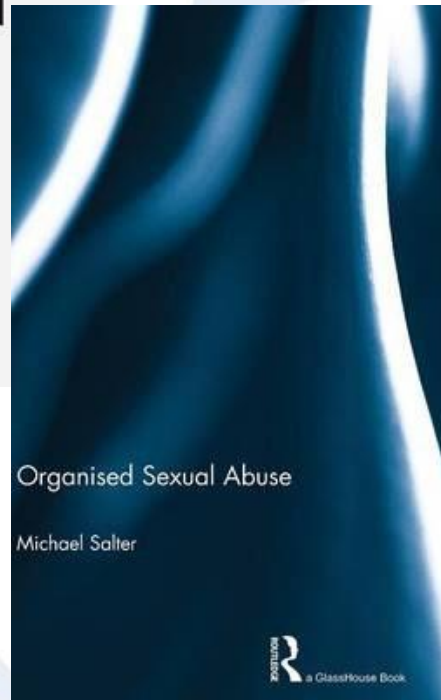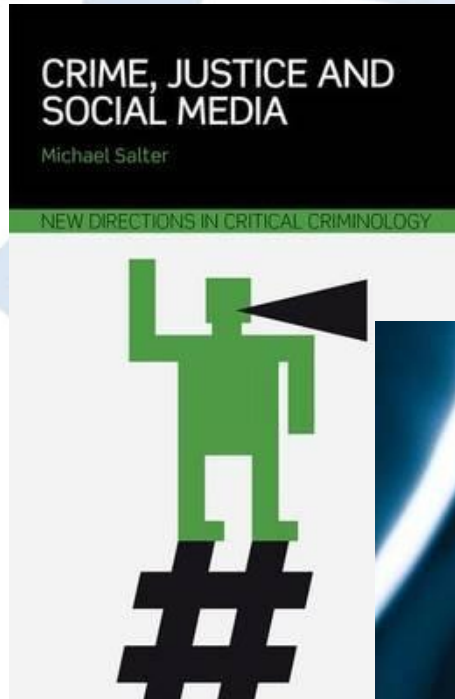# Themes and Trends from Research Regarding CSAM Generated by Family Members

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Structure today

- 1. Prevalence of child sex offending in Australia, USA and UK

- 2. Family-based organized child sexual abuse

- 3. Parental production of child sexual abuse material

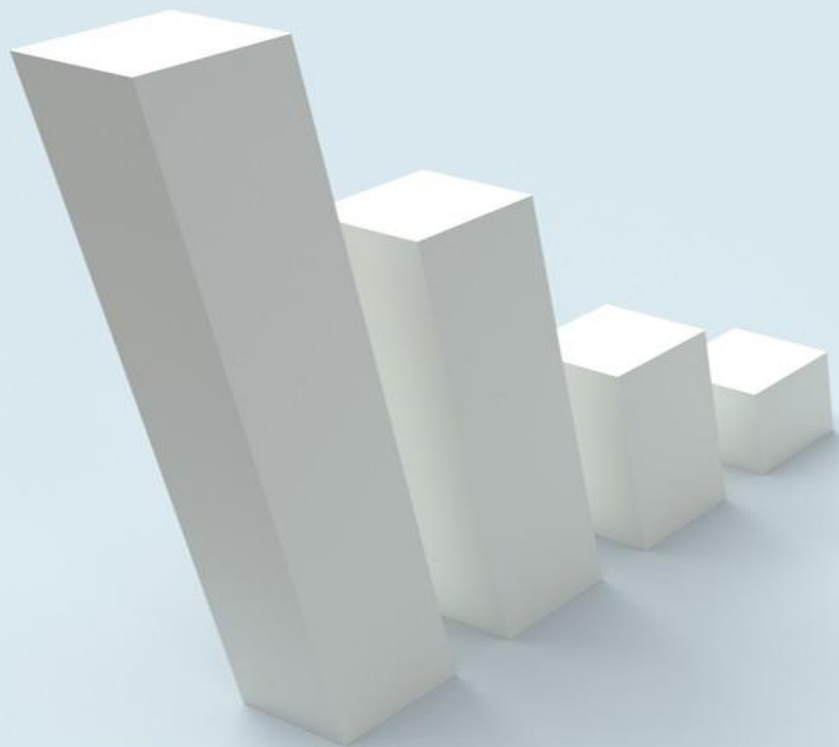- 4. Non-offending partners

- 5. Conclusion

Data sources

National CSA perpetration prevalence survey (2023)

