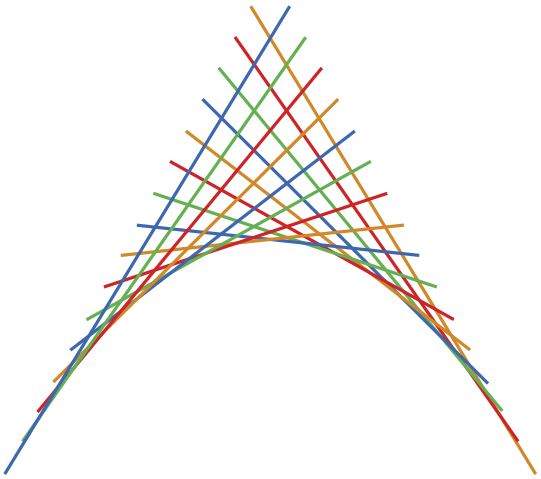

AUSTRALIAN
CENTRE TO COUNTER
CHILD EXPLOITATION

# ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION:
## UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY AWARENESS, PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES AND PREVENTATIVE BEHAVIOURS

## Research Report

**FEBRUARY 2020**

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# Acknowledgments

The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) pays respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present, their cultures and traditions and acknowledges their continuing connection to land, sea and community.

We also acknowledge and thank the participants who gave their time to contribute to this important piece of research.

This report was commissioned by the ACCCE, with the research undertaken by ORIMA Research.

# Definitions

For the purpose of this research, online child sexual exploitation is defined as when an individual (adult, or another child) or group uses technology or the internet to facilitate the sexual abuse of a child, including the production and sharing of child sexual abuse material online.

# Key Insights

This report summarises primary and secondary research undertaken by ORIMA Research as well as relevant published literature. The report focuses on community awareness and attitudes towards online child sexual exploitation and preventative measures that should be considered in addressing this issue.

Five key insights from the research are outlined below:

### 01. Awareness and understanding of the topic of online child sexual exploitation is limited and superficial.

Poor knowledge, existing myths and misconceptions and lack of confidence in knowing what to do are reducing the community's ability to respond effectively to the prevention of online child sexual exploitation.

### 02. Online child sexual exploitation is a stigmatised issue.

This means that it:

- is not commonly or openly talked about;
- is highly emotive, eliciting feelings of discomfort or strong negative responses; and
- causes many to disassociate from the topic, assume it is not relevant to them/their families or believe it will not happen to them.

### 03. There are established social norms that discourage vigilance.

Current social norms are hampering proactive vigilance, guidance and oversight, including:

- the prioritisation of preventative measures for physical safety over online safety;
- the desire to preserve privacy of the child/young person when online; and
- the tendency to assign blame to victims in instances of online sexual exploitation.

### 04. Preventative measures are currently ad hoc, reactive and applied inconsistently.

In addition to the above, parents/carers assume that they need to be "digitally savvy" to protect their child(ren) and that they will have time to notice if signs/symptoms emerge. Parents/carers also assume that their children will notify them directly and immediately of any unsafe online issues.

### 05. There is a strong need for awareness and education tools that supports the development of preventative behaviours in relation to online safety.

Systemic education, encouraging engagement and empowerment can contribute to promoting positive attitudes and bring about sustained behaviour change among parents/carers, key influencers and educators of children and young people.

# Executive Summary

## BACKGROUND

With the prevalence of children and young people accessing the internet, online safety is becoming an increasing concern around the world.

The increase in young people (including children and infants) accessing the internet has seen a corresponding upward trend in cases of online child sexual exploitation, including grooming, image-based abuse, and the spread of self-generated sexually explicit material.

In 2018, the ACCCE Child Protection Triage Unit received almost 18,000 reports of child sexual exploitation, each of which can contain hundreds or thousands of images and videos.

To better understand this trend, the ACCCE commissioned market research into the current awareness, perceptions and attitudes of online child sexual exploitation in Australia.

Participants included parents and carers, siblings (aged 18–21 years) of children and young people, educators, health professionals and community members.

## AIM

The aim of the research is to establish current attitudes and awareness levels in the community to inform effective prevention and education activities to protect Australian children online.

## METHODOLOGY

The research comprised both primary and secondary research components across three stages:

- **a literature review;**
- **a qualitative research stage—**comprising focus groups and interviews

  n=159 participants:
  - parents/carers of children and young people aged 4–18 years;
  - educators;
  - siblings and other key influencers of children and young people;
  - health professionals and other community members.

  Via:
  - 15 focus groups, 8 couple in-depth interviews, 5 one-on-one in-depth interviews.
- **A quantitative research stage**—comprising an online survey

  n=2,559 Australians aged 18 years and over:
  - n=1,509 parents/carers of children and young people aged 4–18;
  - n=426 educators of children and young people aged 4–18 years;
  - n=167 other influencers of children and young people aged 4–18 years; and
  - n=457 other community members.

The project was conducted in accordance with international quality standard ISO 20252 and the Australian Privacy Principles contained in the *Privacy Act 1988*. The project was approved by the ORIMA Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

# KEY FINDINGS

## Online usage

In line with the findings from the literature review, the primary research found that children's online usage started from an early age. Most parent/carers felt that their child had an equal or better understanding of technology than they did by the time their child was 8 years old.

As such, parents/carers reported finding it difficult to "keep up" with the current technological landscape and what their children were doing online. This sense of being overwhelmed was compounded by the fact that many children were accessing the internet via multiple devices, and often these were portable (e.g. tablets and smartphones).

By 12 years of age, many children were reported to be undertaking online activities that posed some risk in relation to online child sexual exploitation (e.g. messaging apps, social media and interactive online games). For many parents/carers, this age (which usually coincided with the start of high school), was a turning point in their child's online use, as they felt less able to actively monitor the type of content their child(ren) were accessing and time spent on the device/s.

Despite these challenges, half of parents/carers with children over 7 years felt that the benefits of the internet for children and young people outweighed the risks, illustrating a general pro-digital predisposition and acknowledgement that children and young people needed digital literacy to succeed in the future.

## Awareness and understanding of online safety and online child sexual exploitation

The research found that online safety is a key concern for many parents/carers,[1] with good awareness and understanding identified in relation to the issue, and the range and types of risks faced by children and young people. While most participants could list the full range of issues when probed, the less severe issues (i.e. those not associated with online child sexual exploitation) were found to be more front-of-mind, considered more prevalent and felt to be more "likely to happen".

Overall participants tended to have limited knowledge about online child sexual exploitation, including the extent of the issue, how it could occur (including how quickly it could happen), what they should be doing to minimise the risk to their child(ren) and resources available to help.

The research identified a number of myths and misconceptions about online child sexual exploitation. These related to who was at-risk, the safety of certain online platforms and the effectiveness of control measures, and the nature and risk of online child sexual exploitation. In many cases, these were found to act as a direct barrier to parent/carer and other key influencer participants implementing effective preventative behaviours.

The research found that only a few participants had actively sought information on the topic of online child sexual exploitation. It was evident in the qualitative research that information seeking and discussion about the topic was generally undertaken only in response to a specific incident (i.e. reactive manner) and rarely with a preventative focus (i.e. proactive manner).

The research also found that participants mostly reported being exposed to the topic of online child sexual exploitation through sources that sensationalised the issue and focused on more severe cases that were often "shocking" and "confronting". Overall, it was found that such exposure:

- contributed to the tendency of some participants to disassociate from the issue and assume it was not relevant to them/their families—the extreme nature of the scenarios limited the perceived likelihood of them occurring;
- heightened the fears and anxieties amongst some participants—which contributed to their sense of being "overwhelmed", particularly given the absence of practical guidelines or directions to assist them in minimising harm for their child(ren); and/or
- made a few participants question the actual frequency and prevalence of events—i.e. made it seem "unbelievable".

1 ReachOut Australia, Parents rank social media and technology worse than drugs, alcohol and smoking, 2018 [Media release].

## Perceptions of and attitudes towards online safety and online child sexual exploitation

The research found that many parents/carers perceived their child(ren) to be safe when using the internet (65%). In addition, 21% of parents/carers thought there was a likelihood that online child sexual exploitation could happen to their child, highlighting that for many participants, this issue was not "on their radar". In support of this, the research also found that currently there is less interest in and engagement with the topic of online child sexual exploitation than that of online safety more generally.

The research found overall that the topic of online child sexual exploitation made many participants feel uncomfortable, particularly as it was related to "sex" and "body safety". A few participants indicated that it was not a topic they were comfortable talking about with their children or with others in their lives. Likewise, the qualitative research identified immediate strong, negative attitudes towards the topic. Unlike some other parenting challenges, this was felt to be a newer, less well understood, highly stigmatised, and for some, a "taboo" concern.

In addition, the research found that social norms around online child sexual exploitation tended to:

- prioritise the privacy of the child/young person when online;
- affirm the blaming of victims in instances of online sexual abuse; and
- endorse limited parental guidance and oversight.

## Motivators and barriers to implementing effective preventative measures

The research identified a range of key motivators and barriers for parent/carer, key influencer and educator participants enacting effective preventative measures to help keep their children safe from online child sexual exploitation. Overall, the barriers were currently found to outweigh the motivators for many participants.

Key motivators to parent/carer, key influencer and educator participants implementing effective preventative measures included:

- knowing and understanding the risks;
- perceiving the risks as relevant to their child and recognising the need to take preventative action;
- knowing what to do;
- feeling that they could be effective in minimising harm; and
- having support to enact preventative measures.

Key barriers to parents/carers and educators implementing effective preventative measures included:

- holding negative feelings and attitudes towards the topic, which caused disassociation or limited engagement;
- having limited knowledge and understanding of the risks and consequences;
- feeling that it was too hard to take action;
- not having adequate information or support to take effective preventative action; and
- not perceiving it to be their responsibility.

## Current preventative measures

Overall, the research has found that the preventative measures reported by parent/carer and key influencer participants tended to be ad hoc, inconsistently applied and often implemented reactively in response to a negative event (rather than in a proactive manner).

The most common preventative behaviour was to restrict child(ren)'s time online—with more than half (56%) of parent/carer respondents doing this frequently.

In addition to this, around half of parents/carers were frequently:

- talking to their child(ren) about online safety (52%); and
- talking about rules with those looking after their child(ren) (47%).

However, only a relatively low proportion of parents/carers were frequently restricting internet use to common areas in the house (37%), and very few were frequently undertaking other desired behaviours such as reviewing the content of emails, social media accounts or messaging apps (27%) and sitting with their child while they use the internet (23%).

The qualitative research tested some scenarios relating to online child sexual exploitation with participants, and found that many participants reported they would respond negatively and/or in a manner that may exacerbate the issue (such as with anger).

Despite the strong likelihood of parents/carers reacting negatively towards their child, most assumed that their child(ren)/child(ren) in their care would tell them if something bad occurred to them online. In contrast, most younger participants in the qualitative research reported they were unlikely to tell their parents/carers if something happened, particularly as they were aware of the anger and/or stress this would cause.

## Impact of exposure to information

Exposure to information and educational messages in the research was found to have a positive impact on participants':

- awareness of the issue and risks associated with online child sexual exploitation;
- reported attitudes and perceptions relating to the topic; and
- intentions to implement preventative behaviours.

## Approaches to maximise prevention behaviours across the community

It was evident from the research that an educational-based behaviour change approach is recommended to maximise preventative action on online child sexual exploitation across the community. An integrated and holistic approach is recommended to encourage the desired behavioural changes in an effective and sustained manner to maximise return on investment (ROI) in effort, consisting of the following:

1. social marketing campaign(s);
2. resources and tools;
3. education programs and professional learning;
4. a support and advisory service; and
5. policy initiatives.

PART

# one

# INTRODUCTION

# A. BACKGROUND

In the era of digital technology, internet use is becoming ubiquitous amongst children and young people. The literature suggests that, in Australia, over 95% of those aged 8–17 years,[2] and 81% of pre-schoolers aged 2–5 years,[3] access the internet. With the prevalence of children and young people accessing and using the internet, online safety is becoming an increasing concern.

The upward trend in young people accessing the internet has seen a general corresponding trend in cases of online child sexual exploitation, including grooming, solicitation, the dissemination of abusive images, and the spread of self-generated sexually explicit material.[4]

To drive a collaborative national response to the issue, the Australian Government established the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE). The ACCCE is built on four key pillars, namely:

- prepare—future capabilities and technologies to counter child exploitation.
- prevent—the exploitation of children, and intervene earlier in the abuse of victims.
- protect—victims from further victimisation, and protect the wellbeing of members; and Support authorities to
- pursue—disrupt and prosecute child sex offenders, and remove victims from harm.

In 2018, the ACCCE Child Protection Triage Unit received almost 18,000 reports of child sexual exploitation material, each of which can contain hundreds or thousands of images and videos.[5]

While the topic of online child sexual exploitation is receiving increased attention in the community, there may be a tendency to view this as a law enforcement issue rather than as a broader issue affecting the community. The literature review, which was conducted as part of the initial stage of the research, suggests there is a significant gap in primary prevention programs, and thus a necessity for further education programmes and training to ensure the protection of children and young people in Australia.[6]

# B. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The key objective of the research was to establish current awareness, perceptions and attitudes amongst the target audiences to inform future prevention initiatives. More specifically, the research sought to:

- determine the target audiences' awareness, knowledge and understanding in relation to online sexual child exploitation;
- identify the target audiences' perceptions, attitudes and current behaviours related to the topic;
- identify motivators and barriers to driving behavioural change amongst the target audiences.

# C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research comprised of:

- **an initial stage of secondary research**—a review of relevant research was conducted to inform the research. Key findings from this literature review have been included throughout the report and the full review is provided at Appendix A; and
- **a primary research stage**—including both qualitative and quantitative research components, outlined below.

2 Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Like, Post, Share: Young Australian's experience of social media*, (Australia: Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2013), 6.

3 "Digital parenting: Supervising pre-schoolers online," Office of the eSafety Commissioner, accessed 22 March 2019, https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/research-library/digital-parenting-supervising-pre-schoolers-online.

4 Virtual Global Taskforce, *Virtual Global Taskforce Child Sexual Exploitation: Environmental Scan 2015*, (The Hague: Europol, 2015), 2.

5 Australian Federal Police Annual Report data published on Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation's website. Accessed May 2019 from: www.accce.gov.au

6 Burn. J et al. *Behind the Screen: Online Child Exploitation in Australia*, (Australia: Anti-Slavery Australia, 2017), X.

## Qualitative Research:

The qualitative component of the research involved a total of n=159 participants via 15 focus groups, 8 couple in-depth interviews, and 5 one-on-one in-depth interviews.

Research participants included:

- parents/carers of children and young people aged 4–18 years—including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) parents/carers, parents/carers of children and young people with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/carers;
- educators—including teachers, other school educators, tutors and leaders of extracurricular activities;
- siblings (aged 18–21 years) of children and young people aged 4–18 years;
- other key influencers of children and young people/those in a part-time caring role—including aunts, uncles, grandparents, babysitters, godparents, etc.;
- health professionals—including general practitioners (GPs), school counsellors and psychologists; and
- other community members (i.e. those without children in their care aged 4–18 years old).

The research was conducted between April—May 2019, across the following seven locations:

- **metropolitan:** Melbourne, VIC; Sydney, NSW; Perth, WA;
- **regional:** Launceston, TAS; Darwin, NT; Cairns, QLD; and
- **remote:** Port Lincoln, SA.

## Quantitative Research

The quantitative research comprised an online survey with n=2,559 Australians aged 18 and over, split across the key target audience groups as outlined in the table below.

**Table 1: Quantitative sample design**

| Target audiences | Target | Sample achieved |
|---|---|---|
| **Parents/carers** of children and young people aged 4–18 years | *n=1,500* | **n=1,509** |
| **Educators** of children and young people aged 4–18 years | *n=400* | **n=426** |
| *Primary and secondary school teachers, principals and counsellors* | *n=300* | **n=315** |
| *Other educational leaders (e.g. tutors, leaders of extracurricular activities, nannies etc.)* | *n=100* | **n=111** |
| **Other influencers** of children and young people aged 4–18 years | *n=150* | **n=167** |
| **Other community members** (i.e. not covered by the above) | *n=450* | **n=457** |
| **TOTAL** | *n=2,500* | **n=2,559** |

The sample was sourced from a high-quality online access panel—the Online Research Unit (ORU) panel—and fieldwork was conducted from 17 to 27 May 2019.

More information on methodology, research participants and recruitment is provided in Appendix B.

# D. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Throughout the report, the following references have been used to differentiate between the quantitative and qualitative research findings:

- the term 'participant(s)' refers to participant(s) in the qualitative research whilst 'respondent(s)' refers to respondent(s) from the quantitative survey; and
- numbers and percentages used only refer to the quantitative research findings.

## Understanding the qualitative research findings

Qualitative research findings have been used to provide depth of understanding on particular issues.

In some cases qualitative data has been presented without quantitative data. In these cases it should be noted that the exact number of participants holding a particular view on individual issues cannot be measured.

The following terms used in the report provide a qualitative indication and approximation of the size of the target audience who held particular views:

- most—refers to findings that relate to more than three quarters of the research participants;
- many—refers to findings that relate to more than half of the research participants;
- some—refers to findings that relate to around a third of the research participants; and
- a few—refers to findings that relate to less than a quarter of research participants.

The most common qualitative findings are reported except in certain situations where only a minority has raised particular issues, but these are nevertheless considered to be important and to have potentially wide-ranging implications/applications.

Participant quotes have been provided throughout the report to support the main results or findings under discussion.

## Understanding the quantitative research findings

Percentages from the quantitative survey presented in the report are based on the total number of valid responses made to the question being reported on. In most cases, results reflect those respondents who had a view and for whom the questions were applicable. 'Don't know/not sure' responses have only been presented where this aids in the interpretation of the results.

For stacked bar charts, numeric labels for categories that are less than three percent of the total proportion have been removed from the chart for clarity, and percentage results throughout the report may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Base sizes may vary for questions asked of the same respondents due to respondents being able to select 'Prefer not to say' throughout the survey (these responses were treated as missing in the analysis—i.e. were removed from the valid response base).

Further information relating to the quantitative research findings, including statistical precision and recruitment is detailed in Appendix C.

# E. QUALITY ASSURANCE

The project was conducted in accordance with international quality standard ISO 20252 and the Australian Privacy Principles contained in the *Privacy Act 1988*. The project was approved by the ORIMA Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

PART two

# RESEARCH FINDINGS

# Online usage

This chapter provides contextual background about children and young people's online usage, including the age at which online use began, devices used, where they are used, and the types of online activities engaged in. These findings are drawn from both the literature review, as well as the primary research.

## A. SUMMARY OF CHILD(REN)'S REPORTED ONLINE BEHAVIOURS

The following table provides a summary of the information presented in this chapter by key age ranges.

**Table 2: Summary of children/young people's reported online behaviours, by parents**

| | Use the internet^ | Use internet without supervision^ | Average hours online daily | Understand technnology better than parent | Access to a personal device | Most used device | Top 3 most common activities online | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4—7 years | 87% | 16% | 1.4 | 28% | 40% | Tablet 79% | Watch videos 82% | Educational games 67% | Chat via video call 24% |
| 8—11 years | 98% | 40% | 1.9 | 51% | 71% | Tablet 81% | Watch videos 87% | Interactive games 54% | Educational games 54% |
| 12—15 years | 100% | 73% | 2.9 | 70% | 95% | Smart phone 80% | Watch videos 87% | Messaging apps 54% | Interactive games 50% |
| 16—18 years | 100% | 91% | 3.9 | 78% | 99% | Smart phone 93% | Watch videos 86% | Messaging apps 78% | Social media (view/post) 65% |

^Proportions of those who 'use the internet' and 'use internet without supervision' are based on all children. For all other columns, percentages/results are based on only those who use the internet. *54% of this group also played educational games.

> "Our generation doesn't have the experience... it's difficult to police when we don't have the knowledge."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, PORT LINCOLN

The research (including the primary research and literature review) found that many parents/carers recognised that they were the first generation to be raising children following the 'digital evolution' (e.g. the wide-spread introduction of portable online devices). Parents/carers tended to have a limited understanding of the technology and platforms used by their children, and often reported finding it difficult to "keep up" with the current technological landscape.[7]

7 Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce, *Adjust our Settings: A community approach to address cyberbullying among children and young people in Queensland*, (Queensland: the Queensland Government, 2018).

