Prevalence, risk factors and internet use characteristics of online child sex offenders operating in the Australian, U.S, and U.K general population.

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Background to the study

- Recent shifts to a focus on a "public health" and preventative CSA response.

- Available data on CSA includes robust victimisation surveys but data on perpetrators is mostly limited to forensic or convenience samples.

- Lack of information for evidence-based policy and practice, or resolution of ongoing debates and controversies.
  - Attempts to build "typologies" of CSA offenders grounded in forensic experience but a poor match with victim report.
  - Financial institutions focused on detecting live-streaming and travelling sex offenders with limited "red flags" for other CSA types.
  - Increased interest in early intervention/secondary prevention but little data on the target population.

Prior research

- Wurtele et al. (2014) - 435 U.S. men and women - 9.8% of men reported some sexual interest in children or proclivity toward CSAM or contact offending.

- Seto et al. (2015) - 2003 survey of 1978 third year high school students in Sweden - 4.2% of young men had viewed CSAM.

- Dombert et al. (2016) - 8718 German men - 4.1% with a sexual interest in prepubescent children, 3.2% had engaged in a sexual offence against a child including 2.4% accessing CSAM.

- Joyal & Carpentier (2017) - 1040 Canadian men and women - 0.6% of men reported sexually abusing children and 1.1% expressed an interest in sex with children (telephone survey).

- O'Ciardha et al. (2022). - 997 men in six countries - 23.1% reported some sexual interest in children and 3.3% reported they had watched CSAM.

The current study

This project aims to conduct a rigorous analysis of the prevalence and attitudinal, behavioural and demographic correlates of child sexual abuse amongst men in Australia, United Kingdom and United States.

Three key aims:
1. Measure the prevalence of offending and risk behaviours and attitudes amongst men aged 18 and above;
2. Develop robust statistical profiles of undetected offenders and men at risk of offending; and
3. Identify key attitudes and technological practices that facilitate offending.

Methodology

- The research team used a variety of validated survey measures and developed their own measures, which have subsequently been validated, such as the Adapted Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Myth Scale that was drawn from Collings (1997).

- Survey questions were reviewed by the Project Advisory Group (which includes representatives from law enforcement, financial intelligence units, government departments and mental health support services).

- The survey received ethics approval (HC220317) from the University of New South Wales in September 2022.

Sampling

- Survey participants recruited via CloudResearch, an online survey recruitment platform with access to an international pool of over 1.5 million participants.

- Stratified random sampling was conducted to obtain a representative sample of 1500 Australian, US and UK adult men according to most recent census data.

- Iterative proportional fitting, or raking, was conducted to improve the representativeness of the sample by iteratively adjusting the weight of each participant until the sample distribution was concordant with the population distribution according to benchmark demographic characteristics (Speed, 2005).

- Weighted sample: 1945 Australian, 1473 US, 1506 UK = 4924 men

Key survey questions

- Demographics

- Online behaviours

- Health and wellbeing including ACEs

- Attitudes to children and TFCSE

- Pornography and CSAM use

- Sexual feelings towards children

- Online and offline sexual behaviours towards children

Attention and honesty checks used throughout the survey.

18 as the standard age of consent across countries and offences.

Men with sexual feelings towards children

Six survey items were used to determine if men had any sexual feelings towards people below the age of 18 years:

1. Has sexual feelings towards people below the age of 18 years

2. Would have sexual contact with a child between 12 to 14 years if no one would find out

3. Would have sexual contact with a child between 10 to 12 years if no one would find out

4. Would have sexual contact with a child younger than 10 years if no one would find out

5. Has concerns about sexual feelings towards people below the age of 18 years

6. The lowest age typically find attractive is under 18 years

# Men who have had sexually offended against children

Five survey items were used to determine if men had sexually offended against children:

1.   Knowingly and deliberately viewed pornographic material containing people below the age of 18

2.   Have flirted or had sexual conversations with a person below the age of 18 online

3.   Have webcammed in a sexual way with a person below the age of 18

4.   Have paid for online sexual interactions, images or videos involving a person below the age of 18

5.   Have had sex or sexual contact with a person below the age of 18 while over the age of 18

Comparison of sexual feelings and contact with children between weighted Australia, UK, and USA samples