Research interviews with survivors of family-based CSAM production (2007 – 2022)

AIC study on the role of parental figures in CSAM production (2021)

Interviews with non-offending partners (2020-23)

Ongoing research on CSAM distribution on the "dark web"

Prevalence of child sex offending in Australia, UK and USA

Project aims

This project aims to conduct a rigorous analysis of the prevalence and attitudinal, behavioural and demographic correlates of child sexual offending amongst Australian men.

Three key aims:
1. Measure the prevalence of offending and risk behaviours and attitudes amongst men aged 18 and above;
2. Develop robust statistical profiles of undetected offenders and men at risk of offending; and
3. Identify key attitudes and technological practices that facilitate offending.

Sampling

- Survey participants recruited via CloudResearch, an online survey recruitment platform with access to an international pool of over 1.5 million participants.

- Stratified random sampling was conducted to obtain a representative sample of 1500 Australian, US and UK adult men according to most recent census data.

- Iterative proportional fitting, or raking, was conducted to improve the representativeness of the sample by iteratively adjusting the weight of each participant until the sample distribution was concordant with the population distribution according to benchmark demographic characteristics (Speed, 2005).

- Weighted sample: 1945 Oz, 1473 US, 1506 UK.

Prevalence of offending in Aust, UK and USA weighted samples (%)
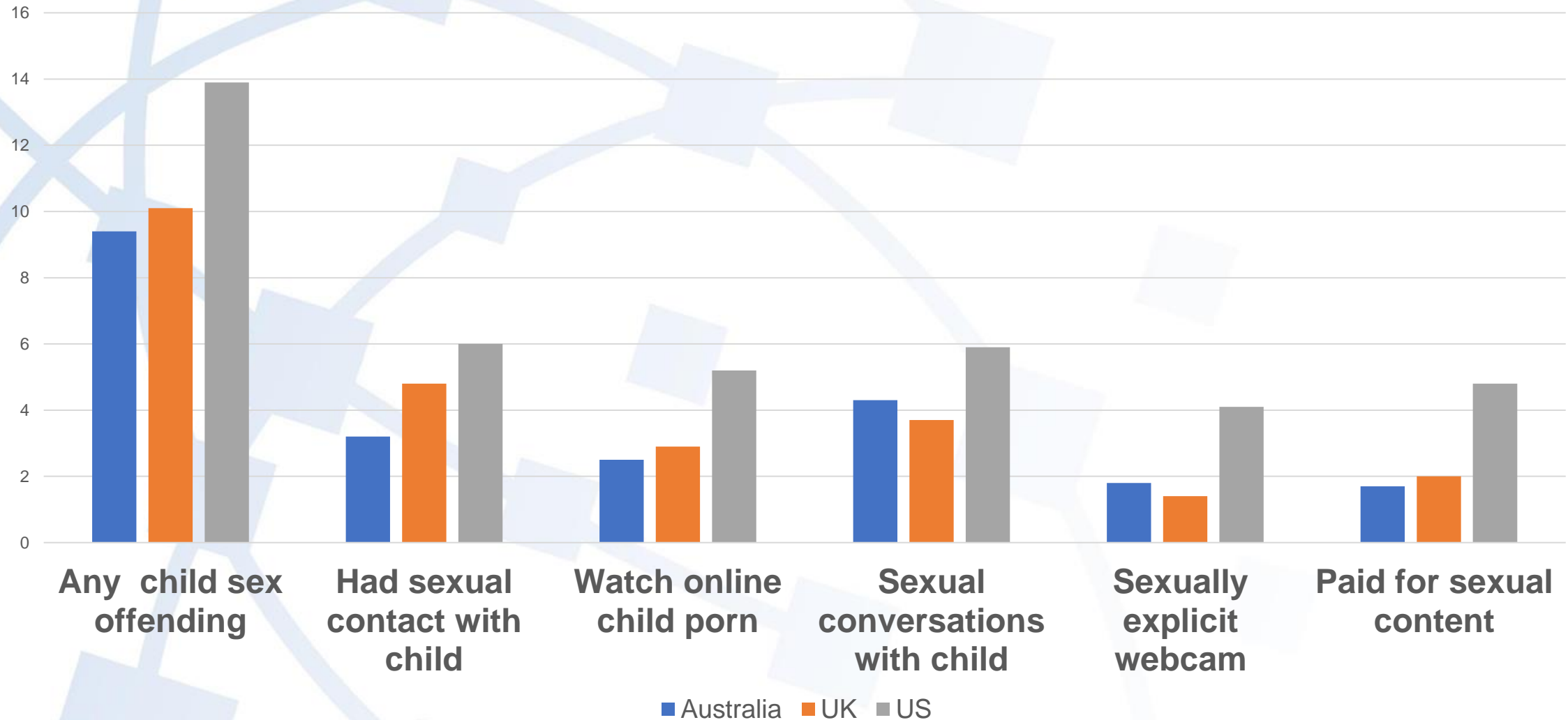
Comparison of pornography use between Aust, US and UK weighted samples (%)
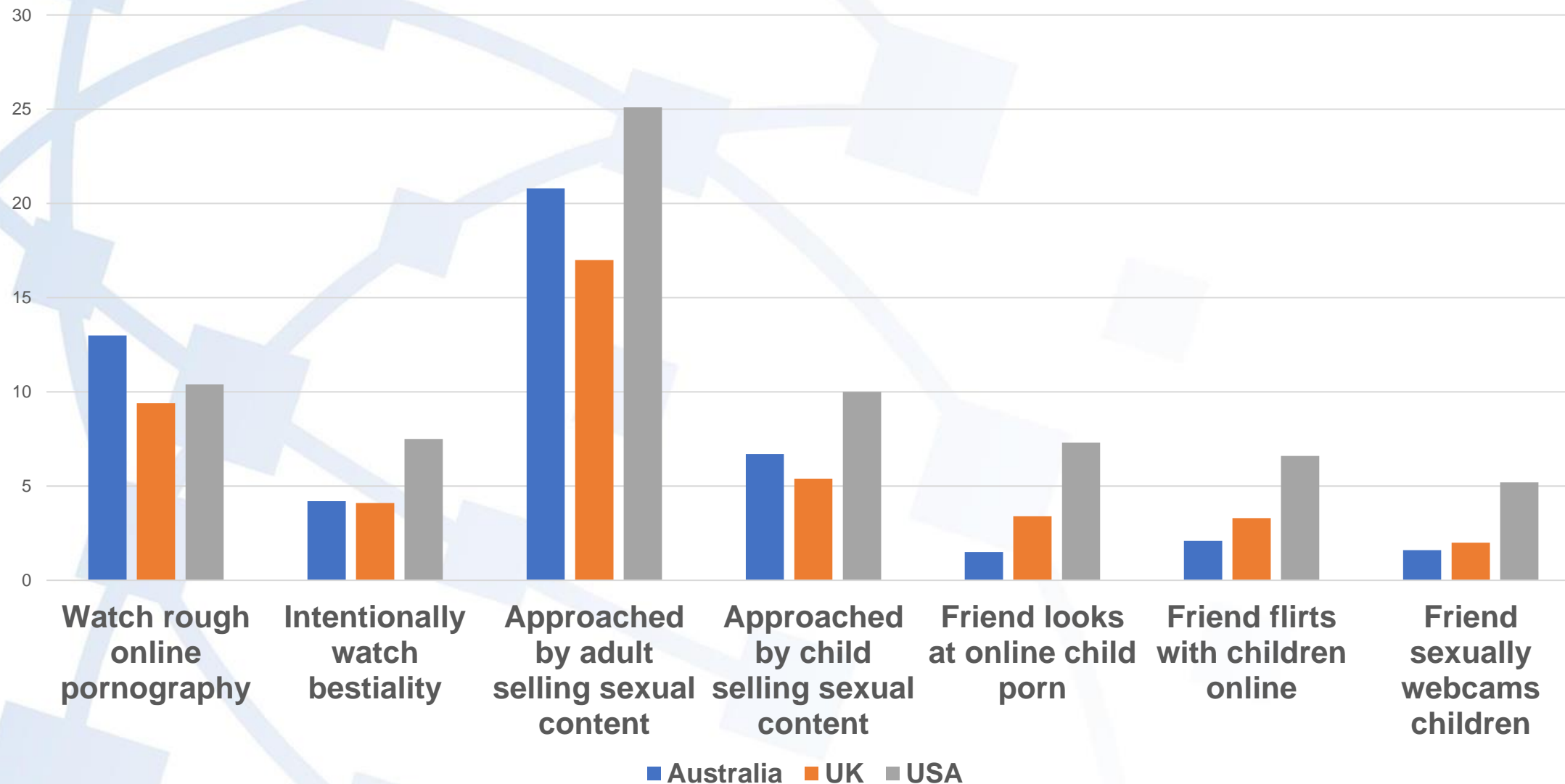
Overlap between online and offline offending (Australia)

