



Australian Government

Australian Institute of Criminology

Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice

ISSN 1836-2206 (Online) | ISBN 978 1 925304 91 6 (Online)

No. 616 February 2021

Abstract | Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is widely available online. Existing research indicates that the parents and parental figures of victims are notably represented in offender populations. However, there is limited research in this area. Drawing on Australian media and legal databases, this study created a database of 82 cases of CSAM production and distribution perpetrated by parents and/or parental figures from 2009 to 2019. The study found that perpetrators are most often the male parental figures of the victims, and victims are predominately girls under nine years of age. The findings reveal distinct patterns and scenarios of parental CSAM offending that may inform prevention, early intervention and improved responses to victims. The study documented the significant impact of parental CSAM offending on victims and the need for specialist victim support.

Production and distribution of child sexual abuse material by parental figures

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Introduction

Despite law reform and eradication efforts, child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is widely available online and its prevalence and severity appears to be increasing (eg Keller & Dance 2019; Seto et al. 2018). In this report, CSAM refers to 'sexually abusive images of children that are typically disseminated via the internet' (Brown & Bricknell 2018: 1). Over the last two decades, notifications of CSAM to US authorities have increased by an average of 50 percent each year (Bursztein et al. 2019). In 2017–18, reports of child sexual exploitation to the Australian Federal Police were 50 percent higher than the previous year, reaching almost 15,000 (Australian Federal Police 2018).

Child Sexual Abuse Material
Reduction Research Program

The identification of child victims in CSAM is a major challenge for law enforcement, with the majority of victims remaining unknown to authorities (ECPAT International & Interpol 2018). Over time, CSAM production has trended towards more egregious abuse associated with younger child victims (Seto et al. 2018). New strategies and approaches are necessary to prevent CSAM offending and improve the identification of victims.

Research suggests that a significant proportion of CSAM is produced and distributed by parents who victimise their children (Canadian Centre for Child Protection (CCCP) 2017). An online convenience sample of 150 adult survivors of CSAM found that, of those abused by a single perpetrator, 42 percent identified their biological or adoptive father or stepfather as the offender; and of those abused by multiple perpetrators 67 percent identified their biological or adoptive parents or step-parents as the primary perpetrators (CCCP 2017). A second online convenience sample of 133 adult survivors of CSAM found that 52 percent of perpetrators were family members (Gewirtz-Meydan et al. 2018). These findings are consistent with qualitative research with adult survivors in Australia and overseas which has consistently identified parents as CSAM perpetrators (Itzin 2001; Salter 2013a). Content analysis of CSAM images and videos suggests that over two-thirds were manufactured in a home setting (CCCP 2016), and that the most highly traded CSAM images online involved the abuse of prepubescent girls by their fathers (Seto et al. 2018). The impact on victims is significant, including complex traumatic and dissociative disorders, suicidal ideation, shame, and fear associated with the ongoing circulation of the abuse material (CCCP 2017; Salter 2013a).

Parental production poses a major challenge to the prevention and detection of CSAM. Within the home environment, situational factors such as access to vulnerable children and opportunities for offending can lead to serious abuse and exploitation with comparatively little risk of detection for the offender/s (Seto 2019). Parental offenders exert greater control and have greater access to their victims than extra-familial or online offenders. Sexual exploitation in the family often begins at a younger age, and involves more serious and frequent offending for a longer duration, compared to extra-familial abuse (Salter 2013b). The shame and mental health impacts of CSAM victimisation are reported to be a major barrier to disclosure, with child victims frequently refusing to describe their abuse to therapists or police (CCCP 2017; Gewirtz-Meydan et al. 2018). The challenges of detecting, substantiating and prosecuting intra-familial sexual abuse result in a lack of information about incest offenders, who are under-represented in forensic samples and studies (Goodman-Delahunty 2014). Existing sex offender typologies and risk assessments are focused largely on extra-familial offenders who abuse multiple children, rather than intra-familial offenders who subject their own children to intensive abuse (Goodman-Delahunty 2014).

As a result, there is a lack of evidence and guidance for policymakers, practitioners and law enforcement in this crucial area. There is a need for targeted research into the circumstances, patterns and dynamics of CSAM production perpetrated by parental figures in order to inform strategies to prevent and detect offending parents. There is also a need to further document the impact of parental CSAM offending on victims in Australia. While parents are often positioned as partners in online safety education and abuse prevention, this study highlights the significant role played by parents in CSAM production.

