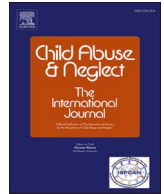




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What do the potential recipients of disclosure of OSA say? Perspectives from adolescent residents in Scotland and Chile

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ABSTRACT

Background: With the increase in internet use, new forms of child victimization like Online Sexual Abuse (OSA) have emerged. Children and adolescents rarely disclose these incidents and most disclosure happens around peers.

Objective: This research addresses the perspective of adolescents (not victims of OSA), potential recipients of the disclosure, within the context of disclosure of OSA committed by either adult or peer perpetrators.

Methods: The study was performed in two stages. We interviewed adolescents in Scotland and then conducted focus groups with adolescents from Chile.

Participants and setting: 51 adolescents (6 from Scotland and 45 from Chile) aged 15–20 years participated.

Results: Despite differences in age and cultural contexts, there were similarities in responses. Obstacles of disclosure included lack of clarity of OSA, prior levels of personal vulnerability, and gender factors (stereotypes and stigmatization). On the other hand, the disclosure process would be easier for adolescents with more personal resources (e.g. self-confidence) and when they have a supportive social environment, which includes parents, but especially peers.

Conclusion: Disclosure of OSA is considered similar to the disclosure of offline sexual abuse. However, differences such as a lack of clarity regarding the boundaries of the relationships on the Internet, and presence of a generational gap between adolescents and their parents or tutors in the use of internet makes early disclosure of OSA highly challenging. Plans to facilitate disclosure should consider different components: behavioral (risky behaviors), emotional (feelings of fear and shame) and cognitive (lack of information, self-blame, stigma). This should be focused on adolescents, potential recipients of disclosure (parents, authorities and peers) and society, where the prejudices and practices that prevent disclosure begin.

1. Introduction

Internet use has increased significantly, especially amongst children and adolescents. Approximately 98 % of children and adolescents have access to the internet, with 83 % of 12–15-year-olds in the UK having their own smartphones ([Office of Communications](#),

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2015). The situation is no different in Chile, where an estimated 94 % of students have access to the Internet at home, of which 88 % use the internet on a daily basis (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2017; SUBTEL & Brújula, 2017). Internet use offers benefits for the adolescent, but there are attendant risks, including sexual abuse (Koçturk & Yuksel, 2018).

Online Sexual Abuse (OSA) of children and adolescents is defined as any instance of sexual abuse mediated by technology (Quayle & Sinclair, 2012). The forms of OSA are varied, including exposure to pornography, where the perpetrator incites the victim to watch sexual images and videos; online sexual solicitation (direct sexual proposals using the Internet); or online grooming, where the abuser uses different strategies - compliments, pressures, blackmail and threats - to persuade the victim to engage in sexual behaviour, also known as online sexual enticement of children (Guerra & Pereda, 2015). Perpetrators commonly use technology to persuade, pressurize and victimize minors, or to obtain sexual photos and videos of victims, sometimes unknowingly (Jones, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2012; Quayle & Jones, 2011). OSA also includes non-consensual exchange of unsolicited images of sexual nature and videos along with creating, accessing and circulating material of a sexual nature, even if the abuse occurs offline (Ramiro et al., 2019).

Children and adolescents are more susceptible to the perils of online communication (Livingstone et al., 2014) because they depend on the internet to initiate, explore, express, question and challenge pre-existing ideals, and establish relationships with more diverse people, away from the constant presence of an authority or parent (Marret & Choo, 2018). This has led to an increase in risk of OSA, especially when adolescents interact and share personal information with individuals they have only met online (Marret & Choo, 2018).

Several studies have examined the prevalence of OSA. However, as de Santisteban and Gámez-Guadix (2017b) warn, it should be borne in mind that these studies have used different instruments, different definitions of OSA and have included different age groups, which makes comparing them difficult. For example, In Denmark, Helweg-Larsen, Schütt, and Larsen (2012) reported 16.2 % females and 5.4 % males aged 14–17 years have been sexually solicited by an unknown person through the internet. In the US, Dick et al. (2014) stated that 13.7 % of females and 9.2 % of males aged 14–19 years were exposed to OSA while establishing online relationships. They defined this as the pressure to talk about sex or do something sexual that victims did not want to do or sharing a sexual picture of the victims. In Chile, 11.5 % males and 17.8 % females between 12–17 years of age have been victims of sexual harassment on the internet, and 9.2 % males and 12.8 % females have received direct sexual solicitations through the internet (Pinto & Venegas, 2015).

Major risk factors for OSA in children and adolescents include social isolation, the feeling of not being accepted by their peers' network in the offline world, and the perception of lacking family support (Guerra, Montiel et al., 2019; Guerra, Salinas et al., 2019; Katz, Piller, Glücklich, & Matty, 2018). These people tend to find a greater sense of community and belonging in the virtual world, which makes them more susceptible to risky use of the internet and to being victims of online abuse (Guerra, Montiel et al., 2019).

