Click to verify

Young Streams Telegram channel has 14,500 subscribers for adults aged 18+. Chinese 18+ group also has around 9,893 followers and users can join it by downloading the app. Reddit's Cookie Notice warns that they use cookies to enhance user experience, personalize content, and track ads. However, a BBC investigation found that women's intimate photos are being shared on Telegram for harassment and blackmail. A woman named Sara had her nude photo leaked on Telegram and was flooded with requests from unknown men for more pictures. She stopped going out due to shame and felt objectified as if she were a prostitute. A group of 18,000 followers in Havana saw the photo, making her fear strangers recognizing her. Sara's experience is just one of many cases where women have been victimized on Telegram. In Azerbaijan, Nigar was forced to leave her country after a video of her having sex with her husband was leaked on a Telegram group with 40,000 members. The ex-husband allegedly secretly filmed her to blackmail her brother, a prominent critic of the president. Nigar still struggles to cope with the trauma and sees therapists regularly. A BBC investigation discovered large groups sharing thousands of women's intimate images in at least 20 countries. Telegram seems to be doing little to address this issue. No progress has been made so far on the issue. They even asked me to forget about it, but I refused. Pictures of Nigar and Sara were reported to Telegram, yet they didn't respond. Their situation is not unique, though. The BBC tracked 18 Telegram channels and 24 groups across countries like Russia, Brazil, Kenya, and Malaysia, which have almost two million subscribers in total. Personal details and explicit images were posted together, including home addresses and parents' phone numbers. Some group administrators asked members to send intimate photos of ex-partners or colleagues to an automated account, so they could be shared without revealing the sender's identity. Telegram claims it has over half a billion active users worldwide now, more than Twitter, with many attracted by its emphasis on privacy. A large number moved from WhatsApp in 2021 due to its changed privacy terms. Despite its reputation for being private, only Telegram's "secret chat" feature offers end-to-end encryption, making sure only the two people talking can see the message. This is unlike secure apps like Signal and WhatsApp where it's the default setting. What drives Telegram's growing popularity? It also appeals to users seeking a less regulated space, including those who've been banned from other platforms. According to Natalia Krapiva, tech legal counsel at Access Now, "Telegram and its owner don't want to censor users," but our research shows that this light-touch approach to moderation has turned Telegram into a haven for leaking and sharing intimate images. Telegram doesn't have a dedicated policy against non-consensual image sharing, though it does make users agree not to post pornographic content in publicly viewable channels. They also have an in-app reporting feature across all groups and channels where users can report pornography. We tested how strictly Telegram enforced its policies by reporting 100 images as porn via the in-app feature, and one month later, 96 were still accessible. Members of far-right groups moved to Telegram's messaging app, but the platform does not prioritize removing intimate images. Five content moderators stated that they receive reports from users via an automated system, which they sort into "spam" or "not spam." They claimed that Telegram doesn't use artificial intelligence to search for intimate images and don't proactively search for them either. This lack of action has led some women to take matters into their own hands. One woman reported finding a naked image of herself from her teenage years in a notorious Malaysian Telegram group. She created a fake profile, searched for similar images, and reported them to her friends. The group was eventually closed down under media pressure. However, during the investigation, at least two duplicate groups sharing the same kind of images were found. Telegram declined an interview but stated that they proactively monitor public spaces and process user reports about content violating their terms of service. It's unclear whether posting intimate images without consent is allowed on Telegram or if they are removed.