ONLINE

OFFENDING

65.6%

14.2%

20.2%
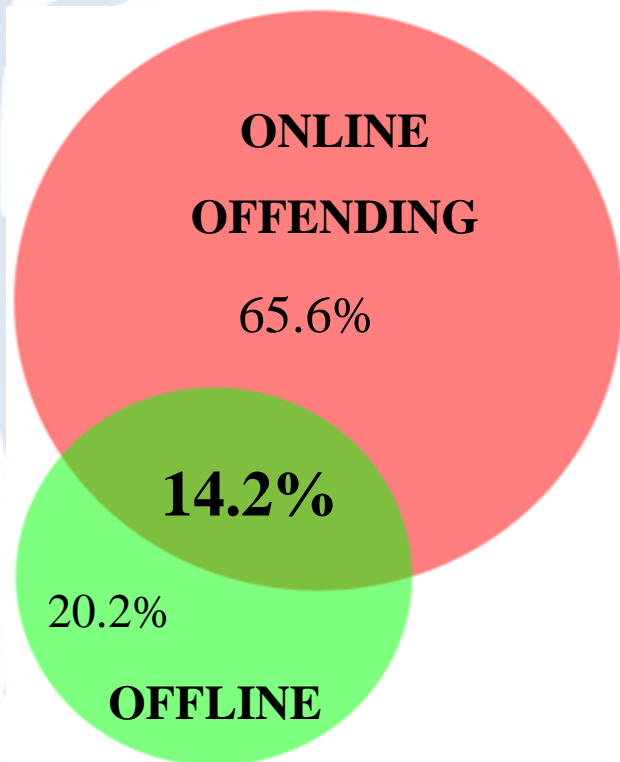
OFFLINE

Proportional Venn diagram of men who engage in online and offline child sex offending (n = 183).

9.4% offended online and/or offline.

- 20.2% engaged in offline offending only,

- 65.6% engaged in online offending only,

- 14.2% engaged in both online and offline offending.

Differences between the groups

- **Contact only offenders** – much more likely to be 65+ years, not living or working with children, unemployed, living regionally/rurally, vastly less active online.

- **Mixed offenders** – younger, employed, working with children, hmore active online (particularly with dating and pornography websites and social media), experienced substantial adversity during childhood, often experienced symptoms of anxiety and depression and engaged in substance abuse

- **Online only offenders** - aged 18 – 34, working with children, has a child in the house, employed.

Categories of men who have sexual feelings and offending against children

A composite variable was created indicating if participants had:

1. No sexual feelings or offending (**80.4%**)
2. Sexual feelings but no sexual offending (**10.2%**)
3. No sexual feelings but sexual offending (**4.5%**), and
4. Sexual feelings and sexual offending (**4.9%**).