Additionally, the literature suggested more prevalence of OSA in females and gender minorities (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008). But as in the case of offline sexual abuse, the prevalence of OSA against boys and heterosexual male adolescents is often under-represented. Several authors point out that it is difficult for males to be identified as victims, which can hinder the disclosure of sexual abuse. The stereotypical expectations of society - characterizing the male as aggressive and dominant - discourages males from asking for help, as this can be seen as a sign of weakness (Alaggia, Collin-Vézina, & Lateef, 2019; Kia-Keating, Grossman, Sorsoli, & Epstein, 2005; Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, & Grossman, 2008).

For individuals who suffer sexual victimization, either online or offline, disclosure is an important part of the recovery process (Ullman, 2007), which may lead to the intervention of a helpful authority and the end of the abuse (Paine & Hansen, 2002). (Finkelhor & Browne, 1988) suggest that a positive process of disclosure is one of the most important factors in mitigating the negative effects of sexual abuse. Unfortunately, most studies discuss disclosure of offline sexual abuse and they do not acknowledge OSA separately. This is a significant gap in the present literature that needs to be addressed. Therefore, the main focus of the present study is to understand the facilitators and the obstacles of disclosure of OSA.

1.1. Disclosure of OSA

Although there is not much research regarding facilitators and obstacles to disclosure of OSA, there is some preliminary evidence. First, the disclosure of OSA depends on the adolescent's understanding of the phenomenon of OSA as a serious issue (Katz et al., 2018). From this perspective, adolescents who do not consider sexual exploitation on the internet as harassment or abuse would not make a disclosure as a formal report or as a form to seek help. That disclosure might be in the form of simply sharing the information, as opposed to reporting a crime. One noted obstacle to this is self-blame, especially when victims view themselves as an accomplice to abuse, for example where sexual images or text messages are sent to the abuser, or a barter of sorts has been made for sexual services (Quayle, 2016) or simply a lack of understanding the boundaries leading up to the abuse itself. Children and young people relate this to shame and humiliation of being exposed in public and may feel an extreme lack of control (Leonard, 2010).

The obstacles at the level of the social or family network are quite similar. Some relevant adults (like parents, teachers or tutors) may be hesitant to ask children about online abuse directly, generating fewer opportunities for victims to disclose, because they do not acknowledge some online sexual interaction as abusive or harmful (Martin, 2014; Quayle, 2016). Other relevant adults may feel that OSA is the responsibility of the child or adolescent, contributing to the stigmatization of the victim (O'Neill, 2011). Consistent with this, there is evidence that only a quarter of adolescents who had suffered OSA reported the incident to a parent (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2005). Young people might choose not to disclose due to the expectation of being blamed by their parents (Katz, 2014) or being sanctioned by them (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009).

The perception of the authorities or the police also seems to play an important role in the disclosure. Some studies showed that victims of OSA rarely ask for help from formal authorities (Davidson et al., 2016; Mitchell, Jones, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2013; Schönbacher, Maier, Mohler-Kuo, Schnyder, & Landolt, 2012), believing that their disclosure, especially in the case of OSA, will not be

taken seriously by police officers, who may trivialize their experiences (O'Neill, 2011).

According to O'Neill (2011), perceptions of police officers and formal authorities are equally important to victims as those of their parents and such authorities may have the same beliefs and behaviours that hinder disclosure by victims. These reasons may account for a tendency in adolescents to disclose to their peers rather than parents or authorities (Priebe & Svedin, 2008). However, to our knowledge, studies that consider the OSA disclosure process to peers or the perceptions of these important potential recipients of disclosure.

1.2. *The present study*

Even though OSA as a concept is gaining attention both within the realms of academia and practice, study of the factors influencing their disclosure is a fairly under-represented phenomenon in both research and clinical practice. The available research suggests that adolescent victims of OSA rarely ask their parents or other adults for help, with other adolescents serving as the most frequent disclosure recipients. Even when the evidence is scarce, we believe that the role of peers in the OSA disclosure process is worth studying. Not only because of the role peers play during adolescence, but also because like OSA victims they have grown up surrounded by technology and are living in a digitized world. For this reason, this research addresses two areas not sufficiently explored: the process of disclosure of OSA and the perspective of peers, the potential recipients of that disclosure.

The objective of this research is to investigate the factors facilitating or preventing disclosure of OSA, as conceived in a general population sample of late adolescents. This information could be very useful when designing preventive programs for online abuse or to promote its disclosure, which is itself an issue that has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature.

