



**eSafety**research

# **Understanding the attitudes and motivations of adults who engage in image-based abuse**

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**eSafety**Commissioner



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We acknowledge and thank the anonymous people who gave their time to participate in various parts of this research.

Please note that the views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the participants and not necessarily those of eSafety.

Content warning: Please be aware that this research report includes discussion of content that some readers may find confronting or disturbing.

# Understanding the attitudes and motivations of adults who engage in image-based abuse



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# List of abbreviations and terms

Domestic violence – DV

Image-based abuse – IBA

MBCP – Men's Behaviour Change Program

eSafety Commissioner – eSafety

Qualitative Research Unit – QRU

Social Research Centre – SRC

Technology-facilitated abuse – TFA

# Executive summary

The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) commissioned the Social Research Centre in conjunction with leading academic experts from RMIT and Monash Universities to undertake research to explore and understand the beliefs, motivations and attitudes of adults who have engaged in image-based abuse (IBA). This report provides the findings of this research, which was conducted with individuals engaged in perpetrating IBA, and stakeholders who provide intervention services to perpetrators of IBA.

The aims of this research are to:

- explore why individuals decide to non-consensually capture, distribute or threaten to distribute intimate images
- identify and examine the therapeutic intervention programs in Australia that treat, educate or support perpetrators of IBA
- explore awareness and understanding among frontline professionals of IBA behaviour, and their perceptions of the efficacy of current therapeutic programs in reducing recidivism.

## Methodology

The research involved qualitative in-depth interviews with two key cohorts:

- 12 stakeholders who provide intervention support to perpetrators of IBA (including police, defence lawyers, forensic psychologists, Men's Behaviour Change Program facilitators)
- 16 adults engaged in IBA (including one adult who 'thought about' perpetrating IBA, and 2 who were 'accused' of IBA).

More information about the sample and recruitment is included in the report and appendices. All fieldwork was conducted from August 2018 to January 2019. A thematic analysis was applied to anonymised transcripts, using NVivo software.

## Key findings

### *IBA typologies*

The research identifies five typologies (analysis or classification based on types or categories) of IBA. These typologies are ordered below, based on stakeholder observations of prevalence. Please note that the sample size is too small to assume that this reflects the prevalence of IBA perpetration in the wider Australian population:

1. Relationship-based IBA — particularly related to domestic violence (DV).
2. Sharing images where victim is identifiable — particularly related to young a person sharing intimate images.
3. Sharing unsolicited images where victim is unidentifiable, such as on-sharing 'dick pics' from dating apps.
4. IBA related to child exploitation.
5. Taking images of strangers such as 'upskirting' and 'downblousing'.

### *Motivations*

The motivations for IBA differ depending on the typology. With the exception of sharing unsolicited unidentifiable images, each of the IBA typologies involve some element of asserting power and control, either to punish or embarrass the victim or to seek social status at the cost of the victim through boastfulness or self-aggrandisement.

Motivations and identified typology:

- Relationship-based IBA is primarily motivated by retribution for relationship breakdowns and a desire to assert power and control over the former partner.
- IBA involving the sharing of identifiable images is mostly motivated by a desire to seek and assert social status by boastfully demonstrating to peers that they are in possession of intimate images, with seeming disregard to the impact on the victim.
- IBA involving the sharing of unsolicited unidentifiable images, such as on-sharing 'dick pics' received on dating platforms, is mostly motivated by boastfulness, entertainment, and in some cases seeking advice from friends on how to respond to the person who sent the intimate image of themselves.
- IBA linked to child exploitation is motivated by a desire for deviant sexual gratification. Where child sexual predators elicit and share images online, the data demonstrates that perpetrators may seek power through increased social status and self-aggrandisement as the perpetrator fulfils the desires of other sexual predators online.
- IBA involving taking images of strangers, such as 'upskirting', is similarly motivated by a desire for deviant sexual gratification. It is also shaped by the desire for a sense of power over the victim who is unaware of the images being taken.

More broadly, in cases involving men as perpetrators, some stakeholders suggested that males perpetrated relationship-based IBA as a result of the negative attitudes they harboured towards women, particularly through adherence to prescriptive beliefs about the role of men and women in relationships.

### *Awareness of legal ramifications*

Few of the perpetrators in this research were aware that their behaviour was against the law. The notable exceptions being those involved in taking images of strangers and sharing child exploitation images. There was a strong sense among those interviewed that on-sharing intimate images, while not a kind thing to do, was fairly commonplace. These comments from perpetrators combined with stakeholder observations of IBA prevalence suggests that IBA is becoming somewhat normalised.

### *Justification, remorse and recidivism*

Across each of the typologies, and irrespective of perpetrator awareness about the illegality of IBA, participants downplayed their actions in several ways. These were through minimisation e.g. 'I only shared it with a few friends', victim blaming 'they shouldn't have sent the image to me in the first place', and, in some cases, outright denial.

Overall, perpetrators demonstrated little remorse for the IBA they perpetrated. This was consistent across each of the typologies. Stakeholders provided this insight for perpetrators who had engaged in offences related to sexual assault and child exploitation. Perpetrators mostly focused on the personal

impact of being investigated and going through the justice system, rather than the impact of their actions on victims.

It is not possible to make claims about 'recidivism'—the tendency to reoffend— rates from this small sample of qualitative data. However, there are indications to suggest that recidivism could be quite high: the overall lack of perpetrator remorse; admission by some perpetrators, even after learning about the unlawfulness of IBA, that they would be likely to on-share intimate images without consent again; and reports from a couple of Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP) facilitators that they have perpetrators return to their programs following court mandates for similar offences.

### *Intervention pathways*

A key finding from this research is that many perpetrators are not being identified for their actions so their behaviour is not being addressed by the appropriate legal mechanisms, either through eSafety's civil penalties scheme (Federal law) or through State criminal law. This may be due to insufficient evidence, the victims not being aware that IBA has occurred, victims being ashamed, or victims not being aware that they can report IBA to the police.

None of the perpetrators interviewed had been referred to intervention services because of their IBA behaviour — only one perpetrator reported attending counselling sessions and they did not disclose IBA in those sessions. Stakeholders were able to provide insight into perpetrators' behaviour once they did attend therapeutic services, reporting that non-disclosure was a significant issue. IBA perpetrators were unlikely to discuss their abusive behaviour to assist the therapeutic process. This can be linked to a reluctance on the part of the perpetrator to acknowledge what they had done and a general tendency, identified by stakeholders, for perpetrators to avoid talking about their abusive behaviour.

### *IBA visibility and the efficacy of intervention services*

A key finding from this research is the lack of IBA visibility not only among perpetrators but also within perpetrators' intervention services such as Men's Behavioural Change programs. Therapeutic interventions are not well placed to identify IBA perpetrators and target their interventions due to a lack of targeted questions at intake (see section 8.1.3), barriers in information-sharing between services (9.2) and non-disclosure from perpetrators (8.1.2 and 9.2). This lack of IBA visibility means that there is currently little insight into the prevalence of perpetration, the effectiveness of therapeutic services, or rates of recidivism.

The report concludes with a range of possible strategies aimed at helping to improve the visibility of IBA.

# 1. Introduction

eSafety commissioned the Social Research Centre to undertake research to understand the beliefs, motivations and attitudes of adults who have engaged in IBA. This qualitative research was undertaken to help identify trends and patterns in IBA perpetration, understand how the wider service system identifies and interacts with adult perpetrators of IBA, and to explore the efficacy of therapeutic programs in reducing recidivism. The report provides the findings from in-depth interviews with 16 adults engaged in IBA as well as interviews with 12 stakeholders who work in a professional capacity with perpetrators of IBA.

This chapter reviews the current state of knowledge about IBA based on academic literature. It also clarifies the institutional context within which IBA is legislated against and addressed in Australia and outlines research objectives and methodologies. As a first step in contextualising IBA, it is important to position eSafety within a range of stakeholders addressing IBA in Australia. Based on the *Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015*, eSafety's specific responsibilities include:

- co-ordinating and leading the online safety efforts of government, industry and the not-for profit community
- providing a complaints service for young Australians who experience serious cyberbullying
- identifying and removing illegal online content
- tackling image-based abuse.

The Office also provides audience-specific content to help educate all Australians about online safety including young people, women, teachers, parents, seniors and community groups.

eSafety's responsibility for IBA covers when intimate images are non-consensually shared or threatened to be shared. Furthermore, eSafety's function to administer complaints and objections may result in enforcement action against the perpetrator under the civil penalties scheme, but it does not extend to criminal law. Notably, some findings outlined in this report refer to instances in which intimate images are non-consensually taken and conduct which may warrant action under the criminal law.

## 1.1 Defining image-based abuse

In academic literature, IBA, also known as 'image-based sexual abuse', 'revenge pornography' and 'non-consensual pornography' (e.g. Citron & Franks, 2014; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017; Powell & Henry, 2017; Powell, Henry & Flynn, 2018), refers to three key behaviours: (i) the creation or taking of nude or sexual images (ii) the sharing or distribution of nude or sexual images and (iii) threats made to share nude or sexual images (Powell & Henry, 2017; Powell et al, 2018). In this report, 'images' is defined to include videos and/or photographs.

First, the *non-consensual distribution*, sharing, posting or dissemination of nude or sexual images can involve sharing with one or more people via email, internet site, mobile phone or other means for reasons such as retribution, sexual gratification, social-status building or monetary gain (Henry, Flynn & Powell, 2019; Powell et al, 2018).

Second, the perpetrator may make *threats to distribute* nude or sexual images of the victim in order to coerce victims into engaging in an unwanted act, such as paying money (blackmail), performing a sexual act, sending more images, or preventing the victim from leaving an intimate relationship (Flynn & Henry, 2019).

Third, IBA may involve the *non-consensual recording, taking or creation* of nude or sexual images in which the victim is photographed or filmed without their consent, in both public and private settings. It can involve the secret filming of consensual sexual encounters without the person's knowledge or consent, as well as the secret recording of a person's private parts without their consent or knowledge. It can also involve the production of digitally altered images that depict the victim in a sexual way, referred to as 'fake' or 'morph' porn. When involving the use of artificial intelligence, these are known as 'deepfakes' (Chesney & Citron, 2018). This third set of behaviours relating to non-consensual taking of nude or sexual images does not fall under the civil penalties scheme in Australia, but may be subject to criminal laws.

Notably, recent changes to the civil penalties scheme in September 2018 means that 'intimate images' relating to IBA are not only nude and sexual images, such as images of genitalia, but now also include a images of a person without the religious or cultural attire they would normally wear in public.

Some images may be initially taken or shared consensually, for example, images shared in the context of an intimate relationship. It becomes abuse when there is a lack of consent for images to be further shared, or when the abuser threatens to share the image with others. Images can also be obtained non-consensually, through computer or storage platform hacking, or by coercion or threats, which compel a person to send an image of themselves to an abuser.

## 1.2 Legal responses to IBA

Many jurisdictions internationally have introduced laws criminalising IBA, including the Philippines (2009), Israel (2014), Japan (2014), Canada (2014), England and Wales (2015), New Zealand (2015), Northern Ireland (2016), Scotland (2016), and 43 states in the United States, as well as Washington DC. In some jurisdictions, the law only captures the non-consensual distribution of nude or sexual images. In others, threats to distribute nude or sexual images, and the taking or creating of nude or sexual images without consent — which includes digitally altered images — are included as criminal offences.

In Australia, all states and territories, except Tasmania, have introduced laws criminalising IBA. This includes Commonwealth legislation making IBA a federal offence under the Criminal Code. Australia has some of the most advanced legislative responses to IBA which capture its three main forms. Significantly, no Australian laws require the prosecution to prove that the perpetrator intended to cause harm and/or serious emotional distress to the victim, or require evidence of the serious harms caused to victims be provided to secure a conviction. As a result, Australian laws avoid some of the problems being experienced in other jurisdictions, where distress requirements fail to recognise the diverse motivations for IBA, beyond retribution, and do not capture situations where the distributor deliberately conceals the sharing of such images (Crofts & Kirchengast 2019; Flynn & Henry, forthcoming; Henry & Flynn, forthcoming).

Civil laws also exist to give victims the option of taking offenders to court under sexual harassment, copyright or privacy laws, however, the cost of civil litigation can be prohibitive for many victims (Flynn & Henry, 2019). Again, Australia has led the way with innovative civil justice approaches to IBA through the creation of a federal civil penalty scheme that provides an alternate avenue to the criminal justice system or civil litigation. Under this scheme, eSafety can give removal notices to the service on which the intimate image is provided or the person who posted the image, requiring them to remove it within 48 hours. eSafety also has a range of civil remedies for the non-consensual sharing or threat to share intimate images via the internet, email and mobile phone. Failure to comply with removal notices can result in civil penalties of up to \$105,000 for individuals and up to \$525,000 for corporations.

### 1.3 Brief literature review

IBA is an emerging focus of academic research. However, the majority of empirical research on adults to date has focused more broadly on intimate relationships and technology use, and, as such, do not comprehensively investigate IBA (e.g. Branch, Hilinski-Rosick, Johnson, & Solana, 2017; Dir & Cyders, 2015; Marganski & Melander, 2018). There are, though, a small number of studies specifically exploring the prevalence and impacts of IBA adult victimisation, albeit primarily through quantitative research methods (e.g. CCRI, 2014; Eaton, Jacobs, & Ruvalcaba, 2018; Lenhart et al, 2016; OeSC, 2017; Powell et al, 2018; Powell, Henry, Flynn, & Scott, 2019). It is difficult to compare results across these studies owing to different methods, definitions and sample sizes, yet broadly speaking, the research indicates the prevalence of adult IBA victimisation to be between 1% and 12%. The victimisation rate for threats to share nude or sexual images sits between 1% and 15% (e.g. Eaton et al, 2018; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2015; McAfee, 2013; Lenhart et al., 2016; Powell & Henry, 2017; Powell et al, 2018; Powell et al, 2019; Reed, Tolman & Ward, 2016). Very few studies have explored the prevalence of the non-consensual taking or creation of intimate images. In Powell et al's study (2018), they found that 1 in 5 (20%) participants had experienced someone taking a nude or sexual image of them without their consent, with a further 1 in 10 women reporting having experienced someone taking an image of their cleavage without consent, and 1 in 20 women experiencing someone taking an image up their skirt. Some researchers have also investigated 'coercive sexting' among adult populations which includes where a person is pressured or coerced into sending nude or sexual images, finding that one fifth of participants had experienced this (e.g. Drouin, Ross & Tobin, 2015).

Some of the research to date has found that women are more commonly the targets of IBA than men (e.g. Eaton et al, 2018; Lenhart et al, 2016; OeSC, 2017), whereas other studies have found either similar victimisation rates among both men and women (e.g. Powell & Henry, 2017; Powell et al, 2018; Reed et al, 2016), or somewhat higher rates among men (e.g. Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix & Calvete, 2015; Reed et al., 2016). The gendered difference in victimisation rates may in part be attributed to sampling and recruitment approaches. For example, in Powell et al's study (2018), the respondents were a community sample of Australians aged 16 to 49 recruited through an online panel provider, whereas the survey commissioned by eSafety (OeSC, 2017) was representative of the Australian adult population. In a 2017 nationally representative study on IBA with over 4,000 respondents, eSafety found that women (15%) were twice as likely as men (7%) to report experiencing someone sharing nude or sexual images of them without their consent. This study also found that age and gender were a significant predictor of prevalence, with 24% of women and 16% of men aged between 18 and 24 years reporting having experienced IBA (OeSC, 2017).

The eSafety study also found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (25%) were twice as likely to have experienced this form of IBA compared with non-Indigenous Australians (11%). Similarly, prevalence was high for those who spoke a language other than English at home (19% compared to 11%) and among lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) participants (19% compared to 11%). Another Australian study (Powell et al, 2018), found that one in two Australians with a disability, one in two Indigenous Australians, one in three LGB people, one in three young people aged 16 to 19 years, and one in four people aged 20 to 29 years reported experiencing IBA. Together, these findings suggest that IBA victimisation experiences reflect the patterns of abuse and harassment common among vulnerable or marginalised groups within the community more broadly (see also eSafety, 2019, for an overview of culturally and linguistically diverse women's experiences of technology-facilitated abuse, including IBA).

Notably, there have been very few studies specifically on IBA perpetration. Again, while it is difficult to synthesize the findings given the different sample sizes, definitions and instruments used, studies

examining IBA or broader studies on technology and abuse indicate an approximate perpetration rate between 12% and 30% of respondents who self-report sharing nude or sexual images without the consent of the person depicted in the image (e.g. Crofts, Lee, McGovern, & Milivojevic, 2015; Eaton et al, 2018; Garcia, Mirra, Morrell, Martinez, & Scorz, 2016; Morelli, Bianchi, Baiocco, Pezzuiti, & Chirumbolo, 2016; Powell et al, 2019; Thompson & Morrison, 2013).

In the first-ever study specifically on self-disclosed IBA perpetration (n=4,274) Powell et al. (2019) found that 1 in 10 respondents reported engaging in at least one IBA behaviour (taking, sharing or threatening to share nude or sexual photographs or videos). For all individual IBA behaviours, they found that men were significantly more likely to report engaging in perpetration than women. This was particularly so for men aged between 20 and 29 and 30 to 39 years (Powell et al, 2019). The study also reported that LGB participants were more likely than heterosexual participants to self-report perpetration. This is true for IBA victims and those who had engaged in sexual selfie behaviours — taking and/or sharing nude or sexual images of themselves — as well (Powell et al, 2019). In a US survey of over 3,000 people, Eaton et al (2018) found a lower self-reported perpetration rate of 5.2% for the non-consensual distribution or threat to distribute nude or sexual images, with rates highest among those aged 18-25 years (8.2%).

Survey research provides much-needed insight into IBA, but it is only able to capture the experiences of respondents who have become aware that someone was taking or sharing images without their consent. Likewise, perpetration rates are likely to be a conservative estimate given that people tend to offer biased estimates of their behaviours in order to 'look good', even in anonymous surveys.

To date, there have only been a small number of empirical studies investigating IBA and perpetration. All of these studies have involved an examination of the online websites that host or distribute IBA material, often without the knowledge of the victims depicted in the images (see Hall & Hearn, 2018; Henry & Flynn, forthcoming; Uhl, Rhyner, Terrance, & Lugo, 2017). To date, however, no qualitative research has been published involving interviews with perpetrators of IBA. This is a significant gap in the research field, and one that this study directly responds to with world-first qualitative research into perpetrators and IBA.



## 1.4 Research aim and objectives

The aims of the research are to:

- explore why individuals decide, non-consensually, to capture, distribute or threaten to distribute intimate images
- identify and examine the therapeutic intervention programs in Australia that treat, educate or support perpetrators of IBA
- explore awareness and understanding among frontline professionals of IBA behaviour, and their perceptions of the efficacy of current therapeutic programs in reducing recidivism.

## 1.5 Methodology

The research involved in-depth interviews with two key cohorts:

- 12 stakeholders who work in a professional capacity with perpetrators of IBA, including police members, defence lawyers, forensic psychologists, MBCP facilitators
- 16 adults engaged in IBA, referred to as ‘perpetrators’ throughout this report. Note, however, that this cohort included one adult who ‘thought about’ perpetrating IBA, and 2 who were ‘accused’ of IBA. These individuals were included in the research due to the content of those interviews in which they provided valuable insight into their motivations and attitudes of IBA perpetration. It is quite possible that these individuals did indeed perpetrate IBA but were not comfortable disclosing this in the context of the interview.

