







# MEDIA REPORTING OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA

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## MEDIA ANALYSIS KEY FINDINGS

### Episodic and thematic framing

Media reporting of child sexual abuse in Australia is often episodic, focusing on individual cases rather than broader systemic issues. This approach can lead to a fragmented understanding of the problem, as the focus is on the specific details of a single incident rather than the underlying patterns and causes. Thematic framing, which involves identifying and exploring common themes across multiple cases, is less common in mainstream media reporting. This can result in a lack of depth and a failure to address the broader implications of the issue.

Analysis of media coverage shows that episodic reporting is more prevalent in print news, while thematic reporting is more common in digital news. This suggests that digital platforms may be more conducive to in-depth, thematic analysis. The episodic nature of reporting can also contribute to a sense of urgency and crisis, which may not always be warranted. Thematic reporting, on the other hand, can help to build a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the issue over time.

### Best practice reporting is thematic, victim-centred and trauma-informed

Best practice reporting on child sexual abuse should be thematic, victim-centred, and trauma-informed. Thematic reporting allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the issue, identifying common patterns and causes. Victim-centred reporting focuses on the experiences and needs of survivors, rather than the details of the crime. Trauma-informed reporting recognizes the potential for re-traumatization and aims to provide a safe and supportive environment for survivors. These approaches are more likely to be found in digital news and specialist media outlets.

### Courts the dominant source of news

Courts are the dominant source of news for child sexual abuse cases. This is often due to the public interest in high-profile cases and the legal process. However, this focus on courts can limit the scope of reporting, as it often fails to explore the broader context and implications of the crime. It can also lead to a focus on the legal details of the case, which may not be the most relevant information for survivors and the public.

### News focuses on the perpetrator

News reporting often focuses on the perpetrator, particularly in high-profile cases. This can lead to a focus on the perpetrator's background and motives, rather than the impact of the crime on survivors. This approach can also contribute to a sense of victim-blaming and a focus on the perpetrator's actions rather than the broader systemic issues.

### Celebrities the focus of news stories

Celebrities are often the focus of news stories about child sexual abuse. This is due to the public interest in the lives of celebrities and the potential for scandal. However, this focus on celebrities can divert attention away from the broader issue of child sexual abuse and the experiences of survivors. It can also lead to a focus on the celebrity's actions rather than the broader systemic issues.

### Online/digital the most common location of abuse in media stories

Online and digital platforms are the most common locations for child sexual abuse in media stories. This is due to the widespread use of social media and the ease of sharing content online. However, this focus on online and digital platforms can lead to a narrow view of the issue, as it often fails to explore the broader context and implications of the crime. It can also lead to a focus on the perpetrator's actions rather than the broader systemic issues.

### Overshadowing of priority groups

Priority groups, such as Indigenous children and children in care, are often overshadowed in media reporting. This is due to the focus on high-profile cases and celebrities, which can divert attention away from these groups. This oversight can lead to a lack of understanding of the specific needs and experiences of these groups and a failure to address the broader systemic issues. Specialist media outlets and digital news are more likely to provide coverage of these groups.

### Limited information about support services

There is limited information about support services for survivors of child sexual abuse in media reporting. This is often due to a focus on the legal process and the perpetrator's actions, rather than the needs of survivors. This lack of information can make it difficult for survivors to find the support they need and can contribute to a sense of isolation and helplessness.

### Problematic language

Problematic language is often used in media reporting on child sexual abuse, such as terms like 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. This language can be dehumanizing and can contribute to a sense of victim-blaming. It can also lead to a focus on the perpetrator's actions rather than the broader systemic issues. Specialist media outlets and digital news are more likely to use more respectful and trauma-informed language.





## AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The project aims to explore the impact of media reporting on public perceptions of child sexual abuse in Australia. It will investigate how the media's portrayal of such cases influences societal attitudes, reporting rates, and the support available to victims. The research will also examine the role of the media in raising awareness and promoting policy changes to better protect children and support survivors.

A. The research shows that the media's reporting of child sexual abuse is often sensationalist and focuses on the details of the crime rather than the impact on the victim. This can lead to further trauma for the victim and their family. The research also shows that the media often fails to provide accurate information about the legal process and the support available to victims.