Due to the sensitivity of the phenomenon, in a first stage we decided to work with a sample of 18 to 20-year-old adolescents, resident in Scotland who, in addition to participating in the study, would give us feedback on the appropriateness of questions, before approaching younger participants. We then sampled younger adolescents' resident in Chile in order to have a more differentiated picture in terms of age and cultural background. The Internet is a global phenomenon, so it is necessary to explore factors associated with OSA across different cultures.

2. **Methods**

2.1. *Design*

The present study applies qualitative methodology across multiple cultural contexts. The study was conducted across two phases. The first phase of data collection was from a small sample of late adolescent university students in Scotland. The second phase of data collection involved younger adolescents in Chile.

2.2. *Participants*

A non-clinical sample was chosen as the focus of the study was on the perception of peers, who could be potential disclosure recipients. In total, 51 adolescents participated in the study; 6 participants aged 18–20 years (5 females and 1 male), all of them university students living in Scotland (originally from England, India, Japan, Russia and Scotland) and 45 Latin-American school students aged 15–16 years (21 females and 24 males) resident in Chile.

To reduce the probability that direct victims of OSA or other types of interpersonal victimization participated in the study, people diagnosed with mental health conditions, victims of sexual abuse or other similar traumatic events, and those attending any form of therapy were not eligible for the study.

2.3. *Data collection strategy*

Adolescents from Scotland participated in semi-structured interviews (45–120 min), focused on their opinion of facilitators of and obstacles to OSA disclosure. We asked them how they believe young teens cope with the process and what could help promote disclosure and early detection.

Based on the results of these interviews, we prepared a non-invasive question script to be included in focus groups with Chilean secondary school students who were participating in a series of focus groups, workshops and school activities aimed at improving the school climate and preventing offline and online victimization. These activities were organized by the school and had the support of the school community, teachers, and school psychologists. In this context, we included general questions about OSA in the focus groups about internet safety to obtain their opinion regarding the facilitators of and obstacles to disclosure. Since the topic is sensitive and because the focus groups could not guarantee confidentiality (since adolescents from the same school participated), participants were not asked about their own experience. Instead, participants were asked about their perception of OSA in general (e.g. How would you define OSA? what do you think hinders its disclosure? What factors could favor it?). These types of questions were included in 6 focus groups, each comprising between 6 and 10 adolescents.

2.4. *Procedure*

Ethical approval was granted independently by ethics committees of the University of Edinburgh and Universidad Santo Tomás in

Chile. In Scotland, the participants were recruited using convenience sampling, whereby the study was advertised by posters, flyers and official social media platforms of various societies in major university campuses in Edinburgh. Prior to the interview, informed consent was requested from the participants. The interviews were conducted in English, by postgraduate students in private rooms at the University of Edinburgh. The participants were provided with a debrief sheet giving contact details of various support services and helplines in case of distress.

In Chile, participation was requested from local schools in order to access an adolescent population. One school, which was organizing a series of activities aimed at improving the school climate and preventing victimization agreed to participate in the study. According to the regulations in Chile, informed consent was required from both adolescent participants and their parents. The school took safeguards to decrease the probability that direct victims of traumatic situations participated in the focus groups, in line with the eligibility criteria. The focus groups were conducted in Spanish in the school by psychology graduates with training in group interviews. An action protocol was devised in coordination with school psychologists in case of disclosure or distress occurring during the study. The contact information of the research team was given to parents and guardians in case participants were distressed by the sensitive nature of the study.

In both phases, the data was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All personalised data was anonymised in order to maintain confidentiality. Data was shared within the team using encrypted secure network drives. Post completion of the study, recorded audio data was deleted.

2.5. Analysis

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify various themes in the transcripts. Preliminary analysis was performed subsequent to the 6 interviews in Scotland. The second data collection phase was conceived and carried out in order to deepen the analysis and evaluate age-related and cultural differences. To reduce biases in the analysis, triangulation (Denzin, 2006) was performed by the researchers.

3. Results

Four major themes were identified in the data (see Table 1).

The first major theme that arose from the analysis was the lack of clarity around OSA. There was little knowledge and understanding of OSA, which in turn affected disclosure. This theme included, diffuse limits between OSA and offline relationships and the need for education on the subject. The ambiguity regarding the nature of OSA may be a factor that hinders its recognition and subsequent disclosure.

Most participants mentioned that they had no idea of what OSA is, how others define it, and that they had never thought about the idea of something like OSA before. As highlighted by some of the participants in Scotland, this lack of knowledge can be explained by the lack of sexual experience associated with age.

“So, if you go from the lower age range like 13–14–15–12, they might not exactly know because they themselves are so naive so they wouldn’t know what’s happening to them...” (Interview 2, Scotland).

In fact, in all the focus groups carried out in Chile (with adolescents between 15 and 16 years old) the participants indicated that they were not clear about what OSA was and spent a few minutes talking about that.

P1: *“¿Cómo abuso sexual online? ¿Qué es eso?”* [How OSA? What is that?]

