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The breaking of secrecy: Analysis of the hashtag #MeTooInceste regarding testimonies of sexual incest abuse in childhood

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ABSTRACT

Background: Incest remains one of the great taboos of contemporary society. Secrecy is also crucial in this type of sexual abuse against children, and many victims do not disclose their testimony. This situation changed, when in France in mid-January 2021, the #MeTooInceste movement emerged, and thousands of victims began to reveal the abuse they had suffered as children.

Objective: To analyze the discourse on Twitter regarding this hashtag to understand how incest abuse has been dealt with through social media debate. In so doing, we expected to identify the main elements that could explain how people have symbolically constructed and engaged with childhood sexual abuse in general and with incest abuse in particular.

Participants and setting: In total, 20,556 tweets with the hashtag #MeTooInceste written in French were selected by streaming API from January 14 to February 15, 2021.

Methods: Their content was analyzed by lexical analysis using Iramuteq software (Reinert method).

Results: Victims found a space for disclosure in this movement, where they felt believed, protected, and supported. This movement also embraced the victims of celebrity abusers, denouncing them and calling for their exclusion from public life. Likewise, at the societal level, this movement pushed for changes in public policies to protect children and emphasized the importance of breaking the public silence or secrecy about incest abuse.

Conclusions: This wave of testimonies represents a turning point as it has broken the law of silence and allowed the victims to exist in the media space without being questioned.

1. Background

The silence on a sexual crime, as common as it is taboo, broke in France in mid-January 2021, when, with the hashtag #MeTooInceste, thousands of testimonies reported having been victims of incest during their childhood. Everything arose because of the book written by Camille Kouchner (2021), *La Familia grande* [The large family], in which she accuses her stepfather, Olivier Duhamel, of sexually abusing her stepson, Camille's brother, who was only 14 years old (Williamson, 2021). The prosecutor's office investigates the complaint, and Duhamel, a renowned political scientist, academic, and friend of ministers, resigned from all his posts

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(Bremmer, 2021). Kouchner books comes in the wake of the Vanessa Springora book, *Le Consentement* (2020) which also elicited a massive public debate on sexual violence against children (though not inside the family), reporting on the case of the pedophile and famous writer Gabriel Matzneff (Talabot and Develey, 2020).

In the wake of the tsunami generated by the Duhamel case, the feminist association *Nous Toutes*, in French “All of us,” activated the #MeTooinceste campaign on social networks. Precisely for this purpose, they echoed the tweet launched by a Parisian, aged around 60 years, named Marie Chenevance (pseudonym), who said, “I was 5 years old. During a party, a brother of my mother altered my candor and darkened the rest of my life. In a second, I became 100 years old” (Bonet, 2021). In a few hours, it went viral with tens of thousands of messages (from both men and women) disclosing their abuse (Méheut, 2021).

1.1. Incest as sexual abuse against children

One of the most accepted definitions of the concept of sexual abuse of children is that proposed by the National Center of Child Abuse and Neglect (1988):

Contacts or interactions between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person. A person may also commit sexual abuse under the age of 18 when that person is either significantly older than the victim or when the perpetrator is in a position of power or control over another child. (p. 2)

From this definition, three constituent criteria of child sexual abuse are derived: the age of the victim and offender, the behavior used by the offender to subdue the victim, and the type of sexual conduct between them (Intebi, 2011). Sexual abuse against children must not only be analyzed in terms of the sexual variable but also the asymmetry that results from a situation of abuse of power or coercion (Horno et al., 2001; Katz & Hamama, 2017).

Incest abuse or intrafamilial sexual abuse against children occurs when the abuser and the abused are close relatives in descending or a horizontal line, or adults with parental relationships with children (Dussy, 2013; Greydanus & Merrick, 2017). This kind of abuse is a critical experience that marks the lives of victims (Herman, 2000), mainly when perpetrated by the father (Buchbinder & Sinay, 2020). Incest victims tend to describe the feeling of having remained under the abuser’s control even after the sexual abuse has ceased (Lorentzen et al., 2008). As pointed out by several experts, there is no defined profile of an incest abuse aggressor (Dussy, 2013). These offenders break with the prototype of sexual aggressors against children maintained in society’s imaginary. As Summit (1983) already verified in his observations, the aggressor of sexual abuse against children is usually a familiar, hard-working man with a better educational level, more religious, and more legalistic than usual. Sexual abusers come from different backgrounds and, in most cases, have not been convicted of sexual abuse crimes (Finkelhor, 2009).

