



Queer Vulnerability in the Digital Age: The Mental Health Consequences of Cybersecurity Breaches and Internet Fraud

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Abstract. In this study, gay men who utilise social dating apps are examined for the effects of cybercrime victimisation on their mental health. Recorded interviews and guided in their natural state open discussion was used to gather qualitative data, and themes and patterns in the interviews were found through data analysis. All 20 participants had considerable psychological trauma as a result of their victimisation, according to the findings, and none of them reported the incident to the police out of fear of being identified as a gay male. A further finding of the study was that certain characteristics, such as being a "Bottom or Vers", may raise the likelihood of victimisation. Some participants have expressed a wish to concentrate on one-night stands rather than forging emotional relationships due to the prevalence of cybercrime victimisation, which has caused a sense of caution and mistrust in potential romantic partners. The research underscores the need for cybersecurity regulations that expressly protect the rights and privacy of gay groups as well as the significance of offering support and understanding to vulnerable queer communities.

Keywords: Cybercrime victimization · mental health · LGBTQ + community · social dating application · cybersecurity law

1 Introduction

Cybercrimes have become a developing concern in modern society due to its increasing reliance on technology and the internet. Members of the LGBTQ + community are among the most vulnerable populations, as cybercriminals frequently target them due to their perceived vulnerability and marginalised status [1] (Abreu & Kenny, 2017). Gay males, in particular, are routinely targeted by scammers using social dating software such as Blued to entice, defraud, and PUA them [2, 3] (Beijing News, 2018; Fu Yuan County Public Security Bureau News Office, 2023). The implications of these cybersecurity breaches and internet fraud can have a substantial influence on homosexual men's mental health, leading to feelings of worry, despair, and shame [4, 5] (Button et al., 2014; Cross et al., 2016).

With an emphasis on the particular risks that homosexual men face in the digital age, this paper will examine how mental health and cybersecurity law intersect in the LGBTQ

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+ community. The importance of this subject stems from the potential harm that these cybercrimes may do to the mental health of gay men and the demand for a more nuanced understanding of the effects of cybersecurity law on marginalised populations.

This study will first give background information on the subject, including an analysis of the existing literature on mental health and cybersecurity law in the LGBTQ + community, in order to accomplish this purpose. After that, we'll talk about how the Blued app is used as an example of the unique cybercrimes that target homosexual men. The research findings on the effects of cyberattacks and internet fraud on homosexual men's mental health will then be presented in the publication. An study of the implications of these findings for future research and policy actions aimed at lessening the effect of these cybercrimes on the mental health of gay men will be presented as the paper's conclusion.

2 Literature Review

In the LGBTQ + community, the relationship between cybersecurity law and mental health has become a significant source of discussion. Understanding the effects of cybercrimes that target vulnerable people on mental health has advanced, despite the fact that research in this field is still in its infancy.

The influence of internet fraud and cybersecurity breaches on the mental health of gay males is an area of study that has received significant attention. According to research [1, 7, 8] (Abreu & Kenny, 2018; L. Garnets et al., 1990; Laing & Davies, 2011), gay males are disproportionately affected by cybercrime. Scammers frequently target gay men using social dating software such as Blued, which has been linked to identity theft, blackmail, and financial scams [8, 9] (China News Service, 2015; Anshun City Public Security Bureau Network Security Defence Detachment, 2021).

Research indicates that victims may experience anxiety, melancholy, shame, and social isolation as a result of these types of cybercrimes [4, 5] (Button et al., 2014; Cross et al., 2016). Thus, these negative sentiments may have a major impact on homosexual men's mental health, especially given their stigmatised and marginalised status.

Despite these obstacles, there is also evidence that coping strategies and resilience can mitigate the negative effects of cybercrime victimisation. Fortunately, social support and coping strategies, such as seeking emotional support, can help victims overcome the emotional distress associated with cybercrime victimisation, according to some research [10, 11] (Palassis et al., 2021; Zhang & Ye, 2022).

Overall, the current state of research on mental health and cybersecurity law in the LGBTQ + community indicates a need for a more comprehensive understanding of the unique vulnerabilities these populations face in the digital age. But researchers can learn more about how cybersecurity laws affect underrepresented groups by looking at the existing research on internet fraud and security breaches that target gay men, as well as the effects these types of cybercrimes have on mental health.

