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Preventing image-based abuse in Australia: The role of bystanders

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Abstract

This report examines image-based abuse and bystander intervention in Australia. Image-based abuse involves three main behaviours—non-consensually taking/creating nude or sexual images, non-consensually sharing/distributing nude or sexual images, and threatening to share/distribute nude or sexual images. In this report, we present data from an online survey of 245 Australian residents (aged 18–71 years), 35 face-to-face focus groups with 219 participants and a review of available resources on bystander intervention and image-based abuse. Ultimately, we found that many people do not intervene when witnessing image-based abuse. While 64.1 percent of respondents had witnessed image-based abuse, only 45.6 percent reported that they said or did something. We also discuss a range of barriers to and facilitators of intervention, such as the social and physical safety risks of intervention, potential impacts on interpersonal relationships, gender, the potential for escalation, and whether participants perceived they would receive support from others. The report also shows that participants have limited knowledge of existing image-based abuse resources and supports. We argue that improved education and awareness of image-based abuse is needed to actively discourage it and highlight its harms and consequences, alongside education on how bystanders can safely and effectively intervene and/or support victims when witnessing image-based abuse.



Executive summary

Background

Image-based abuse (IBA), also known as ‘image-based sexual abuse’ (IBSA; Flynn & Henry 2021; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a; McGlynn & Rackley 2017), ‘revenge pornography’ (Bond & Tyrrell 2021) and ‘non-consensual pornography’ (Franks 2017), involves three main behaviours:

- the non-consensual taking or creation of nude or sexual images (hereafter referred to as taking/creating);
- the non-consensual sharing or distribution of nude or sexual images (sharing/distributing); and/or
- the threat to share or distribute nude or sexual images (threatening).

IBA occurs in a range of relationship contexts (see Powell et al. 2019; Powell, Henry & Flynn 2018) and can have serious and pervasive impacts, including ‘social rupture’ or an all-encompassing devastation or disruption of everyday life and relationships (McGlynn et al. 2021, 2019). Research suggests that support for, and intervention by, bystanders—that is, people who witness abusive behaviours—can reduce the extent and impact of IBA behaviours, attitudes and harms (Barlińska, Szuster & Winiewski 2013; Brochado, Soares & Fraga 2017; Kowalski et al. 2014; Rebollo-Catalan & Mayor-Buzon 2020; Song & Oh 2018). Research also suggests that engaging bystanders to take action when they witness violence and discrimination is an effective prevention tool (Darley & Latané 1968; Dovidio et al. 2006; Gordon-Messer et al. 2013; Latané & Darley 1970). In this regard, bystanders are an untapped resource and have a potentially greater role to play in preventing IBA.

Research aims and questions

This study builds on the existing literature (Darley & Latané 1968; Latané & Darley 1970; see also Clarke 2003; Dovidio et al. 2006) to better understand bystander intervention in relation to IBA in Australia. We sought to explore Australians' attitudes towards, and awareness of, IBA, relevant laws, and available options to respond to or counter such behaviours, as well as their willingness or preparedness to intervene, and the barriers to and enablers of bystander action. Using a sample of Australian residents, the study aimed to:

- measure bystanders' capacity and willingness to engage in positive action in response to the occurrence of, or conditions contributing to, IBA;
- identify the enablers of, and barriers to, engaging with IBA law (where it exists) as a form of remedy; and
- identify the enablers of, and barriers to, bystander intervention, and to building cultures that encourage bystanders to take action, where safe to do so.

It addressed five core research questions:

- (1) What attitudes, values and beliefs do Australians have regarding IBA?
- (2) What knowledge do Australians have of IBA laws?
- (3) What knowledge do Australians have of available remedies for IBA?
- (4) What levels of readiness do bystanders have to take action when witnessing IBA?
- (5) How can we improve understandings of IBA, laws and other avenues of support, thereby contributing towards preventing IBA?

Key findings

The study used a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology including an online survey, face-to-face focus groups and a review of available resources on bystander intervention and IBA. The review identified several campaigns on IBA. However, many of these focus on preventing young people from sexting (sending intimate images to others), rather than on preventing perpetration of IBA behaviours, or providing appropriate and effective communications targeting safe and effective bystander intervention.

Survey

The survey sample comprised 245 Australian residents, around two-thirds of whom identified as female (65.7%). The mean age was 31.20 years ($SD=13.02$, range=18–71 years). Further details on the study methodology are contained in the *Methodology* section. Key findings include:

Attitudes

- Blame and minimisation attitudes towards IBA victimisation were low, and significantly lower among those who had ever taken intimate images of themselves and/or sent such images to others.
- Male respondents reported significantly higher levels of blame, minimisation, perceptions that IBA had positive impacts for victims, and attitudes that there are some acceptable circumstances for perpetration, compared to female respondents.
- When presented with examples of IBA, female respondents reported feeling uncomfortable and sorry for the victim, and were less likely to report feeling okay with it or finding it funny, compared to male respondents.

Knowledge of laws and remedies

- Knowledge of laws was limited, with 66.1 percent of respondents believing that it is a crime to upload an image onto a website without consent, 57.6 percent believing it is a crime to take an intimate image without the person's consent, and 51.4 percent believing it is a crime to share an image without consent. Additionally, 38.8 percent of respondents believed it is a crime to threaten to share an intimate image of someone without their consent.
- Average levels of agreement suggest respondents believed these behaviours should 'probably' or 'definitely' be a crime.

Readiness to take action

- Around two-thirds (64.1%) of respondents reported having witnessed non-consensual imagery, most of which involved male perpetrators and female victims.
- Of the 149 respondents who provided further information, 45.6 percent reported that they had said or done something in response to witnessing IBA.
- Actions included: confronting the perpetrator (55.9%); telling a friend, family member or colleague (50.0%); and supporting the victim (47.1%). Few respondents indicated that they had reported the perpetrator to police or another official (14.7%), or reported them to a provider or online platform (7.4%).
- Among the respondents who took action, they reported doing so because: IBA is wrong, taking action is the right thing to do, or IBA is illegal.
- Respondents who did not take action reported that they did not feel comfortable or did not feel it was their responsibility.

- Female respondents were more likely to report not taking action because they did not feel comfortable, because they did not feel it was their responsibility, or because they were concerned others might harass the victim. Male respondents were more likely to report they did not take action because they believed the situation was harmless, because they were not concerned about the situation, or because they were worried their relationship with the perpetrator would be negatively impacted.
- Heterosexual respondents were more likely than lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB+) respondents to report not taking action because they did not feel it was their responsibility or because they might be verbally abused by the perpetrator.

Focus group

After the survey was completed, 35 focus groups with 219 participants were conducted in the capital cities of four Australian jurisdictions where IBA laws and responses were in operation—Adelaide in South Australia, Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory, Melbourne in Victoria and Sydney in New South Wales. As the project sought to test knowledge of IBA laws and responses, we selected locations where specific IBA laws were operating at the time of preparing the research proposal (mid-2018). Key findings include:

Attitudes

- Some participants exhibited victim-blaming attitudes and made victim-blaming statements in response to hypothetical scenarios about IBA. In one scenario, these centred on the victim having shared their intimate image, the murky nature of consent, the length of time the victim and perpetrator had known each other, and perceptions that people who share intimate images subsequently lose control over what happens to their image. In the other scenario, respondents exhibited less victim-blaming attitudes, as an absence of consent was more apparent. However, some respondents commented on the clothing choice of the victim as contributing to their victimisation.

Knowledge of laws and remedies

- Participants expressed some confusion over IBA laws and raised concerns about a potential lack of evidence and difficulty in proving perpetration.
- Participants expressed mixed views about whether the behaviour depicted in the scenarios should be criminalised. Factors influencing these perceptions included the motivation behind the act; whether a lack of consent was clear; the normalised nature of image sharing; perceived differences between showing, as opposed to distributing, non-consensual imagery; and perceptions that criminalisation was too severe.
- Participants had limited knowledge of IBA remedies, including of the resources and support available from the eSafety Commissioner (see *Bystander resources* section), or of other support services available for victims of IBA.

- Participants criticised existing Australian campaigns relating to IBA for promoting victim-blaming attitudes. They commented on the lack of consequences for the perpetrator depicted in these campaigns and the poor messaging that bystanders do not need to take action.
- Participants were more positive about the campaigns recently created by eSafety, which prioritise a theme of empowerment, encouraging the victim to seek support and encouraging bystander intervention.

Readiness to take action

- Participants reported several common barriers to intervention, including the nature of the relationship between all parties (bystander, victim, perpetrator), the perceived risks of intervening, the gender of all parties (bystander, victim, perpetrator) and the perceived likelihood of receiving support from other bystanders.
- Participants also reported common facilitators of intervention, including the nature of the relationship between all parties (bystander, victim, perpetrator) and having the support of other bystanders.
- Gender played a key role in participants' willingness and capacity to intervene, including whether they would feel safe or comfortable to intervene; their perception of the seriousness of the situation and the impacts on the victim; and their perception of whether they would receive support from other bystanders.

Improvements to understandings of laws and remedies

- Participants suggested improvements for future campaigns to enhance understandings of IBA laws and remedies, including focusing on possible actions for bystanders to take, providing effective and accessible messages, promoting the message that everyone has a responsibility to intervene, and using social media to disseminate campaigns.

Recommendations

- The findings highlight the importance of education and messaging that challenges victim-blaming attitudes.
- There is a need to raise awareness around IBA laws, reporting mechanisms and support services.
- Future resources on IBA and bystander intervention should therefore focus on empowering victims to seek support and report IBA victimisation, as well as promoting the theme of a shared social responsibility.

Report structure

This report contains six sections. The first presents an overview of relevant literature, with a specific focus on IBA and bystander intervention. It concludes with an outline of the study aims. The second section outlines the research methodology. The third section presents the findings from the survey, and the fourth and fifth sections discuss the findings from the focus groups. The final section summarises the study's key findings and observations.

A note on COVID-19

These are truly unprecedented times. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to be substantial, and economic and relational impacts will continue to affect the Australian community for many years. Any such context of disaster is likely to have an impact on the prevalence and nature of IBA experienced, perpetrated and witnessed, as well as legal and non-legal responses to it. In Australia, eSafety reported that between March and May 2020 it received more than 1,000 reports of IBA, representing a 210 percent increase on the average weekly reports received in 2019 (Powell & Flynn 2020). In the United Kingdom, the Revenge Porn Helpline similarly reported dealing with double the number of cases of IBA in April 2020 compared to April 2019 (Powell & Flynn 2020). In addition to restrictions on social interactions leading to a probable increase in the sharing of nude and sexual images (consensually and non-consensually) during the COVID-19 crisis, this rise has been attributed to increases in domestic and family violence during lockdown periods, people monetising their intimate content, financial pressures, and sextortion scams (Medhora 2020; Morgan & Boxall 2020; Powell & Flynn 2020).

While the existence and extent of COVID-19 was not known (or imagined) when we conducted our research, these emerging figures pertaining to the prevalence of IBA demonstrate further the importance of this study in generating knowledge on IBA, support avenues, and safe and effective bystander interventions.



Literature review

Digital technologies have facilitated many beneficial social and cultural changes, but they are also implicated in the perpetration of harmful, abusive and illegal behaviours (Bailey, Flynn & Henry 2021; Cama 2021; Flynn, Clough & Cooke 2021; Henry et al. 2021; Powell et al. 2019). The dominant role of digital technologies in people's lives and the instantaneous, widespread sharing power of the internet have created an environment where harms such as IBA, sexual harassment, and domestic and family violence are not only possible, but can be facilitated in new and powerful ways (Henry et al. 2021).

In the United States, the most comprehensive survey of online harassing behaviour to date was undertaken by the Pew Research Center (2017). In its representative survey of 4,248 US adults, 41 percent reported having been personally subjected to harassing behaviour online. Women (and young women in particular) were significantly more likely than men to experience sexualised forms of abuse. In a survey of 2,956 Australian adults, 62 percent reported experiencing technology-based sexual violence (Powell & Henry 2016). Most commonly, respondents reported that they had experienced digital sexual harassment, such as receiving unwanted sexually explicit images or material and unwanted requests for sex. Although men and women reported similar rates of victimisation, women reported experiencing greater harms as a result of their experiences. Subsequent analysis among the same sample found that transgender adults experienced higher levels of digital harassment and abuse, and of sexual, sexuality-based and gender-based harassment, when compared to heterosexual cisgender adults (Powell, Scott & Henry 2020).

IBA and other forms of digital harm are able to continue partly because others actively or passively support inequality, discriminatory attitudes or violence, remain silent or tolerate the abuse and its underlying causes (VicHealth 2011). In the 2017 Pew survey, 66 percent of respondents reported having witnessed online harassment directed at others. This was highest among respondents aged 18 to 29 years (86%; Pew Research Center 2017). While 60 percent of respondents felt that people who witness online harassment should step in, only 30 percent said they had engaged in bystander intervention (Pew Research Center 2017). In a nationally representative survey in Australia ($n=4,122$), eSafety (2017) found almost one-fifth of respondents had been bystanders to IBA (19%), but very few had taken action, with 44 percent saying that they did not do or say anything, and 7 percent reporting that they did not know what to say or do. It is evident from these findings that more information, support and guidance is needed on the available options for bystanders, and more research is needed to understand the enablers and barriers to bystander intervention.

In this section, we present a review of the existing literature on bystander interventions and their effectiveness. First, we define IBA and provide a background to the literature on its prevalence, nature and impacts. We then define bystanders and bystander intervention, including discussing evidence on the efficacy of interventions. We conclude with an outline of the aims of the current study and how these are situated in the existing research.

Image-based abuse

IBA, also known as IBSA (Flynn & Henry 2021; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a; Henry, Powell & Flynn 2017; McGlynn & Rackley 2017), ‘revenge pornography’ (Bond & Tyrrell 2021) and ‘non-consensual pornography’ (Franks 2017), involves three main behaviours:

- the non-consensual taking or creation of nude or sexual images (hereafter referred to as taking/creating);
- the non-consensual sharing or distribution of nude or sexual images (sharing/distributing); and/or
- the threat to share or distribute nude or sexual images (threatening).

Research on IBA suggests that experiences of these behaviours are common (Powell et al. 2022). A study by Henry, Flynn and Powell (2019a) of more than 4,000 Australians aged 16 to 49 years found that as many as one in five reported having experienced at least one of these behaviours. The majority of perpetrators were reported to be men and known to the victim, such as a current or former intimate partner. The most comprehensive research on the prevalence, nature and impacts of IBA to date was conducted by Henry et al. (2021) and Powell et al. (2020). In their survey of respondents aged 16 to 64 years across Australia ($n=2,054$), New Zealand ($n=2,027$) and the United Kingdom ($n=2,028$), Powell et al. (2020) reported that 38 percent of respondents had experienced at least one form of IBA victimisation, with the figures being comparable across the three countries (Australia, 35%; New Zealand, 39%; UK, 39%). Of those surveyed, 47 percent aged 16 to 39 years had experienced one or more forms, compared with 26 percent of respondents aged 40 to 64 years. Research has also shown that IBA disproportionately impacts gender- and sexuality-diverse people, people with a disability, young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Eaton, Jacobs & Ruvalcaba 2018; eSafety, 2017; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a, 2019b; Scott et al. 2022). For example, Powell et al. (2020) found that 56 percent of gender- and sexuality-diverse respondents, compared with 35 percent of heterosexual respondents, and 66 percent of Indigenous respondents, compared with 34 percent of non-Indigenous respondents, reported having experienced one or more forms of IBA.

Perpetrators of IBA can be intimate partners, family members, friends, acquaintances and persons unknown to the victim (Powell, Flynn & Henry 2019). It occurs in a range of contexts, including relationship retribution, sextortion, voyeurism (eg ‘upskirting’ and ‘downblousing’), sexploitation, and sexual assault (Powell et al. 2019). IBA is widely recognised as a significant public health problem owing to the multiple psychological, physical, social and economic harms individuals experience, including anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, social isolation and

financial loss (Bates 2017; Citron & Franks 2014; Cyber Civil Rights Initiative 2014; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a, 2019b; McGlynn et al. 2021, 2019). Henry et al. (2021) found that victims experience negative feelings (86%), negative health impacts (55%), reputational concerns (79%) and negative impacts on their relationships with others (56%). Gender was also a key factor in their study, with the authors finding that women were more likely than men to report negative feelings (women, 92%; men, 76%), negative health impacts (women, 61%; men, 45%), reputational concerns (women, 74%; men, 59%) and relational impacts (women, 60%; men, 49%) (Henry et al. 2021). Some impacts were greater for LGB+ women, who reported experiencing greater health impacts (71%) than heterosexual women (58%) and heterosexual men (44%), and higher negative relational impacts (74%) than heterosexual women (55%) and heterosexual men (49%) (Henry et al. 2021). McGlynn and colleagues (2021) further reported that the impacts of IBA include ‘social rupture’, which refers to an all-encompassing devastation or disruption to one’s everyday life, relationships and activities.

Over the past decade, there has been greater attention paid to IBA globally, evidenced by parliamentary inquiries, public consultations, criminal law reform and media attention, as well as other proposed or enacted legal and non-legal measures (see, for example, Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a; Henry et al. 2021; McGlynn et al. 2019). All but one of Australia’s eight state and territory jurisdictions (Tasmania excluded) have introduced specific offences to criminalise IBA, and the Commonwealth Government introduced laws in 2018 to specifically criminalise IBA at a federal level (Flynn & Henry 2021). While the introduction of specific IBA laws is a positive step towards recognising its harms and the experiences of victims, research has found there is limited understanding among Australians of the existence and scope of these laws, how and when they apply, and where to find help (eSafety 2017; Flynn & Henry 2021; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a; Henry et al. 2021). There also continue to be a number of barriers to reporting IBA, including a lack of police resources, evidentiary issues, jurisdictional restrictions, and victim-blaming attitudes among police and society that minimise and trivialise IBA (Henry, Flynn & Powell 2018; McGlynn et al. 2021).

The low reporting of IBA to police, and subsequent low numbers of prosecutions (Henry Flynn & Powell 2019a, 2018), has created a sizeable gap between estimated IBA victimisation and official reporting and prosecution of IBA perpetration in Australia. For example, 35 percent of Australian respondents in one study reported having experienced IBA (Henry et al. 2021; Powell et al. 2020), yet research conducted by eSafety (2017) estimates that only one in four Australians who experience IBA will take action, such as reporting the abuse (35% of those who take action). Recent data detailing police reports further demonstrate the gap between IBA victimisation and official reporting rates. Data released by the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council (Chalton & Schollum 2020) showed that 2,055 IBSA offences were recorded by police in the four-year study period (2015–16 to 2018–19). Of these, only around one-quarter (478) resulted in a sentence, with sentencing outcomes including community correction orders, imprisonment and fines. Improving understanding and awareness of IBA laws is crucial to improving reporting rates.

Bystanders and intervention

Bystanders have the potential to disrupt IBA behaviours and harms, or prevent them from occurring (Barlińska, Szuster & Winiewski 2013; Brochado, Soares & Fraga 2017; Kowalski et al. 2014; Rebollo-Catalan & Mayor-Buzon 2020; Song & Oh 2018). A bystander refers to a person who witnesses or is aware of an emergency or critical event, such as harmful behaviour that is happening to another person (Taket & Crisp 2017). Bystander action or intervention refers to actions that are taken by those not directly involved in the critical event to disrupt or prevent it from occurring. Bystander intervention has its theoretical origins in social psychology, and was a key focus of research following World War II, when researchers sought to examine why people remained passive or did not intervene to prevent the Holocaust (Powell 2011). However, academic interest heightened in response to several notable cases where it was reported that witnesses failed to intervene when witnessing a critical event (eg Kitty Genovese's rape and murder in 1964). Researchers have since been interested in how bystanders respond in emergency situations, how their behaviours are influenced by the actions of other bystanders, barriers to and facilitators of intervention, and programs that can help encourage intervention.