Stakeholder recruitment was targeted at relevant organisations through desk-top research, snowballing (i.e. a non-probability sampling technique where existing research participants help identify future research participants through their social and professional networks) and support from *No to Violence*, a peak body for organisations working with men to end family violence. Perpetrator recruitment methods included snowballing from the stakeholder interviews, social media advertising and specialist recruitment services.

The research project was approved by the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee and carried out according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007). The fieldwork was conducted from August 2018 to January 2019. Using an analytical framework, anonymised transcripts were coded using NVivo, a software program designed to support a thematic analysis of the data.

It is important to note that there is a difference in the types of IBA discussed in each of the interview groups. Those who agreed to participate in the perpetrator interviews tended to describe behaviour such as non-consensually showing a ‘dick pic’ they had been sent on dating platforms to a friend, or non-consensually sharing intimate images of peers on social media platforms. Few perpetrators interviewed described IBA related to domestic violence, and none described sharing child exploitation images. The stakeholder interviews provide deep insight into these other types of IBA.

Further information on research design, recruitment, information on ethical approval, instrumentation and the data analysis approach is provided in Appendix A.

## 2. Typologies of image-based abuse

This section outlines five typologies of IBA that were identified from analysis of the interview data with stakeholders and perpetrators. The typologies are listed in order of prevalence according to stakeholder observations, noting that the sample size is too small to assume that this reflects the prevalence of IBA perpetration in the wider Australian population. These are:

1. relationship-based IBA including IBA linked to DV
2. sharing images where the victim is identifiable — particularly relating to a young person sharing intimate images
3. sharing unsolicited images where victim is unidentifiable, such as on-sharing 'dick pics' from dating apps
4. IBA related to child exploitation
5. taking images of strangers such as 'upskirting', 'downblousing'.

Figure 1 provides also summary of key findings relating to each typology identified. However, before exploring each of these typologies in detail, there are a few important caveats to note. These classifications of IBA should not be seen as a catch-all for all types of IBA but rather a useful structure within which to examine the range of behaviours that emerged from this research. There is evidence to suggest that other types of IBA, such as sexexploitation and sextortion, are significant forms of IBA occurring in Australia (see, for example, a previous research report on IBA commissioned by eSafety, 2019), however, in this research there has only been one case of sextortion within the sample. As such, there is not sufficient data to form a typology in this instance.

Another important caveat is that there is some overlap between these five typologies. The majority of IBA behaviour provided in the interviews fit clearly into one of these typologies, but in some cases the boundaries are blurred. For example, there were a few instances of child exploitation-based IBA in which the perpetrator had abused a child from their immediate family. These have been classified as IBA related to child exploitation rather than relationship-based IBA linked to family and domestic violence, however, both categories are appropriate.

The task of classifying IBA into these five types is complicated by limitations in the data collection. Perpetrators interviewed may have resisted providing detailed information or the stakeholders interviewed may have been unable to recall specifics of cases they had worked on. This is particularly relevant when it comes to assessing solicitation. Solicitation in this research refers to repeated or pressured requests for intimate images rather than a single request. Solicitation suggests malicious intent on the part of the perpetrator, but this can be difficult to assess, particularly where the research relies on perpetrators to self-disclose their behaviour. Likewise, whether or not a victim was identified when the image was distributed has been difficult to assess in some of the data. The perpetrator may have made comments when they distributed the image such that it was possible to identify the victim even though their name was not provided and/or their face not clearly visible. This heightens the impact on the victim considerably but has been difficult to assess in these interviews.

The final caveat is that while prevalence of IBA perpetration is discussed in each of the typologies, caution needs to be exercised in assuming prevalence and transferring these findings to the wider population given the relatively small sample size. Where prevalence is discussed in the findings of this research, it is based purely on stakeholder observations. Stakeholders were able to draw on hundreds of cases of IBA that they had been involved in over the course of their careers and commented on prevalence of perpetration based on their exposure and experience. While this is not a robust measure of perpetration prevalence, it provides a useful indication in the absence of comprehensive data from other sources.

**Figure 1** Summary of findings by IBA typology

IBA type	Perpetrator characteristics	Perpetrator motivations	Perpetrator attitudes	Intervention pathways
Relationship-based IBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mixed gender, mostly male</li> <li>➤ No age profile but many 30-40 years old who have been in longer term relationships</li> <li>➤ Often negative attitudes towards women and linked to DV</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Power and control</li> <li>➤ Retribution</li> <li>➤ Shaming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mixed awareness of unlawfulness of activity</li> <li>➤ Tendency to minimise responsibility for their actions, blame victim or deny actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prevalence high</li> <li>➤ Perpetrators identified as part of police DV investigations</li> <li>➤ Court sentences related to DV referred to counselling or MBCP</li> <li>➤ Perpetrators usually mandated to attend therapeutic services. Low engagement</li> <li>➤ Lack of willingness to disclose IBA in group settings, if at all</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unclear but stakeholders report frequent number of re-offenders</li> </ul>
Sharing identifiable images	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mostly male</li> <li>➤ Mostly young (16-25 years)</li> <li>➤ Stakeholders suggest link to pornography viewing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Social norms</li> <li>➤ Power and control</li> <li>➤ Boastful</li> <li>➤ Social kudos and increasing status</li> <li>➤ Social pressure</li> <li>➤ Entertainment: 'for a laugh'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Not necessarily aware of unlawfulness of IBA</li> <li>➤ Justified because initially consensually shared by victim and IBA normalised: 'everyone does it'</li> <li>➤ Tendency to minimise responsibility: 'I only uploaded the image', and blame victim for sending image</li> <li>➤ Little remorse or interest in victim impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prevalence high</li> <li>➤ Few cases going to police Sometimes handled internally by schools/universities</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown Assumption that young people will grow out of it</li> <li>➤ Stakeholders report that behaviour could escalate into other abusive behaviours</li> <li>➤ Suggest school/university programs to improve awareness of IBA unlawfulness, potential risks for perpetrators (sexual predator list) and impacts on victim. For example, see the <i>Tea and Consent</i> video: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZWvrXVavnQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZWvrXVavnQ</a></li> </ul>

Sharing unsolicited non-identifiable images	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mixed gender</li> <li>➤ Mostly 20-35 year olds who are engaged in online dating</li> <li>➤ Mixed sexual orientations with some signs of high prevalence in gay communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Boastful: 'look what I received'</li> <li>➤ Entertainment: 'showed my friends for a laugh'</li> <li>➤ Looking for advice: 'he sent me this, what should I do?'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Little/no awareness of legal implications of IBA</li> <li>➤ Justified because consensually shared by victim</li> <li>➤ Tendency to minimise behaviour: 'they never knew I shared it', 'they probably send their dick pics to heaps of people', 'everyone does it'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prevalence high</li> <li>➤ Victim usually not aware of IBA to report</li> <li>➤ Little/no interventions being taken</li> <li>➤ High level of recidivism: 'it's harmless', 'everyone does it'</li> </ul>
Child exploitation-based IBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mostly male</li> <li>➤ No clear age profile</li> <li>➤ Often high functioning professionals</li> <li>➤ Intimacy issues</li> <li>➤ Negative attitudes towards women</li> <li>➤ Stakeholders suggest escalating pornography usage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Power and control</li> <li>➤ Sexual perversion and deviance</li> <li>➤ Titillation</li> <li>➤ Social status and self-aggrandisement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Perpetrator is generally aware of unlawfulness of actions</li> <li>➤ Little remorse. Focus is on impact it has had on themselves rather than victim</li> <li>➤ Tendency to minimise responsibility for actions and engage in delusions and distancing mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prevalence low</li> <li>➤ Perpetrator mostly identified by special unit police investigations into child exploitation rather than triggered by victim reporting</li> <li>➤ Police investigations lead to criminal charges and court proceedings</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown</li> </ul>
Taking images of strangers such as upskirting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Examples provided were male</li> <li>➤ No age profile</li> <li>➤ Includes high functioning professionals</li> <li>➤ Intimacy issues</li> <li>➤ Stakeholders suggest escalating pornography usage</li> <li>➤ Examples of mental health issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Titillation</li> <li>➤ Sexual perversion and deviance</li> <li>➤ Power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ General awareness of unlawfulness of activity</li> <li>➤ Obsessive behaviour often linked to long history, multiple victims</li> <li>➤ Tendency to minimise responsibility for their actions and blame victim</li> <li>➤ Illusions of victim seeking that kind of attention: 'she wore a short skirt so she had it coming'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prevalence low</li> <li>➤ Perpetrators identified through victims</li> <li>➤ Police charges and court proceedings lead to referrals to counselling/ psychologists</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown/mixed. Victim confrontation may be effective in preventing recidivism</li> </ul>

To help demonstrate these typologies, five composite vignettes have been developed to demonstrate perpetrator behaviour, motivations and attitudes. All characters appearing in these vignettes are fictitious. They are composed of several narratives that were provided during the interviews.

## 2.1 Relationship-based IBA

Perpetrators in this typology either currently have or previously had a close relationship with the victim. The abuse usually occurs at or towards the end of an intimate relationship where there is animosity between the perpetrator and the victim. Typically, the perpetrator uses an image that was consensually taken during the relationship and distributes, or threatens to distribute, this to mutual social networks or to broader forums such as 'revenge porn' websites. The IBA is motivated by retribution/retaliation, attempts at having power and control over the victim, and often linked to DV.

### **VIGNETTE 1: Relationship-based IBA**

*Michael has come out of a long-term relationship with Jane, with whom he has a child. He is in his 30s, works as a plumber and is well-liked by his mates. Michael and Jane had a difficult relationship — they would often argue and sometimes he would become angry and become physically violent with her. While not proud of it, Michael sometimes feels that Jane pushed him to it.*

*After the relationship ended Jane sought full custody of their child, stating that Michael was violent. Livid, Michael wanted to make things difficult for her — revenge for the pain that she was causing him.*

*Michael had an old video of them having sex which was filmed consensually after a night out drinking. So that all their mutual friends, including her family members, could see it, Michael shared the video on a social media site.*

*When Jane found out that Michael shared the image, she went to the police requesting an intervention order. Michael was referred to a Men's Behaviour Change Program based on charges of physical abuse. In the program he discussed his anger management issues and tendency to push women around. He did not disclose that he shared the sex video.*

## 2.2 Sharing images where the victim is identifiable

This type of IBA relates to perpetrators who have shared images, in many cases solicited from the victims and then distributed without consent. The perpetrators are mostly young and share nude images of similar aged peers. The victims often provide the intimate images of themselves after receiving a request from the perpetrator. The victim provides the image in the hope that a relationship might blossom or because they feel pressure to do so because other young people have done the same. The images are usually identifiable — the victim's face is visible or they are named in comments accompanying the image — and the image is then shared by the perpetrator to mutual social networks, such as distributing to a school or university community. The public nature of this form of IBA means that the victim tends to be shamed and then isolate themselves from their peer group. Shaming, however, does not appear to be a key motivation for perpetrating this type of IBA. Instead, perpetrators seem motivated by attempts at attaining social status, boasting about the images they have been able to elicit and, to some extent, feeling that they have gained social kudos in not caring about the impact on victims. Entertainment is another motivation.

## **VIGNETTE 2: Sharing solicited images**

*Jake, who is now at university, feels bad about some of his behaviour when he was at high school. Back then, he used to send text messages to girls in his class saying he would go out with them if they sent him a picture of themselves naked. He would ask girls repeatedly to send him naked photos and if they didn't, he would turn on them with abusive name calling. Jake collected numerous nude images of girls in this way that he would then send to his friends using [social media site], identifying the girl in the comments. It didn't take long for these images to be shared with the whole school year level.*

*Jake felt a sense of power and social status sharing the images. He liked showing his friends that he was able to coerce girls into doing what he asked, and felt cool showing that he didn't care about the consequences. Other kids at school were doing similar things and, at the time, he felt like this was pretty normal behaviour. Jake didn't really pay attention to how the image sharing affected the girls. In his mind, they were the ones who had taken the images of themselves and sent them to him. He felt it was their fault for sending the images in the first place.*

*When one girl's parents found out about the image sharing, they complained to the school. Jake doesn't really remember what happened but the police were not involved.*

*The girl changed schools not long after.*

## **2.3 Sharing unsolicited images where the victim is unidentifiable**

This typology was highly prevalent — based on interviews in this study — but seems to be the least documented in other research. It refers to perpetrators who have received images without having solicited them and have on-shared these images to social networks. A key example of this is where the perpetrator is engaged in online dating platforms and in the early stages of contact with a potential date has received a nude image such as a 'dick pic' and has shown this image to friends. Motivations are mixed but tend to centre around entertainment and seeking support, for example 'he sent me this, what should I do?'.

## **VIGNETTE 3: Sharing unsolicited images**

*Maria, in her late 20s, was using an online dating platform as a way to meet guys. She had been using the app for a few years and had messaged lots of different guys in that time. Over the years Maria had received lots of dick pics from guys trying to impress her, and hoping to get a date. She thought it was pretty funny. Seeing dick pics didn't excite Maria one bit. Instead she thought it was hilarious that random men kept sending her photos of their genitals.*

*Maria has a friend who uses the same dating platform and also receives lots of dick pics. When they catch up, they pull out their phones and have a good laugh at all the pictures. Maria thinks there's no harm in sharing the images with others. The men are not identified and, in any case, they sent the images to her unsolicited: she didn't want to receive them. Maria is confident that the men don't know she has shared the images and also thinks they send the photos to lots of women and clearly want their 'junk' to be seen. She is unaware that sharing intimate photos like this is a form of IBA. Maria doesn't think*



*there is anything malicious in what she's done nor that there is any impact on the men in question. She plans to continue sharing the images with her friend.*

## 2.4 IBA related to child exploitation

This cohort of perpetrators had a relatively low prevalence according to stakeholders, as compared to other types of IBA explored in this report. The abuse involves taking and/or sharing intimate images of children. Victims may be 'tricked' into having their photo taken, such as providing a photo of themselves believing that they are sharing it with someone they have befriended online. Other victims may be victims of sextortion and sexploitation. In most cases the perpetrator then distributes these images to an online forum/network of other sexual predators.

### **VIGNETTE 4: IBA related to child exploitation**

*Robert is an IT professional in his 40s who is a bit of a loner and is generally regarded as socially awkward. Robert finds it difficult to build and maintain intimate relationships, particularly with women, and has spent a large amount of his personal time on the internet. He has a history of watching pornography. Robert also has an obsession with content involving under-age girls and a fantasy of taking their virginity. He frequented an online imageboard — an un-moderated website where people can anonymously upload images. Initially he just looked at the intimate images of under-age girls, but this evolved to soliciting intimate images online and distributing these to the online community.*

*To befriend under-age girls in online forums Robert used false profiles, asking them to send him photos of themselves naked. He would then distribute these on an imageboard platform for the sexual pleasure of others interested in child exploitation material. Robert had been doing this for an extended period of time and felt some social status and power in being able to provide images of under-age girls to others.*

*Police investigating the online forums identified Robert as a sexual predator. Charges and a court sentencing followed and he was eventually imprisoned for his actions. Despite knowing that the actions were wrong, Robert had little remorse. He was most concerned about the impacts of being convicted: imprisonment, restrictions linked to being on the sex offenders' registry, and damage to his reputation among colleagues, friends and family.*

## 2.5 Taking images of strangers

This final typology describes where perpetrators take non-consensual images of strangers for private use. It is more commonly referred to as 'upskirting', 'downblousing' or 'creepshots'. It involves using hidden cameras in public places, such as in public toilets or train station escalators, to capture the intimate parts of victims. This behaviour is motivated by sexual deviancy where the perpetrator seeks sexual gratification and a sense of control and power over the victim because the image is taken without them being aware.

### **VIGNETTE 5: Taking images of strangers**

*Ben is a man in his forties. He is employed and seen by his peers to be a functional member of society. He has difficulties relating to women and a history of watching pornography. Over a number of years Ben has taken upskirt images of 40 or so women. He would take these surreptitiously in public places, trying to photograph women's underwear and intimate parts. Ben would then take the device home to look at the pictures in private for sexual pleasure. He never shared the images but kept them as a private collection.*

*Not long ago, a woman spotted him taking a photo up her skirt while at a shopping centre. She confronted Ben and called to the security staff to catch him. He was taken to the police who quickly found many other upskirting images of women on his phone. He was sentenced in court, served a community-based order and was placed on the sexual predator list. This made things with work very difficult for Ben because of the associated travel restrictions. He was also mandated to attend psychological therapy which did help Ben to better understand his behaviour.*

*While Ben knew that what he was doing was wrong and had legal implications, he never thought that he would be caught. As part of Ben's sexual fantasy he had entertained the idea that the women liked having their photos taken, and that their short skirts were an invitation for such behaviour. The victim's shock and disgust at his taking an image shattered this fantasy and Ben now feels ashamed. While he is still excited when he sees women wearing short skirts and feels the urge to take a photo, he has so far been able to control this urge.*



### 3. Relationship-based IBA

This section of the report explores the characteristics, motivations and attitudes of individuals who perpetrate relationship-based IBA. This chapter draws on findings from both stakeholder and perpetrator interviews. Figure 2 summarises perpetrator characteristics for this typology.

**Figure 2** Summary of findings of relationship-based IBA

Relationship-based IBA	
Prevalence	➤ High, based on stakeholder assessments
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mixed gender, mostly male</li> <li>➤ No age profile but many 30-40 year olds who have been in longer term relationships</li> <li>➤ Linked to family and DV</li> <li>➤ Often negative attitudes towards women</li> </ul>
Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Power and control</li> <li>➤ Retribution</li> <li>➤ Shaming</li> </ul>
Attitudes and reflections	➤ Tendency to minimise their responsibility for their actions, blame victim or deny actions
Intervention pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ IBA often identified as part of police DV investigations</li> <li>➤ Court sentences related to DV (intervention orders, child custody) often referred to counselling or MBCP</li> <li>➤ Perpetrators usually mandated to attend therapeutic services. Engagement often low</li> <li>➤ Lack of willingness to disclose IBA and sexual violence in group settings</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown although stakeholders report frequent re-offenders</li> </ul>

#### 3.1 Examples of abusive behaviour

Relationship-based IBA was reported to be one of the most common forms of IBA observed by stakeholders and was one of the most frequently discussed types among interview participants. This form of IBA occurs most regularly following an acrimonious intimate relationship break-up, often in the context of long-term relationships.

Most cases of relationship-based IBA were said to involve the perpetrator sharing intimate images of the victim on social media platforms, distributing images to close friends and family members of the victim or uploading images to 'revenge porn' websites.

*'That [relationship] ended up with the male posting some of these intimate photos up on [social media] sites, including some that were accessible by people that the female knew, and were likely to cause her some embarrassment'. (Interview 5, Legal Service)*

*'Sharing intimate stuff with a new partner or other family members, like mothers and sisters, the female members, [in an] effort to embarrass [the victim]'. (Interview 10, Police)*

In most cases, participants reported that the images shared had been taken consensually during the course of their relationship and had only been distributed once the relationship began to break down. That said, one stakeholder highlighted examples where the perpetrator had taken intimate images of his partner throughout the course of their relationship without her consent.

