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Abstract | We analysed the chat logs of seven Australia-based men who had committed 145 child sexual abuse (CSA) live streaming offences, to examine the overlap between this offending, contact sexual offending and engagement with child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

Four CSA live streaming offenders attempted to travel to offend against victims in person, in that they discussed travelling or actually booked flights in order to meet these children. Offenders also requested or received images and videos of victims they had viewed over live stream, and recorded live streams to produce CSAM.

Travelling to offend against children, use of CSAM and CSA live streaming appear to be interrelated and should be considered by law enforcement as potential risk factors for one another. Further, detection and removal of new CSAM, and scanning of live streams for abusive content, should be a priority for all electronic service providers.

The overlap between child sexual abuse live streaming, contact abuse and other forms of child exploitation

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Warning: this paper contains graphic descriptions of child sexual abuse.

Background

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) refers to images and videos that depict the sexual abuse of a child. Popular video call platforms such as Facebook Messenger and Skype have been used by Australian men to view the live streamed sexual abuse of children in vulnerable countries (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a). Child sexual abuse (CSA) live streaming differs from CSAM offending and contact sexual abuse in that the offender is in a different location to the victim and requests specific acts to be performed by the child or perpetrated against the child by another individual facilitating the abuse (WeProtect Global Alliance (WPGA) 2021).

Law enforcement and non-government organisations have indicated that CSA live streaming is increasing (Interpol 2020; Netclean 2019; WPGA 2021) and is often facilitated by third-party traffickers (WPGA 2021). Offenders will often pay small sums of money (usually under A\$100, and as low as A\$13) to either the victim or facilitator for CSA live streaming (Brown, Napier & Smith 2020; Cubitt, Napier & Brown 2021; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a, 2021b). While these facilitators can be part of organised criminal groups, research has found that they are commonly adult female relatives of the victims, acting alone and seeking money for basic living necessities (International Justice Mission 2020a; Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b). While many countries are at high risk of CSA live streaming (Netclean 2019), South East Asia, in particular the Philippines, has emerged as an epicentre for this type of exploitation, particularly when being sourced by Australian offenders (AUSTRAC 2022).

According to law enforcement agencies internationally, offenders are also recording live streams to 'sextort' victims and to create and disseminate CSAM online (Australian Federal Police (AFP) 2021; Europol 2020). Europol and Interpol suggest that offenders use online child abuse and exploitation as an alternative to contact sexual offending when they are unable to meet victims face-to-face, which was exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic (Europol 2021; Interpol 2020). However, at the time of writing, only one empirical study could be located that examines the overlap between CSA live streaming and contact sexual offending (Cubitt, Napier & Brown 2022). Further, little information was available on how CSA live streaming interacts with CSAM offending.

CSA live streaming and contact sexual offending

Research, including meta-analyses and rapid evidence assessments, has found that a small minority of detected online sexual offenders will subsequently be detected for a contact sexual offence (1%–8%; Dowling et al. 2021; Seto & Eke 2015; Seto, Hanson & Babchishin 2011). However, this research did not focus on CSA live streaming offenders, and very little is known about whether individuals who view CSA live streaming also commit contact CSA offences in person. A study of 256 Australian CSA live streaming offenders found that only seven percent had a prior sexual offence against a child in their criminal history (Brown, Napier & Smith 2020). Further analysis identified a subgroup of CSA live streaming offenders who engaged in contact sexual offending and had characteristics unique to those who did not (Cubitt, Napier & Brown 2022). Important to note, however, is that criminal justice figures likely under-represent actual CSA offending. For example, Schuler et al. (2021) surveyed 4,161 respondents who accessed a web-based intervention app for individuals with a sexual interest in children and completed a 'self-assessment'. They found that 41.5 percent self-reported ever committing CSA, while only 9.4 percent had been prosecuted or sentenced. Further, given that CSA live streaming offenders target victims located in vulnerable countries for online abuse (Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021b), they may also target victims in vulnerable countries for contact CSA offending to avoid being detected. However, little research is available to verify this.

