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Online sexual harassment and depression in Chilean adolescents: Variations based on gender and age of the offenders[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Background: Online sexual harassment in adolescence is associated with depressive symptoms. There is, however, a dearth of research investigating variability of symptom profiles in this population in relation to offender gender and age.

Objective: To identify the proportion of adolescents reporting online harassment by different types of offenders and compare their levels of depression.

Participants and setting: Participants were 18,872 Chilean students aged 12 to 17 years (3,063 of them online sexually harassed).

Methods: The study involved a secondary analysis of self-report data on online sexual harassment, poly-victimization, and depression collected as part of the National Poly-victimization Survey.

Results: In 37.6% of the cases the offender was male under 18, in 22.4% an adult male, in 14.5% a female under 18, and in 2.9% an adult female. In 22.5% of cases the offender could not be identified. An ANCOVA demonstrated levels of poly-victimization across the lifespan and frequency of online sexual harassment in the last year to predict depressive symptomatology. In females, higher levels of depressive symptoms were observed among those sexually harassed by either a female under 18, an offender whose age and gender the victim could not identify, or an adult male. In males, higher levels of depression were observed among those harassed by either an adult male, an offender whose age and gender the victim could not identify, or a male under 18.

Conclusions: The current study highlights the importance of offender's age and gender in predicting depression levels in adolescent victims of online sexual harassment.

1. Introduction

Over the past years, internet use has grown dramatically worldwide. In the case of Chile alone, the percentage of households with

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internet access in 2009 was estimated at 30% (SUBTEL, 2015), whereas in 2017 the respective estimate was 87.4%, based on a nationwide survey of 3600 households (SUBTEL & Brújula, 2017). In Chilean households with schoolchildren and higher education students, reported internet access reached higher levels, at a rate of 94% (SUBTEL & Brújula, 2017). Even though the internet has been a tool that has delivered benefits to society, online activity may also assume patterns that endanger oneself or inflict harm upon others. Different authors warn that advances in internet technology have allowed criminal practices to transfer and adjust to the online context (Korenis & Billick, 2014; Mayer, 2011).

Criminal practices in the online world are varied, from offenses against the confidentiality of computer data, copyright-related offenses, to different forms of online violence (Quayle, 2020). Among them, the study of online sexual abuse against children and adolescents has gained relevance in specialized literature due to the negative effects it has on its victims (May-Chahal et al., 2018; Toro, 2021). In fact, various studies in the area of online sexual abuse have shown that, even when the contact between the victim and the offender is maintained exclusively in the online context, the victims suffer a series of psychological consequences, including depression, post-traumatic stress, externalizing symptoms such as antisocial behaviours and substance abuse, as well as difficulties in academic and social adjustment (Gökçe Nur et al., 2015; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020; Houck et al., 2014; Joleby et al., 2020; Maas et al., 2019; Pashang et al., 2019; Zetterström Dahlqvist & Gillander Gådin, 2018).

However, the study of online sexual abuse has not been without its difficulties. First, definitions of online sexual abuse differ across studies, which makes comparison difficult (de Santisteban & Gámez-Guadix, 2017). Online sexual abuse integrates different forms of aggression such as the production or dissemination of child sexual abuse images, the online grooming of children for sexual purposes, the sexual extortion of children, the online sexual harassment or the commercial sexual exploitation of children (for a review see Quayle, 2016). Usually, studies address the psychological consequences of various integrated/mixed forms of online abuse, neglecting the evaluation of specific presentations. That is why the focus of the current study revolves around online sexual harassment which corresponds to a form of online sexual abuse where the offender sexualizes the interaction in a way that makes the victim feel uncomfortable (Mitchell & Stulhofer, 2020). Online sexual harassment can operate through the sending of explicit images, video text messages or through insistent and decontextualized questions or comments with sexual content. It can be associated with other forms of online sexual abuse (e.g. unwanted exposure to pornography) or be a preliminary step for explicit sexual requests. Although this form of online sexual abuse may be considered less invasive than others such as sexual exploitation, it is still serious. This is demonstrated in recent studies that showed significant relationship between online sexual harassment in adolescents and alcohol and drug use, depression and anxiety (Mitchell & Stulhofer, 2020; Reed et al., 2019).

