

# Increasing Reports of Sexual Offending on Public Transport: 19 Arrests That Would Never Have Happened

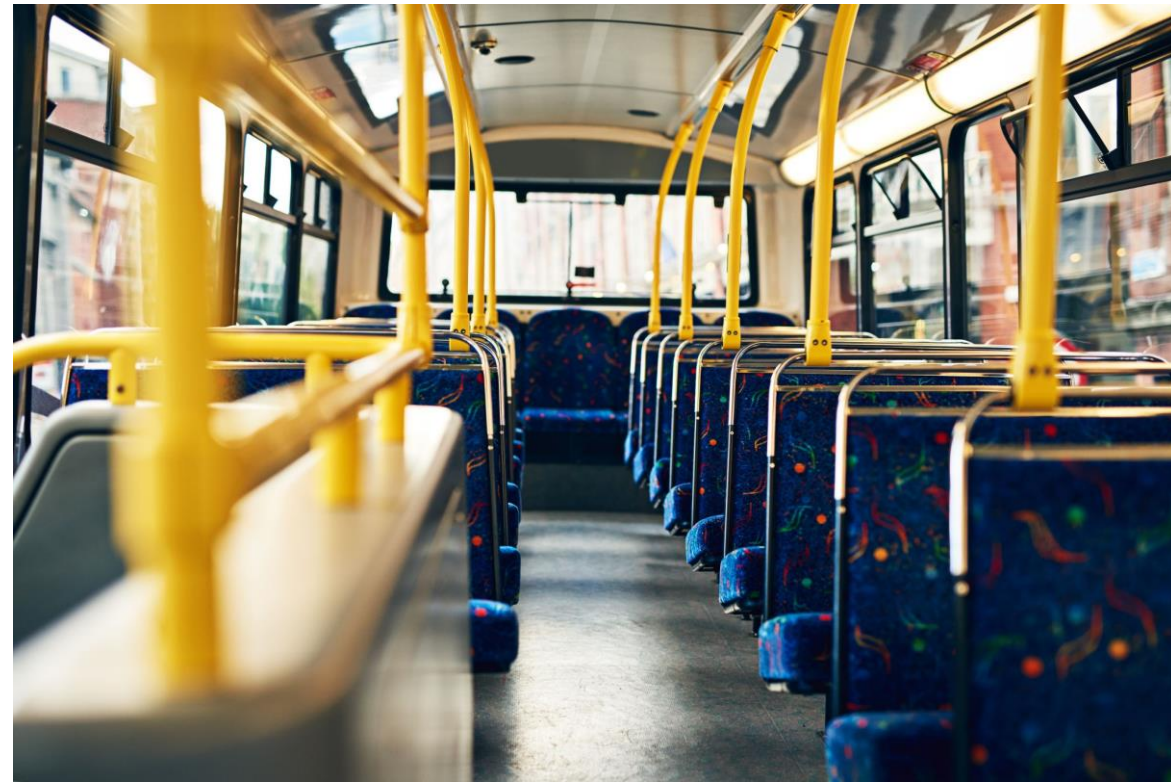
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Research Consultant, *Wheretoresearch*

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**TRIGGER WARNING: This presentation contains content about sexual assault and/or violence which may be triggering to some individuals**

