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Understanding Revenge Pornography: Public Perceptions of Revenge Pornography and

Victim Blaming

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Abstract

Purpose: The disclosure of private images with the intent of causing distress is often described as 'revenge pornography'. In the UK, this newly legislated crime has received a high level of media attention following several high profile cases, however there is a paucity of research in this area.

Methods: 168 adults (UK general public) completed an online survey using a vignette approach. Views of the influence of perpetrator-victim relationship length and reason for termination were considered alongside perception of an offence, the necessity of police intervention, what extent revenge pornography creates psychological harm in victims, and victim blaming.

Findings: Perpetrator-victim relationship length and reason for relationship breakdown did not influence perceptions of victim blame. Participants believed that the situation described in the vignettes was likely to be an offence, and that police intervention is somewhat necessary. Participants believed that the scenario was 'very likely' to create fear, and 'moderately likely' to create psychological/mental harm in victims. In line with the literature relating to stalking and sexual assault, men blamed the victim significantly more than women. Furthermore, women rated police intervention significantly more necessary than men.

Implications: The public are recognising that revenge pornography is an offence, with consequences being fear and psychological harm, showing an awareness of the impact on victims. However, there are sex differences in the perceptions of revenge pornography and victim blame and this could be addressed by raising awareness of this crime. This research, which highlights that the public are aware of some of the harm caused, may encourage victims in coming forward to report such a crime.

Originality: There is a paucity of research into revenge pornography, and this study is one of the first in this area.

Key Words: Revenge Pornography, Victim Blame, Victimisation, Sexual Violence, Partner Violence, Domestic Abuse

Introduction

The disclosure of a "*private sexual photograph or film...without the consent of an individual who appears in the photograph or film, and with the intention of causing that individual distress*" (UK Parliament, 2015, p. 34-35) is the definition of what many have come to know as 'revenge pornography' or 'revenge porn'. Revenge pornography has been catapulted into the public arena via the media after several high profile cases in the UK, within which justice was difficult to achieve due to lack of legislation deeming the distribution of private sexual images an offence (Mullen, Pathé & Purcell, 2000). Before 2015, victims of revenge pornography in the UK relied upon the criminal justice system applying alternative laws such as the Harassment Act 1997, Communication Act 2003, and Malicious Communications Act 1988 to be able to prosecute perpetrators of revenge pornography with any offence at all. This reliance on other laws was problematic, because they were not reflective of modern harassment methods and the psychological impact of such methods. Often, perpetrators escaped justice and Courts were unable to impose appropriate sanctions. It was clear that specific legislation was needed to fill this justice gap. To account for this, the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill 2015 has now deemed this behavior an offence, which is punishable by up to two years' imprisonment. In light of the high profile that revenge pornography has gained in other countries, there are now 26 states in the USA with relevant laws, for example the 'Non-consensual Dissemination of Private Sexual Images' in Illinois. Other states are considering or developing such laws (Endrevengeporn.org). Similarly, some states in Australia, for example Victoria, have developed a relevant law. Other states have argued that existing laws such as the Summary Offences Act 1953 are sufficient to cover this act (Henry, 2015).

Revenge pornography relies on the perpetrator coming into possession of the images in the first place. Photographs or film clips may initially be consensually shared between sexual partners, with the understanding of confidentiality. This posits that the sharing of intimate photographs is by virtue of trust, later breached by the perpetrator. Although there is little research in this area, Daswani and Pearson (2014) have indicated that revenge pornography often occurs in the context of relationship breakdowns, where one individual may share private images online with others, causing the victim great distress. The law surrounding revenge pornography accounts for images shared both electronically and physically, and includes both online and offline images, text messages, and email. There are websites dedicated to revenge pornography, in which intimate photographs are posted alongside details of the person in the image, and links to their social media (UK Government, 2015). Breach of this type of trust has been cited as being not only to achieve humiliation and revenge; the threat of distribution of sexual imagery is being used as an instrument to harass, control, and threaten current (and former) intimate partners (Henry & Powell, 2015).