> We're digital tourists, they're digital natives.
> EDUCATOR, MELBOURNE

> Honest to God I am petrified about what's out there and what my daughters got to face that I don't know about—she's so much more tech savvy.
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, SYDNEY

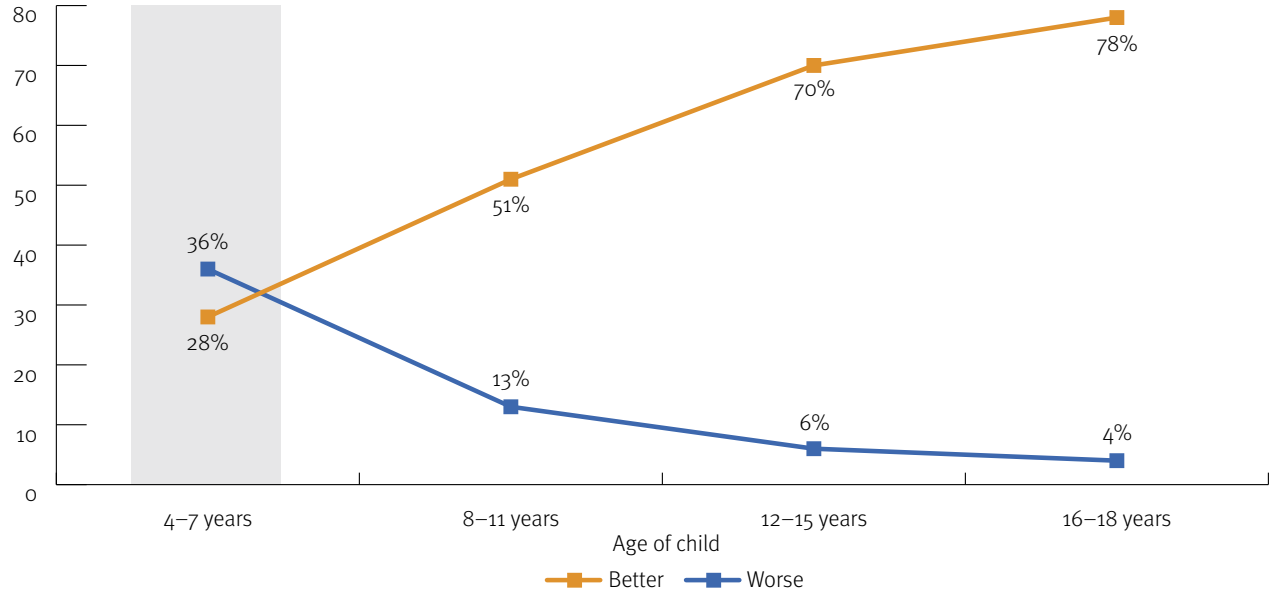
This was compounded by the constantly evolving nature of technology, such as the introduction of livestreaming software, new apps and different internet enabled devices.

Results from the quantitative survey also suggested that the overwhelming majority of children and young people aged 4 years and above used the internet in some capacity (with oversight, or alone—90%) and that more than half of parents/carers overall rated their child's understanding of technology as 'better' than their own (56%).

Figure 1 illustrates how this digital divide between the literacy levels of children and their parents/carers grows substantially with the age of the child. While many parents/carers with children 7 years and under did not feel that their child's understanding of technology was better than theirs, by the time children were aged 8 years, most felt that their child had an equal or better understanding of technology than they did. By around 11 years of age, 63% of parents/carers felt that their child had a better understanding of technology than they did and this proportion grew to 76% by 14 years of age.

**Figure 1. Parent/carer assessment of child's understanding of technology compared to their own, by child age**

(Base: all parents/carers whose child uses the internet, n=1,509)




*Q19. How would you rate their understanding of technology in general compared to your own? (Neither better nor worse not shown)*

> There are a lot of benefits to the internet... it comes down to not scaring the parents so much that they don't want the internet at all.
> ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARENT/CARER, MELBOURNE

The research also found that the age of the parent/carer had an impact on this digital divide, with those aged over 55 years being more likely to rate their understanding of technology as worse than their child's (this included those aged 55 years and over who had younger children, and was thus not simply as a result of this audience having older children).

Nevertheless, for half of parents/carers with children over 7, the benefits of the internet for children and young people were felt to outweigh the risks (50%). A further 38% had mixed opinions, whilst very few disagreed (12%). This illustrates a general pro-digital predisposition, and acknowledgement that children and young people needed digital literacy to succeed in the future. Likewise the qualitative research found that many participants appreciated the benefits of the internet for their children, and felt these should be acknowledged alongside risks to provide a balanced view.

# B. AGE OF ONLINE USE

> "Even at two years old they have it—my daughter is using it."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD STARTING SCHOOL IN 2020, PERTH

> "As soon as they can do a two-handed grasp, they can access a phone. It's the new pacifier."
> EDUCATOR, CAIRNS

> "I don't monitor it so I can't tell you exactly what they do... it's just games really."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, SYDNEY

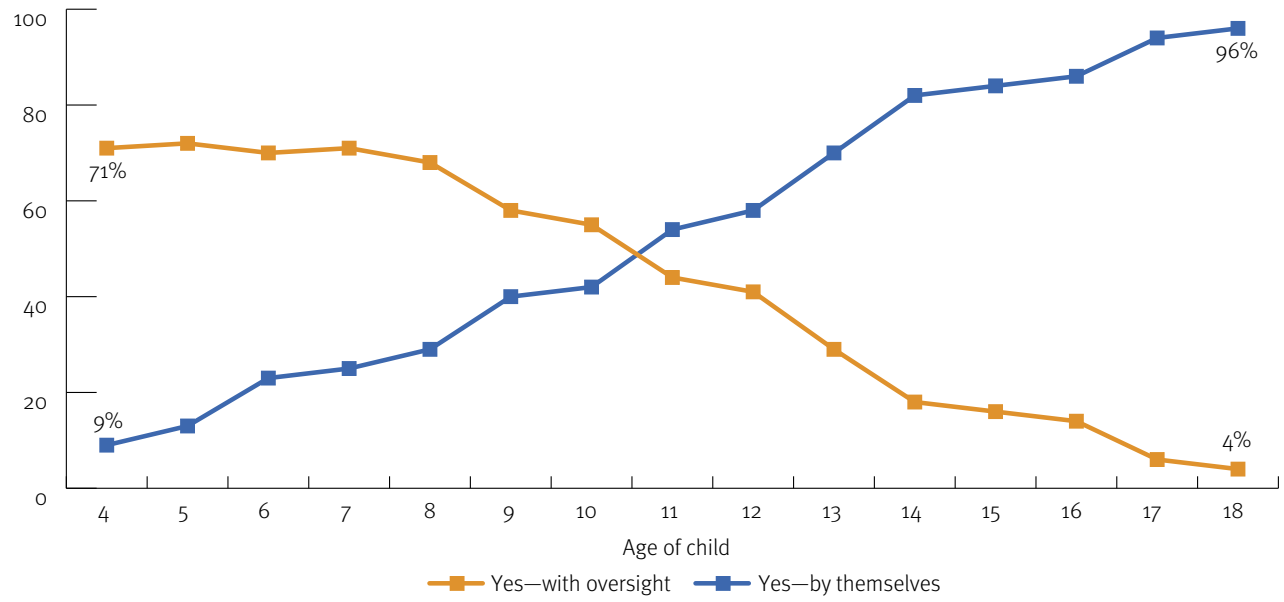
The literature review suggests that over 95% of those aged 8–17 years,[8] and 81% of pre-schoolers aged 2–5 years[9] have access to the internet. Likewise, in the qualitative research:

- children were reported to be using the internet from as young as 1 or 2 years of age—for some parents/carers, the technological abilities of their child(ren) at such a young age was something they were proud of/would "brag about" to other parents/carers;
- by 4 years, a few parents/carers reported that their child was online more than 4 hours a day; and
- by late primary/early high school, many children had a significant amount of online freedom.

In line with this, the quantitative survey found that 80% of children aged 4 years were using the internet and that 9% of these were doing so unsupervised. As shown in Figure 2, this percentage increased with age. By 11 years of age, more children than not were using the internet unsupervised. By 12 years of age (the age up to which it is recommended children be overseen by their parents/carers to ensure their safety) 58% of children who use the internet were reported to be doing so independently. Unsurprisingly, by 14 years and over, independent use of the internet was by far the dominant practice (>80%).

**Figure 2. Children's typical internet usage by age**

(Base: parents/carers, n=1,509)




*Q16. Do your children use the internet when they are at home or in your care? Proportion of non-users not shown.*

8 Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Like, Post, Share: Young Australian's experience of social media*, (Australia: Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2013), 6.

9 "Digital parenting: Supervising pre-schoolers online," Office of the eSafety Commissioner, accessed 22 March 2019, https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/research-library/digital-parenting-supervising-pre-schoolers-online.

> "In year three the school gave them all an iPad, and she was sitting there feeling bad because she didn't know how to use one at all… now every child in the year has to have one."
>
> KEY INFLUENCER/CASUAL CARER DARWIN

> "I had a three-year-old help me with the iPhone the other day… it's hard as teachers to keep up with technology."
>
> EDUCATOR, CAIRNS

> "They go through a VPN, and then nobody knows what they're doing. They're smart."
>
> EDUCATOR, MELBOURNE

The qualitative research also found that many parents/carers felt pressured by the school their child(ren) attended to introduce technology earlier than they would otherwise have chosen to do so. In some States/Territories, participants reported that this was a policy applied to all government schools, and was therefore difficult to avoid. Many of these participants reported that they did not appreciate the early introduction of technology, particularly given that they felt unsupported by the schools in this transition with little or no guidance in relation to online safety or minimising other perceived developmental impacts to their child(ren).

Likewise, school educators in the qualitative research reported varied approaches to internet use with their students, most often determined by school policies. Many educator participants reported that they also often did not feel adequately prepared or supported to deal with the extent of technology use in their classrooms, particularly when technology was introduced in the earlier years.

Educator participants also noted that the safeguards provided by the school networks were often ineffective, as the digital knowledge of some of the students allowed them to "bypass" any implemented security settings. While parent/carer, educator and student participants reported that some independent schools had made significant investments to respond to this issue (e.g. a couple of participants reported that their school had a team of 'investigators' that tried to befriend students on social media to "catch them out"), the same did not seem to be true amongst many government and other non-government schools.

## C. DEVICES

> "We try to limit it… phones, tablets, laptops, but they're a lot more savvy. At five years old my daughter was able to work it out."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

The literature review found that most children and young people accessed the internet via multiple devices.[10] As such, the role of parents/carers in providing oversight for their children was found to be increasingly difficult, as they were not only required to navigate the digital divide but also "keep up with" and monitor activity across all these devices.[11]

This was supported by the primary research, with the quantitative survey finding that more than half of children were reported to have access to three or more devices, whether these be shared or personal (57%). The results differed by the age of the child, with almost seven-in-ten young people aged 16–18 years having access to three or more devices (68%).

Table 3 illustrates the overall proportion of children/young people using various devices (personal and shared devices), as reported by parents/carers.

10 "Digital families: Connected homes and technology usage," Office of the eSafety Commissioner, accessed 22 March 2019, https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/research-library/digital-families-connected-home-and-technology-usage.

11 ORIMA Research, developmental research into children and young people's online safety.

> "Technology's a big part of our lives... he's allowed to use the tablet but it's not his."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON

**Table 3. Devices used by children***

(Base: parents/carers, n=1,039—1,084)

| | | Personal | Shared |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Smart phone | 60% | 32% |
| | Tablet (e.g. iPad) | 57% | 41% |
| | Laptop computer | 48% | 32% |
| | Games console | 25% | 27% |
| | Desktop computer | 11% | 31% |
| | Smart TV | 8% | 51% |

*Asked of parents/carers, about child. Q22. Which devices does this child typically use to access the internet?

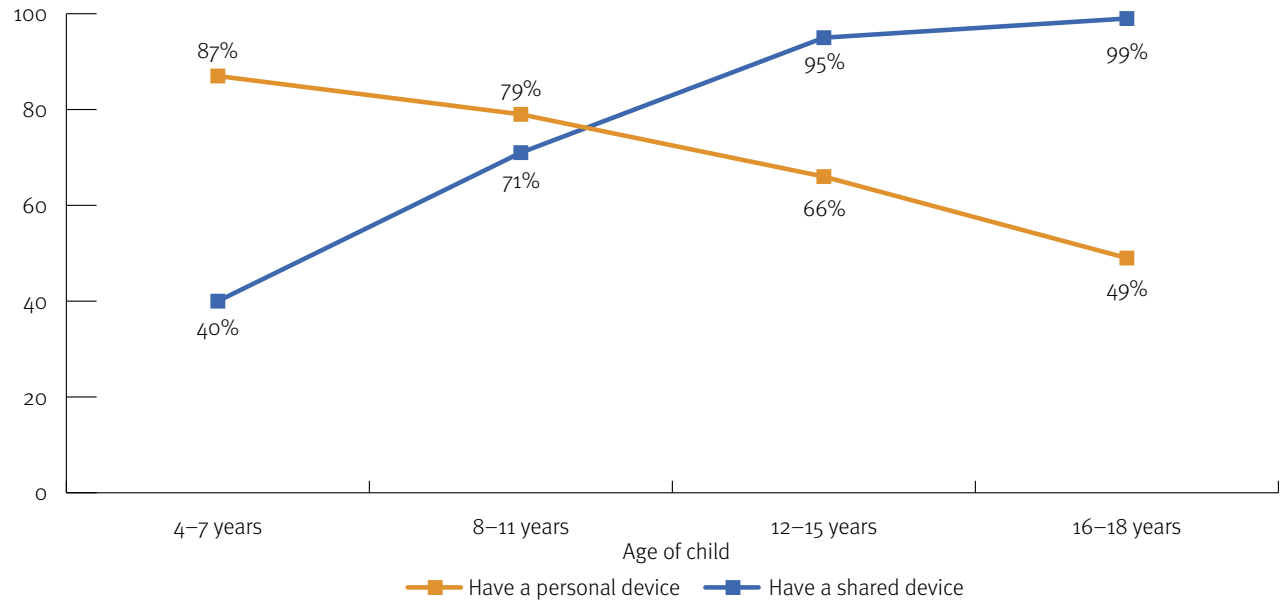
> "I give him YouTube for emergencies, if I need to cook, or if he's having a meltdown."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD STARTING SCHOOL IN 2020, PERTH

In relation to device use by age, the research found that 30% of 4-year-olds had access to their own personal device. A few participants in the qualitative research reported that their child had a personal device from as young as one. In addition, many reported that they frequently handed their pre-school aged children their own smartphones to keep them occupied. While they tended to try to oversee them in such instances, many participants reported "getting distracted" and leaving their child with the device for extended periods of time. A few of these participants reported that their child had accessed inappropriate content or posted inappropriate images, as their phones had not been "set up" for children (e.g. they did not have parental controls in place and had full access to social media accounts and messaging apps).

> "As soon as they've got a phone they're online, and it's very early now."
> SIBLING AGED 18–21 YEARS, PERTH

By age 12, most children and young people had access to their own device (see Figure 3). The qualitative research found that, for many parents/carers, this age (between 11 and 12, usually coinciding with the start of secondary school) was a turning point in their child's online use, as they felt less able to actively monitor the type of content they were accessing and the hours they used their device for. This was a point in time when many parents/carers reported feeling overwhelmed and underprepared.

**Figure 3. Proportion of children/young people using at least one personal device or shared device, by age**
(Base: parents/carers, n=1,039-1,084)




*Q22. Which devices does this child typically use to access the internet?*

# D. ONLINE ACTIVITY

> "The University of YouTube is powerful. Who doesn't go there when they need to figure something out?"
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, PERTH

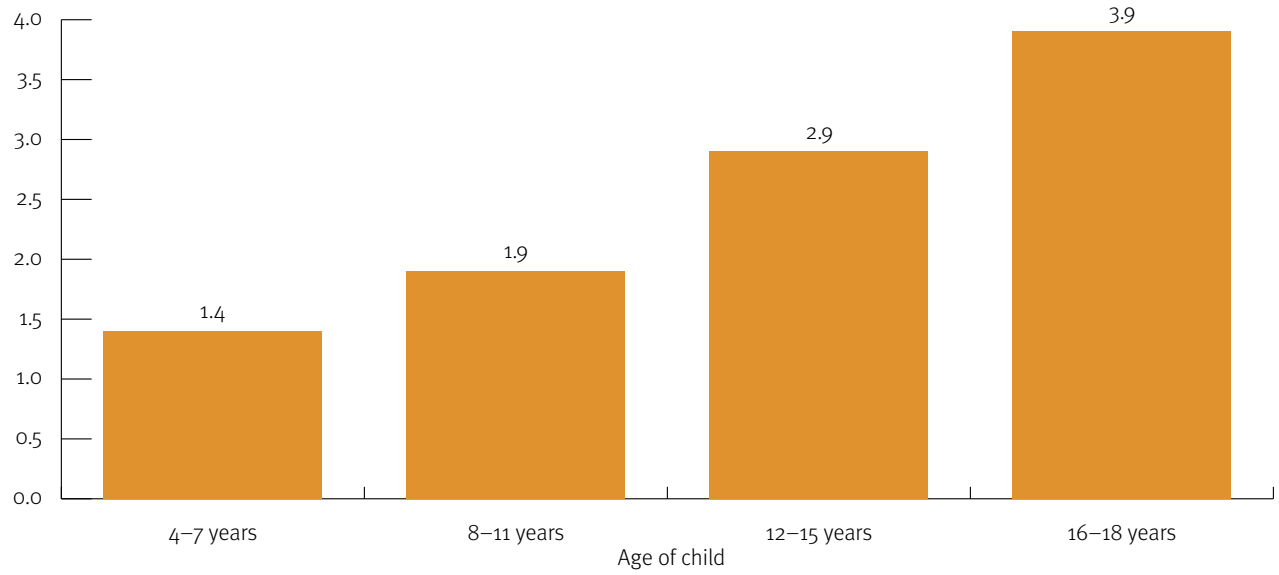
The qualitative research found that parent/carers and educator participants considered being online to be a central part of a child's life. Digital technology and online connectivity were felt to have impacted a range of spheres in young peoples lives, including:

- social—used to connect with friends and arrange events;
- entertainment—to watch videos and play games; and
- education—used in schools and for research.

The quantitative survey found that, as reported by their parents/carers, children and young people spent an average of 2.4 hours online per day when they were at home or in their care. Perhaps unsurprisingly, time spent online increased proportionally with age. As illustrated in Figure 4, time spent online ranged from an average of 1.4 hours per day at home for children aged 7 and under, up to 3.9 hours for those over 15.

**Figure 4. Average hours spent online, by child age**

(Base: parents/carers, n=1,451)




*Q17. On average, how many hours per day do(es) your child(ren) spend online when they are at home or in your care?*

> "YouTube is a must when we're having dinner."
> CALD PARENT/CARER, SYDNEY

When asked what their child typically did when online at home, watching videos was by far the most reported activity across all ages (85%—see Figure 5). Around four-in-ten children and young people were also reported to use the internet to play both interactive (40%) and educational (37%) games.

> "My son plays Fortnite … they talk to each other while they play, but you have no idea who is talking to them."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON

**Figure 5. Top 3 activities undertaken online by group**

(Base: parents/carers n=1,440)

| | Children/young people* |
|---|---|
| Watch videos | 85% |
| Play interactive games | 40% |
| Play educational games | 37% |
| Use messaging apps | 36% |
| Chat with family or friends via video call | 33% |

*Asked of parents /carers, about child. Q23mr. What do they typically do when they are online at home or in your care? (multiple response).

# E. HIGHER RISK BEHAVIOURS

> "They were sexting and sharing images before the age of twelve."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, DARWIN

The literature review suggests that children and young people engage in a number of risky behaviours online which could compromise their online safety and increase their vulnerability to online child sexual exploitation. This included:

- sexting—among young people aged 14—17 years, nearly 1 in 3 reported having some experience with sexting (including sending, asking or being asked for, and sharing or showing nude or sexual images or videos);[12]
- lack of consideration of privacy settings—31% of young people who used social media had not managed their social media presence at all;[13]
- talking to strangers online—38% of young people aged 8—17 had talked to strangers online, however contact was nearly twice as high among those aged 13—17 years (50%);[14] and

> "My little brother buys followers and likes on 'Instagram', most are probably old men."
> SIBLING AGED 18–21 YEARS, PERTH

- sharing personal information with strangers—14% of young people tended to share information such as they real age, images with their face, or their full name.[15]

While children and young people were not surveyed themselves in the present study, the quantitative survey nevertheless identified some 'riskier behaviours' as reported by parents/carers. The findings suggest that children and young people's online activity, and the risks posed by these activities, varied by age and gender.

The quantitative survey showed that:

- of children aged 4—7 years, around one-in-five engaged in activities which had the potential to increase their risks of being exploited online, such as:
  - playing interactive games (17%); and
  - chatting with friends and family via video call (24%)—participants in the qualitative research reported that this enhanced their child(ren)'s access to, and understanding of, video enabled devices and could thus pose a greater risk in relation to the self-production of exploitative materials.
- of those 8—11 years of age, half reportedly played interactive games (54%), and 18% used messaging apps.

