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Abstract | We used data from the Australian Cybercrime Survey to measure the perceived frequency of artificial intelligence (AI) enabled crimes, and which specific technologies pose the greatest perceived risk of victimisation.

Half of respondents were worried about AI causing them harm or being a victim of AI-enabled crime, and nearly one in five believed this would occur in the next 12 months. Respondents were most concerned about AI being used to track their location, AI being used to access their device or accounts to commit other forms of cybercrime, and the use of AI to manipulate, impersonate or trick them in ways that would cause harm or embarrassment.

Perceived frequency of, and victimisation from, different misuses of AI technology varied by respondent age, gender and parental status. Both were also correlated with the use of AI technology.

These findings highlight priority areas for industry safeguards and public education.

Perceived risk of victimisation by artificial intelligence enabled crimes

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In the past 10 years, there has been a rapid proliferation of publicly available tools and applications (apps) using artificial intelligence (AI). These technologies have the ability to perform a variety of advanced 'human-like' tasks (Gil de Zúñiga, Goyanes & Durotoye 2023), such as providing almost immediate access to an enormous library of information, assistance with problem solving and writing, personalised learning, automating repetitive tasks, and enhancing creativity and efficiency (Rashid & Kausik 2024). While these tools have the potential to significantly benefit daily life, there are growing concerns about the potential for AI technologies to be misused for criminal, nefarious or antisocial purposes (Hayward & Maas 2021).

A workshop with stakeholders in law enforcement, government, industry and academia in the United Kingdom asked participants to rate the most significant and imminent threats posed by AI (Caldwell et al. 2020). These threats were identified as the potential for driverless vehicles to be used as weapons, AI-authored propaganda and disinformation, video impersonations of public officials (using 'deepfake' technology), widespread disruption of critical infrastructure that uses AI systems, and more widespread and proficient scams and blackmail operations by criminals. Concerns about AI among the general public are likely different to those held by experts in government or industry, as public perceptions of emerging technologies tend to be more heavily based on media representations (Choi et al. 2024).

Several recent surveys of the public in Australia and overseas have measured the use of AI-based technologies (Tan 2023a, 2023b), perceptions about current and future benefits and harms of these technologies (Bao et al. 2022; Ikkatai et al. 2022), and general feelings towards AI, such as its trustworthiness (Castelo & Ward 2021; Kreps et al. 2023; Tan 2023c). Attitudes have varied by demographic factors and prior exposure to AI, with less support for AI expressed among respondents who were female, were older in age, had fewer years of education, had less knowledge about AI, or less experience using AI (Horowitz & Kahn 2021; Ikkatai et al. 2022; Tan 2023b). Attitudes also varied considerably based on the specific technology—for instance, Australians are much more supportive of AI technologies that assist physicians in making medical diagnoses compared with AI technologies that completely replace physicians for routine clinical tasks (Isbanner et al. 2022).

Research into perceived harms of AI has typically focused on macro-level existential harms on a national or global scale. For instance, citizens surveyed in the United Kingdom (Cave, Coughlan & Dihal 2019) and Australia (Saeri, Noetel & Graham 2024) expressed concerns about humans becoming overly reliant on AI for social needs, mass unemployment if humans are replaced in industry, and conflict if AI becomes 'more powerful' than humans. To our knowledge, little to no research has examined whether Australians believe they or their families will be *personally* impacted by crimes involving AI technology in the *imminent* future, and which specific AI technologies are perceived as posing the greatest risk of harm to individuals and their families.

This is an important area of study. Public perceptions of the risks posed by AI can have a significant influence on how these technologies are developed by industry, adopted by consumers and regulated by governments (Cave et al. 2018; Fast & Horvitz 2016). However, there has been less focus on the fear of cyber-enabled crime than on more traditional forms of crime (Brands & Van Doorn 2022). Some research has focused on the consequences of being fearful of cybercrime, finding that rather than increasing the use of protective behaviours, fear of online crime increases avoidance behaviours, such as not using the internet for banking, shopping and social networking (Brands & van Wilsem 2021; Riek, Bohme & Moore 2016). Fear of cyber-enabled and, in this case, AI-enabled crime may have important implications for how emerging technology is used by online Australians. If the perceived risks are overestimated, people may be less likely to embrace the use of AI in ways that could be beneficial to them, while underestimating the risks may undermine efforts to encourage people to implement protective behaviours to reduce their risk of falling victim to such crime.

Method

Data collection and analysis

Data were drawn from the 2024 Australian Cybercrime Survey, a large-scale annual survey of Australian internet users aged 18 years and over conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology (Voce & Morgan 2025a). The survey was conducted in July and August 2024, with 10,335 respondents recruited from Roy Morgan's Single Source panel and supplemented by third-party panel members. To ensure the sample was broadly reflective of the spread of people living in Australia, proportional quota sampling was used based on the Australian adult population stratified by age, sex and usual place of residence (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2024). In addition to the core survey, an AI addendum (short additional survey) was completed by 6,292 respondents. The results presented have been weighted by age, sex and usual place of residence (consistent with the Australian population), and additional random iterative method weights were applied to correct for higher levels of education and more frequent internet use. Further information on the sampling and weighting procedures, as well as the concordance between the survey sample and general population characteristics, are reported in Voce and Morgan (2025a). Interquartile range (IQR) and 95% confidence intervals (95% CI) are reported where applicable. We used Pearson's chi-square (χ^2) analysis to compare responses between groups (eg age or gender); however, because the study uses weighted survey data, the Pearson χ^2 statistic is corrected and converted into an *F* statistic.