*'People may have filmed each other consensually in a — as part of their relationship — but then it sours, and [it] tends to be the male who doesn't want — who's unhappy with the end of the relationship or feels they've been cheated or whatever — and will transmit such material to embarrass their former partner, to sort of get revenge on, usually, her.'*  
(Interview 7, Legal Service)

*'I get to see people who have taken covert videos of their wife, or their husband, in sexual poses, or having sex, and then use that as what you call 'revenge porn', but have used that, or threatened to use that, or put it on the internet to cause embarrassment...'*  
(Interview 11, Psychologist)

It's important to note that for this typology there is a strong correlation with DV, in which the perpetrators seek to exercise power and control over their victim. This form of abuse typically involves the sharing, or threat of sharing, intimate images in an attempt to blackmail or punish the victim. It was reported by stakeholders to be associated with ongoing domestic abuse, including stalking behaviour, physical violence and, in some cases, sexual assault.

## 3.2 Characteristics

Perpetrators of relationship-based IBA did not appear to be defined by a set of characteristics relating to gender, age, or sexuality. These perpetrators belonged to a range of age cohorts, from mid-20s to participants in their 50s. In this research, it was uncommon for perpetrators to be from a younger age category i.e. their early 20s. This may be related to the shorter length of their relationships.

Examples of relationship-based IBA provided by interviewees included perpetration by both males and females, although it was reported to be more common for a male to perpetrate this form of IBA against a female. Some stakeholders suggested that this was due to negative attitudes held by some men towards women. Following from this, the relationship-based IBA type was said to be common in heterosexual relationships, but participants also recounted instances where this form of IBA was perpetrated in same sex relationships.

*'The victims are invariably women [in] our experience so far... The only case we've had, the perpetrator — it was a male. So, that probably meshes pretty much with natural societal expectations'. (Interview 3, Legal Service)*

*'[IBA is perpetrated by] certain types of, mainly young men, who are very, very possessive and don't want to accept that someone said that they don't want to be with them anymore or they've met someone else or they're moving on'. (Interview 7, Legal Service)*

As noted, some stakeholders suggested that males perpetrated relationship-based IBA as a result of the negative attitudes they harboured towards women, particularly through adherence to prescriptive beliefs about the role of men and women in relationships. It was suggested that men who identified with these gendered constructs were more likely to exhibit abusive behaviour in their relationships. It was also highlighted that some perpetrators of relationship-based IBA demonstrated broader behaviours consistent with DV, including stalking and exerting power and control over victims.

*'I think the attitude of a man feeling that they have a right to treat their partner in any way that they see fit... the fact that they choose to share images of the woman, or do anything for that matter, that they have a right to do that. That's the attitude'. (Interview 1, MBCP)*

*'You get a lot of these people who are still trying to harass [victims], even if they've been sent to jail they'll still be trying to call... And they'll still try and exert their authority or possession over the former partner, putting...circumventing ways that they're not allowed to get in contact with them and breaching non-contact orders'. (Interview 7, Legal Service)*

One perpetrator participant indicated that they had engaged in relationship-based IBA as a means of retribution, due to themselves being a victim of sexual assault from their ex-partner. Similarly, some of the perpetrators of other forms of IBA who were interviewed also identified as victims of relationship-based IBA. This is perhaps indicative of the frequency with which relationship-based IBA occurs and its close relationship with other forms of domestic and family abuse.

*'It was, yeah so, a sexual thing... I tried to say no and push [my former partner] away, but I was in pain, so it was kind of difficult. So yeah, after that I kind of hated [my former partner] after that, I guess that's — and that's probably why I'm like, I don't respect you because you don't respect me and so I think that made me — made it easy for me to share that'. (Interview 9, Perpetrator)*

### 3.3 Motivations

Two main motivations were observed for individuals who perpetrated relationship-based IBA, both of which were linked to perpetrators' sense of entitlement in their relationships.

One motivation outlined in discussions was the perpetrator seeking retribution on the victim through attempting to shame or embarrass them by distributing intimate images within close social networks. Some participants indicated that this was preceded by a bad break-up and the perpetrator feeling that they had been cheated or wronged in the relationship.

*'It's always revenge. It's typical[ly] either actual threat or potential threat of revenge porn you might say. That induces fear and embarrassment in the client'. (Interview 3, Legal Service)*

*'We had a bad break-up and she was kind of manipulative towards me and she tried to do stuff to me without my consent. So maybe I did it for retaliation'. (Interview 9, Perpetrator)*

Another prominent motivation for relationship-based IBA was the perpetrator exercising power and control over the victim. This was said to commonly involve the threat of distributing images, often in an attempt to blackmail the victim — for example, to coerce them to stay in the relationship against their will. There was also evidence to suggest that some perpetrators used the threat of distributing images to cause fear and emotional distress to victims, reportedly as a method to gain leverage in an argument.

*'His motivation seemed to be to get at her, or to destroy her and it's still about control, but it was really hurtful and spiteful that came out of that place I guess... 'how dare you have another partner in my house with my kids,' that's sense of entitlement... They were his words, 'I'll destroy you'... It was purely power of control. So he'd sent the photos to show her what he had, and he was going to send this to this guy and I think there was a threat of sending it to her work'. (Interview 2, MBCP)*

*'So [we] just had been having an argument and it was something I knew that would piss her off, she wouldn't want other people to see those photos and think all that, so it's just something I said to try and piss her off or make her feel bad, or just something to hurt her basically... [to] make her feel bad'. (Interview 12, Perpetrator — Threatened to Send)*

### 3.4 Justifications, doubts and remorse

Most participants, mainly stakeholders, indicated that perpetrators of relationship-based IBA displayed little remorse for their actions. Instead, it was highlighted that these perpetrators harboured such pronounced dislike and resentment towards the victim (again, often due to a relationship breakdown) that they were incapable of feeling remorse for the potential shame and embarrassment they caused by sharing the intimate image.

*'They don't really have any remorse. They don't like the other person anymore and they're determined to cause them as much humiliation and embarrassment and shame... In the immediate period of time, they're so locked into their emotional dislike for the other person that they just think anything they do is acceptable'. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

The only evidence of regret displayed by these perpetrators was reportedly due to being placed in a legal setting as a result of their actions, often leading to social and employment-related repercussions.

*'I think he was focusing on it purely from... the trouble it had led to him being placed in rather than the effects it may have had on the other person'. (Interview 5, Legal Service)*

One perpetrator participant noted that they regretted their actions. On reflection they felt that their judgment had been clouded when they perpetrated the IBA due to their strong desire for vengeance against their ex-partner. However, even in demonstrating regret, this perpetrator still made comments in attempt to minimise their responsibility and blame the victim for allowing the image to be taken in the first place.

*'[I] thought "oh I maybe shouldn't have said that", but not — I suppose that is regret, a bit. Probably, if it was different circumstances, I'd probably have a bit more regret, like maybe if I was a bit more serious about it or if the photos were taken without her consent in the first place, or something like that'. (Interview 12, Perpetrator – Threatened to Share)*

The impacts on victims of relationship-based IBA were reported to be emotional distress and fear. This was particularly clear in cases where the perpetrator used images to threaten or blackmail the victim. The perpetrators interviewed stated that they were no longer in contact with the victim, so were unable to comment on repercussions for them. When asked to reflect on how their behaviour had affected them personally, these participants reflected on the harm to their reputation among others they knew.

*'I guess the impact is if you tell other people what you've done, they get less — kind of trust you. They're always going to have that, you know, they're not in the relationship at the time and they don't know what motivated me. They probably just look at me as someone who would do it again if I got upset with them'. (Interview 9, Perpetrator)*

*'[When asked what happened once they had threatened to share the image] More arguing [laughs] and just her telling me, "don't do that, don't you dare do that..." It's something she didn't want to happen, so she was just trying to stop it... I don't think it would have been too much impact... She was probably more threatened and frightened.' (Interview 12, Perpetrator — Threatened to Share)*

### 3.5 Awareness of legal ramifications

The two perpetrator participants who had engaged in this form of abuse both indicated low awareness of legal ramifications. One participant stated that this form of IBA is widespread and was aware of numerous people getting away with similar actions. The other participant tended to minimise their actions.

*'You hear about people getting away with it all the time, so you don't really pay too much notice of all that sort of stuff. It doesn't enter you mind like, oh no, I'm going to get into like big trouble now that I've sent, like shared this image'. (Interview 9, Perpetrator)*

*'No, I didn't know that just threatening [to send images] could [have legal ramifications]. I knew sending them probably could. I didn't know threatening could... I'm not sure whether threatening to send them should be a crime unless there's something there to back up that they could actually do it'. (Interview 12, Perpetrator — Threatened to Send)*

### 3.6 Recidivism

Rates of recidivism for relationship-based IBA are unknown on the basis of these qualitative discussions alone. Of the two perpetrator participants who had engaged in relationship-based IBA, both indicated that they had not engaged in another form of IBA since the incident that they described.

That said, some stakeholders commented that they had observed frequent re-offenders. This was potentially more prominent among offenders presenting with a history of abuse and DV.

*'When I'm seeing them it [is] always within that context of DV... One I'm thinking about was in a couple of different, or new relationships throughout the course of that group and the same behaviour was going on... He was talking one night in the group about 'I met this other one,' which was how he referred [to] a woman... You know, 'I met this other one, this other bird, does anyone want to see photos?' (Interview 2, MBCP)*

## 4. Sharing images where the victim is identifiable

This chapter examines in greater detail the different forms of IBA where identifiable images are shared. This typology covers a range of different behaviours with varying levels of severity and impact. Although in some cases this form of IBA involves the perpetrator first soliciting images from the victim, the data collected from stakeholders and perpetrators did not always provide insight as to whether the images were solicited or not. As a result, there is some ambiguity around this particular aspect of IBA where identifiable images are shared.

In this chapter, where discussing IBA where images are solicited then shared without consent, it is generally in reference to young people, based on comments by stakeholders. However, no young people who have perpetrated this form of IBA were included in the sample for this research, and it is also unclear from the data collected how widespread soliciting and sharing identifiable images without consent is in the adult population. Figure 3 summarises perpetrator characteristics for this typology.

**Figure 3** Summary of findings related to sharing identifiable images

Sharing images where the victim is identifiable	
Prevalence	➤ High, based on stakeholder assessments
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mostly male</li> <li>➤ Mostly young (16-25 years old)</li> <li>➤ Stakeholders suggest link to pornography viewing</li> </ul>
Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Social norms</li> <li>➤ Power and control</li> <li>➤ Boastful and social kudos</li> <li>➤ Social pressure</li> <li>➤ Entertainment —‘for a laugh’</li> </ul>
Attitudes and reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Justified because consensually shared by victim, even if image-taking was solicited by perpetrator</li> <li>➤ Justified because ‘everyone does it’, normalised and high prevalence particularly among young people</li> <li>➤ Tendency to minimise responsibility for their actions e.g. ‘I only uploaded the image’, and blame victim for sending image in the first place</li> <li>➤ Aware that what they’re doing is not nice but not necessarily aware of unlawfulness of IBA</li> <li>➤ Little remorse. Not interested in victim impact</li> </ul>
Intervention pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Few cases involving the police. Sometimes handled internally by schools/university authorities</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown. Assumption that young people will mature/grow out of it. Some evidence from perpetrator interviews that this occurs, but also stakeholders saying that behaviour could easily escalate into other abusive behaviours</li> <li>➤ Suggest school/university programs to improve awareness of IBA unlawfulness, potential risks for perpetrators (sexual predator list) and impacts on victim. For example, see the <i>Tea and Consent</i> video:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrXVavnQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrXVavnQ</a> </li> </ul>



## 4.1 Examples of abusive behaviour

Stakeholders reported non-consensual on-sharing of intimate images as highly prevalent, particularly for young people. This form of IBA generally involves young people pressuring peers to send them intimate images and then sharing with others without their consent.

*‘For sexting, I mean with young people ...[it] is where a person is influenced by another party to take a photograph of him or herself... either their clothes on, or posing in some fashion. And then this person who’s influenced them to take this photograph will then share it with others and that’s your traditional sexting kind of stuff’. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

*‘In the younger age groups, I see a lot of pressure placed from males on the girls. And they set up multiple conversations and just go at it. Go at these girls to try and just send an image of something. Send something sexy. Send me a picture of your boob[s] or whatever’. (Interview 8, Police)*

Although some research participants spoke of perpetrators distributing solicited identifiable images, it was not always clear whether the images had been solicited. In some instances, participants described images being taken without consent and then shared. Often these were taken during a brief sexual encounter or a short-term relationship.

*‘Anyway, [he]... became friendly with a young woman at [Nightclub Name] who was a fairly independent young woman and they went back to his place... After they had sex he took a photo of himself naked and also a photograph of her... He sent that on to some friends of his with the comment, “You can’t any longer say that I’m gay”’. (Interview 3, Legal Service)*

*‘The other one we see a lot of is the young people, the teenagers who may be drunk and someone will film their friend having sex with a young girl and send it along, transmit it amongst a small group of friends, which then of course can be transmitted much more widely by them... The young man might know but the woman doesn’t know and finds out about it later when it becomes the topic of conversation amongst their friends at school’. (Interview 7, Legal Service)*

Social media platforms were commonly identified as distribution channels for sharing identifiable images, particularly for young people sharing nude images.

*‘Back in the bad old days when I was married, about five years ago, I took a video of my wife performing an act of enjoyment upon myself. I was over at a mate’s place one night. As most things start — holding my beer, I sent that clip to him’. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

Several perpetrators who were interviewed also described distributing images that had been taken by someone else and then either sent to them directly or discovered online. These images were then on-shared using online forums or messaging services. In these instances, the perpetrators did not necessarily have a personal relationship with the victims, although they may have known them from their social circle.

*‘A friend of mine was talking to me over [an online gaming platform] which is kind of like a gaming version of [online video] calls, where we communicate, and the person I was speaking to was a gay male, and he said he’d taken a photo of his partner without his partner knowing. He sent it to me and I was texting [my friend] at the same time... and I just basically said oh look at the goodies that I’ve just been sent’. (Interview 3, Perpetrator)*

*'And I was just scrolling through and I just saw this one thread saying, 'Anyone have any pics of girls from [state name]?' and then all these people were sharing girls, and so I would save some images of people that I knew... And then once I had a sort of collection of plenty, I had a different [imageboard]'. (Interview 1, Perpetrator)*

## 4.2 Characteristics

As previously described, the sharing of solicited nude images is a form of IBA commonly associated with young people. Stakeholders who were interviewed noted a strong link between the range of technology platforms and social media channels used by young people and the ability to easily use these platforms to distribute intimate images.

*'Yes, I mean as you can gather I'm not a younger person myself, but I think the more you use social media, which tends to be the younger you are, the more inclined you might be to think of engaging in this type of activity'. (Interview 5, Legal Service)*

*'In the junior high school, or middle schools, there's a number of instances of young girls photographing their... breasts and distributing that amongst these pubescent males. I don't think the general public understands how normal this is for these kids because of the phones and of course they're not adults, they are liable to make these silly mistakes'. (Interview 6, Legal Service)*

Although not widely discussed by stakeholders, there was a general acknowledgement that young males were the primary perpetrators of this form of IBA, especially pressuring young girls to provide intimate images of themselves. Most perpetrators who admitted to committing this form of IBA in interviews were also male.

*'And these boys are just monsters in a lot of cases. They send it to their friends and it gets to other — it gets back to some of the girl's friends. And then you get... the bitchiness and the fighting that happens in the schoolyard, it's really mean and nasty'. (Interview 8, Police)*

*'He's basically telling her that if she wasn't sending these photos, he would have no interest in her. I said — who raises a f\*\*\*ing son like that? To basically turn around and tell a young girl, 'I'm not going to date you if you don't want to send naked photos of yourself to me'. (interview 11, Accused Perpetrator whose daughter was also a victim of IBA)*

## 4.3 Motivations

Unsurprisingly, there was a strong social aspect to the motivations for sharing identifiable images discussed by participants, given the inherently social nature of sharing content. In this typology, perpetrators were often motivated to share images with friends to increase their social standing or to respond to peer pressure. This was identified as a particularly strong motivator for young people still at school, and perpetrators described a sense of pride that they derived from sharing images.

*'Oh, I don't know — it might have been a bit of showing off'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

*'A bit of pride for lack of a better term, in the sense that [I wanted to show my friends the image so that they could see] I was able to hook up with this quite good looking male'. (Interview 3, Perpetrator)*



*'I think that after I'd built up quite a collection, I started to kind of take this pride in it, and I started saving people in [state] that I even didn't know, just for the sake of the collection'. (Interview 1, Perpetrator)*

More broadly, participants described social pressures that prompted the sharing of images. Again, this was particularly associated with young people. In this demographic there was a perceived culture of image sharing that was widely accepted and normalised, despite often negative consequences.

*'So some of the sexting stuff — I actually think there's a real culture of that kind of material and I think that there's a certain measure of cruelty in the way in which young people operate and a certain brashness which comes from simply being young and I don't think that they even recognise the dimension of their behaviour. They don't see that what they're doing is emotionally dangerous, or horrible to somebody else'. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

*'You've got these girls going "oh yeah, yeah well maybe I'll show you one [photo of myself]". [And the boys are like] "Oh, I'm just talking to someone else and I'm doing this and I'm doing that [getting images from other girls]"... I don't know if it's peer pressure that they do it and then they go and share it with their mates... I can't even think for myself why or how they are getting such courage to be so targeted towards their specific questioning and things like that... they can construct a message and get it to sound how they want and maybe make themselves out to be someone different'. (Interview 8, Police)*

In cases where images were taken without consent, image sharing was often used as a way of proving to peers that the perpetrator had 'hooked up' with the victim. This was seen by some perpetrators as a way of boasting about their sexual activities or 'conquests'.

*'In one or two cases it's been a friend of mine saying I bet you can't hook up with this person, usually involving alcohol where I've been drunk and my friend [has] been drunk... and then I have hooked up with this person. It's like here's a little bit of proof'. (Interview 3, Perpetrator)*

As demonstrated by this example, alcohol sometimes influences the decision to share images. There was an acknowledgement by several perpetrators that being intoxicated had led to image sharing in a social environment. One perpetrator also indicated that it was unlikely they would have shared images had they been sober.

*'I think — the alcohol may have affected the judgment a bit'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

Another social motivation for sharing images was to entertain friends and peers. This was not limited to young people, and other perpetrators also indicated that they had been motivated to share images for the amusement of themselves and others.

*'Motivation would have been — well, it was something I enjoyed at the time, and I thought he might enjoy watching it too. I don't know. As with a few things you do — it seemed like a good idea at the time. I just thought he might get a bit of amusement out of it'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

*'No, I mean the ones that all spring to mind are just the ones of school children who do it for — they think it's a bit of a joke or a laugh and sort of they haven't thought through the ramifications'. (Interview 7, Legal Service)*

Although participants primarily identified social motivations for sharing identifiable images, a small number of perpetrators also described sharing images as a form of titillation for themselves, but this was not widely discussed.

*'And I mean, often times, I'd get excited in school but then I think it was because I had this — how do I put it? I related feelings of school as sort of an erotic thing'. (Interview 1, Perpetrator)*

*'I think it would be mainly a little bit of the thrill of it, knowing that I'm doing something naughty, but also a bit of the memento I guess you could say, this person's quite hot, I've hooked up with them'. (Interview 3, Perpetrator)*

## 4.4 Justifications, doubts and remorse

Participants reported varying degrees of remorse among perpetrators, depending on the specific type of IBA where identifiable images are shared. For young people soliciting and non-consensually distributing nude images, stakeholders felt that there was often little sign of remorse. They emphasised that perpetrators tend to justify sharing images because they were consensually taken or because the victim deserved it.