Men with sexual feelings who have sexually offended against children

- More likely to be married

- Higher social capital

- Wealthier

- More likely to use encrypted apps, crypto, TOR and VPNs

- Very engaged in online sexual services

- Consuming more pornography

- Consuming much more deviant pornography (inc rape and bestiality content)

- Does not believe that sexual abuse harms children

- Almost three times more likely to work with children

Family based organized child sexual abuse

Organised child sexual abuse

- Any case of sexual abuse in which 2+ adult perpetrators conspire to sexually abuse one or more children (Salter, 2013).

- Survivors report a **spectrum of organised abuse** from:
  - localised, informal 'clustering' of offenders,
  - coordinated offending with routine group incidents, and
  - criminal subcultures with sophisticated techniques for exploiting children.

- **In the 80s and 90s**: 2 - 3% of sexual abuse cases reported to police and child protection and 2% - 17% of children and women in treatment for sexual abuse report organised abuse (Salter and Richters, 2012),

- **Today**: Half of adult survivors of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) report organised abuse (C3P, 2017). 80% of this group identify their parents as the primary offender (Salter and Woodlock, 2023).

Scenarios of organised abuse
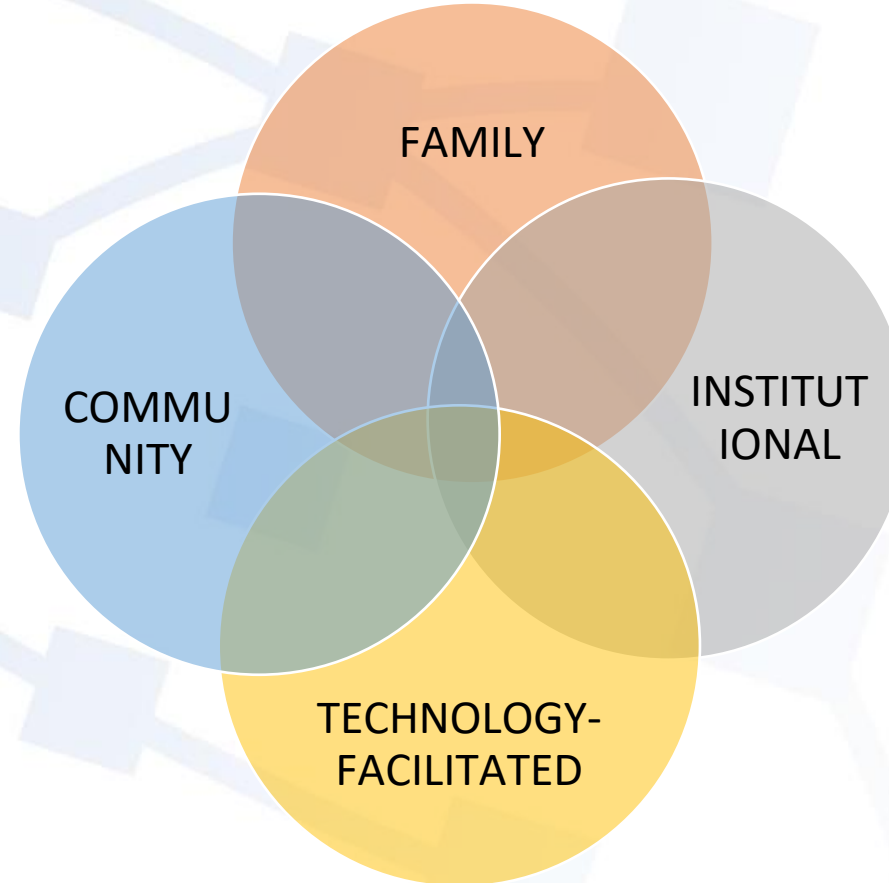
Familial organised abuse

- **Parents** the most commonly identified perpetrators of organised abuse.

- Parents who engage in prolonged sexual abuse of children are **almost inevitably connected to other offenders**, inc relatives.

