

PERMESSONEGATO PRESENTS

IBSA 2023 REPORT

Image-Based Sexual Abuse within Telegram Groups

*The non-consensual
sharing of intimate material
within Telegram groups*

P
PERMESSONEGATO.IT

IBSA 2023 Report

Image-Based Sexual Abuse within Telegram Groups

Authors:

Cosimo Sidoti

Edel Margherita Beckman

Nicole Monte

Gaia Rizzato

PermessoNegato APS

Via Vitruvio, 1, Milan (Italy)

info@permessonegato.it

<https://www.PermessoNegato.it>

2023

ISBN: 9791221047912

© 2023 PermessoNegato APS

Suggested reference:

Sidoti, C., Beckman, E. M. et al. (2023) *IBSA 2023 Report: Image-Based Sexual Abuse within Telegram Groups.*
Milan:PermessoNegato APS

2023 Report

04

PermessoNegato

05

Telegram & IBSA

06

Why Telegram?

07

Trade

08

Cum tribute

09

Expose her & repost her

10

Child pornography

11

Consequences

12

Legal framework & contrast

13

Words matter

PermessoNegato

About us

With an expertise team in Technology, CyberSecurity, Criminology, Psychology and Law, **PermessoNegato** (that can be translated from Italian as "*DeniedPermission*") is **the largest European organisation** that develops and implements technologies, strategies, and policies for the prevention and intervention of **non-consensual sharing of intimate material** (commonly defined as **IBSA, Image-Based Sexual Abuse**). This is achieved through the **identification, reporting, and removal** of such type of content from the main online platforms every year.

Specifically, PermessoNegato provides technological assistance, legal guidance, and psychological support to the victims and potential victims of IBSA and online violence. These services are completely **free of charge**.

PermessoNegato is a Partner of Meta., Google, TikTok, MindGeek, and fulfils its statutory mission also thanks to the contributions of 42 Law Firm, The Fool, Messagenet, AlteaNet, LegalEye, and Tconsulta.

The criminal phenomenon

IBSA can be considered **one of the worst forms of sexual exploitation and violence perpetrated online**, with consequences that also extend to the offline sphere, affecting the victim in every aspect of his/her life.

In the majority of cases, victims find themselves – especially immediately after the material is shared – in an unmanageable situation that often involves a complete **loss of control**. Even more, considering the very high likelihood of the non-consensual shared material going viral in a very short period of time.

Within the definition of **IBSA**, also known as **NCII** (*Non-Consensual Intimate Image*), various shapes of this crime are included, such as **Revenge Porn** (when there is a revengeful purpose) or **Sextortion** (a word derived from the combination of 'sex' and 'extortion'). The latter is characterised by situations where the victim is extorted, and a sum of money or other favours (usually of a sexual nature) are demanded to prevent the material from being disclosed.

Telegram & IBSA

The Report

The objective of the current report is to shed light on the **steady increase** of this criminal phenomenon and raise awareness of the **different and ever-evolving shapes of such crime and abuse** against victims and potential victims.

The 2023 version of the report aims to examine IBSA through an empirical analysis based on the largest primary data source available, obtained by extracting **1 month** of conversations within each of the **7 Telegram groups** under analysis.

These 7 groups represent a subsample of the **147 Telegram channels and groups** monitored in the Italian context.

Each of these groups was created with the aim of **searching, trading, and disseminating non-consensual material**, including **intimate and child pornography** content.

We examined both the supply and demand as well as victimisation patterns, identifying three of the most recent and common practices in Italy on Telegram within the broader IBSA phenomenon. These are better known as **trade, cum tribute**, and "expose her and repost her".

2023 Data

From a first **preliminary analysis** of the Telegram groups/channels, the following descriptive results have emerged:

- **Groups/Channels:** 147 groups and channels were monitored. Within these, it can be found **intimate and child pornography** content, material from **social media**, and profiles of sex workers on **OnlyFans** as well as the disclosure of personal data.
- **Non-unique users:** 16.883.722
- **Shared contents:** 6.704.05
- **7 selected groups:** 331.837 messages were extracted and analysed within these 7 groups.
- **Sex, age, and nationality:** Most of the members populating these groups/channels are **Italian, males**, and the age goes from **11 to 60 years old** without a prevalent age pattern.