*'There's either a suspension of moral value in that sense, or sometimes there's a neutralisation too; so what happens, they say, is — and particularly for instance for sexting they'll say "well if the girl is slutty enough to take her top off, then she deserves what she gets". It's that kind of moral neutralisation [that perpetrators use] and excuses [them] from doing any behaviour because the other person is in a sense culpable for it'. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

*'Firstly, if it's just the distribution of images... if it's just that then they say what have I done wrong? You know, I've got the image, you've given me the image, we took it with consent, it was all a bit of fun at the time, what have I done wrong?' (Interview 6, Legal Service)*

One perpetrator described his lack of remorse in the context that there had been no impact on him personally.

*'I hate to sound like a heartless bloke, but nil [remorse]. It seemed like a fun thing to do at the time, and it was, and there haven't been any ramifications of it since then, so really, I don't feel — perhaps a twinge guilty I suppose, I suppose a 1% chance that it might get out in the public domain, but the chance of that's minimal, I'm not losing any sleep over it, definitely'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

Many perpetrators however tried to justify and minimise their responsibility for perpetrating IBA. These perpetrators primarily saw the sharing of identifiable images as justified because they were only shown to a limited number of people, or because they were consensually taken.

*'Sharing it with one as opposed to possibly millions is probably a little bit of a line in the sand, I think. I'm pretty happy with that'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

*'If you're getting a photo taken, and you're giving consent at the time of getting the photos taken it's like — once they're taken, they're out there. You know what I mean? You don't know what's really going to happen with that'. (Interview 14, Accused Perpetrator)*

Despite these comments which demonstrate a lack of remorse and minimisation of IBA, comments from some stakeholders and perpetrators suggest that young people who are charged with this form of IBA sometimes do express remorse, once they understand the ramifications of what they have done.

*'I think some of those, when they're caught, they're sort of genuinely remorseful and sorry about what they've done or realise the ramifications of it, not only for the person or people*

*that are depicted, but for themselves and having done that and how they'll be thought of'. (Interview 7, Legal Service)*

*'After I finished school, I sort of became a bit of a different person. I got a girlfriend at the time. I told her what I'd done and I felt guilty about it and I deleted them all and let her know that I did'. (Interview 1, Perpetrator)*

*'If I flipped the situation and think of it being I'm the one that this is happening to, I definitely wouldn't want people to know... if I could redo it all over again I'd probably, I'd either ask for consent, explain that I also shared some of my photos to people, and if they consented then cool, awesome, and also giving them permission to do the exact same thing. However, if they said no, then I probably wouldn't'. (Interview 3, Perpetrator)*

Few of the perpetrators interviewed were able to comment on the impact of the IBA on their victims. In a handful of cases where this insight was provided, it appears that the impact was quite severe, leading the victim to substance abuse, self-harm and losing contact with family.

*'After that, [the victim] flipped out, she hit the drugs, she was on drugs at 14. Started drinking, hanging around with even worse kids than that boy...' (Interview 11, Accused Perpetrator)*

*'It's being claimed that this kind of material can lead children to consider suicide, or that kind of stuff. But the evidence doesn't suggest that sexting directly causes suicide, but it can add to the depression that a young person might feel, that increases the risk; then they might harm themselves'. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

## 4.5 Awareness of legal ramifications

Stakeholders did not believe there was a strong awareness among young people of the legal ramifications of soliciting and sharing identifiable images without consent. As previously described, there is a perceived culture of non-consensually sharing nude images among young people that ignores the risks and legal ramifications associated with this form of IBA. However, some stakeholders also noted that the laws for sharing intimate images without consent were not fully enforced when dealing with young people. There was a perception that although laws related to distribution of child exploitation material generally did not distinguish between whether the perpetrator was a young person or not, this was often not reflected in the intervention pathways used.

*'I think most young people don't recognise what they're doing is illegal and 99.9% of them might get roused on, might get yelled at, but there are no legal consequences for their behaviour. So there's no incentive for them really to stop doing this kind of stuff. They get stronger support for doing it from their peer group and all that kind of stuff than getting yelled at by their parents, or getting yelled at by the school, or yelled at by even the copper who might be brought in to say "don't do that, or we will arrest you next time" kind of stuff, but they don't believe that'. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

One perpetrator who had been in high school when he shared identifiable images indicated that he learned that there could be serious legal consequences for still having those images on his computer once he was over the age of 18, as it could be treated as child exploitation.

*'I did remember someone saying to me, "You having those images on your computer, if you have those as an adult, you can get arrested," and that idea kind of scared me. (Interview 1, Perpetrator)*

More generally, adult perpetrators of IBA, where the images identify the victim, did not have a strong awareness of the legal ramifications or did not think that there was much risk of being caught. However, awareness tended to increase over time and in some cases prompted them to stop sharing images.

*'I suppose I was aware that it could be illegal — but I suppose it was all a matter of risk negation, it seemed like there was a slim to nil chance of it ever going anywhere else, but as we covered before, given the same opportunity, in a sober scenario, possibly it may not have happened'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

*'[At first I didn't realise it was illegal] not at first, if I'm honest, I was I guess a bit naive, however near the end of it there, I was considering stopping and then thought well I could just ask consent, if they say no then I just don't do it. Then I did definitely did understand that it wasn't exactly, it wasn't legal, it wasn't kosher, it wasn't nice, it wasn't socially acceptable and all those sorts of things'. (Interview 3, Perpetrator)*

## 4.6 Recidivism

Most perpetrators who had committed this form of IBA indicated that they would not share images without consent again in the future. Some did not rule out sharing intimate images again but agreed that they would ask for consent from the subject of the images before sharing them with others.

*'I wouldn't do it again. Put it this way — I might take the video, but I definitely wouldn't share it'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

*'If the occasion were to arise where I could take a photo, it would definitely cause an internal debate, and nowadays I'd definitely lean towards more if we were in the action of sexual intercourse or leading up to it, I would say nine out of 10 times I would say, oh this is quite fun, do you mind if I snap a photo? If they then said keep it between us, then I'd most likely keep it between us. However, if that's not specified, I would feel a little bit torn, because the ramifications, the specific wording of that isn't keep it between us. It is a little difficult'. (Interview 3, Perpetrator)*

## 5. Sharing unsolicited images where the victim is unidentifiable

This section of the report explores the characteristics, motivations, and attitudes of individuals who shared unsolicited intimate images where the victim is unidentified in the image. Figure 4 summarises perpetrator characteristics for this typology.

**Figure 4** Summary of findings related to sharing unsolicited unidentifiable images

Sharing unsolicited images where victim is unidentifiable	
Prevalence	➤ High, based on stakeholder assessments
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mixed gender</li> <li>➤ Mostly 20-35 year olds engaged in online dating</li> <li>➤ Mixed sexual orientations with some signs of high prevalence in gay communities</li> </ul>
Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Boastful and social kudos e.g. 'look what I received'</li> <li>➤ Entertainment e.g. 'showed my friends for a laugh'</li> <li>➤ Looking for advice from peers e.g. 'he sent me this, what should I do?'</li> </ul>
Attitudes and reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Justified because consensually shared by victim — often with little/no personal relationship with perpetrator, such as dick pics sent on dating platforms</li> <li>➤ Tendency to minimise behaviour e.g. 'they never knew I shared it', 'they probably send their dick pics to heaps of people', 'everyone does it'</li> <li>➤ Little/no awareness of this constituting IBA with legal implications</li> </ul>
Intervention pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Victim usually not aware of IBA to report</li> <li>➤ Little/no interventions being taken</li> <li>➤ High level of recidivism — 'it's harmless', 'everyone does it'</li> </ul>

### 5.1 Examples of abusive behaviour

Similar to sharing images where the victim is identified, this IBA typology was reported as highly prevalent in the interviews. Among the participants interviewed, there was little variation in the types of behaviours associated with this IBA typology. For the most part, participants reported that they had received unsolicited images (such as 'dick pics') through a dating app, which they had then forwarded to their friends. The relationship between the perpetrator and the victim was often cursory in nature, with the two having never met before, or having known each other for a relatively short period of time.

*'I just had gotten [online dating platform], because I was at uni, and I had decided to try it out the dating app. I was talking to someone on there and he had asked for my [social media account name]. We were talking through [that social media site]. Then, you know, it was just fine, we were just talking, and then he just began to bombard me with a bunch of his pictures' (Interview 13, Perpetrator)*

*'Often when they send it, I've never met them before... We've shared our contact details, but then it fades out. But it has always been with guys when we were close to meeting up, and then they send them as a preparation for the date'. (Interview 8, Perpetrator)*

Most participants indicated that they had either forwarded the unsolicited pictures using a private messaging platform on social media sites, or by showing the images to friends in-person. Most participants noted that they had shared the images with a small group of close friends and did not distribute the images more widely than this. Some participants noted that the perpetrator was not identified in the image that they sent, but it was not always clear to what extent this held true in other cases.

*'I have a bunch of close girlfriends who are also single. They are on dating apps and we were sitting around discussing pictures that have been sent to each of us and that men are senseless... I showed the picture that I'd been given and they were showing pictures that they'd been given'. (Interview 15, Perpetrator)*

*'... on [social media site], the pictures disappear... But I don't take a screenshot or anything. It's just if she happens to be in the room, I'll show her. But if they do send them in a more permanent manner, like on [private social media messaging] or something, I have sent them to her through [text] messages, as well'. (Interview 8, Perpetrator)*

*'Because guys like to send dick pics... My friend's like "oh, I got this dick pick and I got that dick pic" and she's like, "I should just make a book of dick pics." (Interview 9, Perpetrator)*

Sharing unsolicited images was the form of IBA most commonly admitted to by perpetrator participants. This is likely due to a range of factors, not simply that it is a highly prevalent form of IBA, but also because perpetrators felt that they were themselves a victim because they had received the unsolicited images, such as in the case of receipt of 'dick picks', and because they had a low awareness that sharing these images constituted IBA.

## 5.2 Characteristics

This form of IBA was not frequently discussed by stakeholders, as the focus of these discussions tended to be on IBA that was visible to psychologists and those in legal or law enforcement settings. As such, perpetrator characteristics discussed here reflect the sample of perpetrators in this research.

Most perpetrators of this IBA typology were younger, typically in their late teens and early 20's. Of the participants who identified as perpetrators of this form of IBA, most were female. This is likely due to women being the primary target of individuals who send unsolicited images. Some participants also mentioned that sharing unsolicited images was prevalent in gay communities.

*'Sharing images and those kinds of things... in gay culture it's all about look who I'm dating or look at what I look like just all the superficial stuff' (Interview 2, Perpetrator)*

One participant identified that they had also been a victim of relationship-based IBA, but no other participants identified as victims of IBA. That said, it was evident that many participants felt violated as a result of receiving unsolicited images, and in this sense, they identified themselves as 'victims' rather than as perpetrators.

*'I did feel a bit violated — like, "whoa, I didn't want to see a video of you playing with yourself!" And a bit forced, because he kept asking me to send pictures and images and I just kept going, "no, I think we're a bit too old for this game". (Interview 10, Perpetrator)*

## 5.3 Motivations

Perpetrators in this category often reported being motivated by two co-occurring factors. The first of these relates to sharing the image in a social context, due to perceived pressure from friends. For example, many participants indicated that, after telling their friends that they had received unsolicited images, they were met with disbelief and requests for ‘proof’ of the incident. As such, some participants suggested that they had felt pressured to share the image to legitimise their experience. This was not necessarily to brag or gain social kudos, but there may be elements of this.

*‘They won’t believe me if I don’t send them the picture. They might just think I’m pretending, or lying... which I’m sure happens a lot’. (Interview 10, Perpetrator)*

*‘There was a bit of social pressure, there were a lot of people that asked, “do you have [the image]? I want to see it”, kind of thing as well’. (Interview 4, Perpetrator)*

*‘I don’t know whether it was a case of me feeling left out and I’ve gone well hey, “hey I’ve got one too”... Because [my friends are] on apps and getting messages all — one of them has got bloody 24 people sending their bloody dick pics’. (Interview 15, Perpetrator)*

Similarly, some participants noted that they shared the image as a means to gauge how they should respond. As noted in section 7.2, perpetrators of this form of IBA often felt violated as a result of being sent these images, resulting in some seeking out advice from friends about how they should react.

*‘I just wanted to talk to somebody about it... I honestly just didn’t even think this is wrong to send. I just did it. I didn’t think about it. Just — “oh my God, look what’s happened.” He actually had asked me to send videos and pictures back’. (Interview 10, Perpetrator)*

The other major motivation that was discussed by participants was the desire to mock the person who had sent the images. Participants described sharing the image with their friends, so that they could joke about it with other people.

*‘It was more like, having a laugh because he kept thinking that — yeah, because I was opening these [social media messages], that I was obviously interested... This whole time he had this perception of how things were going and then it’s turned out the other way, he’s actually being made fun of’. (Interview 13, Perpetrator)*

*‘I think it was more just a joke, I saw it as a joke... Being young, you think that’s funny, and humiliating someone and embarrassing them is funny’. (Interview 4, Perpetrator)*

## 5.4 Justifications, doubts and remorse

Most perpetrators indicated that, at the time of sharing the unsolicited image, they did not think that they were doing something wrong. As noted elsewhere, many perpetrators of this form of IBA saw themselves as victims (having been the ones to receive the unsolicited images), and some rationalised their behaviour for the entertainment value of on-sharing images with friends.

That said, the interview questions caused participants to reflect critically on their behaviour, with most indicating at some point throughout discussions that they later regretted their actions. Some attributed this to age, noting that they were young and immature when the incident occurred.

*‘I was just wanting to share it with someone and talk to my friends about it, which I didn’t... feel like I was doing anything wrong... Now we’ve talked about it, I realise that it’s quite a stupid thing to do’. (Interview 10, Perpetrator)*



*'I would be a lot more against it than I was when I was 20/25... The older I get the more I respect other people and the more I respect myself... But when I was — even five years ago I didn't even care about that really'. (Interview 7, Perpetrator)*

Despite most participants expressing remorse for their behaviour, this appeared to be inconsistent with their reflections on the incident throughout discussions. Instances of minimising and victim blaming were frequent throughout interviews. Many perpetrators justified their actions by pointing out that the victim had initially shared the image consensually (without the perpetrator asking to receive it).

*'I should have respected his privacy... but at the same time... I didn't ask for the images. He willingly sent them, without his privacy being a concern'. (Interview 10, Perpetrator)*

*'I was just, "I never wanted those pictures to be given to me in the first place..." I just said, "Next time maybe you should think about doing that — asking permission before you send me these pictures because you don't know what will happen". (Interview 13, Perpetrator)*

It was also common for participants to minimise the impact of this form of IBA on the victim. Many participants stated that they were no longer in contact with the victim, so could not elaborate on how the incident had impacted them. Many participants indicated that the victim was unaware that the image had been forwarded to others, and others stated that they did not think the victim would care.

*'It feels like it's not a big deal, because the [victim] doesn't know. But if they found out, then yes, it would be a very horrible experience'. (Interview 10, Perpetrator)*

In cases where victims were aware of the image being shared, participants noted that they reacted angrily or became embarrassed. However, it was evident that most participants were more likely to reflect on the impact of the incident on themselves, as opposed to thinking about impact on the victim.

*'He was a bit — well, he was a bit angry, actually, because he was a bit like, "Hey, I just wanted to get to know you more. Why would you go and share these pictures out?"... I think he was quite frustrated because, I guess, this whole time he had this perception of how things were going and then it's turned out the other way'. (Interview 13, Perpetrator)*

*'I feel a bit remorseful but more remorseful to myself than to others. I don't think at the end of the day it did a massive amount of harm. I don't think they found out... I'm just a bit more remorseful to myself... having to use other people to make me feel better about myself... that makes me feel, I guess, sad now...' (Interview 7, Perpetrator)*

## 5.5 Awareness of legal ramifications

There was some awareness among participants that the sharing of images had legal ramifications. However, most perpetrators indicated that it was not something that they had considered when sending the image. Some participants stated that they did not think that potential legal consequences would be serious, if they were charged. It was evident that most perpetrators felt that the legal responsibility should rest with the victim for sending the unsolicited images to them in the first place.

*'I guess obviously it's wrong, it's something that you shouldn't really do but it's like a little kid kind of thinking, "oh yes mum told me not to eat the cookies, but I will anyway, I'll still do it." It kind of feels like it's an innocent kind of behaviour of sharing photos, especially of someone that you haven't really met'. (Interview 2, Perpetrator)*

*'It depends on the picture... I can't imagine it having a very big effect on men as it has on women, because men want to get it out there... Hypothetically, I know that there can be*



*consequences, but I don't believe that there would ever be consequences for me, because I don't think it would have any effect on their life'. (Interview 8, Perpetrator)*

## 5.6 Recidivism

Recidivism rates for this IBA typology were unclear. While many perpetrators indicated a sense of remorse as they got older and said that they would no longer engage in that behaviour, most perpetrators had committed this type of IBA on multiple occasions and a couple said that they would continue sharing images despite now being aware that it was against the law.

*'I don't think it will change anything for me. Again, because it doesn't have any consequences for the men that I share with or with the friends I'm sharing it with. Because it's only the two of us. It's not in a group chat or a lot of people or sharing it on [name of an unmoderated online platform] or something like that. It's more of an internal joke, kind of thing. So I don't think it will change anything for me'. (Interview 8, Perpetrator)*

## 6. IBA related to child exploitation

This chapter explores in detail the characteristics, motivations and attitudes of perpetrators who have committed IBA linked to child exploitation material. None of the perpetrators in the sample discussed/admitted to perpetrating this type of IBA and so the data in this chapter is entirely provided by stakeholders who have worked with this group of perpetrators. Figure 5 summarises perpetrator characteristics for this typology.

It is important to note that the behaviour outlined in this chapter (taking and eliciting intimate images) does not fall under eSafety's remit of IBA but rather is captured under criminal law.

**Figure 5** Summary of findings of IBA related to child exploitation

IBA related to child exploitation	
Prevalence	➤ Low, based on stakeholder assessments
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Almost all male</li> <li>➤ No clear age profile</li> <li>➤ Often high functioning professionals</li> <li>➤ Intimacy issues</li> <li>➤ Negative attitudes towards women</li> <li>➤ Stakeholders link to escalating pornography usage</li> </ul>
Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sexual perversion/deviance</li> <li>➤ Sexual gratification</li> <li>➤ Power and control</li> <li>➤ Social status and self-aggrandisement</li> </ul>
Attitudes and reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Little remorse. Focus is on impact it has had on themselves rather than victim i.e. Impact of court process, being placed on sexual predator list</li> <li>➤ Perpetrator is aware of unlawfulness of actions</li> <li>➤ Tendency to minimise responsibility for actions and engage in delusions and distancing mechanisms</li> </ul>
Intervention pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Perpetrator mostly identified by special unit police investigations into child exploitation rather than triggered by victim reporting</li> <li>➤ Police investigations lead to criminal charges and court proceedings</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown</li> </ul>

### 6.1 Examples of abusive behaviour

According to stakeholders, this cohort of perpetrators had a relatively low prevalence rate compared to the other types of IBA. This type of IBA includes intimate images that were taken and/or shared without consent. Child victims may be 'tricked' into providing a photo or video of themselves believing that they are sharing it with someone they had befriended online similar in age to them. Some victims have been blackmailed into sharing further images — also known as 'sextortion', and some victims' experiences of IBA were directly linked to perpetrators of domestic violence. In most cases the perpetrator distributes these images to an online forum/network of other sexual predators.

