

# Understanding Help-Seeking & Help-Giving on Social Media for Image-Based Sexual Abuse

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USENIX Security | August 15, 2024 | Philadelphia, USA

**content warning: text descriptions of image-based sexual abuse**

# image abuse is a devastating and common privacy violation

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1 in 10

women under 30 in US  
threatened with or  
experienced their nudes  
being **shared without  
consent**

Lenhart et al. 2016

1 in 7

adults have experienced  
**sextortion**

Henry & Umbach 2024

# revenge porn → image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)



“Not ‘revenge porn,’ but abuse: let’s call it image-based sexual abuse” [McGlynn & Rackley 2016]

“Taking, distributing, and/or making threats to distribute, nude or sexual imagery without a person’s consent”

[Powell et al. 2018]

# formal support for IBSA is sparse or insufficient

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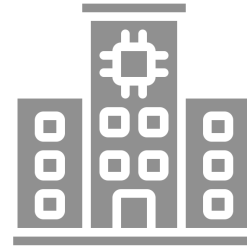
nascent legal  
protections and  
enforcement



under-resourced  
advocacy orgs.



limited tech solutions  
and policies



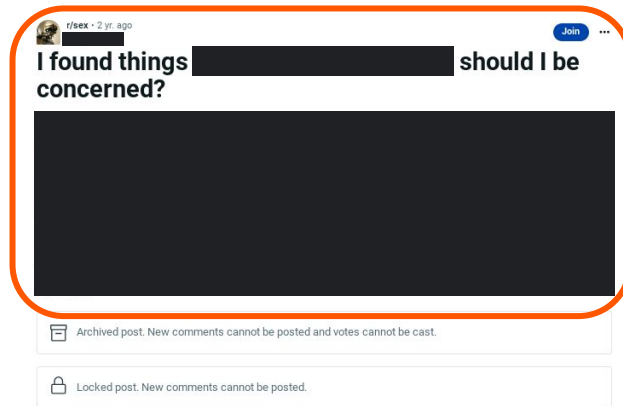
**leading many victim-survivors to seek informal support**



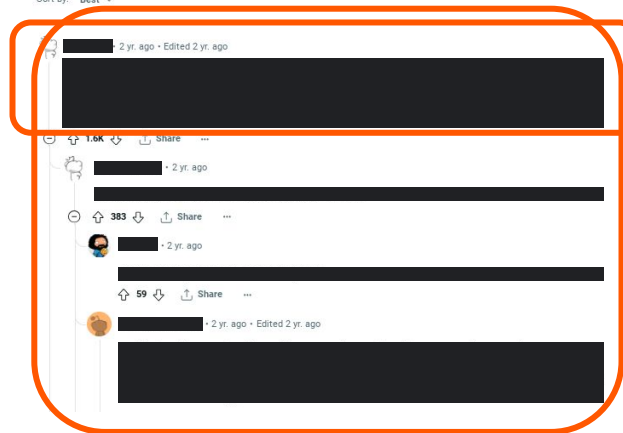
# Reddit

“home to thousands of communities, endless conversation, and authentic human connection”

Post, posted by the original poster (OP)



Comment



Comment Thread

# research questions

## RQ<sub>1</sub>: IBSA types

*Which types are discussed on Reddit? What gender or relationship dynamics manifest?*