# What would you do in these scenarios?



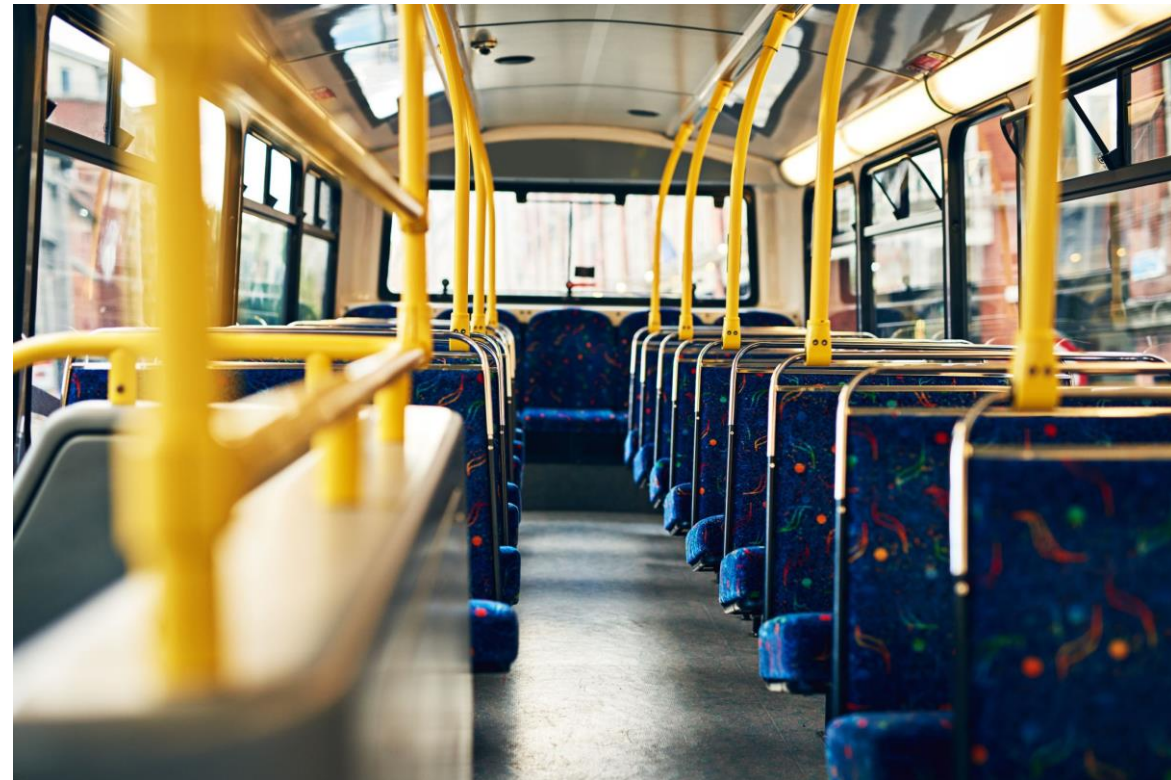
You're on the bus to work and you overhear a man talking in a sexually explicit way to a young schoolgirl. It is clear this man is not known to the girl. The girl is trying to ignore the man and looks extremely uncomfortable.

# What would you do in these scenarios?



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# Unwanted sexual behaviour on public transport (USB on PT)

Unwanted sexual behaviour (and anti-social behaviour) is any form of unwelcome behaviour that makes you or others feel:

Uncomfortable

Frightened

Threatened

These behaviours can be physical or verbal, subtle or direct, ongoing or a one-off

# The problem

- Unwanted sexual behaviour on public transport is prevalent around the world
- People feel they have to simply put up with this unacceptable behaviour when using public transport
- Without reports of these incidents, Victoria Police
  - Cannot paint a complete picture of the problem in Victoria
  - Cannot deploy the required resources to prevent future incidents
  - Cannot build the evidence against offenders and apprehend and stop repeat offenders
  - Cannot help Victorians feel safe and comfortable when travelling on public transport

# The problem

## **Behavioural change strategy**

Encouraging victims to report offences  
and discourage offenders from offending



Reporting process needed to be  
simplified and other avenue of reporting  
were required



# The proposed solution

A service was needed where public transport users can tell Victoria Police:

- What is happening
- When it's happening
- Where it's happening

# Overview of the research study

1 Developmental research

2 International Best Practice

3 Campaign strategy & user testing

4 Messaging & benchmark

5 Creative concept testing

# Trauma-aware research approach

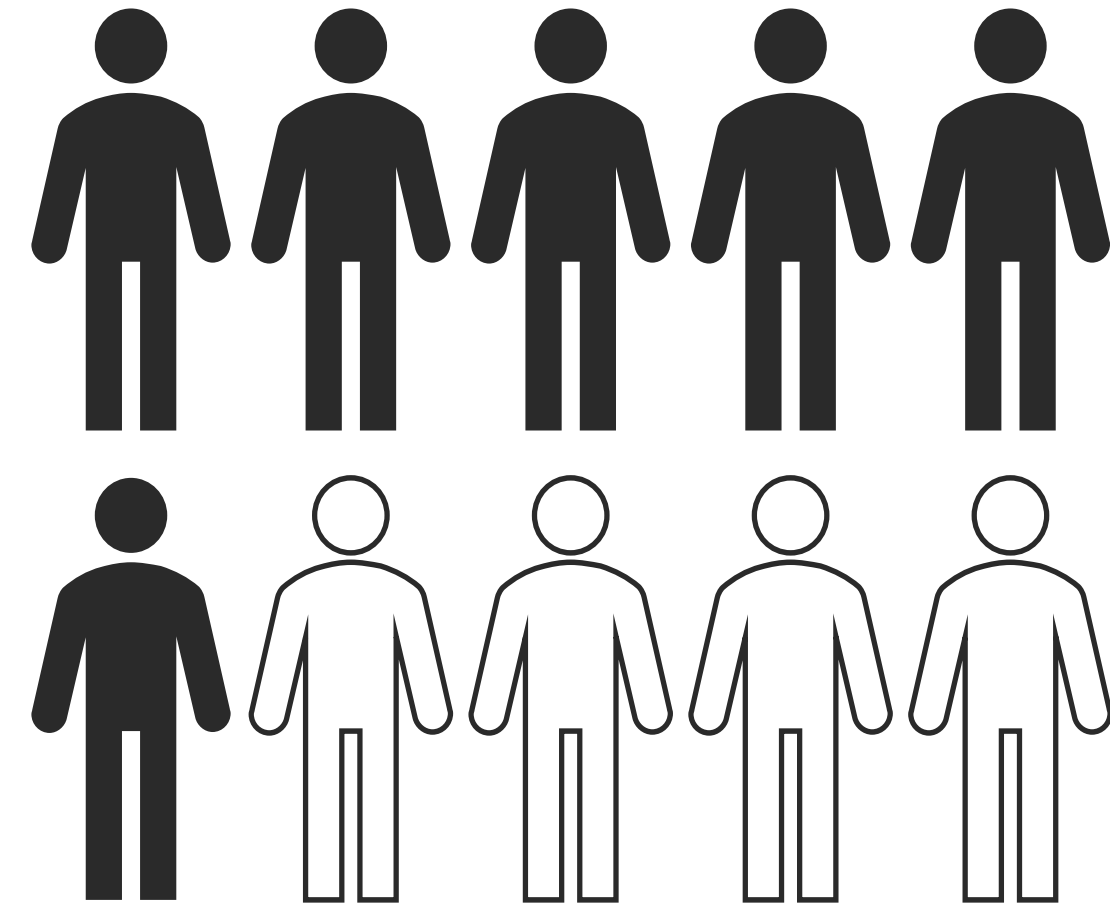


- Creating a trusted environment
- Inclusive and participant-led environment
- Transparency and respect

# The alarming statistics

USB is frequent and unwanted – yet tolerated and largely ‘normalised’ when traveling on public transport

**6 in 10** had either personally experienced or witnessed USB on PT, although these were more often the acts considered to be not worth of reporting