Aims and method

This study aimed to identify the characteristics of CSAM production cases perpetrated by parental figures, and to develop interdisciplinary policy and practice recommendations to increase the ability of law enforcement and other agencies to detect offenders. Accordingly, the research team developed a database of 82 cases in which Australian parents or parental figures were charged with CSAM offences against their children, as reported in media or legal databases, from 2009 to 2019. In June 2019, we began a search of media reported cases of CSAM production and distribution perpetrated by the child's parents. The search was conducted on Factiva, which is an online database of global news and business information produced by Dow Jones and Reuters. We searched Factiva for all Australian newspaper reports that included the terms 'father', 'mother' and 'child pornography' between 2009 and 2019. All results were read to determine their relevance to the project, yielding 54 cases that involved a parental figure or carer (eg mother, father, step-parent, parent's partner or foster parent) who produced CSAM of children who were in their care.

Following the Factiva search, we searched the Australasian Legal Information Institute (AustLII) database for legal documentation, such as sentencing judgments, pertaining to CSAM cases perpetrated by parental figures from 2009 to 2019. AustLII is operated jointly by the law faculties at UNSW Sydney and the University of Technology, Sydney. Its content is publicly available legal information. Its primary source information includes legislation and decisions of courts and tribunals. Using the terms 'mother', 'father', 'incest', 'produce child pornography', 'producing child pornography' and 'producing child exploitation material', the AustLII search yielded 34 cases that involved a parental figure or carer who produced CSAM of their biological children, stepchildren and/or their partner's children. The terms 'incest' and the addition of 'produce' or 'producing' to 'child pornography' were included in the AustLII search as these terms were commonly used in sentencing judgments.

All Factiva and AustLII cases were entered into a database that recorded key case characteristics, including:

- the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim (ie biological parent, step-parent, parent's partner, foster parent/carer);
- demographics of perpetrator and victim;
- number of perpetrators and victims;
- duration of abuse;
- mode by which the abuse was detected;
- characteristics of the abusive acts;
- whether the abuse images were distributed;
- known psychological impacts on victims;
- previous involvement with police or community services; and
- the use of alcohol and other drugs in the abuse.

The Factiva and AustLII cases were then compared to identify any cases duplicated in the two datasets.

The Factiva cases contained limited information compared to the AustLII cases, which complicated attempts to identify duplicate cases. However, drawing on available information about the cases (eg the year of the reported incident, demographic details such as the gender and age of perpetrators and victims, and geographical locations), six cases were matched between the two datasets, reducing the number of cases found through Factiva to 48. This left a total of 82 cases (48 from Factiva and 34 from AustLII). Of the 48 Factiva cases, the accused was reported to have pled guilty or been convicted/sentenced in 39 cases (81%). In the remaining nine cases (19%), the accused was recorded as being charged.

All Australian states and territories except for the Northern Territory were represented in the 82 cases—Australian Capital Territory (3), New South Wales (15), Queensland (14), South Australia (9), Tasmania (3), Victoria (31), Western Australia (6) and non-Australian territory (1). The relevant non-Australian case was being heard in a US court regarding an Australian male couple, where one of the men was the victim’s father through surrogacy.

Analysis of the data involved extracting frequency statistics for key case characteristics. These findings were written up in a preliminary report and shared with the research team, who collaborated in drawing out the specific challenges to policy and practice across child protection, law enforcement and public policy. Findings were discussed through online group and one-to-one meetings and via email using a multiple case study analysis (Yin 2009), integrating existing research literature, interdisciplinary professional expertise and the findings of the database analysis.

Limitations

The methodology of the study has a number of limitations. It is well recognised that cases of child sexual abuse detected by authorities are not representative of child sexual abuse cases as a whole, since the majority of child sexual offences are not reported and prosecuted (Bromfield & Higgins 2004). Hence, it is likely that the cases gathered in this study represent a narrow selection of CSAM cases perpetrated by parental figures.

The study is based on data gleaned from media articles and legal documents, and hence is limited to the information adduced in court processes and recorded by journalists or judges. Additionally, given child sexual offences are under-reported and inadequately detected, and that the cases included in the study involve perpetrators who were identified and apprehended, this sample may be skewed towards perpetrators who are more reckless, less careful and less technologically competent than undetected perpetrators. The most strategic and technologically savvy offenders are the least likely to be detected and prosecuted. In familial abuse cases, it is challenging to assess and document the full extent of offending (Pratley & Goodman-Delahunty 2011). For these reasons, the criminal record of a parental offender might not accurately record their perpetration history.