1.2. Quantifying the problem of incest abuse

Incest abuse of children is a universal problem that, in one way or another, is present in all cultures and societies. It is a complex phenomenon, resulting from a combination of individual, family, and social factors (Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2019). Regarding the frequency of sexual abuse against children in general and incest in particular, it is not easy to determine the actual incidence of this problem in the population because it usually occurs in a private environment (the family) and minors may feel powerless to reveal the abuse (Rickett & Bewaji, 2020). In addition, the social and family structure also hinders disclosure (Echeburúa & Guerricaechevarría, 2015). In this regard, a systematic review of the literature from the Nordic countries shows a prevalence of child sexual abuse (in a broad sense) of 3–23% for boys and 11–36% for girls (Kloppen et al., 2016), but the best of our knowledge, there is no systematic review either in France even though important authors have worked on the subject in great depth (Ambroise-Rendu, 2003, 2009, 2014, 2016; Dussy, 2009, 2013).

According to a recent survey conducted by Ipsos for the association *Face à l'inceste* (Ipsos, 2020), up to 10% of French people claim to have been victims of incest. Of these people, 78% were women, and 22% were men. Regarding age range, 12% were between 18 and 24 years old, 19% between 15 and 34 years old, 30% between 35 and 49 years old, 22% between 50 and 64 years old, and 17% over 65. It is also worth noting that this percentage has increased significantly from 3% in 2009 to 6% in 2015. These data give continuity to those obtained in the VIRAGE victimization study (*Violences et Rapports de Genre*, 2016) which focuses mainly on gender violence. According to this study (involving 15,556 women and 11,712 men aged 20 to 69 years) 5.0% of females and 0.83% of males had experienced (attempted) rape and other sexual assaults in the family or close circle during their life. In the case of females, 93% of rapes (attempted) and 94% of other sexual assaults occur for the first time between the ages of 0 and 17. For males, 100% of attempted rapes and 94% of other sexual assaults occur for the first time between the ages of 0 and 17 (Le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 2017).

In addition, 32% of French people recognize knowing at least one person who has been a victim of incest abuse. More specifically, those people have reported that they know someone who, as a child or adolescent, has suffered one of these victimizations: 23% knew someone who had been sexually assaulted, either by touching or fondling; 19% of the victims were the object of repeated indiscretions of a sexual nature; 16% of victims were raped as children or adolescents; 15% suffered acts of exhibitionism; and finally, 4% of the victims were forced to pose for erotic or pornographic photographs (Ipsos, 2020).

Until now, the French justice system viewed sexual abuse in the family environment as an “aggravating circumstance” when it concerns minors under 15 years of age, and not as a crime (French Penal Code, 1992, article 222-23). In fact, this legislation starts from a much discussed evolution as there was an attempt to create a specific offence in 2010, but it was annulled as unconstitutional by the Council of State in 2011, as the French law does not define what “family” means (Bourgneuf, 2021). The current wording of Article

222-3-1 is the result of a patch created ad-hoc in 2018 to put incest back on the books (Pichard, 2021). This is even more relevant to understand the debate that the new legislation had been proposed in Parliament (and finally passed in April) by Annick Billon on this specific issue, with counter-proposals from Isabelle Santiago and Laurence Rossignol (20 minutes, 2021; Santiago, 2021). Billon's proposal was widely considered insufficient by activist groups (Chanbonneau, 2021; Face à l'inceste, 2021). The hashtag #MeTooinceste was deliberately introduced by Nous Toutes to impact this debate (Franceinfo, 2021). In fact, the Billon proposal, as well as the current Commission sur les violences sexuelles et l'inceste, led by Edouard Durand Pilorget-Rezzouk (2021), have been considered a direct result not only of the incest debate but also of the Matzneff case (Boussaguet, 2021; Chemmin, 2021).

1.3. Silence or secrecy, "an essential element" in the incest system

Incest is an abusive act surrounded, supported, and enabled by secrecy (Ford & Crabtree, 2002), and it usually takes months or years before the secret is disclosed (Testoni et al., 2018). The emotional and physical coercion exerted by the abuser on the victim is carried out with the intention of ensuring the victim's silence (Dussy, 2009). The abuse is the secret that, according to the perpetrator, is shared with equal responsibility by the adult and the child (Callaghan et al., 2015).

The taboo of silence to talk about incest is very strong both personally and socially (Dussy, 2009), and it is imposed in at least four different ways. First, direct silencing can take the form of violence, threats, or conditioning (Suyanto et al., 2019). Second, there is a lack of vocabulary to discuss the issue, given that when children are raped or sexually assaulted, they are often so young that they do not know the words rape, erection, or genitalia to describe what is happening (Gul et al., 2020). Third, the taboo is reinforced by disqualifying and discrediting those who dare to challenge it, blaming the story on imagination, external pressures, or making them believe that no one will believe them (Barringer, 1992). Finally, the child may also be convinced that revealing this secret will disintegrate the family group, which is valid to a certain extent, as families go through a deep crisis when they find out what has happened (Ford & Crabtree, 2002; Katz & Hamama, 2017).