P2: *“Que te envíen fotos, te acuerdas? cuando a xxx [nombre borrado] le enviaron una foto de un pene... y dijo que tenía miedo... ese tipo de cosas [Somebody sent you photos, remember? when xxx [name deleted] was sent a picture of a penis ... and said she was afraid ... that kind of thing]”* (Participants 1 and 2, Focus group 1, Chile)

“I have not heard that much discussion going on about OSA. So, even though I am studying at a University..., there are increased chances that I would hear about it, considering that, I think that many children would simply not know what it is.” (Interview 4, Scotland).

Participants also described that some adolescents might have trouble acknowledging that what they were going through is abuse, mainly because there is no line drawn on when something becomes abusive, especially in cases of OSA within a couple, or in cases where adolescents feel they have an emotional bond with the online perpetrator.

Table 1
Identified Themes and Sub-themes.

Lack of Clarity of OSA	Risks in Internet and level of Vulnerability	Gender factors	Disclosure Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge • Diffuse limit • Need for Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to Relate to Strangers • Need for Relationships • Threat • Self-Confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presumed Female Vulnerabilities • Male Victim Difficulties • Sexual Orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigmatization • Shame and Blame • Parental Relationships and Generational gap • Peer Reliance

"I think there is like a spectrum of it. So, there might be some situations where you are sure that is sexual abuse and somewhere there is a line where you don't know if it is crossed or not...I think sometimes they wouldn't know because the way in which the person who does the sexual abuse approaches them umm could be through a sort of relationship that they formed that they think is a good relationship to have with someone" (Interview 1, Scotland).

This is specifically relevant when it comes to delayed disclosure as participants mention that people might disclose later in life because they only then realized that what was happening to them was abuse. It was frequently suggested that the connection an adolescent has to their abuser will be relevant to their perception of the abuse. Participants thought that adolescents might find it difficult to recognize OSA if they were convinced that they had a positive social connection or romantic relationship with their abuser and that some, especially younger adolescents, may be unable to distinguish between positive, supportive connections and abusive ones. In this sense, adolescents reported that the recognition of abuse arises when the situation becomes unsustainable. Only then, usually after a long time, would children and adolescents disclose and ask for help.

A4: "...como por ejemplo que sea como demasiado, que... todo el día lo esté molestando o que por ejemplo sea más de una persona... dos, tres, cuatro [such as being too much, that ... the whole day is bothering him or that for example they are more than one person ... two, three, four]...

A2: ...Como cuando traspasa su zona de confort, puede ser alguien que se sienta cómodo durante un tiempo y ya empieza a sobrepasar su zona de confort y se empieza a sentir incómodo y eso rebalsa el vaso por así decirlo... [Like when it goes beyond your comfort zone, you can be someone who feels comfortable for a while and then it begins to exceed your comfort zone and begins to feel uncomfortable and that exceeds your limit ...]

A3: ...yo creo que cuando ya empieza afectarte tanto que lo único que tú piensas es en todo el día en lo que te está pasando, que ya no tengas cabeza para otras cosas y ya te sientas tan mal que ya no puedas hacer nada...esa, como la saturación extrema... cada quien tiene un límite, son distintos los límites, hay gente que puede aguantar más, gente que puede aguantar menos... [I think that when it starts to affect you so much that the only thing you think about is what is happening to you all day, that you no longer have headspace for other things and already feel so bad that you can no longer do anything ... that, as extreme saturation ... everyone has a limit, the limits are different, there are people who can endure more, people who can endure less ...]" (Participants 4, 3 and 2, Focus group 2, Chile)

Given the lack of clarity about OSA affecting all adults and children, and that it would favor the online abusers and prevent disclosure, the participants from Scotland and Chile also mentioned the need for social change and education to clarify and spread awareness about OSA in order to enlighten the community.

"Yo creo que sería empezar a informar a los apoderados, padres, profesores, todo eso y después informar al alumno [I think it would be good to start informing the guardians, parents, teachers, all that and then informing the student]" (Participant 1, Focus group 5, Chile).

The second theme mentioned by adolescents in Scotland and Chile refers to the risks that the internet may have and how these risks increase in more vulnerable people. For this reason, the second theme has been called "Risks of the Internet and level of Vulnerability". For the participants, in this technological context, the risk would be associated with the fact that it is Easier to Relate to Strangers. Participants mentioned that under the growing influence of the internet, teenagers and children resort to the internet for establishing new relationships in which they find it easier to relate to strangers online across the globe and disclose private and personal information.