**Qualitative media analysis**

B. The research shows that the media's reporting of child sexual abuse is often sensationalist and focuses on the details of the crime rather than the impact on the victim. This can lead to further trauma for the victim and their family. The research also shows that the media often fails to provide accurate information about the legal process and the support available to victims.

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**GUIDE TO THE EVIDENCE**

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Reporting on Child Sexual Abuse: Guidance for Media, Engaging with Media about

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G... ACCCE1 1, B... C... EC1 1, A... A... ED AC CE

## A MEDIA STUDIES APPROACH

Media studies approach involves a systematic analysis of media content to understand the representation of social issues. This approach is used to examine how child sexual abuse is portrayed in the news, including the language used, the focus of the stories, and the role of different stakeholders.

The media studies approach is a critical tool for researchers to understand the complex relationship between media and society. It allows them to identify patterns and trends in media coverage and to explore the underlying power dynamics and ideologies that shape these representations.

### Evidence

Age data is a key component of media studies research. It involves collecting and analyzing information about the age of individuals mentioned in media reports, such as victims, perpetrators, and public figures.

Network analysis is another important method in media studies. It involves mapping the relationships between different entities mentioned in media reports, such as individuals, organizations, and institutions, to understand the structure and dynamics of the media landscape.

Network analysis helps researchers to identify key actors and influencers in the media and to explore the ways in which these actors interact with each other and with the public. This method is particularly useful for understanding the spread of information and the formation of public opinion.





■  $f^T \cdot k \cdot \gamma \cdot k^T$  (circled) is a  $3 \times 3$  matrix  
 $\circ$   $f^T \cdot k$  is a scalar (circled)  $\gamma$  is a scalar  
 $\circ$   $k \cdot k^T$  is a  $3 \times 3$  matrix (circled)  
 $\circ$   $f^T$  is a  $1 \times 3$  vector (circled)  
 $\circ$   $k$  is a  $3 \times 1$  vector (circled)

$A = k \cdot \gamma \cdot k^T$  is a  $3 \times 3$  matrix  
 $E = f \cdot f^T$  is a  $3 \times 3$  matrix  
 $C = A + E$  is a  $3 \times 3$  matrix  
 $AC = A \cdot C$  is a  $3 \times 3$  matrix  
 $C^{-1} = (A + E)^{-1}$  is a  $3 \times 3$  matrix

$N^{-1}$  is a  $3 \times 3$  matrix  
 $N^{-1} \cdot k$  is a  $3 \times 1$  vector  
 $(N^{-1} \cdot k)^T$  is a  $1 \times 3$  vector  
 $11$  is a scalar  
 $D$  is a  $3 \times 3$  matrix









## Appendix A

A

B

ABC

The Today Show Studio 1Q ABC Drive

## QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Quantitative results

Qualitative results

### Story type

Story type

Investigative

News

Opinion

Analysis

Documentary

Interview

Feature

Editorial

Commentary

Column

Cartoon

Podcast

Video

Infographic

Interactive

Podcast

Video

Infographic

Interactive

Investigative

News

Opinion

Analysis

Documentary

Interview

Feature

Editorial

Commentary

Column

Cartoon

Podcast

Video

Infographic

Interactive













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Tm k' + -Tm . - . n . y . . . . k' . . . . k' - . n'  
y . -Tm - k' . n' . k' . - . . . Tm . k' Tm .

... a man charged with child sexual abuse in Australia: 2020-22: Research Report 23

... a man charged with child sexual abuse in Australia: 2020-22: Research Report 23

MAN CHARGED OVER ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE (Newcastle Herald, 22/12/2021)

Tasmanian school staff member charged with dozens of child exploitation offences (ABC News Online, 21/09/21)

Rugby Australia executive charged with four child abuse offences amid AFP investigation (news.com.au, 19/09/21)

... a man charged with child sexual abuse in Australia: 2020-22: Research Report 23

... a man charged with child sexual abuse in Australia: 2020-22: Research Report 23

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY

... a man charged with child sexual abuse in Australia: 2020-22: Research Report 23

... a man charged with child sexual abuse in Australia: 2020-22: Research Report 23







... Daily Mail ...

