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ICMEC Australia has been working closely with the stakeholders in the child sexual exploitation (CSE) response ecosystem to identify effective ways of tackling online CSE as a collective. Through its stakeholder engagement over several years, it became clear that there are many gaps in our knowledge about the online CSE response ecosystem. No single entity has a system wide view of the variety of responses to online child sexual exploitation. Unfortunately, perpetrators are increasingly networked, and do share information on ways to avoid detection. When perpetrators of child sexual exploitation operate like structured and cohesive organisations, a coordinated and collaborative response is the only way to detect, report and prosecute these crimes, and save children from harm.

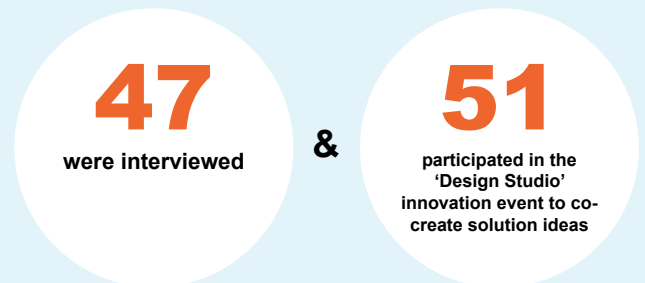
Perpetrators collaborate through dark, deep and surface webs, social media chat rooms and communication apps to facilitate live streaming of CSE, gain access to child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and use conventional online payment methods without being detected. This crime is growing at an exponential rate with the perpetrators constantly changing tactics, leveraging technology and outnumbering law enforcement resources.

To counter this, the stakeholders in the CSE response ecosystem at the front line of detecting, investigating and reporting child sexual exploitation (CSE) need scalable tech-enabled tools and coordinated, multi-sector action - ways to share timely information about new issues and how to respond to them. In order to determine their roles, willingness and resources in enabling this change, ICMEC Australia wanted to understand:

*What is the key to driving real changes and disrupting online child sexual exploitation, where are the gaps and who are in the right places to do it?*

To answer this question, ICMEC Australia worked with Tobias, a strategic design and social innovation partner, to map the current state of the ecosystem. It was the moment to produce a foundational research piece, something that can be built on as the response ecosystem develops further in Australia, and across the globe.

The User Centred Design (UCD) research collected data from diverse stakeholders in the CSE response ecosystem.



The research surfaced the root causes of the barriers that the ecosystem stakeholders face, and generated insights and evidence to support committing resources to addressing complex systemic gaps instead of reacting to surface-level problems.

# Gaps in the Ecosystem of Online Child Sexual Exploitation, Detection, Investigation & Response

The research identified 7 large, complex barriers that currently stand in the way of optimal processes and outcomes for the sake of children. These systemic barriers require paradigm shifts, a completely new way of thinking, and a large number of stakeholders working closely together towards the same goal - CSE is a wicked, societal, global problem.



## Data Access & Legislative Barriers

Access to the right data at the right time (systemic data flow) is significantly difficult for all players in the ecosystem.



## Evidence Split Across Sources

Data footprints of CSE activity span across multiple different platforms and industries, and one data source alone may not be enough to lead to an investigation.



## Working in Silos

There is a lack of alignment on the collective impact and short- and long-term outcomes, owing to siloed functions of each stakeholder group and lack of cross-sector trust and engagement.



**You can have a few transactions and you need to see the bigger picture. Bad actors are utilising different methods of payment (including crypto and the dark web environment). There is a need for public-private partnerships to pay off to disrupt this.**

- Financial Service Provider



## Unknown Scale of Crime

The scale of CSE is unknown due to anonymity, and the continuously changing nature of the crime, meaning many remain undetected. No baseline means it is difficult for the ecosystem stakeholders to track progress or impact; and improve their systems and tools in response.



**(Law enforcement) are playing with one hand behind their back and they are so outnumbered. The good guys are in the 1000s, and the bad guys are in the 10s of millions.**

- Subject Matter Expert



## Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) as Currency

Financial transactions are only one form of currency in the CSE criminal network. Some offenders trade CSAM with each other as a way to avoid detection.



## Public Awareness

There is a lack of public awareness of CSE and what this type of crime looks like. The subject is seen as taboo and not openly discussed.



## Crime Displacement

Removing the place / environment (e.g. website, payment platform) may lead to the crime moving to somewhere else.

If you're involved in the fight against child sexual exploitation, register to join the ICMEC Australia Member Portal and access the full report: <https://members.icmec.org.au/register/>.