"definitely now there is a lot of catfish situations going around where people can pose as different people and lure them in and because they are more vulnerable...because they are more open to such friendships because it's becoming more widely accepted. They are more vulnerable to these kinds of situations where they wouldn't know the person who is exactly texting them behind a face or behind a picture." (Interview 2, Scotland)

"lo que está de moda es que en instagram hacen grupos gigantes, y una sola persona hace grupos gigantes metiendo gente al azar de todo el mundo y luego pregunta < where are you from? > ... y es gente que pone una foto de perfil, así bien atractivo, para que lo sigan. Gente que es como perversa... [What is common is that on Instagram they make giant groups, and a single person makes giant groups randomly putting people from all over the world and then asks < where are you from? > ... and it's people who put a profile picture, a very attractive one, so that they'll be followed. People who are like perverts...]" (Participant 3, Focus group 5, Chile)

This branches to another important factor within this theme: the need for relationships. Participants acknowledged that since adolescence is a time where individuals look forward to establishing many interpersonal relationships, they might indulge in some risky behavior which makes them more vulnerable to OSA. Some of the participants hinted how these relationships are established by the individuals in order to fit into their social environment. The search for acceptance, connectedness, self-esteem and a sense of identity was generally agreed to have the potential to lead adolescents towards negative online experiences. As well as experiencing a general pressure to fit in, it was felt that some adolescents seek to build connections with particular individuals online and boost their own self-esteem by sharing more than they should with those individuals. This was considered risky, especially in children and adolescents who are more emotionally vulnerable, and who are trying to make new relationships. The internet provides a context in which adolescents lacking affection in their offline lives might find it easier to interact with others, make friendships and, even, explore the parameters of relationships. More vulnerable adolescents may be more vulnerable to falling into abusive relationships online and engaging in sexualized behaviors, such as sharing their own explicit photographs.

"It could be because they make you feel important so you share information with them that probably you shouldn't because you don't really know them face to face. You never met them. And, they make you feel better about yourself. Maybe they complement you... um...

and they make you feel like you are important to them. So, I guess, especially in adolescence where your image really is important, and the internet helps you sort of project that image. Or even who you're disclosing information with helps you satisfy that image. I guess you'd want to share everything with him or her or yeah..." (Interview 1, Scotland)

In fact, the sharing of personal information and of pictures was seen to be a normal part of adolescents' internet use. Sharing could be on a one-to-one basis or with larger audiences through social media.

"...eso de los Packs [envío de imágenes sexuales]... porque es común que alguien manda Packs y la persona que lo recibe envía uno de vuelta, como que hay reciprocidad... [That of the Packs - sending of sexual images -... because it is common that someone sends Packs and the person who receives it sends one back, so that it's been reciprocated]... (Participant 5, Focus group 3, Chile)

In this case, children and adolescents' victims of OSA may be inhibited from disclosing due to the fear caused by the threats of the online perpetrator. These threats could be varied, starting with exposing sexualized images of the adolescent, if any, to threats of establishing violent contact at the offline level.

"Oh! The abuser might threaten the victim and you know threaten to expose if any..." (Interview 2, Scotland).

"yo igual pienso que no revelan el abuso por miedo porque pueden pensar que el agresor online es alguien que lo conoce... [I think that the victims do not disclose the abuse because they feel fear, because they may think that the online perpetrator is someone who knows them ...]" (Participant 2, Focus group 1, Chile).

By contrast, more self-confident children and adolescents appeared less vulnerable. Participants described that people with higher self-confidence were less vulnerable to being sexually abused online and could easily disclose instances of abuse to others.

"Because confident people say, if something is going wrong and if they don't like the behavior of another person, they would probably be able to say like 'Stop! I'm just not talking to you anymore...'" (Interview 4, Scotland).

"... también tiene que ver con la valentía que tú tengas para decirle a la otra persona lo que te está pasando... es decir confiar más en uno mismo porque si tú no confías en ti mismo vas a tener siempre ese miedo y al final vas a terminar sin decírselo a nadie y te lo vas a guardar para ti para siempre ["... It also has to do with the courage that you have to tell someone what is happening to you... that is, trust more in yourself because if you don't trust yourself you will always have that fear and in the end you will not tell anyone, and you will keep it to yourself forever]" (Participant 4 Focus group 1, Chile).

The third major theme is related to gender factors that favor or hinder the disclosure of the OSA.

"I guess by disclosing... it also again depends on their gender or sexual orientation. Because they could face different problems because of it." (Interview 1, Scotland).

The majority of the participants mentioned that females are more vulnerable to OSA because of presumed vulnerability of females and a perception that girls were more insecure, vulnerable, and exposed to abusive content in general. However, participants suggested that, even though females are more vulnerable, it was easier for them to disclose OSA because it is culturally accepted for women to talk about their experiences of being victims of sexual abuse.