Prevalence

As well as there being a paucity of research into the factors motivating revenge pornography, there is little research into its prevalence. Prevalence would be extremely difficult to accurately assess, because detection of the associated behavior depends on a person reporting this to authorities, and many factors may influence a victim in not reporting this type of crime. In an attempt to highlight the extent of the problem, the Internet security software company McAfee (2013) conducted an online survey of customers and found that one in ten adults had been threatened by an ex-partner to release intimate photos. Of those, almost sixty percent of the threats to release images had been carried out, indicating that a significant proportion of those threats are acted upon, inevitably causing a degree of distress

and harm in the victim. It is not known how many of these occurrences were reported. However, it is clear that in the UK relatively few individuals have been prosecuted for these offences, in part due to legislation only recently coming into place and due to issues such as low frequency of reporting. A freedom of information request in 2015 showed that in the six months to April 2015, there were 139 allegations of revenge porn made to the police (Guardian, 2015). Two thirds of victims were women under the age of thirty, with the suspects mainly being former partners (Guardian, 2015). Given that victims have suffered humiliation, and have been subjected to a defamation of character, it is understandable that they may not wish to report their experiences, fearing further embarrassment through the criminal justice system being required to further analyse and view the images. Victims are also left vulnerable to harassment and they are at increased risk of stalking (Franks, 2015). Fear of further victimisation and embarrassment due to the private nature of the images may influence victims in not reporting these crimes, despite the harm suffered.

Links to other areas within the literature

Motivations for revenge pornography, consequences, and public understanding have not been explored in any great depth to date. Henry and Powell (2014) emphasise the damaging impact that having private images on a digital platform can have on an individual's social reputation. This "*gross violation of sexual autonomy, consent norms and personal integrity*" (Mathen, 2014:542) has been likened to 'cyber rape', and has been accused of facilitating stalking (Phillips, 2013), although this is not well established in the literature. Whilst perpetrators are able to hide behind the comfort of some anonymity, websites intended to help victims of revenge pornography indicate that victims are left mentally harmed including feeling scared and fearful.

As this is a developing area of crime and law, it is important to grasp a basic knowledge of public understanding of revenge pornography. Lay responses about a variety of criminal issues have in the past been cited as being influential in suggesting ways in which the substantive criminal laws can be changed (e.g. Robinson & Darley, 1995). Although revenge pornography is increasingly brought to the public's attention via the media, it still stands that there may be many members of the public who are unaware that it is a crime. Consequently, they will be unaware of the procedures that are in place to protect them if they became a victim and importantly, if they are not prosecuted, perpetrators are free to repeatedly commit such crimes, creating more harm. As it stands currently, in the UK revenge pornography is a criminal offence, but the reporting rates may increase if the public have greater knowledge of the legislation.

Offences such as revenge pornography have been likened to technology facilitated sexual violence. It has been argued that they are often framed as a problem of "*naiveté rather than gender based violence*" (Henry & Powell, 2015: 104). Similar to cases of sexual assault there is a tendency "*to blame the victims of misfortunes for their own fates*" Lerner & Miller, 1978, p.1030). This fundamental attribution error highlights an individual's "*bias in attributing another's behavior more to internal than to situational causes*" (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005, p.650). The notion of victim blaming in sexual assault and stalking cases is well accounted for within the literature, and contextual/situational variables that have been found to influence victim blaming include the nature of the prior relationship between victim and perpetrator. For instance, Krahé, Temkin and Bieneck (2007) found that university students assign most victim blame when a rape perpetrator was an ex-partner, and least victim blame when the rapist was a stranger. This could contribute to victims of other crimes, such as revenge pornography, fearing coming forward where the perpetrator is an ex-partner. They may fear being blamed by their peers and also those in the criminal justice system such

