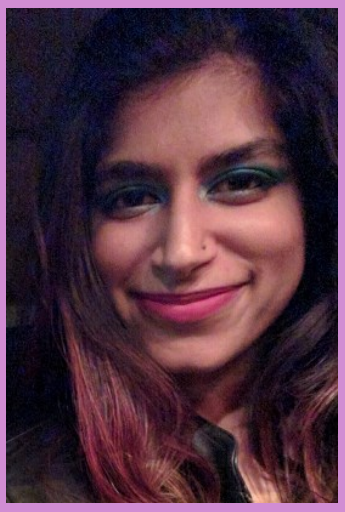
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‘We work in the grey around decision making’
Police discretion in cases of youth image-based sexual abuse



ZOOM WEBINAR

Wednesday 24 Jan 2024
4.00 - 5.00pm

Police discretion is a topic of considerable interest in academia. It describes the individual freedom that police officers have to navigate certain situations using their own judgement. Unsurprisingly, discretion is not employed in a uniform manner and can be influenced by different factors and circumstances. Indeed, it is particularly important to reflect on the impact that discretion can have on responses to gender-based abuse. As part of a wider doctoral project investigating youth image-based sexual abuse – harmful image-sharing practices amongst and involving young people – this research proposes the original term ‘thematic discretion’ to define how police officers have crafted their own measurements to inform decision-making.

Drawing on findings from a mixed methods analysis of police freedom of information requests and interviews with police officers of different ranks, this study produced significant findings regarding police use of discretion. Firstly, discretion was utilised extensively during cases of youth image-based sexual abuse and in an inconsistent manner. Additionally, police officers made use of subjective guidelines to direct their decision-making – amounting to my definition of thematic discretion – with many of these guidelines being steeped in victim blaming and sexist narratives. Certainly, police discretion continues to wield power, this has implications for how youth image-based sexual abuse cases are responded to, and consequently how abuse is understood.

Dr Alishya Dhir is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Durham University based in the Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse. Her research largely concerns gender-based violence, with a focus on image-based sexual abuse, domestic abuse, and intersectional experiences. This research draws on her doctoral research titled ‘Understanding Youth Image-Based Sexual Abuse: The Role of Context and Police Discretion’.

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