



Australian Adults Online

Methodology Report

February 2025

Acknowledgement

eSafety acknowledges all First Nations peoples for their continuing care of everything Country encompasses – land, waters and community. We pay our respects to First Nations peoples and to Elders past and present.

Introduction

This report outlines the methodology used for eSafety's *Australian Adults Online* research series. The research comprised an online survey conducted in November 2022, followed by a recontact of survey participants with a small number of additional questions in December 2022. Select findings will be published in a series of publications in 2023–2025.

The study aimed to build on our understanding of adults' online participation and experiences, and to provide an updated evidence base to inform eSafety's online safety resource development, program implementation and regulatory responsibilities.

The objectives of the research are to:

- examine the online activities and behaviours of adults living in Australia
- determine the prevalence and nature of negative online experiences
- provide insights into the online experiences of adults at greater risk of online harm – specifically, adults who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, linguistically diverse, sexually diverse and/or with disability.

The survey was conducted from 11 to 29 November 2022. A total of 5,304 adults aged 18 and over took part. Additional questions were sent to survey participants ($n = 5,304$) in December 2022, and 4,011 responses were received by January 2023.

Ethical considerations

Various steps were taken to address ethical considerations during project development and recruitment. This project was submitted as part of the Victorian University Human Research Ethics Committee approval process. Ethics approval for the project was received on 11 November 2022. There were two amendments to the original ethics submission. The first provided for a short recontact survey to be fielded to participants. It was approved on 15 December 2022. The second amendment allowed for the analysis of data from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was approved on 15 May 2024. eSafety collaborated with Distinguished Professor Bronwyn Carlson and Madi Day of Macquarie University's Department of Critical Indigenous Studies to review the methodology and survey instrument and to ensure that questions were worded in a culturally sensitive manner.

eSafety took several steps to reduce the risk of harm to participants by ensuring that their best interests were served and that the research conducted provided for their safety, emotional and psychological security, and wellbeing (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018). Informed consent to participate in the research was obtained by providing participants with information about the kinds of questions they would be asked and by explaining the potential risks of participating. Participants were also informed that the research was completely voluntary and that they could opt out at any time. Additionally, participants had the option of not answering potentially sensitive questions in the survey. Help-seeking/self-support information was made available to participants throughout the study.

The study

eSafety commissioned WhereTo Research to conduct the study, which comprised an online survey in two parts. The first part included a 20-minute survey consisting of approximately 80 questions covering topics such as:

- demographics
- online participation and activities
- confidence about staying safe online
- attitudes towards online safety and engagement
- negative online experiences

The second part of the study consisted of a recontact of survey participants, who were asked a few additional questions regarding facilitated child sexual exploitation.

The survey instrument was cognitively tested with eight adults of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds to ensure the questions and response categories made sense, were not ambiguous, and were appropriate for the range of people who would be participating.

Throughout the survey, participants were asked to think about the last 12 months when answering questions regarding their online participation and negative online experiences. The reference period for the survey data is therefore the 12 months to November 2022.

Survey sample

A total of 5,304 adults living in Australia participated in the first round of the survey. From this sample, 4,011 adults participated in the recontact survey.

Adults were recruited from three non-probability-based online panel providers (Octopus Group, Pure Profile and Research Profile). To best reflect a nationally representative sample, soft quotas were placed on gender, age, state, area (metropolitan and regional) and socio-economic status (defined by postcodes). The online survey included additional quotas for labour force status, highest level of educational attainment, sexual orientation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, disability, and linguistic diversity. Population statistics were sourced from comparable population estimates published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Survey weights were additionally applied to correct for oversampling of adults who identified as sexually diverse.

Table 1 shows key demographic characteristics of the survey participants.