> "They have Instagram, Snapchat and stuff... my daughter posts her own videos to Instagram."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, PORT LINCOLN

- the proportion using messaging apps increased significantly amongst 12—15 year olds (54%), whilst by this age 42% were also using social media to view or post content.
- by 16—18 years of age, although the proportion playing online interactive games began to decrease, other potentially risky activities were being engaged in instead—predominantly around using social media to post content (65%) and messaging apps (78%).

By gender, more than half of male children and young people reportedly played interactive online games (54%), compared to just one-quarter of female children (25%). This was more common amongst males aged 8 years and older.

12 SWGFL/UK Safer Internet Centre, University of Plymouth, Netsafe and Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *Young People and Sexting*, 14.
13 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *State of Play—Youth, Kids and Digital Dangers*, 11.
14 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *State of Play—Youth, Kids and Digital Dangers*, 13.
15 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *State of Play—Youth, Kids and Digital Dangers*, 15.

> My 10-year-old niece tried to get Instagram… all the other girls at her school have it, so she thinks she should.
>
> ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARENT/CARER, PORT LINCOLN

In contrast, parents/carers of female children and young people were significantly more likely to report them using:

- messaging apps (41% versus 29% of males);

Females used messaging apps substantially more than males from around 11 years of age. The results showed that 24% of male children aged 11–12 years were reported to use messaging apps, compared with 50% of female children of the same age.

- play educational games (41% compared with 34% of males);
- chat with family and friends via video call (38% compared with 28%); and
- use social media to view or post content (31% compared with 23% of males).

However, female and male children and young people were equally as likely overall to use social media or gaming platforms to send and/or receive direct (private) messages (25% and 23% respectively). The qualitative research found that many parent/carer and key influencer participants had not considered the ability of their child to message within gaming platforms until prompted in the research, and as such, reported behaviours from these audiences may not reflect the true extent of children and young peoples' actual behaviours.

## F. LOCATION OF ONLINE USE

> I don't feel like I can do much in terms of online safety – they use it at school, as well as at other homes.
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON

> As a parent you can't [monitor] them, it's virtually impossible… mobile phones are ubiquitous.
>
> EDUCATOR, MELBOURNE

The qualitative research found that the extent and accessibility of online access via "wifi" or "mobile data", including the portability of devices used, meant that children and young people could access the internet "pretty much everywhere". This omnipresent nature of the online world was found to contribute to the perception many parents/carers had of it being something they could not control.

The research found that children and young people were accessing the internet:

- at school—and, as previously mentioned, many schools were necessitating online use, either directly (i.e. through provision of devices) or by setting tasks that required online access or the use of devices (e.g. creating a video);
- at home—while some participants reported having rules around the location of online use in the home (e.g. only in shared spaces or in plain view), many others allowed their children to have online access throughout the house, including in bedrooms. The quantitative survey found that, overall, around seven-in-ten parent/carer respondents allowed their child(ren) to use the internet 'anywhere' in the house, albeit with varying levels of supervision, with 22% allowing their child(ren) to use the internet anywhere in the house with no oversight whatsoever;
- other places outside the home—participants reported that their children would use their devices at friends' and relatives' houses.

In addition, the quantitative survey found that children and young people were most likely to have devices that were personal and portable (48% of children under 12, and 95% of children and young people over 12, were reported to have access to a personal device that was portable)—thus meaning that many children and young people had the ability to be online at any time.

# G. FINDINGS ABOUT SPECIAL AUDIENCES

> "They know how to use a webcam because we do Skyping with the family... we have family overseas, so we share photos and videos."
>
> CALD PARENT/CARER, SYDNEY

> "My kid has autism... technology is all she knows... she's non-verbal... and if we try to take it away, she will throw a tantrum. We don't want the neighbours to hear, so we let her have it."
>
> CALD PARENT/CARER, SYDNEY

> "He's in a different category when it comes to safety. He's absconded from school and a stranger picked him up... if a lovely lady offers him help, he would see a lovely lady, not a stranger."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, SYDNEY

> "A lot of kids come from the Islands... so the problem is when they move to a city, the parents don't know how to parent in a city setting... up there, there's little to no reception, and the value of a phone isn't as great as what it is here."
>
> EDUCATOR, CAIRNS

The literature review findings suggested that there were some differences in online use and risks amongst young people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background and those with a disability. Specifically, they were reported to be more likely than others to share personal information with strangers online.[16]

The primary research suggested that children and young people from a CALD background were:

- more likely to be familiar with and exposed to video enabled technology due to overseas connections (42% used the internet to chat via video call versus 32% non-CALD); and
- more likely to have started using the internet at a younger age than non-CALD children—the quantitative survey found that, on average, those from a CALD background had started using the internet supervised at 5.4 years of age (compared with 6.8 years reported by other parent/carer respondents). The qualitative research found that these families often had less child care support, meaning some parents/carers were more reliant on technology as a form of entertainment for their children.

The results also suggested that children and young people with a disability:

- tended to depend on the internet more for functioning processes (e.g. communicating), which made it harder for some parents/carers to moderate, control and supervise their online use, given they spent significant amounts of time online. This was particularly the case amongst children who were non-verbal and/or used devices to communicate with others;

This reliance was also found to impact on assumptions about their technological ability, with parent/carer and key influencer respondents of children and young people with a disability more likely to rate their children as having a 'better' understanding of technology than themselves;

- were more likely to have access to a personal and portable device than children and young people without a disability (88% versus 70%); and
- for some children/young people with a disability—particularly those on the autism spectrum—they were considered by their parents/carers to be less able to make safe and discerning choices to keep themselves safe online.

The qualitative research also found some indicative differences in online use and risks amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences, including:

- a higher likelihood that digital devices were shared between multiple people in households—which could increase access to inappropriate content and unsupervised access;
- an increased risk amongst those who moved to larger cities from communities with limited reception (e.g. Torres Strait Islands)—as many parents/carers in such circumstances had less understanding of the risks and issues associated with online use given their limited exposure to technology and the internet; and
- an increased digital knowledge divide, with older family members/grandparents often acting as primary carers—potentially making it harder for parents/carers to oversee online activity.

16 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *State of Play – Youth, Kids and Digital Dangers*, 15.

# Awareness and understanding of online safety and online child sexual exploitation

This chapter presents research findings in relation to awareness and understanding of online safety and online child sexual exploitation. It discusses myths and misconceptions, information seeking behaviours and key sources of information about the topic.

## H. UNDERSTANDING OF ONLINE SAFETY AND ONLINE CHILD EXPLOITATION

> "Online safety is a common anxiety for parents."
>
> HEALTH PROFESSIONAL, MELBOURNE

The primary research, consistent with the literature review findings, suggested that online safety is a key concern for many parents/carers,[17] with good awareness and understanding identified in relation to the issue and the range and types of risks faced by children and young people online.

The qualitative research found that participants tended to report a spectrum of online safety issues, from issues that were perceived to be "softer" to those considered more "extreme" or "severe". The issues reported by participants along this spectrum are shown below (with bolded responses for those that relate to online child exploitation):

**Figure 6. Spectrum of online safety issues**

| | |
|---|---|
| Low level cyberbullying | **Grooming** |
| Consensual sexting | **Predatory behaviour** |
| Exposure to age-inappropriate content | **Blackmail and extortion (e.g. sextortion)** |
| **Posting or sharing provocative images** | **Meeting up in person/rape** |
| Receiving inappropriate images from others | Extreme cyberbullying (linked to suicides) |

> "Cyberbullying is a big one... but online child exploitation is something you don't hear very often."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, DARWIN

The research found that, while most participants could list the full range of issues when probed, the less severe issues were more front-of-mind, considered more prevalent and felt to be more "likely to happen". In contrast, the issues associated directly with online child sexual exploitation (i.e. mostly those sitting at the more "severe" end of the spectrum), were generally not raised as a primary concern amongst participants. Despite participants being able to differentiate these issues when prompted in the research, generally they were not considered separately from one another, with participants viewing them together (in addition to excessive screen time) as part of "online safety" more broadly.

17 ReachOut Australia, *Parents rank social media and technology worse than drugs, alcohol and smoking*, 2018 [Media release].

> Parent's concerns are more about what their children are accessing as opposed to who might have access to their children.
>
> HEALTH PROFESSIONAL, BRISBANE

In support of these findings, the quantitative survey asked parents/carers and other key influencers to list their five greatest concerns in relation to online safety of children and young people. The following were the most commonly mentioned concerns:

- children and young people viewing inappropriate content—22%;
- cyberbullying/trolls—16%;
- predators/pedophiles—11%; and
- cybersecurity (i.e. hacking, viruses etc.)—10%.

Online "grooming" was mentioned by just 3% of respondents.

In relation to online child sexual exploitation, the qualitative research found good awareness amongst participants of:

- what the term 'online child sexual exploitation' constitutes—e.g. grooming, predatory behaviours, blackmail and extortion and production of sexual imagery of children and young people (for more information on this term, refer to Chapter XI); and
- sexually exploitative behaviour towards children and young people more generally—this issue was found to be particularly front-of-mind due to recent public exposure of incidents (i.e. The Royal Commission into child abuse and charges against George Pell). Many participants also reported being exposed to media relating to recent issues within their community.

In contrast, participants tended to have less awareness of:

- the extent of the issue of online child sexual exploitation, and the frequency with which it occurred in Australia;
- how it would occur—most participants were unaware of what a typical scenario would be, such as who the perpetrators and victims could be and through which devices and platforms it may happen (e.g. online games, social media or through chat/messaging apps). In addition many were unaware:
  - how quickly it could happen when a child was online—many participants expected that grooming would be a slow process that would take months or years to occur;
  - the possibility that children and young people under the age of 18 could be involved in offending and charged with these offences;
- what they should be doing to minimise the risk to their child(ren)—the literature review and qualitative research found that many parent/carer participants reported not knowing how to manage their children's general online safety,[18] and there was even less awareness in relation to how to keep their children safe from online sexual exploitation more specifically;
  - the quantitative survey found that 29% of parents/carer participants did not believe there were clear guidelines available to assist them in keeping children and young people safe from online child sexual exploitation—and when explored in the qualitative research, most participants reported they were unsure of exactly what they should be doing;
- that there were resources and information available to parents/carers on this issue, as well as reporting mechanisms—over half of respondents in the quantitative survey either agreed or neither agreed nor disagreed (51%) with the statement *'I don't know what to do to keep my children/the children I work with/I am close to safe from online child exploitation'*.

> I would have thought the grooming process would be longer.
>
> PARENT/CARER ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON

> I've got no idea, no clue what to do.
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, CAIRNS

18 ReachOut Australia, *Parents rank social media.*

> "I feel online safety is a huge gap in training."
> HEALTH PROFESSIONAL, MELBOURNE

Qualitative research with health professionals found that they felt that online safety was becoming an increasingly relevant part of their role, yet many felt that more information was required to assist them in protecting children and young people from harm (i.e. information about the signs/symptoms and advice about relevant questions to ask to ascertain risk to children and young people). Exposure to online child exploitation related issues amongst this audience included:

- parents/carers approaching GPs about screen time, as well as young people asking about screen or porn addiction; and
- parents/carers approaching mental health professionals due to concerns about not knowing who their child was talking to online, and young people approaching them (often anonymously) about sending photos, exposure to grooming behaviour and cyberbullying.

# I. MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

The research identified a number of myths and misconceptions about online child sexual exploitation, particularly in relation to:

- who was at-risk;
- the safety of online platforms and effectiveness of control measures; and
- the nature and risk of online child sexual exploitation.

In many cases these were found to act as a direct barrier to parent/carer and other key influencer participants implementing effective preventative behaviours, as they decreased the perceived relevance of the risk of online child exploitation to their child(ren) or contributed to assumptions that their child(ren) were adequately protected.

In relation to who was at-risk, many participants perceived online child exploitation to only happen to certain types of children and/or families, or thought that some children were more likely to be victims than others.

> "It's the children that don't get the nurturing they need at home... they are rampantly dysfunctional."
> OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBER, LAUNCESTON

In particular, many participants perceived that:

- online child sexual exploitation mostly involved disadvantaged or neglected children and young people—in the quantitative survey 12% of parents and other influencer respondents agreed with this. The qualitative research found that particular types of children and young people who were assumed to be at greater risk due to their vulnerability included those:
  - from broken homes;
  - not receiving sufficient "love" or "attention" from their families—which many assumed would lead to children "seeking attention" online;
  - with lower self-esteem;
  - from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
  - with "lower IQ"—with some participants assuming "smarter children" were not at-risk;

> "I'm scared for my daughter... I don't worry as much for boys as girls."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD STARTING SCHOOL IN 2020, PERTH

- female children and young people were assumed to be more at-risk than males—while the literature review did suggest that this was true, the qualitative research found that many parent/carer participants who had boys thus assumed that their children were safe. This was also found in the quantitative survey. Parent/carer respondents who only had sons were less likely to think that the topic of online sexual exploitation was relevant to them compared to those with only daughters (54% compared with 63%); and

> It's more teenagers. They would have full access to the internet and less control from parents. There's a good chance inappropriate contact can come through. For younger children, it doesn't make sense.
>
> CALD PARENT/CARER, SYDNEY

> The iPad has a parental lock, so I'm OK with him taking it into his room.
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON

- high school children and young people were perceived to be more at risk from online predators than those in primary school (67% of parents/carers and other influencers felt this was the case). In contrast the literature review suggested that it was more likely to happen to prepubescent children (more than 60% of cases).[19]

In relation to the safety of online platforms and effectiveness of control measures, the research identified the following myths and misconceptions:

- that parental and other filters were enough to keep children and young people safe and were effective at protecting them from online exploitation (62% of parent/carer and other influencer respondents stated this to be true);
- that children's games (i.e. on gaming consoles or apps) were not online and therefore safe—this misconception was found particularly amongst older influencer participants (e.g. grandparents). In addition, some participants felt that only children or young people who were using social media or messaging apps were at risk, without realising that similar messaging functions may be available through other apps or platforms (e.g. interactive games); and

Some parent/carer participants also noted that they had checked an app initially and determined it to be safe, but that subsequent updates applied to the app had meant that a messaging function had been introduced without their knowledge; and

- that app-based devices such as tablets were safer than computers—a few participants reported that they were more comfortable with their children using these devices as they felt they could be completely in control of their activities.

Myths and misconceptions relating to the nature and risk of online child sexual exploitation included that:

> Some parents think 'they're protected by the screen'. There's a false sense of security there.
>
> EDUCATOR, CAIRNS

- online child sexual exploitation mainly happened overseas/was not a common problem in Australia—15% of parent/carer respondents agreed that online child exploitation was not as much an issue in Australia as it was overseas, and 13% disagreed that it was a common problem in Australia;
- online child sexual exploitation was not an issue if a child or young person could not physically meet up with strangers—the qualitative research found that this had a significant impact on a few participants who assumed their children were safe as they did not allow them to leave the house alone;

> That it could happen in two hours shocked me… there are families out there who let their kids do marathon sessions unsupervised.
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON

- children and young people in smaller or more isolated towns were safer from online predators –participants felt that it was unlikely a child would "meet up with" a stranger under these circumstances;
- online grooming was a slow process which would take months or years, thus meaning there would be time to notice the signs—while 94% of survey respondents agreed to the statement that 'online grooming could happen within hours', 48% later reported this being one of the 'most useful' things they had learnt through the survey; and
- offences were typically committed by older white males—the qualitative research, supported by the literature review, found that this was the top of mind image of a perpetrator of online child sexual exploitation (i.e. "a dirty old man"). This pre-conceived view meant that many would not be alert to other people (e.g. siblings or younger gaming friends) as being potential perpetrators of online child sexual exploitation.

> Most people have a stereotype – an old man, a white man, a bald man.
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, SYDNEY

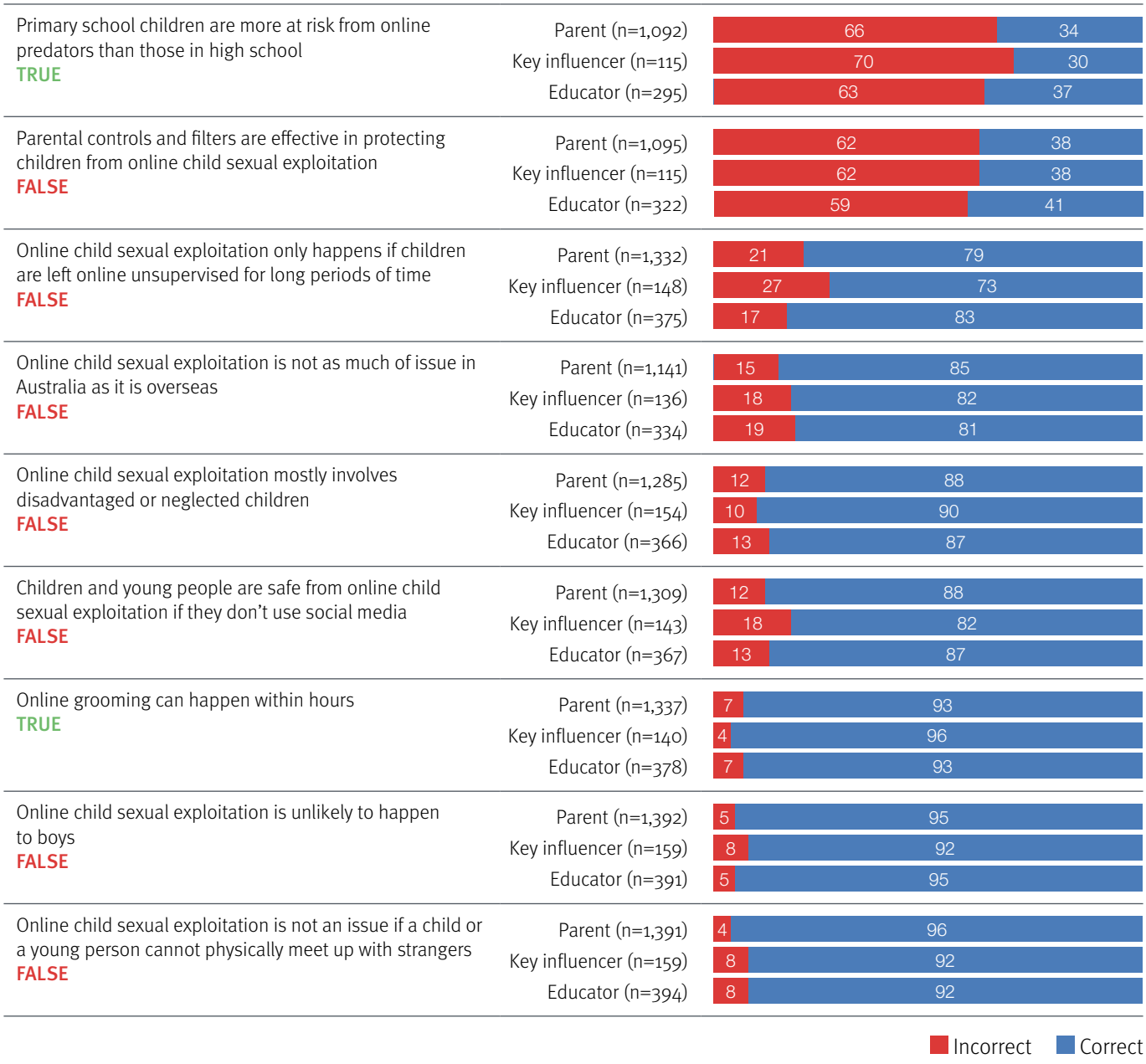
In support of the above findings, when asked to mark 'true' or 'false' to statements relating to online child sexual exploitation in the quantitative survey, very few parents/carers responded correctly to all key statements (9%).

19 O Child, "On unidentified victims in child sexual exploitation material," In *Towards a Global Indicator*. (2018), 5

Figure 7 illustrates the proportion of respondents who had misconceptions, per statement.

**Figure 7. Responses to key statements, by group**

(Base: parents/carers, key influencers, educators)




*Q36. Please indicate whether you think the following statements are true or false?*

# J. INFORMATION SEEKING

> "I don't think you'll find a lot of people doing online research."
>
> ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARENT/ CARER, MELBOURNE

Overall, the research found that only a few participants had actively sought information on the topic of online child sexual exploitation. It was evident in the qualitative research that information seeking and discussion about the topic were generally undertaken only in response to a specific incident and rarely with a preventative focus. It was also notable that most parent/carer and key influencer participants reported not discussing the topic with others—and for a few, a lack of consideration in relation to discussing the issue and preventative measures with those supervising their children.

The quantitative survey found that educator respondents were by far the most likely to report that they had sought information or help in relation to risks or prevention, with 37% agreeing they had done this. In contrast, only 16% of parent/carer respondents had sought such information, and even fewer key influencer (9%) and other community member (4%) respondents.

Of parent/carer respondents who reported that they had sought information, 43% reported that they had done so because they wanted to be better informed, and 41% because they were concerned about a child's general online safety.

For the 84% of parent/carer respondents who had not sought information on the topic, the majority reported that this was because they had not needed to as they had never had any issues or concerns (44%) or that it was not relevant to them/their families (23%).