“They face a string of charges involving *child rape* and the possession and sharing of images.”

*The Canberra Times*

“A 26-year-old man was charged with two counts of *raping a child under the age of 10 years* and a 21-year-old man was charged with six counts of *raping a child under the age of 10 years* in the NSW towns of Kendall and Old Bar.”

*Sydney Morning Herald*  
*Adelaide Advertiser*  
*Daily Telegraph*  
*Courier Mail*  
*Herald Sun*

*Geelong Advertiser*

*Ensign*



A Daily Mail  
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news.com.au  
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“The shame sits at the feet of perpetrators of child sexual abuse,” she says. “We have to eradicate these cultures of victim-blaming and denial and dismissal, because there are so many structures in our society, both in terms of social attitudes and institutions, that enable predatory behaviour. I’m really determined to encourage and normalise the ace shar it

### Historical abuse in orphanages and Out of Home Care settings

A  
ABC B  
B

The memo that erased a scandal (ABC, 24/4/2021)

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### Sports coaches and institutions

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My pseudo father, my coach, my abuser (@OE)

... and ... to ... ..  
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*The Australian* ... ..  
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My sister was abused. So was I. She's dead. I'm speaking up (19/9/20)

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“Please say her name. I need to tell this story, in all its shocking ugliness, to elicit a reaction. I want people to say my dead sister's name and to openly reject the whole spectrum of predatory sexual behaviours. [...]

In doing this, we destigmatise the victim and cultivate a culture where talking openly about sexual abuse becomes acceptable.”

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### First Nations survivors

The Australian Government's *First Nations* *Survivors* *Report* (2021) is a landmark document that provides a comprehensive overview of the experiences of First Nations survivors of child sexual abuse. The report highlights the significant impact of such abuse on the mental health and well-being of survivors, and the need for a coordinated response from government, service providers, and the community.

The report also identifies the need for a national strategy to address the issue of child sexual abuse in First Nations communities. This strategy should focus on prevention, early intervention, and support for survivors. It should also address the need for culturally appropriate services and support for survivors.

*The Australian* 1 .1

## INSIGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS

• The research shows that media reporting of child sexual abuse in Australia is often limited to sensational headlines and brief news items, rather than in-depth, investigative journalism. This can lead to a lack of understanding of the complexities of child sexual abuse and the impact on victims.

• The research also highlights the need for more consistent and accurate reporting of child sexual abuse, including the use of appropriate language and the inclusion of expert commentary. This can help to reduce the stigma and shame associated with child sexual abuse and support victims in seeking help.









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D . . . . . *Ethnic and Racial Studies* . . . . . 1 . . . . .

E . . . . . *Journal of Communication* . . . . . 7 . . . . .

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F. C. *Hell on the way to heaven* B.

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G. F. *Journal of Australian Studies*

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G. *Journal of Australian Studies*

11 G Child Sexual Abuse and the Media Z. +

F. 1 Dark secrets of childhood: Media power child abuse and public scandals

F. 1 Child Research Net

A 1 1 Af

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## APPENDIX 9 : CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING FRAME

TABLE 2: Metadata (iSentia)

CODE	DESCRIPTOR
D. s. . . . .	D. s. . . . .
■ . . . .	■ . . . .
■ . . . .	■ . . . .
■ . . . .	■ . . . .
■ . . . .	■ . . . .
A . . . . .	A . . . . .
D. s. . . . .	D. s. . . . .

TABLE 3: Content specific data

CODE				

CODE	DESCRIPTOR	DEFINITION/ EXPLANATION	MENU TYPE	DROP DOWN MENU CATEGORIES
N		A	F	
	L	V	D	L, F, G, C, N
A	A	A	D	A, C, GB, A
		C	D	
C	C	C	D	C, G, G, C, N







# MEDIA REPORTING OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA

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0 0 00 : E EA C EN

*Reporting on Child Sexual Abuse: Guidance for Media*  
*Engaging with Media about Child Sexual Abuse:*  
*For Victims and Survivors*