Sample

Sample sociodemographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. Approximately half the sample was female (48.6%) and aged between 35 and 64 years (47.0%). Most of the sample lived in a major city (74.5%), were born in Australia (77.8%), were currently employed (64.3%) and did not identify as First Nations (94.6%).

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of sample (%) (*n*=6,292)			
Gender		**Education level**	
Female	48.6	Year 12 or lower	31.5
Male	50.8	Vocational training	41.3
Non-binary	0.5	University degree	26.5
Age in years		Unknown	0.6
18–24	11.8	**Employment status**[a]	
25–34	19.1	Employed	64.3
35–49	26.5	Unemployed	4.8
50–64	20.5	Other	29.6
65+	22.2	Unknown	1.3
First Nations status		**Long-term restrictive health condition**	
No	94.6	No	86.3
Yes	4.0	Yes	8.7
Unknown	1.4	Unknown	4.9
LGB+ status		**Children living at home**	
No	90.1	No	67.2
Yes	7.9	Yes	32.1
Unknown	2.0	Unknown	7.1
Born outside of Australia		**Annual income**	
No	77.8	$0–18,200	9.4
Yes	21.6	$18,201–45,000	22.0
Unknown	0.6	$45,001–120,000	40.5
Non-English language at home		$120,001–180,000	12.0
No	93.4	$180,001+	5.7
Yes	6.1	Unknown	10.3
Unknown	0.5	**Geographic remoteness**	
Currently in relationship		Major city	74.5
No	40.7	Regional	22.7
Yes	58.3	Remote	2.5
Unknown	1.0	Unknown	0.3

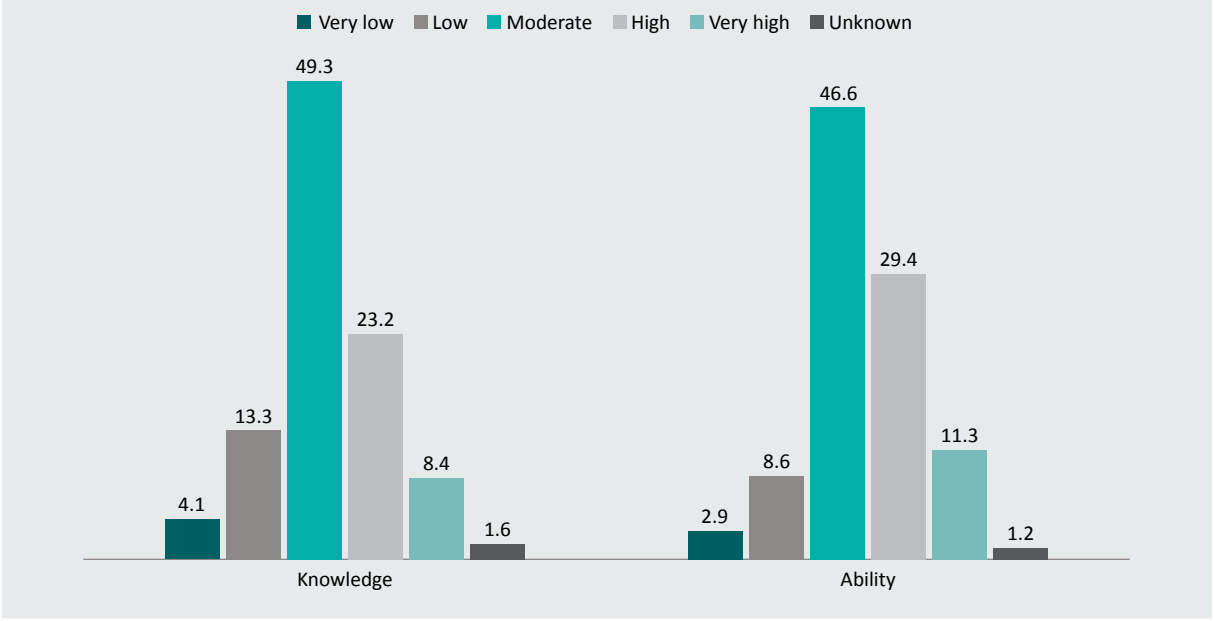
a: Currently employed respondents include those who are working full-time, part-time, or casually or who are semi-retired. Employment status of 'other' includes respondents who are studying full-time, homemakers, unable to work due to illness, retired, or seasonal workers

Note: Weighted frequencies and percentages may not add to total due to rounding

Source: Australian Cybercrime Survey 2024 [weighted data]

Respondents reported that the average number of hours they spent online per day was 3.3 hours for personal purposes (95% CI=[3.2, 3.4]) and 4.1 hours for work purposes (95% CI=[4.0, 4.2]). Most respondents used social media at least weekly (82.7%), with approximately half the sample using social media between three and eight hours (24.8%) or over eight hours (26.8%) per week. Approximately three-quarters of respondents rated their knowledge of and ability to use digital technologies as either moderate or high (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Self-rated levels of technology knowledge and ability (%) (*n*=6,292)