# K. SOURCES OF AWARENESS

> "That reminds me now that we watched something on TV series, like a crime investigation. But in real life you don't think those things will happen."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

The qualitative research found that participants mostly reported being exposed to the topic of online child sexual exploitation through sources that sensationalised the issue and focused on more severe cases that were often "shocking" and "confronting". These included:

- crime shows and documentaries;
- media coverage of specific incidents, which tended to be the more extreme/severe cases; and
- "gossip" among other parents/carers and with other community members (e.g. if an incident had occurred in their local area or at their child's school).

> "It stresses me out because I'm not as good with technology."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, CAIRNS

Overall, it was found that such exposure:

- contributed to the tendency of some participants' to disassociate from the issue and assume it was not relevant to them/their families—the extreme nature of the scenarios limited the perceived likelihood of them occurring;
- heightened the fears and anxieties amongst some participants—which contributed to their sense of being "overwhelmed", particularly given the absence of practical guidelines or directions to assist them in minimising harm for their child(ren); and/or
- made a few question the actual frequency and prevalence of events—i.e. made it seem "unbelievable".

> For professional development we do an online training sessions every year.
> EDUCATOR, MELBOURNE

While many educator participants reported having received information about the topic that had an educational or preventative focus, only a few parent/carer participants had received such information. Specific sources of preventative-focused information identified by participants included:

- professional development at schools—among educator participants;
- mandatory reporting training—for participants who were working with children and young people and/or had applied for working with children's checks either through the workplace or for voluntary roles they held; and
- parent education programs/information nights in schools or sporting clubs—among a few parent/carer participants. Educator participants also reported that it tended to be the more "diligent" parents/carers that attended these sessions.

# L. FINDINGS ABOUT SPECIAL AUDIENCES

Overall, the research found that there were some differences in levels of awareness and understanding of the topic amongst participants and respondents from a CALD background, as well as those who had a child with a disability.

Qualitative findings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants suggest that levels of awareness and understanding were broadly consistent with that of others—however it is recommended that more research be conducted with this audience on this topic to confirm.

> It's my first time hearing online child exploitation, so I have no idea what it means.
> CALD PARENT/CARER, SYDNEY

Respondents from a CALD background tended to be less aware of the specific risks associated with online use (particularly online child sexual exploitation) than other parent/carer respondents. They were also found to be more likely to hold misconceptions regarding the topic of online child sexual exploitation—with just 4% of this group correctly identifying all key facts about online child sexual exploitation (compared to 10% non-CALD).

> For us it has always been an issue because my son has always been unaware of inappropriate things. Online safety is a hard message to get across.
> PARENT/CARER, CAIRNS

Nevertheless, CALD and non-CALD audiences were aligned in their likelihood to have sought information or help in relation to risks or prevention of online child sexual exploitation (16% for both CALD and non-CALD parents/carers).

In relation to parents/carers of children and young people with a disability, this group tended to be slightly more engaged and informed about the issue. The research also found they were more likely than others to have sought information in relation to the topic—with almost one quarter reportedly doing so (29% versus 15%).

# Perceptions of and attitudes towards online safety and online child sexual exploitation

This chapter explores current perceptions of and attitudes towards online child sexual exploitation, to better understand the impact they have on current behaviours. It identifies current perceptions, beliefs and attitudes to the topic, and also offers insights into the social norms that exist about the subject matter.

## M. PERCEPTIONS RELATING TO THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN ONLINE

> "I would wonder if my child is to blame if they hadn't made good choices... online if someone is aggressive or coercive, they can just switch it off."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, PERTH

> "We don't worry about our children... we chose the Catholic school... you pay something for the school, so you expect a higher standard."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, SYDNEY

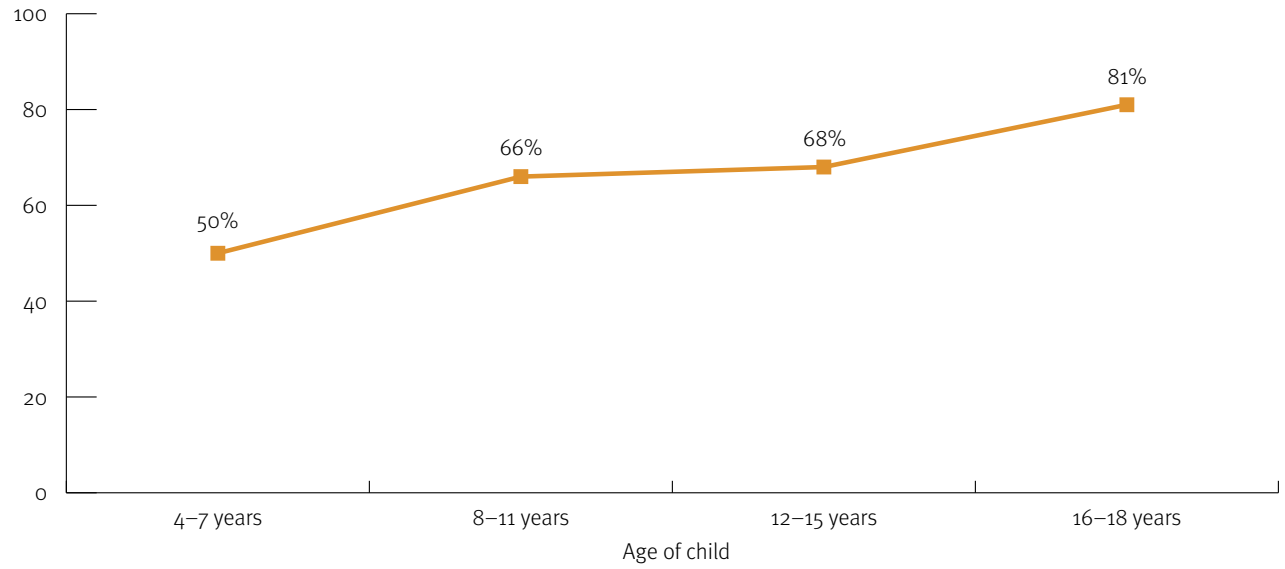
The research found that many parent/carer respondents perceived their child(ren) to be safe when using the internet (65%).

While perceptions of safety were not found to vary significantly by child's gender, they did vary by other demographics, including:

- age of child—with younger children perceived to be less safe than older children and young people, particularly those under 7 years of age (see Figure 8). The qualitative research similarly found that many parent/carer participants believed that children over the age of 12 years were "old enough" to know and understand the risks and consequences of their actions online, and as such were relatively safe. This perception meant that some felt children of this age were primarily to blame if they experienced online sexual exploitation as they "should know better";
- age of parent/carer—older parents/carer respondents were more likely to perceive their child to be safe online (78% of over 55 year olds, compared to 57% of under 35 year olds and 66% of 35—54 year olds). This included those aged 55 years and over who had younger children.
- school type of child—a few participants in the qualitative research reported that, because their child was attending a private school and was perceived to have a "good peer group", they perceived them to be safer than if they were attending a government school.

**Figure 8. Perceived safety of children/young people online, by child age**

(Base: parents/carers n=1,427)




*Q20. How safe would you say that this child is when using the internet? (% safe)*

> "I'm not so concerned about my daughter. She's got her head screwed on… she doesn't accept people she doesn't know online."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, PORT LINCOLN

In the quantitative survey, parents/carers and other key influencers were asked to provide reasoning in regard to why they felt their child(ren), or the child(ren) that they had a close relationship with, were safe or unsafe online. Free text responses were coded into themes. The top three themes mentioned by those who felt their child was safe online (n=1,004), included:

- child is trustworthy/responsible/smart—25%;
- child has been educated about the risks/how to stay safe—22%; and
- child is monitored/supervised—18%.

14% also mentioned they felt their child was safe online due to parental controls/ restricted settings.

> "They're more naïve than they like to think they are."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, PORT LINCOLN

Whilst the few (n=108) who felt their child was unsafe mentioned:

- there are potential dangers on the internet, and you can never be 100% safe—39%; and
- child is too young/naïve/may not identify risks—34%.

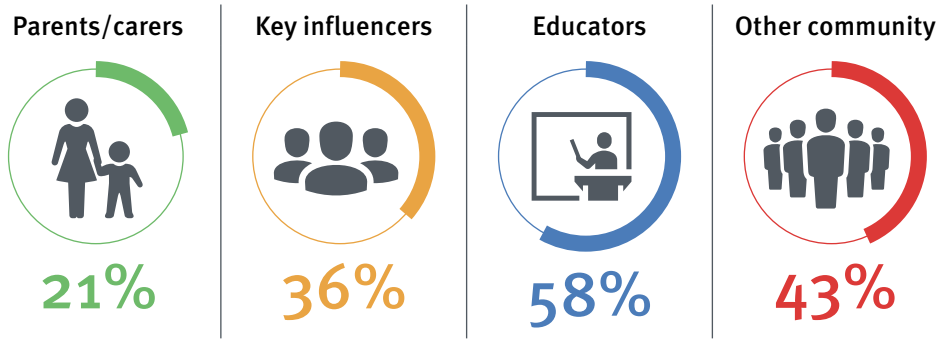
Through the quantitative survey, all respondent groups were asked how likely they felt it was that online child sexual exploitation could happen to their child (parents/carers) or a child or young person that they know (all others). The results varied significantly by respondent group, with educator respondents being the most likely to believe this could happen, and parent/carers the least—see Figure 9.

> "Always you think 'that couldn't happen to me."
>
> ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARENT/CARER, PORT LINCOLN

Parent/carer respondents with older children were also significantly less likely than those with younger children to feel this could happen to their child (which is interesting given 66% believed that high school aged children and young people were more at risk generally, showing a dissociation from the issue when asked to consider the personal impact).

**Figure 9. Perceived likelihood that online child sexual exploitation could happen to your child/a child or young person that you know**

(Base: parents n=1,389, key influencers n=149, educators n=403, other community members n=392)




*Q34. How likely do you think that online child sexual exploitation could happen to your child(ren)/a child or young person that you know? (% likely).*

> "Of course he doesn't understand the internet… he understands what's happening at a high level, but he doesn't understand the implications."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

Around a quarter of parent/carer, key influencer and educator respondents also agreed that children and young people are generally savvy enough to stay safe from online child sexual exploitation. In contrast, just 11% of other community members agreed with this statement.

## N. INTEREST AND ENGAGEMENT IN TOPIC

The research found that currently there is less interest in and engagement with the topic of online child sexual exploitation than that of online safety more generally.

Overall, when asked to comment on their feelings in relation to the topic of children and young people's online safety generally, and the topic of online child sexual exploitation more specifically, parent/carer respondents were *more likely* to view children and young people's general online safety as relevant to them, a concern, and a key priority:

- 83% felt general online safety was a concern to them, versus 77% in relation to online child sexual exploitation;
- 85% felt general online safety was relevant to them, versus 60% in relation to online child sexual exploitation; and
- 82% felt general online safety was a key priority for them, versus 69% in relation to online child sexual exploitation.

> "I am concerned. I've been exposed to those people. I've been online and I know what's there."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON

Furthermore, just 40% of parents/carers stated that they were *really worried* about their child(ren) being sexually exploited online.

Whilst a similar proportion of both key influencer and educator respondents reported that the topic was of concern and a key priority to them, key influencers were less likely than educator respondents to feel that this was relevant to them.

# 0. ATTITUDES TOWARDS ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

> "It's sickening, dirty... it's difficult to discuss with young people without scaring the bajeebers out of them."
> OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBER, LAUNCESTON

The research found overall that the topic of online child sexual exploitation made many participants feel uncomfortable, particularly as it was related to "sex" and "body safety". For a few participants, this meant that it was not a topic that they were comfortable talking about with their children or with others in their lives. The quantitative survey found that 20% of parents/carers would not be comfortable, or weren't sure whether they would be comfortable, talking to their children about online child sexual exploitation (3% disagreed, 17% neither agreed nor disagreed).

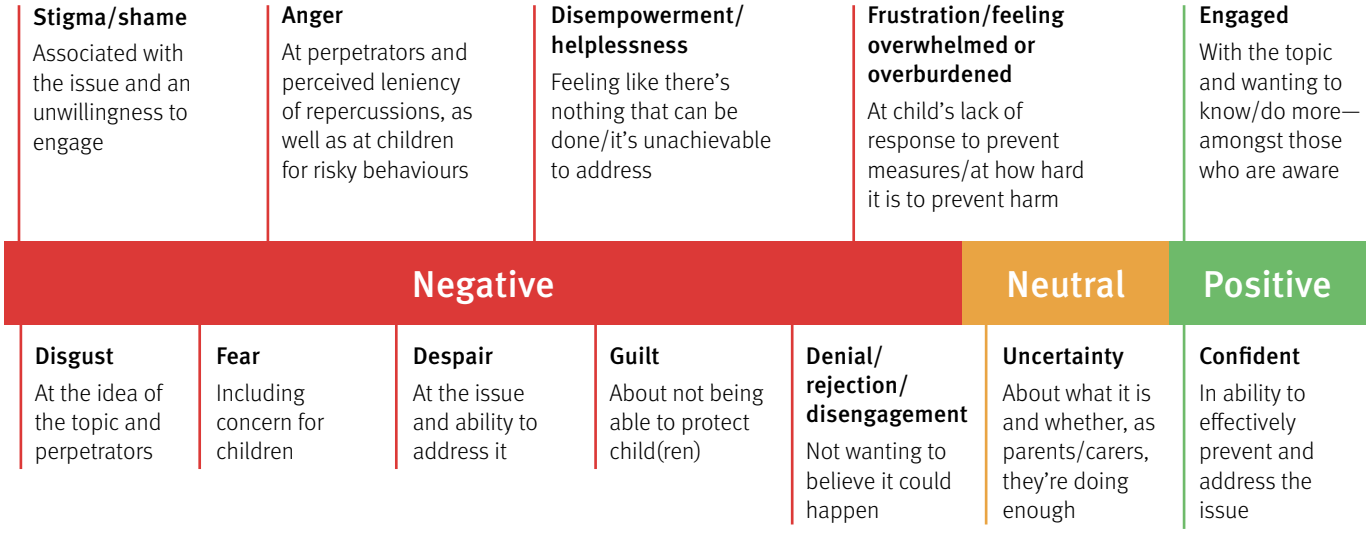
In addition:

- 15% of parents/carers reported that if their child was sexually exploited online, they would feel too embarrassed/ashamed to talk about it with others (and a further 18% neither agreed nor disagreed); and
- 21% of parents/carers felt that the topic was just too repulsive and sickening to think about.

> "Parents are ashamed... because people are judgemental of families it happens to."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, PERTH

Likewise, the qualitative research identified a prevalence of strong, negative attitudes towards the topic as shown in Figure 10 below. Unlike some other parenting challenges, this was felt to be a newer, less well understood, highly stigmatised, and for some, a "taboo" concern.

**Figure 10. Attitudes identified in the research**




The research also identified that a few participants who were currently taking effective measures to protect their children felt reassured and validated following exposure to information on the topic. This attitude was found to be important in motivating the continuation of their preventative behaviours.

# P. SOCIAL NORMS RELATING TO ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

> "[If I looked at their] private conversations with friends, I would feel like I was intruding."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, PORT LINCOLN

The research found that attitudes of participants were strongly influenced by what others in the community were doing (i.e. social norms) in relation to online safety and prevention of online child sexual exploitation. These norms were found to play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of participants in relation to this issue.

The research found that current social norms around online child sexual exploitation tended to:

- prioritise the privacy of the child/young person when online—the qualitative research found that many participants did not believe it was their place to "interfere", as their child(ren) had a right to personal space (even in the online world where privacy of posts could not be guaranteed). In the quantitative survey, 27% of parent/carer respondents agreed that adults should respect the privacy of children and young people, with a further 37% who were undecided on this point;
- affirm the blaming of victims in instances of online sexual abuse—the quantitative survey found that 80% of parents/carers would respond with anger at their child if they found out that they shared images online, and 73% would be angry if their child spoke with strangers online; and
- endorse limited parental guidance and oversight—while in principle most respondents agreed that children and young people needed guidance to keep them safe online, the qualitative research found that in general, ensuring the safety of children and young people online was not considered equally important as ensuring the safety of children in the physical world. While parents/carers reported actively considering and responding to the risks posed to their child(ren) in the physical world (e.g. swimming and road safety, 'stranger danger') the same was not true online. This was evidenced during the qualitative research sessions, with participants coming to the realisation through the discussion that their children had been "inviting the outside world" into their home, often with little to no oversight. In addition, some parents/carers who mentioned being vigilant in relation to online safety reporting being "mocked" or "scorned" by their children or other parents/carers for doing so, further illustrating the positioning of current norms around this issue.

> "I would just have to stay away till I calmed down, I would be so angry. I don't know what I'd do."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

> "He says 'no one else does this Mum, you're the problem'... it does feel like I'm the only mum thinking about this, it will be nice to be supported."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, SYDNEY

# Q. FINDINGS ABOUT SPECIAL AUDIENCES

> "There are definitely cultural barriers. I never had these conversations with my parents. They wouldn't feel comfortable – it's a very conservative culture."
>
> CALD PARENT/CARER, SYDNEY

Some differences in perceptions were noted amongst special audiences, as detailed below.

Although CALD parents/carers were seemingly more cautious in general about the internet (only 52% felt their child was safe using the internet compared to 67% of non-CALD parents/carers), they:

- tended to be less comfortable at the idea of talking to:
  - their children (69% agreed they would be comfortable discussing online child sexual exploitation with their child, versus 82% of non-CALD parents/carers);
  - other people about the topic (63% agreed, versus 77% non-CALD); and
- were more likely to agree that they would be embarrassed to talk about it, if their child was sexually exploited online (22% agreed, versus 13% non-CALD). The qualitative research found that this was particularly the case amongst those from more conservative cultures in which issues related to sex were not openly discussed (e.g. Asian cultures including South Korea and India).

> "Online safety is something we always think about when the phone is in our son's hand... they ask personal questions and he answers anything. [With autism] he misses that line and often crosses that boundary."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

The research found that respondents who were parents/carers of children and young people with a disability, tended to be more worried than others about the issue of online child exploitation. Specifically:

- one third (33%) of parents/carers of a child with a disability felt online child sexual exploitation could happen to their children or a child they know, compared to just 20% of other parents/carers; and
- around half of parents/carers of children with a disability reported that they were really worried about their child being sexually exploited online—a substantially higher proportion than those without a disabled child (51% versus 39%).

Based on the qualitative research findings, this was likely due to a few parents/carers of children and young people with a disability identifying that their children may be more susceptible to risk due to a perceived:

- reduction in capacity to correctly judge the safety of a behaviour or situation—some participants reported feeling that there was a greater likelihood that their child could be deceived/"led astray" by others online. This was particularly felt to be the case for children and young people on the autism spectrum.
- reliance on digital resources to assist them—as previously mentioned, this meant they often spent more time online/using devices, thus increasing the risks.

# Motivators and barriers to implementing effective preventative measures

This chapter explores key motivators and barriers to implementing effective preventative measures amongst parents, carers, key influencers and educators.

## R. OVERALL

The research identified a range of key motivators and barriers for parent/carer, key influencer and educator participants undertaking effective preventative measures to help keep their children safe from online child sexual exploitation. Overall, the barriers were currently found to outweigh the motivators for many participants.

## S. MOTIVATORS TO IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

> "It's all very relevant. I have a 12 year old son, he plays Fortnite all the time. I have to monitor him... its very dangerous."
>
> ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARENT/ CARER, MELBOURNE

> "My definition will be different to yours. Knowing what to do and what the rules and regulations are behind it is important."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

> "I think the social media forums should take some responsibility to educate."
>
> EDUCATOR, MELBOURNE

The research identified the following key motivators for parent, carer, key influencer and educator participants implementing effective preventative measures:

- knowing and understanding the risks—including:
  - that anyone can be impacted by online child exploitation; and
  - how, when and where children and young people could be at risk;
- perceiving the risks as relevant to their child and recognising the need to take preventative action—this included perceiving online safety to be as important as, if not more so than, physical safety;
- knowing what to do—including having clear age-based guidelines for children and young people relating to access and oversight requirements, and how to discuss the topic;
- feeling that they could be effective in minimising harm—believing that it was achievable and "doable" to undertake preventative measures, regardless of their digital capabilities; and
- having support to enact preventative measures—including support from:
  - their partner or co-parent to implement oversight strategies;
  - schools, in providing education and guidance to parents/carers and students, and appropriate policies for online use;
  - other parents/carers, family members and/or their community to provide encouragement and "look out for" children and young people's online safety;
  - the government—through the provision of information, education and guidelines for parents/carers, influencers and educators; and
  - online platforms/companies—through the provision of transparent information about the risks of their online products as well as age-appropriate guidelines and easy to use parental controls and monitors.

