



Research article

Multiple online victimization of Spanish adolescents: Results from a community sample[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about online victimization of Spanish adolescents. The present study aims to determine the past-year prevalence of online victimization in a community sample of Spanish adolescents. The final sample consisted of 3,897 adolescents between 12 and 17 years old ($M=14.45$, $SD=1.59$), 1,836 males and 2,049 females, recruited from 39 secondary schools in the east of Spain. The *Cuestionario de victimización juvenil mediante internet y/o teléfono móvil* (hereinafter, Juvenile Online Victimization Questionnaire, JOV-Q, Montiel & Carbonell, 2012) was applied for the assessment of eight types of online victimization grouped in two major domains: sexual (sexual coercion, sexual pressure, online grooming by an adult, unwanted exposure to sexual content and violation of privacy); and nonsexual victimization (online harassment, happy slapping, pressure to obtain personal information). Sixty-one percent of adolescents reported online victimization during the last year. Online sexual victimization was reported by 39.5% of adolescents and nonsexual victimization by 53.4% of them, whereas 31% of youth reported having experienced online victimization in both domains. The highest prevalence rates were recorded for online harassment (50%), unwanted exposure to sexual content (24.4%), pressure to obtain personal information (18.4%) and online grooming by an adult (17.2%), and the lowest for sexual coercion (6.7%) and happy slapping (2.2%). Thirty-five percent of the adolescents were considered online polyvictims and most of them experienced victimization in both sexual and nonsexual domains (88%). This study illustrates that Spanish adolescents experience high levels of online victimization and that multiple online victimization appears to be the norm among cybervictims.

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Introduction

Considerable research and clinical attention have been paid in recent years to various forms of child and youth online victimization, especially in the United States (e.g., Mitchell, Jones, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2014) and in northern European countries

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(e.g., [Smith et al., 2008](#); [Wachs, Wolf, & Pan, 2012](#)), but knowledge on this problem in Spain is still not well-founded. A recent systematic review of Spanish publications providing rates of victimization from the adolescents' own self-reports carried out by [Pereda, Guilera, and Abad \(2014a\)](#) showed that, of all the revised studies published between 1994 and 2010, only 10.7% were focused on online victimization. Although some European studies about online risks assert that Spain is in the “low risk and harm” group in comparison with other countries ([Helsper, Kalmus, Hasebrink, Sagvari, & De Haan, 2013](#)), the scarce Spanish studies conducted on this problem have shown data of concern about the prevalence of online damaging situations for young people. For example, a report published by the Ombudsman ([Defensor del Pueblo, 2010](#)), based on the reports of 3,219 adolescents (12–18 years old), noted that a relevant proportion of youth recognized that they had experienced a situation of violation of their rights or had felt threatened or intimidated while surfing the Net. Nearly 23% of the youth had received sexual solicitations and nearly 12% had been insulted, threatened or harassed online. More recently, [Pereda, Guilera, and Abad \(2014b\)](#), administered the Spanish version of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ; [Finkelhor, Hamby, Ormrod, & Turner, 2005](#)) to a community sample of 1,107 youth aged 12–17, and found that electronic victimization (i.e., sexual solicitations and electronic harassment) was reported by 12.6% of adolescents during their lifetime and by 8.9% in the past year.

However, an endemic problem with the literature about online victimization in adolescents is that studies usually focus on only one or a few forms of victimization out of the large spectrum of victimizations that young people experience online, just as it has been observed traditionally in the field of child and youth victimization ([Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007a](#); [Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005a](#); [Saunders, 2003](#)), ignoring that victims of a single form of violence are very rare ([Finkelhor, 2008](#)). In Spain, the majority of studies about online victimization have focused on describe the prevalence rates of particular types of victimization such as cyberbullying ([Buelga, Cava, & Musitu, 2010](#)), online harassment and unwanted sexual solicitations ([Pereda et al., 2014b](#)). This narrow perspective underestimates the burden of victimization that young people experience through information and communication technologies and fails to show the interrelationships among different kinds of online victimization and thus to understand fully the problem of victimization vulnerability or the impact of one kind of victimization alone, as has been concluded in previous studies about polyvictimization ([Cyr, Clément, & Chamberland, 2014](#); [Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007b](#); [Finkelhor et al., 2005a](#); [Mitchell, Ybarra, & Finkelhor, 2007](#)).

Nevertheless, there are a few international studies that provide data about the co-occurrence of different forms of online victimization in adolescents. For example, in the United States, [Ybarra, Espelage, and Mitchell \(2007\)](#) observed a strong association between online harassment and online sexual harassment, along the lines of the recent findings of [Zweig, Dank, Yahner, and Lachman \(2013\)](#) when studied cyber dating sexual and nonsexual abuse among teens. In Canada, [Mishna, McLuckie, and Saini \(2009\)](#), after examining 346 anonymous posts made by children and youth to a free, 24-hour, national, bilingual phone and Web counseling, referral, and information service, concluded that children and youth frequently experienced various forms of cyberabuse, including bullying, stalking, sexual solicitation and pornography. Studies from Europe, such as the work by [Wachs et al. \(2012\)](#) in Germany have found a significant association between being victim of cybergrooming and cyberbullying in a community sample of adolescents between 12 and 16 years old.

From these studies it can be concluded that experiencing one form of online victimization is closely related to the experience of other types of online victimization. But in the absence of a comprehensive online victimization developmental epidemiology, certain forms of victimization may get overemphasized, while other, equally or more damaging problems are being ignored. Besides, the interrelationships between these forms of victimization remain completely unknown, since a true measurement of multiple online victimization has not been conducted.

Aim of the Study

In this context, the present study aims to extend research on online victimization by simultaneously gathering the prevalence of eight different forms of online victimization in a community sample of Spanish adolescents during a one-year period. Following previous studies of polyvictimization (e.g., [Finkelhor et al., 2005a](#); [Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005b](#); [Pereda et al., 2014b](#)), a multiple online victimized group will be detected and analyzed. Furthermore, according to the developmental victimology perspective, gender and age differences will be taken into account to detect high-risk groups of victimized adolescents ([Finkelhor, 2008](#); [Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2009](#)). Whereas it has been amply proved that girls and older adolescents are more at risk of unwanted online sexual solicitations than boys and younger ones ([Mitchell et al., 2014](#); [Pereda et al., 2014b](#)), in the case of online harassment or cyberbullying, although several researchers have addressed on age and gender differences (e.g., [Mesch, 2009](#); [Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012](#)), inconsistent findings have been reported ([Bauman, 2013](#); [Tokunaga, 2010](#)). Therefore, further research is needed to clarify the effect of gender and age on the incidence and frequency of different and specific forms of online victimization.

Method

Sample

From a total of 709 secondary schools in the eastern region of Spain, 354 were randomly selected and were asked to participate in the research. Finally, participants were recruited from 39 that accepted the proposal. The total sample comprised 4,310 young people between 12 and 20 years old, but we restricted the sample for the current research to youth aged 12–17 ($n=4,126$). Moreover, 184 questionnaires were excluded from the sample due to non-reliable or incomplete

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