Second, although some studies recognize gender differences in the symptoms experienced by victims of online sexual abuse -showing greater depression in female victims and greater externalizing symptoms in males (Guerra et al., 2020; Zetterström Dahlqvist & Gillander Gådin, 2018)- no analyses have been carried out on the incidence of gender or age of the offenders. Self-reported victimization and perpetration surveys have shown that between a quarter and a third of perpetrators who send unwanted sexual requests or engage in grooming are female (Mitchell et al., 2003; Schulz et al., 2016). Also, a review by Lewis (2018) argues that online sexual harassment takes place among peers. In fact, 26.6% of girl victims of online sexual harassment report the offender to be a relationship partner (Reed et al., 2019) and around 10% of high school students report online sexual harassment perpetration (Hill & Kearn, 2011; Leemis et al., 2019). It is important to investigate (or meaningfully discern between) consequences of online sexual harassment in boys and girls in relation to the gender or age of the offenders. This could be of importance, since past research has demonstrated gender dynamics to differentially affect boys and girls depending on the gender of the sexual offender (Easton et al., 2014). For example, a recent study by Manrai et al. (2021) concludes that there are dynamics associated with gender stereotypes that would make it more difficult for male adolescents to cope with online sexual abuse when it is committed by someone of the same sex (e.g. questioning of sexual orientation, greater blame for what happened).

Third, most of the studies on online sexual abuse against children and adolescents have been conducted in Europe or the United States. In Chile, the investigation of internet habits, risk behaviours, and online sexual victimization in children and young people emerged approximately five years ago. These studies have made it possible to examine the phenomenon of online victimization, showing that 41% of Chilean adolescents reported at least one distressing experience while using the internet (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2017), while 21% had suffered some type of online abuse in the last year (Consejo Nacional de Infancia, 2018a). With regards to exposure to online sexual harassment in Chile, lifetime prevalence in adolescents is reported at 14.7% (Pinto-Cortez & Venegas, 2015), while 12-month prevalence is reported at 10.2% (Guerra et al., 2021). However, these studies so far have not explored the combined profiles of the victim and the offender as a factor determining victims' responses to online sexual harassment.

1.1. The present study

Given the lack of evidence on potential differences in psychological consequences of online sexual harassment victimization depending on offender profiles, the objectives of the current study were, first, to identify the proportion of girls and boys exposed to online sexual harassment by perpetrators who differ by age (minors vs. adults) and gender (male vs. female) and, second, to investigate the interaction between victim and offender profiles in contributing to levels of depressive symptoms in victims of online sexual harassment.

Taking into consideration that findings of previous Chilean studies have shown a variation in depression levels depending on the age of victims (Cova et al., 2007), the frequency of online sexual victimization in the last year (Guerra et al., 2020), and a lifetime history of poly-victimization (Consejo Nacional de Infancia, 2018a; Guerra et al., 2019), the current study further examined these factors as a control variables.

2. Methods

2.1. Design

This study employed secondary analysis of cross-sectional, nationwide data collected as part of the study on victimization and polyvictimization in children and adolescents, which was an initiative of the Subsecretaría de Prevención del Delito del Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública (Crime Prevention department from the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security) of the Chilean Government ([Consejo Nacional de Infancia, 2018a](#)). The second author of this study was granted the formal and ethics permits by the authorities in charge of the original study to carry out a secondary analysis of the data.

2.2. Participants

The participants were 18,872 students between 12 and 17 years old ($M = 14.54$, $SD = 1.42$) from 699 educational establishments (43.9% attended public schools, 51.8% subsidized schools, and 4.3% private schools) across the 15 regions of Chile (15.7% in the north, 20.6% in the center; 30.5% in the capital and 33.2% in the south of the country). The sample consisted of 50.8% female, and 49.2% male participants. Among them, 96.4% were born in Chile, 3.1% in another country in South America, 0.2% in Central America and the remaining percentage in another non identified country. The sampling was representative, probabilistic and multistage concerning: (1) type of school (public, private, or subsidized), (2) grade, and (3) students in each grade. The sampling frame was the 2016 directory of enrollments and institutions from the Ministry of Education of Chile, and the maximum sampling error was $\pm 0.7\%$ at the 95% level of confidence.