as police Officers. Similar to sex crimes, the relationship of stalkers to their victims has played a role in attributions of victim blame. Being stalked by an ex-partner is viewed as 'reasonable' and the victim is viewed as somewhat accountable (Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw & Patel, 2003). The belief that stalking can be a consequence of poor relationship choices has also been found by Pathé, MacKenzie and Mullen (2004). This study is even more relevant, because this was conducted with police Officers, suggesting that victim blaming and a belief in a 'just world' is evident across law enforcement. Given that police Officers are those to whom a victim would need to report crimes such as rape, victim blaming may result in biased investigation and poor treatment of victims. It may also be the case that this type of victim blame crosses over to offences such as revenge pornography, where prior relationships between victim and perpetrator are often involved. Not only can victims be blamed for their experience, Patterson (2011) indicates there is a risk that victims will be disbelieved when they report crimes. This could have a harmful impact on the judicial process, beginning at initial detective questioning which may or may not end in prosecution of a perpetrator. In support of this concern, it has been found that in stalking cases where the perpetrator is an ex-partner, in comparison to a stranger, people perceive that police intervention is less necessary, the offence is likely to invoke less fear, and the victim is likely to be less psychologically harmed (Scott et al., 2010). Where gender is concerned, females tend to attribute more harm and less blame and towards victims than males in sexual assault cases (i.e. Temkin & Krahé, 2008) and stalking cases (i.e. Lambert, Smith, Geistman, Cluse-Tolar, & Jiang, 2013), indicating that gender may play a part in victim blame. With regards to victim believability, revenge pornography may differ in relation to this because there is a much clearer evidentiary basis. The image/video has been shared publicly, and therefore the act of this crime is not hidden.

Aims and Rationale

The purpose of the current research is to examine variables that may influence the public perception of revenge pornography. The findings of this study may influence public policy, whereby attempts can be made to prevent perceptions of revenge pornography taking a similar route as stalking and sexual assault cases, with victims being blamed depending on the circumstances of their victimisation. Increased knowledge of the public's view of revenge pornography can help inform the manner in which public policies aim to increase awareness of this crime in order to help victims feel more comfortable in coming forward. It is inevitable that men such as male police Officers will be the recipients of disclosures of such victimisation. Therefore, it is vital that perception of revenge pornography crimes is explored to increase our knowledge of issues such as gender differences in victim blaming, so that measures can be put in place to ensure that victims are offered a non-judgemental, empathic response to the reporting of this crime.

Although from 2015, revenge pornography is formally an offence in England and Wales, little is known as to whether the public are actually aware that it is an offence. Furthermore, little is known about public perception of the fear and mental harm that it creates in victims. Research findings in stalking literature suggest that less blame is attributed towards victims of stranger stalking, than ex-partner stalking (Scott et al., 2010). Moreover, as the relationship between the victim and perpetrator becomes more familiar the perceptions of danger, mental harm/fear and need for police involvement decrease (Scott et al., 2010). In light of the research into stalking and sexual assault discussed above it is reasonable to acknowledge that there are likely to be a range of contextual factors influence the public perception of revenge pornography. Consequently, this current study will examine issues such as the nature of the victim perpetrator relationship, and public views according to gender.

This research aims to explore how the length of the relationship and the cause of it ending influences victim blaming and public judgement as to whether a revenge pornography offence has taken place. These contextual variables will be explored in relation to whether the public feel that police intervention is necessary. Finally, the research will attempt to establish what the public thinks about the extent of the distress experienced by the victims, including the fear and mental harm suffered, with the aim that these findings may give a greater understanding of public perception, and then may be able to inform the interventions and support offered to victims of revenge pornography.

Method

Study design

The study was quantitative quasi-experimental 2 x 2 between subjects design using questionnaires containing vignettes and related questions. Opportunistic and snowball sampling, using online social media platforms Facebook and Twitter, was applied in order to try to gain a range of participants from differing backgrounds, but who were from the United Kingdom. Independent group design was adopted, with the aim of interpreting participant attitudes according to test condition. A repeated measures design was avoided because it may increase the likelihood of participants becoming attuned to the variables being manipulated, and thus they may adjust their answers.

Two independent variables were manipulated on the basis of the review above, and work examining infidelity and forgiveness in relationships and resulting anger and disappointment of infidelity (Hall & Fincham, 2006). This leads to the variables being designed to examine blame and 'deserving' victimisation my means of revenge pornography because of infidelity and because trust had not been built.

