of gender and sexual identity, gender and sexual minorities are often excluded from research due to small sample sizes or challenges in recruitment (Lee, 2022; Maas et al., 2021; Yang, 2023). This means the experiences of these marginalized groups are underrepresented and underexplored in the context of IBSA. Karasavva and Forth (2022) examined characteristics such as gender and sexual orientation and whether these were predictive of perpetration and victimization. They found that sexual orientation was predictive of victimization, with results showing that heterosexual participants were almost 50% less likely to be victims of IBSA compared to LGBTQ+ participants. Within this particular sample, those who identified as transgender, non-binary, or other were excluded, this explains the use of LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer/questioning and + as an inclusive term for all) and not LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and + as an inclusive term for all). A study by Waldman (2019) specifically focused on gay and bisexual men who engaged in online communities found higher rates of IBSA victimization in contrast to the general population and broader members of the LGBTQI+ community such as gay and bisexual women. However, due to the small sample size of lesbian and bisexual women, this data was excluded, and the focus shifted specifically to experiences of men. Similarly, Douglass et al. (2020) suggested victimization was associated with identifying as non-heterosexual. However, further multivariate analysis suggested no significant association between victimization and sexual identity. Henry et al. (2019) in their multi-methods study in Australia found that IBSA disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including people identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Age. The age range focused upon in IBSA research has mainly been toward the younger age bracket (18–29 years); thus, many articles within this review have focused their sample on university students (Bonilla et al., 2021; Branch et al., 2017; Dardis & Richards, 2022; Fisico, 2021; Henriksen, 2020; Karasavva, 2020; O'Connor et al., 2018; Marcum et al., 2022; Runyan, 2023; Said & McNealey, 2023; Sirianni, 2015; Snaychuk & O'Neill, 2020; Sparks et al., 2023; Walker et al., 2021). In contrast, Lee (2022) and Webb (2021) focused their research on an older adult sample (25–75 years) and found men and women of all age ranges experience online abuse, including IBSA.

Victim-Perpetrator Overlap. Within the review, there is the suggestion of the concept of a victim-perpetrator overlap (Sparks et al., 2023). Karasavva (2020) suggests a cyclic relationship between victimization and perpetration and that if an individual had been a victim, they were more likely to become a perpetrator of IBSA. Similarly, Said and McNealey (2023) also found perpetration was strongly related to previous

victimization and also receiving unsolicited intimate images. Furthermore, Karasavva and Forth (2022) of their sample of 816 undergraduate students, 28% who had been victims of IBSA, also had a history of perpetration, whereas 57% of perpetrators also had a history of victimization, highlighting this overlap and relationship.

Discussion

In this scoping review, 921 articles were reviewed, and 60 studies were included focusing on the predictors, motivations, and characteristics of both victims and perpetrators of IBSA. The earliest publication within this review was in 2015, but there has been a sharp increase in scholarly interest and publications between 2019 and 2022; this could be suggested to coincide with the development of more awareness around legislation and the impact and harms caused by IBSA. Additionally, in some of the big five countries, new legislative measures have been put in place to protect victims of this type of offense, so this could have impacted the volume of publications and interest. For example, in the United Kingdom, The Criminal Justice and Courts Act was introduced in 2015 with Section 33 stating that it is an offense to disclose private sexual images or films of an individual without their consent and with the intention of causing distress to the individual. This was further amended in May 2021 in which the threat to disclose private sexual images or films was defined within Section 33 of the act. Similarly, in Australia, eight of the country's jurisdictions have introduced specific IBSA laws, with attempts made to include the experiences of transwomen, by criminalizing IBSA perpetration against transwomen. In Canada, Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act was introduced in 2014, and in the United States, as of 2019, 46 states have legislation in place against IBSA. Although some countries have legislation in place, not all fully encompass the range of offenses that define IBSA. Finally, in New Zealand, Harmful Digital Communications Act was introduced in 2015; however, this act addresses online violence and abuse more broadly, as New Zealand does not have a specific criminal offence for IBSA. Although this is a mixed picture in terms of legislation, the increase in research suggests growing interest from scholars in technology-focused abuse which coincides with the evolution of social media, the increased accessibility and usage of image and media sharing platforms, as well as the global pandemic and the impact this may have had on the use of technology and incidences of technology-facilitated sexual violence and abuse. Further, the global interest in the phenomenon of IBSA appears to have peaked following the publication of Hunter Moore's revenge porn website "Is Anyone Up," which was closed down in 2014 (Franks, 2017).