**Non-Unique
Users Active
Online**

**16+
million**

The term "non-unique users" represents the count of each member within the monitored groups. A single user may be counted more than once if they are part of multiple groups.

Why Telegram?

Since **2020**, PermessoNegato has published once a year the data collected during the continuous monitoring of Telegram groups and channels, aiming to showcase how the phenomenon is **steadily increasing year after year**.

Telegram enables the exchange of a wide range of content by simply getting access to groups and channels that regardless of being public or private, are of easy access.

The platform's features support criminal activities by setting up **groups with thousands of members** while ensuring **anonymity**.

Further, signing up on Telegram does not require personal information, not even a phone number. For these reasons, Telegram has often been **the focus of investigations** for a variety of crimes occurring on the platform, not necessarily related to the IBSA phenomenon.

The Telegram platform's architecture allows the creation of both **groups** and **channels** and these need to be distinguished. The former are more interactive, and members engage in actual chat conversations. The latter are managed by one or more administrators who disseminate messages and visual content to their members who can only read or view the content without interactions among them.

Q: There's illegal content on Telegram. How do I take it down?

All Telegram chats and group chats are private amongst their participants. We do not process any requests related to them.

Since its birth in **2019**, PermessoNegato has managed to establish a **strong network of collaborations** with numerous **platforms** in order to promptly remove intimate content shared without the **consent of the individuals depicted**. For example, we work daily with **Meta**, various sites under **MindGeek**, and other notorious social media such as **TikTok**.

Telegram is the only platform with which interaction or initiation of dialogue has never been possible, despite the numerous reports and investigations into IBSA on Telegram. It is important to underline how the platform never intended to intervene despite reports made by other associations, public entities, and victims. Telegram has consistently turned a **deaf ear** and shown **complacency** towards any requests for help or removal, even regarding **child pornographic material**, effectively leading to an **encouragement of such behaviours**.

Therefore, this report represents a unique opportunity to shed light on a phenomenon (not so underground) that occurs **daily** and involves a significant portion of the **male population** in Italy. It aims to denounce the abuse and **commodification of the female body**, which should never be accepted or encouraged. This year, we have decided to share an in-depth analysis of the three most recent and prevalent practices on Telegram: **trade, cum tribute, and “expose her and repost her”**.

Retrieved from Telegram's FAQs

Trade

Definition: This practice involves the exchange, often in **private** chat, of either intimate or non-intimate material **without the consent** of the individuals involved.

Activity: Within public groups, requests are made for specific types of non-consensual material that can vary depending on the **intimate** relationship (e.g. "who trades their girlfriend?"), or **familial** relationship ("I am looking for someone who exchanges their daughter"), **geographical** location ("I am trading girls from Rome"), or **age** ("I trade girls born in 2008, 2009, 2010 for the same").

When the requester finds someone in the chat willing to offer what is requested, he, in turn, will offer equivalent material in exchange, based on the preferences of the second requester. This involves an exchange of non-consensual material that will occur later within a private chat.

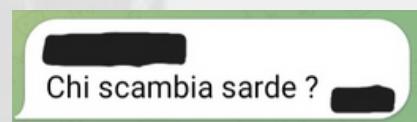
In some cases, **financial compensation** may also be offered/requested in exchange for the material.

Motivation: The main objective of this practice is to **accumulate** as much non-consensual material as possible, creating a **personal collection** of photos and videos divided into various categories and stored on online file hosting.

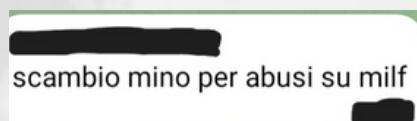
Additional remarks: The exchanged content may always **not** be of a **sexual** nature and could encompass material retrieved from social media and disseminated without consent, including the exposure of personal data (known as **doxxing**), or even photos taken without the consent of the individuals depicted (known as **spy**).



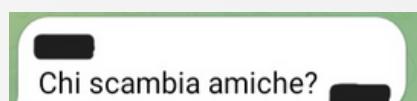
I trade ex minors – looking for the same



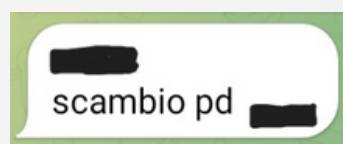
Who trades girls from Sardinia?