Note: Unknown includes respondents who did not know or declined to answer the question. Weighted frequencies and percentages may not add to total due to rounding

Source: Australian Cybercrime Survey 2024 [weighted data]

Results

Respondents were asked about a range of common apps that rely on or involve the use of AI technology. Three-quarters (74.7%) of the respondents had used at least one of the AI apps in the previous 12 months and, among these respondents, the median number of AI apps used was three (IQR: 1–4; see Table 2). By far the most commonly used apps were map and navigation tools (50.2%), followed by language translation services (25.4%), virtual assistants (24.0%), generative AI chatbots (22.2%) and facial or voice recognition apps to unlock a device or account (21.9%).

Table 2: AI apps used by respondents in the 12 months prior to the survey (*n*=6,292)

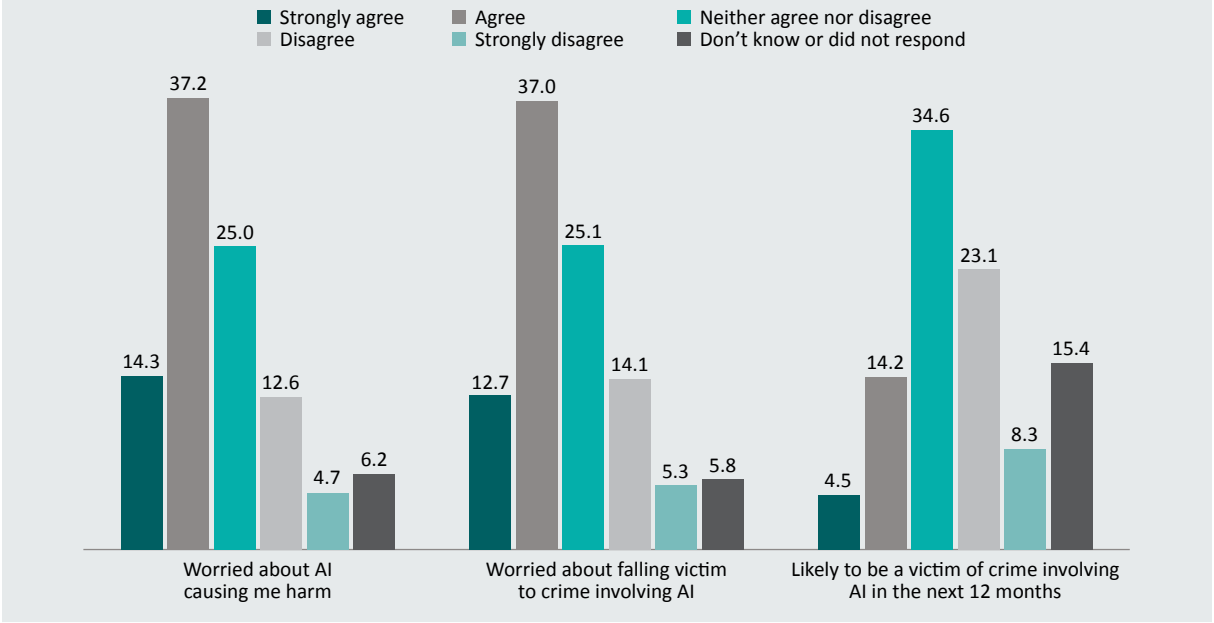
	n	%
Map and navigation apps (eg Google Maps)	3,160	50.2
Language translation services (eg Google Translate)	1,599	25.4
Virtual assistants on mobile phone, computer or TV (eg Siri, Google Assistant)	1,511	24.0
Chatbots to have a conversation or answer questions (eg ChatGPT)	1,396	22.2
Facial or voice recognition to unlock device or account (eg bank account)	1,379	21.9
Voice-controlled smart home assistants (eg Google Home)	1,074	17.1
Text and grammar editors (eg Grammarly)	880	14.0
AI tools for generating artwork, images, music and videos (eg DALL-E)	489	7.8
Filters to alter appearance in photos or videos (including on social media apps)	437	6.9
AI home security and camera systems	393	6.3
AI-generated media (ie deepfakes) or AI face-swapping technology	204	3.2
Augmented, virtual or mixed reality headsets (eg Apple Vision Pro)	199	3.2
AI chatbots for companionship or romantic relationships (eg Replika, DreamGF)	198	3.2
Self-driving vehicles (eg Tesla)	145	2.3
AI apps for stock trading	141	2.2
Other	28	0.4
None of the above	1,594	25.3
Unknown	204	3.2

Source: Australian Cybercrime Survey 2024 [weighted data]

As shown in Figure 2, around half of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that they were worried about AI technology being used to cause them harm (51.5%) and that they were worried about falling victim to a crime involving AI technology (49.7%). One in five respondents (18.7%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that it is likely they will become the victim of an AI-enabled crime within the next 12 months.