Criminal trials prioritise certain types of information over others. For instance, relevant information such as a family’s prior contact with child protection services was frequently unavailable, since it was not discussed in the trial. Apparent biases were evident in the kinds of cases that were reported in the media or available in AustLII. For instance, all identified cases involving solo offending by biological mothers were found in media reports, whereas no such cases were found in AustLII. This difference might indicate a preference for sensationalist or unusual stories about female perpetrators in the media or inattention to solo female perpetration cases in AustLII. Therefore, findings from this study should be understood as preliminary and the basis for further research and examination.

Overview of the cases

Perpetrators

Over three-quarters of identified CSAM cases perpetrated by parental figures (64/82, 78%) involved single perpetrators, while the remaining cases (18/82, 22%) involved multiple perpetrators. A male perpetrator was involved in 90 percent (74/82) of the cases—72 percent (59/82) of cases involved a single male perpetrator, 10 percent (8/82) involved a single female perpetrator, and 18 percent (15/82) included male and female perpetrators.

Most offenders were the biological parents of the victims, followed by step-parents or a parent's partner (see Table 1). However, when differentiated by gender, all female perpetrators were the biological mother 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), 30/74 (41%) of the cases were perpetrated by a stepfather, a parent's partner or a foster father. There was one case where the male perpetrator was a friend or associate of the victim's biological mother.

Table 1: Perpetrator's relationship to victim

	Biological parent	Biological parent (surrogate)	Foster parent	Parent's friends/ associates	Parent's partner	Step-parent
Media	37	1	2	3	6	11
AustLII	21	1	0	1	4	11
Total	58	2	2	4	10	22

Note: Some of the 82 cases involved more than one victim. In some of these cases, the relationship between each victim and the perpetrator was different (eg one victim could be the perpetrator's biological daughter, and another could be the stepdaughter). Only cases that involved a victim's parent, step-parent, foster parent or a parent's partner are included in this study

The age of perpetrators ranged from early adulthood to 60s. In cases where the perpetrator's age was identified, most perpetrators were in their 30s and 40s (see Table 2).

Table 2: Perpetrators by age group

	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	Unknown
Media	6	18	20	8	1	13
AustLII	5	12	11	3	0	10
Total	11	30	31	11	1	23

Note: Some of the 82 cases involved more than one perpetrator

Victims

Of these 82 cases, two-thirds (55/82, 67%) involved a single victim, and eight in 10 cases (69/82, 84%) involved the perpetrator's daughter/stepdaughter/partner's daughter (see Figure 1). The perpetrator's son/stepson/partner's son was the victim in one-fifth of cases (17/82, 21%; see Figure 1). In cases where the age of the victims were reported (72/82, 88%), the majority of victims were aged between zero and 14 years old—33 victims were aged between zero and four years old, 25 were aged between five and nine years old, 32 victims were aged between 10 and 14 years, and six victims were between 15 and 17 years old (see Table 3).