I trade minors in exchange for sexual abuses on milf



Who trades friends?



I trade child pornography

Source: anonymised extraction of chats on Telegram

Cum tribute

Definition: The term “cum tribute” refers to an online practice that involves the act of **self-pleasure** and subsequent **ejaculation** (hence “cum”) onto a photo or video, not necessarily of a sexual nature, previously sent by others **without the consent** of the individuals involved.

Activity: This practice takes place in **private** chat, but requests and offers for cum tributes occur **publicly** within these Telegram groups. Requests usually include **details** about the type of tribute desired. For example: “Who’s tributing a photo of a friend’s face?”. Those offering the tributes, on the other hand, specify a **broader** category they wish to focus on. For instance: “I tribute young friends, ex-partners, girlfriends, or wives, message me privately”.

Further, the specific modalities by which this practice occurs can involve the use of an **additional device** or the **printing** of a photo. For example: “I tribute your girlfriends with a double device or printed photo”. This means that after receiving the material, the one performing the tribute will use another device to open the photo or video or use a printout. Afterward, they proceed with the act while the requester follows the interaction via video call.

Motivation: The practice reflects the male desire to **connect** with other men and establish their own status within a group of men. This regards the concept of **hegemonic masculinity**, a highly prevalent **social construct that is very difficult to dismantle in our society**. In addition, any type of material that gets cum tributed is also added to their personal collections of illegal and non-consensual content.

Additional remarks: From a legal standpoint, cum tribute is abstractly framed within Article 612-ter of the Italian Criminal Code “*Illicit dissemination of sexually explicit images or videos*” or in Article 167 of the Privacy Code (D.L. 196/2003) “*Illicit processing of personal data*”.

The interpretation is not a foregone conclusion since the non-consensual material disseminated is usually of a non-sexual nature – hence, illicit processing may occur solely on that basis. However, the acts of autoeroticism and ejaculation imply a sexually explicit component, and consequently Article 612-ter could also apply. There are currently no legal precedents in Italy.

[REDACTED]
tributo le vostre troie nude con doppio dispositivo [REDACTED]

I tribute your naked b****es with double device

[REDACTED]
Chi tributa/pisella mia sorella su carta/doppio disp?(ho solo volto e costum) [REDACTED]

Who tributes my sister either from a printed pic or using a double device? I only have a pic of the face and in swim bath

[REDACTED]
Tributo adesso con secondo dispositivo, anche vestite [REDACTED]

I am tributing right now with a second device, also dressed girls

[REDACTED]
Chi tributa con doppio viso delle mie cugine [REDACTED]

Who tributes the faces of my cousins?

Source: anonymised extraction of chats on Telegram

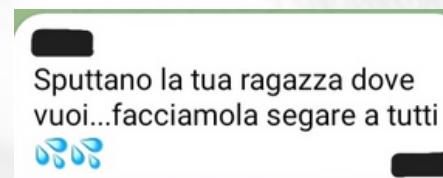
Expose her & repost her

Definition: This **recently** emerged and understudied online phenomenon involves the **public** dissemination of non-consensual images or videos within Telegram groups, with the explicit request to **repost** them as widely as possible by other members, not only within the same groups but also on other online platforms.

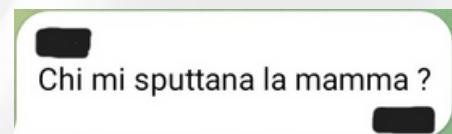
Activity: This practice is divided into two well-defined phases. The first phase, referred to by members as "**expose**", consists of the first dissemination of non-consensual material concerning friends, girlfriends, ex-partners, wives, family members, or simply acquaintances. During this phase, detailed **personal information** is disclosed, which can lead to the victim's identification, such as age, place of residence, or social media usernames. The "expose" process is considered complete only when transitioning to the second phase, which involves the **unlimited reposting** of the material in question within Telegram groups and beyond.

Motivation: While all of these activities are driven by the intent to **denigrate and objectify the body of female victims**, the "expose her and repost her" practice stands out for its specific objective of **defamation and misogynistic humiliation**, reaching the largest possible audience of Telegram users.