*'He'd solicited images. He'd struck up conversations I think it was a 16-year-old or maybe a 15-year-old, female... I think he was actually charged with blackmail in the end... There's a technique down for befriending someone, getting an image and then demanding another image under threat of exposing the first ones... The parent of the third girl had the police involved and somehow, they traced him... They found other images which he took in [imageboard platform] and some of them were child pornography'. (Interview 4, Counsellor)*

*'I had a guy who had very excellent IT skills, so he organised a link through to somewhere in the [foreign country], and he had a contact there [which he paid], and this man would then set up children and have them being physically and sexually abused, that would be filmed and sent back to him live and he would re-watch some of these... He still claims, "I would never, ever offend against a person directly"...' (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

In a couple of instances, stakeholders described child abuse images that had been taken of their own family members. In the first instance, the images had been kept for private use (sexual pleasure), and in the second example, the perpetrator had distributed the images on online platforms for other sexual predators.

*'I know a guy who puts surveillance cameras in the bathroom; so that whenever his daughter went to have a shower he was able to watch his [teenage] daughter naked in the shower... He didn't do anything with those images, rather than — well, other than use them for his own sexual pleasure'. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

*'She was groomed by her step-father to allow him to take — in inverted commas "modelling photos" of her, which essentially were pornographic images'. (Interview 5, Legal Service)*

## 6.2 Characteristics

In all but one case discussed throughout the interviews, the perpetrators of IBA linked to child exploitation were male. The female perpetrator in the sample was atypical in that she was a victim of abuse and was soliciting images of children to provide to her abuser. There was no clear age profile. Some of the perpetrators described by stakeholders were young adults, and in one case, the perpetrator was identified as being in his senior years.

*'Seeing this old guy, it really didn't look like he was capable of doing any sort of thing like that. But then reading some of the texts that he'd send... specifically targeting these girls and how he set them up... [He] showed some excitement about what he's going to get [what images he promised the forum he could obtain]... he got them [child victims] playing and just managed to manipulate it from behind and up skirts type of stuff'. (Interview 8, Police)*

Stakeholders described perpetrators of child exploitation-based IBA as high functioning in that they could be well-educated and hold professional jobs.

*'A number of those are seemingly pro-social individuals — obviously not — but [they] hold jobs down. Maintain some level of pro-social lifestyle'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

Nonetheless stakeholders identified that perpetrators linked to child exploitation tended to have difficulties relating with other people, and in some cases intimacy issues effecting their ability to develop healthy intimate relationships.

*'He comes across as quite arrogant and a little bit aloof... elements of narcissism and being on the [autism] spectrum there as far as not being able to read people by tone and intent... and taking words very literally... [He was] in a very lonely space. And I see this quite often in my work'. (Interview 4, Counselling)*

*'A lot of sexual abusive behaviours is attachment problems and intimacy problems. But in terms of attitudes I think that a lot of these people have problematic attitudes in general not necessarily about women but about sex, about intimacy, about a sense of entitlement, the role that sex plays, masculinity, obviously by extension femininity those kinds of things, so definitely problematic attitudes. I also think that generally speaking this client group tends to use sex as an emotional coping strategy as well'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

Negative attitudes towards women and a high use of pornography were also identified by stakeholders as characteristics of these perpetrators.

*'[He came from a] cultural background... [of] machismo... There are also elements of disrespect for his mother, for example, and the rest of his family'. (Interview 4, Counselling)*

*Most of the individuals that I have seen that engage in child — access or distribute child abuse material, all of them have a very problematic relationship with pornography. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

Stakeholders described how perpetrators escalate their viewing of pornography from initially soft pornography towards sexually violent videos in what they understood to be obsessional/addictive behaviour.

## 6.3 Motivations

Three types of motivations were identified for perpetrators engaged in IBA related to child exploitation: sexual perversion/deviance; sexual fantasy; and power and control linked to social status or self-aggrandisement. The data informing this section is dominated by one stakeholder's insights on several perpetrators of IBA linked to child abuse. Other stakeholders in the sample echoed these insights but were unable to provide such detailed accounts.

Sexual perversion/deviance was discussed as a key motivator for child exploitation-based IBA. Sexual deviance describes perpetrator behaviour that is compulsive, akin to an obsession or addiction to sexually perverse materials and activities. This should in no way be understood to diminish the responsibility or culpability of those perpetrators.

*'There was a very strong array of deviant activity that was going on that I think was appealing to his general sexual appetite. Almost, the most deviant the better... He kept them for himself... It was quite a personal prized collection'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

*'Some individuals would claim that it was quite compulsive. That they were looking to amass a collection of almost everything. So, they would say, "I was only collecting it. I never masturbated to it." But then, you would sometimes look at these collections and they would be quite ordered. Categorised... they might add a sexualised text almost like a bubble, a speech bubble... quite clearly the opposite to what they are saying'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

The stakeholder described how sexual perversion/deviance can be physically re-enforcing such that perpetrators can form quite entrenched behaviours.

*'If I am a male and I have a sexual interest in something and then I masturbate to that and ejaculate to that, that is quite physically reinforcing... I then feed that desire and emphasise my deviance. That is what we find with people who engage in great fantasies, and when you ejaculate to those, it really does create a — 'bond' is the wrong word, but a clearer association in the classic conditioning sense'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

Perpetrators may not admit to feeling sexual gratification from the images which they solicit from children, but instead may justify their behaviour saying that they were meeting the needs of others. Given the high level of non-disclosure among perpetrators, stakeholders felt that gratification and fantasy was nonetheless a major motivator for child exploitation-based IBA. One stakeholder described a perpetrator who disclosed his sexual fantasies involving children.

*'A lot of them will talk about their interest in a person that is going through that pubescent stage and being the first to engage in sex with them, and touch them, and experience their emerging sexuality... [For one perpetrator] it would be his dream to have sex with a 13-year old and experience them in that way. He has really distorted views about how they would want to have sex with him as a hairy 30-year old male. So, a lot of them really romanticise and idealise what these interactions would be like'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

The final type of motivation is linked to power and control in which perpetrators seek social status/affirmation and self-aggrandisement. Perpetrators get a sense of control and power through successfully tricking and exploiting the victim but the dominant motivator seemed to be the social affirmation and status they would feel when they shared these images with other sexual predators seeking child abuse images online.

*'Their online life and behaviour provides them an escape or a better lifestyle than what they have in the outside world... They will sell themselves to look a certain way and be a certain person, and then they kind of really enjoy what contact and feedback they get from that because their life is very different and is often a lot more mundane and dull'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

*'They claim they try and meet other people's needs on the internet. So, sometimes quite intelligent people that may have insecurity, self-identity issues, depression, whatever. A whole range of things that lead them to seek out affirmation from other people, and so they would talk to other people on the internet. Some of them would claim, "I would promise them, Yes, I can get you a child to do this," or, "You can have my cousin," and they were using really graphic and quite abhorrent descriptions about what they could do'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

## 6.4 Attitudes and reflections

Stakeholders described delusions and distancing mechanisms that suggest perpetrators minimise the culpability of their actions. Most of the child exploitation-based IBA reported in this research was perpetrated online: the images were mostly solicited from victims that the perpetrator never met in person and the images were then distributed to people that they never met in person. This means that the perpetrators could maintain psychological distance from the victim's experience and to some extent avoid confronting the reality of their abusive behaviour.

*'He said he acknowledged the hurt and the pain to the other people but still there was this element of 'this was just internet' and this wasn't real, these people were dots... [It was] brought home pretty hard obviously when the police actually knocked on the door, that that was actually the real world'. (Interview 4, Counselling)*

Stakeholders described that perpetrators of child exploitation-based IBA were aware that their behaviour was illegal at the time of perpetration but that this did not prevent their behaviour from occurring. This in part links back to minimising mechanisms ('lots of people share these types of images') but also feeling that they can get away with the behaviour without being caught.

*'I think he did [was aware of legal ramifications] but it's like anyone else — experience is the mother of all teachers. As long as it's happening to someone else, there's so many people that seem to be doing it on the internet, why would he be the one [who is caught]?' (Interview 4, Counselling)*

Stakeholders' observations of perpetrators through police investigations and court processes, suggest a low level of remorse for their behaviour after committing IBA. Remorse was mostly limited to the impact the court process and sentencing had on themselves as the perpetrator.

*'The remorse was more about the sh\*t that's he'd made for himself and his family... there was a fair sense of... narcissism there, which again, is 'all about me', that tended to change probably about two months in [to therapeutic process after court sentencing]...'*  
(Interview 4, Counselling)

The perpetrators described in this chapter were charged and convicted for child-exploitation related crimes. The stakeholders were unable to provide follow-up data for these cases to indicate recidivism rates.

## 7. Taking images of strangers

This chapter examines in greater detail the characteristics, motivations and attitudes of perpetrators who have taken intimate images of strangers without their consent, commonly referred to as ‘upskirting’, ‘downblousing’, or the broader term ‘creepshot’. Only one perpetrator in the sample had committed this form of IBA so this analysis is largely based on examples and insights from stakeholders. Figure 6 summarises perpetrator characteristics for this typology.

As in the previous chapter, it is important to note that the behaviour outlined in this chapter (taking intimate images) does not fall under eSafety’s remit of IBA but rather is captured under criminal law.

**Figure 6** Summary of findings related to taking images of strangers

Taking images of strangers	
Prevalence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Low, based on stakeholder assessments</li></ul>
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ All examples from stakeholders were male</li><li>➤ No age profile</li><li>➤ Includes high functioning professionals</li><li>➤ Intimacy issues</li><li>➤ Linked to escalating pornography usage</li><li>➤ Some examples of mental health issues</li></ul>
Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Gratification</li><li>➤ Sexual perversion/deviance</li><li>➤ Power (in terms of doing something without person’s knowledge but not coercive/manipulative)</li></ul>
Attitudes and reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Obsessive behaviour often linked to long history, multiple victims</li><li>➤ Tendency to minimise responsibility for their actions, also illusions of woman seeking that kind of attention e.g. ‘she wore a short skirt so she had it coming’</li></ul>
Intervention pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Perpetrators identified through victims spotting the perpetrator taking image and going to the police</li><li>➤ Police charges and court proceedings lead to referrals to counselling/psychologists</li><li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown/mixed. Victim confrontation may be effective in preventing recidivism</li></ul>

### 7.1 Examples of abusive behaviour

Upskirting was seen by stakeholders as having a low prevalence compared to other forms of IBA. The low prevalence rate is perhaps not unusual given that images are taken secretly and may be for personal use such that victims may never be aware that the image was taken (and therefore have no capacity to report). Examples of this form of IBA given by stakeholders were largely consistent and there was little variation in the types of abuse committed. Typically, participants gave examples of men taking intimate images of women without their consent. These offences occurred in a variety of public or shared spaces such as a shopping centre, train station or public/shared bathroom.

*‘I’ve got a client in my group at the moment who’s been convicted for a range of... prior offences where he videoed adult women in toilets, public toilets’. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*



*'So, he would go to a train station and film as many people as he could, as long as they met his criteria, i.e. able to film, short enough skirt, and all the other dynamics that must exist'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

The victims of this form of IBA were not always aware that images had been taken of them, although stakeholders gave several examples of victims or bystanders alerting police when they caught the perpetrator in the act of taking images.

*'When he came to us initially he was caught with one, like one person, caught him at a train station basically following her. She was going up the escalator and she saw that he was videoing her and she alerted security guards and they got him. But once the police process began he was found with footage of multiple victims basically in similar circumstances, so he was eventually charged I think with 12 separate [offences]'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

*'The next morning he was found out... somebody saw him walking away from the bathroom window and alerted police'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

There were no comments made about the sharing of the images taken by perpetrators in this category, with participants acknowledging that the perpetrators generally took the images for their own personal use (see also Henry & Flynn, forthcoming, for a discussion of the types of forums where such images are shared online).

## 7.2 Characteristics

A broad range of characteristics were identified for these perpetrators, although this form of IBA was typically committed by men. Within this group though, there was a large spectrum of different characteristics, which was acknowledged by one stakeholder below.

*'They are from different walks of life. People from low SES to high-functioning individuals with quite professional backgrounds, these three individuals that I am thinking about. All three of them enjoyed the risk and the thrill of doing it'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

Despite this, there were some common traits identified among upskirting perpetrators. In particular, some perpetrators had intimacy and social issues, which reportedly had an influence on their offending. These issues could lead the perpetrator to feeling isolated, with upskirting presenting as a distorted and highly sexualised approach to seeking intimacy and an escape from reality.

*'He was quite depressed and, again by his account, quite disillusioned with life. Having some interpersonal and intimacy problems in terms of where to go with his relationship at the time... His claim was this was an outlet that allowed him to escape quite far from his life and his professional life'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

*'He's not a callous person I just don't think he'd ever thought about the other person, he's very self-focussed in what he was doing which again is probably a common theme in a lot of these people'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

According to stakeholders, in some cases these intimacy and social issues also stemmed from aspects of the perpetrator's sexuality, such as specific fetishes and the escalating usage of pornography.

*'The seed for this offence was probably planted in his very early days... [when] he stumbled across this woman peeing I think and he found that quite exciting in this titillating young person's mindset... That made a memory trace and he kind of went back to that'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*



*'Pornography was part of the problem that drove the fantasy and then at some point the pornography becomes not exciting enough and the desire comes to create that in real life'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

Some stakeholders discussed the prevalence of mental health issues among perpetrators.

*'He has quite serious and debilitating social anxiety and that's relevant because it is relevant to his offending in the sense that he found it very hard to talk to people, engage with people, and therefore obviously to meet women and he developed an interest in voyeuristic porn because it enabled him to have the fantasy of being hidden, if that makes sense, because of his anxiety and then that was reinforced over a period of time and fed the fantasy which ultimately led to his offending'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

*'I suspect he has neurological issues. I submitted him to a whole bunch of neurological or neuropsychological testing... there's something that's clearly going on with him if that makes sense. His functioning is not normal. He's average intelligence but he can't remember stuff, he can't prioritise things, he can't organise things, he's very scattered, his memory's poor'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

However, in other cases stakeholders reported no clear signs of the perpetrator having mental health issues, although there was still some variation in their level of functionality in the community.

*'No mental health issue with this guy, very functional for all intents and purposes. Married but separated... functional, employed, participating actively in the community, no intellectual disability, mental health, other social disadvantage issues for him'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

*'He was less functional in the community. He's still employed but at a lower level. No clear mental health issues. Only one known offence that we know of and I think it was opportunistic but he had a history of taking photos of people generally and I think that was probably a distraction technique when he was stressed or preoccupied'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

These examples reinforce that there is a high degree of variability in the backgrounds of these perpetrators, which may have an influence on their offending behaviour.

## 7.3 Motivations

In this typology of IBA, there was a specific motivation consistently identified, namely sexual deviance and gratification. According to some stakeholders, this titillation in part stems from the anticipation and act of taking images without the consent of the victim. Perpetrators were reportedly excited by this and enjoyed the 'thrill' of taking the images.

*'[He] enjoyed the fact that he was able to look at this without the person's knowledge or consent. You know, catching them unawares, so he was quite aroused by people going about their daily business and, kind of, catching them unawares'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

*'The actual act of taking the images was also extremely exciting for them'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

According to stakeholders, perpetrators experienced arousal from the images they took when they viewed them later on. In some instances, this was due to specific fetishes or obsessions the perpetrator had such as women's underwear.

*'Overwhelmingly the motivation for my clients in this stuff is sexual motivation, sexual pleasure'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

*'One of those had a fetish related to ladies' underwear, and his offence actually involved filming a younger person, somebody in their school uniform, and up-skirting and that kind of scenario. But for him, it wasn't about the age of the person. He basically wanted to capture, by his account, any form of underwear'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

*'I mean, I was a very sexual person. You know, I still am very sexual and I have this like a fetish'. (Interview 6, Perpetrator)*

One stakeholder also spoke of power and control as a motivation for committing this form of IBA, which could equally cause pleasure and gratification.

*'The motivation is more of... a sexual psychopathic motivation and the image is a sense a trophy, or a memory — a physical memory they've got of how much power and control they've been able to exert over something, or someone... and that gives them ongoing pleasurable feelings'. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

## 7.4 Justifications, doubts and remorse

According to stakeholders, perpetrators of upskirting justify their actions because their victims are often unaware that images have been taken of them. From the perpetrator's perspective, this means that the victim is not hurt by their actions.

*'That "she doesn't know, you know, she's not aware of what's going on, I'm just here, if she doesn't know then it can't hurt her", that kind of stuff'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

There is also a perceived low level of remorse among perpetrators. Participants indicated that perpetrators often had limited empathy for their victims and did not always understand the impact of what they had done. In some cases, this was due to cognitive or social issues that perpetrators may be experiencing, which make it harder to empathise with others.

*'His level of remorse was not so high but the reason I say that I think again is this neurocognitive functioning, he's got such difficulty — he's very concrete. It's hard for him to perspective take and appreciate other's experiences so I think he has limits in his capacity to have empathy or remorse.' (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

However, the one perpetrator who was interviewed in this category did express some regret.

*'After I felt a little bit guilty, to be honest. She wasn't aware, it was a public place again, you know? I never shared her picture, deleted it not long [after]... probably in an hour'. (Interview 6, Perpetrator)*

Stakeholders reported that perpetrators tend to have a low awareness of the impact of upskirting on their victims. However, one stakeholder recounted that after seeing the emotional distress of the victim, a couple of perpetrators had come to consider the impact of their offence, especially since undergoing therapy.

*'His initial thing I think was around consequences to himself. But through the treatment process he's become much more aware and I guess the thing for him is the last victim which was the victim that confronted him she looked shocked and horrified and frightened so that facial reinforcement has helped him see a direct human impact'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

One stakeholder reported that the impact of upskirting related charges were quite high on perpetrators, particularly as a result of being placed on the sexual offenders' registry. These impacts include travel restrictions and the financial impacts of going through court proceedings and treatment, as well as employment impacts as perpetrators had to take time off from work to attend court appearances and therapeutic interventions.

*'Obviously there's a financial impact and an ongoing financial impact because he's got to pay for treatment. He also has to take time off work to attend treatment. His boss doesn't know so he's kind of juggling time off work and lies about why he's not at work'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

*'The criminal justice outcome obviously is a stressful process, you've got to go through court... All the frustrations of then having to deal with the sanctions in terms of the limits on movement, applying for travel permits... and financial impacts as well'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

## 7.5 Awareness of legal ramifications

Participants agreed that perpetrators were generally aware that what they were doing was illegal, or at least ethically wrong. There was a perceived element of risk in taking photos of strangers, which perpetrators accepted because the desire for the images outweighed the possibility of being caught.

*'For the person who's up-skirting, or taking images of other people whom they know they shouldn't be doing — they're using it for sexual pleasure, or whatever — they know what they're doing is wrong. They go to some lengths to try and hide it. For instance, recently there was the case where guys at a cricket game [were] up-skirting the girls... Someone complained — he saw the cop car — he just deleted his phone before the cops arrived. He knew he was in trouble and he managed to get rid of the images in time'. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

*'Well, I have assumed [it was illegal] but I never really look into it. Yes, so I assumed that it would have. I was not a 100% certain'. (Interview 6, Perpetrator)*

## 7.6 Recidivism

There was a mix of views among stakeholders as to whether there was a high chance of perpetrator recidivism with upskirting behaviour. One stakeholder noted that all perpetrators they were aware of had re-offended whereas another noted the perpetrator they worked with had a low risk of recidivism.

