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**Abstract |** Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) is the threatened or actual capturing or sharing of an intimate image of a person without their consent. This bulletin describes the findings of an analysis of 771 individuals proceeded against by police for IBSA offences in four jurisdictions in 2022–23.

Most alleged offenders were males perpetrating IBSA against females, and offenders were most commonly aged 25–34 years. The analysis also identified differences between IBSA subtypes. Alleged offenders were most likely to have distribution offences, and many also had other non-IBSA offences. The bulletin discusses implications for prevention and detection of IBSA offending.

## Characteristics of image-based sexual abuse recorded by police

Tom Sullivan and Merran McAlister

Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) is the threatened or actual taking or sharing of an intimate image of another person without their consent. It includes the taking or sharing of nude or sexual photographs, videos or other images. Empirical research suggests IBSA may be increasing in Australia (Powell et al. 2020) and can lead to all-encompassing, ongoing and often devastating harms for victims (McGlynn et al. 2021).

IBSA covers a range of behaviours that are typically categorised as the capture, distribution, or threatened capture or distribution of nude or sexual images. Capture refers to the taking or creation of nude or sexual images of another person without their consent. This form of IBSA includes 'deepfake pornography' and digitally altered imagery (Flynn et al. 2022), and the use of an electronic device to covertly take photographs or videos of an individual's genital or anal region or cleavage or breasts, known as 'upskirting' and 'downblousing' (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020; Thompson 2019). Distribution is the non-consensual sharing or sending of a nude or sexual image of another person.

This behaviour is sometimes described as 'revenge porn', although this term is controversial and can be misleading, as perpetrators may share or threaten to share images for reasons other than revenge (eSafety Commissioner 2025). The final type of IBSA is the threatened capture or distribution of a nude or sexual image. For example, perpetrators of sexual extortion (or 'sextortion') threaten to distribute sexual material of a victim unless they comply with demands, such as for money, further intimate materials or sexual contact with the victim (Wolbers et al. 2025a, 2025b). The limited amount of research on IBSA perpetrators has focused mostly on the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, while very little research has examined other forms of IBSA (Henry & Beard 2024).

Each Australian state and territory has legislation that criminalises some or all types of IBSA (Dowling et al. 2024). However, criminal proceedings against IBSA offenders depend on incidents being recorded by police, and research suggests only a portion of IBSA victimisation is reported to police (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). One national survey found 24 percent of respondents had taken some form of action in response to their most recent experience of IBSA victimisation, including reporting the incident (eSafety Commissioner 2017). Although the level of reporting of IBSA was relatively low, 71 percent of respondents who knew where to go for information, help or support reported that they would go to police (eSafety Commissioner 2017).

Research on the policing of IBSA has examined victims' experiences of reporting IBSA, police understanding of IBSA, and law enforcement responses (Bond & Tyrrell 2018; Flynn, Powell & Hindes 2023; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2018). Fewer studies have examined police-recorded data on IBSA offending. Police-recorded crime data can provide information relevant to the detection and prevention of IBSA, potentially capturing a segment of IBSA offending where victims experience more severe harms and are more likely to go through the criminal justice process (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020).

One source of police data on IBSA is the Australian Institute of Criminology's Australian Sexual Offence Statistical (ASOS) collection. The Australian Institute of Criminology established the ASOS collection in 2022 to bring together data on alleged sexual offenders, their offences and their victims (Sullivan, McAlister & Bricknell 2025). The collection covers a large range of sexual offences against victims of any age and categorises offence data using a comprehensive national review of child sexual abuse and sexual assault legislation (Dowling et al. 2024).

This study examines police-recorded IBSA data from the ASOS collection, defining IBSA as 'the taking and/or distribution of an intimate image without the consent of the person depicted or the threatened taking and distribution of such an image' (Dowling et al. 2024: 67). The bulletin begins by examining the characteristics of alleged IBSA offenders and their victims and then explores the characteristics and patterns of offending of people proceeded against for IBSA. This approach responds to a need for a greater focus on specific types of IBSA (Henry & Beard 2024).

## Methodology

The study uses data from four of the six states and territories that contributed data to the ASOS collection in 2022–23 (New South Wales, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory). These four jurisdictions were included as their data distinguished between different types of IBSA offences. We analysed individuals who police had proceeded against for an IBSA offence on the first or only time the police took action against them in 2022–23 (an index offence). Police may have proceeded against the alleged perpetrator only for IBSA offence/s or for IBSA and other offences. The IBSA offence was not necessarily their only or most serious offence.

The data collected by the ASOS program and analysed in this study included demographic information about the alleged offenders and victims, and information about the offences. Offender age is defined as their age at the time they were proceeded against for their index offence, unless stated otherwise, and the age of the victim is their age at the time of the offence. In most Australian states and territories, the law relating to taking, keeping, sending or requesting sexual or intimate images of a young person pertains to people aged under 16 or 17 years (Dowling et al. 2024). This study analyses offenders and victims aged under 16 years, and those aged 16 years and over separately. We analysed offenders and victims aged 16 years and over separately to align this research with selected studies of IBSA involving perpetrators and/or victims aged 16 years and over (Courtice et al. 2021; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019; Karasavva & Forth 2022; Powell et al. 2024). We collected information about alleged offenders' other (non-IBSA) offences to better understand the perpetrators' patterns of offending. Non-IBSA offences were categorised using the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011) as the data were collected before the classification's 2023 update.

The term 'proceeded against' refers to police initiating legal action against an alleged offender for an offence or offences. Relationship with primary victim is the alleged offender's relationship to the victim, if only one victim was involved in the IBSA offending, or the closest relationship to a victim if more than one was involved. The closest relationship is intimate partner (including former intimate partners), followed by non-intimate partner family member, non-family member known to victim, and stranger. The number of offenders or victims with missing data for specific characteristics are noted where relevant.