- **Diverse pattern of victimisation** with common factors:
  - Early initiation of abuse and prolonged duration (inc into adulthood -> intergenerational)
  - Comparatively low numbers of victims but high intensity of abuse
  - Predominance of female victims
  - Presence of female perpetrators
  - Often sadistic, sometimes 'bizarre'
  - Production of **child sexual abuse material**

CSAM as a form of gender-based violence

- **Child sexual abuse material**: videos or images that depict the sexual exploitation of children.

- 80% of victims are girls and 78% were under the age of 12 (C3P, 2016).

- The volume of reports of CSAM to US authorities have increased by 50% per year since 2008 (Bursztein et al., 2019, p. 1).

- A record 32 million reports of suspected CSAM made to US authorities in 2022 (over 88 million files), an increase of 50% from 2021 (NCMEC, 2023).

- **Majority of CSAM is manufactured in a home environment.** Post-internet, victims are becoming younger and the abuse more severe (Salter and Whitten, 2022).

Parental production of CSAM

- Empirical research over the last half century finds that **parental figures have an important role to play in CSAM production** (Salter and Wong, 2023).

- Warnings to this effect have been evident in scholarly publications since the late 1970s, but were largely ignored for the following two decades.

- While the advent of the internet undoubtedly made CSAM more available, it brought new visibility and urgency to the problem and provided new sources of data.

- **Parentally produced CSAM is more likely to involve more serious abuse, younger children, and the participation of female as well as male perpetrators.**

- This content is highly sought after by online offenders. However parental CSAM producers continue to be marginalized in CSAM scholarship.

Class and racial bias

- Acknowledgement of parental CSAM production in trafficking and sexual exploitation research **often restricted to marginalised and low-income parents** described as substance abusing and/or involved in prostitution (Reid, Huard, & Haskell, 2015).

- Research studies drawn from criminal justice data as well as qualitative and quantitative research has identified sexual exploitation within families masked by a "pseudo-normal veneer" (Kluft, Braun, & Sachs, 1984) of apparent functionality.

- Children subject to parental CSAM production in these "pseudo-normal" families may continue to be sexually abused by parental and other figures into adulthood.

- While CSAM production can be lucrative, it is a mistake to assume that parental perpetrators are solely or primarily financially motivated, **particularly in middle and high income families**.

I recall a lot of my childhood not making sense because what happened during the day was very different to what happened at the night, or on weekends. What was happening was the total opposite to what was being portrayed during the day, you know, the whole Brady Bunch thing. Mum, Dad, kids, everything looks hunky dory. It was the total opposite to that.

I don't know if I've ever seen him as my father. I have a birth certificate, in that sense. But I'm not sure that I ever put it in that context. I saw him connected to something outside the family …

He played the role of being the, you know, figurehead, and I'm sure there were times where there were some nice things that he did just so that you knew he wasn't 100% horrible. But I'm not sure that I ever related to him that way [as a father]. It's kind of 'I have to do that at home, because that's the game we're playing'.

Isabelle

Incest in CSA groups and subcultures

- The **most in-demand and highly traded CSAM** manufactured by fathers in the abuse of pre-pubescent daughters (Salter and Whitten, 2022; Seto et al. 2018).

- **Incest the most common type of child sexual abuse** referred to on child sex offender forums (Westlake and Guerra, 2023, Owens et al., 2022).

- Incest is the most commonly depicted form of sexual violence in **legal adult pornography** (Vera-Gray et al., 2021).

- **Family-based child sexual abuse remains largely ignored and neglected** within policy and practice responses to CSAM and technology-facilitated sex offending (Salter and Wong, 2023).

- Child protection frameworks and responses to child sexual abuse **persistently neglect** to address the specific problem of familial offenders (Salter, 2016).

"Well, it's a dream of mine to one day start a pedofamily. Get married, move somewhere remote, have kids and then raise them to love being f*cked. I was wondering, for anyone part of a pedofamily, how did you meet your partner? Because it's not something you can shout about obviously lol, and meeting up with people are dangerous, but there's clearly proof that people have done it, so I was wondering how people find others with the same interests as them."