2.3. Measures

Sociodemographic data were collected on participants' age, gender (male or female), place of birth and type of school.

Frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment in the last 12 months, and offender characteristics were evaluated through two questions drawn from the original survey ([Consejo Nacional de Infancia, 2018a](#)): 1. Has anyone used the Internet to ask you sexual questions about you or tried to chat with you about sex, making you feel uncomfortable? (1 = never; 2 = once; 3 = two or three times; 4 = at least once a month; 5 = at least once a week; 6 = each day). 2. Last time it happened – who was the person who did it? (1 = an adult man; 2 = an adult woman; 3 = a boy under 18 years old; 4 = a girl under 18 years old; 5 = I do not know).

Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ; [Finkelhor et al., 2005](#)). The Chilean adaptation of this instrument ([Consejo Nacional de Infancia, 2018a](#)) was used to evaluate lifetime exposure to 32 forms of victimization against children and adolescents (conventional crime, caregiver victimization, peer and sibling victimization, sexual victimization, witnessing violence, and online victimization - Including one item about online sexual harassment). This is a self-administered scale with a dichotomous response format (0 = no victimization and 1 = victimization). The possible scores range between 0 and 32 (with higher scores indicating higher levels of polyvictimization). Two scores were drawn from this scale. The single item on online sexual harassment was used to identify the proportion of individuals, among the original pool of participants, who were sexually harassed at least once in their lifetime. The total score was used as an indicator of lifetime poly-victimization, to be investigated as a potential control variable. JVQ as a scale obtained adequate internal consistency (α : 0.81 in scale to assess victimization last year and α : 0.85 in the scale to assess lifetime victimization) in the original study with dataset ([Consejo Nacional de Infancia, 2018b](#)). This instrument has also obtained good psychometric properties (omega coefficients over 0.69 and convergent validity) in other Chilean study ([Pinto-Cortez et al., 2018](#)).

Depression Self-Rating Scale ([Birlleson, 1981](#); Chilean adaptation by [Álvarez et al., 1986](#)). This self-report scale consists of 18 items on the frequency of depressive symptoms experienced within the last week. Responses are reported on a 3-point Likert scale (0 = never; 1 = sometimes; 2 = Always), with total scores ranging from 0 to 36 (with higher scores indicating higher levels of depressive symptoms). The Chilean version showed good indices of convergent validity and reliability in a study with adolescent victims of sexual abuse ([Plaza & Saiz, 2013](#)). Internal consistency of the questionnaire in this study was reported at $\alpha = 0.86$.

2.4. Procedure

The original study was approved by the ethics committee of its sponsoring university. The government institutions that funded the original study further certified the study protocol to align with statutory ethics regulations in Chile. Prior to participation, informed consent was requested from participants and their parents or guardians (among those approached, 59% consented to participate in the study). The assessment was carried out by administering self-report questionnaires in the respondents' classroom, in the presence of a qualified facilitator and in the absence of the teacher. Participants were asked if they wanted to make a formal disclosure of victimization or seek support about anything that affected them. In response, 9.3% of participants proceeded to seek support, and they were consequently referred to public specialized centers available in the closest support network (mental health services, centers to support victims of crime). Finally, participants' responses were anonymized and entered into a database for analysis.

Approval to undertake the secondary analysis was granted by the Consejo Nacional de la Infancia in charge of database administration. The original study included 19,684 secondary students, among whom there were 812 with 18 years old or older. For the purposes of the current study, which focuses on child and adolescent victimization, data were drawn only for the subsample of minors (under 18 years of age in Chilean legislation). Data were, therefore, retrieved for 18,872 students between 12 and 17 years old.

2.5. Data analysis

First, the percentage of the sample that had experienced online sexual harassment at least once in their life and during the last 12 months was evaluated. The choice of descriptive and inferential statistics used in the current study was finalised following a review of normal distribution statistics. Due to the large sample size, the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis were reviewed to detect the presence of normality, in addition to an overview of the distribution visually (Field, 2017).