*'I mean if you're talking about up-skirting for instance — all the people I've been involved in — these are people who've been charged, who were up-skirting and taking photographs of young girls or indeed mature women... they do it again. Any remorse they've got are just crocodile tears — it's almost a kind of obsession with them'. (Interview 11, Psychologist)*

*'Yeah, quite low risk. There's no other markers for him of deviancy, major self-regulated issues around sex or intimacy, et cetera'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

This may suggest that rates of recidivism vary greatly among perpetrators, although the discussion of recidivism in relation to upskirting was inconclusive.

## 8. Intervention pathways

This section examines the (in)visibility of IBA, the common intervention pathways for perpetrators, and the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions. Figure 7 summarises the findings from this chapter.

**Figure 7** Summary of perpetrator intervention pathways for each IBA typology

IBA type	Intervention pathways
Relationship- based IBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Perpetrators identified as part of police DV investigations</li> <li>➤ Court sentences related to DV (intervention orders, child custody) often referred to counselling or MBCP</li> <li>➤ Perpetrators usually mandated to attend therapeutic services. Engagement often low (denial, blame, minimisation)</li> <li>➤ Lack of willingness to disclose IBA and sexual violence in group settings, if at all</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown although stakeholders report frequent re-offenders</li> </ul>
Sharing images where victim is identifiable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Few cases going to police. Sometimes handled internally by schools/university authorities</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown. Assumption that young people will grow out of it. Some evidence that this occurs, but stakeholders also identify that behaviour could easily escalate into other abusive behaviours</li> <li>➤ Suggest school/university programs to improve awareness of IBA, potential risks for perpetrators (sexual predator list) and impacts on victim. For example, see the <i>Tea and Consent</i> video: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrXVavnQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrXVavnQ</a></li> </ul>
Sharing unsolicited images where victim is unidentifiable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Little/no interventions being taken</li> <li>➤ Victim usually not aware of IBA to report</li> <li>➤ High level of recidivism — many perpetrators don't see it as wrong, see it as 'harmless fun', 'everyone does it'</li> </ul>
IBA related to child exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Perpetrator mostly identified by special unit police investigations into child exploitation rather than triggered by victim reporting</li> <li>➤ Police investigations lead to criminal charges and court proceedings</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown</li> </ul>
Taking images of strangers (upskirting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Perpetrators identified through victims spotting the perpetrator taking image and going to the police — may involve direct confrontation between victim and perpetrator</li> <li>➤ Court sentencing usually refers perpetrator to counselling and psychologists</li> <li>➤ Recidivism rates unknown/mixed. Victim confrontation may be effective in preventing recidivism.</li> </ul>

### 8.1 (In)visibility of IBA

Despite its high prevalence, a key finding of this research is that there is a lack of visibility about IBA. Most perpetrators who were interviewed had not been involved in any interventions related to IBA, either through police, the legal system or treatment interventions. This would suggest that non-consensual sharing of unsolicited intimate images is becoming normalised and that community

awareness of IBA as a legal issue is low. Furthermore, stakeholders providing intervention services do not necessarily identify that perpetrators under their treatment have committed IBA. These factors combined means that many victims are not seeking police intervention and those cases of IBA are not reaching the justice system. Those that are referred by the courts to intervention services are not necessarily being treated for IBA.

### **8.1.1. Normalisation and prevalence of IBA**

As mentioned earlier, some perpetrators tried to justify or minimise their actions by suggesting that non-consensual sharing of images is becoming normalised. This was particularly the case for sharing intimate images in the context of intimate relationships and friends among younger cohorts. The proliferation of social media sites and dating apps, and access to camera phones, were emphasised as contributing factors by participants.

*'Now it is more common to send pictures, even to your friends as a joke. We do it all the time... But no, in this day and age it's just so common, it just happens all the time, as a joke you send something to your friends, you know, just a picture of your butt or whatever. Yeah, you don't always think of the consequences'. (Interview 4, Perpetrator)*

*'A lot of people would be doing it... particularly kids nowadays... I know from having a son myself, that they know a hell of a lot more than I ever did before I hit 30, and he's only 14... I think it would be pretty widely predominant nowadays'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

Some stakeholders discussed how IBA behaviour was reinforced for men in particular due to widespread gendered constructs.

*'I think again that societal context of yeah that gender equity and dating in general... lots of friends that are female and a couple of them are on [online dating platform] and various dating apps and they just talk of receiving dick pics from guys they don't even know... it's not a one off, it's very common the fact that guys can think like that, that that's acceptable and okay... what's going on at a societal level that [says] that's okay?' (Interview 2, MBCP)*

*'This phenomenon of sharing internet images — it's a phenomenon brought about [by] technology and the ability to take a photograph of reasonably good quality and very explicit photographs, high megapixel... if you've got a great body, let's show it, let's take images of it, you know? And so you've got all these images out there in the community and amongst young people, there is a sh\*t load... Image is everything to these young people, you know? It's an endemic thing. And they share it'. (Interview 6, Legal Service)*

### **8.1.2. Non-disclosure of IBA by perpetrators and victims**

Many stakeholders theorised that perpetration of IBA went undetected for most of their clients. Stakeholders working with perpetrators of DV — MBCP facilitators and psychologists — noted that the prevalence of IBA among this cohort was likely to be far higher than reported. In many cases, this was linked to reluctance from the perpetrator to acknowledge what they had done. Stakeholders mentioned that this was consistent with the general tendency of perpetrators to avoid talking about their abusive behaviour, reinforcing patterns of denial, minimisation, and victim blaming.

*'It's really hard to get men to talk about what they've done, and whether that's image based or other ways, most men will deny the abuse, they will blame the abuse on someone else, so it was because she did something that they did it, or they will minimise*

*it... I would anticipate that we'd have a number of men that would either threaten or [share] images, in our program, but they won't be talking about that'. (Interview 1, MBCP)*

*'You get a lot of breaches of IVOs as well, but generally it will say a breach via text so you really have to talk to Corrections or the referring [officer], to really knuckle down what that message was... we're kind of a bit reliant on asking [the perpetrator] what those breaches were... he's most likely to say, "I don't know, just a few messages, I can't remember"... Men will under-report their own behaviour and they'll over exaggerate their partner's behaviour... So we take it with a grain of salt what he will report (Interview 2, MBCP)*

Relatedly, stakeholders identified that victims were often reluctant to discuss their abuse to assist perpetrator intervention services, such as during participation in MBCPs. Stakeholders suggested that victims were reluctant to share their experiences based on a fear of retribution, frustration with the justice system, and a desire to move on in their life. This means that intervention services often rely on victim statements that were provided in court which tend to focus on physical abuse rather than IBA.

*'We don't always have family contact. Sometimes the family or the woman will say, "I'm not interested in being involved in this because I've had enough and I don't want to know anything more." So we have to rely on the information that we get from the court, and the dilemma with that, we don't always get the full story because they'll only give a bit of sketchy information from the intervention order and from the counselling order. We won't get the rest of it because he's not going to divulge what he's done'. (Interview 1, MBCP)*

### **8.1.3. Lack of IBA visibility within intervention services**

In addition to non-disclosure of IBA by victims and perpetrators, the research indicates that stakeholders are not necessarily aware of IBA, or at least there is little visibility of IBA within their work practices. Some stakeholders stated that they were aware of new legislation that had recently been developed and acknowledged that IBA was an area that was gaining increasing attention from a legal standpoint. That said, it was evident that some stakeholders were unsure about the current status of legislation, suggesting that they were not sure that IBA warranted court proceedings and subsequent referral to therapeutic services.

*'I know this legislation exists, but I don't know that it's actually become law yet'. (Interview 6, Legal Service)*

For those perpetrators who are referred to therapeutic services following court proceedings, the sentence and related court documents may not specify IBA (particularly for DV related charges) so referral services are likely to be unaware that the perpetrator has committed IBA. For example, in cases of DV, images may be used as evidence of sexual assault but there is not necessarily a charge specific to IBA. The perpetrator may be referred to a MBCP and the service is provided court documents (the judgment, a victim statement) which detail some, but not all, of the court material so IBA may not be specified. Intake and assessment procedures within MBCPs do not currently ask specific questions to understand whether a man has perpetrated IBA. This means that facilitators rely solely on the man's disclosure of this activity which, according to the interviews in this research, seldom occurs.

*'...at least with our [intake] forms, about technology. Just to have that wording in there would be a good start about image-based violence. Just having like another tick-a-box or another question thing pop up, would certainly be a better way. It's that old you can't answer the question if the questions not asked type thing. So that would certainly help, it seems so obvious now, but yeah'. (Interview 2, MBCP)*



Documents like the Common Risk Assessment Framework Tool used by Victorian services to assess perpetrator behaviour currently do not include IBA<sup>1</sup>. There is the Power and Control Wheel,<sup>2</sup> developed by the Duluth organisation and used internationally, which is specific to technology-facilitated abuse. However, according to interviews conducted for this research, facilitators were not aware it existed. In addition, the standard Power and Control Wheel, which is used in MBCP programs, does not include types of behaviour specific to technology-facilitated or image-based abuse.

As one MBCP facilitator explained, having IBA included in these assessment tools would mean that services would better capture information about IBA and could use these behaviours as part of their suite of risk indicators for DV.

*'... the correlation between that image-based violence and seeing if that's some type of escalation factor, which I'm sure it would be... surely that's an indicator of some higher level of violence. So if you could make that link you'd get that stuff in the CRAFT [Common Risk Assessment Framework Tool]... it'd be spoken language... everyone [in the sector] accepts that if that's the level of detail he's going to then that shows that obsession towards her and how much he wants to punish, that he's going to go to those lengths... they're all high risk factors... [so] okay let's put another set of eyes on her, let's call the police like we really look for all that safety planning stuff'. (Interview 2, MBCP)*

Beyond MBCPs, there was discussion that the sector, in general, did not provide clear avenues within which to categorise IBA, with the DV sector in particular favouring categorising abusive behaviour as either sexual or physical abuse.

*'I can't think of particular government services or social services directed at the particular issue [of IBA]... There's the custody-based and non-custodial based services for sexual offenders. So that falls within the category of sexual offending although I don't know if they're particularly geared to [dealing with IBA], distinct from people who have committed indecent assaults or other sexual assaults'. (Interview 7, Legal Service)*

*'I'm not sure where [IBA] would fit in, in the scheme of various services and programs that certainly the courts make available as part of the sentencing process or as a diversionary process... certainly there are programs available to treat and deal with sex offending... [but IBA] may not fall within that umbrella. There are programs to deal with domestic violence. But you might not have the sort of relationship between the parties'. (Interview 5, Legal Services)*

One stakeholder noted that the lack of visibility of IBA across the social services sector means that there is not sufficient data about IBA perpetration to help justify resources to address IBA.

*'What has led to other programs being put in place is usually the sheer weight of numbers of people that are coming through the courts with those sorts of charges. Now, I don't get a sense that many people are being prosecuted for this particular type of offending. And therefore there probably isn't the perceived need to direct resources to it... resources for any sort of program are pretty stretched. I don't think they'd be looking for new areas [like IBA] to tackle, because they're struggling with the existing ones'. (Interview 5, Legal Services)*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/family-violence-risk-assessment-and-risk-management-framework>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>

## 8.2 Intervention pathways

This section seeks to demonstrate the ways in which IBA perpetrators do enter and engage with intervention services, noting that most perpetrators who were interviewed had not been involved in any interventions related to IBA.

Victims of relationship-based IBA may report it to the police where it is linked to physical and sexual assault. Often in these DV cases, IBA is used as evidence of sexual assault rather than forming a separate charge.

*'I've had plenty offences in which intimate images are an important part of the prosecution case... [In one case] he's been charged with rape on the basis that she couldn't consent because she was asleep. And I've had a number of cases... [there] was a case a couple of years ago in which the intimate images were used by the prosecution to prove a lack of consent'. (Interview 6, Legal Service)*

For child exploitation-related IBA, police proactively identify perpetrators through internet crime units and child abuse units.

*'[The police] came across him because he was also accessing child abuse material, so he had two offences. He was accessing material, and then he was engaging in these types of online [solicitation] behaviours'. (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

For upskirting offences, victims typically catch the perpetrator in the act and are able to get police assistance to immediately apprehend the perpetrator. In these instances the images themselves are saved on devices as part of the perpetrator's 'collection' and this is used by police as evidence of the perpetrator's offence.

After being identified by police, investigations may lead to a formal charge and court proceedings. Before court proceedings commence, a defendant may receive legal advice to voluntarily engage in counselling/psychology services or a MBCP as this may help reduce their sentence. Even though the perpetrator has 'voluntarily' signed up for these intervention services, this does not mean that perpetrator is meaningfully engaged.

*'If someone was admitting this type of [IBA] behaviour, sometimes we try and direct people to get assistance ahead of their matter being finalised. Because it can indicate a willingness to reform and rehabilitate themselves'. (Interview 5, Legal Service)*

Court sentences were mixed. With the exception of child exploitation and sexual assault cases, most of the IBA cases described by stakeholders led to non-custodial sentences. Intervention orders with a MBCP referral were common in DV-related IBA cases. In the few cases reported where young people were charged, stakeholders reported community-based orders and referrals to counselling programs through a court diversion process.

*'I doubt if they'd send them to prison to serve time but it would be suspended. So if they repeat it or commit another crime they'd go to jail on that one'. (Interview 3, Legal Service)*

*'Revenge porn is generally dealt with in the family court, you know? Family court making an order don't distribute intimate images, you know, and you breach the order, you will suffer a real penalty: all your property goes. That sort of thing'. (Interview 6, Legal Service)*

*'We use a youth diversion type process. So it keeps them out of the court system. They do a program of some sort. [There's usually] counselling. It might include an apology letter. Maybe some community service or something as well'. (Interview 8, Police)*



Perpetrators referred to psychology and counselling services tended to be accessed by persons whose IBA typologies more strongly associated with sexual deviance and/or ongoing DV. This included, for example, perpetrators with child exploitation material interests, upskirting behaviour and perpetrators involved in abusive relationships. Psychological interventions reportedly encompassed both group-based and individual services, and focused on addressing power and control, as well as challenging cognitive distortions.

### 8.3 Efficacy of therapeutic interventions

It is difficult to assess the efficacy of IBA therapeutic interventions. Because IBA is not necessarily identified by therapeutic interventions and individuals aren't tracked/monitored following therapy, recidivism rates are not known. Stakeholders in counselling/psychological/MBCP roles were able to reflect on perpetrators' progress from when they started the program to when they left the program. Some felt that perpetrators had demonstrated greater remorse and understanding of the impact on their victims as a result of therapy. This sentiment was shared by a couple of perpetrators who noted that they had accessed counselling services and participants spoke positively of the experience.

*'I've spoken to a therapist for one hour a week for two years and we've talked about all of these things, about apps, about dating, about photos, about my own image. So they're already things I've come to terms with. I think had I not gone to therapy I... I wouldn't have been anywhere near as insightful as I have been with you in the conversation... the thing with therapy is there's somebody there to guide you through in a very healthy way.'*  
(Interview 7, Perpetrator)

However, stakeholders indicated several issues that limit perpetrators from meaningfully engaging in therapy. In many cases perpetrators did not want to attend the therapy in the first place. Most of the perpetrators that stakeholders described were either court-mandated to attend therapeutic services or were in some way obliged to attend as it strengthened their defence in court proceedings.

*'We have three funding streams, we have the Specialist Family Violence Court... We have what we call our Department of Health and Human Services stream, which could be people that are compelled to come for a range of reasons, that might be because of child protection... And then we have Corrections, so we're funded through the Department of Justice...'* (Interview 1, MBCP)

In these instances, stakeholders did their best to engage the individual, accepting that their intervention may not have much traction to begin with but would hopefully serve as a starting point for longer term change.

*'We can sometimes work with someone, and that might just plant a seed, and it can be a very slow growing tree. Our role is maybe to plant the seed, and you hope somewhere along the way, someone else will have the role of watering and taking care of it at different stages of the development of that tree.'* (Interview 1, MBCP)

MBCP facilitators described that perpetrators were reluctant to talk about sexual offences in group settings, though they were relatively more comfortable discussing physical abuse. These facilitators did not feel that addressing IBA in group settings would be a very targeted or effective approach.

A counselling stakeholder felt that therapeutic services for perpetrators tended to focus on re-educating the perpetrator, such as teaching them to respect women, and they questioned whether this was the most effective/constructive approach to engaging perpetrators. This is particularly the case for MBCPs in which the Duluth model is used, seeking men to critically reflect on their male privilege and examine their behaviour in the context of patriarchy.

*'We work on the Duluth model... so, we believe that family violence occurs because of gendered issues, and a social construct in our society that positions men as superior to women'. (Interview 1, MBCP)*

*'There still is this line within the profession that men need to be educated what they're doing wrong and be held accountable for their behaviour but there's no research to tell you how this is going to affect any long-term change...'. (Interview 4, Counselling Service)*

A couple of participants noted that there were challenges in therapy when perpetrators faced other issues, such as intellectual disability, substance use and mental health.

*'If there are issues around mental health, drug and alcohol, homelessness, or any of those, financial issues, what we would be doing is looking at trying to explore whether they're connected with services and what services that they might need to support them outside of — because it's very hard, if you think about change, a serious change, it's very hard to get people to change when they've got other things going on'. (Interview 1, MBCP)*

Linked to these individual barriers to therapy, one stakeholder felt that those perpetrators placed on sexual offender or child offender registries had additional issues to work through — such as the related stigma and sanctions from being registered —which significantly slowed down their progress in therapy.

*'The other issue is the increasing rules and regulations and stigma that's attached to this which then relates to travel restrictions and Child Protection register and people's inability to get jobs.... It just creates so much stress for these clients and it takes so much time... their treatment journey takes so much longer'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

Finally, stakeholders discussed sectoral factors that they felt impacted on the efficacy of therapeutic interventions for IBA perpetrators. One stakeholder felt that the social stigma around sexual offences meant that there was little funding for intervention services. For example, sexual offending is an exclusion criteria for Medicare funding such that perpetrators have to self-fund their participation in therapeutic interventions. Some stakeholders indicated that there was little coordination between Government services, such as Corrections, Child Protection and health services, and private service providers including counselling and psychologist services, meaning that provision of holistic support was unobtainable.

*'Another issue is the lack of consistent through-care and coordination in services... For example, again as a private practitioner it's extremely difficult for me to get information out of Corrections or Child Protection or Health... Outside of the government system it's impossible to get anyone to talk to you or provide information to you or to work with you in a supportive way to provide a holistic service for the client...'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*

## 9. Areas for consideration

This chapter draws on the research findings to suggest possible strategies to help reduce the rates of IBA and improve the efficacy of intervention services in Australia. The suggestions provided are limited to the findings from this study. The suggestions have been drawn from observations and suggestions made by the research participants and upon consideration of the broad implications of the research findings.

### 9.1 Increase visibility of IBA among the general population

A key finding from this research is the lack of visibility and awareness of IBA. This lack of visibility is evident from the perpetrator interviews. While many of those interviewed described on-sharing of intimate images without consent as commonplace, most failed to identify this as a form of abuse. Even when told during the interview that on-sharing intimate images without consent is a form of abuse, many were still dismissive about the behaviour. Perpetrators from the typology 'sharing unsolicited unidentifiable images' described how many of their friends were also engaged in perpetrating this form of IBA, suggesting a high prevalence and that IBA has become somewhat normalised. A key area for consideration stemming from this research is to increase awareness among the general population about how this behaviour constitutes abuse, and the legal implications of that behaviour.

