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**Abstract** | This study examines the prevalence of requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation (CSE) online. Of 4,011 Australians surveyed, 2.8 percent had received a request for facilitated CSE in the past year. Requests for facilitated CSE were significantly higher among those who had shared a photo of or information about children publicly online. Among respondents who had shared publicly, requests for facilitated CSE were significantly higher among men, younger individuals, linguistically diverse individuals, individuals with disability, and those who had experienced other sexual or violent harms online. The results highlight the need for increased awareness of the potential harms of posting photos of and information about children publicly online, and place onus on platforms to warn users of these potential harms.

## Prevalence and predictors of requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation on online platforms

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### Introduction

With the proliferation of social media, individuals across the globe are increasingly taking to online platforms to share various aspects of their personal lives. An increasingly common practice is that of ‘sharenting’—the act of sharing details about parenting and children’s lives online (Romero-Rodríguez et al. 2022; Steinberg 2017). Indeed, a recent study of 493 parents of young children in the United States found that most parents who were active on social media shared photos of their children online and felt comfortable doing so (Amon et al. 2022). While such practices offer individuals the chance to remain connected with family and friends, among other benefits (Auxier et al. 2020; Briazu, Floccia & Hanoch 2021; Ní Bhroin et al. 2022), sharing personal information and photos of children online may place some children at risk of exploitation and harm (Lavorigna, Tartari & Ugwudike 2022).

Individuals with a range of motivations can take advantage of the information shared by parents about their children online (Williams-Ceci et al. 2021). Parents themselves recognise that there are several risks associated with sharing photos of children online, expressing concerns regarding digital ownership, fraud, privacy and safeguarding issues (Auxier et al. 2020; Briazu, Floccia & Hanoch 2021). Particularly concerning is the potential for such information and material to be obtained by offenders and used to facilitate child sexual exploitation (CSE)—for example, offenders may groom parents or guardians to create or distribute child sexual abuse material (CSAM) (Teunissen et al. 2022).

There is a lack of empirical research into the relationship between sharenting and requests for facilitated CSE. There is, however, evidence to suggest that some individuals with pre-existing relationships with children, such as parents or guardians, may be approached online by other adults to facilitate CSE (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021; Salter et al. 2021; Teunissen et al. 2022; WeProtect Global Alliance 2021). Moreover, research suggests that a significant proportion of CSE involves parents or guardians producing and distributing material of their own children or children they have access to (Canadian Centre for Child Protection 2017; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021; Salter et al. 2021). For example, among 82 cases of CSAM production and distribution by parents and/or parental figures, Salter et al. (2021) identified three ‘types’ of parental CSAM producers: the male offender who exploits his own children, the male offender who forms a relationship with a woman and exploits her children, and the biological mother who produces CSAM of her own children at the request of men she knows in person or online. This raises the possibility that sharing information regarding one’s access to children online (eg posting photos of or information about children), especially on public platforms (eg public social media profiles, dating sites), may place individuals at increased risk of receiving requests for facilitated CSE. Indeed, CSE is becoming increasingly prevalent on social media and other online platforms. A recent report found that Meta, who owns Facebook, Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp, accounted for 93 percent of 21.7 million CSE reports received by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (Teunissen & Napier 2022).

There is therefore an urgent need to identify how such material is being obtained, and how and where contact may be established between offenders and facilitators of CSE. A recent survey revealed that dating apps and websites are one such online platform where requests may be made for facilitated CSE (Teunissen et al. 2022). Of 9,987 respondents living in Australia, 12.4 percent had received requests to facilitate the CSE of their own children or children they had access to. The present study aimed to extend this research by investigating whether requests to facilitate (ie arrange or assist in the production of) CSE occur across other online platforms, including social media services. The research additionally aimed to identify any characteristics or behaviours—namely, sharing photos of or information regarding children online—that may increase the likelihood of receiving requests for facilitated CSE.

## Methodology

The present study was conducted as part of a larger online national survey examining the online experiences of Australian adults. The survey was administered to 5,304 Australians aged 18 years and over by WhereTo Research between 11 and 29 November 2022. Respondents were recruited from three online non-probability-based convenience survey panels (Octopus Group, Pure Profile, and Research Profile), with quotas (based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data) placed on gender, age, location (state and regionality), socio-economic status, labour force participation, educational attainment and cultural diversity. Following completion of the larger survey, all respondents were recontacted via email and/or messages sent via the online panel between 23 December 2022 and 25 January 2023 with a series of questions regarding facilitated CSE. The response rate was 76 percent, resulting in a sample of 4,011 respondents for the present study. Online informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to completion of the larger survey and the follow-up survey. This research was approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee.