We examined whether recent use of AI technologies was related to perceived risk of harm or victimisation. A consistent pattern was apparent, with respondents who reported using more than three AI apps less likely to be worried about AI technology being used to cause them harm or about falling victim to AI-enabled crime than respondents who used between one and three apps, or who used no apps at all. These respondents (who used 3+ apps) were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the statements that they were worried AI technology would be used to cause them harm (21.9% vs 15.0–16.7%), that they were worried about falling victim to a crime involving the use of AI technology (23.5% vs 17.3–18.9%), or that it was likely they would be a victim of AI-enabled crime in the next 12 months (40.5% vs 26.4–30.2%).

Figure 2: Perceived risk of victimisation or harm from crime involving AI (%) (*n*=6,292)



Source: Australian Cybercrime Survey 2024 [weighted data]

Specific misuses of AI technology

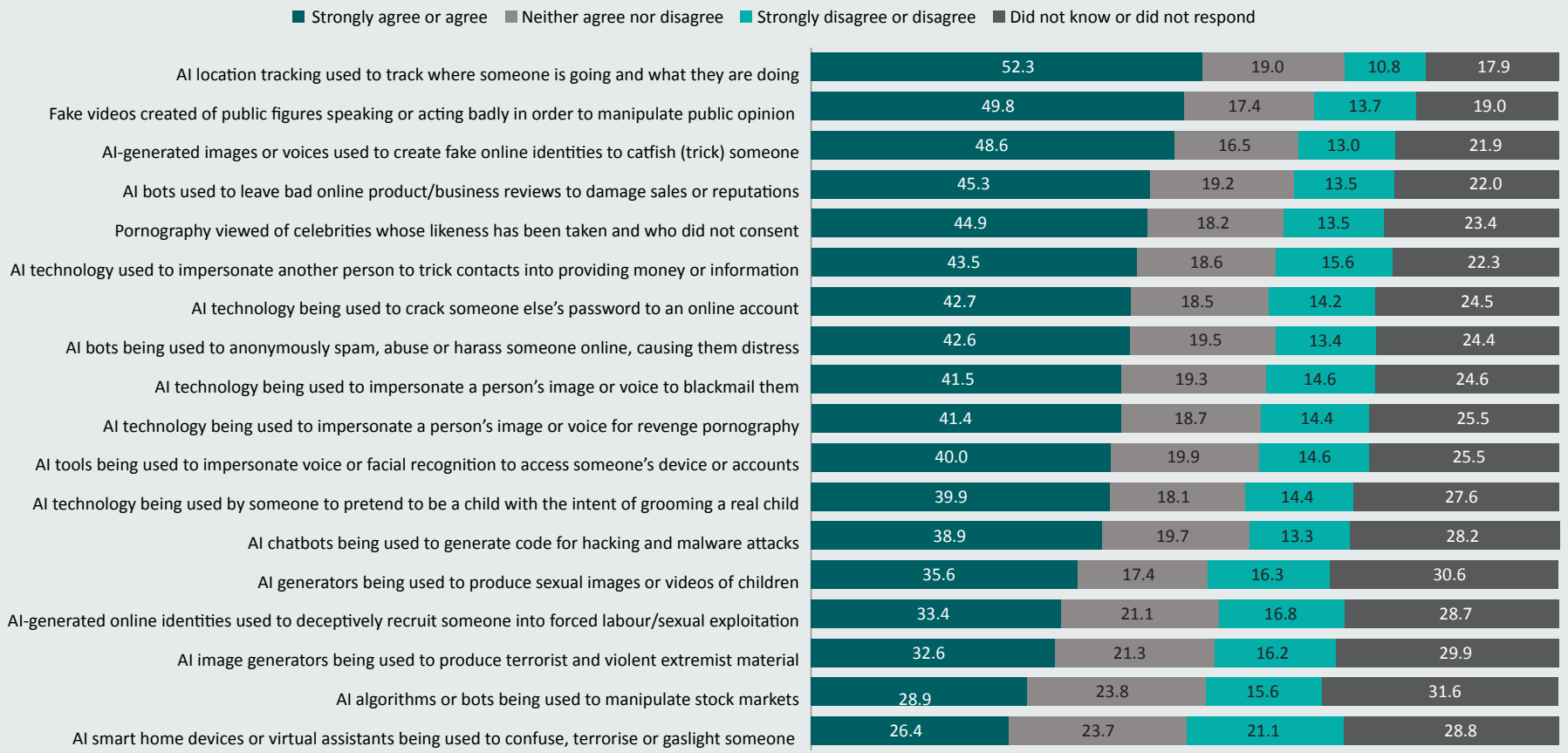
Respondents were asked whether they believed certain illegal or unethical uses of AI by individuals or groups in Australia were common (Figure 3), and whether they were worried that they or their family would fall victim to these AI-enabled crimes (Figure 4).

Respondents believed that the most common misuse of AI involved using AI location tracking to track where someone is going and what they are doing (52.3%). This was followed by fake videos being created of public figures speaking or acting badly in order to manipulate public opinion (49.8%), AI-generated images or videos being used to create fake online identities to catfish someone (48.6%), AI bots being used to leave large numbers of bad online reviews of businesses, products or professionals to damage their sales or reputation (45.3%), and pornography being viewed of celebrities whose likeness has been taken and who did not consent (44.9%). This highlights the wide range of possible misuses that respondents believed were common. Overall, between one in four and one in two respondents believed that the specific misuses of AI were common in Australia.