Many perpetrators were surprised in the interview to hear that sharing intimate images without consent was against the law, with a few explaining that had they known this they would not have perpetrated IBA.

*'If I had known back then [that IBA was against the law], then I definitely wouldn't have taken pictures without consent'. Interview 3, Perpetrator)*

However, it is clear also that many perpetrators were aware that what they were doing was 'wrong' (even if they were unaware it was unlawful) and yet they still committed the IBA. This suggests that greater awareness is important but also that this awareness may not reduce IBA rates substantially.

*'I did have people sort of advise against me, even online. It didn't really stop me, so it's hard to say what kind of would'. (Interview 1, Perpetrator)*

Given most participants lacked remorse for the IBA they had perpetrated, greater communication about the impacts on the perpetrators themselves could be an effective strategy in reducing the rates of IBA. This extends to all of the typologies identified in this research, but particularly for young people sharing identifiable intimate images.

*'I need a little bit more knowledge or understanding of what the potential could be down the track like future job prospects, all those kinds of things'. [Interview 2, Perpetrator]*

*'You're probably aware of the drink-driving campaign, with the 10-year hangover... that's a pretty effective — it makes people think about — you're not just doing your licence for six months, you're doing your overseas travel for at least 10 years. If you aimed it at something like that, to the people who are most likely not to know the repercussions of it, I think that would probably be a good idea'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

#### *Challenge social norms and increase men's engagement with therapeutic services*

The findings from this research demonstrate that some forms of IBA, namely on-sharing of IBA material non-consensually among 'friends', have become widely normalised. This is a concerning

finding and suggests the need for considerable awareness-building activities to demonstrate the importance of consent in taking and sharing intimate images.

Furthermore, social norms around masculinity limit the extent to which men seek support from therapeutic services. This means that men are less likely to be aware of the supports available in managing abusive behaviour, and less likely to engage in those services.

*'Guys will come into group angry that women get all the supports and there's no service for men. And then you kind of ask them, "Well what have you tried? What services have got? None there is none"... And they don't actually know of the services, what's around... so I think it starts with just challenging that stereotype around help seeking and who should and shouldn't get help and what for... if we can challenge that on a societal level I think services will hopefully see more of an intake of guys coming in and then having conversations with staff, going yeah actually you're kind of perpetrating a bit of abuse there... let's have a look at that'. (Interview 2, MBCP)*

#### *Increase IBA visibility through awareness-building campaigns for the general community*

These could involve:

- A focus on the impacts on perpetrators, not only the existence of legislation and the impact on victims.
- Pop-up ads on social media platforms in which IBA images are often shared, and in online dating platforms.
- Real-life scenario-based content to build awareness. The scenarios could be based on the typologies identified in this research (for example dick pic-related scenarios targeted at people accessing online dating platforms).

*'I could think of a few ads to run that would probably address it. Like — my scenario, for example. All of a sudden, my mate's wife is going through his phone that she's found from years ago, and she comes across that video. All sorts of things happen from there. Why are you sending him this? Why did he get this, what are you doing with this? Something along those lines, to make people think about it a little bit more'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

#### *Increase IBA visibility through awareness campaigns within education services*

Campaigns could involve:

- In-school programs led by external trainers/counsellors rather than known teaching staff:

*'No matter how comfortable a student feels with his or her teacher I don't think a student would ever want to talk about that... If somebody was to come in from outside the school to talk about that, have a day, half a day when you — like sex education teachers do then I think it would be easier to broach it with someone'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

- Introducing IBA to sex education programs in early high school years.
- Programs for young people such as the *Tea and Consent* video to communicate the importance of consensual image taking and sharing:

*'[The Tea and Consent video] is this really good video that we show young people... they say, Tea is like consent. So, if I say to you, Would you like a cup of tea? and you say, F\*\*\* yes, I would like a cup of tea, then we have tea. And it*

*goes through all these examples that are really helpful for young people, that say, "If a person is unconscious, do not throw tea down their throat." Or, "If a person passes out during tea, stop giving them tea. Because a person wanted tea for three days in a row, don't make the assumption they will want it on the fourth day." (Interview 12, Psychologist)*

- Giving victims an understanding of where they can seek support for IBA and that they are not alone in their experience:

*'I worry that there's especially a lack of support for young people, perhaps even younger than I was when I did it. So perhaps maybe there's people that are 13/14/15, children who are sharing other people's pictures or have their own picture shared... If I had children, for example, and their photos were being shared I would want somebody to know about it, I guess'. (Interview 5, Perpetrator)*

## 9.2 Potential strategies for intervention services

The lack of IBA visibility extends to intervention services. As described in section 8.1.3, stakeholders reported that their internal processes (such as uptake and assessment procedures) meant that IBA was likely to go undetected for most of their clients, with services instead focusing on other abusive behaviours exhibited by the perpetrators, particularly physical violence. This means that it is hard to gauge the rates of IBA and the efficacy of intervention services.

### *Increase visibility and understanding of IBA within intervention services*

Intervention services could benefit from a greater understanding of what IBA is, what legislation exists to address it and how intervention services can help. Training programs might be one way to help improve IBA awareness within intervention services.

Another possible strategy stemming from this study is for therapeutic intervention services to include specific questions within their intake procedures to identify IBA so that the behaviour can be specifically addressed.

### *Improve support for professionals dealing with IBA perpetrators*

Chapter 8 identified the difficulties many professionals face in getting perpetrators to disclose IBA such that they can receive therapeutic support and address abusive behaviour. One stakeholder stressed the importance of having IBA-specific training and support materials to assist MBCP facilitators to identify and addressing it.

*'[The challenge in the sector is] I guess just the disclosure, it's like getting them to talk about it so you can actually work with it. So if there was kind of a work book or some preference to understanding a way to approach this [IBA] would be good... clinically proven ways of engaging this behaviour... Training workers up in what [IBA] is and maybe how to have those conversations... there must be a skillset on how to engage that conversation'. (Interview 2, MBCP)*

The sexual nature of IBA means that there is an additional barrier in getting men to disclose their behaviour, particularly in group settings. Whereas men may be willing to discuss physical abuse they may have inflicted on their partners (DV), they are less likely to talk about sexual violence in group settings. This suggests a need to consider greater resources to allow for individual-based counselling where IBA has been identified.

*'Those feelings of shame can be managed a bit easier [in individual counselling] because it's not a whole ten sets of eyes looking at you and judging your behaviour. If you're with a counsellor and have rapport I think there'd be greater disclosure from that environment, than in a group context. Unless the group was specifically around people that were charged with image-based offences and they all knew they were there for the same thing, potentially is a good setup. But as I say my one-on-one work is generally with people who aren't group ready for a lot of other reasons, it's usually ADI's [alcohol and drug issues] like I just haven't seen that cohort that are disclosing image base, not one on one yeah'.*  
(Interview 2, MBCP)

#### *Improve coordination between intervention services*

There is scope to improve coordination between intervention services to assist in identifying IBA and to monitor individuals to identify when an individual is demonstrating escalating behaviours which might suggest a high risk of perpetrating violence. For example, MBCPs may receive a victim statement from the court which referred the perpetrator but this may only discuss how the perpetrator inflicted physical abuse in the context of DV. If the MBCP facilitator were able to speak with the victim's DV case manager, they could potentially identify that IBA also occurred and get a deeper understanding of the perpetrator's behaviour.

Stakeholder observations suggest that greater information sharing would allow smaller therapeutic service agencies to provide more targeted counselling or psychological treatment.

*'As a private practitioner it's extremely difficult for me to get information out of Corrections or Child Protection or Health so the agencies they have an agreement to talk to each other but it's all government agencies. Outside of the government system it's impossible to get anyone to talk to you or provide information to you or to work with you in a supportive way to provide a holistic service for the client which is really difficult'.*  
(Interview 9, Psychologist)

#### *Consider risk-based approaches to sentencing and managing IBA perpetrators*

Finally, there was some discussion within interviews about the importance for sentencing to reflect the severity of the crime. Some stakeholders felt that strong sentencing was important as it acted as a deterrent to committing IBA. A few stakeholders felt that high profile cases in the media had helped to increase community awareness. Other stakeholders felt that the legislation for young offenders was too severe, noting that the legislation in some jurisdictions would mean that if an 18 year old perpetrator shared an image of their 16 year old girlfriend, for example, they could be sentenced as a child sex offender. They could then be placed on the Australian National Child Offender Register and state-based Sex Offender Registers resulting in employment, travel, and other restrictions. The likelihood of the perpetrator re-offending is not necessarily taken into account.

*'At the moment [the sex offender registry] is not based on risk at all so you could have one person who [is] 83 years of age who offended 35 years ago who is subject to exactly the same restrictions as a 25 year old who's offended three times in the last three years... It makes no sense from a resource perspective, it makes no sense from a community protection perspective... [the system should] allocate resources sensibly on the basis of the risk the individual poses to the community'.* (Interview 9, Psychologist)

Linked to this issue that IBA sentencing should reflect the severity of the offence, a couple of stakeholders were concerned that the impacts of being placed on the Sex Offender Register negatively affected perpetrator rehabilitation. This only relates to IBA behaviour which falls under criminal law, such as offences involving sexual assault or child exploitation.

*'People [on the sex offender registry] can't access Medicare funded support for psychological therapy... The stigma that's attached to this which then relates to travel restrictions and Child Protection register and people's inability to get jobs and blah blah blah. It just creates so much stress for these clients and it takes them so much time in treatment that their treatment journey takes so much longer because so much of the time you're dealing with the fact that they're not allowed to live here or there or they can't get this job or they're not allowed to travel to see their dying mother... [This] creates real problems and is a massive drain on mental health services'. (Interview 9, Psychologist)*



## 10. Conclusion

The findings of this research meet a significant gap in the literature by providing insight into the motivations and attitudes of perpetrators of IBA. This study responds to this gap with world-first qualitative research. The insights provided in this report richly demonstrate the value in engaging perpetrators in research, despite the challenges in recruitment and disclosure.

The research identifies five typologies of IBA perpetrators. These typologies are ordered based on stakeholder observations of prevalence, noting that the sample size is too small to assume that this reflects the prevalence of IBA perpetration in the wider Australian population:

1. Relationship-based IBA (particularly related to domestic violence (DV)).
2. Sharing images where victim is identifiable—particularly related to young person sharing intimate images.
3. Sharing unsolicited images where victim is unidentifiable, such as on-sharing 'dick pics' from dating apps.
4. IBA related to child exploitation.
5. Taking images of strangers, such as 'upskirting' and 'downblousing'.

The findings provide firsthand insight into perpetrator motivations and the ways in which they justify and reflect on their abusive behaviour. The motivations for IBA differ depending on the typology. Relationship-based IBA is primarily motivated by retribution for relationship breakdowns and a desire to assert power and control over the former partner. Sharing identifiable images may also be motivated by a desire to feel power and control but is mostly associated with seeking social status. The sharing of unsolicited unidentifiable images is mostly motivated by boastfulness, entertainment and, in some cases, seeking advice from friends. The motivations for IBA linked to child exploitation and IBA linked to taking images of strangers were quite similar: both involved a strong desire for sexually deviant gratification and a desire for a sense of power and control. In the case of child sexual predators eliciting and sharing images online there was also an element of seeking social status and self-aggrandisement.

With the exception of the IBA perpetrators related to child exploitation and taking images of strangers, few of the perpetrators in this research were aware that their behaviour was against the law. This lack of awareness was particularly the case for those perpetrators who could be categorised as sharing identifiable images and sharing unidentifiable images.

Across each of the typologies, and irrespective of perpetrator awareness of the unlawfulness of IBA, participants downplayed their actions through minimisation e.g. 'I only shared it with a few friends', blame: 'they shouldn't have sent the image to me in the first place', and, in some cases, outright denial.

Given perpetrators maintained these justifications of their actions during the interview, it is perhaps not surprising that perpetrators mostly demonstrated little remorse for the IBA they perpetrated. The lack of remorse was consistent across each of the typologies, with stakeholders able to provide this insight for perpetrators engaged in offences falling under criminal law. In these cases, perpetrators focused on the personal impact of being investigated and going through the justice system, rather than the impact of their actions on victims. The one possible exception is that in a couple of instances stakeholders discussed perpetrators of 'upskirting' who had been confronted by the victim and this had helped the perpetrator come to terms with their behaviour and feel remorse.



The data on recidivism is limited such that it is not possible to make claims about 'rates' of recidivism. However, there are a few indications from the data that recidivism could be quite high. These include: the overall lack of awareness of IBA unlawfulness among the perpetrators interviewed, an overall lack of remorse, admission by some perpetrators that they would be likely to on-share without consent again and reports from a couple of MBCP facilitators that a few perpetrators have returned to their programs following court mandates for similar offences.

A key finding from this research is the lack of visibility that IBA has not only among perpetrators but also within the social services sector. Therapeutic interventions are not well placed to identify perpetrators of IBA due to issues of information sharing between services and non-disclosure of perpetrators, making it difficult to then target interventions. The lack of IBA visibility means that there is currently little insight into the prevalence of IBA perpetration, the effectiveness of therapeutic services, nor rates of IBA recidivism. Greater visibility could potentially help justify further resources to support intervention services in addressing IBA.

While this research does not seek to grade the severity of these forms of IBA, it is clear that some forms of IBA involve manipulative and malicious acts, with the intent of hurting and shaming victims. Other forms of IBA, such as on-sharing non-identifiable dick pics for 'entertainment', may be less extreme in the impacts on victims and yet appear to be highly prevalent according to interviews from this research. IBA legislation, justice responses and intervention programs need to be agile to navigate these diverse motivations and respond appropriately.

Non-consensual image sharing is extensive and becoming normalised particularly among young people. However, IBA is far from a 'young person' problem. The research finds that perpetrators come from all ages and backgrounds, including high functioning members of the community. This is significant in that there is a perception that young people 'grow out' of this behaviour. While this may be true in some cases, it is clear that IBA is occurring across all age groups and is socially pervasive.

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# Appendix A Methodology

## Methodology

This section summarises the research design, recruitment, fieldwork and approach to data analysis. The research team ensured a range of participants were included in the fieldwork. However, given the small sample size caution needs to be exercised in assuming prevalence and transferring these findings to the wider population.

### Research design and recruitment

A qualitative research design was used to enable an in-depth exploration of IBA. This qualitative approach allowed rich data to emerge while being sensitive to the stories of abuse shared.

The research involved in-depth interviews with two key cohorts:

- 12 stakeholders who work in a professional capacity with perpetrators of IBA, including police members, defence lawyers, forensic psychologists, MBCP facilitators.
- 16 adults engaged in IBA, referred to as 'perpetrators' throughout this report. Note, however, that this cohort included one adult who 'thought about' perpetrating IBA, and two who were 'accused' of IBA. These individuals were included in the research due to the content of those interviews in which they provided valuable insight into their motivations and attitudes of IBA perpetration. It is quite possible that these individuals did indeed perpetrate IBA but were not comfortable disclosing this in the context of the interview.

Stakeholder recruitment was targeted at relevant organisations through desk-top research, snowballing i.e. a non-probability sampling technique where existing research participants help identify future research participants through their social and professional networks and support from *No to Violence* (peak body for organisations working with men to end family violence).

Perpetrator recruitment methods included snowballing from the stakeholder interviews, social media advertising and specialist recruitment services. Due to challenges in recruiting individuals willing to discuss their abusive behaviours, a decision was made to include individuals who had 'thought about' and been 'accused of' perpetrating IBA. This made it easier for individuals to come forward to participate in the research.

The focus of this research was to understand perpetrator motivations and attitudes. Note that the research focused on service providers and perpetrators only. Victims/survivors of IBA were not engaged. Victims have shared their experiences of technology-facilitated abuse in previous reports commissioned by eSafety.

**Figure 1** Summary of research participants

Research participants	Number
<b>Stakeholder interviews</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>Men's Behaviour Change Program Facilitators</i>	2
<i>Legal services (defence lawyers)</i>	4
<i>Police</i>	2
<i>Counselling services</i>	1
<i>Forensic psychologists</i>	3

<b>Perpetrator interviews</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>Taken an image</i>	2
<i>Shared an image</i>	10
<i>Threatened to share</i>	1
<i>Accused of sharing</i>	2
<i>Thought about taking/sharing</i>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>

## Ethical approach

The research project was approved by the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project 21574: NH&MRC Code: EC00237). An application was submitted to the RMIT Human Ethics Committee on 4 July 2018 and full ethical approval was granted for the project on 25 July 2018. Subsequent variations were made the RMIT Committee to expand recruitment approaches for perpetrator interviews.

## Instrumentation and documentation

Prior to participation in the research, all participants were given a research information sheet and a consent form (see Appendix B and C). In consultation with eSafety, discussion guides were developed for the in-depth interviews (see Appendix D). Discussion guides were developed to act as a memory aide for the researchers while allowing the conversations to flow fluidly from one topic to another. The broad themes of the discussion guides were: detailing stories of what IBA was perpetrated and how, what the motivations were for committing the IBA, attitudes about the IBA (including remorse, awareness of illegality, recidivism), and their involvement in therapeutic intervention programs.

## Analysis and reporting

All interviews were audio-recorded. The recordings were transcribed by an external specialist transcription agency, which were then anonymised. The discussion group was not audio-recorded but extensive notes were written. A single analytical framework was formulated from the discussion guide and an initial review of the interviews and discussion board data. Using this analytical framework, each data source was 'coded' using NVivo software to enable a thematic analysis of the data. The use of this thematic data coding technique ensured that findings are directly traceable back to the raw data, providing a fully transparent analytical method.

Verbatim quotes from across the research have been included in this report to illustrate the findings. Where words are shown in square brackets [as such] this denotes the researcher's addition of words, included to make the sentence clearer. Where ellipses have been used (...), this indicates that some superfluous text has been removed from the quote for ease of reading.

Qualitative research is designed to explore — through directed open discussions — the experiences, perceptions and views among a defined population sub-group (in this case, stakeholders of IBA). Qualitative findings are not designed to be representative, in any statistical sense, of the wider population from which participants are drawn, so caution should always be exercised in assuming that what is found in qualitative research can be assumed for the overall population.

The use of numbers within reported findings is generally avoided within qualitative research, and indeed one of its defining features is that numbers are not used to indicate prevalence or patterns. However, it is common practice in qualitative reporting to provide some indication of the commonality of themes, issues or experiences by the use of terms such as most/nearly all, most, some, or a few/on occasion. This provides the reader with some indication of the salience of themes or findings, and how

widespread they were across the purposively-selected sample. This in turn provides some insight into the importance that can be attributed to such findings. That said, there are also times within qualitative research where an issue may appear among a very few participants but is deemed of sufficient interest to draw attention to. Where this occurs, it is highlighted to the reader by the use of terms such as 'on only a few occasions did participants experience x', or a caveat is added such as 'notably, most participants did not highlight this as an issue'.

Identifying data has been removed from transcripts. Quotes which demonstrate specific information about the nature of the abuse (for example where the participant detailed what the abusive message said or a series of actions that were particular to that IBA) have not been included in the report.

Participants are referred to by pseudonyms based on their profession e.g. police or psychologist, or whether they were a self-disclosed perpetrator of IBA. We have used 'accused perpetrator' and 'thought about perpetrating' in a few cases where participants did not disclose perpetrating IBA but discussed their motivations and attitudes linked to specific examples of IBA.