## Measures of sharenting

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had engaged in 'sharenting' in the last 12 months. Specifically, respondents were asked whether, in the last 12 months, they had shared a photo online of a child in their care, or of another child they knew. Respondents could select multiple responses from the following:

- No;
- Yes, on a dating site;
- Yes, on a private social media profile or post;
- Yes, on a public social media profile or post;
- Yes, by direct messages to a single person;
- Yes, by direct message in a group chat;
- Yes, somewhere else; and
- Prefer not to say.

Respondents were also asked whether 'you mention or share that you are a parent, carer, or have a close relationship with a child or children on any of your public profiles? This includes dating profiles and other social media profiles'. Respondents could select 'Yes', 'No', or 'Prefer not to say'.

For analyses, requests for facilitated CSE were first compared among respondents who reported that they had shared a photo of or information regarding children online to those who had not done so. We subsequently disaggregated the former group of respondents to compare those who had publicly shared a photo of or information regarding children online (on a dating site, on a public social media post, or on other public profiles) to those who had shared photos privately only (on a private social media post, by direct message to a single person, or by direct message in a group chat).

## Measures of facilitated child sexual exploitation

The focus of the present study was on adult respondents receiving online requests to facilitate (arrange, assist) the sexual exploitation of children they had access to (hereafter referred to as 'requests for facilitated CSE'). Specifically, respondents were asked about their experiences in the last 12 months of someone online:

- asking them for sexual images of a child/children they knew;
- pressuring them for sexual images of a child/children they knew;
- asking questions of a sexual nature about a child/children they knew; or
- offering payment for sexual images of a child/children they knew.

Respondents could select multiple of the above response options, or 'None of these' or 'Prefer not to say'.

## Sample demographics

For sample demographic characteristics, see Table 1. There was a relatively even split of men (51.0%) and women (48.6%) respondents, though few respondents were non-binary or gender diverse (0.4%). The largest proportion of respondents were aged between 35 and 54 years (40.9%), with a relatively even split of 18- to 34-year-olds (31.0%) and people aged 55 years and over (28.1%). Most respondents identified as straight (89.3%), with one in 10 (9.6%) identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, unsure/questioning or another non-heterosexual orientation (LGB+). The sample included people with disability (18.7%), linguistically diverse people (ie respondents who reported speaking a language other than English at home; 20.2%), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (2.0%).

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	2,044	51.0
Women	1,948	48.6
Non-binary and gender diverse	17	0.4
Prefer not to answer	2	0.0
<b>Age (years)</b>		
18–34	1,245	31.0
35–54	1,639	40.9
55+	1,127	28.1
<b>Sexual orientation</b>		
Straight	3,583	89.3
LGB+	386	9.6
Don't know	10	0.2
Prefer not to answer	32	0.8
<b>Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander</b>	81	2.0
<b>Linguistically diverse</b>	810	20.2
<b>Disability</b>	749	18.7

Note: Men includes 2,041 cis men and 3 transgender men; women includes 1,945 cis women, 1 transgender woman, and 2 sistergirls (see below). The 'Non-binary and gender diverse' category includes 14 non-binary respondents and 3 who use a different term for their gender to those listed in the survey. LGB+ includes those respondents who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, asexual, or unsure/questioning, as well as those who indicated that they use a different term. Disability includes those respondents who reported experiencing any physical, intellectual, cognitive, emotional or other conditions, challenges or disabilities that have lasted, or are likely to last, for at least six months.