Travelling abroad to sexually abuse children is an ongoing problem, particularly in countries where children are vulnerable due to poverty, corruption, and limited community knowledge of offending (AUSTRAC 2022). A survey of 8,718 German men in the community found that 1.5 percent ($n=132$) admitted to sexually abusing a child in the past (Koops et al. 2017). Within this group, over a quarter (27%, $n=36$) reported travelling to a foreign country to pay a child for contact CSA. Intelligence-based information from law enforcement agencies suggests that individuals who view CSA live streaming may subsequently travel to sexually abuse the child/children they viewed virtually in person, or other children (AUSTRAC 2022).

International Justice Mission (2020a) released a report on the characteristics of online CSA offenders based on 44 case referrals of online sexual exploitation of children and young people (including CSA live streaming) where offender information was available. They found that Australia was the third most common nationality (18%) among these offenders, and that 39 percent of cases involved online sexual exploitation 'customers' (offenders) who were known to have travelled to the Philippines at some point in their lives. This suggests that some offenders who engage in CSA live streaming or other forms of online sexual exploitation of victims in vulnerable countries may be prone to visiting these countries.

CSA live streaming and CSAM offending

Very little is known about the role played by the viewing or sharing of CSAM in CSA live streaming offending. For example, individuals who view children being abused live online may also view abusive images and videos of children online, yet little information is available on whether this is the case or whether one behaviour precipitates or substitutes for the other. The Internet Watch Foundation (2018) analysed over 2,000 video captures from CSA live streaming sessions, which demonstrates that the live streams are sometimes recorded and distributed online. Insoll, Ovaska and Vaaranen-Valkonen (2021) found that 45 percent of 5,171 CSAM offenders surveyed anonymously on the darknet said they had viewed CSA live streaming.

Research is required to explore how CSA live streaming is intertwined with CSAM offending and contact CSA offending. It is important to gain insight into whether individuals who pay to watch children being abused live online are at risk of travelling to abuse children in vulnerable countries, and whether they also consume CSAM in the form of images and videos. Knowing this will assist in identifying important intervention points and indicators for this offending, to disrupt escalation.

The current paper forms part of a series of studies (see Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a, 2021b) examining the chat logs of Australian CSA live streaming offenders to better understand the nature of this crime type. This study investigated the links between CSA live streaming and other forms of CSA perpetrated by the offenders, including CSAM offending and contact sexual offending against children. The study aimed to answer three research questions:

- Do CSA live streaming offenders attempt to travel to offend against children face-to-face in vulnerable countries and what are the circumstances surrounding these attempts?
- Do offenders form relationships with victims and facilitators online and what part does this play in the offending?
- What part does engagement with CSAM play in CSA live streaming offending?

Methodology

Sample

This study was approved by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) Human Research Ethics Committee in 2020 as part of a series of studies. The AFP provided the AIC with chat logs from cases of seven Australian men aged 42 to 72 years (median=58 years) who had been investigated for attempting to view, pay for and often direct CSA live streaming of children overseas (predominantly in the Philippines) between March 2012 and April 2019. This was a purposive sample and was limited to cases that the AFP was currently or had finished investigating (see Napier, Teunissen & Boxall 2021a for more detail).

Analysis and key measures

Grounded theory and protocols (Charmaz & Belgrave 2012; Glaser 1978) were implemented due to the exploratory nature of this study. The themes identified were primarily led by the data rather than a prescribed set of pre-existing coding frameworks. Key information was extracted from the chat logs—for example, when offenders discussed intentions to travel to offend against victims, or when they negotiated with facilitators/victims over obtaining CSAM. For each case, discussion between an offender and victim or offender and facilitator about travel was coded as not present (0) or present (1). For example, an offender explicitly discussing travel plans including sharing flight details with victims or facilitators was coded as travel to offend=1, and when an offender did not mention travelling to offend in any capacity, this was coded as travel to offend=0. Attempts to access CSAM (images or videos of victims) were also coded as not present (0) or present (1).

