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**Abstract** | People with disability are at an increased risk of sexual violence. The extent of this increased risk online, particularly in the context of online dating, is unclear as research on dating app facilitated sexual violence (DAFSV) is in its infancy.

This study examines the prevalence and nature of online DAFSV experienced by people with disability ( $n=1,155$ ), using data from a large national survey of dating platform users ( $n=9,987$ ).

Overall, 88 percent of users with disability experienced some form of online DAFSV. Rates of harm were significantly higher for users with disability than for users without disability. Further, women and First Nations users with disability were particularly at risk of victimisation.

Findings support the urgency of responses to protect those most at risk of harm facilitated by online dating platforms.

## Online dating app facilitated sexual violence victimisation among people with disability

Heather Wolbers and Hayley Boxall

Sexual violence victimisation among people with disability is a pervasive problem that has received increased attention recently, due in part to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. Broadly, evidence shows individuals with disability are significantly more likely to be subjected to sexual violence than persons without disability (Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and Health 2020; Mailhot Amborski et al. 2022). In Australia, one in five people with disability have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15, and they are more than twice as likely to experience sexual violence over a 12-month period as individuals without disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2017). Risks of sexual violence are not limited to in-person interactions—evidence shows experiences of online sexual abuse are also common among people with disability (eSafety Commissioner 2021, 2022; Glencross et al. 2021).

While there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the prevalence of sexual violence victimisation among people with disability, the extent of this increased risk within the context of online dating is unclear. The current study examines experiences of online sexual violence facilitated by dating platforms (apps and websites).

Celebrating  
**50** years

Individuals with disability tend to have more difficulty dating and finding romantic and sexual partners than their peers without disability (Miller et al. 2009; Wiegerink et al. 2006). Many turn to online dating as it provides numerous benefits such as access to a large number of potential partners who would have been previously unknown or inaccessible to them, and the ability to find a potential date without leaving home (Finkel et al. 2012; Mazur 2022; Miron 2023; Roth & Gillis 2015). While there are clear benefits to online dating for people with disability, there are also risks of harm. Cases have emerged, for example, of individuals experiencing harassment, discrimination, prejudice and abuse (Heideman 2014; Mazur 2022; Miron et al. 2023; Parker 2022; Roth & Gillis 2015). Few studies have investigated the risks associated with online dating for people with disability, particularly within a large representative sample. The current study, therefore, addresses a notable gap in knowledge about the prevalence and nature of dating app facilitated sexual violence (DAFSV) among people with disability.

The internet can play a vital role in the lives of people with disability, helping them overcome challenges with communication, employment, health care and quality of life (Dobransky & Hargittai 2016). The internet supports people with disability participating in society, especially in the context of interpersonal relationships. Being the targets of harmful behaviours online, such as DAFSV, can significantly affect the ability of people with disability to be active in online spaces.

Broadly, experiences of sexual harassment, aggression and violence facilitated by dating platforms are common (Gewirtz-Meydan et al. 2024; Sidoti & Faverio 2023; Wolbers et al. 2022). Recent research revealed the high prevalence of sexual harassment, aggression and violence victimisation among dating platform users (Wolbers et al. 2022). Specifically, it was found three in four dating platform users experienced DAFSV online, and one in three experienced in-person sexual violence perpetrated by someone they had met on an online dating platform. Further, users typically experienced multiple forms of DAFSV and repeated incidents involving multiple perpetrators (Wolbers et al. 2022).

Prior research on sexual violence victimisation and anecdotal evidence suggests certain cohorts are more commonly subjected to DAFSV than the general population (Albury et al. 2019; Anderson, Vogels & Turner 2020; Wolbers et al. 2022). Certainly, a key finding from Wolbers et al. (2022) was that female respondents who identified as LGB+ experienced higher levels of DAFSV than male or heterosexual respondents. While it was beyond the scope of this prior study to investigate other sociodemographic and situational factors that may similarly be associated with increased risk of DAFSV, as noted above, a cohort that may be particularly at risk are dating platform users with disability.

In addition to investigating the prevalence and nature of online DAFSV among people with disability, it is also important that we recognise the presence of co-occurring factors that could in turn increase the likelihood of DAFSV. For example, some evidence shows dating platforms may perpetuate stigma and social prejudice against users with disability who identify as gender and sexually diverse (Mazur 2022). Further, broad evidence suggests female, young, sexually or gender diverse, First Nations and culturally or linguistically diverse individuals are vulnerable to sexual harassment, aggression and violence (ABS 2017; Canan et al. 2021; Cox 2015; Tarczon & Quadara 2012). However, little research shows how these factors co-occur with disability to exacerbate risk.

There are significant and potentially long-term impacts associated with experiences of sexual violence. These include poorer health and wellbeing, including overall life satisfaction, social isolation and lower self-esteem, as well as increased risk of revictimisation (Boyd 2011; McGlynn et al. 2019; Worsley & Carter 2021). In light of this, there is growing emphasis in Australia and internationally on making online spaces safer for users. To ensure responses to sexual harassment, aggression and violence on dating platforms are effective, they need to be informed by an accurate understanding of victimisation experiences. The current study is a necessary step in contributing to the evidence base on the prevalence and nature of sexual violence and online DAFSV experienced by people with disability.