Silence, therefore, becomes an essential element in incest abuse, and many people who are victims of childhood sexual abuse do not disclose the abuse until many years later (Buchbinder & Sinay, 2020). However, for the incestuously abused child (or adult in the present), breaking the silence and telling the secret is essential for the cessation of the abuse (Roesler & Wind, 1994). In fact, once revealed by someone, incest ceases being anomic and becomes a communicable, social fact wherein parties have an assigned place as victim and perpetrator (Dussy & Caisne, 2007).

Moreover, it has been found that victims look for at least five characteristics of the confidant to break this silence (Petronio & Kovach, 1997): (1) credibility (trust and commonality); (2) supportiveness (feelings of love and understanding); (3) advocacy (act to stop the abuse or other instances of abuse); (4) strength (ability to handle the disclosure emotionally); and (5) protectiveness (free from negative repercussions). Moreover, when the survivor becomes an adult, the disclosure of the incest experience becomes crucial to make sense of their lives and themselves (Silver et al., 1983) through the re-telling process (Ford & Crabtree, 2002). Constructing these narratives and exposing them even becomes essential on both a personal (Buchbinder & Sinay, 2020) and societal level, as it also helps to break the taboo in society by acknowledging the severity of the problem (Ford & Crabtree, 2002).

1.4. Social networks as a tool to break taboo-silences

Nowadays, social media platforms have positioned themselves as a central axis of communication, becoming effective instruments for mobilization and the fight against violence of varying types (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Dragiewicz & Burgess, 2016). In this regard, it is observed that since 2010 there has been a notable increase in the use of networks for awareness and sensitization, mainly with regard to anti-gender violence (Arriaza & Berumen, 2019; Mendes et al., 2018; Turley & Fisher, 2018). Moreover, this new digital activist uses Twitter hashtags to create collective awareness and articulate a social protest within the digital sphere (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer, 2017; Xiong et al., 2019). Hashtag campaigns are accessible to a larger audience, immediate and easy to track, and encourage a collective identity, sense of support, and empathy (Turley & Fisher, 2018).

However, it is worth noting that these kinds of social movements also suffer trolling, online harassment, and even counter movements (Cole, 2015; Phillips, 2015; Sadowski, 2016). These backlash movements often spread attacks against successful denouncement campaigns and even against particular victims of violence, thus attempting to undermine the value of the testimonies and silence the victims and activists (Mendes et al., 2018; Powell & Henry, 2017). Among these denouncement campaigns, the pioneer or one of the best known in creating international awareness was the #metoo campaign (Bhattacharyya, 2018). In 2017, the #MeToo hashtag began trending on Twitter, when Alyssa Milano used it as a Twitter hashtag in response to allegations of sexual assault by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, encouraging members of the public to join in to reveal the magnitude of the sexual violence problem (Mendes et al., 2018). This hashtag was used 12 million times in the first 24 h alone (CBS, 2017).

Xiong et al. (2019) identified the hashtags used in the #MeToo movement through thematic analysis. In doing so, they found that these hashtags had six main objectives: (1) to relate events directly and indirectly to the movement, (2) to publicize related issues motivating the movement, (3) to guide actions, (4) event-specific (i.e., recurring or singular), (5) to refer to victims, and (6) to mention activists. All these objectives would also be in line with a common goal: to break the silence about sexual violence and make the narrative of victimized people more visible.

In addition, recent investigations have also pointed out that a successful public defense campaign will encourage other victims to take the step of breaking the silence (Arriaza & Berumen, 2019; Prasad, 2018). In this context, recent years have seen attempts to create hashtags to report sexual abuse against children, such as #MyFirstHarassment (or #miprimera in Spanish) (de Moraes et al., 2017; Ruiz-Navarro, 2016), although none have explicitly focused on incest or had such social repercussions in a country as the

#MeTooIncest.

1.5. Objectives

The main objective of this study was to analyze the discourse on Twitter regarding the #metooincest hashtag in France to understand how incest abuse has been dealt with through social media debate. We have attempted to identify the main elements that could explain how people have symbolically constructed and engaged with the problem of childhood sexual abuse in general and with incest abuse in particular. It is expected that this #MeTooIncest movement will create a visualization of the victimization of incest abuse, but also references to the movement itself, its triggers, and calls to action, as previous movements of a similar nature have done.

2. Participants and setting

2.1. Data collection method

To create the Twitter sample, we tracked and picked up (by streaming API) all tweets with the word “MeTooInceste” written in French from January 14 to February 15 in 2021. Therefore, the inclusion criteria of the tweets were: 1) to contain the word MeTooInceste (regardless of whether it was a hashtag or a word in the tweet); 2) to be published between 14th January and 15th February 2021, both dates included; 3) to be written in French; 4) original tweets and retweets were included. We chose to analyze the tweets during this period since this constitutes the peak period that began with the appearance of #MeTooInceste on Twitter, after which it went viral and then subsequently decreased. In total, 20,556 tweets were selected for lexical analysis of the discourse on Twitter. Both tweets and retweets were included in this selection as our aim was to analyze the social media debate and the echo of the different discourses on incest that were proliferated. Ultimately, to clean up the original data, user names, emoticons, and characters not accepted by the Iramuteq software were removed.

