

Online Exposure: Experiences of Extreme or Illegal Content in Aotearoa – Supplementary information

The research *Online Exposure: Experiences of Extreme or Illegal Content in Aotearoa* was published by the Classification Office on 27 January, 2026.

This document provides additional information for people who are interested in further details about the research.

Scan the QR code to read the full report. Contact us for further information: info@classificationoffice.govt.nz



Exposure to content – survey design and interpreting results

Determining if content is 'objectionable' requires expert assessment by Classification Office staff, and so directly assessing public exposure to illegal material would not be possible in this type of survey.

As such, findings are presented as exposure to "extreme or illegal material". The aim of the survey was to understand exposure to types of content that are more likely to be objectionable, and so various methods were used to ensure responses focused on this type of content.

This section provides an overview of how we asked about exposure to content, and how results can be interpreted within a broader context.

The survey was designed to focus on extreme and potentially illegal content

Initial questions focused on awareness of illegal content

The survey began by asking questions about awareness of the law, and getting participants to describe types of content that they thought might be illegal in New Zealand. In this way we ensured participants were thinking about more extreme or potentially illegal types of content before being asked about exposure.

Framing the question

We informed participants that "this section is about types of content that can sometimes cross a legal line and might be banned in New Zealand". We also told them "it's not about commercial entertainment like movies or TV shows", as this type of content is unlikely to reach the legal threshold.

Specifying categories of content

Some categories of content were quite specific and did not require additional clarification, such as "Explicit content showing sexual activity between people and animals (bestiality)".

Some categories of content might be interpreted more broadly, and so we provided clear and specific examples focusing on types of content that are more likely to be illegal. For example, we specified that:

- "Graphic violence, extreme cruelty or death involving people" might include "graphic video or images of a mass-shooting, executions"
- "Content that encourages people to commit a crime" might include "instructions and encouragement to manufacture illegal drugs or build a bomb"

We provided additional information in some categories for clarification. For example, we explained that:

- "Graphic or explicit sexual content involving rape, sexual abuse or sexual assault" is "not about commercially produced adult pornography" and might include "recordings of real-life sexual assault, or content that explicitly encourages acts of sexual violence and rape."
- "Explicit sexual content involving children or young teenagers" is "sometimes called 'child sexual exploitation material' or 'child pornography'".

A full list of content categories included in this question are provided at the end of this document.

¹ The Classification Office generally refers to this content as "child sexual exploitation material" or "child sexual abuse material", and we do not consider the term "child pornography" to be an accurate or appropriate description.

However, we included this wording in the survey to help ensure all participants clearly understood the subject matter.

Encouraging honest and accurate responses

We informed participants that their responses were private and confidential, and that their answers would not be linked to any personal details. This was to help ensure that participants felt comfortable answering questions about exposure to potentially illegal content.

We explained that the purpose of the question about exposure was to “help us understand how common it is for people to come across this type of content”, noting that “people can come across this type of content by accident and we are just wanting to see how common this is regardless of how or where you might have seen it”. Before answering the question, we reminded participants that their answers were anonymous.

Further context on interpreting results

While it’s not possible to say with certainty how much of the content participants reported seeing was illegal, findings suggest that coming across illegal content online may be a common experience for many New Zealanders.

Some categories of content may have been interpreted more broadly by participants, while other categories – such as child sexual exploitation material or bestiality – are more likely to refer to illegal content.

Participants were not asked to describe or give examples of content, and questions relied on participants’ subjective opinion or understanding of whether the content types listed applied to content they had seen. The survey also relies on their ability to recall seeing various types of content, which they may have seen rarely, or long ago.

Acknowledging this element of uncertainty is important. However, a comparison with our previous research suggests that the methods outlined above worked as intended, and encouraged participants to focus responses towards more extreme or potentially illegal content.

We have previously asked questions about exposure to specific types of content in our surveys *What We’re Watching* (2022) and *On Our Screens* (2024). Some of the content categories were similar to those in the current survey. However, these were framed more broadly rather than focusing on more specific, and potentially illegal content. (See table)².

The figures show that reported exposure was significantly lower in the current survey when compared with similar or related content types in our previous surveys. This suggests that participants in the current survey were more likely to be referring to more extreme (and potentially illegal) types of content, rather than interpreting the question more broadly.

Our report *Content that Crosses the Line* may also provide some useful context. This report was based on consultations with young people, and this format allowed for more in-depth discussion of types of content they had seen. A number of young people described seeing specific examples of content that are illegal in New Zealand – such as the Christchurch mosque attack livestream, and a suicide livestream.

These consultations involved only a small number of participants, but they broadly reflect findings in the current survey and suggest that encountering this types of illegal material may not be uncommon in the wider population.

The table below compares results for similar content categories in the three surveys:

Current survey	2025	2024	2022	Previous surveys
Content promoting or encouraging acts of violence against individuals or groups	19%	26%	29%	Content that promotes or encourages violence towards others based on things like race, culture, religion, sexuality or gender
Content promoting or encouraging acts of terrorism	8%	17%	20%	Content that promotes or encourages violent extremism or terrorism
Graphic or explicit suicide content	7%	14%	13%	Content that promotes or encourages suicide

² For the full wording in the survey, including examples provided to participants, see the section below: *Full list of categories included in content exposure question*

Full list of categories included in content exposure question

The full text of the survey question is included in the report as an appendix on page 41 – this includes additional information provided to participants.

SURVEY QUESTION: Have you seen any of the following types of content online?

- Graphic violence, extreme cruelty or death involving people.

(Examples of this might include graphic video or images of a mass-shooting, executions.)

- Graphic violence or cruelty to animals.
- Graphic or explicit sexual content involving rape, sexual abuse or sexual assault.

(Examples might include recordings of real-life sexual assault, or content that explicitly encourages acts of sexual violence and rape. This is not about commercially produced adult pornography.)

- Graphic or explicit suicide content.

(Examples of this might include someone recording their own death, or material that encourages people to take their own life.)

- Content that encourages people to commit a crime.

(Examples might include instructions and encouragement to manufacture illegal drugs or build a bomb.)

- Content promoting or encouraging acts of violence against individuals or groups.

(Examples of this might include written documents or video footage linked to acts of violence.)

- Content promoting or encouraging acts of terrorism.

(Examples of this might include written documents or video footage linked to acts of terrorism.)

- Explicit content showing sexual activity between people and animals (bestiality).
- Explicit sexual content involving children or young teenagers.

(This is sometimes called “child sexual exploitation material” or “child pornography”.)