	Australia (n = 1,939)	U.K (n = 1,506)	U.S (n = 1,473)
SEXUAL FEELINGS AND CONTACT			
Sexual feelings	294 (15.2%)[c]	194 (12.9%)[c]	290 (19.7%)[a,b]
Chi-Square test	x^2 (2) = 26.96, p < .001		
Sexual contact	183 (9.4%)[c]	152 (10.1%)[c]	205 (13.9%)[a,b]
Chi-Square test	x^2 (2) = 18.94, p < .001		
No sexual feelings and contact	1,558 (80.4%)[c]	1,245 (82.7%)[c]	1,114 (75.6%)[a,b]
Sexual feelings only	198 (10.2%)[b]	108 (7.2%)[a,c]	154 (10.5%)[b]
Sexual contact only	87 (4.5%)	67 (4.5%)	69 (4.7%)
Sexual feelings and contact	95 (4.9%)[c]	85 (5.6%)[c]	136 (9.2%)[a,b]
Chi-Square test	x^2 (6) = 42.57, p < .001		

[a] = significantly different from Australian sample at p <.05.
[b] = significantly different from U.K sample at p <.05.
[c] = significantly different from U.S sample at p <.05.

Percentage of men with sexual feelings and sexual offending in Aus, UK and USA

Australia ■ UK ■ USA
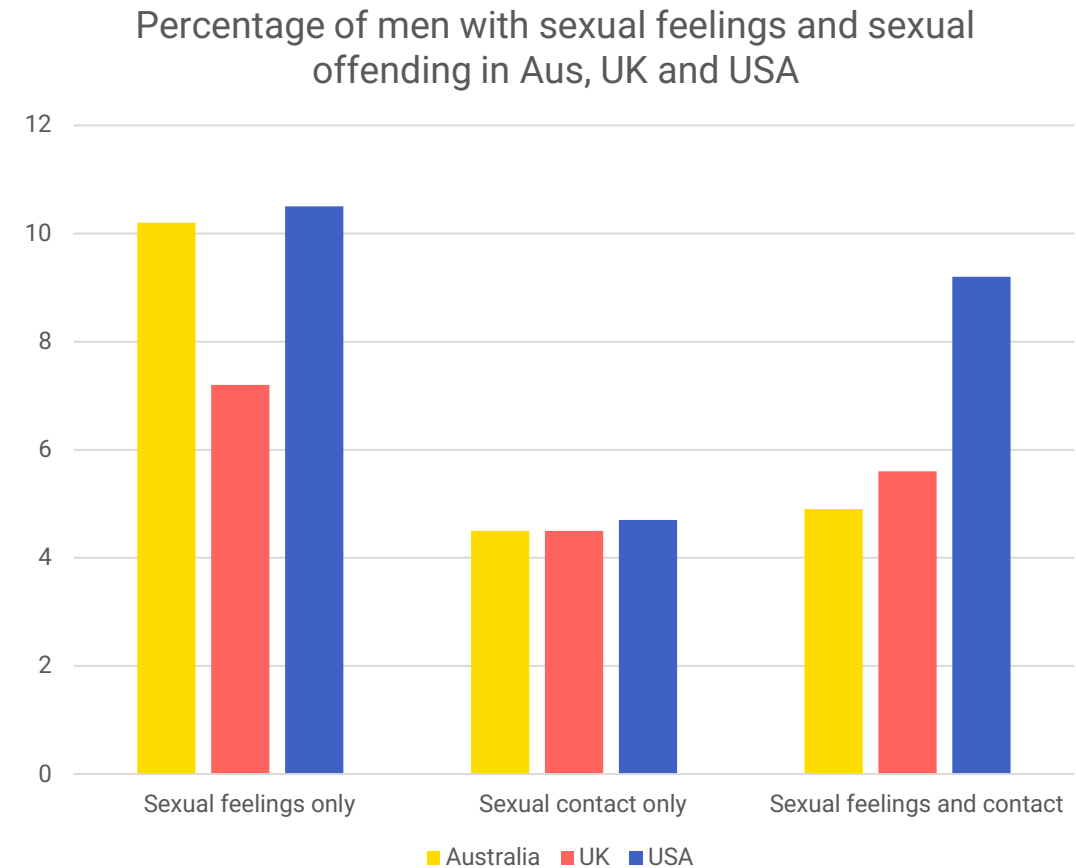
What accounts for these differences?