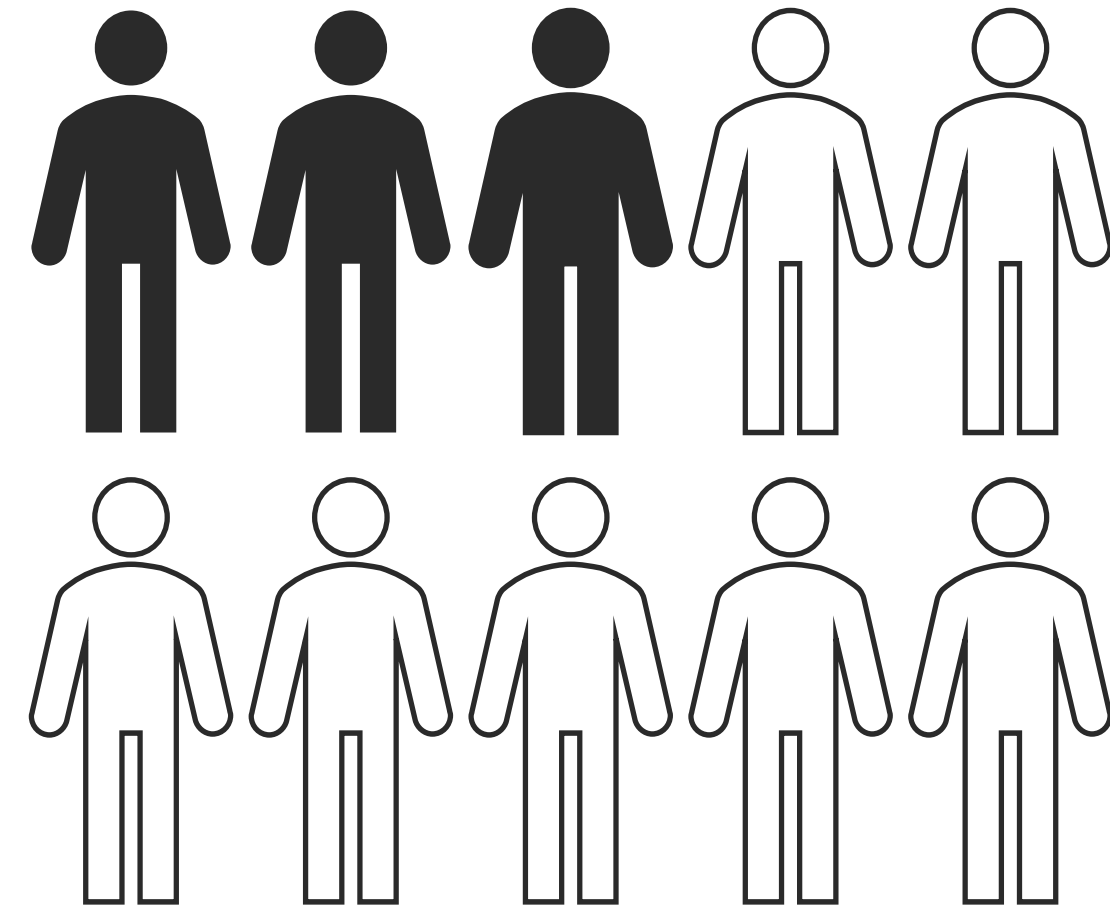


Total sample 2020 (n=1,502) – *In the last 5 years, have you experienced or witnesses one or any of these types of unwanted sexual behaviours*

# The alarming statistics

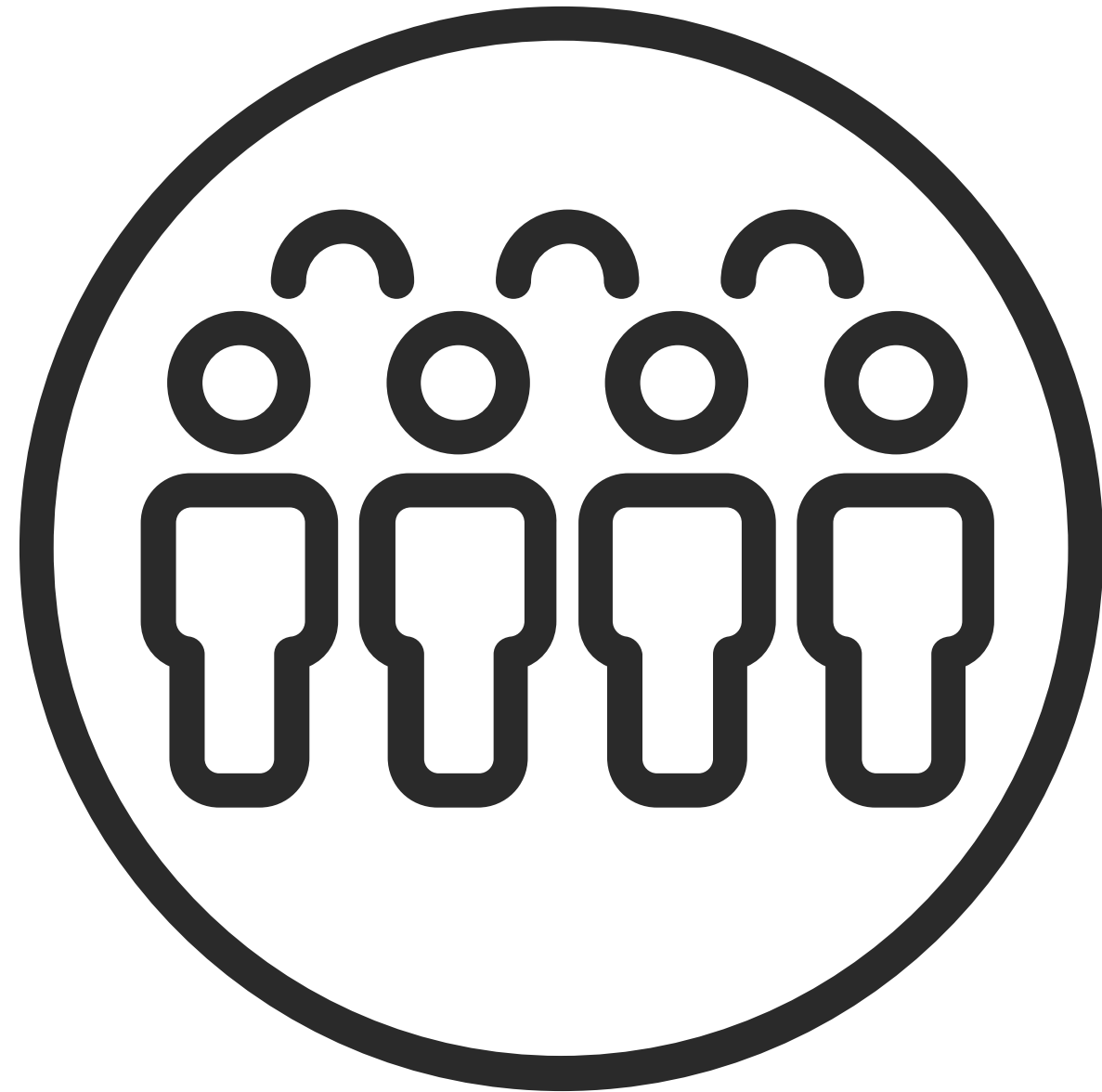
Despite the high incidence of USB, the research indicated a strikingly low rate of reporting