## Aim and method

To address the knowledge gap identified above, we aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What proportion of dating platform users with disability have experienced online DAFSV?
- What is the nature of online DAFSV victimisation among dating platform users with disability?
- How does the risk of online DAFSV victimisation differ between dating platform users with disability and those without disability?
- How does the risk of online DAFSV victimisation among users with disability differ based on demographic and situational characteristics?

## Data collection and sample

This study is part of a body of work examining the prevalence and nature of online harms facilitated by mobile dating apps and websites, with a focus on experiences of online sexual harassment, aggression and violence among users with disability (AIC Human Research Ethics Approval: P0320A.A). The data for this study were collected via an online survey sent to individuals living in Australia aged 18 years and over who had used a mobile dating app or website in the last five years. The survey was conducted by Roy Morgan between June and August 2021 using its Single Source panel and panels managed by PureProfile and Dynata. Proportional quota sampling was used with quotas based on the Australian adult population stratified by sex, age and usual place of residence, adjusted to account for likelihood of using an online dating platform. Overall, 75.5 percent of respondents who opened the invitation, passed the screening process and read the consent form went on to complete the survey ( $n=9,987$ ). This was five percent of contacted individuals. For more information about the sampling protocols and procedures, please see Wolbers et al. (2022).

## Analytical approach

To compare the prevalence and nature of online DAFSV experienced by respondents with and without disability, we used frequency tables and chi-square analyses. Respondents who were unsure or did not want to disclose experiences of online DAFSV were excluded from chi-square analyses. We also undertook a logistic regression predicting online DAFSV victimisation (dependent variable) to determine the odds of victimisation among respondents with disability while controlling for

sociodemographic and situational characteristics pertaining to dating platform use (independent variables). Finally, we examined the intersectionality of disability and the other independent variables to determine the predicted probability of experiencing online DAFSV.

### *Dependent variables*

We measured online DAFSV by asking about 14 behaviours experienced during the previous five years. These included behaviours classified as sexual harassment (eg continuing to contact the respondent even after they told them they were not interested in having a relationship with them), abusive and threatening language (eg threatening the respondent in any way), online stalking (eg pressuring the respondent to give information about their location or their schedule) and online image-based sexual abuse (eg sharing a sexually explicit photo of the respondent with others without the respondent's consent).

### *Independent variables*

Disability status was measured by asking respondents whether they had a health condition that had lasted or was likely to last six months or longer and, if so, whether as a result of this health condition they were restricted in everyday activities or needed help or supervision with everyday activities. Respondents who indicated they had a restrictive health condition or needed supervision or help for a health condition that had lasted or was likely to last six months or longer were defined as a dating platform user with disability. Our measure is similar to the ABS Short Disability Module, but does not ask about specific conditions, and is therefore not directly comparable to ABS data on long-term or chronic health conditions (ABS 2018).

We examined the intersectionality of disability and several sociodemographic characteristics—specifically, gender and sexual orientation, which have been shown to be associated with DAFSV (Wolbers et al. 2022), as well as age, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, and language spoken most of the time at home. The intersectionality of these characteristics were a focus of the recent Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. Respondents self-identified their gender as man, woman or non-binary. Sexual orientation was operationalised as a dichotomous measure of heterosexual or LGB+, meaning all those who were not heterosexual (eg lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, demisexual, pansexual) or who did not know what their sexual identity was (eg questioning). These variables were combined to create gender and sexual orientation subgroups: heterosexual men, LGB+ men, heterosexual women, LGB+ women, and non-binary respondents. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status (First Nations or non-Indigenous) and language background (English or another language primarily spoken at home) were operationalised as dichotomous variables.

Finally, we collected a range of information about the ways in which respondents had used dating platforms in the past five years. This included:

- the primary type of dating service used (app or website);
- frequency of dating platform use at peak usage over the last five years (ranging from once a week or less to more than once an hour);

- use of multiple platforms at once (yes or no);
- whether the respondent paid to use a dating platform (yes or no); and
- whether the respondent linked their social media account to their dating profile (yes or no).

See Wolbers et al. (2022) for more information on the survey and measures.

## Limitations

In addition to the limitations discussed in Wolbers et al. (2022), we acknowledge limitations of the conceptualisation of disability used in the current study—particularly that individuals with disability who fell outside of this definition were not identified or included in analyses. Similarly, our conceptualisation of disability was broad, meaning we are unable to differentiate between different forms of disability (eg physical, intellectual and/or sensory impairment) and subsequently cannot determine whether victimisation differs based on the type/s of disability respondents had. Finally, due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, we cannot say with certainty whether respondents had disability prior to any DAFSV experiences. A restrictive health condition may have developed after, or because of, DAFSV. Findings relating to the prevalence of online DAFSV among respondents with disability should therefore be interpreted with some caution.