"Yo conozco una niña, una amiga mía, que cuando a ella le pasa eso, porque hay muchas veces que le llegan fotos y mensajes así como < hola, te quiero tocar > y cosas así, a ella no le importa. Ella lo que hace es sacar pantallazos y luego las sube a sus redes sociales públicas y pone en ridículo al acosador, y se burla de él porque en realidad no le afecta a ella, y le sigue el juego al agresor para que todos sepan que el tipo es un acosador "I know a girl, a friend of mine, that when that happens to her, because she often receives photos and messages like < hello, I want to touch you > and things like that, she doesn't care. What she does is take screenshots and then upload them to her public social networks and ridicules the sexual predator, and makes fun of him because it doesn't really affect her, and plays the game with the perpetrator so everyone knows that the guy is a sexual predator" (participant 6, Focus group 5, Chile).

Participants states that even though they had not heard of many male victims, they believed that males could be victims of online abuse. Participants also acknowledged that it was more difficult for males to disclose abuse as it questioned their masculinity, they might feel they should not be talking about their emotions and feelings, and that males were presumed to be abusers rather than abused.

"I think that if a man experiences sexual abuse then it can kind of seem like emasculating to admit it" (Interview 3, Scotland).

"por ejemplo lo que le pasó al xxx [nombre de hombre eliminado], lo que le pasó con la foto del pene... [risas]... él lo dijo en la clase... y siempre va a haber alguien que se va a reír de él, lo va a molestar... eso no ayuda mucho, porque es un tema serio y los compañeros hacen bromas sobre él... [for example what happened to xxx [name of man removed], what happened to the picture of the penis ... [laughs] ... he said it in class ... and there is always going to be someone who is going to laugh at him, it's going to bother him... that doesn't help much, because it's a serious issue and classmates make jokes about him...]" (Participant 7, Focus group 1, Chile).

Apart from gender, sexual orientation played an important role in understanding disclosure. Participants stated that disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity initially impacted on how easy or difficult it was for them to disclose their experience of sexual abuse on the internet. Participants said that it was more difficult for LGBTQ + victims to disclose OSA because people generally would not be able to understand or accept them initially due to stigmatization and cultural prejudices associated with gender identities. When a topic is considered taboo in the first place, victims were likely to avoid disclosing because they had already been judged negatively.

"So again, a person who is homosexual for example and discloses to a friend about being homosexual and doesn't receive a great response because of it. Then comes across sexual abuse online, it would prevent them from disclosing to that same person or to a person who is close in their environment because the first initial response to their disclosure was not great. So, that would be sort of a negative situation." (Interview 1, Scotland).

The last big theme that was evident in the data analysis is the importance of the environment in which disclosure happens. In all interviews and focus groups, participants indicate that disclosure was dependent on characteristics of the social environment.

First, participants recognized the difficulty victims have in disclosing OSA due to sociocultural factors such as social stigmatization of victims of sexual abuse in general, and in particular OSA. It was also suggested that adolescents may avoid disclosing to avoid having their reputation be damaged. It was felt that victims' experiences of sexual abuse could be held against them and could have serious negative impacts on their lives.

"So, it can lead to that or could get parents and schools involved. They could be suspended from schools; they could lose their jobs [...] it would impact in their life negatively. [...] in your job application, they can look at your CV, look at your name, just not hire you on the spot they know you have some icky sexual abuse claim going on and they just don't want to associate you and that just makes the victims life a lot more hard..."

They look at what the girl has been wearing, what the girl was doing, or what kind of pictures she's been posting of herself [...] if her account is public versus private. All of that matters. They don't look at the abuser themselves, they're looking at the victim which is so wrong!" (Interview 2, Scotland).

"Yo pienso que la gente más que ayudarla, la va a hundir aún más [I think that people, more than helping her, will sink her even more]." (Participant 1 Focus group 4, Chile).

The above-mentioned excerpts point to blame and shame that the victim of OSA feels. This, especially in cases where victims would have carried out risky behaviors such as sending sexual photos or videos to their friends, or even to the perpetrator. This would be a major obstacle to the disclosure of the OSA because, to ask for help, the victim would be exposed to social judgment.

"...vergüenza, hay gente que le da hasta culpa contar cosas así, pero, por ejemplo le puede dar culpa sobre lo que él hizo para que le haya pasado eso... [shame, there are people who feel guilty about disclosing things like that, but, for example, they can blame him for what he did to make those things happen ...]" (Participants 2 Focus group 2, Chile).

This fear of the reaction of the social environment would be especially pertinent in the relationship between adolescents and their parents. Many of the participants in this study believe that OSA victims do not ask their parents for help for fear that they will not understand them and will reprimand or punish them. The participants also mention a similar difficulty with a non-parental authority, however, they felt that it might be a little easier to disclose to a teacher or another adult who is not a parent.

"A lot of them wouldn't go to their parents just because they would feel that their parents would not approve of them doing any of these behaviours of posting pictures of them online in the first place" (Interview, 2, Scotland).