Significantly more U.S (13.9%) than Australian (9.4%) and U.K (10.1%) men had engaged in some form of child sex offending (x^2 = 18.94, p < .001).

Magnitude greatest for those who had:

- paid for online sexual interactions, images, or videos involving a child

- engaged in a sexually explicit webcam interaction with a child and

- deliberately watched pornographic material containing children.

Multivariate analysis found multiple factors explained the difference in prevalence of sexual offending against children between the US and the Oz/UK sample:

- Childhood sexual abuse and neglect

- Family incarceration, and

- More frequent internet use.

Comparison of adverse childhood experiences between weighted Australian, UK and USA samples
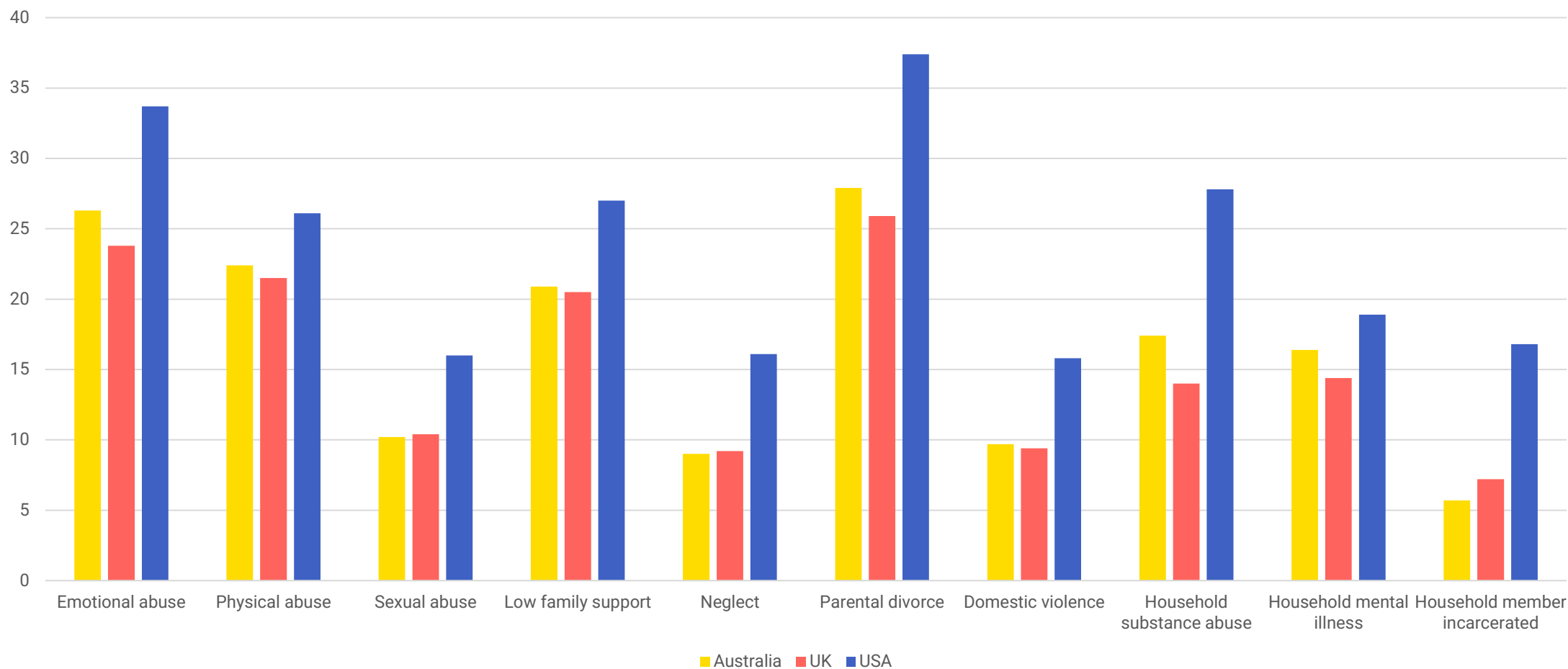
Comparison of pornography use during adulthood between
Aust, US and UK weighted samples
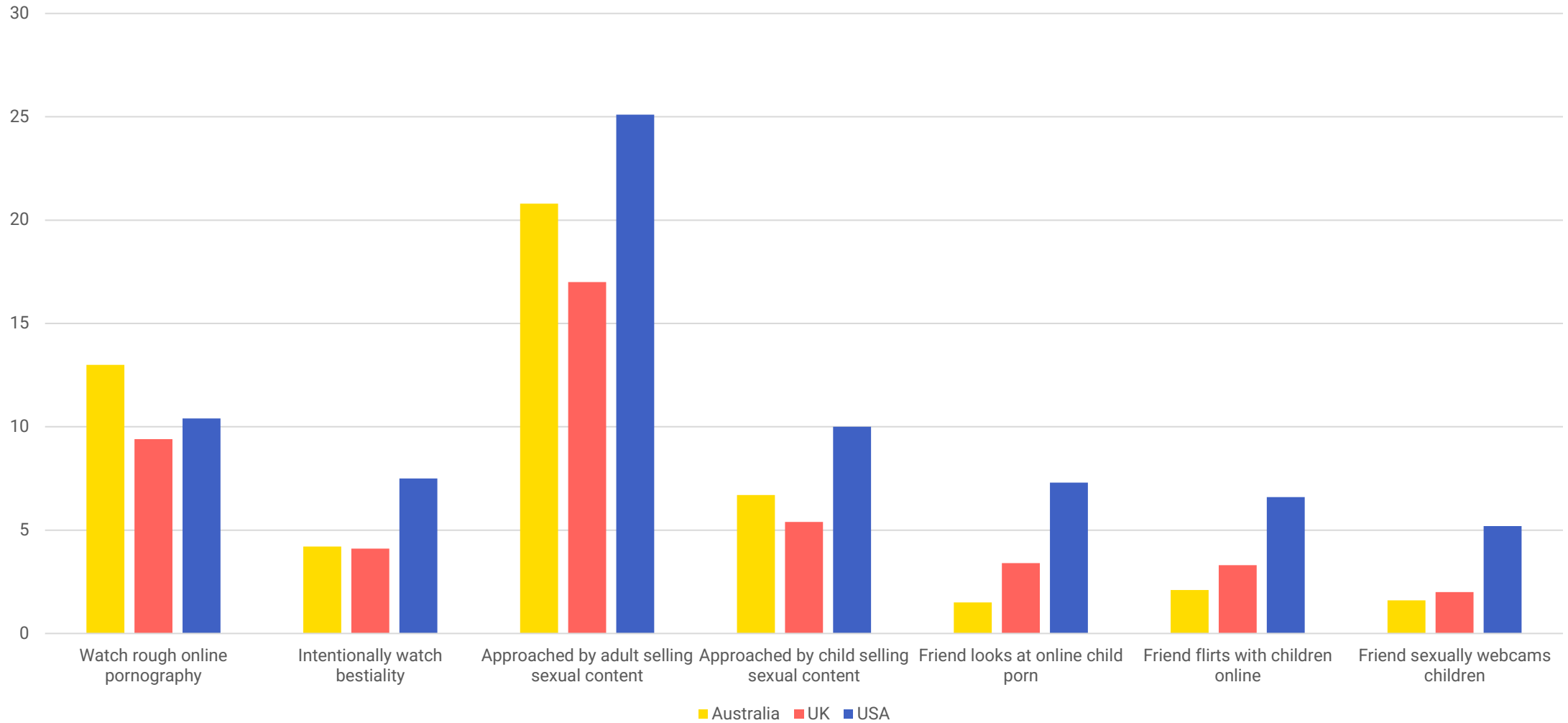
Comparison of attitudes in Australia, U.S, and U.K weighted samples