Sample Considerations

This review highlights the limitations of methodologies and design in extant research. For example, most studies use

quantitative methodologies, such as online surveys and questionnaires. In terms of diversity, existing scholarship highlights the limitations in terms of representative samples. Most populations were recruited through convenience sampling from universities and colleges. This meant that most represented the 18 to 29 age group. When studies examined a wider age range, important findings emerged. For example, Webb (2021) suggested that older adult perpetrators of IBSA who are men are influenced by patriarchal standards such as masculinity and male bonding rather than other identified motivations in younger age brackets such as humor or a joke. In a number of studies, the sample has disproportionately been based on a sample of women; therefore, it is difficult to accurately conclude that men will have the same (or different) experiences, predictors, and motivators of IBSA (Flynn et al., 2021; Ruhland, 2019; Said & McNealey, 2023; Snaychuk & O'Neill, 2020; Yang, 2023).

Further, the majority of included articles do not appear to represent the experiences of the full spectrum of sexual and gender identities. This presents an issue within this area of study as, at the same time, research suggests members of the LGBTQI+ communities are disproportionately affected by this type of victimization (Powell et al., 2020). There was no literature identified that specifically explored perpetrators who are members of the LGBTQI+ communities and whether these experiences differ from a heterosexual population. In addition, future research that does examine LGBTQI+ people's experiences should seek to acknowledge and pay attention to the differences across these communities as to date much research has ignored or subsumed the unique experiences, and needs, of trans and non-binary victims/survivors by treating the LGBTQI+ umbrella as one homogenous community (Rogers, 2021). Overall, it was clear that there is a lack of robust evidence about different sexual and gender identities as well as for ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities, and older adults. Along with the predominance of quantitative methodologies, this limitation suggests a pressing need for more in-depth qualitative exploration of the research topic to facilitate a deeper contextual, interpersonal, theoretical, and conceptual understanding of IBSA. Developing this area will allow for the exploration of effective interventions for both perpetrators and victims that are focused specifically on their needs as well as an understanding of distinct typologies of offenders in the context of IBSA.

Definitional Challenges

As noted earlier, the review draws sharply into focus the vast array of definitions and concepts that have been adopted within the literature, with 21 different terms being identified across the included articles. This highlights the complexity of the research area in the absence of an agreed definition and associated concepts and behaviors. For example, McGlynn et al. (2017) suggest IBSA is characterized by a

number of practices which form the concept of IBSA such as the distribution and creation of intimate images, upskirting, and sextortion. This view reflects Kelly's (1988) earlier work that suggests that this form of behavior cannot be clearly defined as discrete categories of abuse, but rather such behaviors need to be understood within the context of a continuum of actions and harms. On the other hand, some researchers such as Huber (2023) operationalize the term IBSA applying it in a narrow way by focusing on one behavior (revenge pornography). Again, this highlights the complexities around the types of behaviors which are defined and encompassed by the terminology of IBSA. It also illuminates the difficulties in operational terms, varied methodologies and, in policy and practice terms, it reflects the difficulties of legislative and statutory frameworks and the lack of shared or best framework within multidisciplinary working contexts.

Demographic Limitations

It is important to note that a large proportion of the literature on IBSA is produced in the United States and Australia by a modest number of scholars. Although this is not necessarily a negative factor it is essential to consider the limitations when drawing conclusions from the data. The current area is also limited by discipline, for example, IBSA has been explored predominantly from a law perspective but is restricted in terms of the available in-depth contextual and theoretical knowledge development. This scoping review highlights the need for more interdisciplinary and qualitative data that aims to fully explain IBSA as a phenomenon the inner workings of perpetrators and the impacts on victims/survivors. As legislation and policy differ across countries, this is something to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of policy, practice, and legislation within the context of IBSA.

