

THE MOTIVES, REACTIONS AND EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL VICTIMISATION

VIRAL JUSTICE AND E-SHAMING

Chantal van den Berg, PhD
c.j.w.vanden.berg@vu.nl



CYBER SECURITY
RESEARCH CENTER
Cyber Law Program



Faculty of Law



OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. Offline disclosure of sexual victimisation
3. Online disclosure of sexual victimisation
4. Viral Justice and E-shaming
5. Pilot study

INTRODUCTION

Definition of sexual victimisation

- Sexual violence
- Sexual harassment

Dark number

- 50-96% underreporting in police registrations (Gise & Paddison, 1988; Lisak & Miller, 2002)
- On average 16% of all sexually victimized individuals report the offence in the Netherlands.

OFFLINE DISCLOSURE

Formal disclosure

- Police, victim-aid, health professionals, leaders of the church, sportsclub or school etc.

Informal disclosure

- Friends and family

OFFLINE DISCLOSURE

Three important decision stages in offline disclosure

1. Is there a problem? Do I need help?
 - Labelling the event
 - Attribution of blame
2. What are my options?
3. What consequences are related to my options?
 - Barriers

OFFLINE DISCLOSURE

Motivations (Demers, Roberts, Bennett and Banyard, 2017)

1. Improve emotional and psychological welfare
2. Fulfill social responsibility
3. Seeking information
4. Seeking justice

To have a voice
(be heard)

Validation

Gain insight

Help seeking

OFFLINE DISCLOSURE

Motivations (Demers, Roberts, Bennett and Banyard, 2017)

1. Improve emotional and psychological welfare
2. Fulfill social responsibility
3. Seeking information
4. Seeking justice

Gain psychological
(strong) bond (I)

Feel pressured

Moral and ethical
obligation (F)

OFFLINE DISCLOSURE

Motivations (Demers, Roberts, Bennett and Banyard, 2017)

1. Improve emotional and psychological welfare
 2. Fulfill social responsibility
 3. Seeking information
 4. Seeking justice
-
- ```
graph LR; A[3. Seeking information] --> B[To label the event]; A --> C[Minimalise the event];
```
- The diagram shows a horizontal blue line extending from the text '3. Seeking information'. From the right end of this line, two blue arrows branch out to the right. The upper arrow points to the text 'To label the event', and the lower arrow points to the text 'Minimalise the event'.



# OFFLINE DISCLOSURE

Motivations (Demers, Roberts, Bennett and Banyard, 2017)

1. Improve emotional and psychological welfare
2. Fulfill social responsibility
3. Seeking information
4. Seeking justice

**BUT... How do these motivations correlate?**

**AND... Are the motivations similar for online disclosure?**

# OFFLINE DISCLOSURE

## Reactions:

- Secondary victimisation (F)
- Supportive

## Effects:

- Writing works therapeutically – serves as a mirror
- Prevents depression, social isolation and loneliness

# ONLINE DISCLOSURE

Higher percentage of online disclosure compared to offline disclosure (Riva, 2002)

Role of the internet (Suler, 2004):

- Dissociative anonymity
- Invisibility
- Asynchronicity
- Personal feelings

Barriers fade because of the anonymity

# ONLINE DISCLOSURE

Dance of Disclosure (Moors & Webber, 2012)

- Naming
- Emoting
- Unburdening
- Helpseeking

Important concept: The Trustee

# VIRAL JUSTICE

Overlap, yet most studies point towards a more overlapping motivation:

Viral Justice / Innovative Justice / Digital vigilantism / Weaponized Visibility

Based on Trial by Media



# VIRAL JUSTICE

Different forms:

- Revenge, openly shaming the offender
- Ask the public to collect evidence against the offender
- Seeking support
- Activism (Thompson et al., 2016)

Interaction between the needs of the victim and the public. The public can help fulfill the needs of the victim, while the victim helps strengthen and redefine social norms.

# EFFECTS

Limited – few case studies

Rape myths are reaffirmed

- ‘the man in the bushes’
- Many false allegations
- Victim blaming

Direct effect on law enforcement

→ Difficult to convict the offender if he is implicated by almost all individuals in society without a trial.

