

## Abstract

Research on child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) has traditionally focused on depictions of actual children (termed ‘real’ CSEM), but the rise of fictional CSEM (e.g., AI-generated or animated content) introduces new legal and ethical challenges, highlighting the need to understand who engages with fictional versus ‘real’ materials. Using an anonymous dataset of darknet users from a child lover forum ( $N = 2,949$ ), we compared individuals who reported viewing only fictional CSEM ( $n = 1,177$ ; 39.9%) to those who viewed both fictional and ‘real’ CSEM ( $n = 1,760$ ; 59.7%); only 0.4% ( $n = 12$ ) exclusively viewed ‘real’ CSEM. Individuals in the mixed group were significantly more likely to report sexually harmful behaviours. For example, 7.9% of the mixed group reported offline sexual contact with a child, compared to 0.5% of the fictional-only group,  $d = 0.346$  [0.272, 0.420]. Similar patterns were found for having sexual conversations with a child online (11.9% vs. 0.7%;  $d = 0.438$  [0.363, 0.512]), and having been charged with a sexual offence (3.3% vs. 0.8%;  $d = 0.170$  [0.096, 0.244]). These findings suggest that exclusive fictional CSEM use may be associated with lower levels of contact offending, while mixed use may represent a higher-risk CSEM subgroup needing prioritized intervention.

## Reference:

Samithamby, A., Quinten, L., & Babchishin, K. M. (2025, August 26-29). *Not all Child Sexual Exploitation Material (CSEM) users are the same: Differences between fictional and ‘real’ CSEM users* [Poster presentation]. IATSO 2025 Conference, Poznań, Poland.

## Correspondence:

Abiraam Samithamby

Department of Psychology, Carleton University

Ottawa, Canada

Email: [abiraamsamithamby@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:abiraamsamithamby@cmail.carleton.ca)

## Results

**Table 1**

***Self-Report Sexually Harmful Behaviours Among Fictional-Only and Mixed CSEM Users***

Behaviour	Fictional-Only CSEM Users	Mixed CSEM Users	<i>d</i> [95% CI]
Flirted or had sexual conversations with a real child			.44 [.36, .51]***
Yes	0.8% (9/1,196)	12.0% (216/1,807)	
No	99.2% (1,187/1,196)	88.0% (1,591/1,807)	
Paid/gave gifts to a real child for online sexual material			.15 [.08, .23]***
Yes	0.3% (3/1,196)	2.0% (36/1,807)	
No	99.7% (1,193/1,196)	98.0% (1,771/1,807)	
Flirted or had sexual conversations with a fictional child (e.g., roleplay, avatar, AI-generated)			.01 [-.06, .08]
Yes	38.5% (460/1,196)	39.0% (704/1,807)	
No	61.5% (736/1,196)	61.0% (1,103/1,807)	
Had offline sex or sexual contact with a real child			.34 [0.27, .42]***
Yes	0.5% (6/1,196)	7.8% (141/1,807)	
No	99.5% (1,190/1,196)	92.2% (1,666/1,807)	
Pressured someone into having sex			.12 [.05, .20]***

Yes	2.8% (33/1,196)	5.3% (95/1,807)	
No	97.2% (1,163/1,196)	94.7% (1,712/1,807)	
Arrested/charged/ convicted for a sexual offence			.18 [.10, .25]***
Yes	0.8% (9/1,196)	3.4% (61/1,807)	
No	99.2% (1,187/1,196)	96.6% (1,746/1,807)	

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*Note.* \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Positive  $d$  values indicate higher scores for the Mixed CSEM Users group compared to the Fictional-Only CSEM Users group.

**Table 2**

***Self-Reported Proclivity for Sexually Harmful Behaviours Among Fictional-Only and Mixed CSEM Users***

Proclivity to Commit Sexual Offences	Fictional-Only CSEM Users	Mixed CSEM Users	<i>d</i> [95% CI]
Proclivity to commit non-consensual sexual activity with an adult			.30 [.23, .37]***
1	77.8% (931/1,196)	65.6% (1,185/1,807)	
2	12.9% (154/1,196)	15.9% (288/1,807)	
3	3.9% (47/1,196)	6.3% (114/1,807)	
4	3.3% (40/1,196)	6.1% (111/1,807)	
5	2.0% (24/1,196)	6.0% (109/1,807)	
Proclivity to watch porn depicting a real child			1.50 [1.41, 1.58]***
1	57.9% (692/1,196)	7.6% (138/1,807)	
2	18.5% (221/1,196)	12.1% (218/1,807)	
3	7.9% (95/1,196)	14.5% (262/1,807)	
4	8.2% (98/1,196)	19.0% (344/1,807)	
5	7.5% (90/1,196)	46.8% (845/1,807)	
Proclivity to watch porn depicting a fictional child			.40 [.32, .47]***
1	2.8% (33/1,196)	0.6% (11/1,807)	