Figure 1: Victims by gender

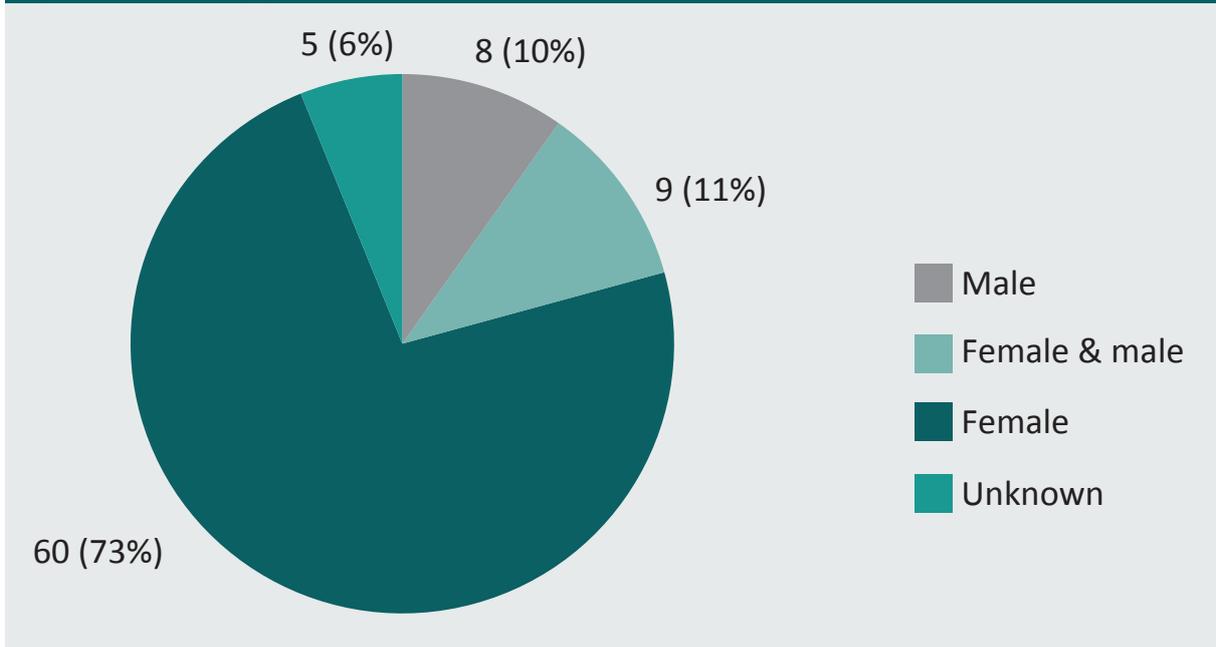


Table 3: Victims by age group

	0–4	5–9	10–14	15–17	Unknown
Media	18	14	20	1	8
AustLII	15	11	12	5	4
Total	33	25	32	6	12

Note: Some of the 82 cases involved more than one victim

Duration of abuse

The duration of abuse was reported for 55 of the 82 cases. In almost half of these cases (26/55, 47%) the abuse lasted for one year or less (see Table 4). Only 10 cases involved offending of over five years duration.

Table 4: Duration of abuse

	6 months or less	1 year or less	2 years or less	3 years or less	4 years or less	5 years or less	10 years or less	10+ years	Unknown
Media	9	4	3	3	0	1	8	0	20
AustLII	7	6	5	1	4	2	1	1	7
Total	16	10	8	4	4	3	9	1	27

Detection

Fifty-eight cases contained information about the manner in which CSAM production or distribution by a parental figure was detected. Among these cases, the most common method of detection was via police investigation (31/58, 53%). However, case information did not detail the reason for the police investigations. Disclosure was noted in one in five cases (12/58, 21%) including where the victim disclosed the abuse to a non-offending parent, to a teacher at school or to a friend, or when a sibling disclosed the abuse to the non-offending parent.

In 11 of these 58 cases (19%) the CSAM was discovered outside of a police investigation. The perpetrator's partner discovered the CSAM in four of these 11 cases. In the remaining seven cases, the offending was detected by members of the community (eg when the perpetrator left his mobile telephone containing CSAM behind in an office; see Table 5).

Table 5: How abuse was detected

	Disclosure	Discovered by partner	Discovered by another person	Perp. admission	Police investigation	Third-party report	Unrelated police investigation	Unknown
Media	5	1	2	1	12	3	7	19
AustLII	7	3	5	1	11	2	1	5
Total	12	4	7	2	23	5	8	24

Note: In some of the 82 cases multiple ways of detection were identified

Distribution

While all cases included CSAM production charges, distribution or sharing was also found to have occurred in just under half of the cases (37/82, 45%; see Table 6). This finding might reflect the fact that some offenders produced CSAM for personal use without intending to share it with others. In some cases, distribution might have occurred but this was denied by the offender or there was insufficient evidence to bring charges in the same court case. In most of the cases, it was clear from the available documentation that the distributed material depicted the offender's child. However, in cases where there were production and distribution charges, it cannot be assumed that the production charges were linked to the distribution charges.

Table 6: CSAM offences

	Produced	Possessed	Distributed/shared
Media	48	19	29
AustLII	34	8	8
Total	82	27	37

Note: In some of the 82 cases, multiple forms of CSAM offences were identified

Types of abuse

CSAM production and distribution perpetrated by a parental figure is a crime that is very likely to occur in the context of other forms of child abuse and maltreatment. In about four in five CSAM production cases (66/82, 79%), other forms of abuse were identified. As might be expected, CSAM production was accompanied by sexual abuse in 61/66 (92%) of these cases, followed by grooming/coercive behaviours towards the child (13/66, 20%; see Table 7). Physical and emotional abuse was also reported in a minority of cases.