Differences in depression scores were evaluated between the group with a lifetime history of online sexual harassment and the group without such history, through an independent samples *t*-test. The Chi-square test for independence was used to investigate differences in the profile of the offenders between girls and boys with a lifetime history of online sexual harassment.

Analyses were conducted to investigate potential covariates for the main model. An independent samples *t*-test was used to explore differences in levels of depression between female and male participants. To the same end, correlation analyses were used to evaluate the association of depression to participants' age, self-reported frequency of online sexual harassment in the last year, and cumulative lifetime exposure to poly-victimization.

As a final step, a factorial ANCOVA was employed to compare the main effects of victims' gender and the profile of the online sexual offender and their interaction effect on levels of depressive symptoms. The assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances and slopes, linear relationship between the covariates and the dependent variable, and independence between covariates and factors were tested (Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2014). Since the normality of dependent variable across the different groups, and the homogeneity of variances were not fulfilled, the analysis was carried out with bootstrapping of 1000 interactions, to be able to build confidence intervals for the adjusted means. The factorial ANCOVA was carried out only with data provided by participants who reported exposure to online sexual harassment and responded to the question about the profile of the aggressor. Cases with missing data were handled by pairwise deletion. The software used for analyses was SPSS 21.0 (IBM Corporation, 2012).

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary analyses

The results showed that 16.2% ($n = 3.063$) of participants reported online sexual harassment across their lifetime. Lifetime prevalence was found to be higher in girls compared to boys (24.7% vs. 8.8%). The 12-months prevalence of sexual harassment reached 10.8% ($n = 2.040$), also higher in girls (16.0% vs. 6.3%).

Differences were found in depression scores between adolescents who reported online sexual harassment across their lifetime and participants who did not report it ($M = 15.21$, $SD = 6.65$ vs. $M = 10.97$, $SD = 5.76$; $t_{(3860)} = 32.019$, $p < .01$). Likewise, children exposed to online sexual harassment in the last year experienced a higher number of depressive symptoms compared to their non-exposed counterparts ($M = 15.45$, $SD = 6.80$ vs. $M = 11.21$, $SD = 5.87$; $t_{(2307)} = 26.131$, $p < .01$).

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for each of the study variables and the correlations between them for the 3.063 participants who reported online sexual harassment during the lifetime. Pearson's correlation analyses further demonstrated depression to be significantly associated with lifetime poly-victimization scores (medium effect size), the frequency of online sexual harassment in the last 12 months (small effect size), and age (small effect size).

The chi-square test for independence indicated differences in the profile of the offender between girls and boys who had experienced online sexual harassment ($\chi^2_{(4)} = 1273.074$, $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = 0.656$, $p < .01$). While girls were predominantly sexually harassed by males under 18 and adult males, boys reported to be predominantly harassed by girls under 18 and other boys under 18. It should be, however, noted that 23.9% of girls and 18.5% of boys failed to identify the gender and age of the harasser (see Table 2).

3.2. Main analysis

A factorial ANCOVA was employed to answer the main research question, by evaluating the influence of predictors (participant gender, offender profile) on levels of depressive symptoms. Participant gender included two levels (boy, girl), while offender profile included five levels (adult male, adult female, male under 18, female under 18, and unidentified). Preliminary analyses informed the inclusion of age, cumulative lifetime poly-victimization scores, and the frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment in the last year as model covariates. The model explained 24% of variance in levels of depressive symptoms.

Consistent with the correlational analyses, covariates are significantly related with depressive symptoms. In particular, more age is a predictor of lower levels of depression ($B = -0.36$, $p < .01$, 95% CI = -0.52 to -0.21), and both poly-victimization across life ($B =$

Table 1

Univariate (M, SD, Min and Max, Skewness, Kurtosis) and correlations (Pearsons' r).

	n	M (SD)	Min-max	Skewness	Kurtosis	Relation with depression
Depression (week)	2906	15.21 (6.65)	0-36	0.27	-0.41	-
Poly-victimization (life)	3063	12.00 (5.18)	1-32	0.44	0.14	0.43**
Online sexual harassment (year)	3040	2.35 (1.23)	1-6	0.69	0.11	0.23**
Age	3063	14.93 (1.41)	12-17	-0.25	-0.87	0.03**

Note. Differences in n are due to missing data (pairwise). ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Number (and %) of girls and boys sexual harassed by offenders with different profiles (n = 2934).