## Sample characteristics

Overall 29.7 percent ( $n=2,962$ ) of respondents had a health condition that had lasted or was likely to last six months or longer. Of these individuals, 39.0 percent ( $n=1,155$ ) were restricted in everyday activities, or needed help or supervision with everyday activities, because of their condition (ie had disability). Individuals with disability made up 11.6 percent of the full sample. The prevalence of disability in the sample was lower than that of the general population (ie around 1 in 6; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022); however, this is expected, as the sample comprises dating platform users, who tend to be younger than the general population and therefore less likely to have disability.

Around two in five respondents with disability identified as heterosexual men (38.4%), one in three as heterosexual women (32.2%), 12.6 percent as LGB+ women and 10.5 percent as LGB+ men (Table 1). There was a higher proportion of LGB+ men and women among users with disability than among those without disability (vs 6.7% and 7.8% respectively). Respondents with disability tended to be older than those without disability, with most being 35 to 44 (32.2%) or 25 to 34 (27.4%). Seven percent of users with disability mostly spoke a language other than English at home, compared to 8.9 percent of users without disability. Over a third of respondents with disability identified as First Nations, a much higher proportion than among those without disability (34.6% vs 4.3%). Indigeneity among people with disability is more prevalent in the current study than nationally, which may be partly explained by a high rate of dating platform use among First Nations individuals with disability.

Four in five respondents used an app rather than a website as their primary type of dating platform, and this was fairly consistent for users with and without disability (79.7% and 81.1%). Users with disability used dating platforms more frequently during their highest period of use compared to users without disability. For example, 24.6 percent of respondents with disability said they had used a

dating platform more than once an hour, compared to 8.8 percent of respondents without disability. Further, people with disability more commonly used two or more platforms at the same time (78.2% vs 59.2%), paid to use a dating platform (65.8% vs 36.0%), and linked a social media account to their dating profile (71.5% vs 50.4%). All of this suggests that respondents with disability were using dating platforms differently to users without disability, which is consistent with broader research showing people with disability use online spaces differently to people without disability (eg Johansson, Gulliksen & Gustavsson 2021).

**Table 1: Sample characteristics, by disability status (n=9,987)**

|   |                        | With disability<br>(n=1,155) |      | Without disability<br>(n=8,832) |      |
|---|------------------------|------------------------------|------|---------------------------------|------|
|   |                        | n                            | %    | n                               | %    |
| Gender and sexuality                          | Heterosexual men       | 443                          | 38.4 | 3,749                           | 42.5 |
|   | LGB+ men               | 121                          | 10.5 | 595                             | 6.7  |
|   | Heterosexual women     | 372                          | 32.2 | 3,665                           | 41.5 |
|   | LGB+ women             | 145                          | 12.6 | 691                             | 7.8  |
|   | Non-binary             | 12                           | 1.0  | 59                              | 0.7  |
| Age   | 18 to 24               | 144                          | 12.5 | 1,948                           | 22.1 |
|   | 25 to 34               | 316                          | 27.4 | 3,155                           | 35.7 |
|   | 35 to 44               | 372                          | 32.2 | 1,848                           | 20.9 |
|   | 45 to 54               | 194                          | 16.8 | 967                             | 11.0 |
|   | 55 to 64               | 87                           | 7.5  | 549                             | 6.2  |
|   | 65 or over             | 42                           | 3.6  | 365                             | 4.1  |
| Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander      |                        | 399                          | 34.6 | 379                             | 4.3  |
| Language other than English spoken at home    |                        | 81                           | 7.0  | 782                             | 8.9  |
| Primary type of online dating platform used   | Mobile dating app      | 921                          | 79.7 | 7,158                           | 81.1 |
|   | Dating website         | 234                          | 20.3 | 1,674                           | 19.0 |
| Highest frequency of dating platform use      | More than once an hour | 284                          | 24.6 | 781                             | 8.8  |
|   | Around once an hour    | 228                          | 19.7 | 819                             | 9.3  |
|   | Several times a day    | 271                          | 23.5 | 2,476                           | 28.0 |
|   | Several times a week   | 236                          | 20.4 | 3,218                           | 36.4 |
|   | Once a week or less    | 124                          | 10.7 | 1,360                           | 15.4 |
|   | Don't know             | 12                           | 1.0  | 178                             | 2.0  |
| Used more than one platform at the same time  |                        | 903                          | 78.2 | 5,226                           | 59.2 |
| Paid to use a dating platform                 |                        | 760                          | 65.8 | 3,180                           | 36.0 |
| Linked social media account to dating profile |                        | 826                          | 71.5 | 4,449                           | 50.4 |

Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding and missing data  
Source: AIC Mobile Dating Apps and Sexual Violence Survey 2021 [computer file]