	Australia (n = 1,939)	U.K (n = 1,506)	U.S (n = 1,473)
Mean overall attitudes (sd)	2.15 (0.54)[c]	2.17 (0.58)[c]	2.28 (0.63)[a,b]
One-way ANOVA	$F_{(2, 3095.76)} = 20.19$, $p < .001$		
Mean denial of abusiveness (sd)	1.93 (0.70)[b,c]	2.00 (0.76)[a,c]	2.10 (0.89)[a,b]
One-way ANOVA	$F_{(2, 3054.13)} = 18.00$, $p < .001$		
Mean blame diffusion (sd)	2.08 (0.99)[b]	1.99 (0.87)[a]	2.04 (0.95)
One-way ANOVA	$F_{(2, 3204.80)} = 3.23$, $p = .04$		
Mean restrictive stereotypes (sd)	2.35 (0.85)[c]	2.40 (0.86)[c]	2.55 (0.93)[a,b]
One-way ANOVA	$F_{(2, 3127.86)} = 21.38$, $p = < .001$		

[a] = significant difference with Australian sample.
[b] = significant difference with U.K sample.
[c] = significant difference with U.S sample.

Associations between CSA and demographic characteristics across the sample

Both child sex offending and overall internet use frequency was crudely associated with:

- having had sex with men

- being employed

- having a bachelor's degree or higher

- at least one child in the household
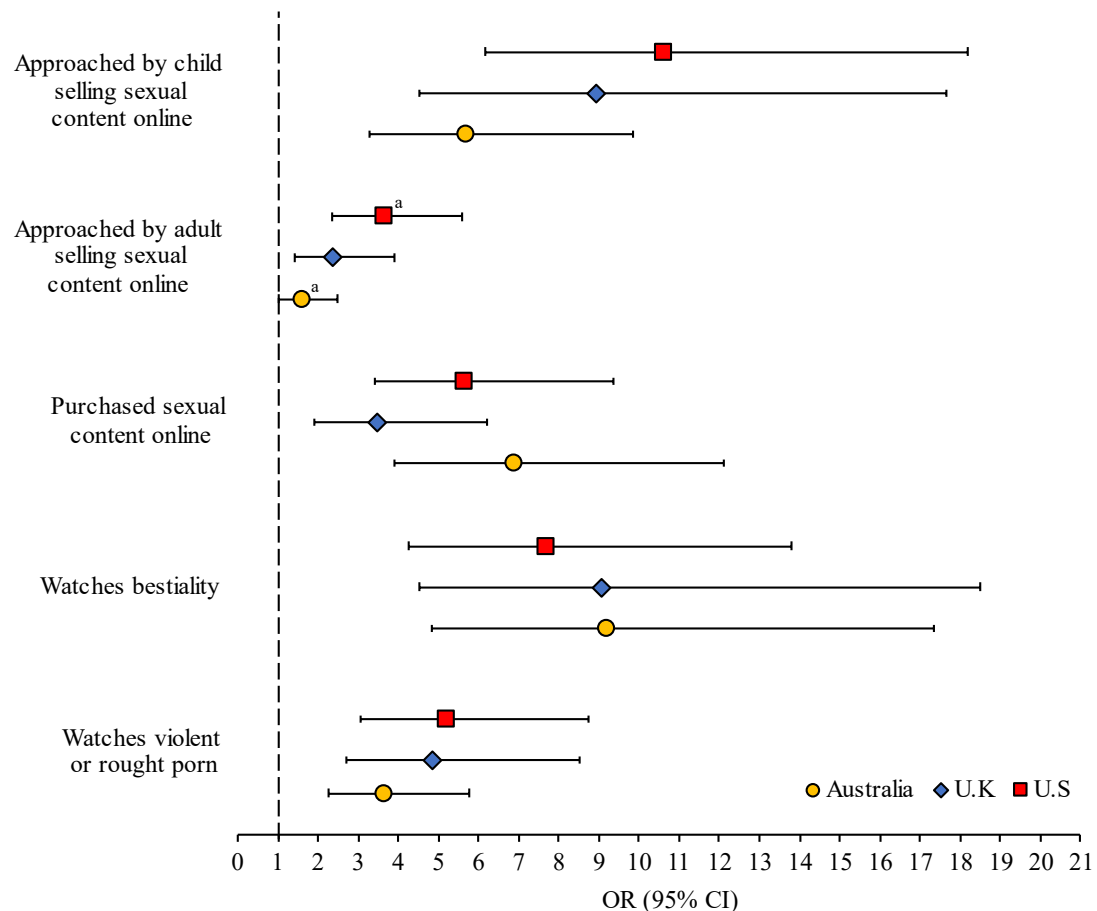
- working with children

- and residing in the city.

Figure 1. Adjusted association (OR [99% CI]) between online child sex offending and online pornography habits (same superscript indicates significant difference in effect size between countries).

Multivariable association between child sex offending and online pornography viewership,

Child sex offenders were:

- 5.69 to 10.60 times more likely to have been approached by children selling sexual content online

- 1.58 to 3.63 times more likely to have been approached by adults selling sexual content online

- 3.45 to 6.89 times more likely to have purchased sexual services online

- 7.66 to 9.17 times more likely to watch bestiality

- and 3.62 to 5.19 times more likely to watch violent or rough pornography

compared to non-offenders.