Police proceeded against offenders for 1,856 IBSA offences and 815 IBSA incidents (ie one or more IBSA offences involving the same alleged offender or offenders with the same date of police proceeding and occurring at the same location type). Overall, 771 individuals were proceeded against by police in 2022–23 for one or more IBSA offences.

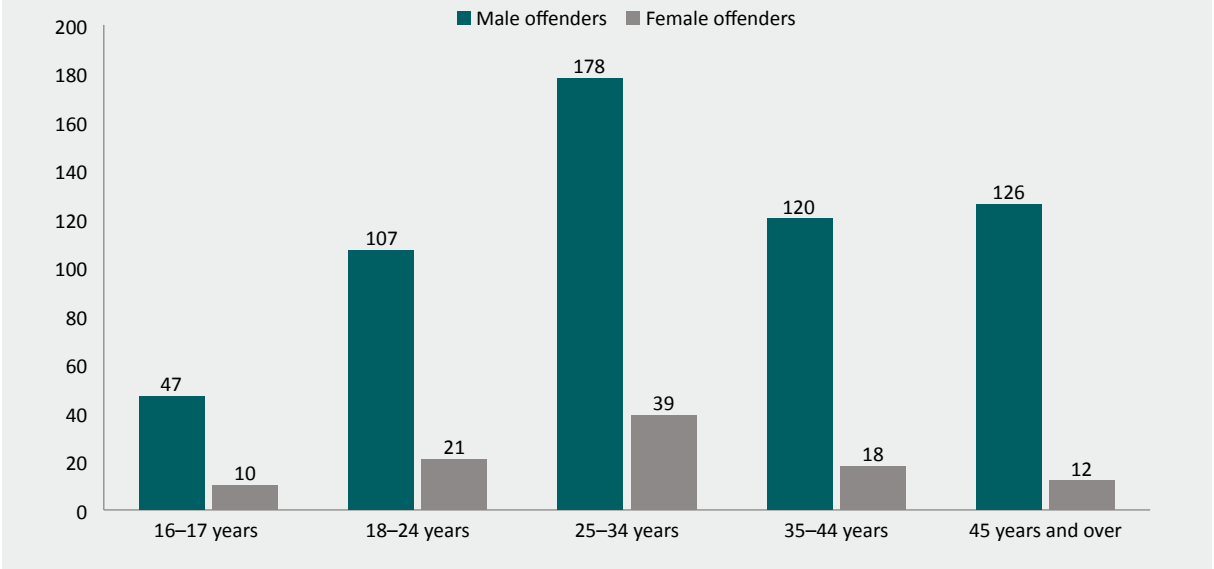
One limitation of this analysis is that offenders proceeded against by police are likely to represent only a portion of IBSA offending in Australia (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). Police data cover offences that have come to the attention of police, and under-reporting has been identified as a barrier to responding to IBSA (Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019). A further limitation is that this study analysed data from only four states and territories. Additionally, some variables, such as victim-offender relationship, had a relatively high proportion of not stated or unknown responses, and the findings may have been different if this information was available. Another limitation is that differences in police recording practices, legislation and policies may have affected the comparability of data from different jurisdictions. Although a recent review found overall consistency across Australian jurisdictions in provisions criminalising IBSA and other selected sexual offences, some differences in definitions still exist (Dowling et al. 2024).

# Results

## Offender characteristics

Eighty-eight percent (*n*=679) of alleged offenders proceeded against for one or more IBSA offences in 2022–23 were 16 years and over and 11 percent (*n*=86) were aged 10–15 years. Of the offenders aged 16 years and over, 85 percent were male (*n*=578) and 15 percent (*n*=100) were female. The most common age group for male and female offenders was 25–34 years (males: 31%, *n*=178; females: 39%, *n*=39; see Figure 1). However, male offenders were slightly older than female offenders (median=32.0 years vs median=29.6 years). Six percent (*n*=44) of alleged offenders were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and 87 percent (*n*=588) were non-Indigenous.

**Figure 1: Sex and age group of alleged IBSA offenders aged 16 years and over, 2022–23 (*n*)**




Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

The difference between male and female offenders aged 10–15 years was less pronounced than for male and female offenders aged 16 years and over. Of the 86 offenders aged 10–15 years, over half (55%, *n*=47) were boys—equating to seven percent of all male offenders with an IBSA offence. A smaller number of females aged 10–15 years were proceeded against for an IBSA offence (*n*=38) but they comprised a larger proportion of all female offenders with an IBSA offence (27%) compared with males.