## Results

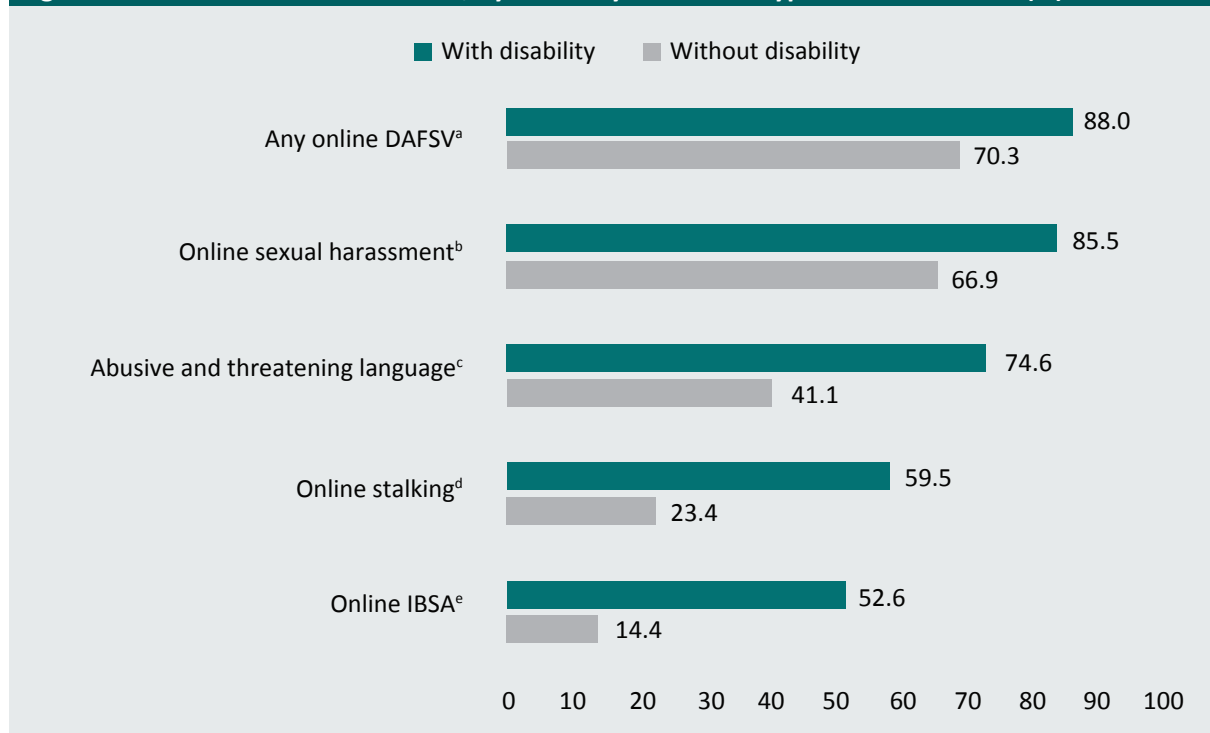
### Prevalence and nature of online dating app facilitated sexual violence victimisation among users with disability

Almost nine in 10 dating platform users with disability had experienced some form of online DAFSV (88.0%), a significantly higher rate than for users without disability (70.3%;  $\chi^2(1)=152.2, p<0.001$ ; Figure 1).

A larger proportion of individuals with disability reported being subjected to all types of online DAFSV compared to users without disability, and these differences were statistically significant. Specifically:

- 85.4 percent of users with disability experienced online sexual harassment (vs 66.9%;  $\chi^2(1)=156.6, p<0.001$ );
- 76.4 percent experienced abusive and threatening language (vs 41.1%;  $\chi^2(1)=455.8, p<0.001$ );
- 59.5 percent experienced stalking online (vs 23.4%;  $\chi^2(1)=664.9, p<0.001$ ); and
- 52.6 percent experienced online image-based abuse (vs 14.4%;  $\chi^2(1)=966.0, p<0.001$ ).

**Figure 1: Prevalence of online DAFSV, by disability status and type of online DAFSV (%)**



a: 3 respondents with disability and 92 without disability were unsure or did not provide this information

b: 3 respondents with disability and 91 without disability were unsure or did not provide this information

c: 2 respondents with disability and 80 without disability were unsure or did not provide this information

d: 7 respondents with disability and 73 without disability were unsure or did not provide this information

e: IBSA=image-based sexual abuse. 8 respondents with disability and 96 without disability were unsure or did not provide this information

Note: Denominators include respondents who were unsure or did not provide information. These individuals were excluded from chi-square analyses

Source: AIC Mobile Dating Apps and Sexual Violence Survey 2021 [computer file]



## Overlap between different forms of online dating app facilitated sexual violence

We next examined whether dating platform users with disability experienced multiple forms or incidents of online DAFSV. We did this by first looking at how many different online DAFSV behaviours respondents had experienced, then by looking at whether any behaviours experienced were perpetrated by multiple individuals (ie repeat victimisation).