# Appendix B Participant information sheet and consent form



## Participant Information Sheet

<b>Title</b>	Understanding the experiences and motivations of adults involved in taking or sharing intimate images without consent
<b>Chief Investigator</b>	Assoc. Prof Nicola Henry (RMIT University)
<b>Associate Investigators</b>	Ms Karen Kellard (Social Research Centre, Australian National University) Dr Asher Flynn (Monash University) Dr Colette Mortreux (Social Research Centre, Australian National University) Chris Owen (Social Research Centre, Australian National University)

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## What is this research about?

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in our study. We are conducting research about adults who have taken/shared/threatened to share/or have been accused of sharing an intimate image of someone without that person's consent. By sharing your experience, you can help us better understand why intimate images are shared and inform future education and support programs.

This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research project and it explains the processes involved. This will help you decide if you want to take part in the study.

Please read this information carefully and feel free to ask us any questions. Before deciding whether or not to take part, you might want to talk about it with a relative or friend, or your support worker. Please also note that participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part in the study, you do not have to.

## What does participation involve?

If you agree to participate in this study, one of the named investigators will conduct an interview with you about your experience. The interview usually takes around 45 minutes and will be either face-to-face (e.g. in person), or via Skype or telephone, depending on your preference. We will set up the interview at a time and location that is convenient to you. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed (and anonymised) for analysis purposes. We will provide an interpreter should you require one. You will be given \$80 to reimburse you for your time.

### **Do I have to take part in this research project?**

Participation in any research project is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage up until 8 weeks following the interview for any reason at all.

If you do decide to take part, you will be given this Participant Information and Consent Form to sign and you will be given a copy to keep. By completing these actions, you are telling us that you (i) understand what you have read and (ii) consent to take part in the study.

You may stop the discussion at any time. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the discussion. Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not in any way affect your relationship with the researchers or with RMIT or any of the organisations involved in this research. Any organisations that are assisting you will not know (or be informed) about whether or not you participate in the study. Your decision to participate, or not to participate, will be kept confidential.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

We appreciate that this is a difficult sensitive topic. We cannot guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this research; however, you may appreciate contributing to knowledge about the issues and experiences discussed. Your participation in the project may help to develop deeper understandings of the practice of non-consensual taking/sharing of intimate images.

### **What are the risks and disadvantages of taking part?**

We do not anticipate that participants will become distressed during the interview. You are under no obligation to answer questions. You may skip questions that you don't want to answer, take a break at any time, or stop the interview altogether without any consequences or needing to give a reason. We encourage you to discuss any concerns with the researcher whenever they arise, and/or contact a free and confidential support service. You will also have the opportunity to opt-in to a debrief session with the researcher after the interview.

If you experience any distress as a result of your participation in this research, you are encouraged to seek assistance by contacting a counselling or support service.

Some free and confidential services you could contact include: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au); <http://www.lifeline.org.au>; MensLine Australia ([www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)); or Mens Referral Service 'no to violence' ([www.ntv.org.au](http://www.ntv.org.au)), 1800 RESPECT, Women's Information and Referral Exchange ph: 1300 134 130; Q Life 1800 184 527

In the interview, you will be reminded not to tell the researchers about the names of any victims or offenders, nor any details of any serious criminal offences that have not gone through the courts.

### **What if I withdraw from this research project?**

If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw from the project at any stage, up until 8 weeks following the discussion for any reason at all. After this time, it will not be possible for us to identify and remove your data, as we would have deleted any contact details you gave us to protect your identity. If you decide to withdraw from the project, please notify a member of the



research team as soon as possible. You have the right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, providing it can be reliably identified.

### **What will happen to information about me?**

By providing written consent, you consent to the research team collecting and using information from you for the research project. With your permission, the discussion will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis using qualitative research software.

Any information obtained in connection with this research project that can identify you will remain confidential and be securely stored. Your contact details will be destroyed after a period of 8 weeks. Until then, your contact details will be kept separate to the interview transcripts and audio-recordings on a password protected computer and/or locked filing cabinet to which only the investigators have access. The de-identified interview transcripts and audio-recordings will be securely stored electronically in a password-protected directory on RMIT, Monash, ANU and Office of the eSafety Commissioner maintained servers and/or a locked filing cabinet, to which only the named investigators will have access.

Following completion of the study, all de-identified transcripts will be securely archived on RMIT, Monash, SRC maintained and password-protected servers, and retained for use for up to five years. The data may be used in future projects, however, only the named investigators will ever have access to this data and all data will be destroyed after a period of five years. Future use by the investigators may involve the further analysis of key themes and/or the use of quotes in future projects on this topic. All preserved data will be anonymised and not linked in any way to identifying details from participants.

As the investigators will destroy any correspondence with you 8 weeks following the completion of the interview, it will not be possible for the investigators to retrieve your data once it has been de-identified.

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums (academic journals, theses, books and/or conferences and other public events). In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified, except with your express permission. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used in place of your name, and any identifying statements will be removed.

### **Who has reviewed the research project?**

All research in Australia involving humans is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). This research project has been approved by the RMIT University HREC (Project Code: 21574, NH&MRC Code: EC00237). This project will be carried out according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007). This statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in human research studies.

### **Further information and who to contact**

If you would like any further information concerning this project, you can contact the Chief Investigator:

Name	Assoc. Prof Nicola Henry
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Position	Chief Investigator
Telephone	9925 2467
Email	<a href="mailto:nicola.henry@rmit.edu.au">nicola.henry@rmit.edu.au</a>

### Complaints

Should you have any concerns or questions about this research project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers listed in this document, then you may contact:

Reviewing HREC Name	RMIT University
HREC Secretary	Dr Peter Burke
Telephone	03 9925 2251
Email	<a href="mailto:human.ethics@rmit.edu.au">human.ethics@rmit.edu.au</a>
Mailing Address	Research Ethics Co-ordinator Research Integrity Governance and Systems RMIT University GPO Box 2476 MELBOURNE VIC 3001

## Consent Form

<b>Title</b>	Understanding the experiences and motivations of adults involved in taking or sharing intimate images without consent
<b>Chief Investigator</b>	Assoc. Prof Nicola Henry (RMIT University)
<b>Associate Investigators</b>	Ms Karen Kellard (Social Research Centre, Australian National University) Dr Asher Flynn (Monash University) Dr Colette Mortreux (Social Research Centre, Australian National University) Chris Owen (Social Research Centre, Australian National University)

### **Acknowledgement by Participant**

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

I understand the purposes, procedures and risks of the research described in the project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I freely agree to participate in this research project as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the project without affecting my relationship with RMIT or any of the other institutions involved in this study. I will notify the researchers within 8 weeks of completing the interview if I wish to withdraw my data from the project.

I understand that the discussion is confidential and that I will not be identified in any reporting. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded, subject to any legal limitations.

Participant

Signature

Date

### **Declaration by Researcher†**

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project, its procedures and risks and I believe that the participant has understood that explanation.

Name of Researcher<sup>†</sup> (please  
print) \_\_\_\_\_

Date

Signature

<sup>†</sup> An appropriately qualified member of the research team must provide the explanation of, and information concerning, the research project.

Note: All parties signing the consent section must date their own signature.

# Appendix C Stakeholder discussion guide

## 2143 Exploring the attitudes and motivation of adults who exhibit image-based abusive behaviour

### Stakeholder Discussion Guide FINAL

#### Background Note

The purpose of these interviews is to explore stakeholder's experiences of supporting adults who have exhibited image-based abusive (IBA) behaviour. Specifically, the interview seeks to:

- Explore the beliefs, attitudes and motivation of adults who have perpetrated IBA (thoughts, decision-making process)
- Identify and examine the effectiveness of therapeutic intervention programs in Australia that treat/educate/support adults who have perpetrated IBA
- Explore frontline workers' awareness and understanding of IBA and their experiences of supporting/treating perpetrators of IBA

As these are semi-structured interviews, not all interviews will cover the exact same topics. However, most areas outlined in these discussion guides will be covered with all interview participants.

#### Explanation to participants

- Introduce researcher and the Social Research Centre and the research scope.
- Explain what the research is about – *“thank you for agreeing to discuss your experience of supporting adults who have perpetrated image-based abuse. This work will help to understand the motivations and attitudes of perpetrators of image-based abuse and will help to understand the effectiveness of existing therapeutic interventions. The research will contribute to better responses in law, education and policy settings.”*
- Explain recording and confidentiality of participant information and seek informed consent
- Explain audio-recording and transcription
- Explain the importance of honest opinions, no right or wrong answers
- Explain how data will be used and stored – especially that it will be stored/used in line with Australian Privacy Principles, and that it will only be accessed by the research team at RMIT, the Social Research Centre and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.
- Remind participants that they might find some questions distressing and that they can take a break from the interview or stop the interview altogether at any time. In the event of any distress, participants will be encouraged to seek assistance by contacting a counselling or support service.
- Housekeeping matters – duration of interview, mobiles off etc.

*“Any questions before starting?”*

Some free and confidential services include: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au); <http://www.lifeline.org.au>; the Sexual Assault Crisis Line ph: 1800 806 292; the National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence counselling service ph: 1800 737 732 or 1800RESPECT; Women's Information and Referral Exchange ph: 1300 134 130.

If you require interpreter services to access these services, you can call 13 14 50. If you have hearing difficulties, you can call the National Relay Service on 1800 555 677 to help access these services.

The investigator will be prepared to contact the local rape crisis/centre against sexual assault/domestic violence service for any assistance if necessary and will be prepared to accompany participants to the local service if necessary.

## Introduction

Before we start, just want to confirm our definition of Image-Based Abuse, as used by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner - Image-based abuse (IBA) occurs when intimate, nude or sexual images are distributed (or threatened to be distributed) without the consent of those pictured. This includes real, altered (e.g. Photoshopped) and drawn pictures and videos." Does this make sense to you?

Can you tell me a bit about your current role and your experience in working with adults who have perpetrated image-based abuse?

What kinds of image-based abusive behaviours have these adults been involved in?

[Explain what we mean by image-based abuse: refers to the non-consensual taking, distribution or threat of distribution of intimate (nude/sexual) images. This can include sharing images of young people, sharing images by a partner or ex-partner without their consent, sharing images as part of sexual or domestic violence, sharing images for exploitation or extortion]

Can you characterise the types of perpetrators that you come across in your work?

[e.g. young adults sexting, adults perpetrating domestic violence, sextortion perpetrators]

## Examples of image-based abuse perpetrated

Remembering that any stories you share will be kept confidential, can you give me some examples from your work of adults who have perpetrated image-based abuse against other adults (i.e. persons aged 18 years or older)?

[PROMPTS: What was the perpetrator's background (age, gender, other)? What did the perpetrator do? Who was the victim (age, gender, other)? Are there other forms of abuse they have perpetrated? Was anyone else involved in the abuse (i.e. distributing the images)? Was the perpetrator charged? How were they referred to your organisation?]

Do you have any knowledge or experience of how police and prosecutors proceed with charges, arrests or convictions related to image-based abuse in your jurisdiction? What were the outcomes of this, in the examples you have provided?

What have been the impacts of this abuse on the perpetrator? (i.e. sexual predator list, employment impacts..., friends and family)

### **Motivations, beliefs, attitudes**

Are there particular attitudes or backgrounds that these perpetrators have that might shape their abusive behaviour?

[For example, attitudes towards women, history of being abused as a child, drug/alcohol issues, mental health issues]

What do you think motivated the adult to perpetrate image-based abuse?

[PROMPT: not seeing it as serious, others are doing it, they saw it as a joke, didn't think it was a big deal, wanting to control, threaten, shame the victim; wanting to retaliate against punish the victim for something they did; wanting to shame/isolate the victim; wanting to flirt or explore sexuality; alcohol/drugs involved; role of social pressure]

What are your observations on how perpetrators view their behaviour in regard to image-based abuse?

What do you think shaped their decision to perpetrate the abuse? Was it the case of a once-off action of poor judgement, or longer term intentional and systematic abuse?

Do you think the perpetrator knew that the behaviour was abusive, and could have legal ramifications?

In the cases that you have described, how would you say those perpetrators of image-based abuse have justified their actions?

[For example, blaming someone else for pushing them to it, denial, dismissing the severity of the action]

Do you think the perpetrator now regrets the action? Why? Do you think they are likely to do it again (recidivism)?

### **Therapeutic intervention programs**

In your current role, what kinds of services (support, referrals, advice, treatment, education) are available to perpetrators of image-based abuse?

How are perpetrators referred to these services? Are there some perpetrators of image-based abuse that these services miss?

How effective do you think these services are? Do you think they reduce the likelihood of recidivism, or prevention of new perpetrators?

[PROMPT: services are available but perpetrators not using them, or nice service but not getting to the heart of the issue?]

What would you say are the gaps in available services/supports?

Do you have any thoughts as to how services could be improved?

What kinds of challenges do you face in your role in terms of supporting perpetrators of image-based abuse?



[PROMPT: evidence; limited resources; increasing reporting; staff training; rapidly changing technologies; limits of the legislation; getting the perpetrator to take responsibility for their actions]

### **Wrap up**

Is there anything further you would like to add or clarify in relation to what we have discussed today? Are there any other people you think we should speak to?

Thank you for your time – we value your expertise and generosity in speaking with me today.

## Appendix D Perpetrator discussion guide

### 2118 Exploring the attitudes and motivation of adults who exhibit image-based abusive behaviour

#### Perpetrator Discussion Guide FINAL

##### Background Note

The purpose of these interviews is to explore the beliefs, attitudes and motivations of adults who have exhibited image-based abusive (IBA) behaviour. Specifically, the interview seeks to:

- Explore the beliefs, attitudes and motivation of adults who have perpetrated IBA (thoughts, decision-making process)
- Examine the effectiveness of therapeutic intervention programs in Australia that treat/educate/support adults who have perpetrated IBA
- Explore the likelihood of recidivism

As these are semi-structured interviews, not all interviews will cover the exact same topics. However, most areas outlined in these discussion guides will be covered with all interview participants.

#### Explanation to participants

- Introduce researcher and the Social Research Centre and the research scope.
- Explain what the research is about – *“thank you for agreeing to discuss your experience as an adult who has been distributed or threatened to distribute personal intimate images of someone without their permission. So this could be a photo or image, either real or altered (e.g. Photoshopped) and drawn pictures or videos. This work will help to understand the motivations and attitudes of those who share intimate, nude or sexual images without consent and the effectiveness of existing therapeutic interventions. The research will contribute to better responses in service development, law, education and policy settings.”*
- Explain recording and confidentiality of participant information and seek informed consent
- Explain audio-recording and transcription
- Explain the importance of honest opinions, no right or wrong answers
- Explain how data will be used and stored – especially that it will be stored/used in line with Australian Privacy Principles, and that it will only be accessed by the research team at RMIT, the Social Research Centre and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.
- Remind participants that they might find some questions distressing and that they can take a break from the interview or stop the interview altogether at any time. In the event of any distress, participants will be encouraged to seek assistance by contacting a counselling or support service.
- Housekeeping matters – duration of interview, mobiles off etc.

*“Any questions before starting?”*

Some free and confidential services you could contact include: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au); <http://www.lifeline.org.au>; MensLine Australia ([www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)); or Mens Referral Service 'no to violence' ([www.ntv.org.au](http://www.ntv.org.au))

If you require interpreter services to access these services, you can call 13 14 50. If you have hearing difficulties, you can call the National Relay Service on 1800 555 677 to help access these services.

## **Introduction**

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? (age, interests, family background)

We got your details through \_\_\_\_\_ organisation. Can you tell me how you became involved with them?

Ok, thanks for that, we'll talk a bit more about the organisation later, but first I would like a better understanding of the circumstances related to the image, photo or video that was shared or distributed by you.

## **Story of image-based abuse perpetrated**

Remembering that anything you share with us will be kept confidential, can you tell me about how you came to share the intimate images (nudes) of someone without their consent?

How old were you at the time? How old were they (the victim)? How did you know them?

What did you do? Probe for how the image was shared – e.g. to friends, to private group, to social media generally, to other specific group e.g. family, workplace?

What prompted you to send the image?

Was anyone else involved in taking/distributing the image?

What happened once you had sent the image? Who found out?

Were you taken in for questions or charged by the Police? What happened then? Court proceedings? Convictions? Were you aware that these actions are a crime in the majority of Australian states? If not a police matter – explore how it was dealt with.

What have been the impacts of this on you? (i.e. impacts on friends and family, perhaps added to the sexual predator list, employment impacts)

## **Motivations, beliefs, attitudes**

Why did you choose to send those image(s)?

[PROMPT: didn't think it was a big deal, everyone does it, thought it was OK, saw it as a joke, wanting to control, threaten, shame the victim; wanting to retaliate against/punish the victim for something they did; wanting to shame/isolate the victim; wanting to flirt or explore sexuality; alcohol/drugs involved; role of social pressure]

Was this just a one-off incident, or something that was more ongoing? Probe – was it related to wider issues/ongoing or a one occasion action?

Have you ever threatened to distribute someone's intimate images, but not followed through? Was the threat effective? If you did follow through, what made you ultimately distribute the images?

Can you recall the instance of when you distributed the image (or images)? Did you have any doubts at the time about what you were doing? Probe: why/why not – what doubts were there? How did you overcome them?

How did you justify those actions at the time?

[For example, others doing it, blaming someone else for pushing them to it, denial, it was a joke, dismissing the severity of the action]

Did you know that the behaviour, which is known as image-based abuse, could have legal ramifications?

Do you regret having sent the image(s) or not? Why? Do you think you might do something like that again or not?

Any other reasons that you can think of that might have led to this behaviour, on your part?

[Do not probe on this, but be mindful/aware of issues such as, attitudes towards women, history of being abused as a child, drug/alcohol issues, mental health issues]

### **Therapeutic intervention programs**

Thank you for sharing all of that with me. So now we'll turn to the intervention and support programs you're involved in.

How did you become involved in x [agency/organisation/group recruited via]? Probe: referred or self-referred/self-initiated– why?

Can you tell me what help you're getting and what programs you're involved in?

What does participation involve?

How are you finding the program? How is it helping you (if at all)?

Any issues that you're finding?

Do you have any thoughts as to how the program/related services could be improved?

Do you think there are particular types of offenders (who have circulated private images without consent) that services aren't targeting? What kinds of services are needed that currently aren't out there?

How helpful have you found this support, in relation to your previous behaviour of sharing the image we talked about? Probe: how likely are you to do something similar again – why/why not?

### **Wrap up**

*Is there anything further you would like to add or clarify in relation to what we have discussed today?  
Are there any other people you think we should speak to?*

*Thank you for your time in speaking with me today.*

## Appendix E Recruitment adverts

**Have you sent, thought about sending,  
or been accused of sending  
an intimate image of someone without  
their consent?**

**If so, would you be willing  
to talk to researchers  
(confidentially) about your  
experience?**



The Social Research Centre, RMIT and Monash University are conducting research into sharing of intimate images without permission.

We would like to understand your perspective, and are committed to conducting research respectfully and in a non-judgmental way.

You can talk to us either face-to-face, by phone or online – it's all confidential and anonymous. We are able to offer a small payment for your time.

Contact us:

- at [qualitative@srcentre.com.au](mailto:qualitative@srcentre.com.au), or
- call **1800 265 648** (freecall)

and one of our researchers (Ian, Hannah or Karen) will be in touch with you.



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