One theory on bystander barriers is the bystander effect. Darley and Latané (1968; see also Latané & Darley 1970, 1968) are credited with first conceptualising and examining the bystander effect, which refers to a person's likelihood of intervening when witnessing a critical event decreasing when other bystanders are present and do not intervene. Darley and Latané (1968) suggested that if an individual is alone and notices an emergency situation, they will feel a greater sense of responsibility to intervene than if there are other people present who could intervene in their place (Darley & Latané 1968; Latané & Darley 1968). These authors found three elements fuelling this effect: the diffusion of responsibility, whereby the greater the number of bystanders present, the less personal responsibility a bystander will feel to intervene; evaluation apprehension, or fears of being judged or viewed negatively by intervening; and social influence, or the reliance of bystanders on how others react in situations.

Although there is evidence to suggest the presence of passive bystanders in critical situations reduces the helping responses of bystanders, a meta-analysis by Fischer and colleagues (2011) found that such a reduction in helping responses is less likely to occur in situations that are perceived to be dangerous, as opposed to non-dangerous. The authors suggested that this may be because there is less ambiguity surrounding dangerous situations, because the presence of other bystanders may reduce the fear of intervening, and because cooperation between bystanders may be more effective in resolving dangerous situations (Fischer et al. 2011).

In 1970, Latané and Darley (1970) introduced the situational model of bystander intervention. According to these scholars, there are five psychological steps bystanders move through when deciding whether to intervene. The bystander must: (1) notice a critical situation; (2) construe it as an emergency; (3) develop a feeling of personal responsibility; (4) believe they have the skills to successfully intervene; and (5) reach a conscious decision to help (Latané & Darley 1970, 1968). If there are situational barriers to any of the steps required, these can prevent the

bystander from intervening. Piliavin et al. (1981) have since expanded this model, introducing the ‘arousal: cost-reward model’. Within their model, Piliavin et al. (1981) propose that if a situation arouses an emotional response in bystanders (eg empathy), they will be motivated to intervene. When experiencing such emotions, bystanders are motivated to alleviate these feelings by relieving the distress of the person/s directly impacted by the event through intervention (Dovidio et al. 2006, 1991; Piliavin et al. 1981; Voelpel, Eckhoff & Förster 2008; Wang 2021). To do so, they may make an assessment of the potential rewards (eg praise, compensation) versus the costs (eg guilt if they do not intervene, personal harm, embarrassment) of intervening (Dovidio et al. 2006; Piliavin et al. 1981; Wang 2021). In these circumstances, bystanders seek to minimise the personal costs of intervening and maximise the potential rewards (Wang 2021). Other research has similarly found that greater empathy and perceived likelihood of reward increase bystanders’ preparedness to intervene (Wang 2021).

Barriers and facilitators

More recently, much of the literature on bystander intervention has focused on sexual violence, particularly in university or college settings. Schwartz et al. (2001) proposed that sexual assault occurs when there is a motivated perpetrator, a potential victim, and the absence of ‘capable guardians’ or witnesses who could intervene. While prevention efforts have largely focused on either perpetrators or victims (Burn 2009), increasing attention has been paid to focusing on those ‘capable guardians’ or ‘bystanders’.

There are a range of factors that influence whether people will intervene to disrupt sexual violence, as well as barriers that may prevent people from intervening (see Mainwaring, Gabbert & Scott 2022). As outlined above, Latané and Darley (1970) identified five steps involved in a bystander determining whether or not to intervene in a critical incident. Burn (2009) conducted a study among undergraduate students at a Californian university to assess whether the barriers in the five-step situational model apply in cases of sexual assault. Findings from surveys provided some support for the model, with the five barriers being associated with reduced intervention behaviour, more so among men than women. McMahon and Banyard (2012) suggest, however, that the application of Latané and Darley’s (1970) work becomes complex in relation to sexual assault, as sexual assault may have different risk markers and patterns of behaviour compared to other critical events, such as medical emergencies.

Banyard (2011) used ecological models to expand knowledge on the factors that could promote or prevent bystander intervention in the context of sexual violence. Banyard (2011) describes intrapersonal factors (ie factors within the individual) and contextual factors that play a role in facilitating or preventing bystander intervention. Individual characteristics can include gender, personality, attitudes and cognitions. There is, for example, evidence to suggest that women are more likely than men to intervene where they perceive there is a risk of sexual violence occurring (Banyard 2008; Burn 2009). This finding on gender difference is contrary to the findings within the broader research indicating that men are more likely than women to intervene in emergency situations (Eagley & Crowley 1986), and could be linked to women’s heightened awareness of sexual violence (Burn 2009). Research also suggests that prosocial

tendencies reduce the perceived barriers to intervention and increase self-reported helping behaviours (Bennett, Banyard & Garnhart 2013). Contextual factors might include the perceived severity of the situation, the relationship between the bystander and the victim or the bystander and the perpetrator, and feelings of social connectedness. For instance, greater perceived severity of the situation can increase the likelihood of bystander intervention (Fischer et al. 2011; Mainwaring, Gabbert & Scott 2022). Furthermore, the relationship to the victim may have an impact on a person's likelihood of intervening, with some studies suggesting people will express greater empathy and intention to intervene if the victim is a friend or someone they know (Bennett, Banyard & Edwards 2017; Burn 2009; Katz et al. 2015). There is also evidence to suggest that men are more likely than women to intervene to prevent sexual assault if the potential perpetrator is a friend rather than a stranger (Burn 2009). However, other studies have found the opposite, with people being more likely to report witnessing a crime, including sexual assault, if the perpetrator is a stranger (Bennett, Banyard & Edwards 2017; Nicksa 2014). Banyard (2008) found that people who had a greater sense of community also exhibited greater intentions to help and were more likely to engage in actual helping behaviour in the context of sexual violence.

Research suggests the same individual and contextual factors that can facilitate bystander intervention can also act as barriers to impede a person from intervening when witnessing sexual violence. Contextual factors can include perceptions of other bystanders' likelihood of supporting intervention. Specifically, there may be discrepancies between perceived and actual norms around bystander intervention, known as pluralistic ignorance (Brown & Messman-Moore 2010; Fabiano et al. 2003; Kroshus 2018). Fabiano and colleagues (2003) found evidence to suggest men hold misconceptions about their peers' level of support for intervening in instances of gender-based violence, perceiving their peers would be less likely to support intervention than they actually are in reality. Such misconceptions can adversely influence intervention behaviours, over and above individual attitudes towards sexual violence (Brown & Messman-Moore 2010).

Individual factors can include self-perceived skills to intervene, concerns around the repercussions of intervening, and problematic attitudes around sexual and gender-based violence. In a study by Kania and Cale (2021) among university students in Australia, barriers to intervention included a failure to recognise the situation as high risk due to ignorance of the warning signs of sexual violence, as well as a failure to notice the situation. Furthermore, a study of college students by Bennett, Banyard & Garnhart (2013) found that participants reported self-perceived skills deficits and a failure to take responsibility for intervening as key bystander barriers. Acceptance of rape myths—that is, stereotypical or prejudiced beliefs about sexual violence, victims and perpetrators—has also been associated with a lower level of willingness to intervene (Banyard 2008; Banyard, Moynihan & Plante 2007; Burgin & Flynn 2019; McMahon 2010) and lower rates of actual bystander intervention (Banyard 2008; Banyard, Moynihan & Plante 2007; Mainwaring, Gabbert & Scott 2022). Research indicates that men tend to be more accepting of rape myths than women (eg see Banyard 2008; Banyard, Moynihan & Plante 2007) and may also express lower levels of willingness and of actual intervention behaviours (Kania & Cale 2021).

Bystander programs

Bystander intervention programs are designed to provide people with the necessary attitudes, confidence and skills to intervene (Banyard, Plante & Moynihan 2004). By changing attitudes (such as reducing rape myth acceptance and increasing empathic concern for victims), these programs seek to foster a sense of personal responsibility among bystanders. Such programs tend to adopt a community-focused approach by giving community members a specific role to play in preventing harm (Banyard, Moynihan & Plante 2007). A range of intervention programs have been introduced to foster prosocial bystander attitudes and behaviours in the context of sexual violence specifically. Many of these have been introduced in university settings, despite sexual violence occurring in a wide range of contexts. *Bringing in the Bystander*, for example, is a multi-session program facilitated by a two-person team and delivered to single-sex or co-ed groups of students. Three 90-minute sessions provide participants with information about the role of bystanders and teach them about appropriate and safe ways to intervene. Another example is the *Green Dot*. This was originally developed for a student audience but has since been expanded to workplaces and communities. The full program consists of four ‘doses’, where participants learn about recognising green (behaviours that promote safety) and red (behaviours that may be contributing to violence) dots. The program ultimately encourages participants to engage in more green dot behaviours to promote safety and disrupt violence in their community. Both programs have been evaluated, with evidence supporting their efficacy in promoting prosocial bystander behaviour (Cares et al. 2015; Coker et al. 2014, 2011; Moynihan et al. 2011; see also *Bystander resources*).

There have been several systematic or other reviews (DeGue et al. 2014; Evans, Burroughs & Knowlden 2019; Mujal et al. 2019) and meta-analyses (Anderson & Whiston 2005; Fenton et al. 2016; Jouriles et al. 2018; Katz & Moore 2013; Kettrey & Marx 2019a, 2019b; Kettrey, Marx & Tanner-Smith 2019) of bystander intervention programs related to sexual violence. Given that many of the existing programs focus on college students, the strongest evidence as to the effectiveness of bystander intervention programs in changing attitudes and behaviours relates to the university setting. Katz and Moore (2013) conducted one of the earliest systematic reviews of the effectiveness of programs for preventing sexual violence in college communities. Data from 12 studies suggested that bystander intervention programs have positive effects on attitudes (reducing rape-supportive attitudes), efficacy (perceived competence in responding to sexual violence), intentions to intervene and intervention behaviour. The review findings suggest that programs are more effective in improving bystander efficacy and intention to intervene, rather than actual bystander behaviour (Katz & Moore 2013).

Kettrey and Marx (2019b) undertook a systematic review examining the effects of intervention programs on bystander efficacy, intentions and intervention, to ascertain whether the moderating effects on these three factors differed depending on the timing of program implementation—during the early or later years of college. The rationale was that most college sexual assaults occur during the first two years of college (Cranney 2015), suggesting programs would be most effective if run during these earlier years. Similar to Katz and Moore (2013), Kettrey and Marx found that intervention programs had positive effects on bystander efficacy,

intentions and behaviour. Furthermore, moderation analyses revealed that program effects on intentions were significantly stronger in the early college years, but not for bystander efficacy or intervention. The authors suggested that the timing of intervention may be important for encouraging greater intention to intervene, but may not impact actual intervention behaviours (Kettrey & Marx 2019b).

Jouriles et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of bystander intervention programs in college campuses to examine the impact of the programs on student attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. They found that students who participated in these programs had more prosocial attitudes and beliefs around sexual violence and reported greater engagement in intervention behaviour. However, the effects of the programs diminished over time, suggesting that repeated program engagement may have longer-term benefits for bystander attitudes and behaviours (Jouriles et al. 2018). Finally, Mugal and colleagues (2019) conducted a systematic review of 44 bystander intervention studies for the prevention of sexual violence in the United States and Canada. Of these studies, a third included measurement of bystander behaviour after the intervention, with most reporting beneficial outcomes in relation to attitudes (rape myth acceptance, sexist attitudes), confidence and self-efficacy, perceptions of denial and responsibility, and bystander behaviour. However, the authors reported several limitations of the bystander intervention evaluation studies in determining causality, including the use of quasi-experimental designs and limited follow-ups.

Bystanders and IBA

There is limited evidence on the extent to which people witness or are bystanders to IBA.

A national survey was conducted by eSafety (2017) to ascertain experiences, including bystander experiences, of IBA. Among a sample of more than 4,000 Australians, nearly one in five were bystanders to IBA, where they had received a nude or sexual photo and knew there was no consent or were unsure whether there was consent. Among these, four in ten did not take action in response (eSafety 2017). This corresponds with research that has examined people's perceptions of whether they would intervene in hypothetical scenarios in comparison with actual bystander behaviour. Powell et al. (2020) surveyed 6,109 respondents across Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom about experiences and perpetration of IBA. Respondents were asked a series of questions to ascertain whether they would potentially intervene when witnessing IBA. Of the respondents, 68 percent reported that they would say or do something to indicate their disapproval, or would like to say or do something (but did not know how), if another person showed or sent them a nude or sexual image of a third person without that person's consent. However, among respondents who had witnessed IBA and reported having the opportunity to intervene, only 46 percent said that they did. Women were more likely than men to report that they would say or do something in a hypothetical scenario, or that they had actually engaged in intervention behaviour.

The current study seeks to add to the limited available literature on bystander intervention and IBA by examining bystanders' attitudes and willingness to intervene when witnessing IBA, their awareness of laws and available options to intervene, and the barriers and enablers for bystander intervention. The aims of this research are to:

- measure bystanders' capacity and willingness to engage in positive action in response to the occurrence of, or conditions contributing to, IBA;
- identify the enablers of, and barriers to, engaging with IBA law (where it exists) as a form of remedy; and
- identify the enablers of, and barriers to, bystander intervention, and to building cultures that encourage bystanders to take action, where safe to do so.

Conclusion

This section has provided a background to IBA, bystanders, bystander intervention and bystander programs. It has demonstrated there is limited research on bystander attitudes and behaviours in the context of IBA, and that further research is needed to understand bystanders' attitudes towards and awareness of IBA, and options for intervention, and to identify the factors that can facilitate or inhibit bystander intentions to intervene or intervention behaviours. In the next section, we outline the study methodology.



Methodology

This section presents the study methodology. This study adopted a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology, which mapped to five research questions:

- (1) What attitudes, values and beliefs do Australians have regarding IBA?
- (2) What knowledge do Australians have of IBA laws?
- (3) What knowledge do Australians have of available remedies for IBA?
- (4) What levels of readiness do bystanders have to take action when witnessing IBA?
- (5) How can we improve understandings of IBA, laws and other avenues of support, thereby contributing towards preventing IBA?

Survey and focus groups

The research involved conducting an online survey and focus groups with a cohort of Australians aged 18 to 71 years across four jurisdictions: Adelaide (SA), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Vic) and Sydney (NSW). The project received ethics approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (project number: 17905).

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using cost-effective and efficient methods successfully adopted by the researchers in previous studies (see Flynn et al. 2021; Henry et al. 2021; McGlynn et al. 2021; Rackley et al. 2021). This included creating flyers advertising the research and directing interested parties to a project Facebook page and website. Members of the team sent the digital flyers to their professional contacts, including stakeholders, community leaders, academics, community organisations and groups whose members may have been interested in participating. The team also distributed digital and hard copies of the flyer across university campuses, Facebook group pages and community noticeboards (eg at local libraries and shopping centres), and advertised the project on their professional Twitter accounts. Paid Facebook advertising was also used. This involved creating a profile page for the project which linked to the project website (described below), and using advertisements targeting people based on the city they lived in. The advertisements promoted the focus groups and directed potential participants to visit the project website.

A (now expired) project website was created to house information on the project; a copy of the explanatory statement describing what was required of participants; details of the focus group dates, times and locations; a link to register interest in participating; and a contact email (also created for the project). When someone registered interest in participating, the information was sent to the project email, and a team member responded to confirm their preferred date, time and location, and dietary requirements. A reminder email was sent in the days leading up to the focus group, alongside a link to the survey, which participants were asked to complete prior to attending. Upon completing the survey, participants created a unique code using their birth date (including year) and initials. This unique identifier was used for a sign-in sheet at the focus groups to ensure the participant had completed the survey prior to attending. These records were deleted at the end of the focus groups.

Online survey

Sample/setting

Respondents were asked to complete an online anonymous survey hosted by Qualtrics XM in May and June 2019. The survey sample comprised 245 Australian residents, around two-thirds of whom identified as female (65.7%). Respondents were provided with multiple response options to describe their sexual orientation, including heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and a free text response for preferred sexuality identity. Small sample sizes prevent reliable separate analyses for some sexuality identities; as such, lesbian, gay, bisexual and the remaining preferred sexuality descriptors have been analysed as a single lesbian, gay and bisexual plus (LGB+) group. The mean age was 31.20 years ($SD=13.02$, range=18–71 years). The demographic characteristics of the sample are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample

n=245	Percentage	Number
Gender		
Female	65.7	161
Male	29.8	73
Non-binary or other gender identity	4.5	11
Sexuality		
Heterosexual	74.7	183
LGB+	25.3	62
Ethnicity		
Asian	25.3	62
Mixed	6.9	17
White	58.8	144
Other	9.0	22
Languages spoken other than English		
No	73.5	180
Yes	26.5	65
Education		
Secondary/high school	32.7	80
Trade certificate	16.3	40
Undergraduate/postgraduate degree	50.2	123
Other	0.8	2
Primary work		
Full-time	20.8	51
Part-time	11.8	29
Student	35.5	87
Other	31.8	78
Location		
Adelaide (SA)	27.3	67
Canberra (ACT)	14.3	35
Melbourne (Vic)	29.0	71
Sydney (NSW)	29.4	72
Total	100	245

Procedure/materials

The survey was adapted from existing international survey research (eg Cyber Civil Rights Initiative 2014; Englander 2015; McAfee 2013), including work previously undertaken by research team members (see Henry et al. 2021; Powell et al. 2019). The survey comprised questions relating to respondents' attitudes towards IBA, their experiences witnessing IBA, their knowledge of laws, and their demographics. We used the term 'non-consensual imagery' to describe IBA behaviours throughout the fieldwork to avoid using terms that may imply the behaviours are criminal (eg IBA).

Questions relating to attitudes towards intimate image sharing. Inspired by our previous work (see, for example, Powell et al. 2020; 2019), respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with 36 statements relating to their attitudes towards a range of sexual, dating and relationship behaviours involving nude or sexual images.

Questions relating to beliefs regarding laws. Respondents were asked whether they thought that certain non-consensual imagery behaviours should be a crime, and whether they thought that these behaviours were currently a crime where they live. Note: all locations in which respondents resided had IBA laws in place.

Questions relating to experiences witnessing non-consensual imagery. Respondents were asked whether they had witnessed, or become aware of, someone engaging in non-consensual imagery behaviours.

Questions relating to most recent experience witnessing non-consensual imagery. Respondents who had witnessed IBA were asked about the details of their most recent experience, including the gender of the perpetrator and victim, their own relationship to the perpetrator and victim, and the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. They were then asked how they felt and whether they said or did anything. Respondents who did not say or do anything were asked why they had decided not to take action, and whether they thought they would have had the support of various people (eg the victim, other bystanders, their friends) had they intervened. Respondents who did say or do something were asked what actions they took and whether their actions were helpful. They were then asked whether they were worried or concerned when taking action, why they decided to take action, and whether they had (or thought they would have) the support of various people when taking that action.

Questions relating to respondent demographics. Respondents were asked to provide basic demographic information about gender identity, sexual/romantic orientation, age, languages other than English spoken, ethnicity, education, employment status, occupation and state of residence.

Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using jamovi, a free and open statistical platform. Descriptive analyses were performed to examine attitudes towards intimate image sharing, beliefs regarding laws, experiences witnessing non-consensual imagery, and, for respondents who had witnessed IBA, their most recent experience of doing so. Principal components analysis was performed to explore the underlying structure of attitudes towards intimate image sharing. Four factors that grouped together were identified, which we labelled as 'blame', 'acceptable exceptions', 'positive impact' and 'minimisation'. Further details are provided in the *Survey* section. Chi-square and *t*-test analyses were performed to explore whether there were any gender- and sexuality-based differences in attitudes towards intimate image sharing, beliefs regarding laws, experiences witnessing non-consensual imagery, and, for respondents who had witnessed IBA, their most recent experience. Unfortunately, trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from these analyses due to the small numbers of respondents who identified as trans or gender-diverse. Given the exploratory nature of the current research, both significant and non-significant but noteworthy gender and sexuality differences are reported. Significant differences have an alpha value of $p < 0.05$ as well as a phi coefficient value of ≥ 0.10 (chi-square analyses) or a Cohen's *d* value of ≥ 0.20 (*t*-test analyses). Non-significant but noteworthy differences have an alpha value of $p \geq 0.05$ as well as a phi coefficient value of ≥ 0.10 or a Cohen's *d* value of ≥ 0.20 (both values represent a small effect size; Cohen 1992).

Focus groups

Sample/setting

In May and June 2019, we conducted 35 focus groups in Adelaide (SA), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Vic) and Sydney (NSW). As the project sought to test knowledge of laws and responses, we selected locations where specific IBA laws were operating at the time of preparing the research proposal (mid-2018). Since completing the project, IBA laws have been introduced across all Australian jurisdictions, except Tasmania, and at a federal level (see Flynn & Henry 2021, 2019).

The focus group sample comprised 219 Australian residents. The variation in this number from the 245 respondents who completed the survey was due to some respondents completing the survey and then being unable to attend the corresponding focus group due to illness or another reason. Details are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of focus groups and participants by location

Location	Number of focus groups	Number of participants
Adelaide (SA)	10	60
Canberra (ACT)	5	30
Melbourne (Vic)	10	64
Sydney (NSW)	10	65
Total	35	219

The focus groups were run by two facilitators—a member of the research team and a research assistant. This ensured that if any participants became distressed or required individual attention (eg running late), a second facilitator could attend to that person, rather than needing to stop the focus group. Two pilot focus groups were run with three facilitators in Melbourne. All focus groups were conducted face-to-face in a central location. This included Flinders University’s city campus in Adelaide, the Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centre in Canberra, RMIT University’s city campus in Melbourne, and the University of Sydney’s Camperdown campus.

The focus groups had an average duration of 60 minutes, with no more than eight participants in each. Participants were provided with snacks, coffee, tea and water, and were compensated for their time with a \$50 Coles/Myer voucher.

Procedure/materials

When participants arrived, they were provided with a copy of the explanatory statement to read and were asked to sign a consent form. They also signed in with their unique identifier to confirm they had completed the survey. Once all forms were collected, the facilitator advised participants on issues relating to how focus groups operate, confidentiality, respectful interactions, and what to do if anyone began to feel uncomfortable or distressed.

Each focus group included a discussion of two scenarios outlining different types of IBA and questions pertaining to bystander information and resources (see Table 3). There were two versions of each scenario: 1(a) and 2(a) were completed by 18 focus groups, and 1(b) and 2(b) were completed by 17. The variations involved changes to the gender identity of the perpetrator and/or victim. These were developed so we could explore whether participants’ views differed according to the gender identity of those discussed in the scenario. Names were also varied in Scenario 1(a and b) to suggest that some were from non-majority racial backgrounds, thereby allowing for potential discussions around race, ethnicity and religion. The victim in Scenario 2(a and b) was identified as a trans woman. This decision was made to respond to the clear gap in the literature on IBA involving trans and gender non-conforming people (see, for example, Flynn & Henry 2021; Juliett 2017; Powell et al. 2020). The inclusion of names from non-majority groups and a trans woman also provided the opportunity to explore some of the intersections of marginalisation that have emerged as relevant in studies of IBA prevalence (see, for example, Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a, 2019b; Henry et al. 2021; Powell et al. 2020; Powell, Scott & Henry 2020).

Table 3: Two versions of each scenario**Scenario 1(a)**

Maryam (female, aged 21) has been seeing your friend Kai (male, aged 25) for about a week. Without any prior discussion, Maryam sends Kai a photo of herself completely naked. The next day, Kai shows the photo to a group of his friends (including you) during a broad discussion about sex.

Scenario 1(b)

Arjun (male, aged 25) has been seeing your friend Sarah (female, aged 21) for about a week. Without any prior discussion, Arjun sends Sarah a photo of himself completely naked. The next day, Sarah shows the photo to a group of her friends (including you) during a broad discussion about sex.

Scenario 2(a)

You are on a train sitting near a trans woman named Alex (who you don't know). She is wearing a t-shirt and a skirt and is 20 years old. A 30-year-old man named Lou (who you also don't know) is sitting opposite Alex. He tries to engage Alex in conversation but it is clear she doesn't know him so she ignores him. Later, you see Lou using his iPhone to secretly take a photo up Alex's skirt. Alex doesn't know Lou has done this.

Scenario 2(b)

You are on a train sitting near a trans woman named Alex (who you don't know). She is wearing a t-shirt and a skirt and is 20 years old. A 30-year-old woman named Lou (who you also don't know) is sitting opposite Alex. She tries to engage Alex in conversation but it is clear Alex doesn't know the woman so she ignores her. Later, you see Lou using her iPhone to secretly take a photo up Alex's skirt.

Alex doesn't know Lou has done this. After reflecting on the scenarios, participants were asked four sets of questions divided into action questions, context/intent questions, responsibility questions and gender questions (see Table 4).

Table 4: Types of focus group questions**Action questions**

Participants were asked if, and if so what, they would say or do in the given situation. This included whether they would say anything to the perpetrator, victim and/or anyone else (Scenario 2 only), what would make them more likely to say or do something, and what would be the biggest barrier to and the biggest facilitator of them saying or doing something.

Content/intent questions

For scenarios 1(a) and 1(b) participants were asked if the intent of the perpetrator and/or victim would affect whether they would say or do anything, and if their opinion would change if the perpetrator had asked for the image of the victim. For scenarios 2(a) and 2(b) participants were asked if they would feel differently about the situation if the perpetrator and victim knew one another, if they personally knew the victim, and if they personally knew the perpetrator.

Responsibility questions

Participants were asked if the behaviour depicted in the scenario should be a crime, what would be an appropriate punishment if it was a crime, and the extent to which the victim was responsible for what happened. For scenarios 1(a) and 1(b) participants were also asked if the victim had broken the law, and if it should be a crime to send unsolicited naked images. For scenarios 2(a) and 2(b) participants were also asked if the perpetrator had broken the law, and if the victim should report the behaviour to the police or someone else.

Gender questions

Participants were asked if they would feel differently about anything relating to the situation if the perpetrator and/or victim (Scenario 1 only) were of the opposite gender. For scenarios 2(a) and 2(b) participants were asked if they would feel differently about anything relating to the situation if the perpetrator was of the opposite gender.

The final stage considered avenues of support; in particular, the ways in which information and resources around IBA could be improved and delivered. This included discussing the suitability of the messages contained in one past and one recent IBA education/awareness campaign. Participants were first asked if they were aware of any avenues of support available to perpetrators or victims of IBA. Following this, they were shown two online resources (videos) and asked to identify the key message of each and whether it was an effective message. The first resource was a campaign called *Megan's Story* (available on YouTube; ThinkUKnow 2020), which was developed to educate school students about sexting. The second, *Your Stories*, was developed by eSafety as part of its TV and digital campaign to raise awareness and prevent IBA (available on the eSafety website: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/image-based-abuse/stories>). The final questions asked participants to imagine they were responsible for creating an education/awareness resource for bystanders, and to consider the form it would take, how long it would be, whom it would target, and how the message would be communicated. Not all questions were asked or asked in this specific order, depending on time restraints and the natural direction discussions took.

Participants were provided with a list of support services (eSafety, 1800RESPECT, Lifeline, Men’s Referral Service, QLife and Kids Helpline) on the explanatory statement they received by email. They were also encouraged to email the project address if they had questions. The consent forms included an option for participants to receive a ‘follow-up’ email from the research team in the week after the focus group. If this was selected, an email was sent the week after the focus group to check in on their wellbeing, and any follow-up queries were responded to. Approximately 180 of the 219 participants requested a follow-up email. No negative responses or concerns were raised during the follow-ups.

Analysis

The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by an external transcription company. The transcripts were verified, and all identifying information was removed. Participants were assigned a pseudonym based on the focus group number (eg FG1) and location attended (ie ADE, SYD, MEL, CAN), their gender, if known (ie M, F, I) and participant number (eg 1). For example, male participant 1 in the third focus group in Adelaide became FG3ADEM1, and the fourth female participant in the fourth focus group in Sydney became FG4SYDF4. The transcripts were imported into NVivo version 12 (qualitative data analysis software) and thematically analysed. Six parent codes were developed for the two scenarios, and four parent codes were developed for the prevention and education discussion. These are provided in Table 5.

Table 5: Parent codes
Parent codes for the two scenarios
1. Bystander action
2. Intent
3. Legal responses
4. Victim-blaming and responsibility
5. Gender
6. Culture
Parent codes for the prevention and education discussion
1. Awareness of IBA resources and support
2. Megan’s Story
3. eSafety resource
4. Education resource

Conclusion

This section has outlined the design and approach of this study. The next three sections discuss the key findings.



Survey

Introduction

This section reports on survey respondents' attitudes towards intimate image sharing, their beliefs regarding IBA laws, and their experiences of witnessing non-consensual imagery. These data are drawn from an online anonymous survey with 245 respondents from Adelaide (SA), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Vic) and Sydney (NSW). This section specifically responds to research questions one, two and four:

- (1) What attitudes, values and beliefs do Australians have regarding IBA?
- (2) What knowledge do Australians have of IBA laws?
- (4) What levels of readiness do bystanders have to take action when witnessing IBA?

It also addresses the first core aim of the study, which is to measure bystanders' capacity and willingness to engage in positive action in response to the occurrence of, or conditions contributing to, IBA.

The section begins by examining respondents' attitudes towards intimate image sharing and their beliefs regarding whether non-consensual imagery is, and should be, a crime. It then examines respondents' experiences of witnessing non-consensual imagery, and, for respondents who had witnessed IBA, their most recent experience of this. The section concludes by discussing the type of educational messaging that could assist in raising awareness of IBA, and which could empower bystanders to take action when witnessing IBA.

Attitudes towards intimate image sharing

We asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with 36 statements reflecting attitudes towards intimate image sharing. Principal components analysis identified four components that grouped together, which we labelled 'blame', 'acceptable exceptions', 'positive impact' and 'minimisation'. The blame component comprises 11 statements reflecting the view that people should not take and/or send intimate images of themselves if they do not want these images to be shared. The acceptable exceptions component comprises three statements reflecting the view that it is acceptable for people to share unsolicited intimate images they have received with others, as well as intimate images of people they have only just

met. The positive impact component comprises seven statements reflecting the view that people may benefit from intimate image sharing by having their reputation boosted and finding it a turn-on. The minimisation component comprises nine statements reflecting the view that it is not a big deal if someone shares an intimate image of another person without their permission. The six remaining statements had low loadings across all four components, or had low and similar loadings on more than one component.

Overall, respondents scored highest on the blame factor ($M=2.61$) and lowest on the minimisation factor ($M=1.36$). However, respondents generally demonstrated a low level of agreement across all four factors, with no factor average exceeding the mid-point of the scale (4 neither disagree nor agree). The means and standard deviations for attitudes towards intimate image sharing are provided in Table 6.

	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =245)	Female <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =161)	Male <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =73)	LGB+ <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =62)	Hetero <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =183)
Blame	2.61 (1.55)	2.44 (1.47) ^a	3.09 (1.66) ^a	2.31 (1.35)	2.71 (1.61)
Acceptable exceptions	2.53 (1.45)	2.35 (1.33) ^b	2.85 (1.62) ^b	2.96 (1.53) ^e	2.38 (1.39) ^e
Positive impact	2.05 (0.93)	1.97 (0.83) ^c	2.26 (1.11) ^c	2.12 (0.91)	2.03 (0.94)
Minimisation	1.36 (0.58)	1.25 (0.42) ^d	1.64 (0.80) ^d	1.37 (0.70)	1.35 (0.54)

Note: Row means sharing superscripts are significantly different ($p<0.05$). Measured via a 7-point scale ranging from '1 strongly disagree' to '7 strongly agree'. Gender comparison $n=234$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Male respondents reported significantly higher levels of agreement with the statements than female respondents across all four factors ($M=3.09$ vs $M=2.44$ for blame; $M=2.85$ vs $M=2.35$ for acceptable exceptions; $M=2.26$ vs $M=1.97$ for positive impact; and $M=1.64$ vs $M=1.25$ for minimisation). Collectively, these findings suggest that male respondents are more likely to blame victims of IBA if they have taken and/or sent intimate images of themselves previously, and to believe that it is acceptable to share unsolicited intimate images or intimate images received from strangers. Furthermore, they suggest that male respondents are more likely to believe that there are benefits associated with IBA victimisation and to minimise the impacts of IBA. LGB+ respondents reported a significantly higher level of agreement than heterosexual respondents for acceptable exceptions ($M=2.96$ vs $M=2.38$), whereas heterosexual respondents reported a higher level of agreement than LGB+ respondents for blame ($M=2.71$ vs $M=2.31$). These findings suggest that LGB+ respondents are more likely to believe that it is acceptable to share unsolicited intimate images or intimate images received from strangers, and that heterosexual respondents are more likely to blame victims of IBA if they have taken and/or sent intimate images of themselves previously.

Beliefs regarding laws

We asked respondents to indicate whether they believe that non-consensual imagery is currently a crime in their state, and more than half believed that it is a crime to upload onto a website (66.1%), take (57.6%) and/or share (51.4%) an intimate image of someone without their permission. Only 38.8 percent believed it is a crime to threaten to share an intimate image of someone (see Table 7).

Table 7: Beliefs regarding whether non-consensual imagery is currently a crime

	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall % (n) (n=245)	Female % (n) (n=161)	Male % (n) (n=73)	LGB+ % (n) (n=62)	Hetero % (n) (n=183)
Uploading	66.1% (162)	67.1% (108)	64.4% (47)	66.1% (41)	66.1% (121)
Taking	57.6% (141)	56.5% (91)	58.9% (43)	67.7% (42)	54.1% (99)
Sharing	51.4% (126)	55.3% (89)	46.6% (34)	43.5% (27)	54.1% (99)
Threatening	38.8% (95)	39.1% (63)	41.1% (30)	37.1% (23)	39.3% (72)

Note: Gender comparison $n=234$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Beliefs did not differ for male and female respondents and differed only slightly for LGB+ and heterosexual respondents. However, LGB+ respondents (67.7%) were more likely than heterosexual respondents (54.1%) to believe that taking intimate images of someone without their permission is currently a crime.

We also asked respondents to indicate whether they believe non-consensual imagery should be a crime in their state, and the average level of agreement was high across all forms (uploading, taking, sharing, threatening to share). All average levels of agreement were between the fourth and fifth points of the scale, suggesting respondents believed non-consensual imagery should 'probably' or 'definitely' be a crime (see Table 8).

Table 8: Beliefs regarding whether non-consensual imagery should be a crime					
	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =245)	Female <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =161)	Male <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =73)	LGB+ <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =62)	Hetero <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =183)
Uploading	4.82 (0.58)	4.87 (0.55) ^a	4.70 (0.62) ^a	4.83 (0.57)	4.79 (0.60)
Taking	4.64 (0.72)	4.73 (0.64) ^b	4.45 (0.83) ^b	4.66 (0.73)	4.58 (0.69)
Sharing	4.60 (0.76)	4.71 (0.68) ^c	4.36 (0.87) ^c	4.65 (0.72)	4.47 (0.86)
Threatening	4.51 (0.81)	4.57 (0.81)	4.41 (0.85)	4.49 (0.84)	4.56 (0.72)

Note: Row means sharing superscripts are significantly different ($p < 0.05$). Measured via a 5-point scale ranging from '1 definitely not' to '5 definitely'. Gender comparison $n = 234$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Although there were no gender differences in beliefs regarding whether non-consensual imagery is currently a crime, there were small but consistent gender differences in beliefs regarding whether non-consensual imagery should be a crime. Female respondents reported significantly higher levels of agreement than male respondents that it should be a crime to upload onto a website ($M = 4.87$ vs $M = 4.70$), take ($M = 4.73$ vs $M = 4.45$) and share ($M = 4.71$ vs $M = 4.36$) an intimate image of someone without their permission. Beliefs did not differ between LGB+ and heterosexual respondents.

Experiences witnessing non-consensual imagery

We asked respondents whether they had ever witnessed, or become aware of, someone engaging in non-consensual imagery, and 64.1 percent reported they had. Respondents were most likely to report having witnessed the sharing of an intimate image of someone without that person's permission (46.1%), followed by the threatening to share an intimate image of someone (29.4%) and the uploading onto a website of an intimate image of someone without that person's permission (28.6%). These data are provided in Table 9.

Table 9: Experiences witnessing non-consensual imagery					
	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall % (n) (n=245)	Female % (n) (n=161)	Male % (n) (n=73)	LGB+ % (n) (n=62)	Hetero % (n) (n=183)
Sharing	46.1% (113)	44.1% (71)	50.7% (37)	45.2% (28)	46.4% (85)
Threatening	29.4% (72)	31.7% (51)	23.3% (17)	33.9% (21)	27.9% (51)
Uploading	28.6% (70)	29.2% (47)	28.8% (21)	33.9% (21)	26.8% (49)
Downblousing	22.9% (56)	26.1% (42)	15.1% (11)	17.7% (11)	24.6% (45)
Taking	20.0% (49)	21.1% (34)	17.8% (13)	16.1% (10)	21.3% (39)
Upskirting	16.7% (41)	18.6% (30)	12.3% (9)	19.4% (12)	15.8% (29)
Other	13.9% (34)	14.3% (23)	12.3% (9)	19.4% (12)	12.0% (22)
Any	64.1% (157)	63.4% (102)	67.1% (49)	72.6% (45)	61.2% (112)

Note: Gender comparison $n=234$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Experiences were similar for female and male respondents, as well as for LGB+ and heterosexual respondents. However, female respondents (26.1%) were more likely than male respondents (15.1%) to have witnessed someone photographing or videoing another person's cleavage without that person's permission (ie downblousing), and LGB+ respondents (72.6%) were more likely than heterosexual respondents (61.2%) to have witnessed 'any' form of non-consensual imagery.

Most recent experience witnessing non-consensual imagery

Although 157 respondents (64.1%) reported that they had witnessed one or more of seven unwanted behaviours (each of which represented a different form of non-consensual imagery), only 149 respondents reported that they had witnessed non-consensual imagery when asked to classify their most recent experience. Further investigation revealed that 26 respondents reported witnessing one or more of the unwanted behaviours, but never having witnessed any non-consensual imagery; and 18 respondents reported witnessing non-consensual imagery, but never having witnessed one or more of the unwanted behaviours. These disparities suggest that some respondents did not identify the behaviours they witnessed as a form of non-consensual imagery.

Of the 149 respondents, 54.4 percent ($n=81$) classified their experience of witnessing unwanted behaviours as sharing only, 15.4 percent ($n=23$) classified it as two forms of non-consensual imagery (ie taking and sharing, taking and threatening, or sharing and threatening), 12.1 percent ($n=18$) classified it as taking only, 12.1 percent ($n=18$) classified it as threatening only, and 6.0 percent ($n=9$) classified it as all three forms of non-consensual imagery (ie taking, sharing and threatening).