## RQ<sub>2</sub>: help-seeking

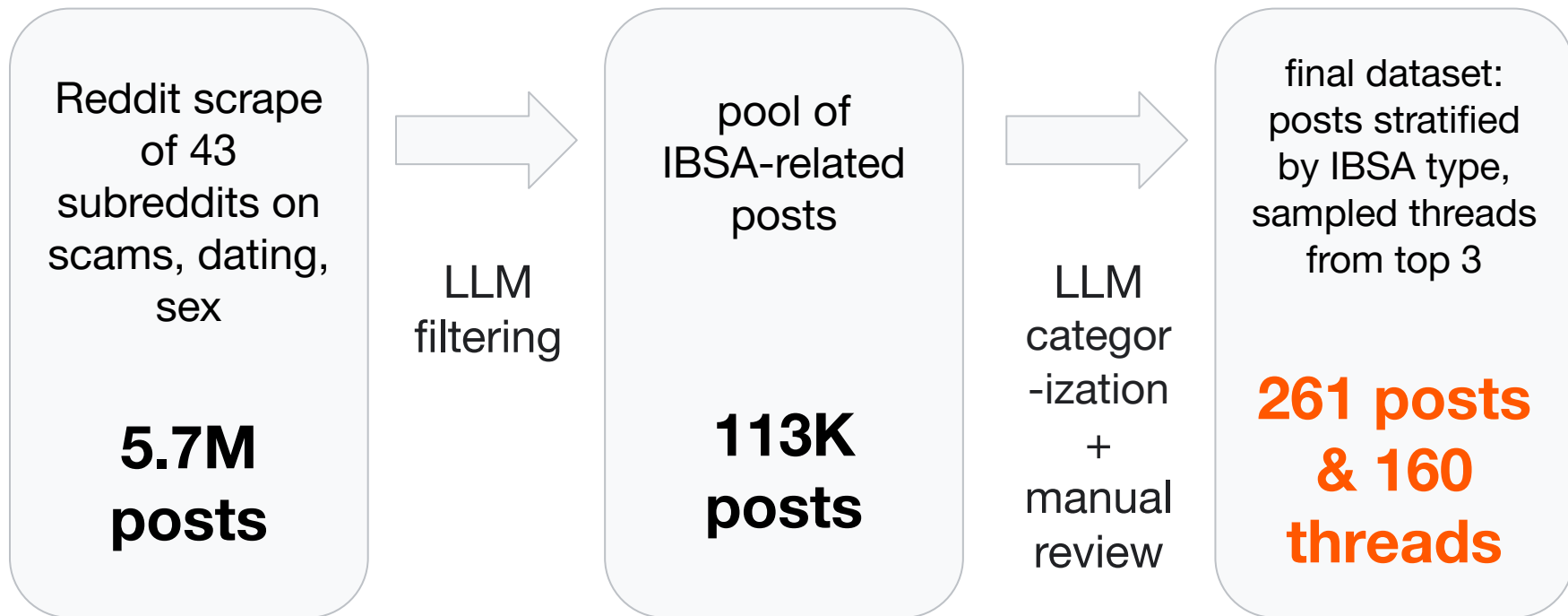
*What help do people seek? At what point do they seek it?*

## RQ<sub>3</sub>: help-giving

*What help do people receive? How supportive is it?*

# data collection & analysis

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# results

RQ<sub>1</sub>: IBSA types

RQ<sub>2</sub>: help-seeking

RQ<sub>3</sub>: help-giving



**image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)**: umbrella term for many abuses defined by prior work, uniquely characterized with first-person reports from Reddit

*imagery of victim-survivor*

nonconsensual explicit  
imagery (NCEI)

pressurized sexting

financial sextortion

nonfinancial sextortion

*imagery also created by perpetrator*

nonconsensual  
**synthetic** explicit  
imagery (NCSEI)

recorded sexual assault

*imagery of perpetrator*

cyberflashing

# financial sextortion example

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So I fell for a scam on Snapchat

Usually I'm good at spotting fakes, but they played along well. They asked for my insta and after chatting for a while, they said they play dirty games and asked if I was game. I was already tipsy so I totally fell into their trap and sent a pic. Then they said they'll share it to a ton of my followers and asked for \$500 to not send it. I was so scared so I just sent it. I feel so awful now... Any advice?

*(post paraphrased for privacy)*

# relationship dynamics in IBSA

financial sextortion more often perpetrated by stranger, unlike other types where perpetrator was more often already known

	financial sextortion	pressurized sexting	nonconsensual explicit imagery	recorded sexual assault
stranger	<b>48</b>	12	6	8
existing or prior relationship, <i>i.e., partner, ex-partner, friend, colleague, family member</i>	1	<b>31</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>

*\* other and unspecified relationships not shown*

# nonconsensual *synthetic* explicit imagery (NCSEI)

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I just saw edited nude pics of my bf's friends on his phone.

I've been with him for over 5 years. If I'm not around or out of town, I'm fine with him watching porn or fantasizing about celebs... Except today I found out that he has some pics of his exes that he edited to make them look naked... What should I do?

*(post paraphrased for privacy)*

# gender dynamics in IBSA

	financial sextortion	pressurized sexting	nonconsensual explicit imagery	recorded sexual assault
victim-survivor: <b>women</b> / men	1 / 26	25 / 3	27 / 3	26 / 9
perpetrator: women / <b>men</b>	21 / 3	2 / 39	1 / 31	3 / 31

may be scammers' false identities

*\* ambiguous and unspecified not shown*

**men more often victim-survivors of financial sextortion, unlike other types where women were more often the victim-survivor**

# trends in how IBSA manifests

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related S&P literature	IBSA type
relationship scams	financial sextortion
intimate partner abuse	NCEI and recorded sexual assault
online dating privacy	pressurized sexting and cyberflashing

# trends in how IBSA manifests

related S&P literature	IBSA type
relationship scams	financial sextortion
intimate partner abuse	NCEI and recorded sexual assault
online dating privacy	pressurized sexting and cyberflashing

nature of explicit images in IBSA compounds harms relative to prior S&P literature

