



Slavery goes viral in Australia

AUSTRALIA'S CONNECTION TO SLAVERY HAS GONE VIRAL, WITH SOME AUSTRALIANS USING THE INTERNET TO SEXUALLY EXPLOIT VULNERABLE CHILDREN BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY.

The digital era has in many ways enabled children to learn, communicate and experience the world in a profound way. Yet as the internet grows and evolves, its ease of use and access poses many avenues for vulnerable children to become victims of sexual exploitation and modern slavery.

In 2020, the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) received more than 21,000 reports of online child sexual exploitation (ACCCE, 2020). Within each of these reports were evidence of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), a contemporary term to describe what was once referred to as child pornography (Leclerc et al., 2021). In 2021, the ACCCE received and examined more than 250,000 files containing child abuse. According to the ABC, reports of Australians accessing child abuse material increased markedly during the pandemic and remains at a high (Purtill, 2022).

A global investigation between Australian and international authorities has recently resulted in the arrest of more than 100 Australians, after police received intelligence that offenders were using a cloud storage program to upload and share child abuse material online and (Radford, 2022). The Australian offenders were aged between 18 and 61 years, with offenders arrested from every state.

The viewing, distributing and production of child exploitation material is not the only way that Australians are connected to the sexual exploitation of children online. A new phenomenon of crime is evolving, as the internet has created a marketplace in which live-streamed abuse can be bought and sold online to abusers from all around the world (International Justice Mission [IJM], 2020).

A MARKETPLACE FOR SLAVERY

This phenomenon is known as webcam child sex tourism, or cybersex trafficking, and it is a form of modern slavery in which children, particularly in South-East Asian countries such as the Philippines and Thailand, are sexually exploited on webcams (IJM, 2020). Abusers around the world can access and pay for the live-streaming of child sexual exploitation over the internet. Children are made to perform sexual acts – often dictated by the customer – in front of a webcam, while the abuse is facilitated by their trafficker, who is commonly a relative and (Napier et al., 2021). The content captured on these webcams is streamed live to viewers in predominantly Western countries. A study of 92 cybersex trafficking cases produced by International Justice Mission revealed that Australian offenders make up the third largest market, behind the United States and Sweden, being responsible for 18% of these webcam child sex tourism cases in the Philippines (IJM, 2020).

In a report released by the Australian Institute of Criminology, it was found that 256 Australians over a 13 year period paid more than \$1.3 million to watch child sexual abuse live-streamed from the Philippines (Doran, 2020). This cyber-enabled access to victims is concerning, as abusers who once had to travel internationally to engage in child exploitation can now abuse children anywhere in the world using the web.

There remain concerns that perpetrators of webcam child sex tourism will travel overseas to further engage in this criminal activity, following a typical pattern of abuse escalation (Brown et al., 2020). As international borders reopen, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) are concerned that human trafficking numbers will increase (Woolley, 2022), and this may have implications for vulnerable children whose families have been made economically desperate due to COVID-19.



IT'S TIME TO BUFFER SLAVERY

There can be no denying Australia's involvement in the demand for trafficked and exploited children, whether the abuse takes place in-person or online. The hidden and concealed nature of these crimes further highlights the need for prevention efforts within Australian and international communities.

ZOE works with local law enforcement in Thailand to rescue children directly from modern slavery, and provides holistic aftercare to child survivors. Yet this is only one side of the child trafficking equation. Equally important to work of rescue and restoration is prevention: ZOE addresses the demand side of child trafficking by raising awareness in schools and other community groups within Australia and around the world.

To combat a globally interconnected issue, we need to address the part that our Australian communities play in the demand for child trafficking and we need to prevent young Australians from becoming future perpetrators of online exploitation.

To find out more about how you can raise awareness of child trafficking in your community, visit www.gozoe.org.au.

REFERENCES:

- Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation. (2020). Statistics. <https://www.accce.gov.au/resources/research-and-statistics/2020statistics>
- Leclerc, B., Drew, J., Holt, T J., Cale, J., & Singh, S. (2021). Australian Institute of Criminology. *Child sexual abuse material on the darknet: A script analysis of how offenders operate*. https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/ti627_csam_on_the_darknet.pdf
- Purtil, J. (2022). Reports of online child abuse material have spiked. A few simple measures can help protect your children. ABC News. [abc.net.au/news/science/2022-02-25/online-predatory-behaviour-on-the-rise-tips-to-protect-children/100854370](https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2022-02-25/online-predatory-behaviour-on-the-rise-tips-to-protect-children/100854370)
- Purtil, J. (2022). *Reports of online child abuse material have spiked. A few simple measures can help protect your children*. ABC News. [abc.net.au/news/science/2022-02-25/online-predatory-behaviour-on-the-rise-tips-to-protect-children/100854370](https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2022-02-25/online-predatory-behaviour-on-the-rise-tips-to-protect-children/100854370)
- International Justice Mission. (2020). Online Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Philippines. https://ijmstoragelive.blob.core.windows.net/ijmna/documents/studies/Final-Public-Full-Report-5_20_2020_2021-02-05-055439.pdf
- Napier, S., Teunissen, C., & Boxall, H. (2021). How do child sexual abuse live streaming offenders access victims? Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice no. 642. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti78474>
- Doran, M. (2020). 256 Australians spend more than \$1.3 million watching child sexual abuse online. ABC News. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-19/australians-paying-to-watch-child-sex-abuse-online/11979844>
- Brown, R., Napier, S., & Smith, R. (2020). Australians who view live streaming of child sexual abuse: An analysis of financial transactions. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice no. 589. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti04336>
- Woolley, S. (2022). Australian Federal Police warn human trafficking will surge as international borders open. 7 News. <https://7news.com.au/news/australian-federal-police/australian-federal-police-warn-human-trafficking-will-surge-as-international-borders-open-c-5805223>