Key Considerations

The review highlights the different dimensions in relation to what motivates perpetrators of IBSA, these seem to focus on those who utilize IBSA as a vehicle to maintain abusive relationships in that they can make threats and humiliate and control the victim. On the other hand, there seems to be a light-hearted dimension to the sharing of images in that perpetrators hold attitudes that deem it humorous or as a joke when in fact research suggests the detrimental and life-changing consequences for victims. The majority of the studies reflected that harm was caused by partners or ex-partners (Branch et al., 2017; Powell et al., 2019). However, a study by Chalton and Schollum (2020) found that on examining police statistics more than half of IBSA cases were flagged as involving family violence. Karasavva and Forth (2022) similarly found 65.9% of their sample of 816 participants reported that the victim was a friend or family, with 39.1%

reporting the victim was a romantic partner. This may provide an explanation for the differing dimensions of motivations that have been suggested for IBSA, in that partners or ex-partners have posted intimate images as a way to seek revenge due to claims of infidelity, promiscuity, or being denied access to children (Hall & Hearn, 2017). It also seems that control is a significant motivator within the context of IBSA, Chalton and Schollum (2020) suggest a substantial portion of the harm associated with IBSA is often linked to coercive control. Similarly, Henry et al. (2023) within their study found that control was one of the main motivating factors. Thus, it can be suggested that the motivation of control combined with the high proportion of perpetrators and victims being current or ex-partners highlights a facet of this type of behavior that is characteristic of intimate relationships. However, this is not to suggest it does not occur in other situations or circumstances; however, it does suggest an interesting focus in the development of IPV and abusive intimate relationship research. This is in contrast to a recent review conducted by Sheikh and Rogers (2024) who examined studies on the Global South. They found perpetrators were commonly found to be partners, family, strangers, and known others, such as work colleagues. This review focused on technology-facilitated sexual abuse in low and middle-income countries and reflected the relationship dynamic and use of technology within these countries. Although the current scoping review only focused on the big five countries (reflecting the Global North), again these differences could highlight the technology focused environment and basis that now underpins relationships within western society and how it can be used as a means of causing harm within intimate relationships.

A fruitful finding from the review and what appears to have been focused upon in scholarship is the relationship between personality traits, specifically the dark triad which was later modified to become the dark tetrad (Buckels et al., 2013), and the engagement in aversive online behaviors. Early research focused on personality traits and IPV or sexual and violent behaviors (Pineda et al., 2022); however, it has been recognized that it can be applied to online behaviors also. Specifically, within this review research by Phipps (2022) and Clancy et al. (2020) found individuals who scored highly on the dark personality traits had more of proclivity to perpetrate IBSA. Furthermore, Karasavva (2020) found psychopathy, narcissism, and sadism were positively correlated with both perpetration and victimization of IBSA. Pineda et al. (2022) compared the dark tetrad personality traits across both perpetrators and victims of cyber IPV and in-person IPV. Cyber IPV perpetrators and victims scored higher on dark personality traits than in person IPV actors. Additionally, there is the suggestion of some gender differences in how personality traits are defined and presented within individuals (Swanek, 2022), for example, narcissism in men is more closely associated with behaviors of grandiose, whereas women are seen and exhibit more manipulative behaviors (Ackerman et al., 2011). Although there are mixed

results in terms of which personality traits are more highly correlated with victims and/or perpetrators, it is clear that there is the existence of a relationship that needs further exploration. Furthermore, much of the current literature has examined the dark personality traits as unidimensional, whereas research suggests a dimensional approach is more appropriate (Miller et al., 2010). By being more dimensional in the understanding of these personality traits, this will allow for a deeper understanding of the complexities, potential correlations, and predictors of IBSA and associated behaviors (March et al., 2020).