➢   Method of relationship ending (amicable, couple growing apart/victim unfaithful).

➢   Length of perpetrator/victim intimate relationship (short/long).

Due to employing an independent groups design, participants were presented with one of the following conditions:

➢   Condition 1: Couple broke up amicably after growing apart, and the prior intimate relationship with perpetrator had been short term.

➢   Condition 2: Couple broke up amicably after growing apart, and the prior intimate relationship with perpetrator had been long term.

➢   Condition 3: Victim was unfaithful to partner and the prior intimate relationship with perpetrator had been short term.

➢   Condition 4 Victim was unfaithful to partner and the prior intimate relationship had been long term.

Bristol Online Survey was the platform used to compose and disseminate the questionnaire. Participants were presented with a link that took them to the survey, with the vignette order being periodically changed to avoid order effects.

Participants

168 members of the British public over the age of 18 years were recruited using opportunistic sampling via social media including Facebook and word of mouth (31% males, n=52; 69% females, n=116). Mean age was 32.9 years (SD=10.96, range=19-71). Despite opportunistic sampling, it was noted that participant profession was skewed towards a

psychologically informed background (e.g. mental health practitioner, clinical psychology) (13.7%, n=23) and students accounted for 17.9% (n=30) of the sample.

Materials

The study employed an online questionnaire comprising of a vignette and eight questions relating to the behavior described in the vignette. Due to limited existing research on revenge pornography, the questionnaires were adapted from rape and stalking literature. The questionnaire was adapted from Krahé et al.'s (2007) study on victim blame in rape cases and Scott et al.'s (2010) study on perceptions of stalking.

There were eight scale items in total; the first four measuring the extent to which participants blamed the victim for the events, and the remaining four considering criminality and impact of revenge pornography. Responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1=not at all/very unlikely, 7=definitely/very likely), as detailed below:

1. How much do you think XX (Victim's name) is to blame for the incident?
2. How likely do you think it is that XX could have avoided the incident?
3. How much do you think XX had control over the situation?
4. How sorry do you feel for XX? (Reverse coding for this item).
5. To what extent do you consider XY (Perpetrator's name) behavior to be an offence?
6. Do you think police intervention is necessary for the resolution of this situation?
7. Do you think XY's behavior will create fear or apprehension in XX?
8. Do you think XY's behavior will cause mental harm to XX?

Vignette Considerations

Vignettes were as consistent as possible, with the manipulation of only the above independent variables so that participants were not able to infer different information from

the four conditions which may or may not influence attributions (i.e. to avoid confounding variables as much as possible, whilst still providing sufficient detail for a meaningful vignette). The vignettes did not explicitly state the length of time the male and female had previously been in an intimate relationship with each other, rather it stated that the relationship was either "short" or "long term". This is because participants may have different views on what constitutes a short/long term relationship, and so by using general terms participants will be able to answer the questions as to their own perception.

An example of the vignette used is shown below:

"Heidi and Jason had been dating for a short while. Throughout the brief relationship Jason and Heidi agreed that it would be fine for Jason to have some private naked images of Heidi on his mobile phone for him to view personally. After dating for a while the relationship came to an ended due to Heidi being unfaithful to Jason. Following this Heidi discovered that Jason had been posting the intimate photos of her online, with details such as her name and email address. Jason had posted the photos after his and Heidi's relationship had finished."

Pilot Study

The questionnaires were piloted to ensure that the vignettes were suitable. An opportunistic sample of participants (n=5) was questioned as to the clarity of the scenarios and corresponding questions. Feedback was obtained and minor adjustments were made to areas such as font size. The same vignette was used in the main study after feedback found that it was comprehendible and accessible.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant Ethics Committee (The University of Nottingham School of Medicine).

Participants were invited to take part in the study by following a link placed on social media. They were presented with an information sheet webpage, where the study was outlined. Participants were then presented with a consent form webpage, where informed consent was gained, and they answered some demographic questions (age, gender, and occupational status). They were subsequently asked to read a short paragraph, constituting a vignette. Participants were then asked to answer eight questions using a 7-point Likert scale (1=not at all/very unlikely, 7=definitely/very likely). A debrief page was presented.