We calculated how many of the 14 online DAFSV behaviours each respondent had experienced (range=0 to 14). Respondents with disability (median=8,  $M=8.1$ ,  $SD=5.3$ ) had experienced more behaviours, on average, than respondents without disability (median=2,  $M=3.4$ ,  $SD=3.5$ ; Table 2). This difference was statistically significant ( $z= -27.9$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Of note, four in five dating platform users with disability (82.2%) had experienced two or more online DAFSV behaviours in the last five years, and, concerningly, three in five (59.8%) had experienced seven or more online DAFSV behaviours. This indicates that occurrences of DAFSV were not isolated incidents, as respondents with disability had commonly experienced a range of harmful behaviours.

|                    | With disability ( $n=1,555$ ) |      | Without disability ( $n=8,832$ ) |      |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|
|                    | <i>n</i>                      | %    | <i>n</i>                         | %    |
| 0                  | 136                           | 11.7 | 2,532                            | 28.7 |
| 1                  | 67                            | 5.8  | 1,085                            | 12.3 |
| 2 to 3             | 105                           | 9.1  | 1,474                            | 16.7 |
| 4 to 6             | 153                           | 13.3 | 1,915                            | 21.7 |
| 7 or more          | 691                           | 59.8 | 1,734                            | 19.6 |
| Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) | 8.1 (5.3)                     |      | 3.4 (3.5)                        |      |
| Median             | 8.5                           |      | 2                                |      |

Note: Denominators include respondents who were unsure or did not provide information. This included 3 respondents with disability and 92 without disability. These individuals were excluded from the Mann Whitney U test

Source: AIC Mobile Dating Apps and Sexual Violence Survey 2021 [computer file]

We next examined whether respondents with disability had experienced the same online DAFSV behaviour multiple times. For each of the 14 online DAFSV behaviours, respondents were asked whether one person had perpetrated the behaviour against them or multiple people. A large proportion of respondents with disability experienced repeat victimisation (between 15.4% and 35.4% for each behaviour; Table 3). Most commonly, users with disability were sent unwanted sexually explicit messages (35.4%), photos or videos (33.4%) by multiple people they met on dating platforms. Further, 31.1 percent of respondents with disability said they had been insulted or called names by multiple people they had met on dating platforms in the last five years and 20.5 percent said they had been threatened by multiple people.

The prevalence of repeat victimisation was significantly higher for users with disability than users without disability across all 14 behaviours. For example, a large difference was observed for repeatedly receiving threats to share a sexually explicit image or video without consent (20.0% vs 3.6%;  $\chi^2(1)=529.3$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Large differences were also observed for someone threatening the



respondent (20.5% vs 5.7%;  $\chi^2(1)=323.7, p<0.001$ ), posting offensive comments online (18.2% vs 4.3%;  $\chi^2(1)=353.6, p<0.001$ ), and logging into their dating platform account without permission (17.7% vs 3.1%;  $\chi^2(1)=474.3, p<0.001$ ).

**Table 3: Prevalence of repeat online DAFSV behaviours experienced, by disability status (%)**

|                                  |   | With disability | Without disability | $\chi^2$ |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------|--------------------|----------|
| Online sexual harassment         | Continued to contact the respondent even after they told them they were not interested in having a relationship with them | 32.3            | 22.8               | 48.8***  |
|                                  | Sent the respondent an unwanted sexually explicit message   | 35.4            | 29.6               | 16.2***  |
|                                  | Sent the respondent an unwanted sexually explicit photo or video of themselves  | 33.1            | 23.9               | 46.5***  |
|                                  | Pressured the respondent to send them a sexually explicit message   | 30.7            | 22.1               | 41.1***  |
|                                  | Pressured the respondent to send them a sexually explicit photo or video of themselves                                    | 32.7            | 21.5               | 72.1***  |
|                                  | Pressured the respondent to meet them in person when they did not want to   | 27.7            | 13.8               | 150.7*** |
| Abusive and threatening language | Insulted the respondent, called them names or used abusive language that made the respondent feel uncomfortable           | 31.1            | 18.9               | 91.6***  |
|                                  | Threatened the respondent in any way  | 20.5            | 5.7                | 323.7*** |
|                                  | Posted offensive comments about the respondent online that other people could see (eg on their social media accounts)     | 18.2            | 4.3                | 353.6*** |
| Online stalking                  | Pressured the respondent to give them information about their location or their schedule                                  | 23.5            | 8.9                | 229.8*** |
|                                  | Logged into one of the respondent's mobile dating app/website accounts without their permission                           | 17.7            | 3.1                | 474.3*** |
| Online image-based sexual abuse  | Threatened to share a sexually explicit image or video of the respondent without their consent                            | 20.0            | 3.6                | 529.3*** |
|                                  | Took a non-consensual photo or video of the respondent which was sexually explicit in nature (eg via webcam)              | 15.2            | 3.1                | 342.2*** |
|                                  | Shared a sexually explicit photo of the respondent with others without their consent                                      | 16.0            | 3.1                | 395.6*** |

Note: Denominators include respondents who were unsure or did not disclose information. These individuals were excluded from chi-square analyses. The degrees of freedom for all chi-square tests were 1

Source: AIC Mobile Dating Apps and Sexual Violence Survey 2021 [computer file]