	Sexual	Physical	Emotional	Grooming/ coercion	Unknown
Media	33	1	1	8	12
AustLII	28	5	1	5	4
Total	61	6	2	13	16

Note: In some of the 82 cases, multiple forms of abuse were identified

Prior contact with welfare services

There was no reference to prior involvement by child protection or welfare services in the majority of cases. However, this does not mean there was no previous intervention. It might be that prior service involvement was not reported. In four cases there was reference to prior involvement by community or welfare services. In these cases, biological parents (2), a biological father (1) and a stepfather (1) were identified as the perpetrators. There were only two cases in which the police had been previously involved, and both cases involved the victim's stepfather. In both cases, the victims had disclosed sexual abuse perpetrated by their stepfathers. However, the matters were not put before the court as one stepfather 'denied the crimes and was never charged', and in the other case 'a brief of evidence was not proceeded with through court due to issues surrounding the alleged victims'.

Overview of perpetrators

Biological father

The biological father of the victim was identified as the perpetrator or one of the perpetrators of CSAM production and/or distribution in 43/82 cases (52%). Of these 43 cases, only 20 cases (47%) were identified as involving both the production and distribution/sharing of CSAM, while the other 23 cases (53%) involved only the production of CSAM. The ages of these perpetrators ranged from mid-20s to late 50s. Almost two-thirds of cases (28/43, 65%) perpetrated by the biological father involved a single victim, and the single victim was their daughter in 75 percent of these cases (21/28). Of the 15 cases where there was more than one victim, slightly under half (7/15, 47%) also involved the perpetrator's son. Of the 43 cases, five of the identified perpetrators were convicted of or being tried for sexual offences not related to the present cases. In 16/43 (37%) cases, the perpetrators were reported to have a psychiatric condition or formal diagnosis.

Table 8: Example involving a biological father

Perpetrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male (aged mid- to late 30s) • no history/past conviction of sexual offences • biological father of the victims
Victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • younger 2 of 3 siblings • daughter—abuse started when 8 years old • son—abused when 12 years old
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • daughter—last 4.5 years • son—one occasion
Abuse type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSAM production • sexual abuse
Detection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eldest sibling disclosed to mother
Details	<p>The perpetrator sexually abused his daughter (youngest child) and son (youngest son). The children’s parents were separated and their mother was living in another state. The perpetrator was the sole parent of the children. There were three children but only two were identified as being abused. The man abused his son on one occasion (when he was 12) but abused his daughter over about 4.5 years (from age 8–12). Production of CSAM involved the daughter only. Sexual abuse with daughter involved force. The offending ended when the eldest son disclosed to the children’s mother that their father was ‘showering and sleeping’ with his sister. Mother took children away and (presumably) reported the perpetrator to the police. He was subsequently arrested.</p>

Biological mother

There were 23/82 cases (28%) where the victim’s biological mother was reported to have been involved. Of these 23 cases, there were eight cases (35%) where the biological mother was the sole perpetrator, and the other 15 (65%) cases were perpetrated by her with a co-offender. These co-offenders included the victim’s biological father or stepfather, and the biological mother’s partner or friends/associates. None of the biological mothers had been convicted or tried for previous sexual offences. In most of the eight cases where the victim’s biological mother was identified as the sole perpetrator of CSAM production and distribution, it was reported that the mothers produced the materials for the benefit of men online or men they knew. There was limited information about the perpetrator and victim in these cases. The ages of the perpetrators, reported in five cases, ranged from 18 to late 40s. None of the biological mothers had a criminal record and only one was reported to have had a psychiatric condition or formal diagnosis.

Table 9: Example involving a biological mother

Perpetrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> female (46 years old) no history/past conviction of sexual offences biological mother of the victim
Victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> daughter—abuse started when 13 years old
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 year
Abuse type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSAM production sexual abuse
Detection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unrelated police investigation
Details	A woman pleaded guilty to charges of sexually assaulting her daughter. These charges were of indecent dealing, making an indecent recording, sexually penetrating a child, encouraging a child to engage in sexual behaviour, and supplying child pornography. It was reported that police uncovered the abuse after officers searched a man’s computer and found a video showing him having sex with the woman and abusing her teenage daughter.