Results

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS version 22.

Reliability analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted for the victim blame subscale, made up of 4 items. Cronbach's alpha indicated that he scale had an acceptable level of internal consistency (a= .72).

Results

Due to 2 or more outcome variables a 2x2 multi-variate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to identify initial group differences between the 4 vignette groups on all dependent variables. Participants believed that the situation in the vignettes was likely to be an offence (M=6.38, SD= 1.21) and it would be 'somewhat' necessary for police intervention (M=5.46, SD=1.72). Participants believed that the scenario was 'very likely' to

create fear (M=6.25, SD=1.15), and moderately likely to create mental harm in victims (5.67, SD=1.45).

Participants' perceptions of whether the perpetrators behavior constituted an offence F(3, 164)=.19, *p*=.90, η2 = .003, necessitated police intervention, F(3, 164)=.82, *p*=.48, η2 = .02, created fear or apprehension, F(3, 164)= .24, *p*=.87, η2 = .004, and caused mental harm, F(3, 164)= 1.80, *p*=15, η2 =.032, were all non-significant and not significantly influenced by condition assigned (length of relationship or method of breakup).

The condition assigned to participant did not significantly influence the amount of blame participants attributed to the victim, F(3,164)=.80, *p*=.50, η2 =.014. The means and standard deviations for the scale items are provided in Table 1.

<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Gender Effects

Significant effects were found between male and female participants for victim blame, F(1, 160)=8.65, *p*=0.004, η2 = 0.004. Males attributed significantly more blame to the victim than females across conditions. Females rated police intervention significantly more necessary than their male counterparts F(1, 160)=10.59, *p*=0.001, η2 =0.062. No significant differences were found for gender with regards to what extent the scenario depicted in the vignette was an offence, F(1, 160)=2.42, *p*=0.12, η2 =0.015, the extent to which participants believe the scenario inflicted fear on the victim, F(1, 160)=0.69, *p*=.41, η2 =0.004 or the extent to which they believe the scenario will inflict mental harm on the victim F(1, 160)=3.25, *p*=.07, η2 =0.020. Means and standard deviations for gender are provided in Table 2.

<INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>

Discussion

This study found that the victim-perpetrator relationship length and the reason for relationship breakdown did not influence public perceptions of victim blame. The results indicated that in general, the victims in the case vignettes were not blamed for revenge pornography. Further analysis indicated that victims were not perceived to be more or less to blame if the relationship ended amicably or if the victim was unfaithful causing the relationship to end, nor were they blamed more or less if the relationship was short-term compared to long-term. When gender was taken as an independent variable, males significantly blamed victims more than females, consistent with previous research findings such as Temkin et al. (2008) and Lambert et al. (2013) in sexual assault and stalking cases. Moreover, for resolution of the case, males rated that police intervention was significantly less necessary than females across conditions. This finding is understandable when considered alongside the finding that males also perceived the victim as less likely to suffer mental harm than women. With regards to the gender differences in victim blaming, it remains important to continue to challenge these differences because it is reasonable to assume that males will often be the recipients of such disclosures by victims given that police Officer type professions tend to be male dominated, and it is vital that victims do not feel further victimised owing to societal attitudes and victim blaming. Indeed, there has been found to be a gender difference in rape myth acceptance by police Officers (e.g. Page, 2008) and it is reasonable to hypothesise that a victim may fear this type of treatment by authorities when reporting offences. Even specialist training on the issue has not been found to impact on police Officers' rape victim blaming (Sleath & Bull, 2012). Positive or negative experiences at disclosure can impact on the judicial process, and is important in relation to victim blaming and victim believability (Patterson, 2011). If an already vulnerable victim discloses and is not believed, and blamed for her/his own victimisation then this has an

adverse impact on that individual (Patterson, 2011). Given the present findings, combined with literature indicating that victim blaming occurs within the police, further research into whether the fact that many staff involved in receiving rape/revenge pornography victim reports are male deters victims from reporting an offence, or re-traumatises the victim, is an area that would benefit from further research.