# trends in how IBSA manifests

related S&P literature	IBSA type	non-abuse case
relationship scams	financial sextortion	consensual sexting
intimate partner abuse	NCEI and recorded sexual assault	consensual imagery creation and sharing
online dating privacy	pressurized sexting and cyberflashing	consensual imagery creation and sharing

dual nature depending on context,  
non-abuse cases exist



# results

## RQ1: IBSA types

- characterize dynamics in 7 types from unique first-person reports
- financial sextortion as outlier

## RQ2: help-seeking

## RQ3: help-giving

# results

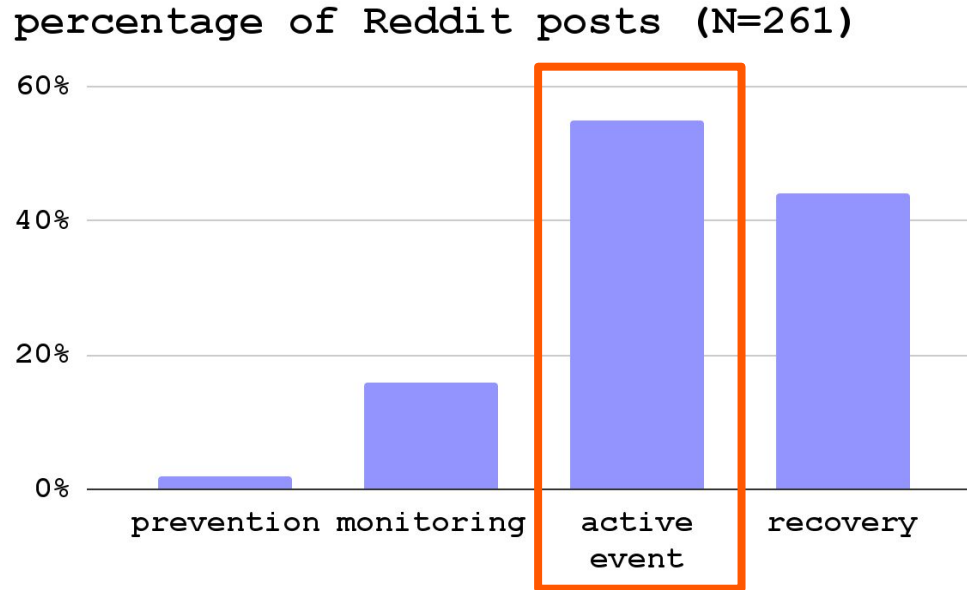
## RQ1: IBSA types

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## RQ2: help-seeking

## RQ3: help-giving

# when help-seeking occurs



Design for At-Risk Users Framework: four user states when experiencing a safety event, may move through states nonlinearly and experience multiple events at once

# help-seeking: pressurized sexting example

Being made to send naked pics by a girl, what do I say?

**relational (32%)**

I'm a 23 male and I've been chatting online with a girl. I'm really happy she's talking to me since I've never had a girlfriend before and I wanna keep talking to her. But she told me to send pics of my dick and I'm scared to do it. I'm so afraid she'll hate me if I don't.

**therapeutic (33%)**

She keeps asking me! Is it controlling and sexist for me to not to what she wants?

**informational (49%)**

*(post paraphrased for privacy)*

**legal or technical (16%)**

# results

## RQ1: IBSA types

- characterize dynamics in 7 types from unique first-person reports
- financial sextortion as outlier

## RQ2: help-seeking

- 5 types: informational, therapeutic, relational, legal, technical

## RQ3: help-giving

# results

## RQ1: IBSA types

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## RQ2: help-seeking

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## RQ3: help-giving

# help-giving: two examples

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I also got blackmailed through Snapchat, but it's been almost 3 months. Haven't heard anything since, seems okay now.

empathizing and sharing  
personal experiences

Your girlfriend's ex sent the video? That's fucking me up to the point I would dump her

jumping to drastic actions

# results

## RQ1: IBSA types

- characterize dynamics in 7 types from unique first-person reports
- financial sextortion as outlier

## RQ2: help-seeking

- 5 types: informational, therapeutic, relational, legal, technical

## RQ3: help-giving

- usually well-aligned and supportive
- could lack nuance



# implications of informal support

- Reddit: complementary but not replacement for institutional support
- split across subreddits: avoids overburdening, but best practices aren't consolidated

## **future work**

- explore supports for this community and other intervention points
- develop further tech, policy, and social solutions
- draw on sociotechnical concepts for consent and countering GBV

# thank you to my collaborators!



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## *methods*

collected and qualitatively analyzed 261 Reddit posts seeking help for IBSA, and 160 help-giving response threads

## *results*

- heterogeneous dynamics in IBSA, but shared sociotechnical abuses of sexual consent
- posters sought info and emotional support in crisis and recovery (rarely beforehand)
- Reddit support: anonymous, immediate, empathetic, but limited