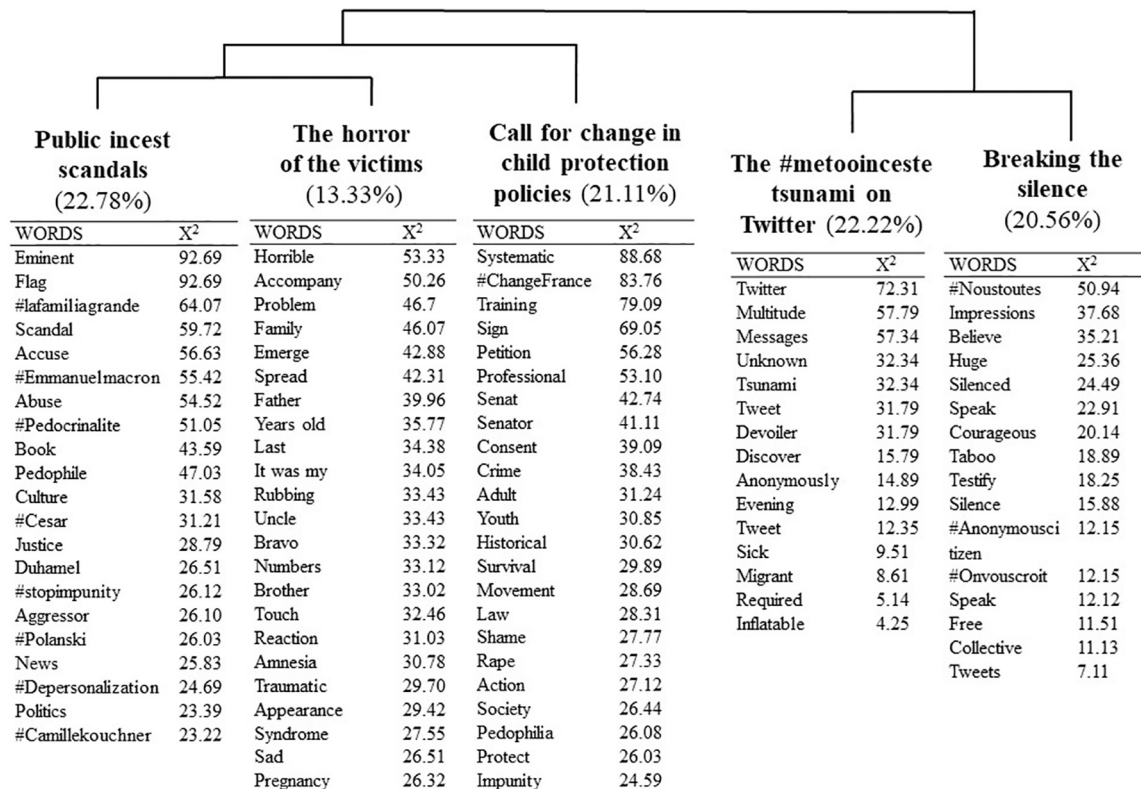


Fig. 1. The hierarchical clustering dendrogram of the free association with the most frequent words and the words with the most significant association $\chi^2(1), p < 0.001$ extracted by the Reiner method.

3. Methods

3.1. Analysis of information

The Reinert method using Iramuteq software for lexical analysis (Reinert, 1990) was employed to analyze the corpus of text. Iramuteq software eliminates problems of reliability and validity in text analysis (Idoiaga & Belasko, 2019; Reinert, 1996). This method is based on the premise that words are not independent of each other but reflect underlying themes. Reinert's (1996) central thesis is that all discourse is expressed from a set of words that constitute units of meaning independently of their syntactic construction.

First, the software creates a dictionary. The initial corpus is broken down into segments with the approximate length of a sentence or two (40 words). The corpus is then analyzed in terms of the presence of whole words in the segments. The segments are used to create a contingency table, which shows the distribution of vocabulary per segment. The program generates a squared distances matrix from this contingency table, following the assumption that two segments are close if they share some of the words analyzed (Reinert, 1996). Subsequently, following the Reinert method, the software runs a descending hierarchical cluster analysis on this distance table, which yields classes of segments that best differentiate the vocabulary. In so doing, this software assists in the interpretation of texts. It extracts sets of words referred to as classes that co-occur and are best differentiated from other classes.

