

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE DIGITAL AND SOCIAL EMERGENCY HAPPENING IN CHILDREN'S BEDROOMS

There was a 13 percentage point increase (from 23% to 36%) in sexual abuse imagery of 7-10 year olds, (regardless of how it was created) and a 10 percentage point decrease (68% to 58%) in sexual imagery of 11-13 year olds compared to the year before. However, imagery of 11-13s is still the most prevalent.

Every year, we see a greater proportion of Category A images – showing the most severe, sadistic forms of sexual abuse – involving babies, toddlers and even newborns. In 2022, we also continued to see many Category B images, suggesting that in almost all images of infants, an abuser is present.

As in previous years, in 2022 there were more sexual abuse images of children aged 11- 13 than of any other age group. Older children can be curious about the online world and keen to explore. Unfortunately, adult abusers – sometimes pretending to be children themselves – exploit this by manipulating children into performing sexual acts on camera, via a smartphone, tablet or laptop.

In 2022:

- 375,230 reports were assessed by the Internet Watch Foundation (+4% on 2021)
- 255,588 reports were confirmed as containing child sexual abuse imagery, having links to the imagery, or advertising it (+1% on 2021).

In 2022, we saw a 60% increase in the number of images including children aged 7-10 years old. As ever-younger children become more tech-aware and active online, they become more vulnerable to grooming and abuse by strangers – even in their own bedrooms.

14-15 year old Girls are especially likely to be targeted and abused online; Within this age group girls account for 95% of the images. The abuse doesn't stop when the child logs off – if images have been captured and saved, they can be shared across the internet again and again

Sexually coerced extortion for financial gain seems to be more prevalent with 16-17 year old boys rather than girls. Boys are typically lured into what they believe are mutual exchanges of sexual images where boys mistakenly believe they are sharing images with a girl or older woman.

There was a significant increase in the number of 'self-generated' child sexual abuse images of boys. 'Self-generated' images of boys accounted for 31% (831) of all boys' child sexual abuse images in 2021, while in 2022 this rose to 56% (3,504) – an overall increase of 25%.

Hidden services are websites hosted within proxy networks – sometimes also called the dark web. These websites are challenging as the location of the hosting server cannot be traced using normal methods. In 2022 we identified 1,067 new hidden services, up from 931 in 2021. This is an increase of 15%.

In 2022, 2.5 % or 6,253 reports showed the sexual abuse of boys only. This is a 137% increase on 2021 (2,641 reports). Within this subset of data, a higher proportion of the imagery of boys shows Category A child sexual abuse compared to girls: 31% for boys compared to 19% for girls.

In 2022, 61,754 reports which included 'self-generated' imagery included a 7–10-year-old girl. This represents 24% of all actioned reports and 31% of 'self-generated' child sexual abuse reports

896 instances of online child sexual abuse images or videos were found containing Category A content of a 'self-generated' nature over a period of 5 days.

- This averages as 25 Category A images an hour
- 668 of these images contained children aged 11 to 13 years old (75%).
- 184 of these images contained 7- to 10-year-olds (20%).
- 44 of these images contained 14- to 15-year-olds (5%)