Perpetrator profile	Perpetrator profile				
	Adult male	Adult female	Male under 18	Female under 18	Unidentified
Girl victim	602 (27.6%)	19 (0.9%)	993 (45.5%)	47 (2.2%)	523 (23.9%)
Boy victim	55 (7.3%)	67 (8.9%)	111 (14.8%)	379 (50.5%)	138 (18.4%)
Total	657 (22,4%)	86 (2,9%)	1104 (37,6%)	426 (14,5%)	661 (22,5%)

0.47, $p < .01$, 95%CI = 0.43 to 0.52) and frequency of online sexual harassment in the last year ($B = 0.48$, $p < .01$, 95%CI = 0.30 to 0.66) predicted higher scores of depressions in the participants.

After controlling the effect of the three covariates, the main effect for participant gender was significant, indicating increased levels of depressive symptoms in girls as opposed to boys ($F_{(1)} = 55.532$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = 0.42$). The main effect for offender profile was also significant ($F_{(4)} = 4.027$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = 0.79$), indicating differences in the levels of depressive symptoms based on the characteristics of the last aggressor to harass the victim. The post hoc analyses with the Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons showed that participants online sexually harassed by an adult female presented less depression compared with whom were harassed by an adult male, an underage male, and an unidentified harasser ($p < .05$ across these comparisons).

Finally, a significant interaction effect between the predictor variables was found ($F_{(4)} = 3.828$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = 0.66$), suggesting that the trend of depression variance in relation to offender profile is significantly different in girls and boys (see Table 3).

Fig. 1 show provides a visual overview of differences in levels of depression symptoms in boys and girls depending on offender profile. The girls who presented higher levels of depressive symptoms were those sexually harassed by another female under the age of 18, by a sexual harasser who cannot be identified, by an adult male, by a male under the age of 18, and finally by an adult female. The post-hoc pairwise comparisons showed that, in girls, levels of depression symptoms were significantly lower when the offender was an adult woman, compared to other offender profiles ($p < .05$ across these comparisons). Comparisons further revealed that levels of depression in girls were significantly higher when the offender was unidentified compared to the offender being a male under 18 ($p < .05$). All other comparisons were non-significant.

With regards to boys, higher levels of depression symptoms were seen in those who have been harassed by an adult male, by an unidentified harasser and by a male under 18 years of age. Boys harassed through the internet by a female under 18 years of age or by an adult female are the ones with the least depressive symptoms (see Fig. 1). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons indicated levels of depression to be significantly higher when the offender was an adult male than when the offender was an adult female ($p < .01$) or a female under 18 ($p < .01$). Levels of depression were significantly lower when the offender was an adult female compared to a male under 18 ($p < .05$) and an unidentified other ($p < .01$). Finally, levels of depression symptoms in boys were significantly lower when the offender was a female under 18 compared to a male under 18 ($p < .05$) or with an unidentified other ($p < .01$).

4. Discussion

This research aimed to identify the proportion of adolescents exposed to online sexual harassment by perpetrators with different profiles in relation to gender and age. Most importantly, the current study aimed to investigate whether the interaction of victims' gender with offender profiles contributes to levels of depressive symptoms while controlling for the effect of other relevant variables such as cumulative lifetime exposure to poly-victimization and frequency of online sexual harassment in the past 12 months.

The data of a representative sample of 18,872 students between 12 and 17 years residing across different regions of Chile were analyzed. Results demonstrated a 16.2% lifetime prevalence of online sexual harassment, which slightly exceeds the lifetime prevalence rate of 14.7% previously found in a study carried out in the northern part of Chile (Pinto-Cortez & Venegas, 2015). The prevalence of online sexual harassment in the last 12 months was estimated as 10.8%, similar to the rate of 10.2% previously reported for central Chile (Guerra et al., 2021).