Gender comparisons revealed that 67.1 percent of witnessed non-consensual imagery was reported by female respondents and 28.2 percent was reported by male respondents, that 71.1 percent involved male perpetrators and 20.8 percent involved female perpetrators, and that 73.2 percent involved female victims and 24.8 percent involved male victims (see Table 10). This supports recent research across Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom that identifies men as more likely to be perpetrators of IBA (Henry et al. 2021; Powell et al. 2020, 2019).

Table 10: Genders of those involved in most recent experience

	Respondent % (n) (n=149)	Perpetrator % (n) (n=149)	Victim % (n) (n=149)
Female	67.1% (100)	20.8% (31)	73.2% (109)
Male	28.2% (42)	71.1% (106)	24.8% (37)
Other or don't know	4.7% (7)	8.0% (12)	2.0% (3)

Relationship comparisons for the most recent experience of witnessing non-consensual imagery (shown in Table 11) revealed that the respondent and perpetrator were similarly likely to be strangers (29.5%), family members or friends (25.5%), or acquaintances (24.2%). In contrast, the respondent and victim were most likely to be strangers (47.0%), and the perpetrator and victim were most likely to be intimate partners or former intimate partners (43.6%).

Table 11: Relationships between those involved in most recent experience

	Respondent to perpetrator % (n)	Respondent to victim % (n)	Perpetrator to victim % (n)
Intimate or former intimate partners	12.1% (18)	1.3% (2)	43.6% (65)
Family member or friend	25.5% (38)	20.8% (31)	10.1% (15)
Acquaintance	24.2% (36)	18.1% (27)	12.8% (19)
Stranger	29.5% (44)	47.0% (70)	25.5% (38)
Other or don't know	8.7% (13)	12.8% (19)	8.1% (12)

We asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with nine statements regarding their feelings in relation to their most recent experience witnessing non-consensual imagery. Respondents were 'somewhat' likely to feel uncomfortable ($M=4.07$) or to feel sorry for the victim ($M=4.06$). They were also 'not at all' or 'not really' likely to be okay with it ($M=1.69$) or find it funny ($M=1.45$). The means and standard deviations are provided in Table 12.

Table 12: Feelings about most recent experience

	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =149)	Female <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =100)	Male <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =42)	LGB+ <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =47)	Hetero <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =102)
Uncomfortable	4.07 (1.18)	4.24 (1.05) ^a	3.52 (1.38) ^a	4.29 (1.11)	3.98 (1.21)
Sorry for the victim	4.06 (1.14)	4.14 (1.09)	3.83 (1.27)	3.95 (1.17)	4.10 (1.13)
Bad about it	3.92 (1.19)	4.02 (1.15)	3.60 (1.33)	3.93 (1.26)	3.92 (1.18)
Annoyed	3.85 (1.23)	4.13 (1.06) ^b	3.10 (1.36) ^b	3.83 (1.19)	3.85 (1.25)
Angry at the perpetrator	3.80 (1.33)	4.06 (1.17) ^c	3.07 (1.49) ^c	3.93 (1.39)	3.75 (1.31)
Not bothered by it	2.08 (1.26)	2.01 (1.28)	2.36 (1.21)	2.02 (1.39)	2.10 (1.21)
Other	1.78 (1.36)	1.76 (1.35)	1.90 (1.48)	1.43 (1.13)	1.92 (1.43)
Okay with it	1.69 (1.03)	1.46 (0.81) ^d	2.33 (1.26) ^d	1.79 (1.16)	1.65 (0.97)
Funny	1.45 (0.93)	1.37 (0.85) ^e	1.71 (1.13) ^e	1.45 (0.83)	1.45 (0.97)

Note: Row means sharing superscripts are significantly different ($p < 0.05$). Measured via a 5-point scale ranging from '1 not at all' to '5 very much'. Gender comparison $n = 142$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Female respondents reported significantly higher levels of agreement than male respondents with the statements that they felt uncomfortable ($M = 4.24$ vs $M = 3.52$), annoyed ($M = 4.13$ vs $M = 3.10$) and angry at the perpetrator ($M = 4.06$ vs $M = 3.07$). Female respondents also reported higher levels of agreement with the statements that they felt sorry for the victim ($M = 4.14$ vs $M = 3.83$) and bad about the situation ($M = 4.02$ vs $M = 3.60$). In contrast, male respondents reported significantly higher levels of agreement than female respondents with the statements that they felt okay with it ($M = 2.33$ vs $M = 1.46$) and found it funny ($M = 1.71$ vs $M = 1.37$). Male respondents also reported higher levels of agreement with the statement that they were not bothered by it ($M = 2.36$ vs $M = 2.01$). This supports research conducted across Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom in which male victims of IBA were more likely to label their experience as 'funny', while female victims were more likely to feel fearful and to report negative emotions (Henry et al. 2021; Powell et al. 2020).

Feelings about their most recent experience were generally similar for LGB+ and heterosexual respondents. However, LGB+ respondents ($M = 4.29$) reported higher levels of agreement than heterosexual respondents ($M = 3.98$) with the statement that they felt uncomfortable, and heterosexual respondents ($M = 1.92$) reported higher levels of agreement than LGB+ respondents ($M = 1.43$) with the statement that they had 'other' feelings. Other feelings included fear for the victim's safety and concern that other people could also be victimised.

Bystander intervention

When we asked respondents whether they said or did anything in response to their most recent experience witnessing non-consensual imagery, 45.6 percent ($n=68$) indicated that they did. Male respondents (52.4%, $n=22$) were more likely than female respondents (42.0%, $n=42$), and heterosexual respondents (49.5%, $n=53$) were more likely than LGB+ respondents (35.7%, $n=15$), to have said or done something. This contrasts with research that has found women are more likely than men to intervene when witnessing sexual violence (Banyard 2008; Burn 2009).

Respondents who said or did something

The 68 respondents who indicated they did say or do something took a range of actions (see Table 13). Respondents were most likely to confront the perpetrator (55.9%); tell a friend, family member or colleague (50.0%); distance themselves from the perpetrator (47.1%); and/or support the victim (47.1%). Respondents were least likely to flag the content with the provider or platform, report the perpetrator to the police or other official (14.7%), threaten the perpetrator or take physical action (13.2%), and/or report the perpetrator to the provider or platform (7.4%).

Table 13: Actions taken

	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall % (n) ($n=68$)	Female % (n) ($n=42$)	Male % (n) ($n=22$)	LGB+ % (n) ($n=15$)	Hetero % (n) ($n=53$)
Confronted perpetrator	55.9% (38)	47.6% (20)	68.2% (15)	60.0% (9)	54.7% (29)
Told friend, family member or colleague	50.0% (34)	54.8% (23)	40.9% (9)	60.0% (9)	47.2% (25)
Distanced self from perpetrator	47.1% (32)	50.0% (21)	40.9% (9)	46.7% (7)	47.2% (25)
Supported victim	47.1% (32)	52.4% (22)	36.4% (8)	53.3% (8)	45.3% (24)
Informed victim	26.5% (18)	26.2% (11)	27.3% (6)	26.7% (4)	26.4% (14)
Confronted perpetrator with another person	25.0% (17)	26.2% (11)	22.7% (5)	13.3% (2)	28.3% (15)
Other	16.2% (11)	11.9% (5)	27.3% (6)	6.7% (1)	18.9% (10)
Flagged content with provider or platform	14.7% (10)	16.7% (7)	13.6% (3)	13.3% (2)	15.1% (8)
Reported perpetrator to police or other official	14.7% (10)	14.3% (6)	13.6% (3)	6.7% (1)	17.0% (9)
Threatened perpetrator or took physical action	13.2% (9)	11.9% (5)	13.6% (3)	6.7% (1)	15.8% (9)
Reported perpetrator to provider or platform	7.4% (5)	7.1% (3)	9.1% (2)	0.0% (0)	9.4% (5)

Note: Items were not mutually exclusive. Gender comparison $n=64$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to tell a friend, family member or colleague (54.8% vs 40.9%) and to support the victim (52.4% vs 36.4%). Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to confront the perpetrator (68.2% vs 47.6%) and to take some 'other' action (27.3% vs 11.9%). Other actions included advising the victim what to do next and warning other people about the perpetrator's behaviour. Although LGB+ respondents were more likely than heterosexual respondents to tell a friend, family member or colleague (60.0% vs 47.2%), heterosexual respondents were more likely than LGB+ respondents to confront the perpetrator with another person (28.3% vs 13.3%), take some other action (18.9% vs 6.7%), threaten the perpetrator or take physical action (15.8% vs 6.7%), report the perpetrator to the police or other official (17.0% vs 6.7%), and report the perpetrator to the provider or an online platform (9.4% vs 0.0%).

Confronting the perpetrator with another person was considered the most helpful action taken, with 76.5 percent ($n=13$) of respondents who took this action indicating it was helpful (see Table 14). Supporting the victim (75.0%, $n=24$), other actions (72.7%, $n=8$), informing the victim (72.2%, $n=13$), reporting the perpetrator to the police or other official (70.0%, $n=7$), and distancing themselves from the perpetrator (68.8%, $n=22$) were also considered helpful by more than two-thirds of the respondents who took these actions. Reporting the perpetrator to the provider or an online platform (60.0%, $n=3$), threatening the perpetrator or taking physical action (55.6%, $n=5$), confronting the perpetrator (52.6%, $n=20$) and telling a friend, family member or colleague (44.1%, $n=15$) were considered helpful by about half of respondents who took these actions. Finally, flagging the content with the provider or online platform was considered the least helpful, with 20 percent ($n=2$) of respondents who took this action indicating it was useful.

Table 14: Helpfulness of actions taken

	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall % (n)	Female % (n)	Male % (n)	LGB+ % (n)	Hetero % (n)
Confronted perpetrator with another person	76.5% (13)	81.8% (9)	80.0% (4)	80.0% (12)	50.0% (1)
Supported victim	75.0% (24)	81.8% (18)	62.5% (5)	75.0% (18)	75.0% (6)
Other	72.7% (8)	40.0% (2)	100% (6)	70.0% (7)	100.0% (1)
Informed victim	72.2% (13)	72.7% (8)	66.7% (4)	64.3% (9)	100.0% (4)
Reported perpetrator to police or other official	70.0% (7)	66.7% (4)	66.7% (2)	66.7% (6)	100.0% (1)
Distanced self from perpetrator	68.8% (22)	66.7% (14)	77.8% (7)	72.0% (18)	57.1% (4)
Reported perpetrator to provider or platform	60.0% (3)	33.3% (1)	100.0% (2)	60.0% (3)	–
Threatened perpetrator or took physical action	55.6% (5)	20.0% (1)	100.0% (3)	50.0% (4)	100.0% (1)
Confronted perpetrator	52.6% (20)	50.0% (10)	60.0% (9)	51.7% (15)	55.6% (5)
Told friend, family member or colleague	44.1% (15)	43.5% (10)	55.6% (5)	48.0% (12)	33.3% (3)
Flagged content with provider or platform	20.0% (2)	28.6% (2)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (1)	50.0% (1)

Note: Items were not mutually exclusive. Item % and *n* values relate to subsamples of respondents who took these actions, and represent the percentage and number of these respondents who found them helpful as opposed to unhelpful. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

We also asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with seven statements regarding why they decided to take action (see Table 15). Respondents were most likely to indicate they acted because non-consensual imagery is wrong ($M=4.79$), because taking action was the right thing to do ($M=4.65$) and because non-consensual imagery is illegal ($M=4.26$). Respondents were least likely to take action because of previous personal experience of victimisation ($M=2.13$) and/or for some 'other' reason ($M=1.49$). A prominent 'other' reason was to stop the behaviour.

Table 15: Reasons for taking action

	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =68)	Female <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =42)	Male <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =22)	LGB+ <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =15)	Hetero <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =53)
It is wrong	4.79 (0.64)	4.83 (0.66)	4.68 (0.65)	4.87 (0.52)	4.77 (0.69)
Right thing to do	4.65 (0.69)	4.67 (0.75)	4.64 (0.58)	4.67 (0.49)	4.64 (0.74)
It is illegal	4.26 (1.12)	4.36 (1.12)	4.05 (1.17)	4.27 (0.88)	4.26 (1.18)
Relationship with victim	3.10 (1.54)	3.31 (1.60)	2.95 (1.40)	3.20 (1.47)	3.08 (1.57)
Relationship with perpetrator	2.25 (1.42)	1.86 (1.32) ^a	3.09 (1.34) ^a	2.40 (1.24)	2.21 (1.47)
Previous experience of IBA victimisation	2.13 (1.54)	2.24 (1.59)	1.91 (1.41)	2.93 (1.83)	1.91 (1.38)
Other	1.49 (1.07)	1.52 (1.17)	1.50 (0.96)	1.13 (0.52) ^b	1.58 (1.17) ^b

Note: Row means sharing superscripts are significantly different ($p < 0.05$). Measured via a 5-point scale ranging from '1 not at all' to '5 very much'. Gender comparison $n = 64$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Male respondents ($M = 3.09$) reported significantly higher levels of agreement than female respondents ($M = 1.86$) with the statement they took action because of their relationship with the perpetrator. In contrast, female respondents ($M = 4.83$) reported higher levels of agreement than male respondents ($M = 4.68$) with the statement they took action because non-consensual imagery is wrong, non-consensual imagery is illegal ($M = 4.36$ vs $M = 4.05$), and because of previous personal experience of victimisation ($M = 2.24$ vs $M = 1.91$). LGB+ respondents ($M = 2.93$) reported higher levels of agreement than heterosexual respondents ($M = 1.91$) with the statement they took action because of previous personal experience of victimisation, whereas heterosexual respondents ($M = 1.58$) reported significantly higher levels of agreement than LGB+ respondents ($M = 1.13$) with the statement they took action because of some other reason.

We also asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with nine statements regarding their concerns about what could occur following their actions in response to witnessing IBA victimisation (see Table 16). Respondents were 'neutral' or 'not really' concerned that other people might have harassed the victim ($M = 2.75$) and/or that the perpetrator might have verbally abused the victim ($M = 2.68$). Respondents were 'not at all' or 'not really' concerned that they might have been physically abused by the perpetrator ($M = 1.79$) or to have some 'other' concern ($M = 1.37$). 'Other' concerns included distress and not being believed.

Table 16: Concerns arising from taking action					
	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =68)	Female <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =42)	Male <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =22)	LGB+ <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =15)	Hetero <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =53)
Others harass victim	2.75 (1.66)	2.98 (1.60)	2.45 (1.71)	2.67 (1.88)	2.77 (1.61)
Perpetrator verbally abuse victim	2.68 (1.67)	3.17 (1.68) ^a	2.05 (1.40) ^a	2.00 (1.60)	2.87 (1.65)
Relationship with perpetrator	2.24 (1.48)	2.17 (1.43)	2.45 (1.60)	2.40 (1.59)	2.19 (1.46)
Perpetrator physically abuse victim	2.21 (1.45)	2.48 (1.52)	1.86 (1.32)	2.00 (1.41)	2.26 (1.47)
Verbal abuse	2.13 (1.37)	2.36 (1.41)	1.73 (1.24)	1.93 (1.49)	2.19 (1.35)
Harassment	2.03 (1.35)	2.12 (1.42)	1.95 (1.33)	1.87 (1.30)	2.08 (1.37)
Relationship with victim	2.03 (1.38)	2.10 (1.43)	2.09 (1.32)	2.00 (1.60)	2.04 (1.33)
Physical abuse	1.79 (1.23)	1.90 (1.32)	1.64 (1.14)	1.67 (1.23)	1.83 (1.24)
Other	1.37 (1.01)	1.24 (0.79)	1.68 (1.36)	1.27 (1.03)	1.40 (1.01)

Note: Row means sharing superscripts are significantly different ($p < 0.05$). Measured via a 5-point scale ranging from '1 not at all' to '5 very much'. Gender comparison $n=64$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Female respondents ($M=3.17$) reported a significantly higher level of agreement than male respondents ($M=2.05$) with the statement that they were concerned the perpetrator might have verbally abused the victim as a result of their taking action. Female respondents also reported a higher level of agreement with the statements they were concerned that other people might have harassed the victim ($M=2.98$ vs $M=2.45$), that the perpetrator might have physically abused the victim ($M=2.48$ vs $M=1.86$) and/or that they (the respondent) might have been verbally abused by the perpetrator ($M=2.36$ vs $M=1.73$). In contrast, male respondents reported a higher level of agreement than female respondents with the statement that they had other concerns ($M=1.68$ vs $M=1.24$). Heterosexual respondents reported a higher level of agreement than LGB+ respondents with the statement that they were concerned that the perpetrator might have verbally abused the victim ($M=2.87$ vs $M=2.00$).

Finally, we asked respondents who said or did something about the support they received (actual), or believed that they would receive (perceived), from four categories of people. Respondents were most likely to receive actual or perceived support from friends (85.3%) and least likely to receive actual or perceived support from other people (32.4%; see Table 17).

Table 17: Actual or perceived support provided to those who took action

	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall % (n) (n=68)	Female % (n) (n=42)	Male % (n) (n=22)	LGB+ % (n) (n=15)	Hetero % (n) (n=53)
Friends	85.3% (58)	85.7% (36)	81.8% (18)	93.3% (14)	83.0% (44)
Victim	61.8% (42)	66.7% (28)	54.5% (12)	73.3% (11)	58.5% (31)
Family	54.4% (37)	57.1% (24)	45.5% (10)	46.7% (7)	56.6% (30)
Other people	32.4% (22)	28.6% (12)	40.9% (9)	40.0% (6)	30.2% (16)

Note: Gender comparison $n=64$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to receive actual support or to perceive that they would receive support from the victim (66.7% vs 54.5%) and family members (57.1% vs 45.5%), whereas male respondents (40.9%) were more likely than female respondents (28.6%) to receive actual support or to perceive that they would receive support from other people. LGB+ respondents were more likely than heterosexual respondents to receive actual support or to perceive that they would receive support from friends (93.3% vs 83.0%) and the victim (73.3% vs 58.5%).

Respondents who did not say or do anything

We asked the 81 respondents who reported that they did not say or do anything to indicate their level of agreement with 13 statements as to why they decided not to take action (see Table 18). Respondents were most likely to indicate that they did not act because they did not feel comfortable ($M=3.42$) and/or did not feel that it was their responsibility ($M=3.22$). Respondents were least likely to indicate that they did not act due to concerns that the perpetrator might physically abuse the victim ($M=1.78$), because of some 'other' reason ($M=1.77$), because of their relationship with the victim ($M=1.73$) and/or because they (the respondent) might be physically abused by the perpetrator ($M=1.68$).

Female respondents reported significantly higher levels of agreement than male respondents with the statement they did not take action because they did not feel comfortable ($M=3.60$ vs $M=2.75$) and/or due to concerns that other people might harass the victim ($M=2.29$ vs $M=1.50$). Female respondents also reported higher levels of agreement than male respondents with the statement they did not take action because they did not feel it was their responsibility ($M=3.34$ vs $M=3.00$), and due to concerns the perpetrator might verbally abuse the victim ($M=2.14$ vs $M=1.50$), they (the respondent) might be harassed by the perpetrator ($M=1.93$ vs $M=1.65$) and the perpetrator might physically abuse the victim ($M=1.79$ vs $M=1.55$). In contrast, male respondents reported significantly higher levels of agreement than female respondents with the statement they did not take action because they believed the situation was harmless ($M=3.30$ vs $M=2.16$) and they were not concerned about the situation ($M=3.55$ vs $M=2.07$). Male respondents ($M=2.35$) also reported higher levels of agreement than female

respondents ($M=1.98$) with the statement that they did not take action due to concerns that their relationship with the perpetrator would be negatively affected. Reasons were generally similar for LGB+ and heterosexual respondents. However, heterosexual respondents reported higher levels of agreement than LGB+ respondents with the statement that they did not take action because they did not feel that it was their responsibility ($M=3.39$ vs $M=2.89$) and because they (the respondent) might be verbally abused by the perpetrator ($M=2.24$ vs $M=1.85$; see Table 18).