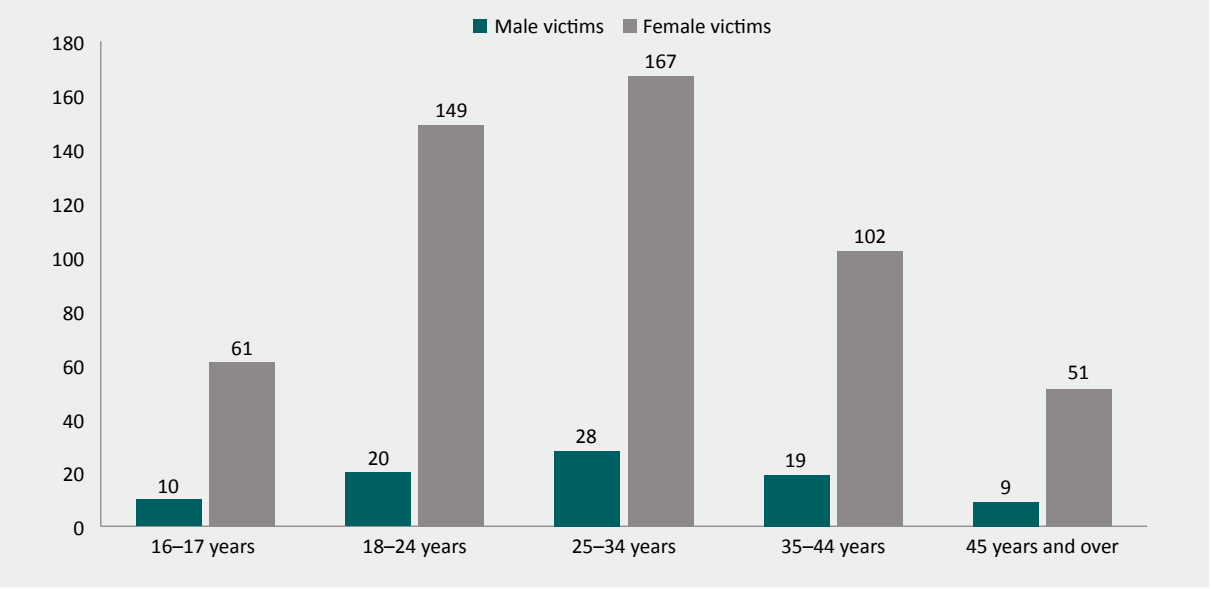
Nine in 10 offenders aged 16 years and over were charged, arrested or summonsed for IBSA offending (93%, *n*=634), with a slightly higher proportion of males than females charged, arrested or summonsed (94%, *n*=542 vs 91%, *n*=91). In contrast, most individuals aged 10–15 years were proceeded against with other actions such as a formal caution, conference or penalty notice (87%, *n*=75). This may reflect legislation in Australian jurisdictions emphasising the diversion of juveniles from the criminal justice system, with juveniles often being issued warnings, police cautions and youth justice conferences rather than being sent directly to court (Richards 2011).

## Victim characteristics

Data on victim characteristics were available for New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory. Alleged IBSA offenders were proceeded against for offences involving a total of 770 identified victims in 2022–23. Eighty percent (*n*=616) of victims were aged 16 years and over and almost one-fifth of victims were aged 15 years and under (17%, *n*=128).

Most victims aged 16 years and over were female (86%, *n*=530) but 14 percent (*n*=86) were male. The average age of victims was 29.7 years (median=28.0 years), with one-third aged 25–34 years (32%, *n*=195) and one-quarter aged 18–24 years (27%, *n*=169). Female and male victims were most commonly aged 25–34 years (females: 32%, *n*=167; males: 33%, *n*=28; see Figure 2). Three percent (*n*=20) of victims were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and 91 percent (*n*=562) were non-Indigenous.

**Figure 2: Sex and age group of IBSA victims aged 16 years and over, 2022–23 (*n*)**

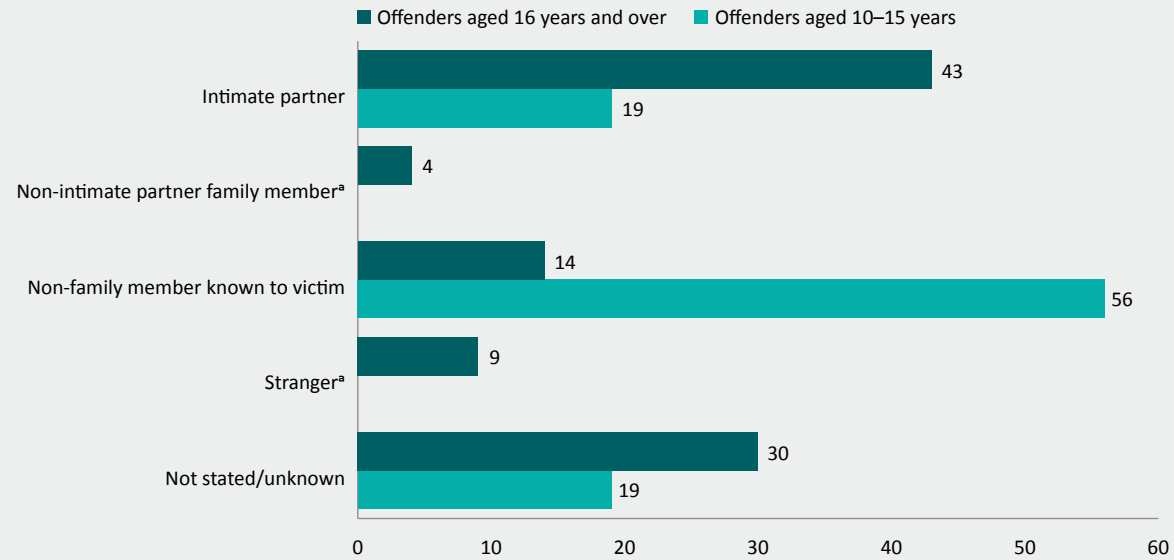



Note: Excludes ACT
Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

Of the 128 victims aged 15 years and under, three-quarters (75%, *n*=96) were female and one-quarter (25%, *n*=32) were male. While girls 15 years and under made up 15 percent of all female victims, boys 15 years and under comprised a larger proportion of all male victims (26%).

Information about offenders' relationship with their only or primary victims was available for 627 offenders aged 16 years and over and 86 offenders aged 10–15 years in New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory. Relationships were unknown or not stated for 30 percent (*n*=187) of these offenders aged 16 years and over and 19 percent (*n*=16) of those aged 10–15 years. Offenders aged 16 years and over were most commonly a current or former intimate partner of their victim (43% *n*=268; see Figure 3). For those aged 10–15 years, the most common relationship type was a non-family member known to the victim (56%, *n*=48).