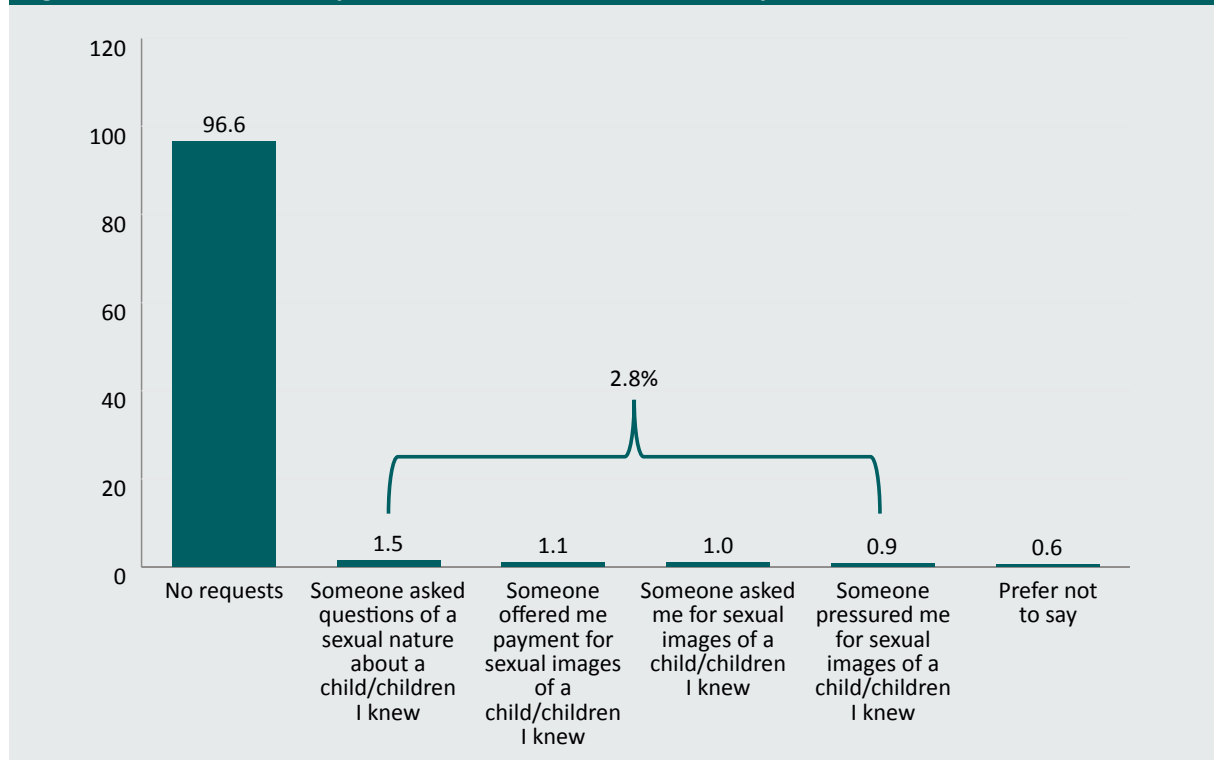
'Sistergirl' is a culturally specific term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe gender diverse people who have a female spirit and take on female roles in the community (TransHub 2021). However, this word can be used differently depending on a person's location, country, and nation. In this study, we grouped sistergirls with women in our data as the term is commonly used by trans women. Any sistergirls who participated in the study and who wish to have their data grouped with a gender category other than women may contact the authors. In future studies, eSafety will include a question in surveys that allows participants to select which gender category they would like their data to be grouped under, in addition to our current questions that capture participants' gender.

## Results

Of 4,011 respondents, 111 (2.8%) had experienced at least one request for facilitated CSE online in the last 12 months:

- 60 participants (1.5%) were asked questions of a sexual nature about children they knew;
- 44 participants (1.1%) were offered payment for sexual images of children they knew;
- 40 participants (1.0%) were asked for sexual images of children they knew; and
- 38 participants (0.9%) were pressured for sexual images of children they knew (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Prevalence of requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation**



Respondents who reported sharing a photo of or information about children online ( $n=2,123$ ) were significantly more likely to have received requests for facilitated CSE (4.8%), compared to respondents who had not shared a photo of or information ( $n=1,863$ ) regarding children online (0.6%;  $\chi^2(1)=62.73$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Table 2). Sharing a photo of or information regarding children online was associated with a significantly increased likelihood of being asked questions of a sexual nature about children, as well as being asked, pressured or offered payment for sexual images of children (Table 2).