2	4.1% (49/1,196)	1.9% (34/1,807)	
3	10.8% (129/1,196)	6.0% (109/1,807)	
4	19.5% (233/1,196)	10.5% (190/1,807)	
5	62.9% (752/1,196)	81.0% (1,463/1,807)	
Proclivity to flirt or have sexual conversations with a real child			.80 [.72, .87]***
1	78.3% (937/1,196)	40.3% (729/1,807)	
2	8.9% (106/1,196)	15.4% (278/1,807)	
3	5.4% (64/1,196)	12.2% (221/1,807)	
4	3.3% (39/1,196)	10.7% (193/1,807)	
5	4.2% (50/1,196)	21.4% (386/1,807)	
Proclivity to flirt or have sexual conversations with a fictional child			.24 [.17, .31]***
1	22.6% (270/1,196)	16.9% (306/1,807)	
2	13.3% (159/1,196)	10.8% (196/1,807)	
3	13.7% (164/1,196)	10.5% (190/1,807)	
4	17.1% (205/1,196)	15.9% (288/1,807)	
5	33.3% (398/1,196)	45.8% (827/1,807)	
Proclivity to pay/give gifts to a child for online sexual material			.64 [.57, .72]***

1	86.3% (1,032/1,196)	56.3% (1,018/1,807)	
2	6.0% (72/1,196)	12.8% (231/1,807)	
3	3.0% (36/1,196)	9.0% (163/1,807)	
4	2.4% (29/1,196)	9.4% (169/1,807)	
5	2.3% (27/1,196)	12.5% (226/1,807)	
Proclivity to have offline sex or sexual contact with a child			.88 [.80, .95]***
1	79.2% (947/1,196)	37.3% (674/1,807)	
2	7.8% (93/1,196)	13.7% (247/1,807)	
3	3.9% (47/1,196)	10.6% (191/1,807)	
4	4.1% (49/1,196)	13.9% (252/1,807)	
5	5.0% (60/1,196)	24.5% (443/1,807)	

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*Note.* \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Positive  $d$  values indicate higher scores for the Mixed CSEM Users group compared to the Fictional-Only CSEM Users group.

**Table 3*****Risk Factors, Variables, and ORs/aORs for Fictional-Only vs. Mixed CSEM Groups***

Risk Factors and Component Variables	OR [95% CI]	aOR [95% CI] ( <i>n</i> = 3,003)
Sexual preoccupation	1.62 [1.44, 1.83]***	1.33 [1.13, 1.57]***
Porn site use frequency		
Weekly orgasm frequency		
Porn tolerance		
Porn use stress		
Sexual behaviour interference		
Sexual control		
Pedohebephilic interests - Viewing time	1.19 [1.10, 1.28]***	1.01 [.92, 1.10]
Pedohebephilic interests - Explicit attractiveness	2.23 [2.05, 2.43]***	1.65 [1.49, 1.82]***
Impulsivity	1.70 [1.48, 1.88]***	1.12 [.95, 1.30]
Exciting/unpredictable friends preference		
Online risk-taking		
Online taboo excitement		
Online rush sensation		
Uncontrolled internet use		

Emotional regulation deficits	1.31 [1.17, 1.47]***	.97 [.83, 1.14]
Perceived overwhelming stress		
Sexual coping - sadness/loneliness		
Sexual coping - boredom		
Sexual coping - stress/frustration/anger		
Substance use for coping		
Offense-supportive attitudes and beliefs	4.87 [4.17, 5.68]***	2.89 [2.43, 3.44]***
Law-breaking justification		
Selective law obedience		
Sexual chat with children justification		
Child-shared images justification		
Sexual chats with real children minimization		
Real child enjoyment in sexual images justification		
Sexual chats with fictional children minimization		
Fictional child enjoyment in sexual images justification		



Ease of finding illegal content online		
Capacity for adult intimacy	.97 [.89, 1.05]	-
Self-perceived sexual desirability		
Self-perceived mate value		
Negative social influences	2.40 [2.16, 2.65]***	2.05 [1.83, 2.28]***
Contact with someone in possession of real CSEM		

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*Note.* \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . OR = Odds Ratio; aOR = Adjusted Odds Ratio. Values above 1 indicate higher odds in the Mixed CSEM Users group relative to the Fictional-Only CSEM group; values below 1 indicate lower odds.