**Figure 3: Alleged IBSA offenders by age group and relationship with primary victim, 2022–23 (%)**




a: Data on offenders aged 10–15 years whose victims were non-intimate partner family members or strangers are not presented due to confidentialisation

Note: The relationship data in this figure pertain to an individual's relationship with their only or primary victim for either the first or only IBSA offence in 2022–23. This first or only police proceeding may have involved one or more offences and one or more victims. Excludes ACT as data did not allow direct linking of offender relationship to victim with other offender information. Excludes offenders for whom police did not provide victim information. Some IBSA offending, particularly offences carried out by children and young offenders, involves comparatively minor behaviour (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). Caution should be used when comparing individuals in young age groups with other offenders

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]; see Table A1

## Offender–victim dyads

For IBSA data from New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory, we also examined offender–victim pairs (or dyads) to explore which combinations of IBSA offenders and victims were most common, based on their sex and age group.

### *Sex*

Most offender–victim dyads with offenders aged 16 years and over involved a male offending against a female (76%, *n*=555; see Table 1). Males offending against males (9%, *n*=65) and females against females (8%, *n*=61) were less common but equally as likely as each other. A smaller proportion of dyads involved females offending against males (6%, *n*=44). Two in five (40%, *n*=37) offender–victim dyads with a 10–15-year-old offender comprised a male offender and female victim, 28 percent (*n*=26) comprised a female offender and female victim, 16 percent (*n*=15) comprised a male offender and male victim and 15 percent (*n*=14) comprised a female offender and male victim.

| Table 1: Offender–victim dyads by offender's age group, offender sex and victim sex, 2022–23 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male victim | | Female victim | | Total dyads[a] | |
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| **Offender aged 10–15 years** | | | | | | |
| Male offender | 15 | 16.1 | 37 | 39.8 | 52 | 55.9 |
| Female offender | 14 | 15.1 | 26 | 28.0 | 40 | 43.0 |
| **Dyads with offenders aged 10–15-years[b]** | **30** | | **63** | | **93** | **100.0** |
| **Offender aged 16 years and over** | | | | | | |
| Male offender | 65 | 8.9 | 555 | 76.2 | 622 | 85.4 |
| Female offender | 44 | 6.0 | 61 | 8.4 | 105 | 14.4 |
| **Dyads with offenders aged 16 years and over[b]** | **109** | | **617** | | **728** | **100.0** |

a: Includes dyads where the victim's sex was unknown or not stated

b: Includes dyads where the offender's sex was unknown or not stated

Note: Some IBSA offending, particularly offences carried out by children and young offenders, involves comparatively minor behaviour (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). Caution should be used when comparing individuals in young age groups with other offenders

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

## *Age group*

To derive dyads based on age group, the offender's age at the time of their index IBSA offence was used, consistent with the victim's age being calculated at the time of the offence. The results showed that offenders were proceeded against for IBSA offences involving victims across a range of age groups (see Table 2). Seventy-five percent of offender–victim dyads (*n*=620) involved offenders and victims aged 16 years and over, seven percent (*n*=58) involved offenders aged 16 years and over and victims aged 15 years and under, and 11 percent (*n*=89) involved 10–15-year-old offenders and victims aged 15 years and under. In 37 percent of all offender–victim dyads with offenders and victims aged 16 years and over, the offenders and victims were in the same age group (*n*=303). Offender–victim dyads with female offenders aged 16 years and over were as likely (36%, *n*=53) as those with male offenders aged 16 years and over (37%, *n*=249) to comprise offenders and victims in the same age group.

Most dyads with offenders aged 10–15 years involved victims aged 15 years and under (82%, *n*=89). Among dyads with offenders aged 10–15 years, 86 percent of those with male offenders involved victims aged 15 years and under (*n*=55), compared with 75 percent of those with female offenders (*n*=33). Conversely, 20 percent of dyads in which the offender was a girl aged 10–15 years involved a victim aged 16 years or over (*n*=9), twice the proportion of dyads where the offender was a boy aged 10–15 years (9%, *n*=6). Most of these victims were 16 or 17 years old.

**Table 2: Offender–victim dyads by offender age and victim age, 2022–23**

| | Victim age (years) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 0–15 | | 16–17 | | 18–24 | | 25–34 | | 35–44 | | 45+ | | Total[a] | |
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| **Offender age (years)[b]** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10–15 | 89 | 10.8 | 11 | 1.3 | na | na | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | na | na | 109 | 13.2 |
| 16–17 | na | na | 26 | 3.2 | na | na | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 56 | 6.8 |
| 18–24 | na | na | 24 | 2.9 | 74 | 9.0 | 27 | 3.3 | na | na | na | na | 141 | 17.1 |
| 25–34 | 18 | 2.2 | 6 | 0.7 | 61 | 7.4 | 109 | 13.2 | na | na | na | na | 233 | 28.2 |
| 35–44 | 11 | 1.3 | na | na | 12 | 1.5 | 43 | 5.2 | 56 | 6.8 | na | na | 142 | 17.2 |
| 45+ | na | na | na | na | 16 | 1.9 | 20 | 2.4 | 43 | 5.2 | 38 | 4.6 | 140 | 17.0 |
| **Total[c]** | **149** | **18.0** | **78** | **9.4** | **174** | **21.1** | **201** | **24.3** | **124** | **15.0** | **61** | **7.4** | **826** | **100.0** |

a: Includes offender–victim dyads where the victim's age was unknown or not stated

b: Offender's age at the time of their index IBSA offence

c: Includes offender–victim dyads where the offender's age was unknown or not stated

Note: na=not available (due to data confidentialisation) . Some IBSA offending, particularly offences carried out by children and young offenders, involves comparatively minor beaviour (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). Caution should be used when comparing individuals in young age groups with other offenders

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

Most IBSA offenders aged 16 years and over were proceeded against for at least one other (non-IBSA) offence in 2022–23 (76%, *n*=514), with 14 percent (*n*=95) proceeded against for other sexual offences. One-quarter of offenders aged 10–15 years were proceeded against for other offences in 2022–23 (26%, *n*=22).