**Table 2: Requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation, by sharing photos of or information regarding children online**

		Shared a photo of or information about children online						Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ )
		Yes		No		Total		
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Any requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation	Yes	4.8	100	0.6	11	2.8	111	62.73***
	No	95.2	2,005	99.4	1,848	97.2	3,853	
Someone asked me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	1.8	38	0.1	2	1.0	40	28.48***
	No	98.2	2,067	99.9	1,857	99.0	3,924	
Someone pressured me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	1.7	36	0.1	2	1.0	38	26.71***
	No	98.3	2,069	99.9	1,857	99.0	3,926	
Someone asked questions of a sexual nature about a child/children I knew	Yes	2.6	55	0.3	5	1.5	60	36.38***
	No	97.4	2,050	99.7	1,854	98.5	3,904	
Someone offered me payment for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	1.8	38	0.3	6	1.1	44	19.77***
	No	98.2	2,067	99.7	1,853	98.9	3,920	
Total		100.0	2,105	100.0	1,859	100.0	3,964	

\*\*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.001$

Note: Table counts, percentages and significance tests exclude participants who preferred not to answer

When broken down by whether information or photos were shared publicly (ie on a dating site or public social media post;  $n=1,448$ ) or privately (ie on a private social media post or via direct message;  $n=644$ ), only the former was associated with a significantly increased likelihood of having received a request for facilitated CSE (Table 3;  $\chi^2(2)=115.23, p<0.001$ ). Of those respondents who reported publicly sharing online a photo of or information regarding children they knew, 6.6 percent had received at least one request for facilitated CSE. Conversely, 0.9 percent of respondents who had only shared a photo privately and 0.6 percent of respondents who had not shared a photo or information of children anywhere online had received a request for facilitated CSE.

**Table 3: Requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation, by public vs private sharing of photos of or information regarding children online**

		Shared a photo of or information about children publicly online		Shared a photo of children privately only		Have not shared a photo or information online		Total		$\chi^2$
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Any requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation	Yes	6.6 <sup>a</sup>	94	0.9 <sup>b</sup>	6	0.6 <sup>b</sup>	11	2.8	111	115.23***
	No	93.4 <sup>a</sup>	1,338	99.1 <sup>b</sup>	637	99.4 <sup>b</sup>	1,848	97.2	3,823	
Someone asked me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	2.5 <sup>a</sup>	36	0.3 <sup>b</sup>	2	0.1 <sup>b</sup>	2	1.0	40	50.35***
	No	97.5 <sup>a</sup>	1,396	99.7 <sup>b</sup>	641	99.9 <sup>b</sup>	1,857	99.0	3,894	
Someone pressured me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	2.5 <sup>a</sup>	36	0.0 <sup>1</sup>	0	0.1 <sup>b</sup>	2	1.0	38	56.46***
	No	97.5 <sup>a</sup>	1,396	100.0 <sup>1</sup>	643	99.9 <sup>b</sup>	1,857	99.0	3,896	
Someone asked questions of a sexual nature about a child/children I knew	Yes	3.6 <sup>a</sup>	52	0.5 <sup>b</sup>	3	0.3 <sup>b</sup>	5	1.5	60	66.62***
	No	96.4 <sup>a</sup>	1,380	99.5 <sup>b</sup>	640	99.7 <sup>b</sup>	1,854	98.5	3,874	
Someone offered me payment for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	2.6 <sup>a</sup>	37	0.2 <sup>b</sup>	1	0.3 <sup>b</sup>	6	1.1	44	43.84***
	No	97.4 <sup>a</sup>	1,395	99.8 <sup>b</sup>	642	99.7 <sup>b</sup>	1,853	98.9	3,890	
Total		100.0	1,432	100.0	643	100.0	1,859	100.0	3,934	

\*\*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.001$

Note: Values in the same row not sharing the same superscript letter are significantly different at  $p<0.05$ . Table counts, percentages and significance tests exclude participants who preferred not to answer. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost sub-table using the Bonferroni correction

1: This category is not used in comparisons because its column proportion is equal to zero or one



Subsequent analyses examined sociodemographic correlates of requests for CSE among those respondents who had publicly shared online a photo of or information regarding children. Of those respondents who had publicly shared online a photo of or information regarding children they knew, men were significantly more likely than women to have received a request for facilitated CSE (Table 4). Notably, 10.3 percent of men who had publicly shared online a photo of or information about children they knew had received at least one request for facilitated CSE, compared to 3.2 percent of women who had done so ( $\chi^2(1)=30.00, p<0.001$ ).