No control over you own story

Aim ‘activisme’ is not achieved: the hashtag can never take the place of real life action to achieve political and social change.

# PILOT STUDY

265 online conversations(149 reactions)

Anonymously shared: 39,6%

Social media platform

- Mostly YouTube
- Different platforms for different aims

Limited offender information

- 10,9% specific details
- 2,6% naming offender

Previous disclosure: 10,6% did not previously disclose the victimisation

Emotions

- blame, sadness, determination, anger, crestfallen, dissapointment, fear and relief



# MOTIVATIONS

| Motivation                             | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Broken moral                           | 98        | 21,7%      |
| Consequences                           | 87        | 19,2       |
| Solidarity                             | 83        | 18,4%      |
| Disclosure as a response to disclosure | 11        | 2,4%       |
| Breaking the silence                   | 81        | 17,9%      |
| Unburdening                            | 26        | 8,0%       |
| Validation                             | 35        | 7,7%       |
| Other                                  | 32        | 7,1%       |

# BROKEN MORAL

“We've had enough of this abuse, we've had enough of this culture, we've had enough of this patriarchal oppression, we've had enough of Harvey Weinstein's, we've had enough of you, we've had enough of you and you how you think that you are able in some **fucking** reason to treat women this way, and you're not.”

# CONSEQUENCES

“Every day im scared he'll try to come find me and hurt me again and everyone thinks im so crazy for thinking that but i can't stop. he ruined my life and he's facing zero repercussions while i live every day with a laundry list of mental illnesses that all stem from my abuse (depression, anxiety, PTSD, binge eating disorder, suicidal thoughts, self harm, etc).”

# SOLIDARITY

“Haaai honey, just wanted you to know you are not alone <3 [..] everyday is a fight, **but if I can do** this so can you <3 For all of you who have been through this you are not to blame! You are amazing! **We will** get through this <3 xxx”

# BREAKING THE SILENCE

“Let us talk about it. Find someone who you trust, talk about it with a relative, a friend, doctor, victim aid. Do it anonymously if you want to. Share your secret. I know now: talking helps. Find someone you can trust.  
Sharing=healing”

# UNBURDENING

“So, this is me taking another step, moving towards another direction of reclaiming my life and empowering myself to say that it's going to be okay. . . . I still had so much anger and shame that I was holding on to. I'm not going to do it anymore. I'm over this. I'm over letting this control my life.”

# VALIDATION

“I'm 12 ~ once online from a pedophile and only 2 weeks ago a boy in a different school groped me. does the first one count? I don't know.”

# OTHER

“hi my name is [naam respondent] and here is my story, im 15 and i signed up for basketball and I wasn't that good so i asked one of the boys if i can get some help, he said yes i got better and better but i felt weird one day before the game we practice for 2 hours and i fell over the basketball and he helled me down and raped me it hurt so i just close my eyes and layed there Frozen the next day he moved away, i hope u liked my story.”



# INTERVIEW

Interview with six women

Activism

Giving information

Negative experiences with offline disclosure – but not main reason for online disclosure

**No** negative experiences with online disclosure

# INFORMING

“I wanted to share my experience, because there are a lot of people involved. They often ask how are you? How are you coping? And this became a way to write about it and inform those interested and involved.”

# CONCLUSION

Many similar motivations for online and offline disclosure

NO indication of Viral Justice or E-shaming

Reactions seem harsh online, yet the women interviewed did not report negative reactions

Benefits of the internet

# BENEFITS OF ONLINE DISCLOSURE

- Distance
- Trial run for offline disclosure
- Control and asynchronicity
- Writing helps the healing process
- Anonymity
- Contact with other victims (support groups)
- No boundaries
  - Can also be negative

# HOW CAN WE EXPLAIN THESE DIFFERENCES

- Sample differences
- Cultural differences
- Small sample sizes, not comparable
- Differences in studied platforms

# WHAT IS NEXT?

What do you think.....