There were several common areas of concern in terms of AI-enabled harm. First, respondents believed the AI technology most likely to be used to target them or someone they knew was location tracking to monitor where they were going or what they were doing (45.5%). Second, respondents were concerned about AI being used to access their device or accounts to commit other forms of cybercrime, such as AI technology being used to crack their passwords to an online account (44.5%), to impersonate them in order to trick their personal contacts (such as family members or work colleagues) into providing money or sensitive information (38.7%), to generate code for hacking and malware attacks (38.5%), or to impersonate voice or facial recognition to access their device or accounts (37.5%). Third, respondents were concerned about the use of AI to manipulate, impersonate or trick them in ways that would mislead, harm or embarrass them. This included fake videos being created of public figures speaking or acting badly in order to manipulate public opinion (38.9%); AI bots being used to anonymously spam, abuse or harass them online (37.3%); AI-generated images or voice being used to create fake online identities to catfish them (37.1%); and AI being used to impersonate a person's image or voice to blackmail them (34.5%).

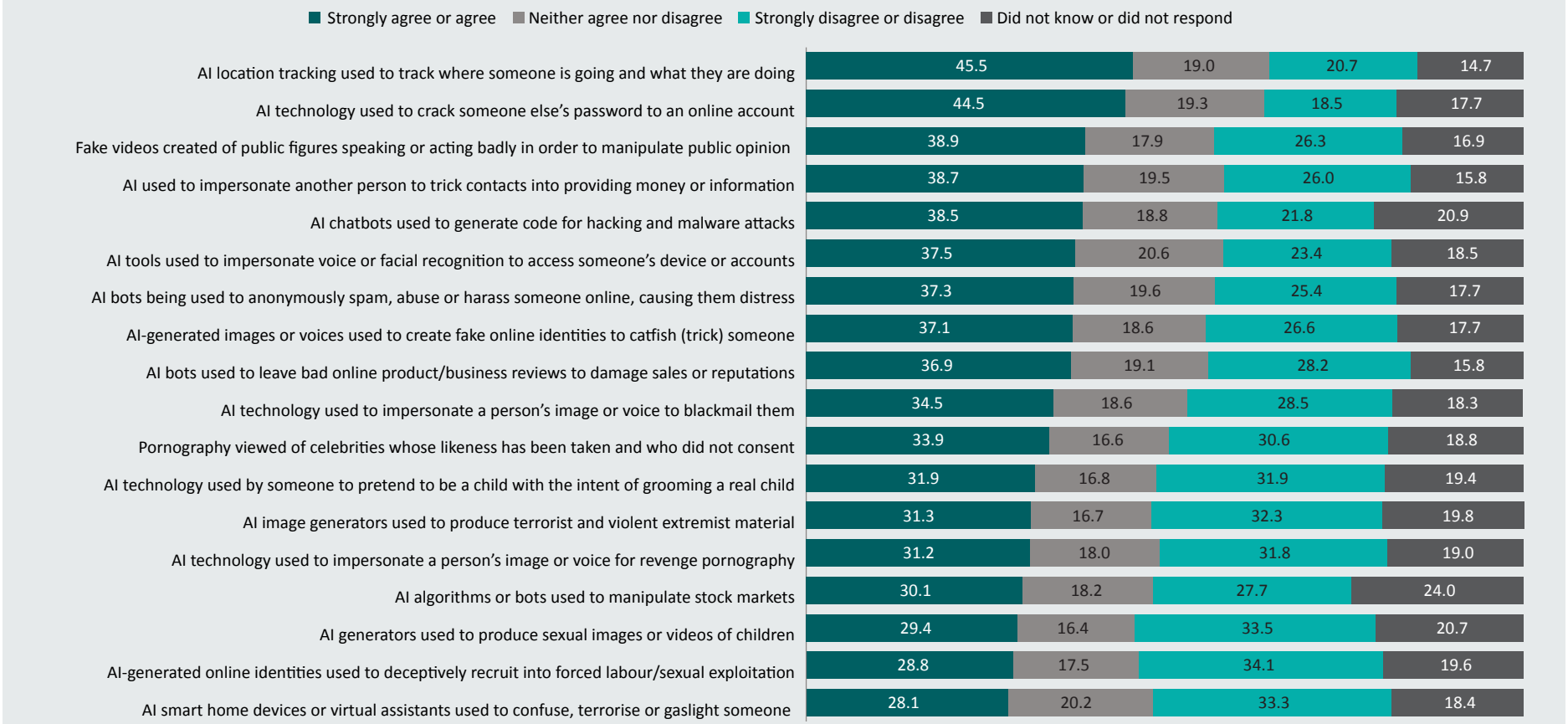
Importantly, a significant minority of respondents did not know or preferred to not answer when asked about common misuses of AI in Australia (17.9–31.6%) and their risk of becoming a victim of these specific crimes (14.7–24.0%). Respondents were most likely to say they did not know whether AI technology is commonly used in Australia to manipulate the stock market, produce sexual images or videos of children, or produce images for extremist material.