**Table 4: Requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation received by respondents who had publicly shared photos of or information regarding children online, by respondent gender**

		Gender						$\chi^2$
		Men		Women		Total		
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Any requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation	Yes	10.3	70	3.2	24	6.6	94	30.00***
	No	89.7	611	96.8	724	93.4	1,335	
Someone asked me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	4.0	27	1.2	9	2.5	36	11.07***
	No	96.0	654	98.8	739	97.5	1,393	
Someone pressured me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	4.3	29	0.9	7	2.5	36	16.03***
	No	95.7	652	99.1	741	97.5	1,393	
Someone asked questions of a sexual nature about a child/children I knew	Yes	5.6	38	1.9	14	3.6	52	13.98***
	No	94.4	643	98.1	734	96.4	1,377	
Someone offered me payment for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	4.6	31	0.8	6	2.6	37	19.88***
	No	95.4	650	99.2	742	97.4	1,392	
	Total	100.0	681	100.0	748	100.0	1,429	

\*\*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.001$

Note: Table counts, percentages and significance tests exclude non-binary and gender diverse participants and participants who preferred not to answer

While a higher percentage of LGB+ individuals who had publicly shared a photo of or information about children they knew had received at least one request for facilitated CSE (10.6%) compared to straight individuals (6.2%), this difference was not statistically significant. Cell sizes were too small to compare specific types of requests for facilitated CSE across sexual orientation.

Of those respondents who had publicly shared online a photo of or information regarding children they knew, requests for facilitated CSE overall were significantly higher among 18- to 34-year-olds (11.6%) compared to 35- to 54-year-olds (4.9%) and those over 55 years (2.7%;  $\chi^2(2)=28.13$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Table 5).

		Age group								$\chi^2$
		18–34 years		35–54 years		55+ years		Total		
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Any requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation	Yes	11.6 <sup>a</sup>	52	4.9 <sup>b</sup>	35	2.7 <sup>b</sup>	7	6.6	94	28.13***
	No	88.4 <sup>a</sup>	398	95.1 <sup>b</sup>	686	97.3 <sup>b</sup>	254	93.4	1,338	
Someone asked me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	5.3 <sup>a</sup>	24	1.4 <sup>b</sup>	10	0.8 <sup>b</sup>	2	2.5	36	21.59***
	No	94.7 <sup>a</sup>	426	98.6 <sup>b</sup>	711	99.2 <sup>b</sup>	259	97.5	1,396	
Someone pressured me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	4.4 <sup>a</sup>	20	1.8 <sup>b</sup>	13	1.1 <sup>a,b</sup>	3	2.5	36	10.31**
	No	95.6 <sup>a</sup>	430	98.2 <sup>b</sup>	708	98.9 <sup>a,b</sup>	258	97.5	1,396	
Someone asked questions of a sexual nature about a child/children I knew	Yes	6.7 <sup>a</sup>	30	2.8 <sup>b</sup>	20	0.8 <sup>b</sup>	2	3.6	52	19.48***
	No	93.3 <sup>a</sup>	420	97.2 <sup>b</sup>	701	99.2 <sup>b</sup>	259	96.4	1,380	
Someone offered me payment for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	4.9 <sup>a</sup>	22	1.5 <sup>b</sup>	11	1.5 <sup>a,b</sup>	4	2.6	37	13.85***
	No	95.1 <sup>a</sup>	428	98.5 <sup>b</sup>	710	98.5 <sup>a,b</sup>	257	97.4	1,395	
Total		100.0	450	100.0	721	100.0	261	100.0	1,432	

\*\*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.001$ , \*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.01$

Note: Values in the same row not sharing the same superscript letter are significantly different at  $p<0.05$ . Table counts, percentages and significance tests exclude participants who preferred not to answer. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost sub-table using the Bonferroni correction

When considering linguistic diversity, respondents who had publicly shared online a photo of or information regarding children they knew and spoke a language other than English at home were significantly more likely (9.4%) than those who spoke only English at home (5.7%) to have received at least one request for facilitated CSE ( $\chi^2(1)=5.89, p<0.05$ ; Table 6). This effect was driven by significantly more linguistically diverse individuals being offered payment for sexual images of children they knew (4.1%), compared to those who only spoke English at home (2.1%).