Stepfather, foster father or mother’s partner

There were 34/82 (41%) cases in which the victim’s stepfather (22/34, 65%), foster father (2/34, 6%), or the partner of the victim’s mother (10/34, 29%) was reported to be the sole offender or co-offender of CSAM production and/or distribution and other forms of abuse. Of these 34 cases, almost two-thirds (22/34, 65%) involved a single perpetrator, and a similar proportion involved a single victim (24/34, 71%). In almost all cases (33/34, 97%), the single victim, or one of the victims, was female. Compared to the percentage of biological fathers who both produced and distributed/shared CSAM (47%), a smaller percentage of non-biological fathers/father figures (10/34, 29%) were identified as having both produced and distributed or shared CSAM. Of the 34 cases, six of the identified perpetrators were convicted of or being tried for sexual offences not related to the present cases.

Table 10: Example involving the partner of the victims’ mother

Perpetrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> male (mid-50s when committing offences) prior history/conviction of sexual offences (sexual penetration of a child under 16 years of age)
Victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 girls (aged 13 and 15 at time of offences)
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 months
Abuse type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSAM production sexual abuse
Detection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unknown
Details	The perpetrator sexually assaulted victim 1 on several occasions when she was travelling in his car, in her bedroom and in the lounge room. On other occasions, the perpetrator photographed both victims when they were naked. After the photographs were taken, both victims saw their photographs on the perpetrator’s computer.

Multiple perpetrators

Of the 18 cases where there were multiple perpetrators (18/82, 22%), all involved at least one biological parent, and five cases involved both biological parents. The other perpetrators identified in these cases were a parent’s partner, friends or associates of a parental figure, strangers (in cases where the victim was prostituted by a parental figure for financial gain), and relatives of a parental figure. Four cases involved strangers or people unrelated to the victims. It is interesting to note that in 8/82 cases (10%) the perpetrators were reported to have given the victims alcohol and/or other substances (eg sleeping pills), and three of these cases occurred when there were multiple perpetrators.

Table 11: Example involving multiple perpetrators

Perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> multiple—male (mid-40s), female (early 30s), 2 other males (late 30s and early 40s) male (mid 40s) was found to have sexually abused one of the co-offenders when younger two perpetrators were biological parents of the victim, and the other two were the nephews of the father
Victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> female (aged 9 years old when abuse started)
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 years
Abuse type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSAM production sexual abuse
Detection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> disclosure (by mother after ending relationship)
Details	<p>Four people were involved in abusing a girl from when she was 9 years old. Two of the four perpetrators were the girl’s biological parents. The other two were the nephews of the father. At first, only the parents were involved in the sexual abuse. However, within six months one nephew was introduced into the abuse. The other nephew was introduced approximately six months later. It was reported that the abuse was planned by the father. He instigated the abuse and invited and organised the attendance of his two adult nephews, who subsequently, but separately, joined him in abusing his daughter. After the mother ended her relationship with the father, she reported the abuse to the police.</p>

Impacts on victims and non-offending family members

There were 34/82 cases (41%) in which the effects of CSAM production and/or distribution as well as other forms of abuse were identified or commented on by the judge, or recorded in a victim impact statement.

Following are some examples to highlight issues and effects that were identified from the cases. The issues and effects were presented by the victims and others who were directly affected (eg the non-offending relatives such as the victim’s mother).