It is possible that the gender differences found in this study could have been influenced by female participants identifying with the female described in the vignette. Furthermore, it is possible that some of the participants were themselves victim of this type of offence, which could have impacted on their perceptions, and this data was not collected as it was not within the breadth of the study to do so. Future research could examine such issues by considering gender differences in victim blaming where the vignette describes a male victim. An extension of this would also be to consider gender blaming differences where the relationship described is a same-sex relationship.

Participants believed that the situation in the vignettes was likely to be an offence and that police intervention is 'somewhat' necessary. The public believing that the victim would need police support highlights the importance of the recent changes in UK law. It is encouraging that the public are aware that this type of behavior constitutes an offence because this indicates that the promotion of the creation of relevant UK law has been effective, and this may act as a deterrent to potential perpetrators. This type of approach could also be adopted in other countries. Media impact on public perception of revenge pornography was not assessed in this study and it may be that public knowledge of this crime has increased because of high-profile media revenge pornography cases.

Participants believed that the scenarios depicted were 'very likely' to create fear, and 'moderately likely' to create mental harm in victims, indicating that the public understand

some of the impact of such crimes on victims. Victim-perpetrator relationship length, and reason for relationship breakdown did not significantly influence participant perceptions of victim accountability, whether or not the situation depicted an offence, the necessity of police intervention, or the extent to which it caused the victim fear and mental harm. This is in contrast to the findings of Scott et al. (2010) who found that as the relationship between the stalking victim and perpetrator becomes more familiar (as indicated in the current study via relationship length), then the perceptions of danger, mental harm, fear, and need for police involvement decrease. As Scott et al. (2010) point out, the reason might be a characteristic of the difficulty the public face in attributing causal factors to the victim or perpetrator in situations where they are already known to each other. The results of the present study indicate that further examination of the familiarity/relationship length is required so that the impact can be accounted for when supporting victims, or encouraging them to come forward. It may be the case that the findings of this study indicate that the phenomenon of victim blaming differs between crimes of revenge pornography and stalking crimes.

It is important to note that the related legislation has only recently been passed in the UK. This received some acknowledgement in the media, but a there is a lack of peer reviewed research to compare the present study to, and this makes generalisation of the results and comparison to existing knowledge difficult.

A strength of the opportunistic and snowballing sampling method applied in the present study, is that the ability to generalise these findings to is not limited by the use of a student only sample. However, it is important to note that it was noted the sample was skewed towards psychologically informed participants (including psychologists, mental health practitioners, psychiatrists), and this may have influenced the findings because these types of professionals may deal with victims and perpetrators, or be specially trained, possibly influencing their attribution of blame. It may be that the results of opportunistic

sampling are skewed by the existing nature of those who agree to take part in voluntary research studies, as in this study 69% of the sample were females, and only 52 males took part which is not a representative sample. Although this gender imbalance is a weakness in design, the study is the first of its kind to examine public perceptions of revenge pornography in the UK and could be expanded upon by sampling different groups e.g. adults versus teenagers. As Henry (2015) has indicated, those most at risk of online sexual harassment are those in their late teens and early twenties, and encapsulating the most vulnerable into this study to gain their perceptions and understanding of revenge pornography was beneficial. However, there are issues involving even younger teenagers to consider. Legal issues in relation to teenagers committing such crimes is that if the victim is under the legal age of consent for sexual relations (16 in the UK), the perpetrator can also be prosecuted for the sexual offence of making or distributing indecent images of children, even if the perpetrator themselves is also under the legal age of consent. This highlights that the issue of revenge pornography being a crime and being harmful to victims needs promotion by state organizations to help to deter offenders and to highlight to victims that their distress is recognised, so that they do go on to seek support.

A limitation of the present study fell within the definition of a long or short relationship when measuring perception of revenge pornography. No specific length of relationship was given in the vignettes, with the rationale being that if the length of relationship was specified, such as two years, one participant may view this as a 'short while' or a 'long time'. Therefore, it was viewed as more important to consider whether perception of the length of relationship, as imposed in the vignettes, was a factor influencing perceptions of the act of revenge pornography. However, this lack of specificity could limit generalisability of the results of this study, and future research could consider defining the length of relationship more specifically to examine the difference this makes to outcomes.