**Table 6: Requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation received by respondents who had publicly shared photos of or information regarding children online, by language spoken at home**

		Do you speak a language other than English at home?						$\chi^2$
		Yes		No		Total		
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Any requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation	Yes	9.4	32	5.7	62	6.6	94	5.89*
	No	90.6	308	94.3	1,030	93.4	1,338	
Someone asked me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	3.2	11	2.3	25	2.5	36	0.95
	No	96.8	329	97.7	1,067	97.5	1,396	
Someone pressured me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	3.2	11	2.3	25	2.5	36	0.95
	No	96.8	329	97.7	1,067	97.5	1,396	
Someone asked questions of a sexual nature about a child/children I knew	Yes	4.4	15	3.4	37	3.6	52	0.78
	No	95.6	325	96.6	1,055	96.4	1,380	
Someone offered me payment for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	4.1	14	2.1	23	2.6	37	4.17*
	No	95.9	326	97.9	1,069	97.4	1,395	
	Total	100.0	340	100.0	1,092	100.0	1,432	

\*statistically significant at  $p<0.05$

Note: Table counts, percentages and significance tests exclude participants who preferred not to answer

Respondents who had publicly posted online a photo of or shared information regarding children they knew and reported lived experience of disability were also at a significantly increased likelihood of receiving at least one request for facilitated CSE (11.6%), compared to individuals without disability (5.4%;  $\chi^2(1)=13.62, p<0.001$ ; Table 7). This effect was driven by those with disability being significantly more likely than those without disability to be pressured for sexual images of children they knew and to be offered payment for sexual images of children they knew.

**Table 7: Requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation received by respondents who had publicly shared photos of or information regarding children online, by disability status**

		Have you experienced any physical, intellectual or cognitive, emotional or other conditions, challenges or disabilities that have lasted, or are likely to last, for at least six months?						$\chi^2$
		Yes		No		Total		
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Any requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation	Yes	11.6	31	5.4	62	6.5	93	13.62***
	No	88.4	237	94.6	1,091	93.5	1,328	
Someone asked me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	4.1	11	2.2	25	2.5	36	3.30
	No	95.9	257	97.8	1,128	97.5	1,385	
Someone pressured me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	4.9	13	2.0	23	2.5	36	7.18**
	No	95.1	255	98.0	1,130	97.5	1,385	
Someone asked questions of a sexual nature about a child/children I knew	Yes	4.5	12	3.4	39	3.6	51	0.75
	No	95.5	256	96.6	1,114	96.4	1,370	
Someone offered me payment for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	4.5	12	2.2	25	2.6	37	4.57*
	No	95.5	256	97.8	1,128	97.4	1,384	
Total		100.0	268	100.0	1,153	100.0	1,421	

\*\*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.001$ , \*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.01$ , \*statistically significant at  $p<0.05$

Note: Table counts, percentages and significance tests exclude participants who preferred not to answer

There was evidence of a pattern of vulnerability across different types of online harms. Respondents who had publicly shared online a photo of or information regarding children they knew and had experienced other violent or sexual online harms were significantly more likely to have received any requests for facilitated CSE (8.3%) compared to those respondents who had not experienced other violent or sexual online harms (2.2%;  $\chi^2(1)=17.36, p<0.001$ ; Table 8).

**Table 8: Requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation received by respondents who had publicly shared photos of or information regarding children online, by experience of other violent/sexual online harms**

		Experienced other violent or sexual online harms						$\chi^2$
		Yes		No		Total		
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Any requests for facilitated child sexual exploitation	Yes	8.3	85	2.2	9	6.6	94	17.36***
	No	91.7	942	97.8	396	93.4	1,338	
Someone asked me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	3.2	33	0.7	3	2.5	36	7.25**
	No	96.8	994	99.3	402	97.5	1,396	
Someone pressured me for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	3.1	32	1.0	4	2.5	36	5.37*
	No	96.9	995	99.0	401	97.5	1,396	
Someone asked questions of a sexual nature about a child/children I knew	Yes	4.7	48	1.0	4	3.6	52	11.28***
	No	95.3	979	99.0	401	96.4	1,380	
Someone offered me payment for sexual images of a child/children I knew	Yes	3.2	33	1.0	4	2.6	37	5.72*
	No	96.8	994	99.0	401	97.4	1,395	
Total		100.0	1,027	100.0	405	100.0	1,432	

\*\*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.001$ , \*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.01$ , \*statistically significant at  $p<0.05$