Table 18: Reasons for not taking action

	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =81)	Female <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =58)	Male <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =20)	LGB+ <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =27)	Hetero <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> =54)
Not comfortable	3.43 (1.40)	3.60 (1.28) ^a	2.75 (1.55) ^a	3.52 (1.53)	3.39 (1.34)
Not responsible	3.22 (1.40)	3.34 (1.33)	3.00 (1.56)	2.89 (1.58)	3.39 (1.28)
Harmless	2.46 (1.42)	2.16 (1.31) ^b	3.30 (1.46) ^b	2.48 (1.58)	2.44 (1.34)
Not concerned	2.42 (1.37)	2.07 (1.20) ^c	3.55 (1.32) ^c	2.59 (1.58)	2.33 (1.26)
Relationship with perpetrator	2.14 (1.44)	1.98 (1.34)	2.35 (1.50)	2.00 (1.59)	2.20 (1.37)
Others harass victim	2.12 (1.40)	2.29 (1.48) ^d	1.50 (1.00) ^d	2.11 (1.53)	2.13 (1.35)
Verbal abuse	2.11 (1.36)	2.16 (1.40)	1.85 (1.27)	1.85 (1.43)	2.24 (1.32)
Perpetrator verbally abuse victim	2.00 (1.37)	2.14 (1.43)	1.50 (1.05)	2.07 (1.59)	1.96 (1.26)
Harassment	1.90 (1.27)	1.93 (1.28)	1.65 (1.14)	1.96 (1.48)	1.87 (1.17)
Perpetrator physically abuse victim	1.78 (1.26)	1.79 (1.24)	1.55 (1.15)	1.93 (1.39)	1.70 (1.19)
Other	1.77 (1.30)	1.79 (1.31)	1.60 (1.14)	1.74 (1.35)	1.78 (1.28)
Relationship with victim	1.73 (1.15)	1.64 (1.04)	1.85 (1.39)	1.85 (1.38)	1.67 (1.03)
Physical abuse	1.68 (1.11)	1.67 (1.08)	1.50 (1.00)	1.67 (1.21)	1.69 (1.06)

Note: Row means sharing superscripts are significantly different ($p<0.05$). Measured via a 5-point scale ranging from '1 not at all' to '5 very much'. Gender comparison $n=78$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Finally, we asked respondents who did not say or do something about the support they believed that they would have received if they had taken action. Respondents were most likely to believe that they would have received support from friends (66.7%) and were least likely to believe that they would have received support from other people (24.7%; see Table 19). This maps onto the data on real and perceived support among respondents who did say or do something.

As shown in Table 19, female respondents (46.6%) were more likely than male respondents (30.0%) to believe they would have received support from the victim. LGB+ respondents were more likely than heterosexual respondents to believe they would have received support from friends (77.8% vs 61.1%) and other people (33.3% vs 20.4%). In contrast, heterosexual respondents were more likely than LGB+ respondents to believe they would have received support from family members (64.8% vs 44.4%) and the victim (44.4% vs 33.3%).

Table 19: Perceived support among those who did not take action

	Total	Gender		Sexuality	
	Overall % (n) (n=81)	Female % (n) (n=58)	Male % (n) (n=20)	LGB+ % (n) (n=27)	Hetero % (n) (n=54)
Friends	66.7% (54)	67.2% (39)	60.0% (12)	77.8% (21)	61.1% (33)
Family	58.0% (47)	56.9% (33)	65.0% (13)	44.4% (12)	64.8% (35)
Victim	40.7% (33)	46.6% (27)	30.0% (6)	33.3% (9)	44.4% (24)
Other people	24.7% (20)	24.1% (14)	30.0% (6)	33.3% (9)	20.4% (11)

Note: Gender comparison $n=78$. Trans and gender-diverse respondents were excluded from gender comparisons due to insufficient data

Conclusion

This section presented the quantitative findings from a survey of 245 Australian respondents. Overall, we found respondents were more likely to blame victims of IBA and to believe there are instances when IBA may be acceptable than to believe there are benefits associated with IBA or to minimise the impacts of IBA. However, support for these beliefs was generally low across the entire sample. Nevertheless, male respondents were more likely than female respondents to blame victims of IBA and to believe that there are instances when IBA may be acceptable. Male respondents were also more likely than female respondents to believe that there are benefits associated with IBA victimisation and to minimise its impacts.

Regarding knowledge of IBA laws, a small majority of respondents believed it is currently a crime to upload, take and share intimate images of someone without their permission, and only a minority believed it is currently a crime to threaten to non-consensually share intimate images of someone. Nevertheless, there was general agreement that all forms of non-consensual imagery should be a crime.

About two-thirds of respondents reported having witnessed non-consensual imagery, three-quarters of which involved male perpetrators and female victims. Perpetrators and victims were most likely to be intimate or former intimate partners. When asked how they felt about their most recent experience witnessing non-consensual imagery, respondents were most likely to report feeling uncomfortable and sorry for the victim, and least likely to report feeling okay with it or finding it funny.

In terms of readiness to take action when witnessing IBA, just under half of respondents who witnessed non-consensual imagery said or did something. These respondents were most likely to confront the perpetrator or tell a friend, family member or colleague. Very few respondents reported the perpetrator to the police or other official, or reported the perpetrator to the provider or platform on which the abuse occurred. The main reasons for respondents taking action were that they considered IBA to be wrong, they felt that taking action was the right thing to do, and they considered IBA to be illegal. The main concerns of these respondents related to not taking action were victim-centred: that others would harass the victim and that the perpetrator would verbally abuse the victim. Among those who acted, the highest level of actual or perceived support they received was from friends, followed by support from the victim and then from family, with the lowest actual or perceived support being from other people.

The main reasons for respondents not taking action were that they did not feel comfortable or did not feel it was their responsibility. In considering whether they would have support if, or when, they took action, respondents had, or were most likely to believe that they would have, the support of their friends, followed by support from their family, the victim and other people. However, a low proportion of respondents perceived that they would have support from other people. Perceived support among those who did not take action was lower than the levels of support actually received by respondents who did take action. For instance, 85.3 percent of those who took action reported that they received actual support or perceived that they would receive support from friends, while 66.7 percent of those who did not take action perceived that they would receive support from friends if they did take action. Such findings support the results of previous research, which has found discrepancies between perceived and actual norms around bystander intervention (Brown & Messman-Moore 2010; Fabiano et al. 2003; Kroshus 2018). The next two sections present the findings from the focus groups.



Focus group findings

Introduction

In this section, we explore the biggest barriers to and facilitators of bystander intervention in IBA incidents, drawing from 35 one-hour focus groups with 219 participants in Adelaide (SA), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Vic) and Sydney (NSW). This section specifically responds to research questions two and four:

- (2) What knowledge do Australians have of IBA laws?
- (4) What levels of readiness do bystanders have to take action when witnessing IBA?

It also addresses the three core aims of the study:

- Measure bystanders' capacity and willingness to engage in positive action in response to the occurrence of, or conditions contributing to, IBA.
- Identify the enablers of, and barriers to, engaging with IBA law (where it exists) as a form of remedy.
- Identify the enablers of, and barriers to, bystander intervention, and to building cultures that encourage bystanders to take action, where safe to do so.

The section begins by discussing the biggest barriers to and facilitators of intervention based on the two hypothetical scenarios presented to participants, as outlined in the *Methodology* section. We then discuss three key themes: (1) gender identity; (2) victim-blaming; and (3) knowledge of IBA laws. The section concludes by discussing the importance of remedies and responses that extend beyond criminal law to prevent, address and respond to IBA, and the value of educational messaging for bystander intervention.

Barriers

Focus group participants were presented with hypothetical scenarios and asked a series of questions about the incidents. The two hypothetical scenarios (S1 and S2) detailed in Table 20 involved different contexts, behaviours and perpetrators. The first (S1) involved witnessing a friend showing an intimate image of their new partner to a friendship group. The second (S2) involved witnessing a stranger upskirting a passenger on a train. In both scenarios, the presence of ‘consent’ was unclear in that it was not certain whether the person showing or taking the photograph had the consent of their partner or the passenger. However, based on the circumstances, it could be assumed that consent was not given.

Table 20: Scenarios

Scenario 1 (S1)

Maryam (female, aged 21) has been seeing your friend Kai (male, aged 25) for about a week. Without any prior discussion, Maryam sends Kai a photo of herself completely naked. The next day, Kai shows the photo to a group of his friends (including you) during a broad discussion about sex.

*Alternate Scenario 1(b) replaced Maryam with Arjun (male, aged 25) and Kai with Sarah (female, aged 21).

Scenario 2 (S2)

You are on a train sitting near a trans woman named Alex (who you don’t know). She is wearing a t-shirt and a skirt and is 20 years old. A 30-year-old man named Lou (who you also don’t know) is sitting opposite Alex. He tries to engage Alex in conversation but it is clear she doesn’t know him so she ignores him. Later, you see Lou using his iPhone to secretly take a photo up Alex’s skirt. Alex doesn’t know Lou has done this.

* Alternate Scenario 2(b) replaced Lou with a 30-year-old female.

In both scenarios, participants identified several common barriers to intervention. Primarily, these related to the nature of the relationship between all parties (bystander, victim, perpetrator and other people present); the perceived risk of intervening; the gender of the bystander, the victim and the perpetrator; and the perceived likelihood of receiving support from other bystanders. In S1, perceptions of risk centred around the social implications of intervening, such as the reactions of both the perpetrator and the broader social group. These perceptions influenced participants’ decisions as to whether they would intervene at all, or within the group setting. In S2, there were several additional barriers identified, including ambiguity around what had occurred, the perceived feelings of the victim, and any perceived power imbalances between the perpetrator and the bystander, such as age, physicality and mental state. The gender identity of the bystander, perpetrator and victim were identified as major barriers to (and, at times, facilitators of) intervention, and this is discussed later in the section.

Nature of relationships between all parties

Participants commonly noted the ‘nature of the friendship’ (FG4ADEM2) as having an impact on whether they would say or do anything. This was particularly relevant in the context of S1, where several participants felt that if there were people in the group who were closer friends with the person showing the image, then the responsibility for intervening would shift to them:

If it was someone I wasn’t as close to, I’d probably be a bit not sure what the boundaries were within that relationship. (FG10ADEF1)

If I wasn’t as close of a friend within that broad group of friends or whatever, I feel like it would be another person who’s closer to that person—it would be their responsibility to do that [intervention]. (FG10ADEM2)

In addition to the relationship with the person showing the image, some participants noted that their relationship with the broader social group present or the ‘group dynamics’ could impact on whether they would intervene. Participants pointed to the perceived response of the group as a potential barrier to intervention. As FG5ADEM3 observed:

It’s going to be dependent on the group dynamic as well, isn’t it? So, if everyone is shocked and it seems like no-one knew what to do, or if everyone’s just in the pub and having a laugh, then it’s a bit confronting to say something.

In particular, participants felt that it would be difficult to intervene if the group was largely supportive of the person showing the image:

F1: I think if we were around a bunch of people and Sarah showed the photo and everyone else is like, ‘That’s so funny’ or I don’t know, I think that would make it harder for me to speak.

F3: Yeah, if there were a bunch of people supporting Sarah, I think it would make it harder for me to say no.

F1: Yeah, if everyone was supporting her it would make it harder for me to say, ‘No that’s not good’. (FG4ADE)

In S2, participants primarily discussed the nature of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator as impacting whether they would say or do something. In particular, participants said they might be less likely to intervene if they perceived that the victim and perpetrator knew each other or were friends. As FG3ADEF2 reflected:

If they were friends, it’s sort of like, I’m going to ruin their friendship—even though he’s already ruined it, because he took the photo. I think I’d find it a little harder to stand up to him, or even just pull her aside once she gets off the train, and be like, hey did you know he just did this? Or like, is this a thing, a friendship thing that you do?...I think I’d just find it more difficult, because she might take his side, be like, he would never do that, he’s my friend, what are you saying?

Receiving support from friends and other bystanders was also a key factor influencing whether participants would intervene. As the following participants noted:

If I'm on the train and I'm with my friends, I'll definitely say something because I know I'll have that support and they'll back me. But if you're on your own and it's just you against someone else, that's a bit more daunting. (FG5ADEF5)

If there was anyone else around in the carriage, yes. If I was by myself, I would be less inclined to step up. (FG10SYDF1)

This reliance on others for support links in with perceptions of safety and risk, which were key themes identified as potential barriers.

Perceptions of safety and risk

In line with much research on bystander intervention (Fischer et al. 2011; Hamby et al. 2016; Lodge & Frydenberg 2005), focus group participants recognised the potential cost of 'putting yourself in a position of risk' (FG1ADEM1) as a key barrier to saying or doing something in both scenarios. However, the perceived risks varied between S1 and S2, with participants in S1 primarily identifying the social risks of intervening, and participants in S2 focusing on the potential risks to personal or physical safety posed by intervening. In S1, participants were very conscious of how intervention might be perceived by their friendship group, and any negative perceptions or consequences were acknowledged as a key barrier to intervention. Participants described being 'the one that deviates from the herd' or acts like the 'black sheep' (FG2CANF2) by intervening in a group setting as a key barrier. The social risks included potentially negative reactions from the perpetrator and the broader social group. Participants felt that intervening could result in being perceived as a 'killjoy' (FG5ADEF2) or 'the morality police' (FG3ADEF1):

So, if it's in a group situation sort of, you want to—if the rest of the group all sides with him, then you feel sort of bad if you're the only one commenting. They'll all judge you a bit for that. (FG8ADEF1)

There were also some concerns raised that intervening could lead to a relationship breakdown between the bystander and perpetrator, which could reduce participants' likelihood of saying anything. For some, intervention would require overcoming the fear of conflict with the perpetrator:

...it would be fear of creating some sort of conflict...It could destroy the relationship between me and the person. And ultimately, if I were to say something it would have to be overcoming that. (FG8ADEF2)

As the below exchange in FG7SYD demonstrates, some participants' concerns about this would impede their willingness to intervene. In this circumstance, participants perceived that as long as the image was not shared any further, then no harm had been done:

F3: Yeah, and also, you don't want to break that, like, relationship with Kai and stuff because friendship, you've probably been like [friends for] years now. You don't want to sacrifice it.

F2: To go behind his back, yeah.

F5: Yeah. It seems like a harmless situation at this point if it doesn't go on any further.

Physical safety was not a dominant concern in S1, as participants noted there would be a greater level of comfort from being in a group situation surrounded by friends. However, as the following comments reflect, some participants raised the issue of safety in relation to being surrounded by a group of the perpetrator's friends, rather than their own:

...if I felt threatened or couldn't guarantee my safety for confronting Kai or even Kai's friends, if it was in a situation that I didn't feel [was safe]—then that would be a big barrier. (FG7MELF3)

Meanwhile, personal or physical safety was repeatedly identified in S2. Many participants described needing to assess their own safety before intervening:

Even though you want to help her, you also don't want to put yourself at more risk. (FG2ADEF3)

I'm not going to put myself at risk. (FG7ADEF1)

Participants were concerned that intervening could result in the perpetrator becoming physically violent. These feelings were strongly influenced by participants' perceptions of the perpetrator. For example, where the perpetrator was perceived to be physically intimidating:

I would say safety, I don't know if they're going to attack me...I don't know if they're going to bash me...You just don't know, so I'd be a bit worried about that. (FG1MELF1)

Perceptions of intimidation were largely linked to Lou's physical appearance:

It would depend on how big and threatening Lou looked. (FG2CNM1)

If Lou was six foot four and built like an ox, that would definitely be a barrier. (FG10MELM2)

The perpetrator's age also factored into preparedness to intervene. Participants made comments such as Lou's age 'would make me almost nervous, someone older than you' (FG10ADEF4) and 'the fact that he's 30, and I'm 19, that's pretty scary' (FG3ADEF2). Others also pointed to age as an indicator of authority and a clear power imbalance that would be difficult to overcome:

I know it shouldn't be a thing, but the fact that Lou is so much older than me—like, I really quite struggle with standing up to authority, and people being my senior is a big thing for me: oh, they're older, they're the boss of you. I don't think I could have the strength to go up to a 30-year-old woman and say, 'Hey, what you're doing is wrong', as a 20-year-old girl. If it was a 12-year-old boy, I would be like, get out of here, because you're his senior. (FG6ADEF4)

It's scary and also just like, if I say anything, she's just going to be like, 'Who do you think you are? You are this young girl, you cannot tell me at all what to do'. (FG6ADEF3)

Facilitators

Common facilitators identified included the nature of the relationship between the bystander, perpetrator and victim, and having the support of others.

Nature of relationships between all parties

In a similar way to how the nature of the relationship between the bystander and perpetrator in S1 created a barrier for intervention, participants identified this as a potential facilitator, with participants more likely to intervene if the perpetrator was a close friend. One of the reasons identified for this was a perceived reduction in risk to personal safety or likelihood of a negative outcome. As F1FG7SYD explained, the level of friendship could potentially act as a buffer against any negative consequences:

Friends are friends. You can say whatever and life is good. Like, there's that level of, like, trust or, like, unconditional love, friendship, a level, makes sense. With an acquaintance, it's kind of like you're kind of expendable. I don't need you in my friendship circle. You can just go. So, there's the difference between the two.

Even when participants agreed they would take action to intervene, the relationship dynamics were discussed as impacting on the type of action taken. For example, as FG2SYDF2 explained:

So, you make a call depending on your relationship with that person. So, I would say you will react differently if a random stranger will show it to you. You know, maybe you'll become hyper, or maybe you will take an action, but when it comes to your friend—so, as everyone is saying again and again, it all comes down to what type of relationship you have with that person. So, your call will differ on that relationship. I mean, say it can be upfront, it can be, I'm there to help you, that's the shoulder, or I can maybe guide you if you are really distressed, maybe we both can go together and if you want some sort of counselling. So, it will all depend on that relationship dynamics.

In S1, the attitude of the perpetrator was also identified as a key facilitator of intervention, particularly where they were making fun of the victim or overtly sexualising them:

If she started pointing at certain parts of the photo and laughing at it or making comments about it. If [Arjun], I don't know, if they were both aware that it was supposed to be private photos or something and she showed it anyway, I would say, 'I don't think you're supposed to show me that. I don't want to see it'. (FG4ADEF1)

The context of how he talks about it. If it was—yeah, it's kind of hard to explain, but if he was sort of bragging or making it clear that, 'Ha, I've got this', in a certain way, over perhaps just a discussion of the image, I'd say something. (FG8ADEM1)

Even where participants believed they would intervene, the type of intervention proposed differed according to the perpetrator's tone and attitude:

If she's sort of like, maybe distressed about it or kind of in shock, like, 'Someone sent me this, I don't want to deal with it', she's sort of already upset about everything, I'd be a lot more gentle with my words and saying, 'Hey, maybe don't show that. But I definitely understand that's not okay to be receiving things like that and that's not cool'. But if she's sort of like laughing about it, like, 'Ha! Look at this dick pic! What a joke!' it's easier for me to be like, 'Hey, hey. Calm down. That's not really cool. Just keep it to yourself'. It changes the way I [would] say it to her. (FG2ADEF2)

Empathy for the victim and the relationship between the bystander and the victim were also key factors in both scenarios. As FG3ADEF2 expressed:

I feel like if that was you yourself, you wouldn't want someone else sharing it, especially not to their friends, because then they've seen it, they've got a copy, they can spread it, and it's just like a never-ending cycle of who has the photo, and where it's going. So, kind of empathy with Arjun, and his privacy.