Table 12: Impacts on victims and non-offending family members

Effects	Examples
Self-blame/guilt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sentencing judgment described the victim as having ‘spent years feeling ashamed and blaming herself for the abuse and beatings and for being disowned by her mother’. A sentencing judgment noted that ‘[a]part from the direct impact of the offences, she suffers ongoing guilt due to her perception that it is she who has ruined her mother’s and brother’s lives by speaking out about the abuse [perpetrated by her father]’.
Psychological harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sentencing judgment noted ‘that the victim is suffering both low self-esteem and depressive symptoms, was highly likely to be related to the abuse from which she suffered’. The impact on the victim was described by the judge as ‘the pain, guilt and turmoil she has experienced as a result of the offender’s criminal conduct’, and that ‘sexual abuse of children of tender years will inevitably give rise to long term adverse psychological consequences.’
Grief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatives of the victims said they ‘live with an indelible sadness’, and that ‘grief controls every facet of our lives’. The mother of one victim noted in her victim impact statement: ‘I feel immense sadness and grief for the fact my children will have no relationship with their father, but there is nothing I can do about it.’
Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sentencing judgment noted that the ‘victim tells of great confusion these crimes have caused, and the loss to the victim of so much that other children and teenagers enjoy. She speaks of her utter isolation as she has now no parent and no-one to turn to’. One victim was noted to have said, ‘I feel angry, upset, disgusted, confused, sad, feel like I’ve lost my childhood and I lost my mum’.
Conflicted emotions/ambivalence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One judge commented that the victim was a ‘hopelessly conflicted child’. A sentencing judgment noted that the victim ‘spoke of her ambivalence, and confusion about the nature of her feelings’. A sentencing judgment said the victim had ‘indicated that testifying against her own parents was likely be the most difficult and defining choice she will ever have to make in her life’.
Mistrust/betrayal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One judge commented that the victim ‘feels totally betrayed by the defendant. She does not want to see him or his family again’. A sentencing judgment noted that the victims ‘have had the natural trust that should exist between a mother and her children, and between sister and brother, tainted (if not destroyed). Indeed, the [perpetrator]’s conduct was calculated to effect the destruction of the family bonds’.

Table 12: Impacts on victims and non-offending family members (cont.)

Effects	Examples
Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One judge commented that the ‘fear, the ingrained fear in fact, of this particular situation that you exposed them to while you sat in that dock and watched them called liars in the position of a stepfather is almost incomprehensible to me’.
Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One judge commented that the ‘offending had a severe impact on the victim who continued to suffer serious trauma.’ A sentencing judgment noted that the victim ‘described her inability to complete her university studies, and every time she hears the sound of a camera shutter, it brings back memories of posing naked for [the perpetrator] and [the perpetrator] secretly photographing her sunbaking in the back garden’.
Projected effects/ vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One judge commented that while the victim ‘was too young to understand what was happening’, the abuse ‘had made him vulnerable to being groomed for sexual activity’. One judge commented, ‘your daughter might be oblivious to what happened at the moment, but one day she will come of an age and be seriously disturbed to know what her own father did’.

Summary and conclusions

This study provides a picture of CSAM production and distribution by parents or parental figures of the victims. The findings indicate that CSAM production and distribution perpetrated by parental figures is a form of abuse mainly perpetrated by a single individual (78%) on a single victim (67%). Consistent with other research findings (eg Seto et al. 2018), it is a gendered form of abuse with men as offenders in 90 percent of cases, and girls as victims in 84 percent. In this context, the victim’s biological father (52%) or stepfather (41%) was most likely to be the offender. In cases where the victim’s age was identified, the victims in the study were very young, with over 60 percent younger than nine, and one-third between 10 and 14. This is broadly consistent with the age distribution of children depicted in CSAM (CCCP 2016). Unsurprisingly, sexual abuse featured in almost all of the cases (92%). In this context, the identified impacts on victims and non-offending others are consistent with those experienced by people who have experienced familial child sexual abuse. While our findings indicate that production of CSAM is not always associated with distribution (in 45% of the cases), this could reflect the evidence available for prosecution rather than the true extent of distribution.

The findings of the study suggest CSAM offending perpetrated by parental figures poses significant challenges to child protection and investigation. While victims of parental abuse are the least likely group to disclose abuse (Goodman-Brown et al. 2003), CSAM victimisation is an additional barrier to disclosure since it is often accompanied by compounded shame, self-blame and confusion (CCCP 2017). These factors were evident among the victims in this study, including trauma, self-blame and conflicted feelings about the perpetrator/s. The duration of recorded abuse in this study was usually under one year, while self-report studies with familial CSAM survivors typically indicate abuse of longer duration (CCCP 2017; Salter 2013a). This difference may be attributable to the challenges of disclosure, evidence-gathering and prosecution in familial sexual offending, where offenders are charged only for those offences that can be substantiated. The difficulties of disclosure and evidence gathering are exacerbated in cases where the child was very young, where the child was unaware their abuse was recorded, and where offenders used alcohol or other drugs to sedate or confuse the child—all of which occurred in some cases in this study.