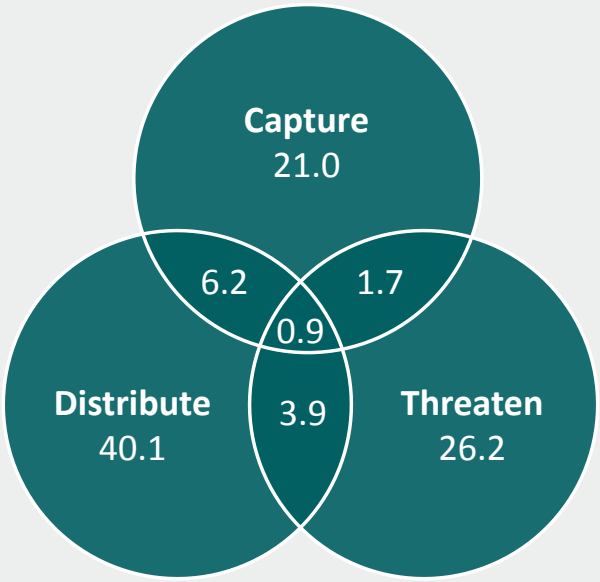
We also analysed the date that offenders' index IBSA offence occurred in relation to their first other offence in 2022–23. For most individuals with other offences occurring in 2022–23, IBSA and the other offences occurred at the same time or the IBSA offence occurred later in the 12-month period (87%, *n*=365).

## Types of image-based sexual abuse

Offenders were most commonly proceeded against for offences involving distributing IBSA (51%, *n*=391), followed by threatening offences (32%, *n*=249) and capturing offences (30%, *n*=228). Among offenders aged 16 years and over (*n*=679), 46 percent (*n*=312) were proceeded against for distributing offences, 36 percent (*n*=243) for threatening offences and 32 percent (*n*=218) for capturing offences. Offenders aged 10–15 years (*n*=86) were substantially more likely to be proceeded against for a distributing offence (88%, *n*=76) than for capturing (10%, *n*=9) or threatening offences, with fewer than five proceeded against for threatening offences.

Around one in eight alleged offenders were proceeded against for more than one type of IBSA (13%, *n*=98). Male and female offenders were equally likely to have been proceeded against for more than one type of IBSA (13%, *n*=80 vs 13%, *n*=18). Offenders aged 16 years and over were more likely than those aged 10–15 years to have more than one type of IBSA offence, with fewer than five aged 10–15 years having more than one type. Overall, six percent of offenders were proceeded against for both capturing and distributing offences (*n*=48), four percent for threatening and distributing offences (*n*=30) and two percent for threatening and capturing offences (*n*=13; see Figure 4). Approximately one percent of offenders were proceeded against for all three types of IBSA (0.9%, *n*=7).

**Figure 4: Alleged IBSA offenders by type of IBSA, 2022–23 (%)**




Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]; see Table A2

For each type of IBSA offence, the date of police action was usually less than six months after the offence had occurred (threatening offences: 82%, *n*=238; distributing offences: 80%, *n*=470; capturing offences: 72%, *n*=704).

## *Offender characteristics*

For each IBSA type, most offenders aged 16 years and over were male, although almost a quarter (23%, *n*=72) of distributing offenders were female (see Table 3). Offenders proceeded against for each IBSA type had a similar age profile, with an average age in the early to mid-30s. However, the proportion of distributing offenders aged 16–17 years (14%, *n*=42) was around two to three times larger than the proportion of capturing (7%, *n*=15) and threatening (5%, *n*=11) offenders in the same age group. The proportion of capturing offenders aged 45 years and over (26%, *n*=57) was also larger than the proportion of distributing (16%, *n*=51) and threatening (19%, *n*=45) offenders in the same age group. More detailed statistics on the sex and age group of offenders proceeded against for different IBSA types are not presented because of small numbers.

**Table 3: Alleged IBSA offenders aged 16 years and over by IBSA type and select characteristics, 2022–23**

| | Capturing | | Distributing | | Threatening | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| **Sex** | | | | | | |
| Male | 206 | 94.5 | 240 | 76.9 | 209 | 86.0 |
| Female | 12 | 5.5 | 72 | 23.1 | 33 | 13.6 |
| **Age group (years)** | | | | | | |
| 16–17 | 15 | 6.9 | 42 | 13.5 | 11 | 4.5 |
| 18–24 | 35 | 16.1 | 60 | 19.2 | 54 | 22.2 |
| 25–34 | 67 | 30.7 | 95 | 30.5 | 82 | 33.7 |
| 35–44 | 44 | 20.2 | 64 | 20.5 | 51 | 21.0 |
| 45 and over | 57 | 26.2 | 51 | 16.4 | 45 | 18.5 |
| Mean (median) | 35.4 (32.7) | | 31.5 (29.9) | | 33.1 (32.0) | |
| **Indigenous status** | | | | | | |
| Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander | 12 | 5.5 | 21 | 6.7 | 15 | 6.2 |
| Non-Indigenous | 184 | 84.4 | 271 | 86.9 | 214 | 88.1 |
| **Total**[a] | **218** | | **312** | | **243** | |

a: Includes alleged offenders whose sex or Indigenous status was not stated or unknown
Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

## *Victim characteristics*

Alleged distributing offenders were proceeded against in relation to 278 victims aged 16 years and over, threatening offenders had 224 victims aged 16 years and over and capturing offenders had 199 victims aged 16 years and over. For each IBSA type, most victims aged 16 years and over were female (see Table 4), although one-fifth of victims of capturing offenders were male (18%, *n*=35). For each IBSA type, victims had a median age in the mid-to-late 20s. Victims of capturing offences had the lowest age (median=26 years), with victims of distributing and threatening offenders tending to be older (distributing: 28 years; threatening: 29 years; see Table 4).