Dark web comment, 29 July 2023

"My friend shares his wife and both his daughters. It didn't start out that way though. He and wife were highschool sweethearts and he ended up getting her pregnant after HS so he married her. After a while he started sl*tting her out to friends at their house. Not in front of the girls but wife was open with them about their sexuality and as a result both girls started out early."

Dark web comment, 16 July 2023

"First rule of fight club, is not to talk about fight club.... No one was to be trusted, period. I made out with my niece, we were peers, large family. She managed to spill it one day that we did it. It was like a bomb going off, my dad managed to cap it off by saying it was "Doctoring" that got out of hand ... After that it was just father, daughter, and son ... Dad did have some kind of activity with pretty much all the kids from time to time, as well as some of their wives / girlfriends ... My mother would come closer to castrating me, or my father, should she find out about our activities."

Dark web comment, 16 June 2023

Parental production of child sexual abuse material

The role of parental figures in CSAM production

- Study aimed to identify the **characteristics of parental CSAM production cases**.

- The research team developed a database **of 82 cases in which Australian parents/parental figures were charged with child pornography offences** against their (biological, step, adopted or de facto) children, as reported in media or legal databases from 2009 – 2018.

- Two data sources for parental CSAM cases from 2009 – 2018:
  - Factiva (media database): A search was conducted for all Australian newspaper reports that included the terms 'father', 'mother', and 'child pornography' between 2009 and 2018, yielding 54 cases.
  - AustLII (legal database): A search was conducted for legal documentation, such as sentencing judgments, using the terms 'mother', 'father', 'incest', 'produce child pornography', 'producing child pornography' and 'producing child exploitation material', yielded 34 cases.

Perpetrators

- 78% of cases involved single perpetrators with 22% involving multiple perpetrators. A male perpetrator was involved in 90% of cases.

- Most offenders were the biological parents of the victims, followed by stepparents or parent's partners.

- When differentiated by gender, all female perpetrators were the biological mothers of the child victim/s (n=23), while over half of male offenders were the biological father of the child (43/74, 58%, including two surrogate fathers).

Table 1: Perpetrator-Victim Relationship

	Bio-Parents	Bio-Parents (Surrogate)	Foster-Parents	Parent's Friends / Associates	Parent's Partner	Stepparent
Media	37	1	2	3	6	11
AustLII	21	1	0	1	4	11
Total	58	2	2	4	10	22

Victims

- 67% of cases involved a single victim.

- 84% involved at least one daughter of the perpetrator.

- While the perpetrator's son is less likely to be the victim when compared with his daughter, the perpetrator's son is represented in one-fifth of the cases.

- In cases where the age of the single victim or multiple victims were reported (72/82, 88%):
  - 33 victims were aged between 0 and 4 years old,
  - 25 were aged between 5 and 9 years old,
  - 32 victims were aged between 10 and 14 years,
  - 6 victims were between 15 and 17 years old.

Table 2: Victim – Age					
	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-17	No Info
Media	18	14	20	1	8
AustLII	15	11	12	5	4
Total	33	25	32	6	12

Key case characteristics

- **Duration**: In the 55/82 cases where the duration of abuse was reported, almost half (26/55, 47%) lasted for one year or less. Only 10 cases involved offending of over five years duration.

- **Detection**: Of the 58 cases that indicated how CSAM production and/or its distribution by a parental figure was detected, police investigations (31/58, 53%) were the most likely way that this crime was detected. Disclosure occurred in 1 in 5 cases (12/58, 21%).

- **Distribution**: While all cases included charges for CSAM production, distribution or sharing was identified to have also occurred in just under half of the cases (37/82, 45%).

- **Multi-victimisation**: In about 4 in 5 CSAM production cases (66/82, 79%), other forms of maltreatment were identified: most often sexual abuse (92%) followed by grooming and coercion (20%). Physical and emotional abuse noted in a minority of cases.