In S2, participants were asked whether their preparedness to intervene would change if Alex (the victim) was their friend. Overwhelmingly, this question was responded to in the affirmative, with all participants indicating that it would increase their preparedness to intervene, whether that involved telling Alex it occurred or confronting the perpetrator. This was largely because participants described feeling the need to defend their friend if the friend was being victimised. Further, participants felt that knowing the victim would remove any uncertainty or ambiguity over whether the victim would want another person to intervene:

I'd be more willing to, like, approach him [Lou] if it was, like, my friend that I was trying to defend and then if she didn't want me to, like, because then I could—because I would know her, I'd know how she would react and then I'd be, like, how much do you want me to be involved? Like, do you want me to call the police for you, and stuff like that. (FG2SYDF1)

Having the support of other bystanders

Having support or potential backup from other bystanders, whether other passengers or a friend on the train, or being amongst a friendship group, was also a key facilitator:

If it's a pretty busy train and there's other people noticing as well, so it's not just me, that would give me more incentive to actually do something. (FG10ADEM1)

If it was on a public train as well and others heard the conversation, I would hope that people with good morals would interject as well. (FG3MELF1)

Some participants acknowledged they would intervene only if they knew other people on the train:

If I had a friend with me I feel like I'd be more inclined to say something because I'm, like, I've got backup, it's okay. But if I was by myself I tend to mind my own business a bit more. So as much as I want to do something, I feel like I wouldn't have the courage to do it. (FG10SYDF1)

Another participant said that having other people present on the train would give them 'the perspective that it might be safer...to say something to Lou' (FG1SYDF3). Further, participants described how having other people present would act as a deterrent for the perpetrator in continuing their behaviour or escalating the situation:

I would say to someone else, if I was alone, another passenger, I'd be, like, 'Hey, this guy's being real[ly] creepy. Can you help me to intervene?' Because then it's kind of like the psychological thing for him, where there's more than one person confronting him, so then he feels uncomfortable and stops. (FG2ADEM2)

Others suggested that having other people present would also be useful, as they may be compelled or feel pressure to intervene if another bystander took the first action:

How many people are on the train? If it's a very quiet train, there's more risk that that person could snap or do something bad. But if it's packed, I think there would be pressure from other people who would help to stand up against them. (FG8SYDF2)

Gender identity

Throughout the discussions, we sought to test whether gender (of bystanders, victims and perpetrators) was a consideration in intervention and what role it may play in a person's willingness or capacity to intervene. To achieve this, across the scenarios we altered the gender of the perpetrator: 18 focus groups had S1 with a male perpetrator and female victim, and S2 with a male perpetrator and trans woman victim; 17 focus groups had S1 with a female perpetrator and male victim, and S2 with a female perpetrator and trans woman victim. At the end of the discussion of each scenario, participants were also asked whether their opinions would change if the gender of the perpetrator had been different.

When explicitly asked this question, participants consistently stated it would not change their response:

Q: Would your reaction, whether you would or wouldn't intervene, do anything, be different if Lou was a woman?

M1: So, woman to woman?

Q: Yes, so a woman is taking a photo of Alex?

F1: No.

F2: No.

M1: I don't think it's any different.

F3: It's going to be the same.

F4: Same. It should be the same. (FG5ADE)

Q: Would you feel differently, or act differently, if Lou had been a woman taking the photo?

F2: No.

M1: No, it's the same.

F1: Still creepy.

F3: Yes, wrong either way. It doesn't matter on your gender.

M2: Yeah. (FG4MEL)

However, in the broader discussions of the hypothetical scenarios, gender was evidently a key barrier to and facilitator of intervention. As a starting point, gender was a factor that influenced whether participants would feel comfortable or safe intervening, particularly where the participant was female and the perpetrator in S2 (Lou) was male. As FG2SYDF2 explained, 'if it was a man, I would not say a damn thing'. Others observed that 'you'd be more worried about Lou's reaction if it was a man' (FG10ADEF2), compared to 'if she's, like, a little woman, I wouldn't be so scared' (FG9ADEF3). These participants explained that they would have greater

safety concerns if the perpetrator was male. In one focus group, there was universal agreement among the female participants that if the perpetrator was male, it would prevent them from saying or doing anything:

F1: I think, for women, I don't want to generalise here though, but there are different issues with physical safety.

F3: Yeah. We're more vulnerable, no matter what you say.

F1: I certainly carry with me a fear of confronting men, because being a woman in a public space, and trying to take up any kind of public space, and to challenge men, can be incredibly risky. (FG3ADE)

A number of female participants who were prepared to intervene when Lou was a female perpetrator ultimately reflected that they would be less likely to do so if Lou was male. As FG5ADEF2 observed, she would feel 'way more comfortable' intervening if the perpetrator was female. This was further demonstrated in the following excerpt from FG4MEL:

F3: You'd feel—you'd be able to approach a female easier.

F1: Yeah, I feel like it would still be a bit more of a mouthy situation than a physical confrontation.

F6: It's less worrying [than if Lou was male].

F1: There's no, like, fear for safety, as such.

Participants changing their preparedness to intervene because of the perpetrator's gender was primarily related to the ability of bystanders to maintain their personal safety and the social conditioning not to put themselves at risk with men:

F1: It doesn't change my feelings about it, but going on that safety and confrontation sort of line, then I'm probably not going to say, excuse me. I would definitely be trying to quickly think of other ways to do it.

F3: Yeah...If there was a security person around, I would go to them rather than confront Lou as a man, for safety [reasons]. (FG3CAN)

This supports research on bystander intervention in both offline and cyberbullying incidents, which has revealed that bystanders react differently according to their own gender (Bastiaensens et al. 2014; Obermann 2011; Oh & Hazler 2009; Pöyhönen, Juvonen & Salmivalli 2012). In our study, male participants who were prepared to intervene generally said that they would do so regardless of whether Lou was male or female. However, several of the male participants said that if Lou was a woman, it would make them less likely to intervene or would alter the action they would take. As FG5ADEM5 observed, 'If it's a woman taking a photograph of another woman, I wouldn't intervene'. FG7SYDM2 similarly stated, 'I really don't think I would step in there. If it looked like it was a more aggressive dude taking a photo of a woman, I would be more concerned. But, like, two chicks, I'm, like, do whatever'. This shift in relation to intervention based on gender reflects two main gendered assumptions. The first is that it

would be more challenging for a male to intervene effectively if the act was committed by a woman (based on a lack of confidence in having the appropriate skills to intervene), either because the intervention may become physical or that it was not the man's place to intervene:

I would feel more confident confronting a guy, personally, because I know I can—I feel more confident being physical, if it came to that. (FG9ADEM3)

Second, there was disbelief among some participants that this type of offending behaviour would be committed by a woman, against another woman, leading to a sense of ambiguity around the nature of the incident. As FG3CANM1 described:

I'd be shocked, probably, because I would just not think it would be [done by a woman]. It's a thing that creepy men do...That would be really strange if it was a case of that and I just do not like to think about it [a woman committing that act].

This view was not restricted to male participants, with several female participants also expressing 'shock' over the switching of the perpetrator's gender in S2:

I would be totally thrown if, I mean, I would be thrown anyway if I saw that happen, but I would be totally thrown if I saw a woman doing that. Yeah, I think, even more so if it was a woman I'd be like, 'What kinky town have we stopped off here?' (FG10MELF1)

It's a woman? That's the other thing that I was shocked at, that it was actually a female taking photographs. I'm used to men [doing this], but not women. (FG8SYDF4)

One group (FG1MEL) reflected on how the gender of the perpetrator might affect the support they would receive from other bystanders:

M1: I feel you'd get more support if there were people on the train, if it was a male taking a photo of a female.

M2: Yeah.

M1: You know, asking for that help from bystanders or eyeballing people, I think you'd get a lot more support if it was a male taking the picture of a female.

M2: Yeah, correct.

Gender was also a barrier to intervention in S1; however, this was connected to both the gender make-up of the focus group, as well as the gender of the perpetrator. As FG7ADEF2 reflected:

I think it would depend on who the group is. If it was a group of female friends, you might be a little bit more inclined to pipe up and say something. Whereas if it's a bunch of guys going, 'Ha ha, look at this!' you feel a bit awkward.

FG9ADEM1 observed that ‘if it’s a group of really kind of, like, alpha males, I would definitely not say anything because I myself would feel threatened’. The perceived difference in how male versus female friends would react to being shown a non-consensual nude image was a strong theme to emerge across all focus groups. The following exchanges show how female participants felt that a group of male friends might perceive them to be overreacting if they intervened:

If it had been a group of mostly male friends and I’d been there, you run the risk of them going, if it’s all guys and you’re the only girl, and you say something, you could be getting a bit of backlash about, you’re a woman, stop being so sensitive. (FG6MELF5)

I think if it was all men, there’s that sense of, ‘Can’t you take a joke?’ that kind of thing that men sometimes give women when they have an issue with sexist behaviour. It’s like, ‘We’re just kidding. Lighten up’. So, I think if it was more men, I’d probably feel a bit less confident [to intervene] than if it was all women. (FG6SYDF2)

Gendered perceptions also played into participant responses in S1 around the perceived differing motivations informing the perpetrator’s decision to non-consensually show an intimate image to their friends. Overwhelmingly, when the perpetrator was male, participants felt that the motivation was to sexualise the victim, to boost the perpetrator’s standing among their peers, and to ‘brag’ about their dating conquest. When the perpetrator was female, the motivation was considered as being either to laugh at or humiliate the victim, or to indicate the perpetrator’s distress at receiving the image (reflecting assumptions about men sending unsolicited ‘dick pics’):

I mean, I think what I’m saying in terms of just context here, is this—whether it’s done in a kind of a gloaty or braggy way, like we assume in this case with Kai showing the picture of Maryam that it’s almost gloating or bragging. But if the reverse was true, it would be more disgust or distress. (FG4CANM1)

In general, a man showing that is just because they love to have fun and showing off the girl in this photo like that and, ‘Look at this porn I got sent’. That’s normal for a guy. But if a girl is doing that, it feels like she maybe—I don’t know whether she’s doing it under some distress. (FG9SYDF5)

Several participants also reflected on the ‘vulnerability of being a woman’ (FG1ADEF1), in terms of either receiving an unsolicited nude image from a male or being the subject of that image, as a factor that would influence their decision-making:

M1: I see it more as maybe it’s more of a bragging thing or something if a guy’s sharing the image. I tend to see the woman as the more vulnerable person in that scenario.

F1: Yeah, I think you can’t ignore the wider context of culture and things, and I think the woman probably, even if she sent it unsolicited herself...I think she probably is more vulnerable having her naked photo out there than a man is. (FG4ADEF2)

Similar findings have emerged in the small number of studies that have explored attitudes towards non-consensual image sharing (Bothamley & Tully 2018; Hudson, Fetro & Ogletree 2014; Pina, Holland & James 2017; Scott & Gavin 2018). In Scott and Gavin's (2018) study, for example, when presented with two hypothetical scenarios—one with a male perpetrator and female victim and one with a female perpetrator and male victim—participants perceived the scenario involving the male perpetrator and female victim to be more serious.

Across the focus groups, very few participants believed that a male would share a non-consensual image because they were distressed or seeking support, or that a female would be bragging or sexualising the person in the image. This contrasts with recent research with perpetrators of IBA which shows little difference in motivations between genders. In their study of perpetration, of the 1,070 respondents who reported engaging in IBA, Henry et al. (2021) found no significant difference between males and females for the most common motivation of it being 'fun' or 'sexy'. Similarly, despite focus group participants in our study suggesting males would be motivated by impressing their friendship group or sexualising the person in the image, and females would be motivated by distress, Henry et al. (2021) found no significant difference between male and female perpetrators with regard to wanting to impress friends.

In S2, the victim's (Alex's) gender identity was also a barrier to or facilitator of intervention. Some participants felt they would be more likely to confront the perpetrator because of the challenges and discrimination generally experienced by trans women:

I'd do something. My instinct would be to give a loud dressing down of his behaviour, because it's fucking disgusting, and particularly just the dynamics of the genders and stuff, and all the oppression against trans women in particular would just make me think, that is so not on. You'd try to intervene in that situation to stop him doing that immediately, without much other thought going into it. (FG3CANM1)

Particularly being transgender too, because they cop enough harassment, enough stigma, enough everything—that's so completely inappropriate. If I saw anything like that, I'd call it out...It's just wrong. (FG1SYDM1)

In addition, there was a common concern raised around the motivation for this abuse being fuelled by discrimination: 'I think another part of the issue is that she is transgender. So, knowing a lot of people who are trans who have experienced a lot of this stuff, it's not so much just sexual, it's also pointing out that someone is different' (FG4SYDF2). For others, reflecting on the marginalisation and discrimination Alex may have experienced in her life was a reason not to tell the victim about what had happened:

The thing is, I'm reading that Alex is a trans woman. As a member of that community, as a minority, I feel like she already experiences—or would be struggling enough. So, I would want to spare her that extra burden [of telling her it happened]. (FG3SYDF2)

Participants often responded that they would prefer to find a way to tell Alex, as opposed to confronting Lou, and to ask 'her how she wanted it handled' (FG8MELF2). Participants described wanting to tell Alex in order to allow Alex to make a decision about intervention:

A trans person can already feel incredibly visible, and may not want to be seen in the way of you yelling that this creeper is taking a photo of them. So, I might try to get to them first, and just say, because it's great being an ally, but it's not always the case that other people want you to speak for them. So, to just say, 'I have observed this, would you like me to do anything?' I will do something, I will do what you want though. Because...you have no idea, you don't know what they might want done. (FG3ADEF1)

You might not want to create a bigger scene. It's up to Alex, because it's quite humiliating already, and being a trans woman would be difficult anyway. So, I don't know, she might not necessarily want more attention drawn to her. (FG8MELF2)

Alex's gender identity was also recognised as a key reason why participants would not contact the police, or encourage Alex to contact the police, unless she wanted to. In the latter case, several participants (as reflected by the following comment) noted that they would 'definitely go with Alex to the police, because sending a trans woman alone to the police is potentially dangerous' (FG10MELM1). Others expanded on this view, stating that 'police can be pretty violent against trans people and wouldn't necessarily believe her...The police might be more likely to harass [her]' (FG10SYDM2). FG3CANM1 similarly commented on this potential discrimination:

I would not tell a police officer or a ticket inspector or something, but that's mainly based on my opinion about them being awful people that abuse lots of minorities, in particular trans people. So, I would think that getting them involved wouldn't be something I would be [up] for. I think the decision's up to Alex, but it wouldn't be something that I would jump to do.

These comments are reflective of much of the literature on trans people's experiences with police (Alliance for a Safe & Diverse DC 2008; Berman & Robinson 2010; Grant et al. 2011; Israel et al. 2013; Miles-Johnson 2016). For example, Langenderfer-Magruder et al. (2016) found that transgender people were significantly less likely to report experiences of intimate partner violence to police than cisgender persons, due to doubt that they would be treated fairly or taken seriously. Fear and mistrust of police have also been identified as key factors that have an impact on trans and gender-diverse people's likelihood to report to police (Campbell & Raja 1999; Silver & Miller 2004; Warner 2007). Serpe and Nadal's (2017) study of 266 participants ($n=66$ cisgender male, $n=147$ cisgender female, $n=53$ transgender) found that transgender people reported less comfort interacting with police; higher levels of police victimisation, discrimination and bias; and higher negative perceptions of police than cisgender men and cisgender women.

Linked to discrimination and police effectiveness is the notion of victim-blaming. In the next section, we explore how victim-blaming influenced participant perceptions and preparedness to intervene.

Victim-blaming

Recent research has found that victims may be blamed when IBA occurs, which serves to minimise the harms and experiences of victims (Burns 2015; Flynn & Henry 2019; Henry et al. 2021, 2018; Marwick 2017). To explore blame in the context of bystander intervention, we asked participants to what extent they perceived that the victims in both scenarios were responsible for the actions of the perpetrators. In S1, mixed views emerged. Some participants spoke of Arjun or Maryam (depending on which version of scenario they received) having some blame or responsibility for their intimate image being shared, because they sent the image unsolicited in the first place. This ranged from participants identifying the victim as being significantly responsible ('I'd say 80% responsible for the image being shared'—FG1ADEF2) to being partially responsible ('you must know a little bit that if you send this image there could be consequences and this could be one of them. So yeah, there might be some partial blame'—FG8ADEF1). Similar views are evident in the following excerpts from FG7SYD:

F3: I would say, like, she's partly to blame. Obviously, it's not her fault that Kai shared it, but if you only have known him for a week, you probably don't know everything about him. You never know what's going to happen, especially with, like, something so sensitive about your body...You should expect that coming, that's what I think.

F5: I also feel she's to blame. Like, she maybe almost wants it to be shared. To share the photo to someone who's almost a stranger, maybe she wants it to be seen by everyone.

Some participants made explicit statements blaming the victim:

I'd make a judgment about her. I'd consider her a tramp and I'd probably say to the guy [perpetrator] that if you've shown it, she deserves it. (FG7MELM1)

Wake up to yourself, lass. This is going out into that cyberspace. You're not doing yourself any favours. (FG4CANF2)

This view became more prevalent when participants reflected on the unsolicited nature of the image, whereby there was a view that it alleviated some of the responsibility of the person showing the image, because there was no consent in the initial sending or receiving of the image. As FG5SYDF2 described, 'If both people have acted without consent, it kind of cancels out'. A similar view was expressed by participants in FG2CAN:

F1: If he sends an unsolicited image, he's basically lost control of it and it's up to her [the perpetrator] what she wants to do with it. If she wants to show it to friends, that's fine as far as I'm concerned.

M1: If he sent it to her unsolicited, he's lost control of it. It's not up to him to say what happens unless he's attached conditions to sending it out.

While the murky nature of consent contributed to participants blaming the victim in S1, the more obvious absence of consent in S2 contributed to participants attributing no blame to the victim. In FG1MEL, the difference in the degree of victim-blaming between the two scenarios was observed by some participants, albeit framed more around the impact on the victims, as opposed to the responsibility they placed on the victims:

M1: The difference is this one [S2] was non-consensual, where the other one [S1], he chose to send it.

M2: Some of these, when you take the photos for yourself, but if you share it with someone else, then yeah, it's a different thing. Because there's already a developed relationship.

F1: Yeah, I get what you mean. This is someone on a train taking a picture up your skirt, it's not like you took it and gave it to them.

F2: You're on a train, you're supposed to be going from one place to another, not having this sort of shit. The other one [S1] was people who knew each other had sent a photo. I just find this one is a lot more problematic.

M1: This one [S2] can be more mentally traumatic.

M2: Yeah.

In discussing S1, references to losing control and taking a risk were also common. Even if the participant clarified that the victim was not to blame, there was a sense that their behaviour was inappropriate or risky:

Yeah, you're opening yourself up to risk. So, you're responsible for opening yourself up to that risk. (FG1CANF1)

I'm quite uncomfortable with calling, or using the word 'responsible' for her. I think what she did is very risky, but I wouldn't go as far as to say she's responsible for what he did with it, because that was still his choice and he could've shared it or deleted it or done whatever he wanted with it. (FG7SYDF4)

Factors such as how long the victim had known the person before sending them an intimate image and the victim understanding the potential consequences of sending an image to another person were also identified as increasing their responsibility for it being shared:

What was she thinking? Who sends someone a photo of themselves naked, like having literally known each other for a week? (FG10ADEF2)

Look, people really shouldn't be sending texts of themselves naked after only knowing someone a week. And you're really opening yourself up to ridicule if you do that. (FG8MELM1)

As demonstrated in FG3MELF2's comment below, some focus group participants expressed their view that both Arjun and Sarah had equal levels of blame:

I think the responsibility should go to Arjun and Sarah equally because both have the responsibility—because Arjun is the person who shared it first, then Sarah shared it next. So, I think both bears [sic] the responsibility.