Five percent (*n*=14) of victims of distributing offenders were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, compared with three percent (*n*=6) of victims of capturing offenders and two percent (*n*=5) of victims of threatening offenders.

| Table 4: IBSA victims aged 16 years and over by IBSA type and select characteristics, 2022–23 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Capturing | | Distributing | | Threatening | |
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| **Sex** | | | | | | |
| Male | 35 | 17.6 | 40 | 14.4 | 24 | 10.7 |
| Female | 164 | 82.4 | 238 | 85.6 | 200 | 89.3 |
| **Age group (years)** | | | | | | |
| 16–17 | 29 | 14.6 | 39 | 14.0 | 17 | 7.6 |
| 18–24 | 64 | 32.2 | 68 | 24.5 | 57 | 25.5 |
| 25–34 | 50 | 25.1 | 84 | 30.2 | 87 | 38.8 |
| 35–44 | 36 | 18.1 | 63 | 22.7 | 40 | 17.9 |
| 45 and over | 20 | 10.1 | 24 | 8.6 | 23 | 10.3 |
| Mean (median) | 28.8 (25.9) | | 29.7 (28.0) | | 30.5 (29.0) | |
| **Indigenous status** | | | | | | |
| Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander | 6 | 3.0 | 14 | 5.0 | 5 | 2.2 |
| Non-Indigenous | 180 | 90.5 | 246 | 88.5 | 210 | 93.8 |
| **Total**[a] | **199** | | **278** | | **224** | |

a: Includes victims whose Indigenous status was not stated or unknown
Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

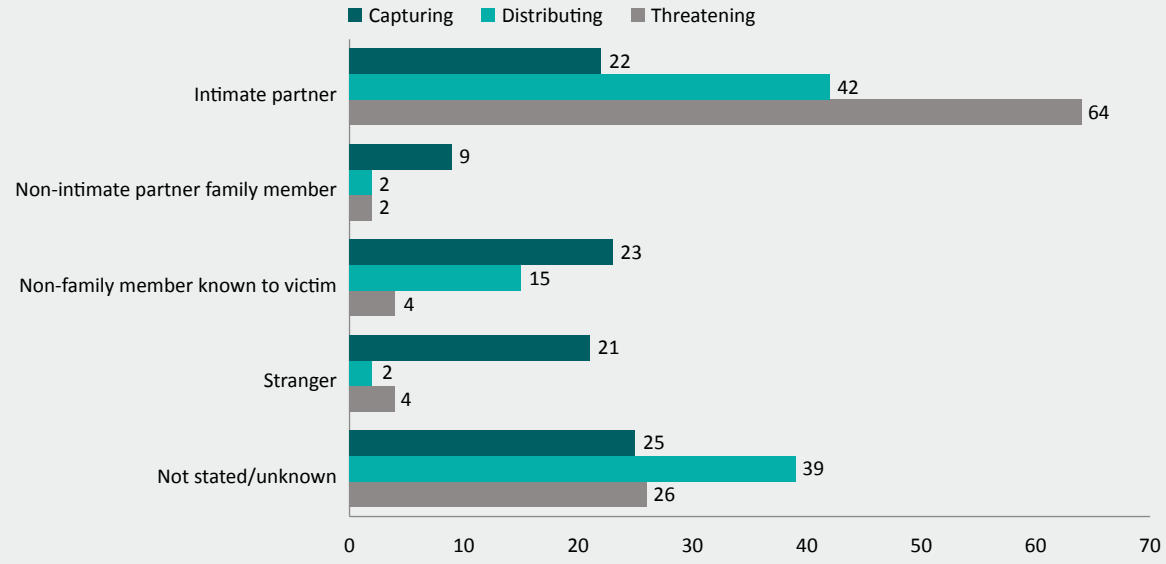
Female victims of each type of IBSA tended to be younger than male victims. For example, among those aged 16 years and over who were victims of distributing offenders, the median age for females was 27 years, compared with 31 years for males (see Table 5).

| Table 5: Median age of IBSA victims aged 16 years and over by IBSA type and sex, 2022–23 (years) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Capturing | Distributing | Threatening |
| Male | 26.4 | 30.6 | 30.6 |
| Female | 25.8 | 27.2 | 29.0 |

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

The most common offender–victim relationship for threatening offenders and distributing offenders aged 16 and over was a current or former intimate partner (threatening: 64%, *n*=144; distributing: 42%, *n*=120; see Figure 5). The pattern of relationships for capturing offenders aged 16 and over was more evenly distributed, with offenders equally likely to be a non-family member known to the victim (23%, *n*=46), the victim's current or former intimate partner (22%, *n*=44) or a stranger (21%, *n*=43).

**Figure 5: Alleged IBSA offenders aged 16 years and over by relationship with primary victim and IBSA type, 2022–23 (%)**




Note: Excludes ACT as data did not allow direct linking of offender relationship to victim with other offender information. Excludes offenders for whom police did not provide victim information

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]; see Table A3

While most perpetrators were proceeded against for offences involving victims aged 16 years and over, for one-fifth of distributing offenders the victims were 15 years and under (21%, *n*=77)—the largest proportion of the three IBSA types. Most of these distributing offenders were aged 17 years or under. Additionally, most of those who were under 16 and who were victims of distributing offenders were girls (78%, *n*=60; see Table 6).

**Table 6: IBSA victims aged 15 years and under by IBSA type and sex, 2022–23**

| | Capturing | | Distributing | | Threatening | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Male | 12 | 26.1 | 17 | 22.1 | na | na |
| Female | 34 | 73.9 | 60 | 77.9 | na | na |
| **Total** | **46** | **100.0** | **77** | **100.0** | **14** | **100.0** |

Note: na=not available (due to data confidentialisation)

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

## *Offender–victim dyads*

**Sex**

For each IBSA type, most offender–victim dyads with offenders aged 16 years and over involved a male offending against a female. Males offending against females were most common for offender–victim dyads of threatening offences (79%, *n*=166), followed by capturing (75%, *n*=146) and distributing (71%, *n*=191). Similarly, dyads with offenders aged 10–15 were most commonly males offending against females (capturing: 63%, *n*=5; distributing: 38%, *n*=30) but a female offending against a female was also common for distributing offences (30%, *n*=24). The numbers for threatening dyads with offenders aged 10–15 years were below five.