Figure 2. Adjusted association (OR [99% CI]) between online child sex offending and internet use frequency (same superscript indicates significant difference in effect size between countries).

Adjusted association between child sex offending and internet use frequency

Child sex offenders from Australia and the U.S, but not the U.K, were significantly more frequent in their engagement with:

- online pornography

- romance and dating websites

- livestreaming themselves

- and online shopping.

Offenders from the U.K were significantly less frequent regarding:

- online browsing

- sending emails

- using social media

- online banking

- online messaging.

Child sex offending was not significantly associated with the use of social media platforms in the U.K sample.
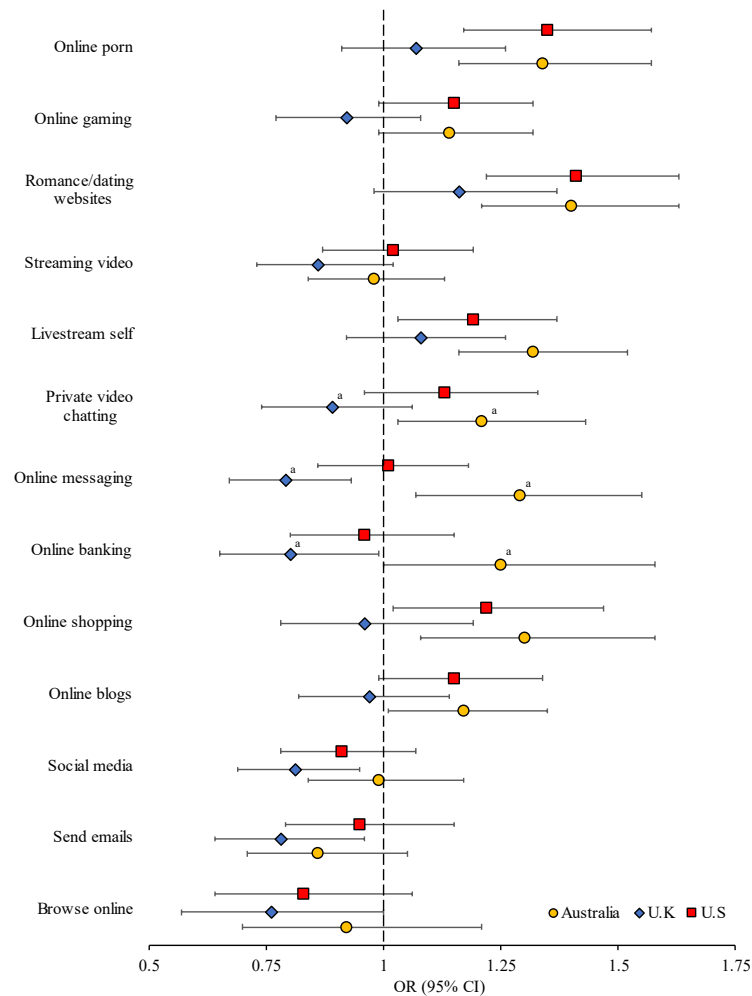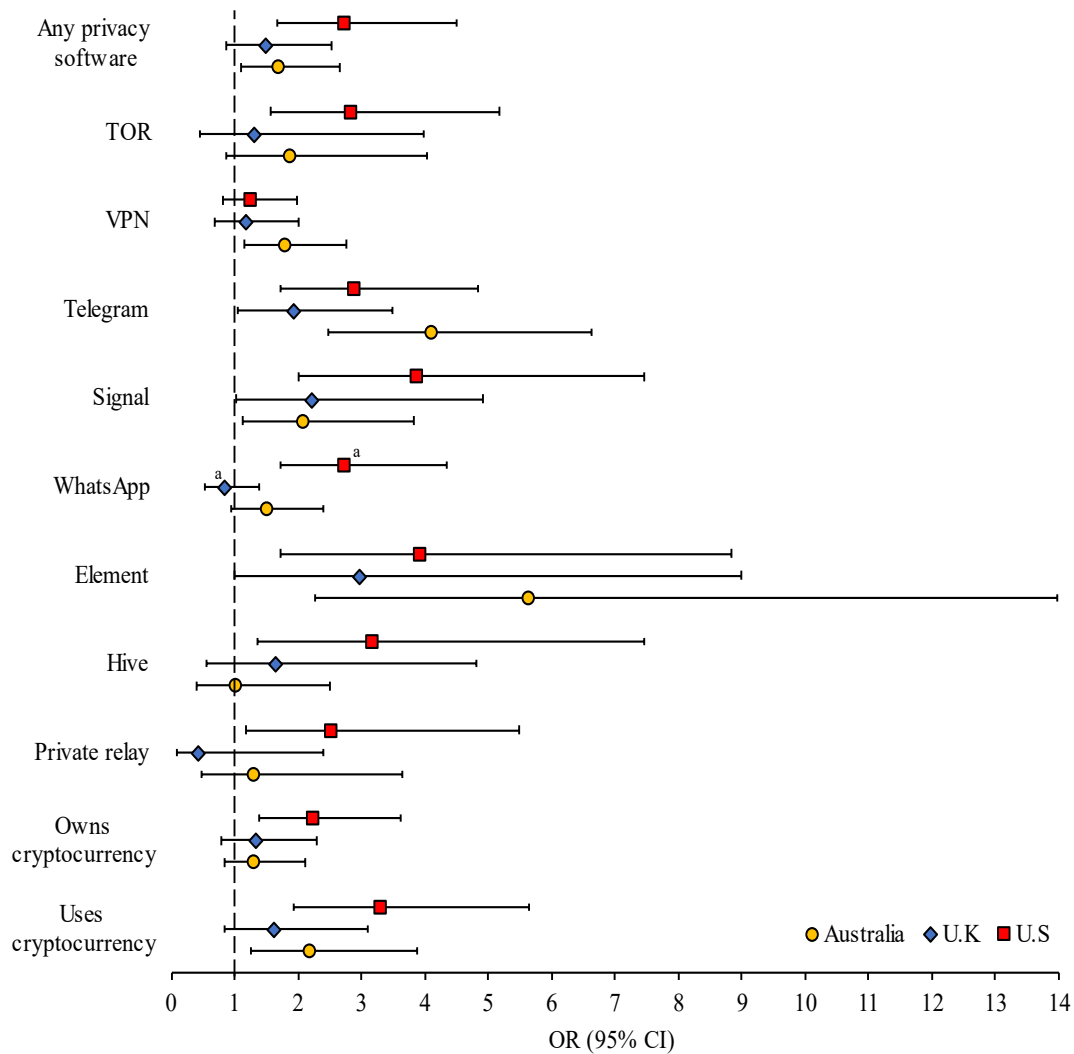
Figure 3. Adjusted association (OR [99% CI]) between online child sex offending and privacy software use (same superscript indicates significant difference in effect size between countries).