"Miedo, como que sus padres no la apoyen... que la empiecen a retar... que le digan a ella que fue su culpa [Fear, like her parents don't support her ... to start scolding her ... to tell her it was her fault]". (Participant 5 Focus group 6, Chile).

Difficulties disclosing to parents was also associated with the generation gap between adolescents and their parents in their use of technology. This generation gap was perceived to make OSA victims less likely to disclose to their parents as they believe they are part of a generation that does not have sufficient knowledge of technology and does not have the skills to understand what is happening.

"Los papás no saben mucho del tema. Algunos tienen más de cuarenta y no saben lo que es la tecnología, entonces como que no van a entender, en el mundo en que estas tú metido [Parents don't know much about this topic. Some are over forty years old and do not know what technology is, so they won't understand the world in which you are involved]" Participant 3, Focus Group 3, Chile).

The participants highlighted that parents would have to be extremely supportive and accepting before disclosure could happen. Having parents who openly talk about these things and come from a place of non-judgment could help adolescents disclose such experiences.

"I guess it depends on the relationship with the person who is in authority or your parents because there are some situations where parents and children have great relationships and some that do not have great relationships..." (Interview 1, Scotland)

However, all the participants agreed that disclosure in most cases happens with peers. An individual could easily disclose their experiences of sexual abuse to friends because they would feel that their friends were in the similar situation and could understand what they were going through very easily. Friends were also perceived to be less likely to stigmatise or blame them.

"It is easier to confront your friends, but I feel like a lot of people are just on the receiving end. It is very hard to do something about it." (Interview 5, Scotland).

"A tus amigos es más fácil contarles, porque igual con los papás siempre todo va a ser más difícil... difícil de contarle [It is easier to tell it to your friends, because to tell your parents is difficult, everything will always be more difficult ... difficult to tell]." (Participant 3, Focus group 2, Chile)

4. Discussion

The current study aimed to understand the context (obstacles and facilitators) of disclosure of OSA in adolescents from the perspective of general population adolescents rather than victims of OSA (Pribe & Svedin, 2008). Also, given the universality of the Internet (Office of Communications, 2015), this study considered participants from different countries.

It is interesting to note that adolescents of different nationalities and different ages showed a similar view about the context of disclosure, despite substantial cultural and age variations between Chilean and Scottish samples. Despite cultural and economic differences, the participants had similar attitudes towards the threats presented by the internet, OSA in particular. This suggests that cultural influence is somewhat diluted in the online world, where adolescents from different contexts are exposed to similar content.

Also, the obstacles and facilitators to disclosure may be universal across cultural contexts, so interventions programs might be advised to consider that as the internet is a global phenomenon online culture may be more universal than previously supposed.

The results show that obstacles to OSA disclosure have to do, firstly, with a lack of clarity as to what OSA is. Coherent with previous evidence (Katz et al., 2018), all participants acknowledged a likely delay in disclosure due to not understanding OSA or its limits with a normal relationship over the internet. In this context it was thought the disclosure would only occur after the situation became unsustainable. It is worth noting that this difficulty to delimit OSA has been previously noted (de Santisteban & Gámez-Guadix, 2017b) highlighting the need to better define the concept.

The lack of understanding of OSA was perceived to be particularly pronounced in adults. Participants clearly anticipated difficulty disclosing to a parent or an adult, expecting them to be unfamiliar with internet use/culture, which has been characterised in the literature as reflecting a substantial generational gap (Strider, Third, Locke, & Richardson, 2012). It does not imply that parents do not have the basic knowledge of internet usage, however, most participants feel that it is difficult for parents to find a balance between supervising and policing internet usage. However, general perception of the adolescent participants clearly state that adults do not acknowledge their experiences of sexual abuse mediated online, which makes disclosure difficult due to generational gap.

Educating people (victims, peers, adults) about the limits of a normal/friendly relationship online versus an abusive one is a necessary first step in helping people to understand what constitutes OSA. In fact, participants highlighted the need to improve education of adolescents in matters related to the Internet, its risks, and OSA. Basic education would provide adolescents with a stronger conceptual understanding and therefore more confidence, to make a disclosure. Likewise, participants emphasized that parents and adults should also be educated about online world, to reduce the generational gap and facilitate disclosure.

Another important obstacle to OSA disclosure is associated with personal vulnerability factors, making the Internet a risky context. The Internet also provides perpetrators with an environment that is affordable and anonymous (Cooper, Golden, & Marshall, 2006). It can help people form friendships when they find it difficult relating to people in their environment, without the worry of social risks (Turkle, 1997). This can be risky in the adolescent population (especially those most emotionally vulnerable), who are evolutionarily in a phase of identity development, search for a sense of belonging and exploration. The Internet offers the possibility of interacting with strangers and exploring relationships and sexuality (Quayle & Sinclair, 2012). In this search for relationships, adolescents could engage in risk behaviours, such as sending explicit photos of themselves, which could be used by the perpetrator to subsequently blackmail the victim and hinder disclosure (Quayle, 2016), fears endorsed by the participants. This was related to contextual factors such as social stigmatization, shame and blame. This supports the argument of self-victimisation, where the victims perceive themselves as active collaborator in abuse by establishing contact with the abuser, in the form of sharing sexual images, text images or any form of sexual service (Quayle, 2016). Children and young people relate this to shame and humiliation of being exposed in public and they feel an extreme lack of control (Leonard, 2010). This fear may stem from a child or adolescent's difficulty communicating with a parent or an adult that it disrupts their interpersonal relationships and anticipate that the disclosure would be met with a negative response within their social environment.

