

Normalisation of violence during sex and of image-based sexual abuse in a sextech era

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Concerns about a normalisation of cyber sexual harassment and rough sexual behaviours have been voiced in both popular and academic spheres in recent years, drawing attention to the potential effect on young populations. The exploratory aim of this study was to investigate the prevalence of aggressive sexual repertoires and image-based sexual abuse concurrently and within a wide age range, also considering generational variances, consent to unwanted sex, and sexual satisfaction.

Method: A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was adopted to study a sample of women belonging to five different generational age ranges ($N = 624$). Participants answered a confidential, self-report online survey with 40 items including four different measures: Cyber Sexual Harassment Experiences (CSHE), Experiences during Sexual Encounters (ESE), Reasons for Consenting to Unwanted Sex Scale (RCUSS), and Quality of Sex Inventory (QSI). Statistical processing of data consisted of prevalence rates, descriptive statistics, reliability, and inferential analyses (chi-squares, variance, correlation, regression).

Results: Significant mean differences were found between the age groups. The youngest generations reported higher frequency and prevalence of image-based sexual abuse and aggressive sexual practices and showed the most favourable attitude towards sexual repertoires. Consent to unwanted sex was reported equivalently across age groups.

Conclusions: Results indicated that belonging to a 'born digital' generation led to a greater exposure to image-based sexual abuse, and a higher prevalence of rough sex experiences. These potential shifts in sexual attitudes and behaviours may result in damaging physical and mental health issues but can also exacerbate gender inequity and gender-based violence. Their normalisation is not insignificant, and implications should be discussed systematically in both sexuality education and the public sphere.