Travel to offend attempts were defined as an expressed desire or intent either to travel to another location to sexually abuse a child, or to arrange for the victim to travel to the offender's location for sexual abuse. This included:

- the offender requesting of a victim or facilitator to meet a victim in person to have sexual contact with them, or agreeing to such a request, regardless of whether the meeting took place;
- the facilitator or victim agreeing to arrange in-person contact between offender and victim for sexual contact, regardless of whether the meeting took place;
- the offender booking travel (eg flights for himself or the victim) and/or successfully travelling to meet the victim in person with an expressed intent to have sexual contact with them, regardless of whether the sexual contact took place.

Firstly, the data were qualitatively analysed in NVivo 10 (Lumivero nd) by reading the data line-by-line and applying basic codes. Secondly, these data were analysed in greater detail to identify additional subcategories and themes. Finally, additional analysis and coding were performed to identify relationships between existing codes and to link them with theory (Thornberg & Charmaz 2013; Urquhart 2012). The authors discussed findings and agreed on the coding framework at each stage of analysis. Quantitative information was stored and analysed in Microsoft Excel and Stata MP14.

Key terms are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Key terminology used in the current study	
Victim	Child or young person (below the age of 18) who was abused or referenced/involved in negotiations for CSA live streaming. This would occur either as a result of the victim conversing directly with the offender or being 'offered' to the offender by a facilitator.
Chat log	Online discussions between an offender and a facilitator and/or victim.
Child sexual abuse material (CSAM)	Photos or videos of children (under 18) being sexually abused/exploited.
CSA live streaming offence	An attempt by an offender, either successful or unsuccessful, to watch a child being sexually abused via a live stream video platform.
Travel to offend	An expressed desire or intent either to travel to another location to sexually abuse a child, or to arrange for the victim to travel to the offender's location for sexual abuse.
Facilitator (also known as a trafficker)	A person who organises and coordinates the abuse of a child over live stream, and often collects the money from the offender.
Offender	An individual who attempts to view CSA live streaming.

Limitations

It is important to note that, while some attempts to travel to offend were clear and involved offenders catching flights and arranging accommodation, others likely did not evolve past discussion. We could not determine from the data whether some discussions of travel were motivated by fantasy, such as has been highlighted in research into the online sexual solicitation of children (Broome, Izura & Lorenzo-Dus 2018). Nevertheless, all discussions in the chat logs about travelling to offend were relevant to the research questions as they illustrate offenders' desires and thought processes relating to contact sexual offending and the willingness of facilitators and victims to grant in-person access to victims for sexual abuse.

It should be noted that the current study was based on a small sample of CSA live streaming offenders who may be at the severe end of the offending spectrum, which may be why they were detected by police. Therefore, observations about the number of CSA live streaming offenders who attempted to travel to offend against children in person or who engaged with CSAM cannot be applied to the general population of these offenders. Further, the sample was based on chat logs that were available to police. It is likely that many CSA live streaming offenders delete their chat logs to avoid detection, and the study could not capture those individuals. Despite these limitations, the study is valuable given the dearth of research into the characteristics of CSA live streaming offending and in particular its co-occurrence with other forms of child abuse and exploitation. Further, chat logs provide genuine insight into offending behaviour, given the individuals are not aware they are being observed, whereas survey research can suffer from biases (McGrath, Cann & Konopasky 1998; Tan & Grace 2008).

Results

Offenders paid to watch CSA live streaming involving 74 victims, predominantly in the Philippines; as outlined in Napier, Teunissen and Boxall (2021a), two offenders offended against the majority ($n=44$) of these victims. See Napier, Teunissen and Boxall (2021a, 2021b) for an in-depth overview of the characteristics of victims, offenders, facilitators and offences relating to the present sample, including how offenders accessed victims for CSA live streaming.