Figure 3: Extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that various uses of AI technology were common in Australia (%) (*n*=6,292)



Note: Items are listed in order of highest rate of agreement. Weighted frequencies and percentages may not add to total due to rounding
Source: Australian Cybercrime Survey 2024 [weighted data]

Figure 4: Extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that various types of technology would be used to target them or someone they know (%) (*n*=6,292)



Note: Items are listed in order of highest rate of agreement. Weighted frequencies and percentages may not add to total due to rounding
Source: Australian Cybercrime Survey 2024 [weighted data]

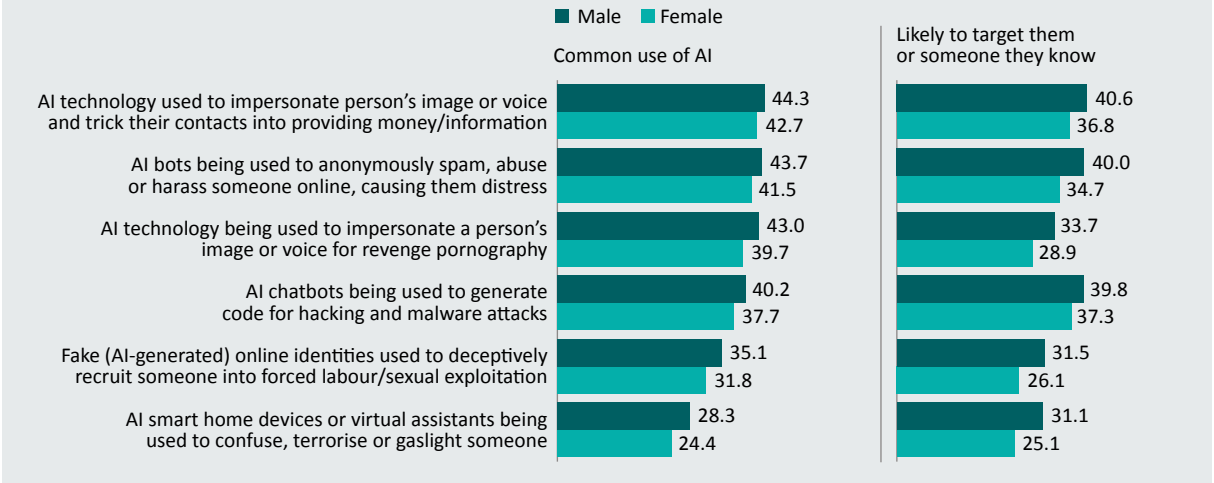
Differences by age, gender and parental status

Respondents were compared based on their age, gender and parental status as to whether they believed the misuse of AI technology is common in Australia and whether they were worried about the technology being used to target them or someone they know. Gender differences were observed for a range of AI technologies, including the use of AI to access respondents' devices or accounts to commit other forms of cybercrime, and the use of AI to manipulate, impersonate or trick them in ways that would mislead, harm, or embarrass them (Figure 5). Compared with female respondents, male respondents were more likely to believe that these activities were common in Australia, and more likely to believe that the technology would be used to target them or someone they know.

Perceptions of AI risk also varied by respondent age (Figure 6). In most cases, respondents aged 35 to 49 years were the most likely to agree that the stated misuses of AI were common, followed closely by respondents aged 18 to 34 years. The exception to this was the use of AI location tracking to track where someone is going and what they are doing, with respondents aged 50 years and over (55.2%) and those aged 35 to 49 years (54.2%) more likely than respondents aged 18 to 34 years (46.4%) to say this was a common use of AI. While not shown in the figure, respondents aged 50 years and over were more likely than those aged 35 to 49 years to say they did not know whether the use of AI was common; respondents in the latter group, in turn, were more likely to say they did not know than respondents aged 18 to 34 years.

Respondents aged 18 to 34 years were consistently less likely than other respondents to say that these technologies would be used to target them or someone they knew. The exception to this was the use of AI smart home devices or virtual assistants to confuse, terrorise or gaslight someone, where there was little difference in the perceived likelihood of being targeted, despite older respondents being much less likely to say this was a common use of AI technology.