Familial child sex offenders are poorly accommodated within existing forensic typologies and instruments based on samples of extra-familial offenders (Goodman-Delahunty 2014). In this study, familial offenders abused prepubescent children while also maintaining romantic and sexual relationships with adults. This pattern of abuse does not accord with longstanding forensic typologies that categorise ‘preferential’ offenders as extra-familial abusers and position incest offenders as ‘situational’ offenders whose abuse is triggered by stressors in their environment (see Robertiello & Terry 2007). The findings of this study also do not align well with current CSAM offender typology research. In this scholarship, categories of ‘online’ and ‘contact’ offending, and production and distribution offences, are inconsistently defined and operationalised. However, in the typology literature, CSAM offenders are considered more likely than contact offenders to be single and disinterested in adult relationships (Henshaw, Ogloff & Clough 2017).

Three profiles of CSAM offenders emerged from this study. The first was the male offender who forms adult relationships and has children of his own to exploit. The second was the male offender who forms a relationship with a woman and exploits her children or seeks to obtain children by some other means (eg the surrogacy cases). It can be inferred from the young age of victims in this study and other evidence of premeditation (such as the administration of alcohol or drugs and participation in online/offline abuse networks) that some biological or de facto fathers and stepfathers formed adult romantic relationships with the intention of producing or procuring children for exploitation. Such a pattern accords with victim descriptions of incest offenders as highly premeditated in their abuse and exploitation of their children (eg Salter 2013a, 2013b). These offenders may recruit women into the abuse of her children, or the abuse might take place without the mother’s knowledge. The third profile was a biological mother who produces CSAM of her children at the behest of men she knows in person or online; however, available information was unclear about the circumstances under which CSAM was produced (eg whether it was done voluntarily, under duress or from a desire to please). Further research is necessary to explore these core subgroups of intra-familial sex offenders in more depth.

Online offending and CSAM introduce complex new dimensions to intra-familial sexual victimisation. Extensive reference was made throughout the documented cases to the impact on children of CSAM offending perpetrated by parental figures. It is therefore notable that there is no specialist policy or service response for Australian CSAM victims such as targeted mental health care or redress and restitution frameworks. The lack of a national approach or framework is in contrast to the United States, where identified CSAM victims (or their appointed caregivers or representatives) can opt to be notified when an individual is charged with accessing their abuse images, and there is a statutory restitution framework (Binford et al. 2015). There is a clear need for further research into the victim experience and impacts of parental CSAM offending to inform the development of evidence-based responses and support.

The study has a number of implications for policy and practice. The study foregrounds the intersection of technology with intra-familial abuse and the difficulties of detecting and disclosing CSAM offending. This finding indicates that all frontline law enforcement personnel would benefit from training on the intersection of technology with familial sexual abuse, and indicators of technology-facilitated offending including grooming behaviours. Such training should cover the sensitive and effective conduct of initial welfare interviews with children where intra-familial or online offending is suspected or reported. Where a father is known to have accessed CSAM, his family should be offered referral to specialist support services, not only for the wellbeing of the non-offending partner but to ensure a supportive environment for children, who may later disclose contact offending.

As Australia and other jurisdictions scale up efforts to prevent child sexual abuse before it occurs, and to intervene as early as possible in abuse cases, the findings of this study highlight technology-facilitated familial abuse as a key area of concern that should be addressed in primary prevention and early intervention efforts. Sexual abuse and online safety education programs should include sensitive messages to children about image-making by family members and relatives, and where and how to seek help to disclose. Community education programs should be developed targeted at women who are repartnering and at risk of being groomed by offenders seeking to abuse their children. These programs should explain how offenders seek to groom women and the signs of a groomed child, and should be targeted through dating apps or social media marketing. Community messaging should be developed aimed at women who become aware that their partner is accessing CSAM, encouraging them to contact appropriate support services or phone lines to discuss their concerns. Telephone counsellors should receive training on how to support and advise women whose partners are accessing CSAM. The findings of this study further confirm existing evidence of the immediate and long-term impacts of CSAM offending by parental figures and the necessity of specialist victim support.

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This project is part of the AIC's Child Sexual Abuse Material Reduction Research Program, funded under section 298 of the Commonwealth *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002*.

General editor, *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* series: Dr Rick Brown, Deputy Director, Australian Institute of Criminology. Note: *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* papers are peer reviewed. For a complete list and the full text of the papers in the *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* series, visit the AIC website at: aic.gov.au

ISSN 1836-2206 (Online)

ISBN 978 1 925304 91 6 (Online)

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