Some participants held opposing views, arguing that all responsibility lay with the perpetrator. As FG7MELF1 stated, 'It's completely on the person that shares it, not on the sender'. Similar views were shared in FG3SYD:

F1: He's [the victim is] not at all responsible.

F2: In terms of sharing, I don't think he is responsible for Sarah's actions.

M1: Yeah, because she's broken boundaries—massive boundaries. So, whatever happens to her is on her from that point forward.

Others reflected on the policing of people's bodies as problematic, reflecting much of the narrative in existing research on image sharing (Albury & Crawford 2012; Burns 2015; Crofts et al. 2015; Flynn & Henry 2021; Henry et al. 2021; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2018; McGlynn & Rackley 2017; Powell, Flynn & Henry 2019). As FG8ADEM1 stated, 'It's her body, her image, she owns it. She chose to share it with him, no-one else'.

When the same question around responsibility or blame was asked for S2, all participants agreed Alex had 'zero' responsibility for her victimisation. However, some participants suggested they would encourage Alex to dress 'more appropriately' in public. For example, FG2ADEF1 claimed, 'I'd probably make her aware that it was possible to take a photo up her skirt. Like, if he can do it, then anyone else can do it. I'd say, "Maybe sit with your legs crossed"' . FG6MELF4 stated, 'I'd probably tell Alex to fix her skirt, or just move her to a different area of the train'. FG10MELM2 drew on his own experience observing women on public transport and said:

In the summertime, I've actually said to a couple of girls... 'You need to be aware that men are standing near you for a reason, because they're—', I mean, it's summer. It's hot. A button has come undone and I've chosen probably to embarrass them, more because I think they need to know that they need to cover up a little bit.

These attitudes are an extension of the narrative used to frame women in response to other forms of sexual abuse, such as sexual assault, harassment and rape, and are highly problematic (Flynn 2015; Henry et al. 2021). Such narratives rely on blaming and shaming victims, particularly women, for putting themselves in risky environments (Flynn 2015). In a more positive vein, there were very few comments like this made, but this finding highlights the importance of education and messaging that challenges problematic attitudes and victim-blaming cultures within society that can legitimise or excuse abusive treatment of others and prevent victims from seeking assistance. In the context of bystander intervention, challenging victim-blaming and harm minimisation attitudes is particularly important to ensure that the reactions of bystanders do not normalise or support abusive behaviour, and thereby dissuade intervention (Voelpel, Eckhoff & Förster 2008).

Knowledge of law

Unsurprisingly, the focus group discussions mirrored the survey results, revealing some confusion over whether the act in S1 does or should constitute a crime. The main point of contention was the perceived difference in harm between showing the image to a group of friends in person and distributing the image digitally—whether by a messaging app or uploading it online. As some participants described:

M2: I don't think it's a crime, because to me the thing that distinguishes it is that she hasn't published anything or distributed anything. I think that's a pretty clear divide between where you need a criminal response.

F2: I think it's in a private forum, she's not profiting from it. I don't see it as really, like she hasn't even asked for the picture. I don't really see it as being a crime. (FG1ADE)

Because it's a closed group, the friends are close and it's a closed group. If she uploaded it online, it would have a different aspect of that where it would be shared among millions, so it would be something [worse]. It would have the face of a crime. (FG3MELF2)

Others focused on the intent of the person showing the image as a factor that would make it more (or less) likely to be a crime. As FG6ADEF3 claimed, 'I think if your girlfriend sends you a nude and you break up and you send it to everyone, that's definitely a crime, because that's wrong'.

For some participants, the key issue was evidence, and the difficulty of proving that the image was shown, versus distributing and publishing the image digitally:

Showing is hard to, it's more hearsay, it's like, he did this, and then she did that, and then I saw it from there, and it's like, well, where's all the evidence? So, it would be really hard to prove. (FG3ADEF2)

Some participants were firmly of the view that distributing the image should be an offence, describing distributing and showing people in person as 'two different things' (FG10MELM1) and distributing as 'the next step up' (FG1MELF1). Others focused on the harm caused to the victim as the key factor influencing whether it is or should be considered a crime:

I mean, if it was something like digitally sharing it, then you've got kind of more grounds to go on, then I think that should definitely be illegal. Showing it is not as detrimental because those people, that group, can't then go on to disseminate it. (FG8ADEM2)

FG2CANM1 expressed a similar view, ‘I certainly don’t think it should be something that is criminalised, until it reaches a higher threshold of causing someone distress’. In FG4MEL, participants reflected on the harm to the victim in relation to why distributing the image was ‘worse’ than showing the image, and therefore that the former should be criminalised, because of the persistence of the harm:

F2: If she shares it [online], it will be there forever. And, he will know, and she will know, and other people will know. And, you can’t really take it out.

F1: Yeah, I think something with that digital footprint—it can never get taken down. Whereas, like, me being like this [holds up phone]—like, yes, it’s on my phone. But, it’s, like, a quick thing...

F2: It’s in my memory, but it’s just my memory.

F1: Sarah [the perpetrator] is the only one that has possession of that photo.

F3: You can’t really do much damage to the person’s image. Whereas, when it’s online, people can store photos and use it against people in the future as well.

After participants reflected on whether the act currently constituted an offence, they were asked whether they thought it should be an offence. The following participant observed that the reason people debated whether it should be a crime was due to the normalised nature of sharing images. This participant believed that the presence or absence of consent was a factor determining whether the act should be a crime:

I think it should be a crime if there’s no consent. Why people would question it should be a crime is because sharing of photos is so normalised. And for me, it’s like you can’t take someone to someone’s bedroom door and let them spy on your girlfriend, in the same way you can’t show them things that she would consider private. So, the lack of consent for me is what sort of pushes it into a criminal area. (FG8SYDF2)

A similar view was presented by participants in FG1SYD, who stated:

F2: I think it should be [a crime], especially if Maryam’s sent something and it was supposed to be just between those two, and it shows something that’s quite explicit, there’s other ramifications for her as well. So, if he’s breached that trust, it should be something that is illegal.

F1: Yeah, I agree. I think it should be illegal, if he didn’t have consent to show [it].

While some participants felt that it should be a crime, the blurred distinction between showing and distributing the image was again a key factor shaping views:

Yeah, I don’t think it should be illegal, because also at the same time, you have the issue of other people sending them I suppose, and I think it shouldn’t—I think if someone publicises the image, if they put it online, that’s a completely different story. But if they show you. If they keep it on their phone, I think it’s very different showing them. But I don’t agree with it. I mean, I don’t think it’s morally right. (FG4CANF2)

Some participants felt criminalising the act would send a message to the community that such behaviour is not tolerated, but that, ultimately, it should be on the lower spectrum of offending behaviour:

It should be one of those things that can be, could be a crime kind of thing. I mean it's like, technically, yes, but in many, many cases it should be treated as a bit trivial.
(FG4ADEM1)

Others described criminalising the act as 'kind of dramatic' (FG4ADEF1) and 'a bit extreme' (FG4SYDF1). While some participants recognised the harm and questioned the 'morality' of showing the image, they felt it shouldn't be against the law. As FG1CANF1 described, 'It's morally wrong, but maybe not criminally wrong...just ethically wrong'. Another claimed that the victim loses ownership of the image once it is sent and, therefore, it should not be an offence to show it to others with or without the person's consent:

It shouldn't be breaking the law, because if someone gives me an apple, it's then my apple. And what I do with that apple is my decision. But the fact that in a digital world, someone gives you a picture, if they've given it to you like a gift, you can do what you want with it. (FG4CANM1)

The murkiness around victim responsibility and blame appeared to influence perceptions of the need to criminalise (or not) IBA behaviours. In particular, the demonstrated absence of consent in S2 versus S1 led to broader consensus around it being a criminal act. Indeed, in discussions of S2, most participants agreed the act was a crime and all felt that it should be a crime:

Q: Do you think that Lou has broken the law?

F1: Yes.

F2: Yes.

F3: Of course. (FG3MEL)

Q: Do you think that Lou has broken the law?

M1: Yes.

M2: Yes, I think he has. Yes.

F3: Yes.

Q: And do you think it should be a crime for him to have done this?

All: Yes. (FG6SYD)

While participants felt that the act of upskirting was an offence and should be treated as such, there were some concerns raised about the effectiveness of the police in responding to this type of crime, again reflective of previous research in this field (Bond & Tyrrell 2021; Flynn & Henry 2019; Henry Flynn & Powell 2018). In FG1ADE, for example, the following comments were made:

M1: I'm a bit sceptical that the police would do anything, myself.

M2: You think it's that bad? You think the police would do nothing?

M1: I'm a bit sceptical, and I guess that reflects me. I would say [to Alex], you may well report it, but I suspect it wouldn't go anywhere.

M2: And that weighs into what I said about not wanting to take agency away from Alex. Like, I especially don't want to subject them to something which is going to be really ineffective. The police say that they take this seriously, and you do hear about people getting arrested for this, but yeah.

F1: I don't think I've ever heard of someone getting arrested for taking a photo up someone's skirt. I feel like Crime Stoppers might be more effective. I feel like the police wouldn't respond effectively if you dialled 000, because it's not a life-threatening thing.

Others similarly felt that police would not take the crime seriously:

I can imagine some police might just go, 'Oh really? We've got way more important crimes to solve and deal with than that'. The perception of this type of incident may not be as serious as it should be...It's hard enough to report a rape, let alone someone taking a photo up your skirt, so why would you bother? (FG10ADE2)

FG9SYDF1 said, 'The police wouldn't take action against her [the perpetrator]. They'd just be like, "Thanks", and not do anything about it'. Another also described feeling 'fairly cynical' about the police's response (FG4ADEM1).

Some participants felt the police would take the matter seriously, and that if Alex did not report it, there may be a risk of other people experiencing similar offending from the perpetrator. As FG1CANM1 explained, 'This could've been reported five times before on the train and they've never caught the person and this report helps them get him'. Participants in FG1SYD similarly stated:

F1: I'd recommend she report it, for the benefit of other people I guess.

M1: Make a stand because it's wrong on every level.

F2: It starts off with that sort of thing, and then next thing you know they're creeping into somebody's house.

F1: It's her choice to report it, but I'd encourage her to do it.

While recognising the importance of reporting such an offence, it was acknowledged by many that the difficulties of the court process may be a reason why Alex would not want to report it, and why they may not recommend reporting it:

Yeah, I'd be very reluctant to make any recommendations to her...It would be probably very tough on Alex. She'd have to give evidence in court and she might not be prepared to do that. And so it's really up to her to decide what to do about it. (FG2CANF1)

This further highlights the importance of having alternative avenues of support and justice available for victims which are not reliant on the criminal law. The law can play an important role in sending a clear message to the community that IBA is wrong, and provides a mechanism for holding perpetrators accountable, deterring future offending and enabling victims to seek justice. However, legal responses must be introduced in combination with different non-legal options and education and prevention messaging in order to be effective and provide avenues for justice beyond the legal realm (Flynn & Henry 2019; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a).

Several participants said they would want to inform police of the situation without involving Alex. Some of these felt that by not involving Alex they could protect her from potential emotional distress:

I think in that situation I'd confront Lou immediately and probably not involve Alex. Like, if I could confront Lou and get her to delete the photo I'd probably never tell Alex it happened. Whereas if Lou didn't react and wouldn't delete the photo, yeah, I'm not sure if I'd tell Alex or not, but I'd probably go to the authorities after that. (FG8ADEF1)

Others similarly indicated that they would involve the police regardless of Alex's wishes. However, their focus was on taking punitive measures against the perpetrator:

You have to do something. Of course, if I saw something like this I would report if I saw some policeman near or someone near, of course. Doesn't matter what Alex thinks about it. It's about that other guy. (FG2MELF2)

Conclusion

This section presented the qualitative findings from focus groups with 219 participants. Overall, we found that bystander intervention was affected by perceptions of safety and the risk of intervening, gender (that of the perpetrator, bystander and victim), perceptions of how the intervention would be perceived (by the perpetrator and other bystanders), who the perpetrator was (ie the relationships between the perpetrator and victim, between the perpetrator and bystander, and between the bystander and victim, as well as the age, physicality and mental state of the perpetrator), and the presence of other bystanders. In this regard, both Latané and Darley's (1970) and Piliavin et al.'s (1981) psychological process models framing bystander decision-making and preparedness to intervene were useful in understanding participant responses, as there were clear crossovers with their findings around the diffusion of responsibility, evaluation apprehension and social influence, as well as cost-benefit assessments of intervention. However, there were some clear deviations, particularly in S2, where more bystanders being present increased the preparedness and likelihood of participants intervening.

This section explored three key themes: gender identity, victim-blaming and knowledge of the law. While there was some awareness among the groups of problematic or somewhat stereotypical attitudes around gender identity and victim-blaming, there remained some attitudes or misconceptions that are likely to have an impact on bystander preparedness to intervene and the type of action taken. This was particularly apparent for S1, where participants attributed a level of responsibility to the victim for their image being shared with others. This is concerning given that victim-blaming may act as a deterrent to intervention among bystanders, but also that such public scrutiny and the internalisation of victim-blame may act as a barrier to reporting IBA (Weiss 2010). Likewise, inaccurate or limited knowledge of the law and available support options appears to influence bystander preparedness to intervene and the type of action taken. It is therefore important that misconceptions are addressed through educational messaging that supports positive and safe bystander intervention. The importance of this is explored in the following section, *Bystander resources*.



Bystander resources

Introduction

In this section, we report on focus group participants' awareness of supports that are available for victims of IBA and of strategies for bystander intervention. The specific focus is on education and prevention resources, including past and current Australian campaigns. The section specifically responds to research questions three and five:

- (3) What knowledge do Australians have of available remedies for IBA?
- (5) How can we improve understandings of IBA, laws and other avenues of support, thereby contributing towards preventing IBA?

It also addresses the third core aim of the study in terms of building cultures that encourage bystanders to take action, where safe to do so.

The section begins by exploring the focus group participants' awareness of eSafety generally, and specifically as a resource for IBA. The section then discusses participants' perspectives on two campaigns (one current, one past) related to IBA to explore the effectiveness of these campaigns in providing bystanders with the necessary knowledge and skills to safely intervene. The section concludes by considering the type of educational messaging that could assist in raising awareness of IBA, particularly for bystanders.

eSafety

eSafety is Australia's main body for providing online safety programs and resources on digital abuse. Since October 2017, people experiencing IBA have been able to report their victimisation to eSafety through an online portal, which can then assist in having the images taken down. eSafety is also responsible for administering a complaints and objections system, which includes a civil penalties scheme. Despite eSafety having provided a comprehensive service to victims who have had their images taken, shared or threatened to be shared without their consent since 2017, there was limited knowledge of this service among participants:

‘I know there is support, although I’m not sure what it’s called’ (FG5SYDM1). Commonly, when imagining themselves in one of the two hypothetical IBA scenarios, participants felt that there should be a service, but could not identify what it was:

M1: I would assume that somewhere existed but I wouldn’t know what it was.

M2: Yeah, I wouldn’t know of anywhere specific, I think maybe you could talk to [the] victims of crime service? So, no [I don’t know] basically.

M3: I’m fairly certain that there’s one of those phone-based counselling services that deal with that, I just don’t know what it’s called.

F2: Yeah, I don’t know if those services just deal with rape, but somewhere they might have resources for stuff like that [IBA]. (FG4ADE)

Other participants pointed to a range of services such as 1800RESPECT, Beyond Blue, headspace and the Centres Against Sexual Assault, and many suggested a helpline, but could not identify anything specific to IBA:

There’s some helplines. (FG1CANF1)

Um, a hotline? (FG4MELF1)

Isn’t there a sexual assault hotline or something like that? (FG1SYDM1)

Some participants expressed an awareness about eSafety as an avenue through which to access information. For example, as FG5ADEM1 commented, ‘Well, there’s the national eSafety Commissioner. They’ve got accessible stuff on their website’. FG4SYDF4 was aware of the option of reporting IBA to eSafety: ‘the eSafety government website has some good resources about how to report online sharing and they can try to take down the images’. However, when asked, ‘Are any of you currently aware of any support mechanisms or resources that are available for someone who might be a victim of non-consensual imagery or a perpetrator looking for support to deal with that?’ most responded with ‘no’ or ‘not specifically’. Some participants suggested that, if pressed, they would seek out information online:

Well I’d go straight to a search engine, because I wouldn’t know anything off the top of my head. I really don’t know what is out there. I’m sure there would be something. I’d be just like, alright, let’s find something. (FG1MELF1)

I’d probably do a Google search. (FG2MELM3)

The absence of knowledge of where to direct victims for support, combined with a limited knowledge of the laws pertaining to IBA (as discussed in the *Survey* and *Focus group findings* sections), is problematic. It shows a gap in knowledge about IBA. It also means that the law is not acting in a way that communicates acceptable norms and standards around this type of behaviour.

IBA bystander awareness campaigns

As discussed in the *Methodology*, focus group participants were presented with two Australian awareness and prevention educational campaigns designed specifically to address IBA. The first was an educational video, *Megan's Story*, developed by ThinkUKnow Australia in 2010, and targeted at students in Years 7 to 12 (13–18 years of age). The second, a current campaign, *Your Stories*, was created in 2019 by eSafety and is available on its website, but also features on social media and public advertisements, including billboards and posters on public transport. This campaign presents a selection of scenarios depicting IBA and is targeted at all ages.

Megan's Story

ThinkUKnow Australia is 'a national program, delivering online child safety information in schools and organisations to parents, carers, teachers and students from the first year of school to Year 12' (ThinkUKnow 2020). It resulted from a partnership between the Australian Federal Police, Commonwealth Bank, Datacom, Microsoft, Neighbourhood Watch and all state and territory police forces (ThinkUKnow 2020). *Megan's Story* was intended to educate young people on the dangers of sending intimate images, with the key aim appearing to be prevention of both consensual and non-consensual sexting.

The video of approximately two minutes shows a teenage female (Megan) exiting a school bathroom, while doing up the buttons on her shirt. She has her mobile phone in her hand and is smiling. When Megan walks into the classroom, a teenage male receives a message, indicated by his phone beeping. We then hear a series of beeps from other mobile phones as it becomes clear that the image Megan sent is now being forwarded to the rest of the class. Some of the males in the class nod suggestively at Megan, while many of the females make disapproving faces or turn away from her. Megan becomes increasingly distraught. The video culminates with the teacher receiving the text message, looking at Megan and shaking his head disapprovingly. The video then cuts to a screen showing the ThinkUKnow logo and the link to the website, with an adult male voiceover stating, 'Think you know what happens to your images? Who will see them? How they will affect you? Think again'. In their analysis of this campaign, Albury and Crawford (2012: 465) critique it as a 'morality tale':

The story of a foolish young woman who 'thought she knew' (but should have known better) and was victimized as an inevitable result of her own actions. This narrative evokes the 'risk management' model of sexual violence prevention education...in which women are defined as inherently at risk of sexual violence. At the same time, they are held responsible, as self-governing subjects, for predicting, evading and/or managing this risk: a model of 'crime prevention' in which perpetrators of abuse or violence are strangely absent.

When asked what the key message of the campaign was, participants in our study similarly felt it was one of fear and shame that placed the responsibility on Megan, as opposed to the people sending the message or the bystanders who did not support Megan or intervene. As FG8ADEF2 observed, 'I think it more sought to instil a fear of taking images rather than an understanding of it. It showed, it was almost like she was on her own and everyone was against her'. Participants in FG2ADE similarly noted:

M1: The guilt was put on the victim and none of the guilt was put on the people who were doing the crime.

M5: I mean, it might work [to stop people sending images of themselves] because it might scare people, but I don't think that's necessarily a good thing because it's not scaring the right people.