Indeed, a distinction needs to be made as to whether 'meaningfulness' of the relationship is the variable that needs consideration, or length of the relationship.

This research has examined a relatively new area of criminal legislation. In comparison to more established crimes such as rape and stalking, there is a paucity of research on revenge pornography. Establishing the prevalence of revenge pornography is critical to progressing research, however this is marred by difficulties caused by lack of awareness of the relevant legislation. This means that victims may be harmed, but may not recognise that this is an offence. Furthermore, the victim may be unaware that an intimate photo of them has been posted online resulting in lack of reporting. Finally, if the victim is aware, reporting it may be problematic for some victims because of embarrassment and fear of judgement by others, and the fear that victim blaming may occur as it can do in sexual assault cases (Temkin et al., 2008). Victims may prioritise the removal of images from the public domain and attempt to prevent their further distribution. This study did find that the public generally did not blame victims in revenge pornography cases. This finding can be used to encourage victims to come forward, as they can feel more reassured that those who they disclose to will not blame them for their victimisation.

Conclusion

U.K. revenge pornography legislation has only very recently come into force. This may be a reason that public perceptions of this *'gross violation of sexual autonomy'*, (Mathen, 2014, p.542) do not appear to have formed along the same lines as other more established crimes, such as rape and stalking. The study demonstrated that victims of revenge pornography are generally not blamed. Furthermore, there is a good understanding of the fear and mental harm experienced by victims. Although this is one of the first studies in this area, and its strengths and weaknesses in scope and design need consideration, it is important to

consider whether this finding represents a general shift in attitudes held by society away from victim blaming, and whether this is in part due to issues such as the media attention that it has given rise to in the UK, and promotion of the fact that this new UK law is in place by government and support organizations. Continued efforts to raise the awareness of revenge pornography should be made by the Government and other bodies in order to foster a growing recognition that technology is an ever increasing tool used to harass, intimidate, and shame others and that this is unacceptable. Only by doing so can victims be fully supported and encouraged to come forward. Alongside policy designed to prevent such offending, further studies could consider the characteristics of victims and perpetrators in order to consider offender and victim needs. This would help relevant agencies provide relevant treatment to reduce offenders' risk of re-offending in this manner, and also to assist in the identification of characteristics that may make a person more vulnerable to victimisation.

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Tables

TABLE 1: Means and Standard Deviations for the Scale Items.

| | | | Scale | Items | | |
Condition	*n*	Victim Blame Mean(SD)	Offence Mean(SD)	Police Intervention Mean(SD)	Fear Mean(SD)	Harm Mean(SD)
Amicable/Short term	60	11.95(5.53)	6.38(0.92)	5.55 (1.56)	6.33(0.97)	5.77(1.38)
Amicable/Long term	34	10.35(4.98)	6.50(1.29)	5.68 (1.59)	6.15(1.21)	5.68(1.51)
Unfaithful/Short term	33	11.72(5.70)	6.30(1.36)	5.06(1.98)	6.18(1.49)	5.18(1.83)
Unfaithful/Long term	41	10.90(4.99)	6.32(1.40)	5.46(1.85)	6.27(1.05)	5.92(1.03)

The five scale items relating to participant perceptions of the behavior described in the vignettes utilized 7-point Likert-type scales.

TABLE 2: Means and standard deviations for Gender across conditions

			Scale	Items		
Gender	*n*	Victim Blame Mean(SD)	Offence Mean(SD)	Police Intervention Mean(SD)	Fear Mean(SD)	Harm Mean(SD)
Male	52	13.25* (4.97)	6.15(1.42)	4.85*(2.03)	6.15(1.35)	5.35(1.74)
Female	116	10.47* (5.27)	6.47(1.09)	5.73*(1.49)	6.29(1.05)	5.82(1.28)

*p=<0.05.