Reporting is uncommon with less than **3 in 10** individuals making a report of USB to an authority.



Total sample 2020 (n=1,502) – *On the occasions where you have experienced/witnesses USB on public transport, did you report it to an authority / make an official report*

# Bystander reluctance



- Lack of knowledge about how to report
- Uncertainty about police responsiveness
- Concerns about personal safety

An illustration of two smartphones, one in the foreground and one slightly behind it, both displaying light blue screens. Several light blue and purple message bubbles are floating around the phones, suggesting communication or reporting. The background is a soft, light pinkish-purple gradient.

**91% of research participants indicated that the STOPIT reporting service would be useful for public transport users**

# So, what is the STOPIT service

—  
and how does it work?



# How to use the STOPIT service

1. Text STOPIT to 0499 455 455 to initiate the service
2. A link is sent to you to an online form where you can share details of the incident (type of behaviour, time, date, location and carriage number), and upload an image or video (if you choose)
3. Once the online form is completed, a confirmation text is sent
4. The information you share then goes to a dedicated team at the Transit Safety Division (TSD) and they triage the information
5. An assigned police officer may contact you to obtain further information

# How does Victoria Police use the information?

- Detectives use the information, along with other data such as CCTV footage which can assist in identifying offenders
- Intelligence analysts use the information, along with other data to better determine where best to deploy their resources to prevent future incidents, and apprehend offenders

# What does the STOPIT service cover?

- Users can notify Victoria Police of unwanted sexual behaviour, and types of anti-social behaviour (such as verbal abuse, harassment and intimidation and vandalism)
- If the incident is an emergency requiring immediate police response, you are still advised to phone Triple Zero (000), as STOPIT is not monitored live
- The service is currently available on trains, trams and buses in Victoria