Consequently, the analyst obtains a series of classes composed of typical words and typical text segments (tweets) with the highest Chi-square values. This provides the basis for 'interpreting' the classes as lexical worlds. The Reinert method produces statistical, transparent, and reproducible data until the final point of interpretation, where the analyst assigns a label; that is, the researcher will give a title to the group of words and text segments grouped by the software (Schonhardt-Bailey, 2013). In that final phase, to create the labels or titles of each class, this study used a systematic process. In this process, two of the researchers independently named each class based on the words and associated tweets. The third researcher created a final label that all three researchers approved.

Iramuteq also conducted a lexical similarity analysis. This analysis examines the corpus as a whole, regardless of whether the answers were from one participant (subject) or another. It considers that the more times two elements were treated in the same way, the closer they will be in the representational structure to the object they refer to (Molina-Neira, 2017).

Finally, it should be noted that all data were collected in French, and the analyses were carried out in that language. Once the analyses were completed, the words, text, and quotations extracted were translated by a professional translator to be published in English and understood by the general public.

4. Results

The entire corpus contained 534,951 words, of which 26,400 were unique. In particular, the descending hierarchical analysis divided the corpus into 15,139 segments and five classes. The results of the analysis are displayed in Fig. 1. The analysis has identified the main discursive patterns posted on Twitter regarding the #MeTooInceste movement. A set of specific words represents each pattern and text segments (tweets), referred to as a class.

With a weight of 22.78%, the first class was labeled "Public incest scandals." This first class refers to how the internet users allude to the scandal arising from the publication of the book *La Famille Grande* in which Camille Kouchner denounces her stepfather Olivier Duhamel. Other previous scandals, such as the case of filmmaker Roman Polanski, are also brought to light. Emmanuel Macron, which is also in this cluster, is also an awkward reference, as he met his now wife when he was 16 and she was his teacher, therefore, many tweets made a parallel between this life experience of the current president and the reality of sexual violence against children. The following lines show the most significant tweets of this class: "Camille Kouchner wrote #LaFamiliaGrande to break free from her silence about the incest suffered by her brother. Her book has opened the way for many through #MeTooInceste. Thank you to her for this book. Huge support to you, victims, who have the courage to break this silence"; "Imprisoned forever in the pages of this moving book, which will serve as bars much stronger than those of a prison. #OlivierDuhamel we never want to hear from you again, not now, not ever! #MeTooInceste #LaFamilieGrande by #CamilleKouchner"; "#Polanski accused of sodomizing a 13-year-old #seuildAge child and drugging her #LaFamiliagrande doesn't extradite him, but gives him 3 #cesars @Les_Cesar #MeTooInceste"; "#MeTooInceste When the media didn't wait for a scandal in the elite to talk about a social phenomenon that affects all walks of life. 2h14 to talk about it, giving everyone a voice".

The second class (13.33%), labeled as "The horror of the victims," mainly compiles the testimony of victims and the repercussions that the abuse has for their lives (e.g., syndromes, traumatic amnesia), as can be seen in some of the characteristic tweets of this class: "I was between 11 and 14 years old. He was my brother. I am 57 years old, and I am still a victim of this past. Apart from my daughter, I have never created anything. My social, professional, and emotional life is a succession of failures and isolation. #MeTooInceste"; "#MeTooInceste you, you were my stepfather, I was 8 years old, when I was touched by you, your fingers in my vagina but you were a SNCF inspector, you shouldn't have said that, the slut was me, you took my childhood and my hatred of men!!!! I'll never forget, we don't do that"; "I was 10 years old when my paternal grandfather asked me to join him on the sidelines. He wanted to 'observe the evolution of my body as a young woman.' There was almost no conviction for what he did next... I want you all to know that you have my full support #MeTooInceste"; "I think it's really horrible and at the same time really brave to see all these testimonies about #MeTooInceste. It's much more widespread than you might think. I send all my support to people who may have suffered such atrocious things"; "No, we don't break happiness or family peace by naming the unspeakable. By naming the guilty. By opening the eyes that close or turn away. It is the rapists who break. Bravo, solidarity with the victims and their words. #MeTooInceste #TraumaticAmnesia".

The third class, which has been labeled “Call for change in child protection policies” (21.11%), criticizes the fact that sexual abuse has been systematic in France and that changes in laws and policies are needed to protect children. These are some of the most significant tweets from this class: “Systematic training on violence for professionals working with children #MeTooIncest-Sign the petition! @ChangeFrance”; “#MeTooIncest a historic moment for victims that calls for strong political responses! Imprescriptibility of sexual crimes against minors”; “The liberation of speech and listening to victims of #MetooIncest is far from sufficient There are not enough trained psychologists to accompany the victims. We don’t have enough police officers, judges, prisons... Changing the law would only be the beginning”. However, this class also denounces a controversial decision taken by the French Senate in January 2021 to set the age of sexual consent for minors at 13 years: “So the senate is going easy, at 13 and a day you can be consenting if an adult rapes you... 2021 guys, 2021. And another spit in the face of the victims. #SenatDirect #senat #gouvernementFR #MeTooIncest”; “Shame on the #Senators, Shame on the #Senate for allowing #pedocriminality to be legalized by giving it an age of sexual consent at 13 YEARS! This system is rotten, let’s reverse it. It is no longer possible to let it happen! #MeTooIncest”.

