



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Peer sexual cybervictimization in adolescents: Development and validation of a scale



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### KEYWORDS

Peer sexual  
cybervictimization;  
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Adolescence;  
Invariance;  
Ex post facto study

**Abstract** *Background/Objective:* The study of sexual cyberbehaviour in adolescence has received much attention in recent years, because of the risks associated with exposure to pornography, unwanted sexual solicitations, and gender-based sexual harassment. The prevalence of this phenomenon varies from study to study due to a lack of consensus around how to define and measure peer sexual cybervictimization. This study aims to contribute to this research topic by developing and validating a measure of peer sexual cybervictimization among adolescents. *Method:* 601 adolescents (mean age 14.06) from two Spanish cities participated in this study. Cross-validation was performed using EFA and CFA. In a second step, a multi-group analysis was conducted to compare the equivalence of the measure by gender. *Results:* The results confirmed a second-order model comprising two first-order factors: Ambiguous sexual Cybervictimization and Personal sexual Cybervictimization. The model was invariant by gender. Descriptive analyses showed significant differences in Ambiguous sexual cybervictimization, this being more frequent in boys than in girls. Prevalence rates varied from 17 to 26%, with less involvement observed in the Personal dimension. *Conclusions:* This work proposes a valid and gender invariant measure to analyze peer sexual cybervictimization in adolescence.

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

Cybervictimización  
sexual entre iguales;

### Cibervictimización sexual entre adolescentes: desarrollo y validación de una escala

**Resumen** *Antecedentes/Objetivo:* El estudio de la ciberconducta sexual en la adolescencia ha recibido mucha atención en los últimos años, especialmente la referida a los riesgos que

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Internet;  
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suponen la exposición a la pornografía, las solicitudes sexuales indeseadas y el hostigamiento sexual basado en el género. La prevalencia del fenómeno varía entre los diferentes estudios debido a una falta de consenso en la definición y medida del constructo cibervictimización sexual. Este trabajo pretende contribuir en esta área, desarrollando y validando una escala para medir victimización sexual online. *Método:* Una muestra de 601 adolescentes de dos ciudades españolas (edad media 14,06) participaron en el estudio. Se realizó una validación cruzada empleando AFE y AFC, así como un análisis multigrupo para comparar la equivalencia de la medida por sexo. *Resultados:* se confirmó un modelo de segundo orden compuesto por dos factores (Cibervictimización sexual ambigua y Cibervictimización sexual personal) invariante por sexo. Los análisis indicaron diferencias significativas en la dimensión ambigua, siendo más frecuente en ellos. Los datos revelaron una prevalencia entre el 17 y 26%, siendo menor la implicación en la forma personal. *Conclusiones:* Se propone una medida válida e invariante en ambos sexos de la cibervictimización sexual por parte de los iguales en la adolescencia.

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Internet uses and the amount of time adolescents spend connected has turned the online world into another context where they can develop and learn, engaging in developmental tasks appropriate for their age group (Denissen, Neumann, & van Zalk, 2010), such as exploring, expressing and adjusting their sexuality in line with social and cultural norms (Steinberg, 2013). Studies to date support this assertion, demonstrating how young people actively and passively participate in sexually explicit content in an online setting (Livingstone & Mason, 2015; Peter & Valkenburg, 2011). This includes exchanging erotic and pornographic material, obscene messages and even posting compromising personal information with the intention of making their sexual image public (Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012), flirting and initiating sexual encounters (Pujazon-Zazik, Manasse, & Orrell-Valente, 2012).

The study of sexual cyberbehaviour in adolescence has received much attention in recent years (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014; Livingstone & Mason, 2015), not only because of the risks that these experiences may entail for young people's personal and social development (Livingstone & Smith, 2014), but also because more than half of the adolescents who receive some of this content find it disturbing and unpleasant (Jones, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2012). When this occurs, expressions of desire and sexual interest may become maladjusted, with some adolescents now feeling themselves at the centre of online sexual victimization (Hill & Kearl, 2011).

Research into the prevalence of peer sexual cybervictimization compared with face-to-face victimization has shown that online forms are equally or less present than the face-to-face kind (Livingstone & Mason, 2015), with prevalence rates varying from 3 to 40% (Mitchell, Ybarra, & Korchmaros, 2014; Rinehart & Espelage, 2015). One of the main reasons for this variability in results lies in the wide range of theoretical models and behaviours under analysis. From a risk perspective, the focus has turned to analyzing unwanted sexual solicitations, unintentional exposure to pornography, and sexting (Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Mitchell et al.,

2014), with more than 30% of adolescents having been unintentionally exposed to sexual content (Mitchell et al., 2014), just over 12% receiving sexual images (Klettke et al., 2014), and approximately 12.5% on the receiving end of sexual solicitations (Baumgartner, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010). As for those studies interested in interpersonal aggression and cyberbullying, sexual forms have been identified as a further expression of peer cybervictimization (Álvarez-García, Núñez, Dobarro, & Rodríguez, 2015), or the focus has turned to sexual, homophobic cyberaggression and cybervictimization (Gruber & Fineran, 2008; Rinehart & Espelage, 2015), which relates to offensive comments about the other's sexual orientation, sexual insults and spreading rumours about another's sexual behaviour. The prevalence rates in these studies varied from 4 to 38% (Fridh, Lindström, & Rosvall, 2015; Van Royen, Poels, & Vandebosch, 2016) and they are perceived as the most hurtful and devastating acts of sexual cyberaggression for victims (Van Royen, Vandebosch, & Poels, 2015). Lastly, from a developmental perspective, sexual harassment is viewed as a range of behaviours that would likely reflect rude or ineffective displays of desire and sexual interest that could evolve into actual sexual aggression (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017). These sexualized interactions would come across as ambiguous to those on both the receiving and giving ends, complicating the perception of violence for victims and perpetrators (American Association of University Women, AAUW, 2001; Ortega, Sánchez, Ortega-Rivera, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2010). From this perspective, the studies have focused mainly on sexual cybervictimization (Van Royen et al., 2015).

Another reason for this disparity of results concerns a lack of empirical consensus surrounding peer sexual cybervictimization dimensions, a limitation that is shared with studies on face-to-face sexual violence, where some authors have distinguished between gender-based sexual harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995), in terms of severity, from moderate to severe (Lacasse, Purdy, & Mendelson, 2003); comparing same and cross-gender sexual

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