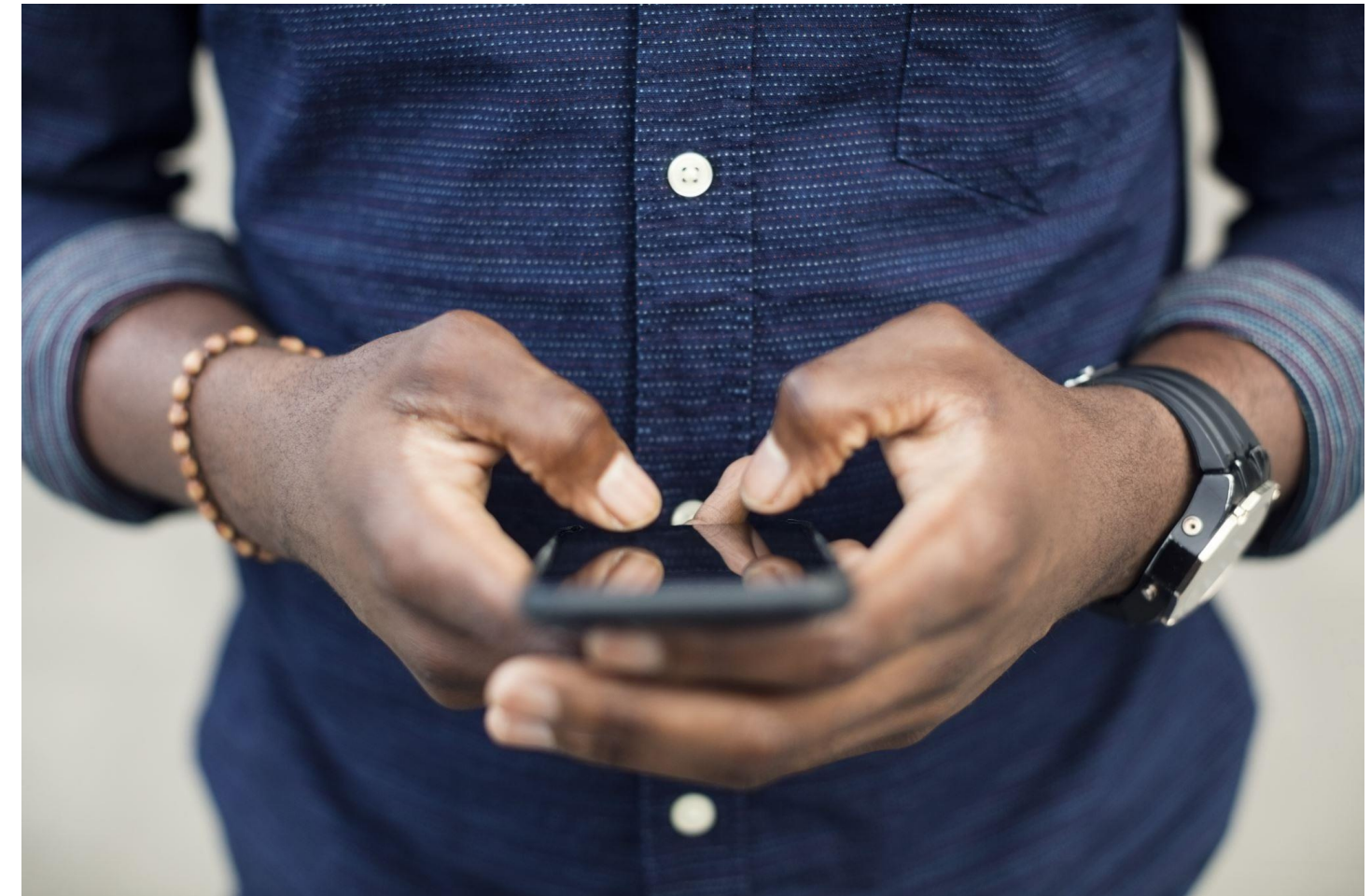
# What did the research show

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and how did it help shape and evolve STOPIT to what it is today?

# Testing the concept of a text-based notification service

- Concept tested through an online bulletin board
- Service was thought to be quick, discreet and easy to use

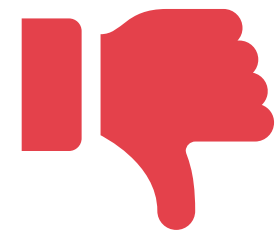


Participants expected an **immediate response** (e.g. a live chat, phone call, or police presence at next stop/station) once they used the notification service

# User testing findings



9 out of 10 survey respondents found the service easy to use



Most negative feedback received was around remembering the STOPIT number



More detailed instructions were needed in order to locate carriage number

“Does this incident require immediate police attendance?”

Helped alleviate impressions of an immediate police response/presence

# Managing the expectation of an immediate response

1

STOPIT is not monitored live. If you require police assistance, call triple zero (000) and speak to an operator.

2

STOPIT is not monitored live.

Does this incident require immediate police attendance? Police will only attend if you select yes below to call Triple Zero (000) and speak to an operator.

# The STOPIT advertising campaign

<b>Target audience</b>	<b>Primary:</b> Train, tram and bus travellers in metro Melbourne <b>Secondary:</b> All users of public transport in Victoria
<b>Campaign objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Raise awareness and understanding of USB on PT, and how to report it</li><li>• Increase reporting of USB on PT</li><li>• Raise awareness of the STOPIT text-based service as a way to notify Victoria Police about incidences of USB</li></ul>
<b>Key messages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Text to notify us about USB on public transport. Every text helps police identify and catch offenders</i></li><li>• Now there is a quick and discreet way to notify police of USB incidents on PT</li><li>• STOPIT is not monitored live</li><li>• For immediate police assistance, call Triple 000</li></ul>
<b>Call to action</b>	Text STOPIT to 0499 455 455