## Intersectional risk of dating app facilitated sexual violence among users with disability

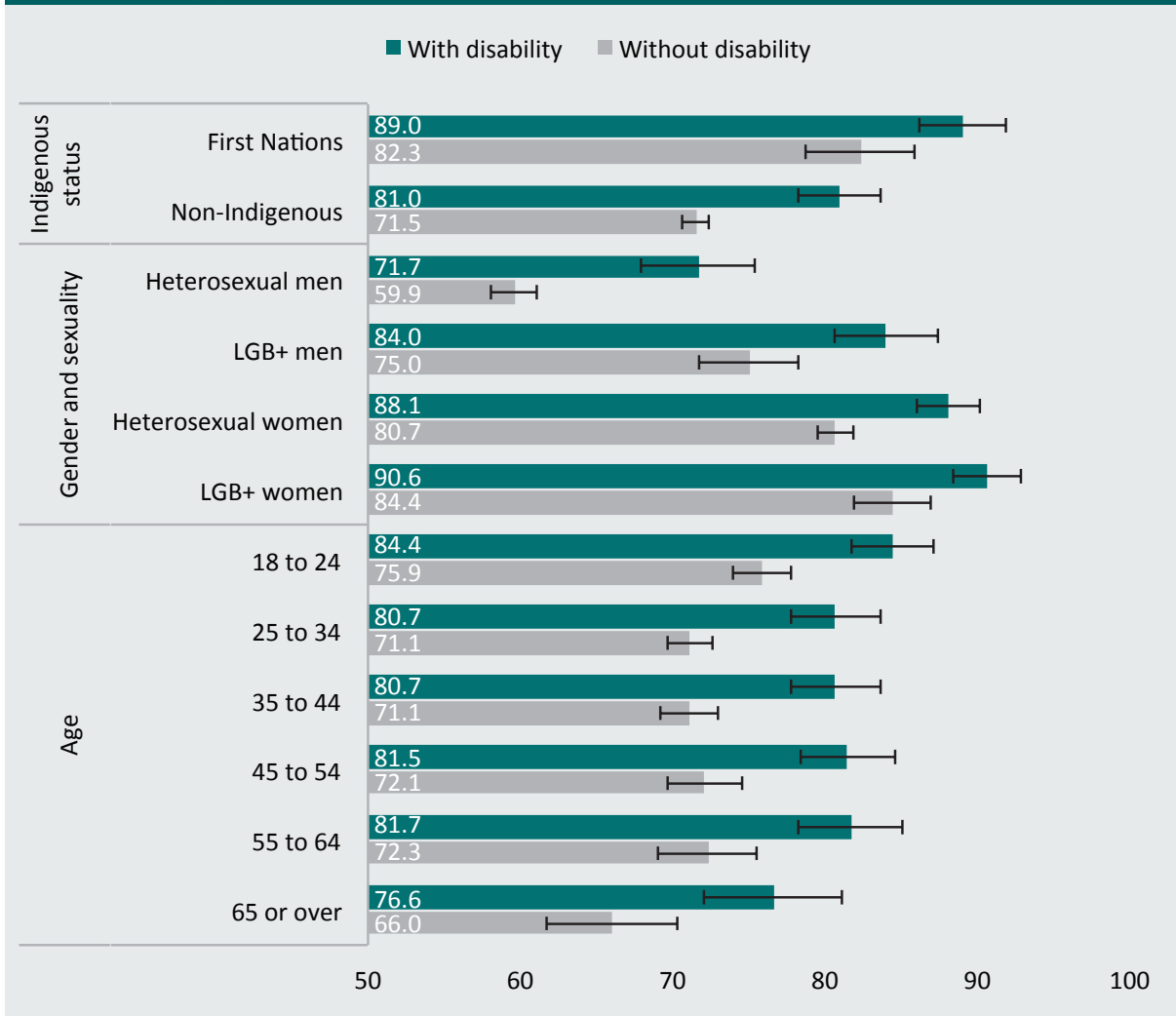
The above analysis identified that dating platform users with disability were more likely to have experienced all types of online DAFSV in the last five years compared to respondents without disability. Further, respondents with disability were more likely to experience diverse and repeated online DAFSV. However, it is possible these findings could be explained by the presence of factors that co-occur with disability and online DAFSV, such as frequency of using dating platforms (see Table 1). To explore the independent effect of disability on online DAFSV, we estimated a logistic regression model including the variables listed in Table 1 (eg age, gender, Indigenous status, frequency of dating platform use). The dependent variable was any online DAFSV victimisation (0=no, 1=yes). Model fit was assessed using the Cragg–Uhler (Nagelkerke)  $R^2$  and the area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUROC).

We then estimated the predictive margins for disability status as well as the interactions between disability status and variables that were identified in the literature as potentially increasing risk of sexual victimisation among respondents with disability: respondent age, Indigenous status, gender and sexuality. Predictive margins indicate the average predicted probability of online DAFSV victimisation when a certain characteristic is present, controlling for the other variables in the logistic regression model.

The predicted probability of being subjected to online DAFSV, when controlling for demographic and situational factors, was 81.4 percent for respondents with disability and 72.0 percent for those without disability. This difference was statistically significant ( $z=5.86$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

However, as demonstrated in Figure 2, the risk of being subjected to online DAFSV was not evenly distributed among respondents with disability. For example, the predicted probability of First Nations users with disability being subjected to online DAFSV was eight percentage points higher compared to non-Indigenous respondents with disability (89.0% vs 81.0%;  $z=4.98$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Further, the predicted probability of LGB+ women with disability experiencing online DAFSV was 90.6 percent, which decreased to 88.1 percent for heterosexual women with disability ( $z=2.49$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and to 84.0 percent for LGB+ men with disability ( $z=3.47$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and 71.7 percent for heterosexual men with disability ( $z=20.96$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Finally, the predicted probability of young people (18 to 24 years old) with disability being subjected to online DAFSV was 84.4 percent, which decreased to 80.7 percent for those aged 25 to 34 years ( $z= -3.94$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). However, there was no relationship between language spoken most of the time at home and online DAFSV among respondents with disability (English=81.5% vs other language=80.0%,  $z= -1.27$ ,  $p=0.205$ ).