**Age group**

For all offence types, the most common offender–victim dyads were individuals aged 16 years and over offending against victims aged 16 years and over, although the distributions were markedly different. For threatening offending, 90 percent (*n*=196) of dyads were offenders and victims both aged 16 years and over, four percent were offenders aged 16 years and over and victims aged 15 years and under (*n*=8), and the other groups had fewer than five dyads. For capturing offending, 74 percent (*n*=150) of dyads were offenders and victims both aged 16 years and over, while 11 percent were offenders aged 16 years and over and victims aged 15 years and under (*n*=23), and four percent (*n*=9) were offenders and victims both aged 15 years and under. Distributing offending had the lowest proportion of dyads where both offenders and victims were aged 16 years and over (66%, *n*=232) but the highest proportion where both offenders and victims were aged 15 years and under (22%, *n*=76).

## *Offending patterns*

One-third of offenders aged 16 years and over with a capturing offence (34%, *n*=73) were also proceeded against for another type of sexual offence, compared with less than 10 percent of those with distributing (6%, *n*=20) and threatening offences (5%, *n*=13; see Table 7). A substantial proportion of capturing offenders were also proceeded against for non-sexual violent offences, specifically acts intended to cause injury (32%, *n*=69).

Offenders with threatening or distributing IBSA offences were more likely than capturing offenders to have also been proceeded against for non-sexual violent offences. For example, 58 percent of threatening offenders (*n*=141) and 41 percent of distributing offenders (*n*=128) were proceeded against for acts intended to cause injury and 45 percent (*n*=109) and 26 percent (*n*=82) respectively for abduction, harassment and other offences against the person. Around one-third of threatening and distributing offenders had also been proceeded against for offences against government procedures, government security and government operations, which include breaches of orders. For threatening offenders, the pattern of acts intended to cause injury and abduction, harassment and other offences against the person was noteworthy in the context of the intimate partner relationships most of these offenders had with their victims.

**Table 7: Alleged IBSA offenders aged 16 years and over by IBSA type and selected other offences proceeded against, 2022–23**

| | Capturing | | Distributing | | Threatening | | Any IBSA | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Acts intended to cause injury | 69 | 31.7 | 128 | 41.0 | 141 | 58.0 | 295 | 43.5 |
| Sexual assault and related offences[a] | 73 | 33.5 | 20 | 6.4 | 13 | 5.4 | 95 | 14.0 |
| Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person | 16 | 7.3 | 82 | 26.3 | 109 | 44.9 | 184 | 27.1 |
| Theft and related offences | 17 | 7.8 | 33 | 10.6 | 29 | 11.9 | 66 | 9.7 |
| Illicit drug offences | 14 | 6.4 | 22 | 7.1 | 21 | 8.6 | 51 | 7.5 |
| Prohibited and regulated weapons and explosives offences | 11 | 5.1 | 13 | 4.2 | 7 | 2.9 | 25 | 3.7 |
| Property damage and environmental pollution | 12 | 5.5 | 47 | 15.1 | 41 | 16.9 | 93 | 13.7 |
| Public order offences | 19 | 8.7 | 21 | 6.7 | 18 | 7.4 | 50 | 7.4 |
| Traffic and vehicle regulatory offences | 30 | 13.8 | 45 | 14.4 | 42 | 17.3 | 99 | 14.6 |
| Offences against government procedures, government security and government operations | 28 | 12.8 | 97 | 31.1 | 88 | 36.2 | 195 | 28.7 |
| Miscellaneous offences | 19 | 8.7 | 12 | 3.9 | 6 | 2.5 | 31 | 4.6 |
| **Total** | **218** | | **312** | | **243** | | **679** | |

a: Excludes IBSA offences

Note: Other offence types based on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Percentages do not total 100 as offenders may have been proceeded against for more than one other offence in the reference period. Excludes offences where cells were less than five due to data confidentialisation

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

## Discussion

This study used multi-jurisdictional police-recorded data to examine the characteristics of alleged IBSA offenders, their victims and their patterns of offending. The analysis builds on empirical research on IBSA perpetrators and provides new insights about different types of IBSA offending, including those that have received little scholarly attention.

The study found most individuals aged 16 years and over who were proceeded against for IBSA in selected jurisdictions in 2022–23 were males offending against female victims, in line with the results of earlier studies of IBSA perpetrators (Henry & Beard 2024; Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). Alleged offenders were most commonly aged in their late 20s or early 30s, and two-fifths of perpetrators aged 16 years and over offended against victims in the same age group.

Around one in 10 offenders were 10–15 years old. Most of these were boys, but girls made up a larger proportion of all female IBSA offenders than boys did of all male offenders. Girls also made up a larger proportion of all 10–15-year-old offenders than women did of all offenders aged 16 years and over. The majority of individuals aged 10–15 years were proceeded against for offences involving victims aged 15 years and under, and most faced actions such as formal cautions. Some IBSA offending, particularly offences carried out by children and young offenders, involves comparatively minor behaviour (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). Caution should be used when comparing individuals in young age groups with other offenders.

Individuals proceeded against for IBSA offences in 2022–23 tended not to 'specialise' in IBSA offending, with three-quarters proceeded against for other types of offences in the same 12-month period. However, IBSA offenders were typically proceeded against for only one type of IBSA rather than multiple types. While these findings may reflect the smaller number of IBSA offences compared with the full range of criminal offences for which an individual can be proceeded against, they may also suggest offenders specialise in certain kinds of IBSA, as has been found for other sexual offenders (Soothill et al. 2000).