Travelling to offend

The study investigated whether CSA live streaming offenders attempted to travel to sexually offend against child victims in person. Four of the seven offenders attempted to travel to offend; one of these also attempted to arrange for a victim to travel to Australia. Available information indicates that these four offenders attempted to travel to offend against almost a third of their 62 victims ($n=20$, 32%). Travelling to offend against victims was discussed with five (29%) facilitators during online communications (Table 2).

Table 2 displays the variation between offenders in attempts to travel to offend. For example, in Case 1, the offender offended against 22 victims over live stream, and discussed travelling to offend with seven of these victims as well as one facilitator. The offender in Case 2 also offended against 22 victims (where relevant information was available) and discussed travelling to offend with two of his victims but no facilitators. Conversely, the offender in Case 7 discussed travelling to offend with most of his CSA live streaming victims (10/14) and all four facilitators. The offender in Case 4 discussed travelling to offend with one of his four victims.

Table 2: Victims and facilitators approached about travelling to offend (n)

Case	CSA live streaming victims	Victims with whom travelling to offend was discussed	Facilitators involved in CSA live streaming offences	Facilitators with whom travelling to offend was discussed
1	22	7	2	1
2	22	2	8	0
3 ^a	4	0	1	0
4	4	1	3	0
5 ^a	6	0	1	0
6 ^a	2	0	1	0
7	14	10	4	4
Total	74 (62 ^b)	20	20 (17 ^c)	5

a: The offenders in Cases 3, 5 and 6 did not appear to discuss traveling to offend with any of their victims ($n=12$)

b: The four offenders who attempted to travel to offend committed CSA live streaming offences against a total of 62 victims, although did not discuss travelling to offend with most of them

c: The four offenders who attempted to travel to offend engaged with a total of 17 facilitators, although did not discuss travelling to offend with most of them

Source: AIC CSA Live streaming dataset [computer file]

Sequence of CSA live streaming and attempts to travel

Of the four offenders who attempted to travel to offend, three (Cases 1, 2 & 7) made these attempts after viewing their victims in CSA live streaming sessions. In the fourth case, it was unclear whether attempts to travel to offend occurred before or after CSA live streaming.

Table 3 displays an excerpt of the 18-month-long conversation between an offender and victim. After viewing the victim in CSA live streaming sessions and in videos and images sent by the victim, the offender purchased flights to the Philippines and met the victim in person. However, it is not clear whether sexual abuse occurred, as the offender complained in a later message: ‘why are you always so hard on me for money, but not let me touch you when I was there, a good wife would be comfortable naked in the arms of her husband’. Please note that these chat logs are presented verbatim and are often graphic in nature.

Table 3: Case study of a 49-year-old offender discussing travelling to offend against a 16-year-old victim (Case 2)

Victim:	...while ur not here yet we just use a cam to cam ok?
Offender:	can I see you pls
Victim:	no cam here
Offender:	:’(...I miss your body I thought after you got money, I would see your sexy bits <3 Who i will sex with when I’m there You, [name] and [name] sister, but not your sister? I am scared to meet you, I still dont know much about you, /i’d like to talk to your family I’m spending 106,000 peso to come and see you... show me how much you love me... you only going online to ask for money is heart breaking...you dont care enough about ME. :(want to see more of you <3
Victim:	Hi my love i love you i miss you so much
Offender:	missing my love too, loving your little video’s so much too <3
<i>The conversation continues and the offender shares his flight details and arrival time.</i>	

Note: Some messages between the victim and offender were removed for brevity. Message content is presented verbatim
Source: AIC CSA Live streaming dataset [computer file]

Similarly, after viewing children in a CSA live streaming session, the offender in Case 7 continued to communicate with the facilitator and discuss travelling to offend against the same children in person (Table 4). It is not clear whether this was fantasy-driven or if the offender travelled and abuse occurred, but the facilitator agreed to arrange for an in-person meeting with the children.

