# "Keeping Them Safe" Consistency in Australian Online Child Exploitation Prevention Messaging

## Problem

> Australian government agencies have published prevention and education guidelines to counter the increasing threat of online child sexual exploitation (OCSE). This thesis looked at consistency in messaging across guidelines, focusing on grooming, sextortion, and capping.

## Aims

> The aim was to understand the current approach and key messages Australian government agencies have implemented to prevent OCSE and analyse the consistencies, duplications, and discrepancies between the guidelines.

## Methodology

> This study thematically analysed 76 written, publicly available OCSE prevention guidelines from 21 Australian government agencies (both Commonwealth and State).

## Key findings

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| | There was consistency across agencies, guidelines, information, and definitions but discrepancies in terminology. This is a significant finding that indicates discrepancies in the guidelines may be detrimental to the audience's understanding of grooming, sextortion, and capping, as consistent terminology is not used. |
| | There were duplications across guidelines with sources linking to each other or even stating the same information word-for-word. |
| 84% | Of the 76 guidelines, 64 (84%) provided links to further information by referencing other guidelines such as the eSafety Commissioner (referenced 126 times across 30 guidelines), ThinkUKnow (referenced 54 times across 25 guidelines), and the ACCCE (referenced 23 times across 11 guidelines). |
| | Prevention techniques were not adequately explained. For example, a guideline would state parents should "implement parental controls" but not explain how to do that. |
| | Guidelines targeting youth tell them not to talk to strangers, add people they do not know, or share personal details online. However, the research literature suggests that youth are aware of the risks yet still choose to participate in risky online behaviour. |

## Limitations

> This thesis excluded school curricula, non-government organisations, and international agencies, as well as non-written formats such as games and videos, and therefore does not provide the full range of OCSE prevention approaches. Further research could incorporate these to allow for a more in-depth understanding of OCSE prevention.

## Implications and recommendations

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| → | Australian government agencies should consider working together to create a consistent OCSE prevention message with consistent definitions and terminology across guidelines. |
| → | Prevention should also consider the research literature about youth online behaviour. Techniques could be focused less on abstinence and more on education about identifying crimes and offenders, as well as open communication with trusted adults. |
| → | Prevention messages can be more specific by explaining not only *what strategies and techniques are* but also *how to implement them*. |