Note: Table counts, percentages and significance tests exclude participants who preferred not to answer. Other violent or sexual online harms category includes respondents who indicated that they experienced one of the following at least once in the past 12 months: they received repeated unwanted messages or online contact from someone other than cold calling/marketing; someone electronically tracked their location or monitored their movements using technology without their consent; they received threats online or electronically of real-life harm or abuse; someone threatened to share private photos of them online or electronically; private (nude/semi-nude/sexual) photos/videos of them were shared online or electronically without their consent; a private (nude, semi-nude, sexual) photo/video of them was taken without their consent (eg via a webcam); they were sent unwanted inappropriate content online (eg porn or violent content); they were touched in a way they did not like online via haptic touch (ie while using a haptic suit); someone created a sexually explicit avatar or image of them to interact with and did not have their consent; someone attempted to groom them; they were exposed to a virtual space that was sexually graphic; they were threatened; they were exposed to environments that they did not feel comfortable in; or they were exposed to a scene depicting abhorrent violent material, terrorist events or other traumatic events

All predictors that were significant in bivariate analyses, other than linguistic diversity, remained significant when included in a logistic regression model predicting having received any requests for facilitated CSE over the past 12 months (Table 9). The model provided a good fit to the data, according to the Hosmer and Lemeshow test ( $\chi^2(8)=9.24, p=0.322$ ). In particular, men were almost four times more likely than women to have received a CSE request, and the odds of having received a CSE request decreased with age. Additionally, respondents who had a disability had more than twice the odds and those who experienced other online harms had three times the odds of having received a CSE request.

**Table 9: Logistic regression analyses predicting having received any request for facilitated child sexual exploitation, among respondents who had publicly shared photos of or information regarding children online**

Predictor	B	SE	OR	95% CI for OR	p
<b>Men (vs women)</b>	1.30	0.25	3.68	2.25, 6.02	<0.001
<b>Age group (vs 18–34 years)</b>					
35–54 years	–0.90	0.24	0.41	0.26, 0.65	<0.001
55+ years	–1.59	0.43	0.20	0.09, 0.47	<0.001
<b>LGB+ (vs straight)</b>	0.27	0.35	1.31	0.66, 2.59	0.438
<b>Language other than English spoken at home (vs English)</b>	0.33	0.24	1.39	0.87, 2.23	0.170
<b>Disability (vs none)</b>	0.79	0.25	2.20	1.36, 3.55	0.001
<b>Experienced other online harms (vs did not)</b>	1.10	0.36	3.01	1.48, 6.14	0.002
<b>Constant</b>	–4.05	0.41	0.02		<0.001

Note: Table 9 shows the results of a logistic regression model, predicting having received any request for facilitated child sexual exploitation in the past 12 months, with no being the reference category. Only respondents who reported having shared photos of or information regarding children publicly online were included in the model. Non-binary and gender diverse participants and those who responded ‘Prefer not to answer’ or ‘Unsure’ to any variable were excluded from analyses. The model therefore included  $n=1,411$

## Discussion

The present study examined demographic characteristics and online behaviours associated with having received requests for facilitated CSE online in the 12 months until January 2023. Specifically, we examined whether ‘sharenting’ practices (that is, sharing photos of or information regarding children online) may be associated with an increased likelihood of receiving requests for facilitated CSE, especially if the photos or information were shared publicly (ie on public social media profiles and dating sites). We found that, across the entire sample, 2.8 percent of respondents had received at least one request for facilitated CSE online in the past 12 months. Respondents who indicated that they had publicly shared photos of or information regarding children online were significantly more likely to have received requests for facilitated CSE, compared to those who had shared photos or information privately or not at all. Among those respondents who had shared a photo of or information about children publicly online, requests for facilitated CSE were significantly higher among men, individuals aged 18–34 years, linguistically diverse individuals, individuals with disability, and those who had experienced other sexual or violent harms online.

Though few other studies have examined demographic characteristics associated with receiving requests for facilitated CSE, our findings align with recent research by Teunissen et al. (2022), which examined the prevalence of requests for facilitated CSE among users of mobile dating apps and websites. In line with the present findings, Teunissen et al. (2022) found that men were significantly more likely than women to receive requests for facilitated CSE. Notably, however, research examining the characteristics of CSAM cases perpetrated by parents suggests that men may also be more likely to instigate, perpetrate and distribute CSAM (Salter et al. 2021). While the present study did not obtain information regarding the gender of perpetrators of facilitation requests, or the outcome of requests, collectively these findings suggest that CSE prevention interventions aimed at men should include initiatives that target third-party requests for CSE facilitation.