Association between child sex offending and the use of privacy software and cryptocurrencies

Across the three countries, child sex offenders were:

- 2.97 to 5.65 times more likely to use Element,

- 1.92 to 4.10 times more likely to use Telegram, and

- 2.08 to 3.88 times more likely to use Signal,

compared to non-offenders.

Offenders from both Australia and the U.S were significantly more likely to use any privacy software and cryptocurrencies for online purchases.

Key take aways

- Child sexual abuse varies by jurisdiction. It is preventable.

- Demographics of UK CSA offenders: urban, employed, working with children, have a child in the house.

- CSA offenders have broader sexual interests: more likely to have sex with men, watch bestiality, watch rough or violent pornography. Sexual dysregulation?

- UK CSA offenders are significantly less engaged online than offenders in the US and UK. Why?

- Offenders are much more likely to use encrypted services.

What does this mean?

- **Primary prevention**
  - ACEs
  - CSA attitudes
  - Encryption
  - Adult pornographic content
  - Online regulation

- **Secondary prevention**
  - Institutional CSA prevention
  - Early intervention for traumatized boys and men
  - Targeting boys/men with deviant porn consumption
  - Services for people concerned with sexual feelings/behaviour

- **Intervention/prosecution**
  - Expect that offenders are educated and of "good character"
  - Offenders are premeditated (ie use of encryption, working with children)
  - Offenders are networking with one another
  - Many offenders living with children
  - Financial footprint (purchasing sexual services, privacy services)
  - Treatment implications?