**Figure 2: Predicted probability of online DAFSV, by disability status and sociodemographic characteristics (%)**



Note: Error bars depict 95% confidence interval. Likelihood-ratio test  $\chi^2(20)=1683.18$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; AUROC=0.76; Nagelkerke  $R^2=0.1501$

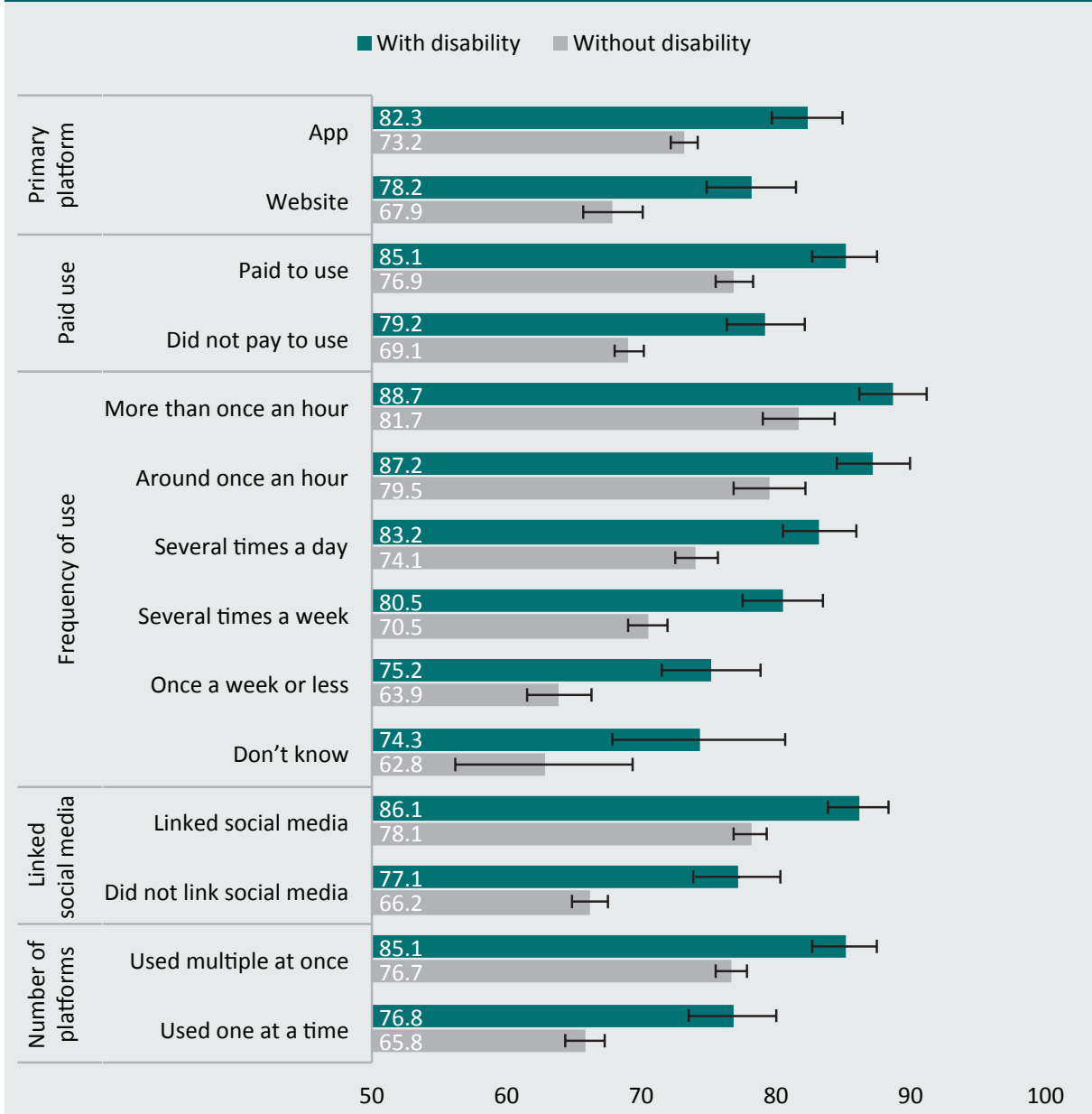
Controls=age, gender and sexuality, Indigenous status, language spoken most of the time at home, primary dating platform type used, frequency of dating platform use, paid to use dating platform, linked social media account to dating profile, used multiple platforms at once

Source: AIC Mobile Dating Apps and Sexual Violence Survey 2021 [computer file]