Additional remarks: Those who engage in this practice seem to derive a perverse pleasure from the sense of **transgression** and the associated risk of losing control over the victim's image and personal information shared without consent. It represents a very dangerous perversion that does not acknowledge the consequences for the victim at all.



I expose your girlfriend wherever you like... let's make everyone masturbate on her

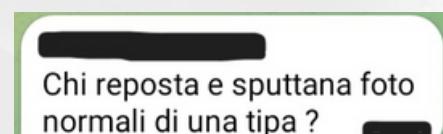


Who exposes a mom?

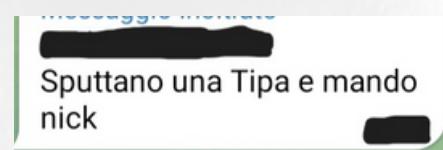
2 repost in 5 minuti e sputtano Instagram della troia!!

REPOSTATELA!!!!

If someone reposts this photo twice, I expose also the Instagram of this bitch!! REPOST HER!!!!



Who exposes and reposts normal pics of a girl?



I expose a girl and send the Instagram nick as well.

Source: anonymised extraction of chats on Telegram

Child pornography

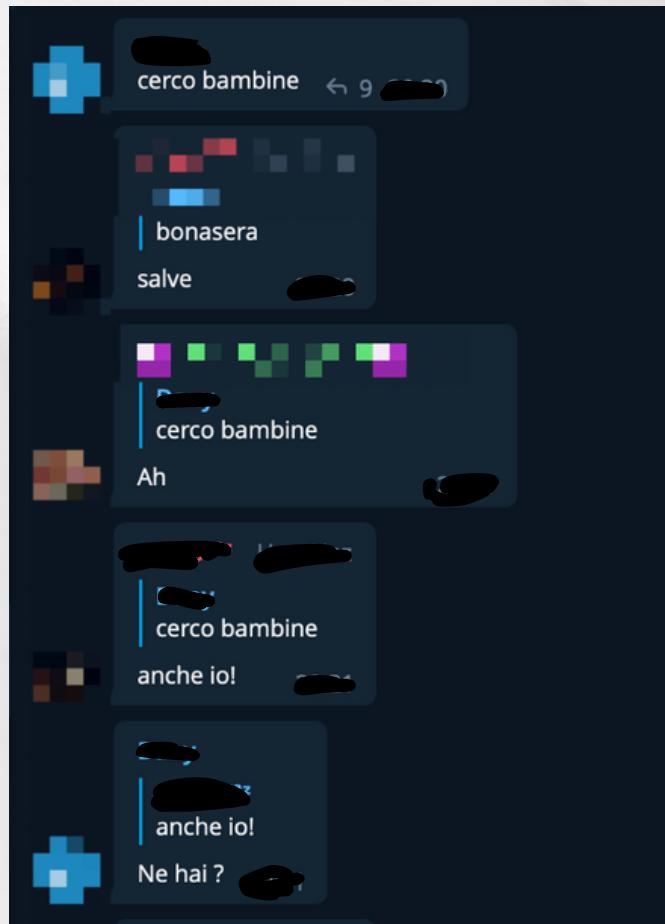
Even if the current 2023 report focuses mainly on IBSA, PermessoNegato considered it relevant to dedicate a section to the many requests and offers of child pornography found within the monitored groups and channels.

Indeed, often following the request within the groups, there is a **private chat between the requester and the offerer**. Sometimes the content could also be conveyed directly in the channel/group. We often found direct questions such as "*I exchange minors*" or "*who has minors?*".

It is important to highlight the **Italian judgment No. 36572, issued on 4 September 2023**, stating that "*even the mere fact of being part of a private group on Telegram that shares child pornography, even without downloading the files to one's own device, constitutes an offence .*"

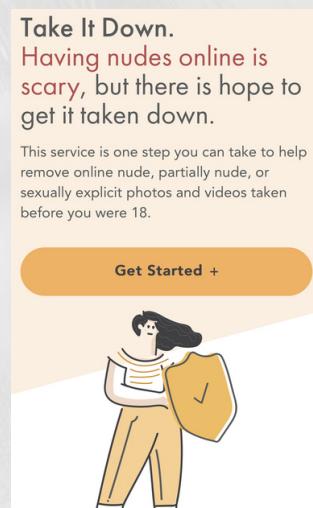
Finally, these Telegram groups are also often populated by minors, who are contacted in private chats: there is a high risk for them to become victims of **online grooming**, also known as **Child Grooming**.