With a weight of 22.22% and named as “The #MeTooIncest tsunami on Twitter,” the fourth class is a kind of meta-reflection. That is to say; it specifically reflects the great media and social echo that the #MeTooIncest campaign itself is having, describing it as a wave in social media. These are some of the most characteristic tweets of this class: “I was 15, my brother”, “he was my grandfather,” “the cool uncle of the family”... “#MeTooIncest: in the wake of the Duhamel affair, hundreds of victims testify on Twitter”; “On Twitter, the messages have multiplied over the last few hours, to the point of making public and political figures from all sides react #MeTooIncest”; “I see this outpouring of #MeTooIncest tweets, and emotion grips my heart. I didn’t believe this liberation of speech anymore, or hardly... I’ve been listening to these stories for 20 years. For twenty years, I’ve been writing about it so that these voices are finally heard. At least a little”; “January 16, 2021, a historic date”. More than 15k poignant testimonies of courageous people who



Fig. 2. Results of the lexical similarity analysis with words appearing with a frequency greater than 400.

were the king's choice as written by Camille Kouchner. Incest has affected my friends and family. I heard you! And I can't stand this silence anymore. Thank you to them #MeTooIncest.

Finally, the fifth class named "Breaking the silence" emerges with a weight of 20.56%. The tweets in this class address the importance of breaking the silence and how this campaign reflects the public debate on the importance of the scourge of child sexual abuse. These are some of the most prominent tweets: "To all of you who testify about incest or sexual violence as a child; huge support from #NousToutes. You have nothing to do with it, we believe you, you can count on us #MetooIncest"; "Thank you to all those who are speaking out and breaking the silence. And love to all those who can't speak yet. Protect yourself; it's the most important. This tsunami is being made by all, and for all, even if you don't speak out yet, you are part of this group. #sorority #MeTooIncest"; "The word is getting out, but often the victims still don't dare to speak. A taboo is being lifted: society wants to end incest, which is often pedophile behavior too! #MeTooIncest"; "A past...an innocent childhood soiled, a taboo...2021 a future in which it is necessary to speak to free oneself and confess the unmentionable... #MeTooIncest".

4.1. Lexical similarity analysis section

Second, to generate an image that would reflect the co-occurrences between all the words in the corpus beyond their division into classes, a lexical similarity analysis was conducted. The idea was to analyze how the words of the corpus were interconnected on a common plane. For this purpose, the lexical similarity analysis was carried out only with words with a frequency greater than 400 (excluding the word *metooincest*), the results of which are displayed in Fig. 2.

Two central nuclei can be observed, composed of the words *incest* and *children*, which are strongly linked to each other. From the central nucleus where the incest is located, different branches arise. The first branch includes the victims, reflecting how they are talking and breaking the taboo or social silence through the hashtag #metoo. These victims are described as being highly courageous because they share their testimony on Twitter, as we see in the second branch. In the third branch are those rapes or abuses that the victims have suffered repeatedly, even at the hands of their fathers. However, the mothers are placed next to the word protection.

Second, from the central core of children, it is pointed out that most of the rapists are acquaintances or relatives and it is also strongly emphasized that there is a lack of justice for sexual violence against children. Because of this, it is deemed necessary to have well-trained professionals.

5. Discussion & conclusions

This study set out to examine the social media discourse surrounding the #MeTooIncest movement on Twitter. The results have demonstrated the importance of this movement in encouraging victims to disclose the secret on a personal level and speak out publicly about one of the great taboos of contemporary society, incest abuse (Sharaby, 2019).

5.1. Summary of findings

First, following the discursive patterns extracted from the cluster analysis, it is noted that, in this case, as in other similar #MeToo movements, a public case has been the spark that has promoted a chain of victim testimonies, as shown in the first class (Mendes et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2019). In the case of incest, the fact that the victims dare to break the silence, even in an anonymous way, has a double value, personal and social, as silence is a crucial element of this type of violence in both spheres (Dussy, 2009; Roesler & Wind, 1994).

On an individual level, the testimonies gathered in the second class may be the beginning of a phase of disclosure for many abused people. Of course, breaking the silence in a tweet, although it may be empowering (Kende et al., 2020), is not the same as constructing a narrative or a life story in which incest is integrated, which is a long process (Buchbinder & Sinay, 2020). However, perhaps this movement may help many people feel that they have the opportunity to make that first disclosure or at least create a safe environment to do so. The tweets of this research reveal some of the essential components of the environment necessary for disclosure, such as giving testimonies credibility, while providing the victims with support and protection (Petronio & Kovach, 1997). Moreover, in this case the discourse focuses on the survivors of incest and how this violence has affected their lives. In fact, Ambroise-Rendu pointed out and criticized the anonymity of child sexual abuse victims in French press reports from the victims' perspective, because she concludes that the victims were therefore voiceless and merely "ideas of victims" (Ambroise-Rendu, 2003). Therefore, giving protagonism to the victims themselves in the first person, beyond speaking in general or statistical terms, can be, as noted, an act of empowerment and empathy (de Roos & Jones, 2020; Hosterman et al., 2018).