Findings from the current study, therefore, confirm that prevalence rates reported by previous authors can be extended to a

Table 3

Adjusted scores of depression, standard error and 95% confidence intervals in girls and boys online sexual harassed by offenders with different profile (n = 2781).

	Harasser profile	Mean	Std. error	95% CI
Girl victim	Adult male	16.13	0.24	15.63–16.69
	Adult female	13.17	1.45	10.54–16.04
	Male under 18	16.08	0.19	15.70–16.52
	Female under 18	17.40	0.88	15.62–19.37
	Unidentified	16.75	0.26	16.24–17.29
Male victim	Adult male	14.81	0.82	12.85–16.79
	Adult female	10.74	0.73	9.56–12.01
	Male under 18	13.05	0.57	11.76–14.41
	Female under 18	11.29	0.31	10.74–11.86
	Unidentified	13.12	0.52	12.12–14.09

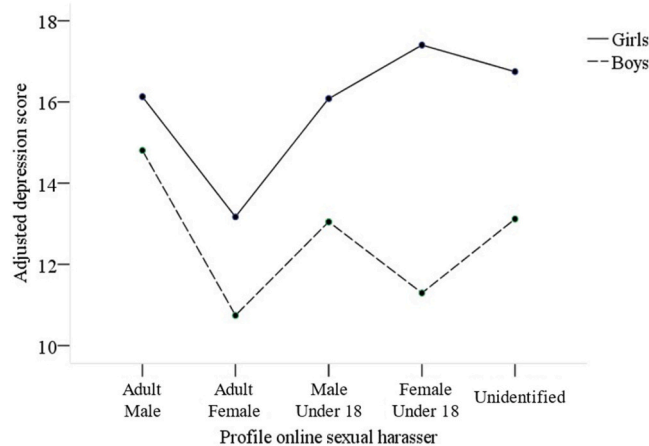


Fig. 1. Adjusted scores of depression in girls and boys online sexual harassed by perpetrators with different profile.

national level and highlight a need to address this phenomenon urgently, especially considering its association with a variety of mental health difficulties (Mitchell & Stulhofer, 2020; Reed et al., 2019), as is common with other forms of online sexual abuse (Guerra et al., 2020; Zetterström Dahlqvist & Gillander Gådin, 2018). Indeed, as expected, adolescents who reported a history of online sexual harassment during their lifetime and in the last 12 months presented greater levels of depressive symptomatology than those who reported not previous exposure. Furthermore, the results are consistent in showing that the higher the frequency of online sexual harassment incidents, the greater the depressive symptoms in participants. In the same vein, results of this study also echo numerous previous findings of greater levels of depressive symptoms in adolescents with a higher exposure to poly-victimization (Álvarez-Lister et al., 2013; Consejo Nacional de Infancia, 2018a; Guerra et al., 2019).

Up to this point, the results are not surprising and simply align with previous Chilean and international research. The contribution of this study involves the investigation of depressive distress in relation to the combined profiles of victims and perpetrators of online sexual harassment. A particularly interesting finding was that peer-related harassment was high for both genders - female victims were more likely to be harassed by males under the age of 18, while male victims were more likely to be harassed by both male and female minors. The above are consistent with the fact that young people constitute a demographic that is most likely to engage in online sexual interactions with other peers (Reed et al., 2019; Sklenarova et al., 2018) and that about 10% of them report to have perpetrated online sexual harassment (Hill & Kearl, 2011; Leemis et al., 2019).

These findings make it necessary to consider a wider range of possible profiles of online sexual offenders, since programs that prevent online sexual abuse and promote the responsible use of the Internet aimed at children and adolescents consider that the recipients of these programs can occupy the temporary position of victim or harasser. An interesting point is the overlap of traditional and cyber bullying and sexual harassment perpetration found by Leemis et al. (2019), possibly suggesting that all violent behaviours are different manifestations of similar intra-personal processes and should be treated together. It also seems necessary to consider how online activity can facilitate processes that encourage a transition from victim to perpetrator. Unfortunately, this study did not ask whether the participants had sexually harassed other people in order to examine the prevalence of adolescents with a dual profile of harasser-victim, which has emerged in previous studies in relation to social acceptance, impulse control, anxiety, stress, and other deviant behaviours (Buelga et al., 2015; Polo-del Río et al., 2017). Future studies should, therefore, address the complexity of online sexual harassment profile variations.