Although Telegram is not among the platforms participating in the initiative, it is worth mentioning that the preventive removal service **StopNCII.org**, described on page 12 of this Report is, starting from 2023, also active for minors, at takeitdown.ncmec.org.



Source: Keywords research "child" within some groups on Telegram

The procedure has been implemented by the **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children**, which is the United States' largest child protection organisation.



Source: takeitdown.ncmec.org, for the preventive removal of sexually explicit content regarding minors

Consequences

Social

"What will people think of me?": this is one of the first questions that a victim of image-based sexual abuse asks herself/himself. This same question is indeed often posed to PermessoNegato operators when looking for help.

One of the main consequences, especially affecting female victims, is the so-called **Victim Blaming** which involves holding the victim responsible for creating the material, highlighting the gender inequalities where women are often discouraged from enjoying the same sexual freedom as men. From a societal standpoint, **the perception of the victim is highly diminished when crime happens online**. Nonetheless, when comparing a victim of an online setting to one in an offline setting, their needs are often identical: legal aid, psychological support, and recognition of the harm suffered.

Another issue related to the phenomenon of image-based sexual abuse is **Online Shaming**, which involves the public humiliation of an individual for behaviours occurred in the private sphere (e.g. taking an intimate picture) often along with discrimination based on sexual orientation, religion, or race.

Psychological

Several studies unveiled that the majority of IBSA victims endure a level of **PTSD** (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) similar to that suffered by victims of sexual violence in offline contexts.

Moreover, victims also experience a strong sense of **humiliation** and **discomfort** that eventually leads them to a deep **sense of guilt**. Each victim of a sexual offence invariably confronts an internal struggle, often directing blame on themselves and disempowering the perpetrators, even though the main issue lies in the absence of a **culture of consent**.

Financial

From a financial perspective, the consequences can be categorised as follows:

1. Direct costs: These are the expenses that the victim may incur for legal actions, whether civil or criminal, and often the victim may not have the financial means to cover these costs;

2. Indirect costs: When intimate material is distributed non-consensually online, it may become accessible to colleagues or human resources, frequently leading to the victim's dismissal in an effort to safeguard the reputation of the company, school, or workplace, as documented in various reports in Italy.

Legal framework & contrast

In Italy, specific legislation addressing **IBSA** was introduced four years ago. It was included in the so-called "Red Code", in effect since August 9, 2019, as **Article 612-ter of the Italian Penal Code**, which deals with the "*illegal dissemination of sexually explicit images or videos*". The prescribed penalty for this offence is **imprisonment from one to six years and a fine ranging from €5.000 to €15.000**.

A highly debated legal issue regards the consent around the dissemination of images. It is often challenging to understand that the granting of image usage – even with sexually explicit content – is **always revocable**, whether it was granted for free or for consideration. The presence of a specified time period in the release or rights concession contract does not matter. The jurisprudence of the Court of Cassation has now established a definitive and nearly twenty-year-old trend, according to which it is necessary to distinguish between the conditions and the agreed-upon modalities for the exploitation of the image, the object of the contract/release, and the consent to the exploitation rights of the image which, even if included in the contract/release, remains distinct and autonomous. In fact, in the case of a contractual obligation followed by a subsequent unilateral revocation, the latter prevails.

In terms of technological contrast to the phenomenon, despite the critical situation of Telegram mentioned above, **PermessoNegato** noticed the behaviour of other platforms that instead have been active and attentive, with a philosophy of "zero tolerance" towards these phenomena. Among these, our association needs to include Facebook, Instagram, Microsoft, Google, TikTok, and the platforms of the MindGeek Group.

On the other hand, Twitter and many pornographic websites have often ignored our reports, whereas, for Telegram and some dedicated forums, there is the de-facto incentive of conduct with complete **deafness to requests**.