Table 4: Case study of a 58-year-old offender discussing travelling to offend after viewing CSA live streaming (Case 7)

Offender:	can i ask you something.....??
Facilitator:	sure
Offender:	is [10-year-old girl] your daughter.....??
Facilitator:	yes
Offender:	thats good i like that we will be very close and the other girls [12-, 14- and 15-year-old girls]...they are your daughters too...???
Facilitator:	no nieces
Offender:	nice too.....i like that as well we will come to a nice agreement with their parents.....
Facilitator:	yes if u will meet in real not have problem
Offender:	yeahhh....thats right i pay them very well and i get there permission

Note: Some messages between the facilitator and offender were removed for brevity. Message content is presented verbatim

Source: AIC CSA Live streaming dataset [computer file]

Forming relationships when arranging CSA live streaming

While all offenders had transactional relationships with facilitators and victims, it was evident from their communications that some offenders perceived that they were in an intimate relationship with these individuals. The perceived relationships were usually characterised by financial support for victims and facilitators and by offenders' desire to have sexual contact with a child. As demonstrated earlier in Table 3, for example, both the offender and the victim used romantic language towards one another.

In another example, the offender used sexualised language with a 20-year-old female facilitator during communications ('when im there baby... we will have a very good time... I will take you shopping... your pussy will be mine... soon as im there I will look after you and the girls... and we will have fun together'; Case 7). Even when younger, pre-pubescent children were offered by facilitators or requested by offenders for CSA live streaming, the offenders would sometimes request to talk to these children over chat before or during the CSA live stream session.

Engagement with CSAM

Information from police briefs indicated that three of the offenders were found in possession of CSAM on their devices (Table 5). This information was not available for the remaining four cases. For offenders in Cases 1 and 3, this included large numbers of CSAM files (312 and 1,072 respectively) created during webcam sessions. This suggests that some CSA live streaming offenders generate their own CSAM through live streaming sessions.

Table 5: Material found on offenders' devices

Case	Material found on devices
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 587 CSAM files (567 images, 20 videos), including 312 files saved from webcam • 14,564 files containing legal material (14,548 images, 16 videos), including 4,251 files saved from webcam
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34 CSAM files (33 images, 1 video)
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,994 CSAM files, including 966 images and 106 videos saved from webcam

Source: AIC CSA Live streaming dataset [computer file]

It was common for offenders in the sample to request images and/or videos of the victims they viewed in the CSA live streaming sessions. Six of the seven offenders either requested or were offered (by facilitators or victims) images or videos of at least one of their victims. When examining this figure with the victims as the unit of analysis, of the 74 CSA live streaming victims in the study, 48 (65%) received requests for or offered images/videos of themselves. These were mostly sexual in nature (eg nude or erotic posing, or sexual abuse involving an adult), although occasionally the images were non-sexual. Of the facilitators for whom information was available, most (15/17) discussed distributing CSAM to offenders, either by offering it or receiving requests from offenders (see Table 6). While offenders did not always receive CSAM when they requested it, there was no information available on whether those who did distributed the material to others.

Table 6: Victims and facilitators who received requests for or offered CSAM (n)

Case	CSA live streaming victims	Victims who received requests for or offered CSAM	Facilitators involved in all CSA live streaming offences	Facilitators who received requests for or offered CSAM
1	22	11	2	2
2	22	17	8	7
3	4	4	1	1
4	4	0	3	0
5	6	5	1	1
6	2	2	1	1
7	14	9	4	3
Total	74	48	20	15

Source: AIC CSA Live streaming dataset [computer file]

Purchasing CSAM

Victims and facilitators always requested payment for photos/videos in addition to, or in place of, CSA live streaming. This included, for example, when victims or facilitators appeared to avoid or to be unable to provide CSA live streaming (see Table 7). Some offenders would initiate the purchase process for CSAM with facilitators: ‘...and send me some pics too baby... i send you 2000 [Philippine pesos] cause its your b/d’ (Case 7). In Case 7, a facilitator offered to sell the offender a video of a victim being sexually abused by a ‘foreigner’. The offender had already viewed this victim over live stream and responded that he would rather have sexual contact with the victim in person than buy the video. The offender in Case 2 paid to view CSAM of two victims who were sisters, aged 12 and 16, and eventually paid to watch CSA live stream sessions of these victims. The offender continued to request CSAM of the victims by communicating directly with the 16-year-old, who on one occasion said she could not because she was in a public place.