The overt victim-blaming of the campaign was identified by many participants. As FG9ADEM2 proclaimed, 'That made me really uncomfortable, it's just like, wow, you're all victim-blaming her and being really like objectifying of her, which is horrible'. Participants also reflected on how the campaign not only ostracised and shamed Megan, but normalised the behaviour of the other students in sending the images to others without consent, contributing to a culture of sexual shame and victim-blaming:

It reflects the attitudes around sexual assault which is always focusing on the victim and what was the victim doing? What was the victim's behaviour? Rather than looking at the perpetrator and saying, 'How can we change the culture of the perpetrator?' So, I think it reflects a more problematic broader societal attitude towards women. (FG10ADEF1)

I think that it also encouraged boys to just think, 'Yeah, well that is just what you should expect if you send me that photo', because that's the focus of the ad. It's her fault, boys will be boys. I think in terms of the function or role that ad would play, it would probably encourage some of that kind of behaviour. Because it just adds to the same negative view of women: that you're a slut if you do something like that. All that kind of crap. (FG2CANM2)

Participants also spoke of the consequences of the victim-blaming and shaming focus within this type of campaign, both in terms of 'making it more difficult for victims to speak out and for kids like Megan to seek help' (FG8ADEF2), as well as creating an ineffective message that people, especially young people, will not absorb:

I feel like it's coming from a generation of people who have not grown up with these kind of technologies, and with these kind of potentials, and it's going, 'Don't do it, and then you won't have any of these negative repercussions'. I feel like teens are not going to take that on board. (FG1ADEF1)

This reflects much of the research on consensual sexting, which argues that an abstinence approach is not only ineffective in preventing image sharing, but it also ignores the realities of contemporary sexual expression and intimacy (Albury & Crawford 2012; Crofts et al. 2015; Flynn 2015; Henry, Powell & Flynn 2015; Powell, Flynn & Henry 2019). As FG9ADEM2 noted:

Got to wonder how effective shame is...That just clearly doesn't really work. So, people are still going to do it. I think it should kind of be acknowledged as part of modern-day sexuality.

In addition, many participants reflected on the ineffectiveness of the campaign in having no consequences for the perpetrator. As FG10ADEM2 described, 'The wider distribution of the image is what's the bigger issue'. This participant continued:

[It] barely at all focused on the guy who sent it around to everyone, or on the other people who would've distributed it too...It doesn't really show the consequences for the guy who sent it to other people, which I feel would be more effective, because in that context of school and also in the wider public, people are going to send images of themselves anyway. (FG10ADEM2)

Overall, participants noted that *Megan's Story* sent a very poor message to bystanders that there is no responsibility on them to intervene. FG1MELM1 observed, 'It tells bystanders to shame the person who took the photo'. The key message thus becomes: don't send images of yourself in the first place. This works to reinforce two key processes of the bystander effect: evaluation apprehension or audience inhibition, whereby there is a fear of being judged negatively by others when acting publicly, making it less likely that the bystander will intervene; and social influence, whereby the bystander relies on the overt reactions of others to define an ambiguous situation (Voelpel, Eckhoff & Förster 2008). The campaign therefore becomes ineffective in challenging problematic norms around IBA. As FG10MELM2 reflected:

The message that I got was basically that the bystanders were doing nothing wrong by acting very shameful towards Megan, when actually that is a very negative act and that is morally reprehensible in itself to be shaming someone who's already suffering from having their images shared non-consensually. I think it is very much pitched as, 'This is the consequences of Megan's actions that are guaranteed and kind of deserved'.

Your Stories

The second campaign was one of 13 advertisements created by eSafety in 2019. The video selected depicts three scenarios where the non-consensual sharing of intimate images (what the video refers to as IBA) has occurred. It lasts for approximately two minutes. It begins with a female voiceover defining IBA, describing its prevalence and noting that it can occur in various contexts. The scenarios presented in the campaign include: (1) a male school student showing a naked image of a female student to two friends (one female, one male) on a phone at school; (2) a man showing his friend pictures of a naked male on his phone at a pub; and (3) a workplace setting showing a male threatening a female colleague, before sending a naked image of her to their colleagues via email. As the video continues, the people depicted in the images appear in each of the scenes naked. The voiceover continues by asking:

How would you feel if this happened to you? How would you feel in front of your mum and dad? How would you feel out socially? How would you feel in front of your colleagues? What if it was your trust that had been broken? What if it was you that felt naked? What if it was your partner who shared your image without consent?

The voiceover then says, 'It is not okay to share intimate images without consent'. The video shows bystanders stepping in across the scenarios, while the voiceover explains what you can do to help: (1) the two school friends walking away disapprovingly from the person showing them the image, and the victim's parents helping her report her experience to eSafety online; (2) the bystander (male friend at the pub) walking away from the person showing the image and up to the person depicted in the image, supporting him and showing him where he can report it to eSafety on his phone; and (3) a colleague firmly speaking to the man who sent the email, directing him to leave the office. The video ends with the three victims facing the camera, putting on their clothes and saying, 'What if this happened to you? Image-based abuse is never okay'. The screen then shows the eSafety website and logo and advises people to report image-based abuse.

While participants felt the video was a bit long—this was the longest version of the campaign, with the 12 other versions available showing just the scenarios and lasting approximately 50 seconds each—there was much more support for this video than for *Megan's Story*, with participants feeling it provided a clear message that IBA perpetration is not appropriate. It was also supported for providing clear guidance on where to go for help and showing examples of positive bystander intervention:

M2: It's about somebody else making wrong decisions. It's not about the person who generated the image having made a bad choice.

F1: I also liked the facts and the resources that were present in there. I like the fact that it wasn't as much of a narrative and was more of a statement, if that makes sense. I feel like the other one [*Megan's Story*] was very much like, 'Everything will go wrong'. Whereas this one was, 'These are the resources you can access. This is how we can help'. It was very empowering.

M2: Exactly. And I think that's a very important thing, because that's often what people seem to think about it being, like it's teenage kids and what happens in high school, but they forget that it can happen with adults. For example, we saw that scenario, it was like a boss and an employee. (FG1ADE)

A theme of empowerment was highlighted by several participants who felt this campaign acknowledged the harm of the act and empowered victims to seek support, while also encouraging safe bystander intervention. As FG7SYDF4 claimed, 'It was much more empowering. It was saying, if this has happened to you, there are things that you can [do to] get support, like it showed the people getting support from their family and friends'. FG2CANF2 commented:

It had a much more positive message for the people who were bystanders, who it was shared with, that they have agency and are able to change the outcome of this...it put the agency and responsibility on each individual person, which was really nice because now it shows that you aren't like this faceless conduit, you actually have some sort of role that you can play.

Furthermore, the diversity of people experiencing IBA was positively identified as sending a message that this can happen to anyone, not just young people, and not just women. As FG1SYDM1 observed, 'I like how it covered all situations really. It covered schoolkids, LGBTQI people, it covered people at work in their 20s, 30s, 40s. Very powerful'. FG10ADEF3 stated that 'the diversity was nice, the fact that it wasn't just a young schoolgirl. It showed different places it can happen'.

The inclusion of information about the resources offered by eSafety was considered highly effective, improving the overall usefulness of the campaign. As FG8ADEF3 observed:

It really hit home as far as a bystander went because it gave you various things that you could do and various scenarios in workplaces and schools, whatever. And various ways the people, the bystanders reacted and what they did to shut that down.

By presenting a diverse range of scenarios, with a diversity of victims and perpetrators, and demonstrating effective bystander intervention techniques, including detailing where to report IBA and where to get support, the eSafety campaign helps challenge problematic norms around IBA and enhances bystander preparedness to intervene by improving people's confidence in what they can do (Latané & Darley 1970). This was reflected in the following comment from FG6SYDF2:

You've got, in the second video of the office at the end, the blonde woman saying something to their boss and maybe showing her reporting something as a bystander and being like, 'I can take action. I can see what's happened. How do I go about it?' It's good when you show the two guys and they're naked and he's showing him to write a report, 'That's what you click on', because most of us don't know. We go to a website and we might be like, 'Where's the thing? Forget it. I'll just keep this to myself'. This is something easy we can all do.

Improving bystander awareness

Participants were asked a series of questions on what information they would want to have in order to feel they had adequate knowledge of IBA as an abusive and illegal behaviour, and the skills to safely and effectively intervene. A key approach identified by participants was that any messaging should focus on the bystander, and that it needed to be readily accessible across the community, and not, as FG1ADEF2 described, ‘something you have to search for’. This participant continued:

If you’re a bystander rather than a victim, it needs to be something you’re not searching for. So, YouTube videos or Facebook posts, things like that. I think if you’re a victim you’ll search and you’ll be engaged. I think as a bystander, if you knew the information, like I’ve just seen that now, then I’d know exactly what to do. But I’d never search for it. And not in a kind of telemarketing style knock on my door, but more the kind of less intrusive Facebook posts, ‘Did you know?’ things like that. (FG1ADEF2)

This view was common among the groups: ‘It’s about putting it in people’s heads in case they’re a bystander one day’ (FG1ADEM2). Participants also highlighted the need for the messaging to be clear and ‘concise’, and ‘something everyone could see at different places’ (FG8ADEM1). As FG8ADEM1 reflected, ‘It needs to say, this is illegal, you can’t do it, it can happen, this is where you can go or where you can tell people to go if it happens’. FG6ADEF2 similarly noted the benefits of ‘having a universal message spread around about the behaviour never being okay and that you can do something’.

Further to advising bystanders that the responsibility is somewhat on them, participants were strongly of the view that any messaging directed towards bystanders should provide guidance on what to do:

F2: It needs to explain what they can do in the moment, like tell them [the perpetrator] it’s not okay to do that. And then, if they want to take it further, link them [the bystander] to [web]pages and information.

M3: It has to help them to understand that it is the right thing to do, to do something and here’s what you can do. Because sometimes in a situation that you see something wrong is happening, it’s very hard to quickly figure out what to do. So, if you’ve seen a video or something, it can come into your mind and you can be like, ‘Oh, I’ll do this’. (FG2ADE)

This discussion reflects some of the concerns that participants raised around not knowing what to do if they had witnessed one of the scenarios they were presented with, discussed in *Focus group findings*. Other participants noted that any campaign or resource should very clearly advise on what bystanders can do:

It should say what to do, so kind of action points. If you see this or something, you can do X, Y, Z. (FG5SYDF2)

It should show you what to do in the moment when it’s happening, and then what to do after it’s happened, like who to report it to. (FG3CANF4)

Some participants identified the need for a clear message around responsibility, and the idea that the harm should be addressed and responded to by everyone. As one participant explained:

Get it out that it's everyone's responsibility. It isn't just about empowering victims, it isn't just about letting perpetrators know that it's not okay. It is about this idea that it's everyone's problem. The behaviour you walk by is the behaviour you accept. (FG1ADEM2)

This idea of a shared social responsibility for harms caused to individuals was also reflected in some of the ideas proposed for the content of educational messaging:

You could just have something for people that would show what would happen if they intervene when something happened, but then if they didn't and just be like, 'Gasps' and show adverse consequences. (FG3CANF2)

M1: It could have bystanders just standing there doing nothing, while something would happen. And then it would show the consequences of that. And then it would say some kind of tagline or something about helping out.

M2: Yeah, 'It's a dick move to share someone's dick pics'. (FG2ADE)

There were a range of perspectives presented on where messaging should be communicated, with most participants suggesting all forms of social media, noting that this was 'much better than TV' (FG10ADEF4), and 'the best platform, because everyone's on social media these days' (FG2ADEF1). However, participants also reflected on it being important to adopt 'a multimedia attack' (FG5ADEF1), and if numerous groups were going to be targeted based on demographics such as age, gender identity/expression, sexual and romantic orientation and race/ethnicity, then the message needs to be communicated both online and offline. Drawing on other messaging campaigns, FG9SYDF3 observed:

If it's also in a poster form then people would get more exposure to it. Because I mean, waiting for a bus, you're waiting on the bus you tend to see a lot of those [advertisements]—there's been an HIV one recently that I had no knowledge about, but now I look at the posters all the time because they're all around me. So, I've gotten—now I know a lot about where to go for HIV testing. So that would be quite useful for something like this.

It was evident from the discussions that participants wanted guidance on how to respond, what actions to engage in and what to say, and needed this to be communicated in concise forms both online and in other public settings. Participants felt strongly that such messaging should be presented in a format that you 'can't just skip through' (FG1ADEM2), such as on YouTube, and that 'you see multiple times in multiple forms' (FG4 YDF2).

At the conclusion of the discussion, many participants reflected on feeling as though they would now be more likely to intervene in an IBA situation, because they felt more equipped with the skillsets to do so, should the environment be safe. FG2ADEM5 stated:

I feel like I know what to do and how to respond if someone is a victim of it. And like, I have a guide for acceptable behaviour, like, 'This is what should be done, when you're in this position'.

This re-emphasises the importance of clear, effective awareness messaging that aims to empower bystanders to safely intervene when and where appropriate, by providing them with the requisite tools to do so. Further to this, effective educational messaging on IBA, particularly messaging that responds to the barriers to bystander intervention, will not only increase awareness, but will help challenge the cultural attitudes that normalise it or underplay its seriousness.

Conclusion

This section presented the findings from the focus groups, including that participants had limited knowledge of existing IBA resources and supports (including and beyond the law), and while most felt that there should be support services for victims and perpetrators, very few could identify eSafety by name. Some common themes emerged regarding participants' views on appropriate messaging for bystanders; namely, that there needs to be clear information that IBA is a crime and that society does not tolerate it, as well as examples of what type of intervention is appropriate. Finally, we found that messaging must move blame away from the victim and onto the perpetrator, and shift responsibility to avoid, diffuse or control the situation away from the victim and towards bystanders. This is vital in both confirming the importance of bystander intervention and challenging problematic cultural attitudes within society that minimise the harms of IBA or attribute responsibility to victims.



Conclusion

This study sought to build on existing knowledge of bystander intervention to explore Australians' attitudes surrounding IBA, IBA laws and bystander intervention. The survey and focus group findings support prior research indicating that many people do not intervene when witnessing IBA (eg see eSafety 2017). In the survey, 64.1 percent of respondents had witnessed IBA. Although many respondents expressed feelings of sympathy towards the victim, only 45.6 percent reported that they said or did something. A range of barriers to and facilitators of intervention were identified, many of which mirror those identified in the broader intervention literature. Specifically, participants' concerns revolved around the social and physical safety risks of intervention, including potential impacts on their interpersonal relationships, the gender of everyone involved, the potential for escalation or violence, and whether they perceived that they would receive support from others. People's perceptions of whether they would receive support if they intervened are particularly important, given that previous researchers have identified people often perceive that their peers will be less supportive than they actually are (Brown & Messman-Moore 2010; Fabiano et al. 2003; Kroshus 2018).

Another interesting finding from the survey was that actual support received or the perceived support that would be received among those who did take action was higher overall than the perceived support that would be received among those who did not take action. Among those who did take action, 82.9 percent reported that they received support or perceived they would receive support from friends. Among those who did not take action, only 66.7 percent perceived that they would receive support from friends if they did take action. In contrast, actual and perceived support from 'other people' was similar among those who did and did not take action, suggesting that actual support may be higher from people bystanders personally know, which may, in some ways, support the theory of the 'bystander effect', which posits that individuals are less likely to intervene when others are present and do not themselves take action (Darley & Latané 1968; Latané & Darley 1970, 1968).

The survey produced concerning findings around men's willingness and capacity to intervene, including their greater propensity to attribute blame to victims and minimise IBA, and their concerns about whether intervention will have an impact on their relationship with the perpetrator (see also Flynn, Cama & Scott 2022). This corresponds with previous research on bystander intervention showing men are more likely to be accepting of myths surrounding sexual violence and to be concerned about their relationship with the perpetrator, which can act as key barriers to intervention (eg see Banyard 2008; Banyard, Moynihan & Plante 2007).

Victim-blaming rhetoric was also present in some focus groups, with participants commenting that people lose control of intimate images that they send to others, and thus are partially responsible if their images are subsequently shared more widely.

Narratives of victim-blame and shame are highly problematic, as they place responsibility on victims to prevent sexual violence from occurring, rather than on perpetrators. These attitudes have important implications for bystander behaviour. In our survey, men were more likely to express attitudes of blame and minimisation, and were also more likely to report not taking action when witnessing IBA because they felt that the situation was harmless or they were not concerned about it. Given that prior Australian research (Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a) shows that many Australians agree with statements that blame victims of IBA, the findings of the current study are particularly concerning, as they reveal the significant barriers to intervention for Australians when witnessing IBA. These findings highlight the importance of education and messaging that challenges victim-blaming attitudes.

Increasing attention has been paid to IBA globally, including through parliamentary inquiries, public consultations, criminal law reform and media attention, as well as other proposed or enacted legal and non-legal measures (see, for example, Henry et al. 2021; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019a; McGlynn et al. 2019). At the time of conducting this research, four of Australia's eight state and territory jurisdictions (ACT, NSW, SA, Vic) had introduced specific offences for IBA. This has since changed, with all Australian state and territories, excluding Tasmania, introducing specific IBA laws, as well as a new law and civil penalties scheme introduced at the federal level (Flynn & Henry 2021). Despite the existence of IBA laws in each of the jurisdictions in which the fieldwork took place, participants demonstrated limited knowledge of the laws, particularly in relation to threats of sharing non-consensual imagery. While 66.1 percent of survey respondents believed that it is a crime to upload an intimate image onto a website, only 38.8 percent believed that it is a crime to threaten to share an intimate image. The majority of these respondents believed that non-consensual image sharing should 'probably' or 'definitely' be a crime. Focus group participants had mixed perceptions around whether the scenarios presented to them depicted illegal behaviours.

In S1 (where a non-consensually received nude image was then shown to a group of friends), the murky nature of consent and the fact that the image was shown in person rather than digitally distributed resulted in some participants believing the behaviour represented a lower-level harm that should not be criminalised. Not believing that IBA perpetration warranted criminalisation was linked to minimisation and normalisation of the sharing of intimate images. Participants also raised concerns about issues of evidence and proving that a crime had occurred, particularly in circumstances where an image was shown or shared in person. S2 (where a stranger upskirted another person on a train) produced higher levels of agreement with criminalisation, due to the more obvious absence of consent, with most participants believing the behaviour was and should be a crime. However, participants had concerns over the effectiveness of the police in such circumstances. Focus group participants were also unaware of the support services available to them should they experience IBA. Low reporting of IBA to police and low numbers of IBA prosecutions have created a gap between

estimated levels of IBA victimisation and official reporting and prosecution in Australia (see *Literature review* section). All of this suggests that there is a need to raise awareness around IBA laws, reporting mechanisms and support services.

Many of the past and current campaigns on IBA victimisation tend to focus on preventing young people from sexting, which can promote victim-blaming attitudes and absolve perpetrators from responsibility. Participants criticised these types of campaigns, expressing concerns that they do not offer adequate information on the appropriate actions to take when witnessing IBA or how to provide support or intervene. Future resources on IBA and bystander intervention should therefore focus on empowering victims to seek support and report IBA victimisation, as well as promoting the theme of a shared social responsibility, to enable bystanders to safely intervene when witnessing IBA. Campaigns should be accessible and utilise the popularity of social media platforms to promote such messaging.

IBA is a serious and significant social, legal and public health problem that requires a multifaceted response. Part of this response must be the development of education campaigns around the laws, supports and remedies available for those who experience IBA and those who witness it. It is vital that any campaigns include prevention education for perpetrators to actively discourage IBA and highlight its harms and consequences, alongside education on how bystanders can safely and effectively intervene and/or support victims when witnessing IBA.

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