In the case of Chile, the information on the different profiles of online sexual harassers obtained in this study is useful for preventative public policy, but also at the intervention level. Although, there are no specialized programs for the intervention of adolescents who engage in sexual harassment online, there are programs throughout the country aimed at rehabilitating juvenile sexual offenders (Servicio Nacional de Menores, 2019) and research indicates that these programs should also aim to address online harassment.

It should be recognized, however, that a large proportion of respondents of both genders was unable to identify who was harassing them. This is in itself a limitation of the study, which represents the complexity of the phenomenon of online abuse, where technology-facilitated anonymity (using avatars or alternative identities), make it more difficult to identify offenders and recognize their age, gender, region of residence, and also abuser profile (Scheechler, 2019; Sotoca et al., 2020; Toro, 2021). In fact, other studies in the area of online harassment have previously reported this difficulty, noting that approximately half of those who have experienced online harassment did not identify the person involved in their most recent incident (Pew Research Center, 2014). This poses a challenge for future research. The use of self-report instruments has limitations when identifying the demographic characteristics of sexual harassers, especially in the online context where the perpetrator may use a false identity, which makes it difficult for the victim to identify them.

Despite this limitation, the study yielded interesting results. Although, in general, girls demonstrated more symptoms than boys - similar to findings of previous research (Guerra et al., 2020) - a variation of symptoms is observed in adolescents of both genders when

they are sexually harassed by different offender profiles. In the case of girls, they presented significantly lower depressive symptoms when the offender was an adult female, while symptoms were significantly higher when the offender was not identified, as opposed to the offender being a male under 18. Of particular interest, the greatest levels of depression symptoms were evidenced in girls harassed by other girls, although the design of the study does not allow clarifying the reasons for this. It would be interesting to further explore these findings through qualitative studies that provide more information regarding the context in which this harassment occurs (e.g., chat rooms, social networks, dating sites, etc.), in order to better understand the interactions between victim and offender profiles and the effect this interaction has on depression. Unfortunately, the national victimization survey does not contain such data, providing scope for future research to undertake this endeavour.

In the case of boys, greatest levels of depression symptoms were seen in those who have been victimized by an adult male (as opposed to girls or adult female offenders), while they were lower when the offender was a female adult compared to a male under 18 and an unidentified other (for adult offenders) and when the offender was a female under 18 compared to a male under 18 and an unidentified other.

As previously stated, the reasons for this cannot be completely determined in this study, but they are consistent with the results of previous studies that refer to social pressure and gender stereotypes faced by male adolescents both in the online (Manrai et al., 2021) and offline context (Guerra et al., 2021). As suggested in these studies, Chile is a country with sexist traditions, where there is a high risk of questioning the masculinity of sexually abused male adolescents, who further run the risk of being discriminated against and stigmatized. This can prevent them from disclosing the abuse and, instead, attempt to deal with its consequences without support. On the other hand, boys harassed through the internet by a girl under 18 years of age or by an adult woman were found to demonstrate the lowest levels of depressive symptoms. This could also be linked to prevalent gender stereotypes in Chile, where being sexually pursued by adolescent or adult women can even be taken as a sign of “manhood” (O’Leary et al., 2017; Schuster & Krahe, 2017; Toro et al., 2011). Future qualitative studies should further explore these possible explanations. What is clear is that the complexity of the phenomenon of online sexual harassment requires that victim support programs consider the context in which the abuse took place, the profile of the harasser, and the cultural norms around gender that may influence the way the victim interprets the situation, copes with harassment and its accompanying symptoms.

This study contributes to the understanding of online sexual harassment, providing evidence of the different profiles of aggressors and how this is associated with levels of depressive symptomatology in the victims. The findings could be useful in designing preventative campaigns (which should acknowledge the possibility that the harasser is another adolescent), in tailoring therapeutic programs for treatment, which should take into consideration the age and gender of the offender, and, finally, in developing public policy in Chile that incorporates the complexity of the phenomenon in prevention, early detection and rehabilitation programs both victims and offenders.

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