Strategies for preventing the dissemination of non-consensual material exist and **PermessoNegato** is indeed one of the partners of **StopNCII**. This platform allows people who are concerned that their intimate image or video can be shared without their consent, to send a safe and secure copy to prevent it from being shared on different platforms. The specific platforms included in this StopNCII service are listed on their website (StopNCII.org).



Source: StopNCII.org, for the preventive removal of sexually explicit content

Words matter

"Replacing the language of 'revenge porn' with the more accurate and inclusive 'image-based sexual abuse' would be a small – yet important – step in challenging the cultural context conductive to high levels of sexual coercion and violence" (Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley, 2017).

Since the introduction of Article **612-ter** in the Italian Penal Code, the non-consensual sharing of intimate material has become a criminal phenomenon that has evolved, expanded, and led to the emergence of many new practices and related offences over these years.

We believe that the language used to define and analyse this phenomenon is crucial, and everyone's goal should be to avoid **obsolete, judgmental, and incorrect** terms as much as possible. **These terms often create confusion among victims and at a societal level.**

Therefore, it has been chosen to provide a brief glossary of the most commonly used terms to date.

IBSA – Image-Based Sexual Abuse: It describes the act of sharing images or videos of an individual (the 'victim') that are sexually explicit without that person's consent. It is one of the most commonly used and accurate terms, as it allows for the understanding of all the facets of the phenomenon. It is also known as NCII – Non-Consensual Intimate Image.

Revenge porn: This term should be used **only** when there is a **revengeful purpose**.

Sextortion: The practice of extorting money or other sexual favours from someone by threatening to reveal evidence of their sexual activity.

Doxing: It is the act of publishing private information about someone on the internet, typically with malicious intent. Often together with the intimate materials, the perpetrators also share the personal information of the victims, for example, the phone number or link to social media profiles.

Victim blaming: This phenomenon occurs when the victim of a crime or any wrongful act is held entirely or partially at fault for the harm they experienced. Victim blaming is often experienced by women. This attitude, coming both from the loved ones and the institution, **further marginalises** the victim and makes it harder to report the abuse.

Consent culture: In the context of intimate relationships and sexuality, the culture of consent emphasises that every person must **freely** consent to any sexual act or intimate interaction. Consent should be **ongoing** and can be **withdrawn** at any time. In other words, consent must be **voluntary, active, and informed**.

The Authors

COSIMO SIDOTI - Volunteer

cosimo.sidoti@permessonegato.it

Ph.D. candidate and teaching assistant in Criminology at the University of Kent, and he is a volunteer for PermessoNegato. His expertise lies in the digital domain within gender-based violence, drugs and drug policies, and organised crime.

EDEL MARGHERITA BECKMAN - Partner

edel.beckman@permessonegato.it

Clinical criminologist and partner of PermessoNegato. Her main interests lie in digital criminology, with a focus on crimes committed online, such as Image-Based Sexual Abuse, cyberbullying, and child pornography. Her research also focuses on victimology, social perception of crimes and prevention strategies.

NICOLE MONTE - Vice-President

nicole.monte@permessonegato.it

Criminal lawyer in Milan and specialised in new technology law. Adjunct professor and fellow of the Polytechnic University of Turin on projects on privacy and cybersecurity. She has followed some important white collar crime trials and many cases of cybercrime against national and international companies. She is the author of several articles on privacy and cybercrime.

GAIA RIZZATO - Founding Member, Operations Director

gaia.rizzato@permessonegato.it

Founding member of PermessoNegato and operations director of the Association. She is responsible for the training and coordination of volunteers, the press office and the management of relations with partners.



Thank you for your support in our battles

Acknowledgments

This report and all our activities would not be possible without the work and commitment of the volunteers, to whom we extend our warmest thanks.

We would like to thank for the **financial support**: Meta, Google and many more *silent contributors*.

Press Contact:
info@permessonegato.it

PermessoNegato APS
Against Image-Based Sexual Abuse
Via Vitrubio, 1, Milan (Italy)
www.PermessoNegato.it

GOLD ADVOCATES OF PERMESSONEGATO

Meta Google

PARTNER

MindGeek TikTok

LEGALEYE®
DIGITAL PROOF KEEPER

messagenet

42L F

the fool.
DATA DRIVEN VALUE

Tconsulta