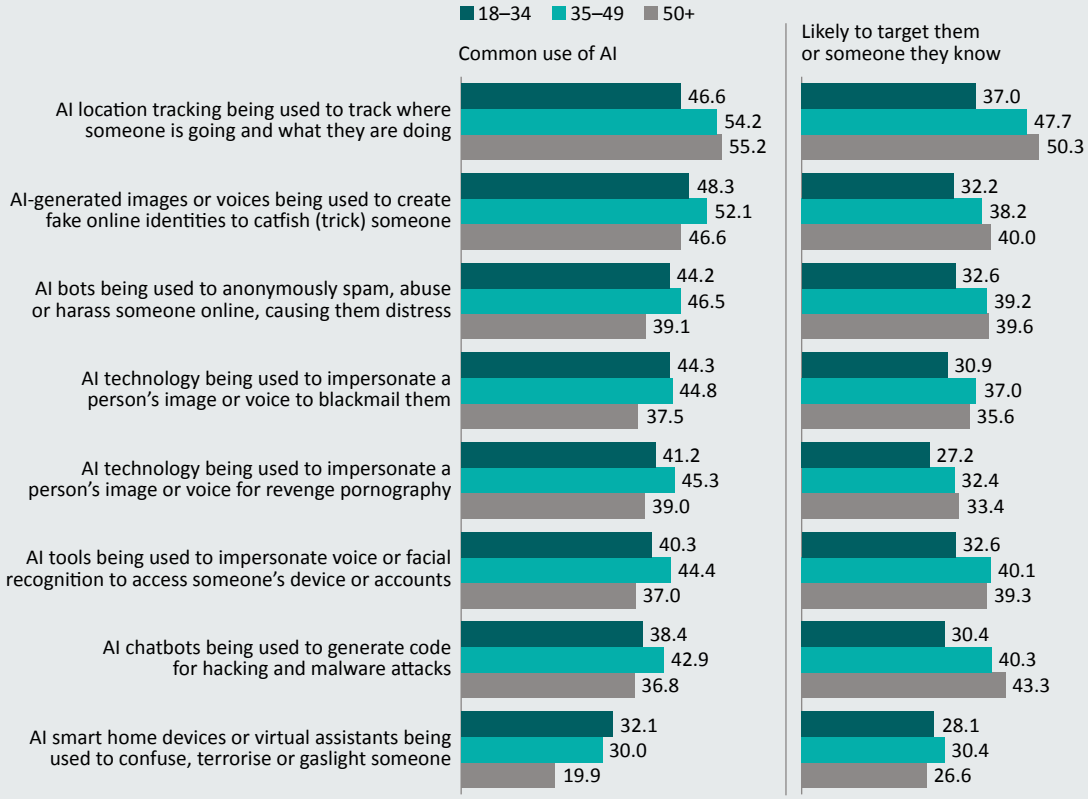
Figure 5: Proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that various uses of AI technology were common in Australia and likely to be used to target them or someone they know, by gender (%) (*n*=6,259)



Note: Limited to statistically significant differences between male and female respondents on both common use and likelihood of being targeted. Excludes 33 respondents who identified as non-binary

Source: Australian Cybercrime Survey 2024 [weighted data]

Figure 6: Proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that various uses of AI technology were common in Australia and likely to be used to target them or someone they know, by age (%) (*n*=6,292)

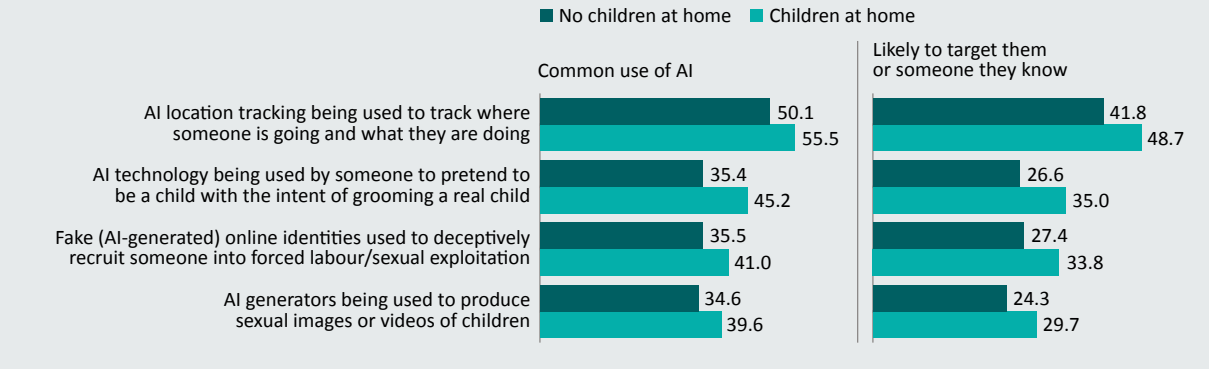


Note: Limited to statistically significant differences between age groups on both common use and likelihood of being targeted

Source: Australian Cybercrime Survey 2024 [weighted data]

Finally, we compared the perceptions of respondents aged between 25 and 49 with and without children below the age of 18 living at home to measure how parents perceived the risk of AI impacting their children (Figure 7). Respondents with children living at home were more likely to report believing the following types of use of AI technology were common: to track where someone is going and what they are doing; to pretend to be a child with the intent of grooming a real child; to create fake online identities to deceptively recruit someone into forced labour or sexual exploitation; and to produce sexual images or videos of children. This group of respondents was also more likely to report that these uses of AI were likely to target them or someone they know.

Figure 7: Proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that various uses of AI technology were common in Australia and likely to be used to target them or someone they know, by parental status (%) (*n*=2,836)



Note: Restricted to respondents aged between 25 and 49 years of age. All displayed differences between groups are statistically significant

Source: Australian Cybercrime Survey 2024 [weighted data]

Discussion

Australians are increasingly using AI technologies for entertainment, productivity and assistance in their everyday lives, and this study demonstrates that there is widespread concern that these same technologies will be used in the commission of illegal and unethical acts. The use of AI tools by respondents was common, as were fears of their potential misuse. Approximately half of the respondents believed that AI is already being used to commit crimes within Australia or were concerned that they or their family members would fall victim to crime involving AI technology. Moreover, one in five respondents believed this would occur in the next 12 months. That so many people are concerned about the risk of AI-enabled crime is unsurprising, given the prevalence of cybercrime victimisation in Australia (Voce & Morgan 2025a). However, much like more traditional forms of crime, it is likely that respondents overestimate the likelihood that they will be a victim of AI-enabled crime or that the technology will be used to target them or someone they know.