Offenders were most commonly proceeded against for one or more distributing IBSA offences, followed by threatening offences and capturing offences, similar to the pattern found by an analysis of Victorian recorded IBSA offences (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). Each group of offenders had similarities but also notable differences. While most offenders were male for each type of IBSA, one-quarter of distributing offenders were female. On average, distributing offenders were also younger than other types of IBSA offenders and were the most likely to be individuals aged 10–15 years offending against other young people. These findings may reflect the higher proportion of females proceeded against for this offence, as female offenders also tended to be younger. Previous research has also found stakeholders providing intervention services to image-base abuse perpetrators have noted a strong link between the technology platforms and social media channels preferred by young people and the ability to use these platforms to distribute intimate images (Mortreux et al. 2019).

Capturing offenders tended to be older and were more likely than other types of IBSA offenders to be men. Additionally, capturing offenders were equally likely to offend against a non-family member known to them, a current or former intimate partner or a stranger. This suggests that while some capturing offenders had been proceeded against for upskirting and downblousing offences involving strangers (Mortreux et al. 2019), others had taken or created intimate images or videos of people they knew. Furthermore, the victims of capturing offenders were more likely to be male than the victims of other types of IBSA. These victims were also slightly younger than other victims and were most commonly aged 18–24 years, suggesting abuse involving teenagers and young adults.

Of the three groups of IBSA offenders, those most likely to target a current or former intimate partner were threatening offenders, followed by distributing offenders. This finding may be partly explained by evidence that threatening to distribute an intimate image is a common way to establish or maintain coercive control over an intimate partner, which can cause harm and dissuade them from ending the relationship (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). Threatening offenders were also the most likely to have been proceeded against for other offences, with more than half having a police action for acts intended to cause injury. They were also the most likely to be individuals aged 16 years and over offending against others aged 16 years and over. Together, these findings suggest that offenders aged 16 years and over may distribute or threaten to distribute intimate images as part of a spectrum of abusive behaviours towards current or former intimate partners.

Our findings indicate that police respond to all types of IBSA. However, contrary to surveys of victims and offenders that have identified capturing as more prevalent than distributing and threatening (Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019; Powell et al. 2024), this study found that people with distributing offences were most commonly proceeded against by police, followed by those with threatening offences. This could suggest that, even though the prevalence of capturing intimate images is higher in the community, perpetrators of other types of IBSA may be more likely to come to the attention of police and be proceeded against. These findings support suggestions for more law enforcement training, education and resources on IBSA (Bond & Tyrrell 2018; Flynn, Powell & Hindes 2023; Henry, Flynn & Powell 2018). Additional training and education should aim to increase police understanding of all types of IBSA in their respective jurisdictions and improve awareness of appropriate police responses to victim reports of these crimes (Henry, Flynn & Powell 2018). A recent update to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification may also assist with measurement of IBSA offending across Australia, with the new classification including a specific group for intimate image offences (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023). By collecting historical offending data, the ASOS collection may also be able to use this information to identify if IBSA offenders have been previously proceeded against for IBSA offences.

This analysis also underlines the need for tailored responses to IBSA behaviours. The high proportion of individuals aged 10–15 years with distributing offences, relative to other IBSA offences, highlights the importance of more education for young people about the potential consequences and harms of sharing intimate images. For all age groups, educational campaigns should inform IBSA victims about the laws, supports and remedies available, educate perpetrators about the harms and implications of offending, and raise awareness about the way bystanders can intervene or support victims (Flynn, Cama & Scott 2022).

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# Appendix: Data tables

**Table A1: Alleged IBSA offenders by age group and relationship with primary victim, 2022–23**

| | 10–15 year-old offenders | | Offenders aged 16 years and over | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Intimate partner | 16 | 18.6 | 268 | 42.7 |
| Non-intimate partner family member | na | na | 26 | 4.2 |
| Non-family member known to victim | 48 | 55.8 | 90 | 14.4 |
| Stranger | na | na | 56 | 8.9 |
| Not stated/unknown | 16 | 18.6 | 187 | 29.8 |
| **Total** | **86** | | **627** | |

Note: Data on offenders aged 10–15 who offended against a non-intimate partner family member or a stranger are not presented due to confidentialisation. Some IBSA offending, particularly offences carried out by children and young offenders, involves comparatively minor behaviour (Sentencing Advisory Council 2020). Caution should be used when comparing individuals in young age groups with other offenders.

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

**Table A2: Alleged IBSA offenders with one or more than one type of IBSA, 2022–23**

| | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|
| **One type of IBSA** | | |
| Capturing | 162 | 21.0 |
| Distributing | 309 | 40.1 |
| Threatening | 202 | 26.2 |
| **More than one type of IBSA** | | |
| Capturing and distributing | 48 | 6.2 |
| Capturing and threatening | 13 | 1.7 |
| Distributing and threatening | 30 | 3.9 |
| Capturing, distributing and threatening | 7 | 0.9 |

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

**Table A3: Alleged IBSA offenders aged 16 years and over by relationship with primary victim and IBSA type, 2022–23**

| | Capturing | | Distributing | | Threatening | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Intimate partner | 44 | 21.8 | 120 | 41.8 | 144 | 63.7 |
| Non-intimate partner family member | 18 | 8.9 | 6 | 2.1 | 5 | 2.2 |
| Non-family member known to victim | 46 | 22.8 | 43 | 15.0 | 9 | 4.0 |
| Stranger | 43 | 21.3 | 6 | 2.1 | 9 | 4.0 |
| Not stated/unknown | 51 | 25.3 | 112 | 39.0 | 59 | 26.1 |
| **Total** | **202** | | **287** | | **226** | |

Source: AIC ASOS 2022–23 [computer file]

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