- **Prior service involvement**: There was no reference to prior involvement by child protection or welfare services in the majority of cases (4 cases with reference to prior social service involvement, 2 cases with reference to prior police involvement).

Perpetrator typologies

The biological father (50%)
- Sires children for the purposes of abuse

De facto/step father (41%)
- Seeks single mothers with children

Biological mother (28%)
- 65% co-offending
- 35% solo offending

Multiple perpetrators outside the nuclear family (22%)
- Includes relatives, family "friends"

Challenges to forensic typologies

- Familial child sex offenders are **poorly understood** within forensic psychology (Delahunty-Goodman, 2014).

- Familial CSAM offending does not accord with long-standing forensic typologies that position incest offenders as "situational" offenders who abuse is triggered by stressors in their environment.

- **Familial CSAM offending is not well described** within current CSAM offender research.

- In the typology literature, CSAM offenders are considered more likely to be single and disinterested in adult relationships compared to contact offenders.

- There is a need for a significant shift in forensic thought regarding parental sex offenders and the sexual exploitation of children.

Non-offending partners

The loved ones of CSAM offenders

- Arrest data for CSAM in Australia, New Zealand, Italy and US:
  - 42 percent of offenders were **cohabitating** with a partner or children, and
  - 31 percent were found to be living with **their parents or grandparents** (Bouhours & Broadhurst, 2011, p. 9).

- Between 21 to 65% of CSAM offenders in treatment have a partner and 25% to 47% have at least one child (Brown & Bricknell, 2018).

- Research with women partnered to male sex offenders **finds relationships characterised by male dominance and aggression** (Iffland, Berner, Dekker, & Briken, 2016).

- Our Australian research has identified significant overlaps between CSAM offending, domestic violence and coercive control (Jones et al., 2021, Salter et al., 2023, Jones et al., 2022).

This is psychologically catastrophic, how am I going to survive this? Because I knew the state I was in. I had fallen to the bottom of a mountain going "I have to climb back up this mountain". I'm 60, how am I going to do this, emotionally and mentally and physically? I thought, for the first time in my life, I was facing something that I genuinely thought I don't know if I'm going to survive. It is not merely your world's just fallen apart. It is as if you have lost your internal organs, you can't breathe.

Non-offending partner

CSAM offenders described by non-offending partners

1. CSAM offender who is not controlling or violent, but engages secretly in CSAM offending and is dishonest with his partner and family.

2. CSAM offender whose CSAM consumption is part of a broader pattern of abuse.
   - Sexual interest in both adults and children
   - Mistreatment of adult partner reflects patterns of misogyny and self-entitlement
   - Forcing partner to take on housework/parenting allows him to pursue his sexual preoccupations.

3. CSAM offender who seeks adult relationships as "cover" for his illegal sexual activities.
   - May target women in order to sire children for abuse or to access her children
   - Premeditated and calculated "double life"
   - Preference for "child-like" adult partner -> withdraws from partner as she ages and/or seeks to recruit her into deviant or unwanted sexual activity.

Conclusion

- Our prevalence study found that child sex offenders are more likely to be in a relationship, working with children, and of "good character".

- Some men are seeking female partners to sire or access child victims, or as a "front" for offending.

- Preferred partners are more likely to be fragile, vulnerable, traumatized, young, naïve.

- Some women may be coerced into co-offending, others into collusion, others will take protective action.

- Child protection frameworks need to acknowledge the intersection of "offline" and "online" abuse, and the presence of parental perpetrators who exploit their children for sexual rather than financial motives.

What does this mean?

- **Primary prevention**
  - Encryption
  - Adult pornographic content
  - Online regulation

- **Secondary prevention**
  - Targeting boys/men with deviant porn consumption
  - Services for people concerned with sexual feelings/behaviour
  - Trauma-sensitive health screening for children

- **Intervention/prosecution**
  - Expect that many offenders are educated and of "good character"
  - Offenders are premeditated (ie use of encryption, working with children)
  - Offenders are networking with one another
  - Many offenders living with children
  - Financial footprint (purchasing sexual services, privacy services)

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