In this way, it is clear from the results that plans to facilitate disclosure should be considering different components including behavioral (considering adolescents' risky behaviors), emotional (feelings of fear and shame) and cognitive (lack of information, self-blame, stigma). It is key that OSA prevention and early detection programs consider these three levels, focusing on adolescents themselves, their direct environment (potential recipients: parents, authorities and peers) and society in general (where the prejudices and practices that prevent disclosure begin).

Related to the above, participants point out that disclosure would be particularly difficult in men, given social gender stereotypes. Adolescent boys were perceived as feeling more shame and guilt when they were questioned by society and catalogued as homosexuals (because the perpetrators mostly are men) as is previously reported in offline sexual abuse (Easton, Saltzman, & Willis, 2014). Participants point out that although women are more vulnerable to OSA – which is consistent with the statistics available in the literature (Pinto & Venegas, 2015) – they would also have fewer obstacles at the cultural level to make the disclosure, as happens in offline abuse (Arredondo, Saavedra, Troncoso, & y Guerra, 2016). Although this perception of the participants is understandable, it is also points to the need to understand better the profiles of online sexual perpetrators since the online space allows anonymity and, as has been reported in offline abuse, it could be that the abuse committed by women is under-represented (Tozdan, Briken, & Dekker, 2019).

Coherent with that, participants thought that victims of OSA would disclose more readily to peers, rather than parents and authorities. This is consistent with one of the main aims of the study. The negative consequences of disclosure can be mitigated with the provision of a healthy and supportive environment, as positive responses are crucial for disclosure experiences (Crisma, Bascelli, Paci, & Romito, 2004; Easton, 2019). Many victims are supported and encouraged by their friends to speak with trusted adults (Crisma et al., 2004). Some participants, however, mentioned that disclosure can occur in the case of friends because the peer groups might be experiencing a similar situation, which helps them to understand the nature of abuse better than an adult would. Peer disclosure can help instil confidence in the victim, which can be an important facilitator of disclosure of OSA.

The question here is how to support peers to support the process of disclosure in victims of OSA. This will help OSA victims access necessary professional intervention. However, peers might not always have the knowledge to exercise a protective role towards their victimised peers. Hence, there should be active channels of communication involving relevant adults to whom information can be passed effectively. It seems important that OSA prevention programs should also include modules that support and teach peers on how to receive and proceed in the case of a friend's disclosure. These programs should also target parents to educate them about risks associated with using the internet, and especially OSA. These will help reduce the generational gap, prejudices, victim stigmatization and blame by adults. There is some work in this regard, but the evidence on effective OSA detection and prevention strategies is still in a very preliminary stage, as shown by the initial results of an ongoing systematic review (Finch, Ryckman, & Guerra, 2020).

This research can be used to help create an evidence-based tool to support disclosure of OSA, but more specific and targeted

research is required. The study elucidates some of the major facilitators and obstacles to OSA disclosure which are similar to those of offline sexual abuse (for a review see Lemaigrea, Taylor, & Gittoesc, 2017). However, there are two themes that are considered most significant by the participants and are worth deepening in specific programs to prevent OSA: ambiguous boundaries between OSA vs. normal online relationships, and the generation gap that makes it difficult for teenagers to trust adults in internet matters. Both factors are important for programs to prevent OSA and enhance its early disclosure to include a strong psychoeducational element (both adolescents and their parents) and consider an important potential recipient of the disclosure: peers.

It is believed that having worked with adolescents who are not victims of OSA is a novel, positive and distinctive element of this investigation, it is necessary to mention some limitations. First, the study sample is small and non-representative. Future research on the matter would benefit from larger sample sizes. Second, to have a more complete understanding of OSA we need to know the perspectives of the victims themselves. Further research with OSA victims could provide more relevant information, but in this case, we suggest that the focus group is replaced by one-to-one interviews, to allow for confidential space to discuss sensitive issues, with the ethical safeguards that this implies. It is also important to understand the impact on disclosure on the potential recipients of disclosure. They could be victims of vicarious or secondary traumatisation and this kind of disclosure could have a detrimental impact on their mental health and well-being. This study encourages future research to look into the implications of this impact.

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