Even in terms of terminology, the Reinert analysis highlighted the absence of the word "pudeur" or "attentat à la pudeur", which were once the predominant expressions used to refer to sexual assault against children (Ambroise-Rendu, 2009). In fact, a complete search of the database has been made and the word "pudeur" is only mentioned 10 times (in 20,556 tweets) and the expression "attentat à la pudeur" is not mentioned at all.

Moreover, Twitter has also echoed the importance of breaking the silence on incest on a societal level, as seen in the fifth class. In fact, the existing taboo around this type of violence has been already identified as a crucial problem (Ambroise-Rendu, 2014, 2016; Barringer, 1992) since it leads our society to continue to underestimate sexual violence against children, both in terms of its frequency and the consequences that those violent acts can have for children. So, there is a deep and persistent resistance to recognize that incest is an ordinary phenomenon in our societies, since to do so is to question the pillar of the social order which is the family (Ambroise-Rendu, 2021). It should be considered that children depend, physically and emotionally, on adults (Mullin, 2014) and that, due to this

dependence and a high degree of vulnerability, in addition to suffering the same victimizations as adults, they suffer victimizations of their own (Pereda, 2019). Likewise, a social system where this violence is not recognized makes children even more vulnerable and defenseless (Gul et al., 2020). In fact, even Édouard Durand, children's judge at the Bobigny Court and since January 2021, president of the *Independent commission on incest and sexual violence against children* of France, admitted that since Vanessa Springora's book, *Le Consentement* and Camille Kouchner's, *La Familia Grande*, the scandals related to pedophilia within the Church and the creation of the hashtag #MeTooIncest, France is witnessing a liberation of speech on sexual violence and incest that has created, in an unprecedented way, a connection with the collective conscience (Varier, 2021).

In the face of this defenselessness, another critical factor of this movement and the disclosure of so many victims could be the advocacy of victims, that is, the belief that this disclosure may stop abuse or other instances of violence (Petronio & Kovach, 1997). As shown in the fourth class, this campaign also prompted calls for action, especially for a revision and restructuring of the French penal code. In response to this debate, in January 2021 the French senate unanimously approved a bill to protect minors under 13 years of age from sexual abuse, which establishes the notion of consent for those over that age. This bill aims to create a new sex crime for minors under thirteen years of age so that an explicit social prohibition is included in the penal code to protect children and adolescents from any sexual violence committed by adults (Coffey, 2021). However, our results show that many Twitter users find this measure insufficient and demand that any incestuous sexual act committed on a minor should be qualified as an incestuous crime and punishable by law, demanding an increase in that minimum age. Consequently, even French President Emmanuel Macron guaranteed that he would change the law to protect child victims of incest and sexual violence but acknowledged that it is "a complex issue" (The Local France, 2021).

Moreover, just as at a clinical level it is necessary to talk about traumatic events such as incest in order to recover from them, at a social level, it is also necessary to establish communication networks to construct the meaning and dimension of events that have been taboos or have been silenced in society (Pennebaker & Harber, 1993). Social networks, particularly Twitter, are instruments created for debate, and therefore the discourse that emerged can help understand critical aspects of the incest abuse problem (Westerman et al., 2014). The results of this research have found that this movement shares key objectives with successful campaigns denouncing violence, such as supporting and giving voice to the victims, driving action for change, reflecting on the events that prompted the movement, or chronicling the scope of the movement itself, as seen in the fourth class (Xiong et al., 2019).

In this particular case, it is worth noting that unlike similar #metoo or other phenomena where victims of abuse were criticized, no counter movement has been found defending the aggressors, not even the most famous aggressors mentioned in the first class (Arriaza & Berumen, 2019). That is, the public treatment of the Duhamel case stands in stark contrast to the way the French press in 2011 dealt with the case of Dominique Strauss-Khan, then president of the IMF, whom many commentators defended after he was accused of rape in New York (Xifra, 2012). It, therefore, seems that this wave of testimonies represents a turning point as it has broken the law of silence and allowed the victims to exist in the media space without being questioned or falling prey to the prejudices of rape culture that question the victims and look for excuses for the rapists (Gunnarsson, 2018).