# T. BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

> "It's not talked about as much as it should be because people are ashamed. It's a dirty subject to talk about."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, PERTH

> "How do I deal with a defiant child who doesn't see it as an issue?"
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

> "It's hard to find time for this when there are a million other things you have to oversee."
> CALD PARENT/CARER, SYDNEY

The research identified the following key barriers to parent/carer, key influencer and educator participants implementing effective preventative measures:

- holding negative feelings and attitudes towards the topic, which caused disassociation or limited engagement—specifically, fear, anger, shame, disgust, denial, stigma, feelings of overwhelm or embarrassment;
- having limited knowledge and understanding of the risks and consequences—and therefore not recognising how and when child(ren) may be at risk;
- feeling that it was too hard to take action—due to:
  - Having challenging relationships with child(ren)—the research found that participants had different levels of engagement with their child(ren), with a few reporting they would be unlikely to be effective in implementing many of the preventative measures due to their limited authority or bond with their child(ren);
  - Competing priorities (e.g. family, work, financial or health pressures);
  - Having limited digital literacy/skills.
- not having adequate information or support to take effective preventative action—while most parent/carer and key influencer participants felt that they had been informed of and knew what to do to protect their children and young people in the physical world, most did not feel that they had equivalent clear guidelines or support for keeping children and young people safe in the online world. In addition, a few single parent participants reported not having support from a co-parent on this issue, which meant that online safety measures could not be consistently enforced between households; and/or
- not perceiving it to be their responsibility—due to a perception that children and young people knew more about technology than themselves and should know "better", or know how to protect themselves. In addition, a few parent/carer participants felt it was the school's responsibility to educate them on the topic.

# U. FINDINGS ABOUT SPECIAL AUDIENCES

> "How is Nana going to know what is a safe online environment? A lot of the older generation don't even know someone in America can contact someone in Australia."
>
> ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER, MELBOURNE

> "Sometimes it can be cultural barriers – some parents are not comfortable talking about it – and sometimes there are language barriers."
>
> CALD PARENT/CARER, SYDNEY

Overall, the research found that the types of motivators and barriers were similar amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences, as well as those from a CALD background or who had a child with a disability.

However, there were some differences in terms of the extent of barriers experienced. In particular:

- low internet literacy was reported to be more common among some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, particularly older community members with caring responsibilities. This was found to have an impact on knowledge and understanding of the risks and consequences, as well as contributing to feelings that taking action would be "too difficult". In addition, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants reported feeling shame or fear of being judged as a "bad parent", particularly due to cultural stereotypes—this was found to act as an additional barrier to seeking support or discussing the topic with other parents/carers;
- as previously mentioned, for a few CALD participants, the conservative nature of their cultural upbringing made discussing topics related to "sex" even more uncomfortable, which limited their ability to have an open conversation with their children or others in the community on the topic. In addition, for some with limited English, the language barriers between themselves and their children in relation to their online activities posed a further barrier in their ability to oversee online activities; and
- some parents/carers who had a child with a disability reported that their child's reliance on technology (e.g. for communications) meant the reliance on and extent of time their child spent on a device each day limited their ability to oversee them consistently.

# Current preventative measures

This chapter outlines current preventative measures being undertaken, and the extent to which they are deemed to be effective or ineffective in reducing the risk of online child sexual exploitation.

## V. PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

> "I'm pretty confident with what we're doing... we monitor my son's iPad, put restrictions on the amount of time he can use it, and there's rules around it."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, DARWIN

> "I don't feel like I can do much... at this moment they could be looking at anything, I wouldn't know, but I just trust they are doing what they're supposed to."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON

Overall, the research found that the preventative measures reported by parent/carer and key influencer participants tended to be ad hoc, inconsistently applied and often implemented reactively in response to a negative event (rather than in a proactive manner). As such, strategies used by many were unlikely to be effective in preventing the online sexual exploitation of their children.

As shown in Figure 11, the quantitative survey found that less than half of parents/carers implemented most of the preventative measures *frequently* ('all' or 'most of the time').

The most common preventative behaviour was to restrict child(ren)'s time online—with 56% of parent/carer respondents doing this frequently. In addition to this, around half of parents/carers were frequently:

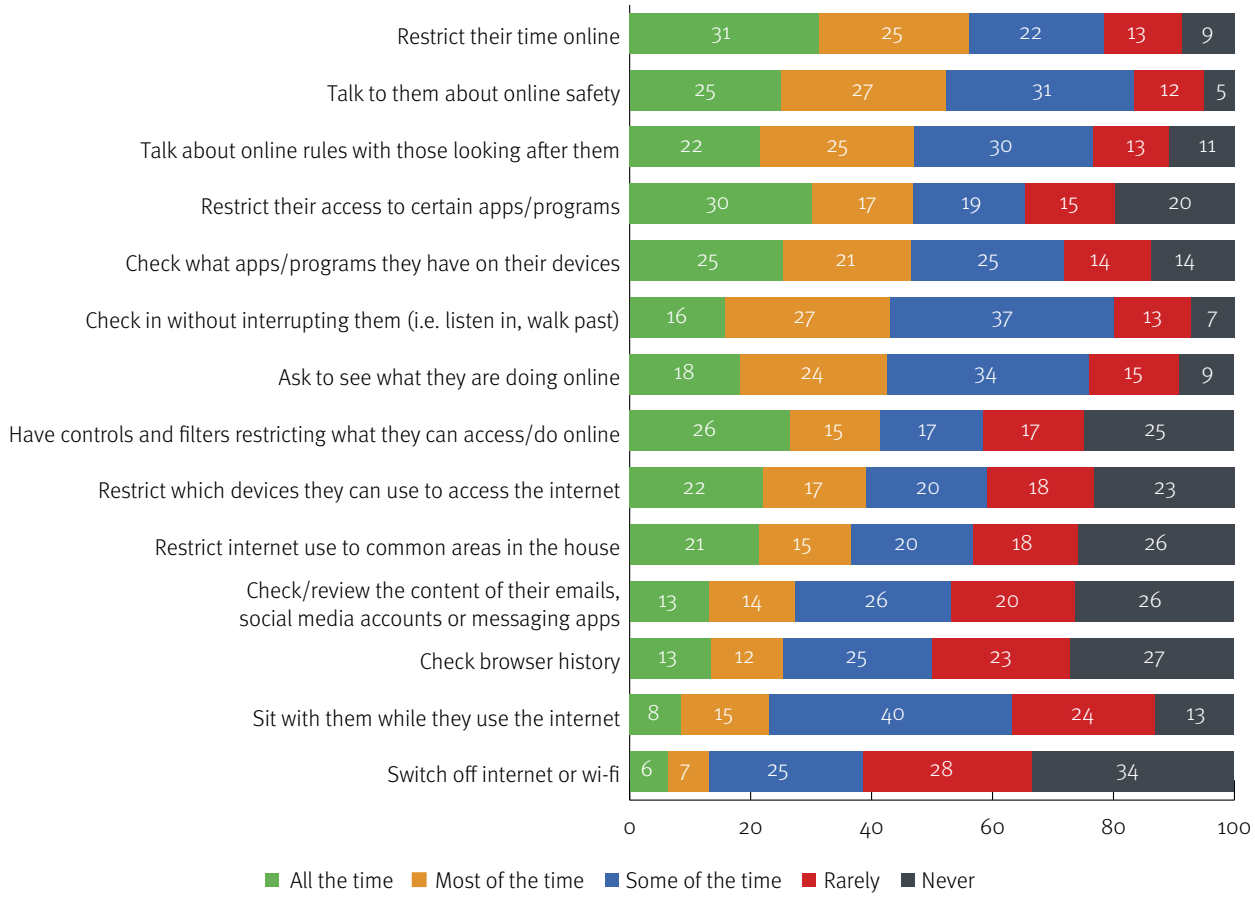
- talking to their child(ren) about online safety (52%); and
- talking about rules with those looking after their child(ren) (47%).

However, only a relatively low proportion of parents/carers were frequently restricting internet use to common areas in the house (37%), and very few were frequently undertaking other desired behaviours such as reviewing the content of emails, social media accounts or messaging apps (27%) or sitting with their child while they used the internet (23%).

Unsurprisingly, the proportion of parent/carer respondents who sat with their children when using the internet was significantly higher amongst those with younger children (50% of those with children 4—7 years of age). However, this proportion dropped to 25% for those with children aged 8—11 years, and to just 14% for children 12 years of age, despite it being recommended by ACCCE that parents/carers should directly oversee online activity for children aged 12 years and under.

**Figure 11. Current preventative behaviours undertaken by parents/carers**

(Base: parents/carers n=1,089—1446)




*Q25. Thinking specifically about your child, how often, if at all, do you personally do the following..?*

> "I always look at what the kids are doing, and we talk constantly about what they're watching and who they're talking to."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, MELBOURNE/ PORT LINCOLN

Despite the limited frequency and consistency with which preventative behaviours were being enacted, many respondents nevertheless reported feeling that they were doing everything they could to keep their children safe from online child sexual exploitation already, with 72% of parent/carer respondents agreeing to this.

# W. WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG: REACTIONS AND REPORTING

The qualitative research tested some realistic scenarios relating to online child sexual exploitation with participants who then reported on their likely reactions and behaviours to these (see Appendix D for a list of these scenarios).

The research found that only a few participants would respond in positive and assured ways to these scenarios, reporting they would:

> "I would talk to them... or I might get a psychologist to talk to them."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD STARTING SCHOOL IN 2020, PERTH

- respond attentively, openly and supportively to their child;
- report the issue to authorities (e.g. the police or the school);
- seek the help of a professional (e.g. a GP or psychologist) to navigate the best way forward; and/or
- alert other parents or adults in the community to the issue so as to increase awareness.

Many participants in the research reported that they would respond negatively/in a manner that may exacerbate the issue. These participants reported that they would likely:

> "She knows I would kill her."
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

- respond with anger at or blame towards their child—as previously mentioned, many parent/carer respondents in the quantitative survey reported they would respond with anger at their child if they found out that they shared images online (80%), or be angry if their child spoke with strangers online (73%). Many participants reported that they would be more angry at their child in the instance of online child sexual exploitation than if the abuse happened in the offline world. This was because they assumed their children should "know better" and could easily "just switch off" the device to protect themselves;
- feel guilt, shame, embarrassment and/or stigmatised due to their perceived "bad parenting" for letting the issue happen;

> "Kids that have too many boundaries are the ones who tend to go the other way and resort to secrecy. It's about balance."
> HEALTH PROFESSIONAL, MELBOURNE

- keep the issue within their close family or social circle and thus not report or seek external help; and/or
- completely stop online access of their child, even for older children and young people—this was reported by some parent/carer participants. A few health professionals interviewed in the research reported that they had seen parents attempt to implement this strategy and it was unrealistic and ineffective. Rather than addressing the issue, the child/young person responded with more secretive online behaviours and was less likely to tell their parents/carers if they had a negative experience, leaving them at greater risk of exploitation.

There were a few parent/carer, key influencer, educator and health professional participants identified in the research who would miss, overlook or ignore symptoms or warning signs of online child sexual exploitation and thus not deal with the issue.

> "That's what they want to think, that we'll tell them... but parents overreact most of the time, so we just wouldn't."
> SIBLING AGED 18–21, PERTH

Interestingly, despite the strong likelihood of parents/carers reacting negatively towards their child, most parent/carer participants assumed that their child(ren)/child(ren) in their care would tell them if something bad occurred to them online (89%).

In contrast, most younger participants in the qualitative research reported that they were unlikely to tell their parents if something happened, particularly as they were aware of the anger and/or stress this would cause. They reported that they were most likely to confide in peers or siblings of a similar age who they felt would be more understanding of their online experiences. These participants felt that it would be useful to have the confidential support of an informed adult to guide and mentor them if they were in need of assistance.

# X. FINDINGS ABOUT SPECIAL AUDIENCES

Parents from a CALD background were reportedly undertaking more desirable preventative behaviours than non-CALD parents—including being much less likely to allow their children to use the internet anywhere without oversight (16% CALD versus 23% non-CALD).

Overall parents from a CALD background were more likely to report undertaking most preventative measures, relative to non-CALD parents. Of particular note were the following:

- restricting time online (64% versus 55%);
- asking to see what they were doing online (53% versus 41%); and
- sitting with them while using the internet (36% all or most of the time, versus 21% non-CALD).

> "If it's very personal it would stay in the family, or outside with close family members, but probably not the police."
>
> CALD PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

The qualitative research, however, found that, should something go wrong, some CALD participants were less likely to seek external support or report incidents as they were unsure where to go and/or were less comfortable conversing with authorities.

Likewise, parents/carers of children and young people with a disability also reported undertaking preventative behaviours more frequently than others. They were more likely to:

- check their browser history (41% versus 24% without a disability);
- check what apps/programs they had on their devices (61% versus 45%); and
- talk to them about online safety (63% versus 52%).

> "I don't want to go to the police... a lot of us are scared they'll call DHS and our kid will get taken."
>
> ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARENT/CARER, MELBOURNE

The following was also found in the qualitative research for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences:

- extended family were more of a consideration in undertaking preventative measures; and
- some were unlikely to report to police/authorities, due to distrust of authorities, negative experiences/perceptions with the police and concern about child removal due to historical issues (e.g. Stolen Generation and the Northern Territory intervention).

# Impact of exposure to information

During the research, participants were exposed to educational messages and information about online child sexual exploitation. This chapter discusses the impact on participants of being exposed to such information. It presents findings in relation to their changes in awareness, perceptions and likely attitudes and behaviours.

## Y. OVERALL

In the research, quantitative survey respondents were exposed to the short form educational/key messages whilst qualitative research participants were exposed to the longer messages (see Appendix E for messaging).

Exposure to this information was found to have a positive impact on participants':

- awareness of the issue and risks associated with online child sexual exploitation;
- reported attitudes and perceptions relating to the topic; and
- intentions to implement preventative behaviours.

## Z. CHANGES IN AWARENESS

> "I feel a lot more informed. There's a lot I didn't know."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, SYDNEY

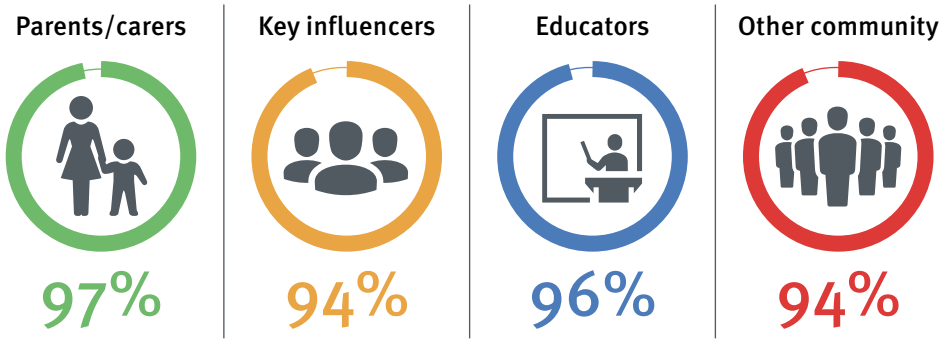
Most qualitative research participants gained knowledge and found value in the information they were exposed to during the research process. Many participants reported being appreciative of their involvement in the research, as they had found the information particularly useful to assist them in providing a safe online environment for the child(ren) in their care.

Similarly, in the quantitative survey, the vast majority of respondents (96%) reported that they had learnt something useful as a result of taking part in the survey (see Figure 12). This was particularly in relation to:

- the existence of the *ThinkUKnow* website—66% of parents/carers, 64% of educators, 71% of key influencers and 69% of other community members.
- the fact that it is important to regularly talk to children and young people about staying safe from child sexual exploitation—50% of parent/carer, 42% of educator, 51% of other key influencer, and 45% of other community member respondents;
- the speed at which online grooming can happen (i.e. within hours)—48% of parent/carer, 45% of educator, 52% of other key influencer, and 49% of other community member respondents; and
- that there is information and resources available to help—45% of parent/carer, 45% of educator, 49% of other key influencer, and 50% of other community member respondents.

**Figure 12. Learned something as a result of taking the survey**

(Base: parents/carers n=1,462, key influencers n=163, educators n=405, other community members n=419)




> "As parents we do have the responsibility, but we need to know what to do first."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON

*Q42. What are the most useful things that you learnt as a result of taking part in this survey?*

In addition to the information listed above, participants in the qualitative research noted the importance of the provision of information relating to:

- the risks and consequences associated with online child sexual exploitation—so as to highlight the importance of the issue and enhance relevance;
- the responsibility adults hold in the protection of children and young people—as many had not considered the importance of their role to provide a safe online environment prior to the research;
- the benefits of taking preventative actions—particularly in relation to minimising the risk of harm to their child(ren)/child(ren) in their care;
- clear guidelines they could follow—as this information increased their awareness of what they should be doing to minimise the risks for the child(ren) in their lives; and
- the fact that actions were not reliant on high levels of digital understanding (i.e. were more about overseeing and communicating than understanding the technology), and were thus achievable for all parents/carers and influencers regardless of their digital ability.

# AA. CHANGES IN ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

Overall, the qualitative research found that exposure to information through the research was found to reduce some negative attitudes and perceptions relating to online child sexual exploitation, and increase the following positive attitudes amongst participants:

> "It shows these things actually happen, and it might happen to us as well."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, MELBOURNE

- **affinity and relevance**—with many participants reporting that they were better able to understand how the issue could directly impact them/their families;
- **feeling interested and engaged**—many participants reported feeling more engaged and to have more of an interest in the topic;
- **confidence and achievability**—some participants who had initially felt overwhelmed by the prospect of overseeing or monitoring their child(ren)s' online use reported that they could see how they could, and needed to, take more preventative action; and
- **feeling reassured**—a few participants who were taking the desired preventative measures reported that the information reassured them that they were doing the right thing, and that they should sustain these positive behaviours.

> It's an eye opener, I talk to my son about stranger danger, but I never talk to him about online dangers, because I thought he was too young... so I'm more switched on now.
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, SYDNEY

As discussed in Section N on page 30, prior to exposure to educational messaging, respondents reported that the general issue of children and young people's online safety was of higher relevance, concern and priority than online child sexual exploitation more specifically. However, following exposure to key messaging in the survey, a positive shift in all three metrics was found across almost all key audience groups—providing evidence to support the need for education and awareness tools that employs positive and achievable messaging.

Of particular note were the large increases in parent/carer and key influencer respondents' perceptions of relevance of the topic to them—which shifted from 59% up to 79% post exposure.

Shifts in many attitudinal statements were also apparent amongst parent/carer respondents following exposure to messaging. This included:

> I'd never really thought about it... but now I feel like it's about having regular chats with your kids, always letting your children know they can talk to you.
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, DARWIN

- parent/carer respondents being much more likely to report feeling *really worried* about their child being sexually exploited online (a shift from 40% up to 51%), and reporting that they were *probably not doing enough* to keep their child safe from online child sexual exploitation (28% up to 36%);
  - consistent with this shift, parent/carer respondents were more likely to disagree that *children and young people were generally savvy enough to stay safe online* (39% disagreed initially, up to 44% post exposure); and
- a greater proportion of parent/carer respondents also reported that they would *feel comfortable talking to their children* post exposure (a shift from 80% up to 85%);
  - furthermore, more disagreed that *the topic was too repulsive to think about* (a shift from 50% up to 57%).

## BB. CHANGES IN LIKELY BEHAVIOURS

> I'm definitely going to the website and talking to the kids more often.
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, CAIRNS

The research found that exposure to information about online safety also had a positive impact on likely behaviours. Following exposure to information, the majority of respondents indicated they were likely to undertake a number of positive preventative measures. Parent/carer and key influencer respondents were the most likely to report that they would undertake a change in their behaviours, including:

- opening lines of communication in regard to this topic with [their] child(ren) and family and friends (see proportions in Table 3);

> I will research practical tips about how to put a firewall in place and how to have the conversation with my kids, what to bring up.
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, DARWIN

The qualitative research also found that parent/carer participants who were already having these conversations were likely to increase the frequency of them;

- visiting the *thinkUknow* website for more information;
- increasing supervision/oversight of their child(ren)'s online use (asked of parents/carers only);

Participants in the qualitative research reported that this included more direct oversight of online activity, checking what apps were being used and who their child(ren) were talking to, restricting certain devices and using more parental controls to restrict access.

- looking for more information about the issue of online child sexual exploitation in general; and
- looking for information, resources and tools to help ensure child(ren) and young people are safe from online child sexual exploitation.