Figure 3 demonstrates the predicted probability of being subjected to online DAFSV based on disability status and respondent's use of dating platforms. Of note, the predicted probability of online DAFSV was 88.7 percent for respondents with disability who used dating platforms more than once an hour, but decreased to 80.5 percent for respondents with disability who used dating platforms less frequently (several times a week:  $z = -6.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, respondents with disability who used multiple dating platforms at once had a higher predicted probability of being subjected to online DAFSV compared to respondents with disability who used one platform at a time (85.1% vs 76.8%,  $z = 11.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Also, the predicted probability of being subjected to online DAFSV was much higher for respondents with disability who linked their dating profiles with their social media accounts (86.1% vs 77.1%,  $z=12.63$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and/or paid to use dating platforms (85.1% vs 79.2%,  $z=7.95$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) compared to respondents with disability who did not do these things. Finally, respondents with disability who used mobile dating apps as their primary service had a higher predicted probability of being subjected to DAFSV compared to respondents with disability who primarily used dating websites (82.3% vs 78.2%,  $z= -4.26$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

**Figure 3: Predicted probability of DAFSV, by disability status and dating platform use (%)**



Note: Error bars depict 95% confidence interval, Likelihood-ratio test  $\chi^2(20)=1683.18$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; AUROC=0.76; Nagelkerke  $R^2=0.1501$

Controls=age, gender and sexuality, Indigenous status, language spoken most of the time at home, primary dating platform type used, frequency of dating platform use, paid to use dating platform, linked social media account to dating profile, used multiple platforms at once

Source: AIC Mobile Dating Apps and Sexual Violence Survey 2021 [computer file]

## Discussion

Consistent with broader research on sexual violence victimisation among people with disability (Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and Health 2020; Mailhot Amborski et al. 2022), we found a large proportion of dating platform users with disability had been subjected to online DAFSV—specifically, nine in 10 (88.0%). Looking closer, online sexual harassment (85.4%) and abusive and threatening language (74.6%) were very commonly experienced, followed by online stalking (59.5%) and image-based sexual abuse (52.6%).

This finding remained consistent even after we controlled for a range of other factors associated with sexual victimisation. However, while disability was identified as a significant predictor of online DAFSV, we also found the way disability intersected with other factors was an important consideration. For example, respondents with disability who were younger or who identified as women, LGB+ or First Nations were particularly at risk of online DAFSV. This builds on prior work by Mazur (2022), who identified several challenges for sexually and gender diverse dating app users with disability relating to ableism and prejudice.

While we cannot offer a comprehensive explanation of why dating platform users with disability are subjected to high rates of online DAFSV, the findings point towards the potential role of opportunity effects. Cybercrimes are increasingly becoming understood through the lens of routine activity theory, an opportunity theory, which suggests crime is more likely to occur when suitable victims (in this scenario, users with disability) and motivated offenders (other users) converge in time and space in the absence of capable guardianship (Cohen & Felson 1979; Leukfeldt & Yar 2016). Using this framework, it could be argued that users with disability may be more likely to be targets of online DAFSV because they spend more time engaging with online dating platforms, in turn increasing the risk of exposure to motivated offenders. This is supported by the finding that, controlling for other risk factors, people with disability who used dating platforms frequently were statistically more likely to experience online DAFSV than people with disability who used dating platforms less frequently.

However, disability was associated with victimisation even after controlling for other risk factors, including how dating platforms were used. This suggests that explaining the high rates of online DAFSV against people with disability requires looking beyond opportunity effects. Potentially, some users were targeted because of their disability (ie were subjected to ableist harassment; Mazur 2022). This may be particularly the case where users also identified with other marginalised groups, including First Nations and LGB+ people (Carlson 2020; Mazur 2022).

Being subjected to sexual violence can have significant and potentially long-term impacts on victim-survivors' health and wellbeing. When facilitated by the internet, it may dissuade people from continuing their normal online activities. This is particularly problematic for people with disability, for whom the internet may play a vital role in different domains of their life (Dobransky & Hargittai 2016). The internet has become pivotal for supporting people with disability to participate in society, especially in the development and maintenance of relationships—romantic or otherwise. It is vital to bolster online safety for people with disability to protect them from harm while performing important online activities, without creating barriers to their rights as digital citizens.

In addition to broad measures for reducing the occurrence and recurrence of DAFSV, such as identity verification and public awareness campaigns, some approaches to reducing the risk of DAFSV specifically for people with disability may include:

- online safety education in accessible formats;
- bolstering the availability of information on online safety and reporting mechanisms for carers and service providers;
- online platforms and law enforcement encouraging reporting of victimisation and streamlining reporting processes; and
- provision of accessible support resources for victim-survivors to mitigate the risk of revictimisation.

To be effective, approaches must be inclusive, appropriate and accessible, as people with disability can have unique service or support needs. For example, challenges such as communication barriers and discrimination increase the difficulty of reporting sexual violence to law enforcement and accessing support services, which can further exacerbate trauma and feelings of isolation often experienced by victim-survivors of sexual violence.

Ultimately, addressing DAFSV against people with disability requires a concerted effort from online platforms, policymakers, service providers and law enforcement to make the use of online environments safe and free from sexual harassment, aggression and violence for all people.

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