Concerning the similarity analysis, aside from the issues already mentioned, such as the importance of giving a voice to victims, demands for justice and rights, or professionals caring for abused children, intra-familial relationships within incest are also echoed. This analysis emphasizes how the Twitter discourse points out that sexual offenders against children are rarely unknown. Also, while the father figure is strongly linked to the word rape, the mother is situated between father and protection. This would represent the importance of the protective figure (or lack thereof) in incest (Kreklewetz & Piotrowski, 1998; Stroebel et al., 2013). Sexual abuse against children is an abuse of power, which is why it is difficult for the victim to cope with the abusive situation or to avoid the aggression without the help of a protective figure, particularly in the case of those who have not yet reached adolescence (López, 2014).

5.2. Implications for future research and practice

On a theoretical level, this research should reflect on the cultural understanding of sexual violence against children. In this comprehension, the #MeTooIncest movement not only has an impact on breaking the taboo of talking about this issue, but would also incorporate as a novelty how people talk about it. "Breaking the silence" is certainly difficult, but the most important and novel factor of this movement is for people to talk about the victims, the impact on their lives as opposed to public morality and/or the prevalence of violence, which were the recurring themes in dealing with incest until now (Ambroise-Rendu, 2014; Dussy, 2013).

On a practical level, this research forces us to reflect on the importance of creating safe spaces to visualize the scourge of incest. Strategies should be sought to break the silence or secrecy on both a personal and societal level. This campaign can be the first step, but if the suffering of the victims who have disclosed their abuse is not channeled, there is a risk of re-victimizing them. For this purpose, in addition to professional therapy, support groups could also be created through social networks (Herring et al., 2002). It should therefore be kept in mind that no digital space can be truly safe for all participants at all times, therefore, based on previous feminist experiences, one should choose to work on "safer spaces" between the activist community in question and the public sphere, always keeping in mind that safe spaces are living concepts that require constant maintenance, rather than closed objects with fixed but tacit principles (Clark-Parsons, 2018). It is equally important to always remember that when working with victims the choice to disclose is theirs and therefore these safe spaces should be based on respecting this (Campbell et al., 2004).

As a society, it will also be essential to support legislation that defends children. There are several scientifically contrasted experiences that promote preventive education against sexual abuse of minors (Apaydın Cirik et al., 2020; Deblinger et al., 2010; Manheim et al., 2019) although as far as we know, there is no systematized public education in this regard. Moreover, we would like to go further by pointing out that we need a society that provides professional protective figures (e.g., teachers, pediatricians) capable of

detecting incest or creating safe spaces to promote disclosure and know how to act in the face of such a problem, something that, as the testimonies tell us, has not been done for decades. But this requires a change in organizational structure and culture, as well as systematic training both in the problem itself and in the management of its complexity and in the efficient regulation of emotions (Albaek et al., 2020).

5.3. Strengths and limitations

This research is, as far as we know, the first done on the #MeTooInceste movement, a movement that has marked the way of understanding and talking about incest in French society. However, it also has several limitations that must be appreciated.

First of all, the results of this research do not reflect the whole society, but only the Twitter users. An even the academic community has proved that the #metoo movements of this platform are a good reflection of the political and social discourse, Twitter also has certain drawbacks from the perspective of diversity. For example, people of colour, queer, transgender, poor or disabled people continue to be invisibilised within a system that requires survivors to narrate themselves as "perfect victims" (Hsu, 2019).

At the methodological level, the use of the Reinert method to analyze the impact of a specific hashtag is new, although it has been used previously to analyze different social movements or cases of abuse (Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2021). In this regard we believe that it is an interesting tool as it allows analyzing a large amount of data automatically, but at the same time it makes it possible to give space to the narrative of the Tweets. However, should also be noted as a limitation that when collecting the database, neither the location of the tweets nor the interactions between different users were analyzed, and this could provide valuable information about the dynamics produced on this debate. Likewise, the Iramuteq software and the Reinert method are highly recommended for working with large databases such as these, but it also has several limits (De Alba, 2004). In fact, the Reinert method does not take the syntactical construction of sentences into account, only the roots of words most frequently used and, consequently, the original meaning of texts may be lost, which means there is a risk of misinterpreting them.

6. Conclusions

France is not the only country with cases of incest. This is a problem affecting all countries almost equally. The #MeTooInceste will now serve, at least, to allow many victims to let out the pain that has been torturing them for decades and to enable society to create a space of recognition for this invisible problem. In fact, from this research, it is concluded that this movement created on social networks has already had a direct impact on French politics (with the creation of specific commissions and changes in laws) and that in addition to breaking the taboo on incest it has also changed the way it is talked about, giving visibility and empowering the victims. In essence, the success of the #MeTooIncest campaign is indisputable, and it is a clear example of the impact of digital technologies on transforming collective action and social mobilization with an open-source discourse spread by the social networks. The challenge now is to manage success jointly, incorporate demands into a shared agenda, and internationalize the anti-incest abuse claim.

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