**Table 3. How likely are you to…**

(Base: parents/carers and key influencers)

| | Parents/carers (n=1,416 – 1,473) | Key influencers (n=155 -160) |
|---|---|---|
| | 80% | 73% |
| | Discuss online child sexual exploitation with your child(ren). | |
| | 73% | 73% |
| | Discuss online child sexual exploitation with your family and friends. | |
| | 71% | – |
| | Increase your supervision/oversight of your children's online use. | |
| | 71% | 67% |
| | Look for information to help ensure your children are safe from online child sexual exploitation. | |
| | 67% | 61% |
| | Look for more information about the issue of online child sexual exploitation in general. | |
| | 66% | 61% |
| | Visit the *ThinkUKnow* website for more information. | |

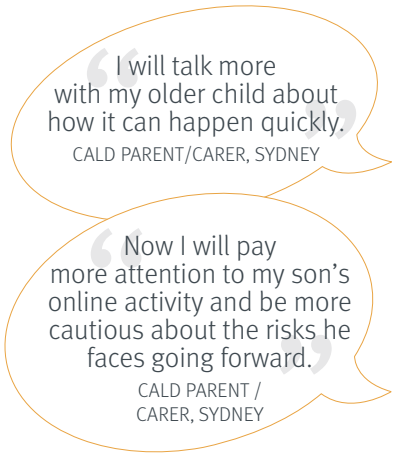
*Asked post exposure. Q40. On a scale from 0 to 10, how likely are you to…?*

> "I'm going to go to the principal and the school council to make sure there's current information available to teachers."
>
> EDUCATOR, MELBOURNE

In addition to those mentioned, educator participants in the qualitative research also reported they were likely to:

- talk to their school principals about online policy/guidelines/rules;
- be more aware of online behaviours in their classrooms;
- communicate more with parents on the topic (e.g. providing information in school newsletters or at parent information nights);
- seek more information to better inform themselves; and
- talk more about online safety with the children and young people that they work with.

# CC. FINDINGS ABOUT SPECIAL AUDIENCES




The research found that the impact of exposure to information was broadly consistent across respondents from a CALD background and parents with a child who had a disability, with both groups experiencing positive shifts in concern, perceived relevance, and priority in relation to the topic of online child sexual exploitation. Some differences to note in relation to attitudinal and behavioural changes are as follows.

Attitudinally, CALD parent/carer respondents reported a positive shift in their level of comfort toward talking to their child about the topic of online sexual child exploitation—shifting from 69% up to 81%.

CALD parents/carers were equally as likely as others to undertake most of desired behaviours post exposure.

In regard to parents/carers of children and young people with a disability, this group demonstrated a decrease in their confidence that what were currently doing is working to keep their children safe from online child sexual exploitation (shifting from 67% down to 55%).

They also reported a downward shift in their perception that they were doing everything they could to keep their child safe (from 71% down to 61%).

Quantitative shifts cannot be determined amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences given their small sample size. Whilst the qualitative research suggested that exposure to information had a positive impact amongst this audience, it is recommended that additional research be conducted with this audience.

# Approaches to maximise prevention behaviours across the community

This chapter discusses the research findings in relation to the need for, and high-level requirements of, a holistic preventative strategy to address the issue of online child sexual exploitation in Australia.

> "You need a culture shift in the home. Education needs to be provided before high school, before they enter that world."
>
> PARENT/CARER, ELDEST CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, SYDNEY

It was evident from the research that an educational based behavioural change approach was necessary to maximise preventative action on online child sexual exploitation across the community. An integrated and holistic approach is required to yield the desired behavioural changes in an effective and sustained manner to maximise return on investment (ROI) in effort.

To enable the successful shift in long-term behaviours and social norms relating to the prevention of online child sexual exploitation, a multi-pronged and ongoing strategy is recommended that encompasses interventions across the five key areas listed below (as identified from the research):

1. **social marketing campaign**(s)—a long-term and ongoing social marketing campaign(s) about the topic, targeted at everyone in the life of a child or young person. It should have a positive tone and communicate the relevance of the topic and achievability of taking simple, preventative action (even amongst those with limited digital literacy).
2. **resources and tools**—resources and tools for follow up information and support to complement communication and education activities;
3. **education programs and professional learning**—for children and young people as well as parents/carers to provide more detailed and tailored information and advice about the topic;
4. **a support and advisory service**—aimed at potential victims, their families, key influencers and health professionals to provide support, advice and reporting avenues for online safety; and
5. **policy initiatives**—to support the prevention of online child sexual exploitation, including funding services, subsidising effective software and/or providing further technical assistance and working with providers to take more responsibility.

> "We all have a role to play. We all need to be aligned."
>
> EDUCATOR, CAIRNS

In addition, it was clear from the research that an effective behaviour change program should take a holistic approach, targeting audiences affected by all sides of the online child sexual exploitation issue, including:

- children and young people;
- parents/carers and other key influencers of children and young people;
- educators and professionals who work closely with children, young people and families; and
- potential perpetrators of online child sexual exploitation.

PART three

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# Conclusion

The current generation of parents/carers are the first to be raising children following the 'digital evolution' (i.e. the wide-spread introduction of portable online devices). Children are accessing the internet from an early age, and most parents/carers report that their child has equal or better understanding of technology than they do. Many were left feeling "overwhelmed" and "underprepared" for managing online safety.

The issue of online child sexual exploitation is not well known or understood amongst many parents, carers, key influencers and educators. It was identified as a stigmatised issue that:

- was not frequently talked about between parents, carers, influencers, educators and child(ren) or between and amongst other community members;
- was highly emotive, eliciting strong negative responses—e.g. fear, anger, shame, disgust, denial, stigma, feelings of overwhelm or embarrassment; and
- many preferred to disassociate from, with respondents and participants not feeling it was likely to happen to them/their families and consequently rejecting the topic as having little relevance.

A number of myths and misconceptions were identified that were negatively impacting on the ability of participants to implement effective preventative behaviours. Such misinformation related to:

- who was at-risk;
- the safety of certain online platforms and effectiveness of control measures; and
- the nature and risk of online child sexual exploitation.

**Social norms** around online child sexual exploitation were currently found to:

- prioritise the privacy of the child/young person when online—many participants did not believe it was their place to "interfere", as their child(ren) had a right to personal space;
- affirm the blaming of victims in instances of online sexual abuse—with most respondents and participants in the research reporting they would respond with anger at their child for allowing themselves to be sexually exploited online; and
- endorse limited online parental vigilance, guidance and oversight—unlike for physical parenting and safety issues, (e.g. road and swimming safety, strangers in the offline world), there was a lack of easy, universal or consistent guidelines for parents, carers, educators and the community to follow to reduce the online risk for children in their care.

Currently, barriers to taking effective preventative measures were found to be outweighing motivators for many parents, carers, key influencers and educators in relation to online child sexual exploitation. Preventative measures that were being undertaken were often ad hoc and inconsistent, and rarely informed by reliable information. Information that was received on the topic was often through sensationalised sources (such as crime shows and documentaries, media coverage and community gossip) which were found to further enhance dissociation, discomfort and negative emotions associated with the topic.

Exposure to information via the educational messages about online child sexual exploitation improved awareness and knowledge, and resulted in reported attitudinal and behavioural changes.

The above findings suggest that a multi-pronged and ongoing prevention strategy is recommended that encompasses interventions across the five key areas listed below:

1. **social marketing campaign(s)**—a long-term and ongoing social marketing campaign(s) about the topic, targeted at everyone in the life of a child or young person. It should have a positive tone and that communicates the relevance of the topic and achievability of taking simple, preventative action (even amongst those with limited digital literacy);
2. **resources and tools**—resources and tools for follow up information and support to complement communication and education activities;
3. **education programs and professional learning**—for children and young people as well as parents/carers to provide more detailed and tailored information and advice about the topic;
4. **a support and advisory service**—aimed at potential victims, their families, key influencers and health professionals to provide support, advice and reporting avenues for online safety; and
5. **policy initiatives**—to support the prevention of online child exploitation, including funding services, subsidising effective software and/or providing further technical assistance and working with providers to take more responsibility.

PART four

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PART five

# RESEARCH APPENDICES

# Appendix A:

# Part 1: A literature review considering the prevention of online child sexual exploitation

## INTRODUCTION

This literature review was conducted as the first stage of a research project to inform a prevention strategy for parents, carers, and educators of school-aged children to prevent online child sexual exploitation.

This literature review examines the following:

- background and current context for online child exploitation;
- public awareness, understanding, perceptions and experiences of online child exploitation;
- methods of prevention currently being utilised to minimise risk in relation to this topic; and
- key indicators of success leading to prevention.

The aim of this literature review is to determine what information is currently available to inform research instruments for the project (i.e. to support the subsequent qualitative and quantitative research stages) and to identify gaps in the body of knowledge.

The literature review began by examining national and international academic sources. However, it found that there is limited academic literature pertaining to the subject matter of online child exploitation specifically. Much of the existing literature is focussed on child exploitation (and slavery) more generally rather than exploitation occurring online, and/or addressed online safety issues that were not directly linked to child exploitation (e.g. cyberbullying and screen time). As such, the literature search was broadened to examine publicly available reports and data from not-for-profit and public sector organisations, as well as the content, resources, information and communications materials available through current prevention programmes and initiatives. Due to the role of modern technologies in online child sexual exploitation, the literature review primarily focussed on sources published in the past five years, however some older sources were also consulted where relevant, due to the limited literature available.

Search terms used to find relevant information included:

'Prevention of online child exploitation', 'Australia', 'Meta-analysis', 'Online child sexual abuse', 'Online child abuse', 'Sexual extortion of children in cyberspace', 'sextortion' 'Prevention', 'Approaches to combatting child online exploitation', 'Online safety', 'eSafety', 'Cybersafety', 'Internet safety';

'Precaution/s', 'Precautionary', 'Precautionary behaviour', 'Preventative behaviour', 'Protection', 'Protective', 'Protective behaviour';

'Parents', 'Parental', 'Children', 'Young people', 'Aboriginal', 'Indigenous', 'Early intervention', 'School/s', 'Education', 'Educators', 'Disability', 'Low SES', 'Disadvantaged communities', 'CALD', 'Non-English speaking background';

'Prevention campaigns child online exploitation', 'FACE', 'Fighting Against Child Exploitation', 'International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children', 'National Framework for protecting Australia's children', 'Listen to your selfie', 'Child Exploitation Online Centre', 'Missing and Exploited Children', 'ThinkUKnow', 'Thinkuknow UK', 'Global Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse', 'Who's chatting to your kids', 'QLD police', 'Your selfie keep it to yourself', 'Bravehearts', 'Soul Buddyz', 'Keeping ourselves safe', 'New Zealand Police', 'Netsmartz';

'Evaluation', 'Results', 'Campaign evaluation', 'Review';

'Profile of child exploitation material offenders'; and

'Australian online child exploitation reports', 'Statistics'.

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

**KEY INSIGHTS:**

Internet usage is prevalent among children and young people, with over 95% of those aged 8–17 years, and 81% of pre-schoolers aged 2–5 years accessing the internet.

In 2018, the ACCCE Child Protection Triage Unit received almost 18,000 reports of child exploitation materials.

There is no distinctive or definitive profile that describes either online child sexual abuse victims or perpetrators, with both groups displaying a variety of characteristics.

In Australia, whilst there is an increasing focus on reaction and action through protection and prosecution, there is a significant gap in primary prevention programmes and a need for further education and training initiatives and resources.

In Australia, over 95% of those aged 8–17 years,[1] and 81% of pre-schoolers aged 2–5 years,[2] access the internet. Furthermore, most children access the internet via multiple devices and use internet-enabled toys.[3] Recent research shows that many of these children are using the internet unsupervised (82% of children aged 11–18).[4] Among young people who access the internet, the majority use at least one type of social media, with usage highest among teenagers aged 14–17 years (82%).[5] Although most social media platforms restrict usage to those aged 13 and over, a notable proportion (34%) of those aged 8–13 years use social media regardless of age restrictions.[6]

The ease of access, widespread availability and use of the internet and technology has seen a general corresponding upward trend in the cases of online child exploitation, including grooming and solicitation, sexual extortion ("sextortion"), the live streaming of child sexual abuse, and the spread of self-generated sexually explicit material on social media.[7] In a recent study, the most common negative experience young people reported online was unwanted contact and content (33%).[8] In particular, the literature shows that females were more likely to experience unwanted contact/content,[9] and 15% of females aged 15–17 years had experienced image-based abuse.[10] Additionally, the literature shows that there has been a rise in youth produced sexual content.[11]

Online child sexual exploitation (OCSE) is defined as any sexual crime committed to children where online tools and/or services are used.[12] This may include the creation, proliferation and/or consumption of child exploitation materials (CEM, which refers to "sexually abusive images of children as broadly defined in Australian law").[13]

Although this is a global issue, in 2016 the International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database[14] report identified 194 Australian-based child victims, and 102 Australian offenders, many of which are major contributors to the exploitation of children both locally and globally.[15] In 2018, the ACCCE Child Protection Triage Unit received almost 18,000 reports of CEM.

1 Australian Communications and Media Authority, Like, Post, Share: *Young Australian's experience of social media*, (Australia: Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2013), 6.

2 "Digital parenting: Supervising pre-schoolers online," Office of the eSafety Commissioner, accessed 22 March 2019, https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/research-library/digital-parenting-supervising-pre-schoolers-online.

3 "Digital families: Connected homes and technology usage," Office of the eSafety Commissioner, accessed 22 March 2019, https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/research-library/digital-families-connected-home-and-technology-usage.

4 ORIMA Research, developmental research into children and young people's online safety, 2019.

5 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *Research insights: Young and Social Online*, 2018.

6 Ibid.

7 Virtual Global Taskforce, Virtual Global Taskforce Child Sexual Exploitation: *Environmental Scan 2015*, (The Hague: Europol, 2015), 2.

8 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, State of Play – *Youth, Kids and Digital Dangers*, (Australia: Office of the eSafety Commissioner: 2018),.20.

9 Ibid., 22

10 SWGFL/UK Safer Internet Centre, University of Plymouth, Netsafe and Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *Young People and Sexting – Attitudes and Behaviours*. (2017), 15.

11 O Child, "On unidentified victims in child sexual exploitation material," In *Towards a Global Indicator*. (2018), 4.

12 ECPAT International, "What is online child sexual exploitation?,". last updated: 2019, https://www.ecpat.org/what-we-do/online-child-sexual-exploitation/.

13 T Krone and R Smith, "Trajectories in online child sexual exploitation offending in Australia," *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, No. 524, (2017): 1.

14 An international image and video database allowing investigators to share information from more than 50 countries across the world managed by Interpol.

15 Burn. J et al. *Behind the Screen: Online Child Exploitation in Australia*, (Australia: Anti-Slavery Australia, 2017), 10.

The literature suggests there are widespread stereotypes and misconceptions about the offenders of these crimes, such as that the majority are 'paedophiles' (those whose only sexual orientation is towards pre-pubescent children) who are strongly motivated to offend.[16] However, the literature suggests that CEM offenders are a heterogenous group, who display diverse sexual behaviours and motivations to offend,[17] and that less than one in ten offenders has a previous criminal justice sanction for a 'contact child sexual offence' (a child sexual offence involving physical contact with the victim).[18]

Despite their heterogeneity, the literature notes that perpetrators have predominantly been found to be:[19]

- white males;
- aged between 35–45 years;
- single;
- in professional occupations; and
- well educated.

Like offenders, the literature indicates that there are also no typical profiles of victims of child online exploitation.[20] There is a misconception that older children are typically victims of online abuse and exploitation, however reviews of CEM have shown that more than 60% of victims are prepubescent (any child who has not yet reached puberty, including infants and toddlers).[21] Some researchers suggest that there are "vulnerability factors" common to some victims.[22] These factors include the level of parental involvement in a child or young person's life, history of previous sexual abuse, their likelihood to exhibit risk-taking behaviours in general, self-esteem, feelings of loneliness and their family situation (i.e. single parent households).[23]

In Australia, whilst there is an increasing focus on reaction and action through protection and prosecution,[24] there is a significant gap in primary prevention programmes and a "necessity for further education programmes" and training to ensure the protection of children in Australia.[25]

16 Ethel Quayle and Nikolaos Koukopoulos, "Deterrence of online child sexual abuse and exploitation," *Policing*, 2018, 5.

17 Krone and Smith, "*Trajectories in online child sexual exploitation*," 3.

18 R Brown. and S Bricknell, "What is the profile of CEM offenders," Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice, no. 564. (2018): 2, 8-9.

19 Ibid, 8-9.

20 International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children, *Online grooming of children for sexual purposes: Legislation and global review*, The Koons Family Institute on International Law & Policy, 2017. 2.

21 O Child, "On unidentified victims," 5.

22 Sonia Livingstone and Jessica Mason, Sexual rights and sexual risks among youth online: A review of existing knowledge regarding children and young people's developing sexuality in relation to new media environments, (London: European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online, September 2015), 10; Helen C. Whittle, Catherine E. Hamilton-Giachristis and Anthony R. Beech, "In their own words: Young peoples' vulnerabilities to being groomed and sexually abused online," *Psychology*, 5 (2014), 1187.

23 Livingstone and Mason, Sexual rights and sexual risks, 10; Whittle, Hamilton-Gichristis and Beech, "In their own words," 1188.

24 Drawing from the four key pillars (4 Ps) 'prevent', 'prepare', 'pursue' and 'protect'. "Home," Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation, accessed 22 March 2019, https://www.accce.gov.au/home.

25 Burn et al, "Behind the Screen," X.

# CURRENT AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING, PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES RELATED TO ONLINE CHILD EXPLOITATION

**KEY INSIGHTS:**

There is limited literature pertaining to awareness, understanding, perceptions and experiences related to OCSE specifically, with much of the research concerning children's online safety more generally.

Whilst the majority of parents and carers are aware of the issue of online safety in general, many reported not knowing how to manage their children's online safety, or where to turn to for help.

A significant majority of children and young people use the internet unsupervised, and many participate in some 'risky' behaviours online, contributing to their risk of exploitation.

## Children and young people's experiences online

Use of the internet and digital technology has become increasingly common among children and young people in the 21st century. Specifically, recent research has shown that 82% of children aged 11–18 use the internet unsupervised, and that unsupervised access was also relatively common among younger children, with one in five 8 year olds also using the internet on their own.[26] In addition, young people have been reported to engage in a number of risky behaviours online which can compromise their online safety and increase their vulnerability to OCSE, including:

**Lack of consideration of privacy settings:** While the majority (68%) of young people who use social media have actively managed their online privacy settings, those aged 8–12 were less likely to report managing their online presence (31% had not managed their social media presence at all);[27]

**Talking to strangers online:** Many young people reported using the internet to talk or chat to someone they have not met face-to-face. 38% of young people aged 8–17 had talked to strangers online, however contact was nearly twice as high among those aged 13–17 (50%) compared to those aged 8–12 (27%).[28] Contact with strangers online was higher when playing online games, with around half of young people aged 8–17 playing with strangers;[29]

**Sharing personal information with strangers:** 14% of young people tended to share personal information such as their real age, images with their face or their full name. The literature suggests that females, teenagers aged 13–17, young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and those with a disability were more likely to share personal information than their peers;[30] and

**Sexting:** Among young people aged 14–17 years, nearly 1 in 3 reported having some experience with sexting (including sending, asking or being asked, sharing or showing nude or sexual images or videos). Experience with sexting was higher among females (35%) compared to males (22%).[31]

## Awareness, understanding and perceptions of online safety

Amongst parents and carers there is significant awareness around the issue of online safety generally.[32] A recent survey of Australian parents of children aged 12–18 found that parents and carers ranked their child's use of social media and technology as a greater concern than drugs, alcohol and tobacco (43%, compared with 25% respectively).[33] In addition, another recent study found that 79% of parents and carers of children aged 8–18 reported that online safety was one of their key priorities.[34]

26 ORIMA Research, developmental research into children and young people's online safety.

27 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *State of Play – Youth, Kids and Digital Dangers*, 11.

28 Ibid., 13.

29 Office of the eSafety Commissioner. *State of Play – Youth and online gaming*, (Australia: Office of the eSafety Commissioner: 2018), 5.

30 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *State of Play – Youth, Kids and Digital Dangers*, 15.

31 SWGFL/UK Safer Internet Centre, University of Plymouth, Netsafe and Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *Young People and Sexting*, 14.

32 Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce, *Adjust our Settings: A community approach to address cyberbullying among children and young people in Queensland*, (Queensland: the Queensland Government, 2018).

33 ReachOut Australia, *Parents rank social media and technology worse than drugs, alcohol and smoking*, 2018 [Media release].