3 Methodology

To investigate the mental health effects of cybercrime victimisation among homosexual men, a qualitative research design was utilised in this paper. The study involved conducting permissioned, tape-recorded, confidential interviews with homosexual men who had been victims of cybercrime via social dating software. Participants were given the opportunity to express their experiences and feelings in their own words through guided free-form conversation. The data analysis involved finding themes and patterns in the interviews to get insight into the effects of cybercrime victimisation on mental health. Due to the sensitivity of the research topic and the requirement for participant anonymity, no personally identifying information was collected from the participants.

4 Results

The purpose of this study was to look into the mental health effects of cybercrime victimisation among gay men who use social dating software. According to the findings of this study, all 20 subjects had considerable psychological harm as a result of their victimisation. However, none of the participants reported phoning the police because they were afraid of being identified as a gay male.

Intriguingly, 18 of the participants possessed the attribute “Bottom or Vers,” while only 2 possessed the attribute “Top.” This may indicate that “Bottom or Vers” individuals are more likely to pursue romantic connections through Gay social dating applications.

In addition, five of the participants said they had given all their money to the “scumbags” who had deceived them, leaving them feeling hopeless about ever finding true love among their fellow gays. These people have stated an intention to give in to their sexual desires and pursue one-night stands rather than committed relationships in the future.

Twelve of the participants stated that they would carefully analyse their future relationships, attempting to avoid expressing their real feelings and providing financial support to cheaters owing to numerous justifications from cheaters. This shows that a degree of caution and suspicion towards possible love partners has resulted from the incidence of cybercrime victimisation in the homosexual community.

Three of the twenty participants indicated that they would uninstall the Blued app and try to pass as heterosexual in the future. This highlights the impact of cybercrime victimisation on the identity and sense of self of homosexual men, who may feel compelled to conceal their sexual orientation in the future to avoid victimisation.

These results shed light on the frequency and severity of cybercrime victimisation among gay males who utilise social dating apps. This study highlights the need for further attention and aid for this vulnerable community by focusing light on these challenges.

5 Discussion

The results of this study highlight the substantial impact of cybercrime victimisation on the mental health of homosexual men who use social dating software. Existing research emphasises the unique vulnerabilities that LGBTQ + individuals face in the digital age

[12–15] (Goedel & Duncan, 2015; Blair, 2020; WXYZ Channel 7, 2016; Hillier et al., 2001). The results of this study are consistent with those findings. However, the need for cybersecurity laws for Queers to safeguard them is not included in these existing findings. The outcomes of this investigation reveal that participants' reluctance to report their victimisation to authorities underscores the need for more sensitive and inclusive cybersecurity laws that protect the privacy and rights of marginalised populations [16–18] (Ottozon, 2013; Shruti Sannon & Forte, 2022; Shruti Sannon & Forte, 2022). Especially for the protection of gay people in the digital world.

These discoveries have significant ramifications for the LGBTQ + community as well as for society at general. They push for more comprehensive cybersecurity rules that account for the unique vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups, as well as better understanding and aid for homosexual males who have been victims of cybercrime. Future studies should also work to create efficient policy measures and treatments that will lessen the negative effects of homosexual men being victims of cybercrime on their mental health.

This study concludes that an improved understanding of the intersection of mental health and cybersecurity law in the LGBTQ + community is required and the urgent need of queer-protecting cyber security laws. Other than, by shedding light on the unique risks and repercussions of cybercrime victimisation among homosexual guys, this study can help inform the development of more effective solutions for prevention, intervention, and assistance.

6 Conclusion

This study illuminates the significant effects of cybercrime victimisation on the mental health of homosexual men who use gay social dating applications. Besides that, the results from this study indicate that these types of cybercrimes can have a significant impact on an individual's psychological well-being, leaving them unhappy and sceptical of future love partners or abandon the so-called love completely.

The investigation stresses emphatically the need for greater understanding of and assistance for homosexual men who have been victims of cybercrime, as well as the requirement for more thorough cybersecurity regulations that take into account the particular vulnerabilities of marginalised groups. And it is imperative in this special era to create a cybersecurity law to protect gays in order to safeguard this vulnerable population.

Overall, this paper emphasises the significance of comprehending the intersection of LGBTQ + mental health and cybersecurity law. We can build effective therapies and legislative actions to mitigate the harmful impacts of cybercrime victimisation on the mental health of homosexual men in the digital age by acquiring a greater understanding of these concerns.

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