Table 1. Survey participants: Key demographics

		Sample (n) (unweighted)	Sample (n) (weighted)	Sample (%) (weighted)
Gender	Men	2,628	2,653	50
	Women	2,647	2,643	50
	Non-binary and gender diverse	23	6	0
Age	18–34	2,005	1,658	31
	35–49	1,629	1,491	28
	50+	1,670	2,155	41
State/Territory	New South Wales	1,555	1,477	28
	Victoria	1,386	1,339	25
	Queensland	1,138	1,203	23
	Western Australia	551	575	11
	South Australia	392	432	8
	Tasmania	115	126	2
	Australian Capital Territory	111	101	2
	Northern Territory	56	53	1

Location	Metropolitan areas	4,098	3,858	73
	Regional and rural areas	1,206	1,446	27
Socio-economic status	High	1,745	1,606	30
	Mid	2,277	2,270	43
	Low	1,275	1,420	27
Labour force	Employed	3,968	3,129	59
	Unemployed	296	318	6
	Not in labour force	1,040	1,856	35
Educational attainment	Degree or higher	1,897	1,694	32
	Other non-school	1,605	1,725	33
	Year 12 or lower	1,777	1,865	35
Other demographics	Sexually diverse	551	140	3
	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	120	159	3
	With disability	995	1,041	20
	Mental health	628	613	12
	Physical	364	461	9
	Cognitive or intellectual	65	65	1
	Behavioural	56	48	1
	Learning	60	54	1
	Other disability	82	100	2
	Speak a language other than English at home	1,127	1,029	19
Total sample		5,304	5,304	100

Note: 'Men' includes four transgender men; 'women' includes three transgender women and three Sistergirls.¹ 'Sexually diverse' includes respondents who identified their sexual orientation as 'gay', 'lesbian', 'bisexual', 'queer', 'asexual', 'unsure/questioning' or 'I use a different term' (including 'pansexual', 'bicurious', 'demisexual' and 'fluid').

¹ 'Sistergirl' is a culturally specific term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe transgender women, femmes and effeminate people (TransHub, 2021). However, this word can be used differently depending on a person's location, country and nation. In this research, we grouped Sistergirls with women in our data, as the term is commonly used by trans women. Any Sistergirls who participated in the study and who wish to have their data grouped with a gender category other than 'women' may contact the authors. In future surveys, eSafety will include a question that allows respondents to select which gender category they would like their data to be grouped under, in addition to our current questions that capture participants' gender.

Computer-assisted telephone interviews sample

In addition to the online survey, 451 computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATIs) using probability-based sampling were conducted to confirm that the online survey results reflected the attitudes and experiences of the broader population. When the data from the CATI sample was reviewed and found to be in close alignment with the online sample, no calibration of the online survey data was undertaken; that is, all analyses were conducted on the online survey sample only.

Analysis

WhereTo Research hosted the survey, collected and cleaned the survey data, and provided eSafety with raw data as well as descriptive analysis. eSafety checked and analysed the data further using SPSS Statistics software. A number of questions included an 'other (specify)' option for participants to report any additional categories they felt weren't captured in the multiple-choice lists provided. eSafety recoded any responses that clearly belonged in existing categories. A small number of responses that didn't relate to the question were removed from the 'other' category.

Limitations

- The findings from this research are reliant on cross-sectional self-reported data. This means that the data are based on participants' experiences and perceptions as they have shared them with us at one point in time, rather than being based on independent observation or assessment.
- The survey sample was sourced from online panels of people who have agreed to be invited to participate in online research on a variety of topics. Technically, these are convenience samples. 'Non-probability-based sampling' means that not everyone has an equal chance of being selected to participate in the research. Results may be subject to a range of biases when compared with results from research using probability-based sampling. Although quotas and survey weights were used to control for demographic skews, and the survey results were found to be in close alignment with those from the CATI sample, it is difficult to control for psychographic skews arising from differential approaches to participation attraction. Additionally, although survey response items were presented in a randomised order, self-report surveys can be subject to social desirability biases. This means that participants may answer survey items in a manner they think is socially desirable or acceptable, as opposed to providing a true reflection of their attitudes or experiences.
- Specific survey findings for transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse adults were not separated out in the main survey data collected and analysed. This was due to the small sample size for this cohort, which is an inherent challenge in statistical analysis. As a result, our findings are unable to reflect the specific online experiences of transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse adults.

Note to the reader

Percentages in data tables and figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding or to question formats that allowed multiple answers to be given. The base sizes shown in the tables and figures use weighted data.

References

National Health and Medical Research Council. (2018). *National statement on ethical conduct in human research* (2007, updated 2018). Australian Government.

TransHub. (2021). *Trans mob*. Retrieved from TransHub: <https://www.transhub.org.au/trans-mob?rq=sistergirl>