34 ORIMA Research, developmental research into children and young people's online safety.

However, whilst parents are aware of and concerned about online safety, many typically reported not knowing how to manage their children's online safety, or where to turn to for help.[35] In addition, one in two parents and carers of children aged 8–18 perceived online safety to be a key priority, but were not confident in their ability to ensure their children's safety online.[36]

The literature suggests that this may be due to parents' and carers' poor understanding of the technology and social media platforms used by their children, and the difficulties they find keeping up with the current technological landscape.[37] More than one in two parents and carers of children aged 8–18 felt that their children were more comfortable using technology in general (62%), the internet (57%), social media services and platforms (52%) and interactive online games/apps (68%) than themselves.[38] This same research also noted that more than two in five parents and carers of children aged 8–18 felt that it was hard to ensure safety of children when they are online—with perceptions of difficulty increasing with children's age (over 60% of parents and carers felt that it was hard to ensure online safety of high school children).[39]

Although the literature indicates a high awareness amongst parents, carers and educators in Australia regarding children's online safety generally, there is a gap in the literature around their awareness of online exploitation specifically. However, there is some indication of a need to raise awareness amongst the general public via education campaigns.[40]

## Children and young people's precautionary behaviours

There is very limited literature pertaining to precautionary behaviours taken specifically to prevent OCSE. One study, however, suggests that while some "basic" precautions such as protecting personal information and rarely sharing photos and videos are being taken by CSE victims, these precautions are not being applied consistently, in all instances or situations.[41] Furthermore, the study suggests that such precautionary measures were neglected during the victims' interactions with the perpetrators, as they perceived the offender to be "different" to other strangers online, due to the relationship they had developed.[42]

The literature pertaining to children's online safety more broadly suggests that many children and young people are taking precautions to protect themselves on social media that could help prevent OCSE, including blocking or 'unfriending' people (46% of children and young people aged 8–17), increasing their privacy settings (43%), configuring account settings to prevent their location being automatically included in posts (36%), reporting someone to social media companies or other organisations (13%) or reporting someone to their school or parents (12%).[43] However, the literature also shows that 31% of children and young people aged 8–17 had not taken any precautions to protect their safety when using social media.[44]

## Reporting of negative online experiences

Although not pertaining to OCSE specifically, the literature suggests that young people are more likely to deal with negative online experiences through informal networks (such as reaching out to parents, siblings and friends), or by taking action themselves (such as by blocking an account), than through formal avenues (such as reporting the incident to the website or social media company, school or police).[45] Females and young people aged 13–17 were more likely to address the problem on their own and use formal channels. In addition, young people from a CALD background were more hesitant to seek help from informal networks, such as family and friends, compared to those from a non-CALD background.[46]

35 ReachOut Australia, *Parents rank social media*.

36 ORIMA Research, developmental research into children and young people's online safety.

37 Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce, *Adjust our Settings*.

38 ORIMA Research, developmental research into children and young people's online safety.

39 Ibid.

40 Commonwealth Government of Australia, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, (Canberra: Commonwealth Government of Australia: 2009), 31.

41 Whittle, Hamilton-Gichristis and Beech, "In their own words," 1191.

42 Ibid.

43 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *State of Play – Youth, Kids and Digital Dangers*, 11.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 24.

46 Ibid., 24-25.

# OVERVIEW OF PREVENTION PROGRAMMES, INITIATIVES AND CAMPAIGNS

**KEY INSIGHTS:**

Preventative programmes and initiatives aimed at children and young people, parents, carers and educators are important in addressing OCSE.

Current preventative measures predominantly provide information and educational resources, most of which are aimed at the target audience of children and young people.

Key learnings from current preventative programmes include tailoring content to specific age groups, ownership of programmes by organisations directly involved in OCSE, targeting a wide range of audiences, and using social marketing and multiple formats to increase programmes' reach.

The literature acknowledges children's right to protection online, and argues that whilst protective legislation and the persecution of predators is important to protect against OCSE, law enforcement alone is not enough to combat the issue.[47] This emphasis on prevention is echoed by the National Framework for Protecting Australia's children 2009-2020, which includes Outcome Six: that "child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented, and survivors receive adequate support".[48] Both the literature and most preventative initiatives recognise parents, carers and educators, as well as children and young people themselves, to be the primary target audiences of prevention programmes, initiatives and campaigns.[49] As such, the remainder of this literature review will focus on examples of, and best practice considerations for, prevention measures aimed at these target audiences.

## Prevention measures targeted at children and young people

Both the literature and many prevention initiatives recognise the importance of education and awareness raising amongst children and young people, to assist in the prevention of OCSE.[50] In particular, there is a suggestion in the literature that raising awareness amongst children and young people about the safe use of technology is the most effective and economically viable preventative measure to combat the issue.[51]

The literature review found that the majority of prevention measures were targeted at children and young people, compared to other target audiences such as parents, carers, or educators. The following initiatives with children and young people were identified in Australia:

**ThinkUKnow Australia**—a partnership between the Australian Federal Police, Microsoft Australia, Datacom and the Commonwealth Bank, and is delivered in collaboration with State and Territory Police Forces, as well as Neighbourhood Watch Australia.[52] ThinkUKnow Australia is a cybersafety programme that aims to provide tools and resources to create safer online environments for children and young people;[53] and

**'Your Selfie: Keep it to Yourself'**—the 'Your Selfie: Keep it to Yourself' campaign was launched in 2013 by the Queensland Police Service Taskforce Argos, with the aim of encouraging teenagers not to send inappropriate photos of themselves to other people.[54]

47 Monica Bilger, Patrick Burton, Brian O'Neill and Elisabeth Sraksrud, "Where policy and practice collide: Comparing United States, South African and European Union approaches to protecting children online," New Media & Society, 19, no. 5 (2017): 750; Kim-Kwang Raymond Choo, "Responding to Online Child Sexual Grooming: An Industry Perspective," Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, no. 379 (July 2009): 1; Kemal Veli Acar, "Sexual extortion of children in cyberspace," International Journal of Cyber Criminology, 10, no. 2, (2016): 122.

48 Commonwealth Government of Australia, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business*, 31.

49 Raphael Cohen-Almagor, "Online Child Sex Offenders: Challenges and Counter-Measures," The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, 52, no. 2 (May 2013):, 196-198; Acar, "Sexual extortion of children," 122; Livingstone and Mason, "Sexual rights and sexual risks," 47; International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children, *Online grooming of children*, 28.

50 Acar, "Sexual extortion of children," 122;

51 Ibid.

52 "About ThinkUKnow," ThinkUKnow Australia, accessed 19 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/about-thinkuknow.

53 "Our program," ThinkUKnow Australia, accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/our-program; "Crime Prevention: Parent, carer, teacher resources," Australian Federal Police, accessed 8 March 2019, https://www.afp.gov.au/what-we-do/crime-types/cyber-crime/crime-prevention.

54 Dempsey, "Media statements"; Thomas Chamberlin, "Police launch campaign as 'selfies' of children as young as 10 ending up in hands of paedophiles," *news.com.au*, 3 September 2013.

In terms of international initiatives, the literature identified the following:

**Thinkuknow United Kingdom**—an educational programme run by the United Kingdom's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP), part of the National Crime Agency. It is reported to be "underpinned by the latest intelligence about sex offending from CEOP Command".[55] Established in 2006, the organisation aims to improve children and young people's safety "by providing education about sexual abuse and sexual exploitation".[56] The Thinkuknow UK website provides targeted age appropriate information and education resources to children and young people;[57]

**'#ListenToYourSelfie'**— a social marketing campaign to address online CEM targeted at teenagers, asking them to listen to themselves, or their "selfie" to determine how to behave in online relationships. The campaign was launched in 2016 by Childline, an organisation in the United Kingdom that provides a free helpline to children and young people for a broad range of issues they may face;[58] and

**NetSmartz**—an educational cybersafety programme that targets children aged 5–17,[59] and is delivered by the United States of America's National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).[60] The programme uses trends in online child exploitation materials (as observed through their own reporting mechanisms) to inform programme materials.

**Stop Sextortion**—an awareness campaign about sextortion targeted at children, teens, and young adults, with additional information aimed at caregivers, educators, companies, and policymakers. The campaign is run by Thorn, a private organisation targeting child sex trafficking in the United States.[61]

**Don't get Sextorted**—a campaign aimed at educating young people about what sextortion is, and how to identify and respond safely to it. The campaign is run by Cybertip Canada which is a program of the Canadian Centre for Child Protection aiming to "to reduce child victimization by providing national programs and services to the Canadian public".[62]

## Prevention measures targeted at parents and carers

Parents and carers are recognised as having an influential and important role in the lives of children and young people, and are therefore considered to be a primary target audience by the literature and many prevention initiatives.[63] In particular, some scholars argue that children and young people with less parental involvement have a higher chance of becoming a victim of online grooming, emphasising the need for preventative programmes targeted at parents and carers.[64] Additionally, young people who have supportive relationships with their family and friends tend to be less afraid of a perpetrator's threats, and are less likely to comply with their requests.[65] Therefore, the literature indicates that parents and carers have an integral role in the prevention of OCSE.

55 "Who are we?" Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Who-are-we/.k

56 Ibid.

57 "Welcome to Thinkuknow," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/.

58 Jessica Goodfellow, "Childline unveils #ListenToYourSelfie campaign to tackle online grooming," *The Drum*, 19 September 2016; "About Childline," Childline, accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.childline.org.uk/about/about-childline/.

59 "Overview," National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, accessed 15 March 2019, http://www.missingkids.com/education.

60 "The issues: Sextortion," National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, accessed 15 March 2019, http://www.missingkids.com/theissues/sextortion.

61 "About us", Thorn, accessed 15 April 2019, https://www.thorn.org/about-our-fight-against-sexual-exploitation-of-children/

62 "About Cybertip.CA", Cybertip CA, accessed April 15 2019, https://www.cybertip.ca/app/en/about

63 Cohen-Alagor, "Online Child Sex Offenders," 196; "ThinkUKnow," ThinkUKnow Australia, accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/; Commonwealth Government of Australia, "*Protecting children is everyone's business*," 31; Quayle and Koukopoulos, "Deterrence of online child sexual abuse," 8.

64 Livingstone and Mason, Sexual rights and sexual risks, 10, 45.

65 Acar, "Sexual extortion of children," 119-120.

The following initiatives with parents and carers were identified in Australia:

**'Who's chatting to your kids?'**—a programme in which the Queensland Police developed educational resources to inform parents and carers about the technologies used in OCSE, as they believe that developing this knowledge is "imperative" in protecting children;[66] and

**ThinkUKnow Australia**—in addition to their resources for children and young people, ThinkUKnow Australia's Parent's Portal provides a range of resources for parents and carers.[67] They also provide presentations to parents and carers on topics such as 'sexting', online grooming, inappropriate content, privacy management and how to report issues.[68]

## Prevention measures targeted at schools and educators

The importance of education in the prevention of OCSE is widely recognised within the limited literature on the topic.[69] In particular, the academic literature calls for a greater focus on the role of technology in child abuse and exploitation as part of sex education taught in the school curriculum, and for this education to start earlier, (i.e. around the age of nine).[70]

**Thinkuknow UK, NetSmartz, Cybertip CA** and **Thorn** provide some resources pertaining to OCSE for educators and other professionals working in the 'children's workforce', including fact sheets, lesson plans and internet safety pledges.[71] Some other international initiatives which provide lesson plans, resources and guidance to educators for prevention include **Love146**[72] and **Audrie & Daisy**.[73] **ThinkUKnow Australia** also provides presentations to educators to assist them in communicating with children and young people about the technology they use.[74]

For more information about the above programmes and initiatives targeted at children and young people, parents, carers and educators, please see the detailed summaries presented in Appendix A.

## Key learnings from current preventative programmes and initiatives

To date, there are very few evaluations of preventative policies, programmes and initiatives pertaining to online child exploitation.

ThinkUKnow Australia does regular self-evaluations of their presentations to parents, carers and educators. In their most recent corporate report, it was stated that 97% of attendants at these presentations "agreed or strongly agreed that the presentation motivated them to take action".[75] This suggests that preventative measures such as information and educational resources can be effective in creating behavioural change.

66 "Who's chatting to your kids?," Queensland Police, last updated 25 August 2018, https://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs/cscp/personalSafety/children/childProtection/default.htm

67 "Parents portal," ThinkUKnow Australia, accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/parents-portal; Family online safety contract, ThinkUKnow Australia and The Carly Ryan Foundation, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-01/TUK_FOSC_2016%20Family%20Online%20Safety%20Contract_FINAL_0.pdf; Family online safety contract template, ThinkUKnow Australia and The Carly Ryan Foundation, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-03/Blank%20Online%20Family%20Safety%20Contract_web.pdf; ThinkUKnow Australia, *Factsheet: Online Grooming*, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/sites/default/files/2018-10/Online%20Grooming.pdf.

68 "Our program," ThinkUKnow Australia.

69 Commonwealth Government of Australia, "*Protecting children is everyone's business*," 31; Livingstone and Mason, Sexual rights and sexual risks, 10, 45; Cohen-Alagor, "Online Child Sex Offenders," 198; Quayle and Koukopoulos, "Deterrence of online child sexual abuse," 8.

70 Commonwealth Government of Australia, "*Protecting children is everyone's business*," 31; Livingstone and Mason, Sexual rights and sexual risks, 10, 45.

71 "Factsheets for professionals," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/factsheets-for-professionals/; "Tip sheets," NetSmartz, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.netsmartz.org/TipSheets; "Lesson plans," NetSmartz, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.netsmartz.org/ActivityCards; "Safety pledges," NetSmatz, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.netsmartz.org/Pledges.

72 https://love146.org/notanumber/

73 http://www.audrieanddaisy.com/teach-and-learn/

74 "Our program," ThinkUKnow Australia.

75 ThinkUKnow Australia, *Corporate Report 2017-18*, 1.

The following commonalities between current and past examples of preventative programmes, initiatives and communications have been observed by the literature review, providing some key learnings:

**Tailoring content to specific age groups**—this allows the most relevant and appropriate information and resources to be targeted and tailored to the applicable age cohort of children and young people, as well as their parents, carers and educators. Similarly, there is a suggestion in the literature that supports an educational approach that allows "children to receive… developmentally appropriate messages", by targeting different topics to different age groups;[76]

**Ownership of programmes by organisations directly involved with OCSE**—many of the current initiatives are delivered by the police force or organisations such as the UK's National Crime Agency's CEOP Command or the United States of America's NCMEC, which gives them a robust data and evidence base to guide interventions;

**Targeting a wide range of audiences**, including children and young people, parents, carers and educators—many of the current initiatives provide resources and information for two or more target audiences, to encourage a holistic approach to the issue;

**Using social media to reach younger demographics** (i.e. the channel through which OCSE predominantly occurs)—to ensure reach with the target audience of children and young people; and

**Using multiple formats to reach audiences**—including, videos, real life stories, fact sheets and interactive games, to increase the effectiveness and appeal of the content.

# FINDINGS RELATING TO SPECIAL AUDIENCES

Similar to mainstream audiences, there appears to be limited literature regarding online child exploitation in relation to special audiences.

It has been acknowledged in the literature that special audiences, such as children with a disability, have a higher risk of becoming a victim of a contact child sexual offence.[77] In addition, the literature also indicates that young people from a CALD background or those with a disability were more likely to:

- speak to strangers online— whilst 37% of young people spoke to strangers online, 50% of those with a disability and 44% of those from a CALD background reported that they had spoken to a stranger online;[78] and
- share personal information online—young people from a CALD background and those with a disability were more likely to share this information than their peers.[79]

In addition, young people from a CALD background were found to be more hesitant to seek help from informal networks, such as family and friends, compared to those from a non-CALD background.[80]

In relation to preventative programmes, the literature review found that only NetSmartz specifically recognises that "children with physical, developmental and learning disabilities may be more susceptible to on and offline risks", including those of sexual exploitation and online predation.[81] As such, they provide resources targeted to parents, carers or educators of children or young people with a disability including:

- modified safety pledges, developed in collaboration with the National Autism Association;
- pictures that can be used to personalise and improve understanding of other resources available on the website; and
- close captioning on some of their video content.[82]

However, overall there is currently very little literature in relation to the relationship between online child exploitation and special audiences, such as children and young people with a disability, or from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and CALD backgrounds. This suggests more research is required in this area.

76 Livingstone and Mason, Sexual rights and sexual risks, 47.

77 Inge B. Wissink et al, "Sexual abuse involving children with an intellectual disability (ID): A narrative review," *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 36, 2015, 20.

78 Office of the eSafety Commissioner, *State of Play – Youth, Kids and Digital Dangers*. 13.

79 Ibid., 15.

80 Ibid., 24-25.

81 Using NetSmartz with Special Needs Children," NetSmatz, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.netsmartz.org/SpecialNeeds.

82 Ibid.

# CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the academic literature pertaining to OCSE is limited, and that concerning the prevention of OCSE is even more scarce. Most of the literature in this area relates to either contact child sexual exploitation, or children's online safety more broadly. The majority of the literature that does consider OCSE predominantly focusses on the perpetrators, as well as reactions after an offence has been committed (i.e. legal frameworks and the persecution of perpetrators), with little focus on prevention.

In addition, it was found that, while there are some national and international preventative programmes and initiatives available, these are predominantly targeted at children and young people, with fewer resources available for parents, carers and educators. Furthermore, evaluation of such programmes has been limited.

Whilst analysis of current preventative programmes, initiatives and communications has provided some important key learnings, the literature review suggests that there is a need to undertake further research to address the gaps in the literature. In particular, the literature review found that there is the need for further primary research with parents, carers and others involved in the lives of children and young people in relation to the types of programmes, initiatives and communications that will be most effective at encouraging behaviour change and thus preventing OCSE.

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"Worried your friend has met someone dodgy online?" Thinkuknow UK. Accessed 13 March 2019. https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/Worried-about-a-friend/Online-friends/.

"You. Your friends. The internet." Thinkuknow UK. Accessed 13 March 2019. https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_13/.

# Part 2: Detailed summaries of prevention programmes and initiatives

## PREVENTION MEASURES TARGETED AT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The following initiatives were identified in Australia:

### ThinkUKnow Australia

ThinkUKnow Australia is a partnership between the Australian Federal Police, Microsoft Australia, Datacom and the Commonwealth Bank, and is delivered win collaboration with State and Territory Police Forces, as well as Neighbourhood Watch Australia.[83] It is a cyber safety programme that aims to provide tools and resources to create safer online environments for children and young people.[84] ThinkUKnow Australia covers a wide range of cyber safety issues, including those related to online CSE such as grooming and sexting.[85] ThinkUKnow Australia delivers cyber safety presentations to students, parents, carers and educators nationally, through State and Territory Police Forces.[86] Between 2017-2018, ThinkUknow delivered 2,711 presentations to 196,881 students, across every State and Territory of Australia.[87]

### 'Your Selfie: Keep it to Yourself'

The 'Your Selfie: Keep it to Yourself' campaign was launched in 2013 by the Queensland Police Service Taskforce Argos, with the aim of encouraging teenagers not to send others inappropriate photos of themselves to other people.[88] The campaign consisted of:

- two posters what were made available online and distributed to Queensland high schools;[89] and
- two short films made available through the Queensland Police Facebook page.[90]

In terms of international initiatives, the literature identified the following:

### Thinkuknow United Kingdom

Thinkuknow UK is an educational programme run by the United Kingdom's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP), part of the National Crime Agency, and as such, "is underpinned by the latest intelligence about sex offending from CEOP Command".[91] Established in 2006, the organisation aims to improve children and young people's safety "by providing education about sexual abuse and sexual exploitation".[92] The Thinkuknow UK website provides targeted age appropriate information and education resources to children and young people, including:[93]

- information for four to five year olds—providing simple information to encourage children to talk to trusted adults about their online activity;[94]
- information for six to seven year olds—providing simple guidelines about subject areas such as online chats, sharing personal information and gaming.[95]

83 "About ThinkUKnow," ThinkUKnow Australia, accessed 19 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/about-thinkuknow.

84 "Our program," ThinkUKnow Australia, accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/our-program; "Crime Prevention: Parent, carer, teacher resources," Australian Federal Police, accessed 8 March 2019, https://www.afp.gov.au/what-we-do/crime-types/cyber-crime/crime-prevention.

85 "Our program," ThinkUKnow Australia.

86 ThinkUKnow Australia, Corporate Report 2017-18 (Australia: ThinkUKnow Australia, 2018), 1.

87 Ibid., 3.

88 Dempsey, "Media statements"; Thomas Chamberlin, "Police launch campaign as 'selfies' of children as young as 10 ending up in hands of paedophiles," *news.com.au*, 3 September 2013.

89 "Teens warned near naked selfies will haunt them later," *The Chronicle*, 3 September 2013.

90 Ibid.; Chamberlin, "Police launch campaign."

91 "Who are we?" Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Who-are-we/.k

92 Ibid.

93 "Welcome to Thinkuknow," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/.

94 "4-5 year olds," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/4_7/4-5-year-olds/.

95 "6-7 year olds," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/4_7/6-7-year-olds/.

Information for eight to ten year olds—including:

- a video game in which players have to answer questions relating to online grooming situations to progress through the game;[96]
- video content exploring issues related to online grooming;[97]
- simple guidelines and stories pertaining to subject matters such as gaming, sharing content online, online chats and privacy settings;[98]
- information for 11 to 13 year olds—providing detailed information and videos about general online safety concerns such as social media and 'fake news';[99] and
- information for young people aged 14 years and older—providing detailed information about a range of topics pertaining to online CSE, including about "peados creeps and weirdos" and what to do if you are "worried your friend has met someone dodgy online".[100] The website includes information pertaining to each of these issues, relevant videos, details of relevant support services, check lists with warning signs that OCSE may have occurred, to assist readers to identify the situation and tips for staying safe.[101]

### '#ListenToYourSelfie'

'#ListenToYourSelfie' is a social marketing campaign to address online CEM. It was launched in 2016 by Childline, an organisation in the United Kingdom that provides a free helpline to children and young people, for a broad range of issues they may face.[102] The campaign features two videos aimed at teenagers of both genders, asking children and young people to listen to themselves, or their "selfie", to determine how they should behave in online relationships, and to call the Childline helpline if required.[103] The campaign was launched across various social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat, to increase its reach with the target audience of children and teenagers.