The present findings also showed that younger people, linguistically diverse individuals, individuals with disability, and those who had experienced other sexual or violent online harms may be particularly vulnerable to receiving requests for facilitated CSE, indicating that targeted preventative efforts may be warranted for these subgroups. Another study that surveyed users of mobile dating apps similarly found that younger people, linguistically diverse individuals and individuals with a health condition or disability were significantly more likely to receive requests for facilitated CSE from other dating app users (Teunissen et al. 2024). Future research is required to determine why these subgroups may be especially at risk of receiving requests for facilitated CSE.

The present study has important implications for users of online platforms, as well as for online platforms themselves. Specifically, we found that respondents who had shared photos of or information regarding children publicly online were significantly more likely to have received requests for facilitated CSE, compared to respondents who had shared photos of children privately online, or not at all. Given that it has become common practice for parents to share photos of their children online (Amon et al. 2022; Bartholomew et al. 2012), concerted education efforts are needed to warn not just parents and guardians but all those who interact with children of the potential harms associated with publicly sharing photos of or information regarding children online. If posting photos on private rather than public online platforms can reduce the risk of receiving requests for facilitated CSE, as the present findings suggest, this is a simple change that parents, guardians and others in a caregiving role could make.

Online platforms also have a responsibility to mitigate harms and to warn users of the risks associated with particular online behaviours. For example, while Facebook, Instagram and TikTok prohibit the posting of material that sexually exploits or could lead to the sexual exploitation of children, there are no specific provisions regarding the posting of photos or information regarding children in general (Lavorgna, Tartari & Ugwudike 2022). Similarly, dating apps such as Tinder and Bumble do not allow the posting of profile photos of unaccompanied or unclothed children, yet this does not prevent users from posting profile photos of themselves with children or sharing that they have children. Given the present findings, showing that merely posting photos of or information regarding children publicly online was associated with an increased likelihood of receiving requests for facilitated CSE, there is a need for online platforms to inform users of this risk. For example, online platforms could implement safety by design features, whereby a user receives a warning message upon attempting to upload a photo of or information regarding children to a public site. Indeed, warning messages have been shown to effectively reduce the online distribution of CSAM (Prichard et al. 2022).

The present results should be interpreted in the context of several limitations. First, the study was cross-sectional, and thus we are unable to infer causality from the findings. The relationship between sharing photos of children online and receiving requests for facilitated CSE may be driven by individuals sharing photos of children *after* they had received requests for facilitated CSE, rather than before. Future longitudinal research is required to determine the direction of this effect. The observational nature of the data also means that there may be additional demographic or behavioural variables other than those measured contributing to or accounting for the relationships observed. In particular, the relationship between younger age and increased likelihood of receiving requests for facilitated CSE may be because the younger respondents may have had younger children. Indeed, offenders may be able to directly access pubescent children to groom online via social media to obtain self-generated CSAM (Quayle et al. 2014; Whittle et al. 2013; Winters, Kaylor & Jeglic 2017). However, offenders who are interested in pre-pubescent children may have to contact and facilitate access and CSE via other adults who have contact with younger children (ie parents and guardians; Seto et al. 2018). Additionally, younger people may spend more time online, which may increase their risk of encountering online harms, such as requests for CSE. Future research is required to form a more comprehensive picture of how CSE is occurring and how CSAM is being procured, obtained and distributed online. Specifically, research should examine who is making requests for facilitated CSE, how those making requests are identifying individuals with access to children, which platforms those making requests are using to meet and interact with recipients of these requests, and the actions taken by recipients in response to these requests. Finally, specific survey findings for First Nations and trans and gender-diverse people were not separated out from the main data collected. This was due to the small sample size for each group. As a result, our findings are unable to reflect the experiences of these groups.

## Conclusion

The present results show that online platforms are being used to request facilitated CSE, with 2.8 percent of respondents indicating that they had received at least one request for facilitated CSE online in the 12 months until January 2023. Considering Australia's population aged 18 and over, this could indicate that a substantial number of people are being approached online every year with requests for facilitated CSE. Respondents who had publicly shared photos of or information regarding children online were especially likely to have received requests for facilitated CSE, suggesting that educational initiatives and platform changes are required to minimise the risk of harm. Preventative measures targeted towards those who may be more vulnerable to receiving these requests, including men, younger people, linguistically diverse individuals, individuals with disability, and those who have experienced other online harms, are also warranted.



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