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The new face of digital abuse:

Children's experiences
of nude deepfakes

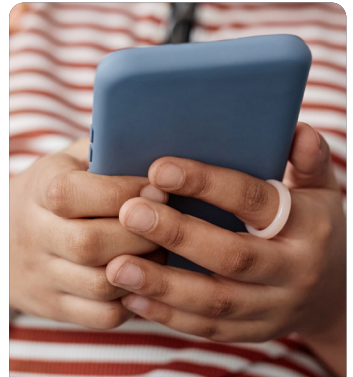
Research summary

This research explores the issue of nude deepfakes: non-consensual sexual imagery generated with AI tools. Nude deepfakes often feature real people, including children.

These images have proliferated online following the release of sophisticated generative AI (GenAI) tools. It is estimated that up to 98% of all deepfakes in circulation online are sexual, 99% of which feature girls and women.

Nude deepfakes affect children in a number of ways: **child-on-child sexual abuse and harassment**; **adult-perpetrated child sexual abuse** including the sharing of AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM) on offender forums; and **sextortion**.

The report summarises current developments in GenAI which have given rise to deepfakes created with 'nudging' tools. It also provides new evidence on families' views and experiences of deepfakes, including nude deepfakes, based on a survey conducted for Internet Matters in June 2024.



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The key findings are:

The majority of families have little to no understanding of deepfakes.

- Almost two thirds of children (61%) and almost half of parents (45%) say that they don't know or understand the term 'deepfake'.
- Just 6% of children and 15% of parents state that they know 'a lot' about deepfakes.

The volume of deepfakes has grown rapidly online – evidence suggests that the majority of deepfakes are used for harmful purposes.

- The evidence suggests that the majority of deepfakes are created to harm, including sexual abuse, mis- and disinformation, scams and fraud. However, deepfakes aren't inherently malicious – there are positive uses of deepfakes such as education and training AI-content moderation.
- It is difficult to establish the true scale of deepfakes in circulation online, given that many will go undetected and unaccounted. One study suggests that between 2022-2023 deepfake sexual content increased by over 400% and deepfake fraud by 3,000%.

Nudify tools are widely available online, cheap and easy to use.

- The development of GenAI has given rise to 'nudify' tools - AI models which strip the clothes from images of real people, including children. The vast majority of deepfakes online are non-consensual sexual imagery known as 'nude deepfakes'.

- Nudify sites and apps are widely available online, including on mainstream search engines. These sites advertise the ability to generate non-consensual sexual imagery featuring real people within seconds, for a small fee.
- The vast majority of nude deepfakes feature girls and women (an estimated 99%). 'Nudging' models often don't work on images of boys and men.
- AI-generated sexual imagery featuring children is illegal in the UK and is treated as child sexual abuse material under long-established child protection legislation. However, the AI models used to generate nude images of children are not illegal and are not covered by the UK's Online Safety Act.
- The sharing of nude deepfakes featuring adults was made a criminal offence by the UK's Online Safety Act. However, it is currently not illegal to produce consensual nude deepfakes featuring adults, so long as the image isn't shared further, meaning that nudify tools are still widely available to users in the UK, including on mainstream search engines and app stores.

Nudging tools are used to sexually abuse children.

- Most nudify sites have terms and conditions which explicitly prohibit the production of deepfake sexual images featuring children, which is classified as illegal child sexual abuse material. However, these guardrails are often easy to circumvent – as demonstrated by the growth of nude deepfakes featuring children in both schools and dark web offender forums.

- AI-generated sexual images featuring children can be used to facilitate child-on-child sexual abuse, adult-perpetrated sexual abuse and sextortion.
- As with other forms of image-based abuse, deepfake nudes can impact victims profoundly, leading to the onset of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts.

Teenagers see nude deepfake abuse as worse than sexual abuse featuring real images.

- Teenagers are deeply concerned about nude deepfakes. The majority of teenagers (55%) believe that it would be worse to have a deepfake nude created and shared of them than a real image. Just 12% of teenagers disagree with this statement.
- The reasons for seeing nude deepfake as worse than a real image-based abuse include: lack of autonomy and awareness of the image, anonymity of the perpetrator, ways in which the image may be manipulated to make the victim appear, and fears that family members, teachers or peers might believe that the image is real.

A significant number of children have experience with a nude deepfake.

- Overall, 13% of children have had an experience with a nude deepfake, including sending or receiving a nude deepfake, encountering a nude deepfake online, using a nudifying app or someone they know having used a nudifying app.

- This means that around half a million (529,632) teenagers in the UK, or 4 teenagers in a class of 30, have had an experience with a nude deepfake.

Boys and vulnerable children are more likely to have engaged with a nude deepfake.

- Teenage boys (18%) are twice as likely as teenage girls (9%) to report an experience with a nude deepfake, however boys are more likely to be creators of deepfake nudes, and girls are more likely to be the victims. 10% of boys aged 13-17 have come across a nude deepfake online, compared to 2% of girls the same age. In focus groups (conducted by Internet Matters in 2023), some teenage boys told us that they had viewed nude deepfake images featuring celebrities.
- Vulnerable children are also more likely to have been impacted by nude deepfakes, compared to non-vulnerable peers. In total, a quarter (25%) of vulnerable children have experience with a nude deepfake, compared to 11% of non-vulnerable children.
- The wider literature, including previous research by Internet Matters, suggests that online misogyny and pornography are shaping harmful image-sharing norms among peer groups – including the creation and sharing of nude deepfakes.



Next Steps

Families are in broad consensus that Government and industry need to do more to tackle nude deepfakes.

- The majority of teenagers (84%) and parents (80%) feel that **nudifying tools should be banned for everyone in the UK, including adults.**
- Families also agree that **more education is needed on the topic of deepfakes.** Only 11% of teenagers have been taught about deepfakes in school, and just 6% about nude deepfakes in particular. The overwhelming majority of teenagers (92%) and parents (88%) feel that children should be taught about the risks of deepfakes in school. A further 92% of children and 86% of parents feel that children should be taught about nude deepfakes, in particular.
- In addition, parents are in broad agreement that **firmer action should be taken by industry to tackle the issue** – including preventing children from creating and encountering nude deepfakes (88%), removing nudyfy tools from search engines (84%), and removing instructional advice on how to create nude deepfakes (86%). Mums are more likely than dads to support these measures.

Legislation and industry action is needed to protect children from deepfake sexual abuse – parents and schools cannot and should not be expected to protect children alone.

- **We are calling on the Government to ban nudify tools** as a priority in this Parliament. The Government should also strengthen the Online Safety Act to tackle the epidemic of online violence against girls and women, by **introducing a statutory code of practice on gendered harm.** The Online Safety Act already mandates the online safety regulator, Ofcom, to produce non-enforceable guidance on gendered violence (Online Safety Act Section 54) – this should be strengthened to a code of practice to ensure compliance by companies in scope.
- Ofcom should introduce **specific measures to tackle child-on-child abuse in its illegal harms code of practice.**
- Industry should take firmer action to tackle deepfake child sexual abuse both upstream, by **removing search results for nudifying tools and ensuring they are kept out of app stores,** and downstream by **swiftly removing deepfake nude images, with priority given to images featuring children.**
- **The national curriculum should be updated to integrate teaching on critical media literacy, including how to spot and report a deepfake.** Additionally, the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) guidance should be updated to cover teaching about nude deepfakes, especially including the legal aspects and ethics of nude deepfakes and how to report deepfake image-abuse.

Scan the QR Code or visit internetmatters.org for expert information and advice on protecting children from deepfake image-abuse.

