Internet Watch Foundation Research Detail

The [Internet Watch Foundations (IWF)](#) [2021 annual report](#) highlighted some key concerns in relation to child sexual abuse material. The report found that sexual abuse imagery of girls is increasingly being shared online with almost all (97%) child sexual abuse material identified in 2021 showing female children. In 2021 the IWF took action to remove a record-breaking 252,000 URLs (Uniform Resource Locator - a URL is the address of a given unique resource on the internet) which contained images or videos of children being raped and/or suffering sexual abuse. Of these, 182,281 URLs contained images or videos of "self-generated" material. This is a 374% increase on pre-pandemic levels when, in 2019, analysts took action to remove 38,424 URLs containing self-generated material. Sexual abuse imagery of children aged 11-13 is most prevalent, accounting for almost seven in 10 instances identified last year. Whilst just 1% of the sexual abuse imagery shows boys, this accounts for 2,641 instances. In more than half of these cases (53%) the boy was suffering category A sexual abuse which is penetrative sexual activity, sexual activity with an animal or sadism. By comparison, 17% of the sexual abuse imagery of girls shows category A activities.

New data released by the IWF shows almost 20,000 webpages of child sexual abuse imagery in the first half of 2022 included 'self-generated' content of 7- to 10-year-old children. That is nearly 8,000 more instances than the same period last year. When compared to the first half of 2020, when the UK entered its first Covid lockdown, there has been a 360% increase in this type of imagery of 7- to 10-year-olds.

The IWF is calling the rapid growth of this material, showing primary-aged children, a social and digital emergency, which needs focussed and sustained efforts from the Government, the tech industry, law enforcement, education and third sectors to combat it. Susie Hargreaves OBE, IWF Chief Executive, has said: "There is no place for child sexual abuse on the internet and we cannot simply accept, year on year, that sexual imagery of children is allowed to be exchanged without constraint online. Child sexual abuse which is facilitated and captured by technology using an internet connection does not require the abuser to be physically present, and most often takes place when the child is in their bedroom – a supposedly 'safe space' in the family home. Therefore, it should be entirely preventable. We need to attack this criminality from several directions, including providing parents and carers with support to have positive discussions around technology use and sexual abuse, within the home. Children are not to blame. They are often being coerced, tricked or pressured by sexual abusers on the internet. Only when the education of parents, carers and children comes together with efforts by tech companies, the Government, police and third sector, can we hope to stem the tide of this criminal imagery."