It is clear from these results that engagement with CSAM is a prominent part of the CSA live streaming offence process, although there was no clear pattern showing that one always preceded the other.

Table 7: Case study of 17-year-old CSA live streaming victim offering CSAM to a 42-year-old offender (Case 1)

Victim:	You want some fun? ...Hehe u want to see my naked pics? Lol
Offender:	so you offering a show also naked pics?
Victim:	20pics for 3000peso, deal?
Offender:	i never bought pics b4, i used to pay 4 shows how many naked pics you got in total?
Victim:	Ammm, 80pics lol
<i>The offender requests a CSA live stream show, but the victim declines due to having no laptop. The offender then agrees to purchase CSAM and sends money via Western Union.</i>	

Note: Some messages between victim and offender were removed. Message content is presented verbatim

Source: AIC CSA Live streaming dataset [computer file]

Discussion

This study investigated whether CSA live streaming offenders travel to offend against children in person, and how their offending relates to engagement with CSAM and the relationships they form with victims and facilitators. This analysis of offender chat logs is the third in a series of papers on CSA live streaming (see Napier, Boxall & Teunissen 2021a, 2021b). It is one of the first to demonstrate that live streaming of CSA can co-occur with CSAM engagement and travelling overseas to offend against live streaming victims in person.

CSA live streaming and CSAM engagement

The study explored what part engagement with CSAM and forming relationships with victims and facilitators may play in CSA live streaming offending. Australia-based offenders who paid to watch CSA live streaming commonly received CSAM from facilitators and victims in the Philippines. Six of the seven offenders requested or accepted offers of CSAM that depicted the victims they had viewed in CSA live streaming sessions. These images and videos were usually but not always sexual in nature. When CSAM was received by offenders, it was almost always in exchange for money. This differs from the uploading of CSAM online typically observed by not-for-profit agencies, who find it is mostly non-commercial in nature (Internet Watch Foundation 2021, 2018). The willingness of offenders to pay for CSAM in this context may be driven by their sexual interest in specific victims, which developed through their engagement with these victims or facilitators in online chat and through viewing live abuse of the victims. Offenders sometimes perceived that they were in intimate relationships with victims or facilitators. Although engagement with CSAM appeared to be an important part of CSA live streaming offending, there was no clear pattern showing escalation from one behaviour to another. Some offenders would receive CSAM before viewing CSA live streaming, while others would receive it afterwards or in place of it.

Additional information from police briefs was available for three of the seven offenders. These offenders were found with CSAM on their devices, which included images and videos saved from webcam sessions.

CSA live streaming and travelling to offend

The study also investigated whether CSA live streaming offenders attempt to travel to offend against children in person. Four of the seven offenders in the study attempted (successfully or unsuccessfully) to travel to sexually abuse victims in person. This occurred for almost a third ($n=20$) of the 64 CSA live streaming victims for whom this information was available. Further, of the four offenders who attempted to travel to offend, three did so after viewing their victims in CSA live streaming sessions. In the context of this qualitative study, CSA live streaming, travelling to offend attempts, and engagement with CSAM appear to be interrelated.

Some discussions about travelling to offend observed in the chat logs were vague. Research has found that online sexual offenders may vaguely discuss travel with victims (such as talking about or arranging face-to-face meetings) as part of their offending fantasy (for a review, see Broome, Izura & Lorenzo-Dus 2018) or as part of their sexual solicitation of children (Seto et al. 2012), even if these physical meetings never eventuate. However, other discussions about travel in the present study were more substantive and involved purchasing of flights or passports, and these occurred after the offender had viewed the victim in CSAM and/or CSA live streaming sessions. This clearly illustrates that these offenders' discussions about travel were not solely fantasy and that some CSA live streaming offenders do travel to sexually abuse children in person.