The greatest perceived threat, according to respondents, was the potential for AI tracking being used to monitor their own or their family members' location and activities. This may have been the most plausible and recognisable form of AI-enabled crime to respondents because apps for navigation that incorporate AI technology (such as Google Maps) were widely used by respondents. However, it is also the technology where the specific use of AI to cause harm is less obvious, and may therefore reflect a general concern about monitoring and surveillance online. However, technology-enabled stalking is not an uncommon experience among online Australians. There has been an increase in the rate of non-consensual location tracking in recent years, particularly in the context of coercive control and intimate partner violence (Powell et al. 2024). A recent survey of 5,304 adults in Australia by the eSafety Commissioner (2020) found that 16 percent of respondents had experienced someone electronically tracking their location without their consent, while 2.9 percent of respondents to the Australian Cybercrime Survey said they had been stalked or harassed online in the 12 months prior to the 2024 survey (Voce & Morgan 2025a). Further, stalking and harassment online was ranked as the most harmful cybercrime by victims (Voce & Morgan 2025b). Whether these behaviours are facilitated by AI or not, they are clearly a major concern for respondents, and appropriate safeguards must be in place and communicated to app users to help allay the fear of others using location tracking on their devices.

AI being used to commit other forms of cybercrime concerned many respondents, who feared that AI tools would be used to access their online accounts by cracking their passwords or impersonating their voice or face to unlock devices, and then stealing their money or personal information. Being hacked is a valid concern—one in five respondents to the Australian Cybercrime Survey reported their financial accounts had been compromised in the 12 months prior to the survey (Voce & Morgan 2025a), with hacking reported by respondents as the most common way in which their personal information was obtained (McAlister et al. 2023). A similar concern was criminals using AI tools to impersonate respondents in order to trick their family members, work colleagues or other personal contacts into sending money or sensitive information. Again, these fears are well founded, given reports of the increasing use of AI in sophisticated scams (Australian Signals Directorate 2024). These ever-evolving threats present a persistent challenge for law enforcement, who must continually adapt to new modus operandi among cybercriminals, including the exploitation of AI technology.

Our findings demonstrate that Australians are concerned about the impact of non-consensual pornographic images or videos (deepfake pornography) not only depicting themselves or their family members but also depicting celebrities and children. In a recent survey of 1,651 Australian adults (Umbach et al. 2024), eight percent had reportedly viewed deepfake pornography of celebrities, while a very small minority had viewed such content depicting ordinary people (2.4%) or had been a victim of someone creating, posting or threatening to post deepfake pornography of them (3.7%). The Australian Government has already taken steps to mitigate the harms of deepfake pornography made without consent by recently criminalising the creation and sharing of such content as a form of abuse (Dreyfus 2024). This may be complemented by educational programs and initiatives to prevent such abuse from happening in the first place.

Fear of illegal uses of AI differed according to the age and gender of respondents and whether they were a parent. Compared with younger respondents, older respondents (aged 50+ years) were less likely to think that many specific crimes involving AI were common in Australia, but they (along with respondents aged 35 to 49 years) were more worried about being a victim of such crime. This suggests that some older Australians may be worried about their vulnerability as a target for AI-facilitated crimes, even if they are less likely to believe—or are unsure whether—AI-enabled crimes are common. Respondents with children living at home were more likely than those without children at home to believe that specific crimes targeting children—such as AI-generated child sexual abuse material or the use of fake identities to groom children or recruit victims into exploitation—were common in Australia, and to believe that they or their family would be negatively impacted by these crimes. This reflects growing concerns among parents, governments, law enforcement and experts about identifying and mitigating risks of AI technologies being used to facilitate child sexual abuse (International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children Australia 2024).

Respondents who were more avid users of AI technology were less likely than other respondents to be worried about AI technology being used to cause them harm or about falling victim to AI-enabled crime. This may be related to their confidence in using AI technologies, but it may also reflect the reluctance of some internet users to make use of certain AI technology because of concerns about their online safety. While further research is needed to understand this relationship, this finding has two potential implications. First, research shows that more confident internet users (Voce & Morgan 2023a) and more frequent users of online platforms (Voce & Morgan 2023b) are more likely to fall victim to cybercrime; as such, more frequent users of AI must be encouraged to employ appropriate protective behaviours. Second, respondents who may be missing out on certain benefits of AI technology because they are reluctant to use it must be supported to use the technology safely and confidently.

Several key limitations must be acknowledged. The current sample is large and representative of the spread of the Australian population according to key demographic characteristics, and draws on panels using probability and non-probability sampling. However, we are cautious not to generalise the results to all Australians. In addition, due to the cross-sectional nature of these data, it is unclear how perceptions of AI-related crime may evolve over time with changes in technology and social attitudes towards the use of AI, especially given how rapidly these technologies are advancing. Future research should examine the sources of information and misinformation that have contributed to perceptions of AI-related crime, and longitudinal research may investigate how these perceptions change in response to policy, legislative and prevention efforts to counter the risk associated with AI.

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