### NetSmartz

NetSmartz is an educational cybersafety programme that targets children aged 5–17.[104] NetSmartz is delivered by the United States of America's National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).[105] NCMEC also provides CyberTipline, which provides an avenue to report suspected child exploitation.[106] As a result of the significant amount of data that NCMEC receives through the CyberTipline, it is able to observe trends in online child exploitation, and use this information to inform the NetSmartz programme.[107]

96 "Learn how to play band runner," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/8_10/about/.

97 "Watch," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/8_10/watch/.

98 "Stay safe online," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/8_10/stay-safe/.

99 "You. Your friends. The internet," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_13/.

100 "Sex. Relationships. The internet. Three things that get a little bit complicated," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/.

101 "Peados, creeps and weirdos," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/Need-advice/Online-grooming/; "Worried your friend has met someone dodgy online?," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 13 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/Worried-about-a-friend/Online-friends/.

102 Jessica Goodfellow, "Childline unveils #ListenToYourSelfie campaign to tackle online grooming," *The Drum*, 19 September 2016; "About Childline," Childline, accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.childline.org.uk/about/about-childline/.

103 "#ListenToYourSelfie – Lara and Paul's stories," Childline, accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/sex-relationships/healthy-unhealthy-relationships/listentoyourselfie-lara-and-paul-stories/.

104 "Overview," National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, accessed 15 March 2019, http://www.missingkids.com/education.

105 "The issues: Sextortion," National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, accessed 15 March 2019, http://www.missingkids.com/theissues/sextortion.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

NetSmartz provides age targeted content, including a separate webpage for teenagers.[108] Content pertaining to the issue of online CSE is predominantly aimed at this audience, and includes:

- video content and tips for staying safe when meeting people online;[109]
- quizzes to help teenagers to determine whether or not to share pictures with others;[110] and
- real life stories from other teenagers.[111]

### Stop Sextortion

Whilst Thorn began as an organisation to target online child sex trafficking, in 2015 Thorn partnered with Crimes Against Children Research Centre to understand and address the growing concern of sextortion as a developing form of child sexual exploitation.[112] Concurrent surveys with victims of sextortion have informed the 'Stop Sextortion' campaign.

Stop sextortion is the campaign aimed at educating children and the public about how to prevent cases of online sexual exploitation before they begin. "Ok. So you did a thing…" is a short video developed by Thorn to educate children and young people about sextortion using cartoon cats. The video aims to destigmatize the issue and encourage young people to speak up when they are being blackmailed or exploited. The video shows a cat sharing a nude and situations that may occur as a result. The campaign also includes a series of memes and gifs with the hashtag #friendsfirst" to encourage children to disclose issues to their close friends and"#noshame" to destigmatize being caught in a case of sextortion. The website also has a dedicated Thorn text line for children and young people who are being extorted to seek help.

There are also 'adult translations' of the website with more specific content and information on how to support children for caregivers, educators, companies and policymakers. These include specific links to further resources, and tips aimed at each of these groups.

### Don't get Sextorted

Don't get Sextorted is an educational campaign aiming to prevent sextortion before it begins.[113] The campaign is based around a video which encourages young people who get requests for nudes to send a picture of a naked mole rat instead. The website also includes a series of gifs and memes of naked mole rats to send to potential exploiters. There are also some practical tips and a list of 'what you need to know' for young people to prevent sextortion, and a Cybertip help line number. The website also includes a lesson plan for teachers and educators to use alongside the website content to help educate young people about sextortion and how to avoid it.[114]

108 "Helping you make safer online choices," NSteens, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.nsteens.org/; "NetSmartzKids Videos," NetSmartz, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.netsmartz.org/NetSmartzKids.

109 "Friend or fake?," NSteens, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.nsteens.org/Videos/FriendOrFake.

110 "To send or not to send?," NSteens, accessed 15 March 2018

111 "Are you sure you know who you're talking to online?," Netsmatz, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.netsmartz.org/RealLifeStories/Sextortion.

112 "Sextortion: An Untold Story", Thorn, accessed 15 April 2019, https://www.thorn.org/blog/sextortion-untold-story/

113 "Don't get sextorted, send a naked mole rat", Cybertips, accessed 15 April 2019 http://dontgetsextorted.ca/#about

114 "Sextortion: What teens need to know", Cybertip, accessed 15 April 2019 http://dontgetsextorted.ca/Ctip_SextortionLessonPlan_en.pdf

# PREVENTION MEASURES TARGETED AT PARENTS AND CARERS

The following initiatives were identified in Australia:

### 'Who's Chatting to your Kids?'

As part of this programme, Queensland Police have chosen to target some of their materials to parents and carers as they believe that it is "imperative" for this audience to "have a basic understanding of these technologies" in order for them to protect their children from OCSE.[115] Two resources for parents and carers have been produced for parents as part of this initiative:

- the 'Who's Chatting to your Kids? e-brochure—an educational resource that provides parents and carers with information about how child sex offenders use technology, how this may affect their children, indicators of risk and suggestions to protect children and young people on the internet,[116] and which aims to "pu[t] the power back into the hands of parents to ensure their children remain safe when online";[117] and
- the 'Family Internet Safety Agreement'—which provides a contract to be signed by children, outlining acceptable online behaviour, and asking them to agree to observe certain precautions to enhance their internet safety.[118]

### ThinkUKnow Australia

The ThinkUKnow Australia's Parent's Portal provides a range of resources for parents and carers, including:

- presentations to parents and carers on topics such as 'sexting', online grooming, inappropriate content, privacy management and how to report issues;[119]
- information about parental controls on devices;[120]
- short, age appropriate videos designed for parents and carers to watch with their children to prompt discussions;[121]
- family online safety contracts—to be signed by children and their parents or carers, outlining acceptable online behaviour and asking them to abide by certain online safety rules;[122] and
- an online grooming factsheet—containing information about grooming and what parents can do to minimise unwanted contact, or if this occurs.[123]

115 "Who's chatting to your kids?," Queensland Police, last updated 25 August 2018, https://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs/cscp/personalSafety/children/childProtection/default.htm

116 Queensland Police, *Who's chatting to your kids: Surviving the use of social media with your children* (Queensland: Queensland Police, 2013), 3-8; "Online safety," Australian Institute of Family Studies, last updated April 2018, https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/online-safety.

117 Jack Dempsey, "Media statements: Police urge teens to keep selfies private," Queensland Government: The Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory, published 3 September 2013, http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2013/9/3/police-urge-teens-to-keep-selfies-private.

118 Family Internet Safety Agreement, Queensland Police, https://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs/cscp/personalSafety/children/childProtection/Documents/internetagreement.pdf.

119 "Our program," ThinkUKnow Australia.

120 "Parents portal," ThinkUKnow Australia, accessed 12 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/parents-portal.

121 Ibid.

122 Family online safety contract, ThinkUKnow Australia and The Carly Ryan Foundation, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-01/TUK_FOSC_2016%20Family%20Online%20Safety%20Contract_FINAL_0.pdf; Family online safety contract template, ThinkUKnow Australia and The Carly Ryan Foundation, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-03/Blank%20Online%20Family%20Safety%20Contract_web.pdf.

123 ThinkUKnow Australia, *Factsheet: Online Grooming*, https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/sites/default/files/2018-10/Online%20Grooming.pdf.

# PREVENTION MEASURES TARGETED AT SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

Both **Thinkuknow UK** and **NetSmartz** provide some resources pertaining to OCSE for educators and other professionals working in the 'children's workforce'. Both include fact sheets covering topics such as grooming, online sexual abuse, reporting abuse and gaming safely.[124] In addition, NetSmartz provides the following resources for educators:

- lesson plans, targeted at different age groups;[125] and
- internet safety pledges, targeted at different age groups.[126]

In addition, **ThinkUKnow Australia** provides presentations to educators to assist them in communicating with children and young people about the technology they use.[127]

124 "Factsheets for professionals," Thinkuknow UK, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/factsheets-for-professionals/; "Tip sheets," NetSmartz, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.netsmartz.org/TipSheets.

125 "Lesson plans," NetSmartz, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.netsmartz.org/ActivityCards.

126 "Safety pledges," NetSmatz, accessed 15 March 2019, https://www.netsmartz.org/Pledges.

127 "Our program," ThinkUKnow Australia.

# Appendix B: Methodology

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research comprised of:

- an initial stage of secondary research—a review of relevant research was conducted to inform the research. Key findings from this literature review have been included throughout the report and the full review is provided at Appendix A; and
- a primary research stage—including both qualitative and quantitative research components, outlined below.

### Qualitative Research:

The qualitative component of the research involved a total of n=159 participants via 15 focus groups, 8 couple in-depth interviews, and 5 one-on-one in-depth interviews.

Research participants included:

- parents/carers of children and young people aged 4–18 years—including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) parents/carers, parents/carers of children and young people with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/carers;
- educators—including teachers, other school educators, tutors and leaders of extracurricular activities;
- siblings (aged 18–21 years) of children and young people aged 4–18 years;
- other key influencers of children and young people/those in a part-time caring role—including aunts, uncles, grandparents, babysitters, godparents, etc.;
- health professionals—including general practitioners (GPs), school counsellors and psychologists; and
- other community members (i.e. those without children in their care aged 4–18 years old).

The research was conducted between April—May 2019, across the following seven locations:

- **metropolitan:** Melbourne, VIC; Sydney, NSW; Perth, WA;
- **regional:** Launceston, TAS; Darwin, NT; Cairns, QLD; and
- **remote:** Port Lincoln, SA.

Research participants were recruited via:

- ORIMA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Field Force; and
- local specialist external qualitative recruiters.

Participants received the following reimbursements to cover their expenses to attend focus groups and interviews of up to 1.5 hours in duration:

- $100 to parent/carer, sibling, other key influencer and general public participants; and
- $120 to educator participants.

Health professionals who participated in interviews of 1 hour in duration were reimbursed $200 for their time.

Table 1 shows the research design and locations of the research.

Table 1: Qualitative research design

| Locations | | Mlebourne VIC | Sydney NSW | Perth WA | Launceston TAS | Darwin NT | Cairns QLD | Port Lincoln SA | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Focus groups (FG) = 7-10 participants, Couple in-depth interview (CIDI) = 2 participants, In-depth interview (IDI) = 1 participant** | | | | | | | | | |
| **Parents/ carers of children and young people 4-18 years** | Eldest child starting school next year | – | – | 1 x FG n=8 | – | – | – | – | **1 x FG n=8** |
| | Eldest child in primary school | – | 1 x FG n=10 | – | 1 x FG n=10 | 1 x FG n=9 | – | – | **3 x FG n=29** |
| | Eldest child in high school | 1 x FG n=7 | – | – | – | – | 1 x FG n=9 | 1 x FG n=10 | **3 x FG n=26** |
| | Couples with eldest child in primary school | 1 x CIDI n=2 | 1 x CIDI n=2 | – | 1 x CIDI n=2 | – | 1 x CIDI n=2 | – | **4 x CIDI n=8** |
| | Couples with eldest child in high school | 1 x CIDI n=2 | 1 x CIDI n=2 | 1 x CIDI n=2 | – | – | – | 1 x CIDI n=2 | **4 x CIDI n=8** |
| | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents | 1 x FG n=7 | – | – | – | – | – | 1 x FG n=11 | **2 x FG n=18** |
| | From a CALD background | – | 1 x FG n=8 | – | – | – | – | – | **1 x FG n=8** |
| **Educators** | | 1 x FG n=10 | – | – | – | – | 1 x FG n=9 | – | **2 x FG n=19** |
| **Key influencers/those in occasional caring role of children and young people aged 4–18 years** | | – | – | – | – | 1 x FG n=10 | – | – | **1 x FG n=10** |
| **Siblings (aged 18–21 years) of children and young people aged 4–18 years** | | – | – | 1 x FG n=10 | – | – | – | – | **1 x FG n=10** |
| **Health professionals— GPs/school counsellors/ psychologists** | | | | | 5 x IDIs | | | | **5 x IDIs n=5** |
| **General public** | | – | – | – | 1 x FG n=10 | – | – | – | **1 x FG n=10** |
| **TOTAL** | | **3 x FG 2 x CIDI n=28** | **2 x FG 2 x CIDI n=22** | **2 x FG 1 x CIDI n=20** | **2 x FG 1 x CIDI n=22** | **2 x FG n=19** | **2 x FG 1 x CIDI n=20** | **2 x FG 1 x CIDI n=23** | **15 x FG 8 x CIDI 5 x IDI n=159** |
| | | | | | **5 x IDI** | | | | |

## Quantitative Research

The quantitative research comprised an online survey with n=2,559 Australians aged 18 and over, split across the key target audience groups as outlined in the table below.

**Table 2: Quantitative sample design**

| Target audiences | Target | Sample achieved |
|---|---|---|
| **Parents/carers** of children and young people aged 4–18 years | *n*=1,500 | **n=1,509** |
| **Educators** of children and young people aged 4–18 years | *n*=400 | **n=426** |
| Primary and secondary school teachers, principals and counsellors | *n*=300 | **n=315** |
| Other educational leaders (e.g. tutors, leaders of extracurricular activities, nannies etc.) | *n*=100 | **n=111** |
| **Other influencers** of children and young people aged 4–18 years | *n*=150 | **n=167** |
| **Other community members** (i.e. not covered by the above) | *n*=450 | **n=457** |
| **TOTAL** | *n*=2,500 | **n=2,559** |

The sample was sourced from a high-quality online access panel—the Online Research Unit (ORU) panel—and fieldwork was conducted from 17 to 27 May 2019

# Appendix C: Understanding the quantitative research findings

Percentages from the quantitative survey presented in the report are based on the total number of valid responses made to the question being reported on. In most cases, results reflect those respondents who had a view and for whom the questions were applicable. 'Don't know/not sure' responses have only been presented where this aids in the interpretation of the results.

For stacked bar charts, numeric labels for categories that are less than three percent of the total proportion have been removed from the chart for clarity, and percentage results throughout the report may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Base sizes may vary for questions asked of the same respondents due to respondents being able to select 'Prefer not to say' throughout the survey (these responses were treated as missing in the analysis—i.e. were removed from the valid response base).

Table 1 provides indicative confidence intervals (at the 90% level of statistical confidence) for different response sizes. Percentage results for questions answered by all parents/carers to the survey have a degree of sampling error at the 90% level of statistical confidence of **+/- 2 percentage** points (pp). That is, there is a 90% probability (abstracting from non-sampling error and subject to the caveat set out below in relation to online panel respondents) that the percentage results will be within +/- 2pp of the results that would have been obtained if all Australian parents/carers of children and young people aged 4–18 years or more had responded. Higher degrees of sampling error apply to questions answered by fewer respondents and for specific target audience groups.

**Table 1: Statistical precision**

| Number of respondents | Statistical precision |
|---|---|
| 1,500 | +/- 2pp |
| 1,000 | +/- 3pp |
| 500 | +/- 4pp |
| 200 | +/- 6pp |
| 100 | +/- 8pp |
| 50 | +/- 12pp |

Note: These confidence intervals are upper bound levels based on percentage results of 50%. For higher or lower percentage results, the confidence intervals will be narrower.

The ORU panel's rigorous recruitment approach (offline as well as online) and large size means that the panel is broadly representative of the underlying Australian population. However, the panel members were not selected via probability-based sampling methods and hence the use of statistical sampling theory to extrapolate the online panel survey findings to the general population is based on the assumption that a stratified random sample of panel members provides a good approximation of an equivalent sample of the general population.

In most cases, parents/carers or key influencers have been asked to report on the experience and behaviours of their child/the child that they have a close and influential relationship with. For most questions, where parents/carers or key influencers have a relationship with more than one child, they have been asked to only respond in relation to one 'reference child'. This reference child was selected and made clear to them based on rules programmed into the quantitative survey (i.e. questions asked them to think about their child of 'x' age in their responses).

Results in Figures denoted with a '*' are significantly different to the reference group of interest. These differences will be statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, unless otherwise noted.

# Appendix D: Example scenarios used in qualitative research

## SCENARIOS PRESENTED TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS:

*Imagine… [for educators, replace with 'a student in your class', for general public, 'a child you know']*

1. Your 11-year-old son is playing an online game and talking with someone you don't know.
2. Your 13-year-old is being more secretive than usual about who they're talking to and what they're doing on their mobile phone.
3. You walk in on your 15-year-old daughter posing for selfies in provocative positions.
4. Your 5-year-old son is making up games with his toys that seem sexual.
5. You see naked photos and videos of your 4-year-old daughter on your 12-year-old son's phone.

# Appendix E: Information/key messages tested in the research

## KEY MESSAGES

### Final messages (long-form)

1. Online child exploitation is a growing concern in Australia and the world. It refers to the sexual exploitation of children and young people aged 16 and below over the internet and includes online grooming, personal image sharing and image-based abuse.
2. Never before has it been easier for our children and young people to receive inappropriate contact via online devices, apps and online games.
3. Inappropriate contact can come from people known and unknown to children and young people, and online connectivity makes it possible for that contact to come from anyone anywhere in the world.
4. Online grooming and child sexual exploitation can happen within hours, and often starts with being asked:
    - inappropriate or personal questions
    - to move to another platform/app to continue chatting
    - to send intimate pictures or do things online that are inappropriate.
5. Research indicates that more and more online child sexual exploitation material is being produced and shared by children and young people themselves.
6. There are significant harmful psychological and emotional consequences from online child sexual exploitation. There can also be legal consequences for perpetrators of current and past online child exploitation offences.
7. Encouraging someone under 16 to produce and share sexualised images of themselves or encouraging them to meet up in person is a criminal offence. It is also an offence to download, share and possess child exploitation material. Perpetrators, including minors, can be charged for such offences.
8. People who care for or spend time with children and young people can help them keep safe online by knowing:
    - what they are doing and who they are talking to online;
    - what is safe and acceptable online behaviour;
    - how to provide a safe online environment;
    - how to recognise inappropriate or suspicious behaviour online; and
    - the signs and symptoms of child exploitation.
9. The most important thing that families and carers can do is to start the conversation about online safety with children from an early age and to continue talking with them regularly throughout all stages of their lives.
10. Children and young people of all ages need the support, guidance and education of adults to stay safe online.
    - Those of primary school age should always be overseen by an adult when online.
    - Those in early teenage years should have their online activity monitored and supervised closely by an adult.
    - Those in older teenage years should be educated about what to do to stay safe when they are online.
    - Those with learning or other disabilities may require different levels of supervision and support based on their needs.

11. Everyone in a child and young person's life has a responsibility to teach and educate them that:
    - nothing is so bad that they can't tell a trusted adult.
    - once they hit 'send', they lose control of who sees it and where it ends up. Entire deletion of images cannot be guaranteed, including through apps like Snapchat in which content is supposed to disappear after a short time.
    - not everyone online is who they say they are, with many people faking their identity.
    - how they portray themselves and the information they share online can put them at greater risk.
12. There are resources available for parents, carers, educators, health professionals and children and young people.
13. For more information and access to tools, resources and advice, as well as reporting and support services, please visit ThinkUKnow.org.au.

The final tested and refined short-form key messages are presented below (these were used in the quantitative survey).

## Final messages (short-form)

1. Online child exploitation is a growing concern in Australia and the world. It refers to the sexual exploitation of children and young people aged 16 and below over the internet and includes online grooming, personal image sharing and image-based abuse.
2. Never before has it been easier for our children and young people to receive inappropriate contact via online devices, apps and online games.
3. Online grooming and child sexual exploitation can happen within hours, to anyone and from anywhere (including exploitation materials being produced and shared by children and young people themselves).
4. Encouraging someone under 16 to produce and share sexualised images of themselves, or encouraging them to meet up in person is a criminal offence. It is also an offence to download, share and possess child exploitation material. Perpetrators, including minors, can be charged for such offences.
5. Children and young people of all ages need the support, guidance and education of adults to stay safe online.
6. Those of primary school age should always be overseen by an adult when online.
7. Those in early teenage years should have their online activity monitored and supervised closely by an adult.
8. Those in older teenage years should be educated about what to do to stay safe when they are online.
9. The most important thing that families and carers can do is to start the conversation about online safety with children from an early age and to continue talking with them regularly throughout all stages of their lives.
10. There are resources available for parents, carers, educators, health professionals and children and young people. For more information and access to tools, resources and advice, as well as reporting and support services, please visit ThinkUKnow.org.au.