Research has found that most contact child sexual offending is perpetrated by a family member or someone else known to the victim (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016; Canadian Centre for Child Protection 2017) and that most individuals detected for CSAM offences will not progress to contact offending (Dowling et al. 2021). However, viewing CSA live streaming is different to viewing CSAM. Wortley and Smallbone (2012) suggest that individuals who sexually offend against a child must first cross a psychological threshold. Arguably, CSA live streaming offenders have already done this, by directing and watching the live sexual abuse of a child online—which is on par with abusing the children themselves. This may partly explain why some CSA live streaming offenders in the current study attempted to travel to offend against children in person.

The present study was qualitative in nature and did not compare CSA live streaming offenders with CSAM-only offenders. However, based on knowledge from previous research on CSAM offenders (Henshaw et al. 2020; Knack, Holmes & Fedoroff 2020), we argue that two key factors differentiate CSA live streaming offenders from CSAM-only offenders and increase their risk of contact offending:

- offenders form relationships with the facilitators and victims they view over live stream, which provides greater access to the victims and for some leads to a desire to sexually abuse these children in person; and
- the victims and facilitators with whom offenders are communicating are vulnerable and likely to comply with the offenders' requests to arrange contact sexual offending in exchange for money.

For these reasons, CSA live streaming offenders are at risk of traveling to vulnerable countries to sexually offend against the children they view over live stream, or other children whom they are provided access to. This study showed that at least some offenders will attempt to do this. A previous study examining the financial transactions and criminal histories of 209 Australia-based CSA live streaming offenders found that a subgroup of these individuals also engaged in contact sexual offending (Cubitt, Napier & Brown 2022). The authors found that these offenders tended to display more compulsive and persistent behaviour in their CSA live streaming offending than the non-contact sexual offenders in the sample. Further empirical research is required to determine whether some CSA live streaming offenders are more likely than others to travel to offend against children, and which other characteristics increase this likelihood.

Implications for law enforcement and the tech sector

The findings relating to the overlap between CSA live streaming, CSAM engagement and travelling to offend have implications for law enforcement investigations. Travel restrictions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic may have prevented travel for many CSA live streaming offenders and other child exploitation offenders (Europol 2021, 2020). However, with many borders having reopened, persons identified as making transactions for CSA live streaming should also be investigated for travelling to vulnerable countries to offend against children. Further, travel to vulnerable countries and possession of CSAM may be additional behavioural indicators of engagement in CSA live streaming, which could be used when profiling individuals at the border. These factors could be combined with other established tech and financial sector indicators such as chat log keywords (International Justice Mission 2020b) and transaction information/patterns (AUSTRAC 2022) to assist in the detection of CSA live streaming offending.

The findings also have implications for the tech sector. Offenders producing CSAM by recording CSA live streaming may increase the volume of new and unique CSAM on the internet, if they then distribute this material (Internet Watch Foundation 2018). This presents challenges for law enforcement and electronic service providers (eg Meta, Snap Inc), because most existing tools rely on matching images and videos with databases containing known CSAM (Langston 2018; Teunissen & Napier 2022). This emphasises the need to develop technology that can detect whether an image or video is CSAM (eg scanning for content that shows nudity and children in the same image/video), in addition to indicating whether it matches a previously identified CSAM file. While some companies such as Meta and Google claim to use technology that identifies new CSAM (Jasper 2022; Teunissen & Napier 2022) there is little information on how the technology works or its effectiveness. Similarly, a 2022 study found there was little public information available stating whether major electronic service providers use technology that specifically tackles CSA live streaming (Teunissen & Napier 2022). Detection and removal of new CSAM, and scanning of live streams for abusive content, should be a priority for all electronic service providers.

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