Limitations

Adopting a scoping review methodology has both advantages and disadvantages in that it allows the researcher to determine the size and availability of literature within a given topic (Mak & Thomas, 2022). However, by the very nature of a scoping review, any findings discussed may not highlight methodological issues from the individual articles included. Although this review aimed to cast a wide net to include as many studies as possible that relate to IBSA, some articles will have unfortunately been missed. As discussed above, the nature of the terminology used to describe IBSA is diverse and complex; therefore, it presents a challenge to ensure all relevant articles are captured in the review. The initial search terms used aimed to encompass all terms utilized within the literature; however, it became apparent to the researchers that the terminology currently adopted was vast and did differ across disciplines. However, as far as the researchers are aware, this scoping review is a reliable representation of the current landscape around IBSA.

A limitation to note was the decision to focus the scoping review on the big five anglosphere countries. The decision was justified by an initial scoping search which identified that the majority of research focusing on IBSA was conducted by researchers within the big five regions. Additionally, recent reviews conducted by Afrouz and Vassos (2024) did not exclude research by countries and predominantly found that research was more prevalent within the big five regions, providing further justification of the exclusion decision.

A final limitation focuses on the inclusion criteria in that only adults 18+ were included in this review. Some articles were excluded when they did have adults as part of the sample; however, if they could not be fully distinguished from the under 18 sample, then a decision was made to exclude these articles. If the age groups could be distinguished, for example, in the article by Douglass et al. (2020), then these have been included in the review.

Conclusion

This review aimed to explore the current available literature on the predictors, motivations, and characteristics of both victims and perpetrators in the context of IBSA. Although

there were a number of articles that explored these concepts, methodological and conceptual issues were identified which suggested a need for further research to be conducted, particularly focused on rich qualitative data. There is limited research that considers marginalized and diverse groups, specifically gender identity and sexual orientation. If data

was collected from these above-mentioned groups in research studies, it is often excluded and thus not discussed in terms of results and to draw any conclusions. Future research should focus on specifically aiming to understand the experiences of these groups by adopting qualitative methodologies.

Critical Findings of Included Studies.

- The current literature does not fully represent the diverse population, specifically in relation to the experiences of the LGBTQI+ communities.
- There are a vast number of differences in the terminology operationalized by researchers in relation to IBSA.
- There are limited studies which examine the predictors of victimization of IBSA.
- There is a significant but complex interplay of dark personality factors which appears to be a predictor of victimization and perpetration.
- Control appears to be a motivating factor in a number of studies, specifically those which are focused on experiences in which the perpetrator is a partner or ex-partner.
- A higher proportion of research has been conducted within the United States and Australia and represents a narrow disciplinary field.
- Two broad areas were found, which reflect motivation for perpetration of IBSA, humor/fun and to cause distress/harm.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research.

- Further research is needed which considers marginalized and diverse groups so that these experiences can be understood and responded to in policy and practice contexts.
- Research should reflect the multidisciplinary policy and practice contexts that respond to IBSA including criminal justice, health, and social care.
- More qualitative research in this area would be useful to advance in-depth contextual and theoretical understanding of the perpetration and experiences of IBSA.
- There are limited articles that focus on the predictors of IBSA specifically for victims. This would be useful so that preventative interventions could be developed to focus directly on their risk factors.
- The development of typologies to explain the motivations of perpetrators should be studied further as a means of developing a comprehensive framework of IBSA and all-encompassing behaviors.

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ORCID iDs

Loren E. Parton  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6695-8559>

Michaela M. Rogers  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7214-4375>

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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Author Biographies

Loren E. Parton, PhD, is a research associate in Criminology in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield. Her research interests are focused around Image-based sexual abuse and Technology-Facilitated violence and abuse with an interest in marginalized groups such as the LGBTQI+ community as well as victim blaming and the harms/impact of IBSA.

Michaela M. Rogers, PhD, is a senior lecturer in Social Work in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield. Her research examines interpersonal violence with a focus on marginalized groups, impacts, access to services, and service responses. This includes research on elder abuse, trans and non-binary people's experiences, intimate partner violence, and children.