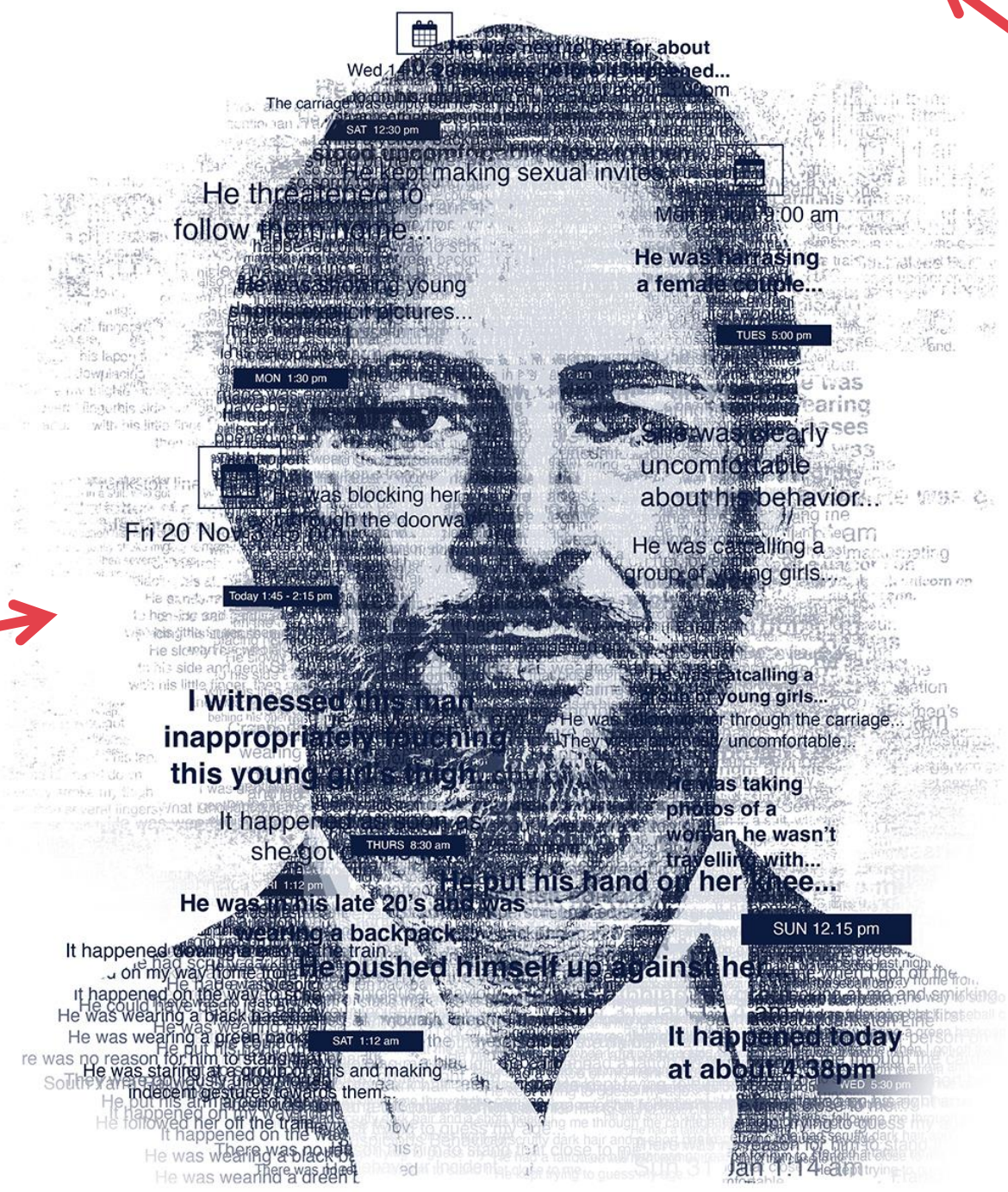


STOP IT IS NOT MONITORED LIVE. FOR IMMEDIATE POLICE ASSISTANCE, PLEASE CALL TRIPLE ZERO (000).

# The STOPIT Creative

Triple Zero disclaimer

Focus on offenders



95% of participants said they would likely or more likely report using the STOPIT service

**TEXT TO NOTIFY US ABOUT UNWANTED SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT |**

‘Safely’ – you can notify police in a discreet way

Safely help police catch offenders.

# The outcomes from STOPIT's first year of service

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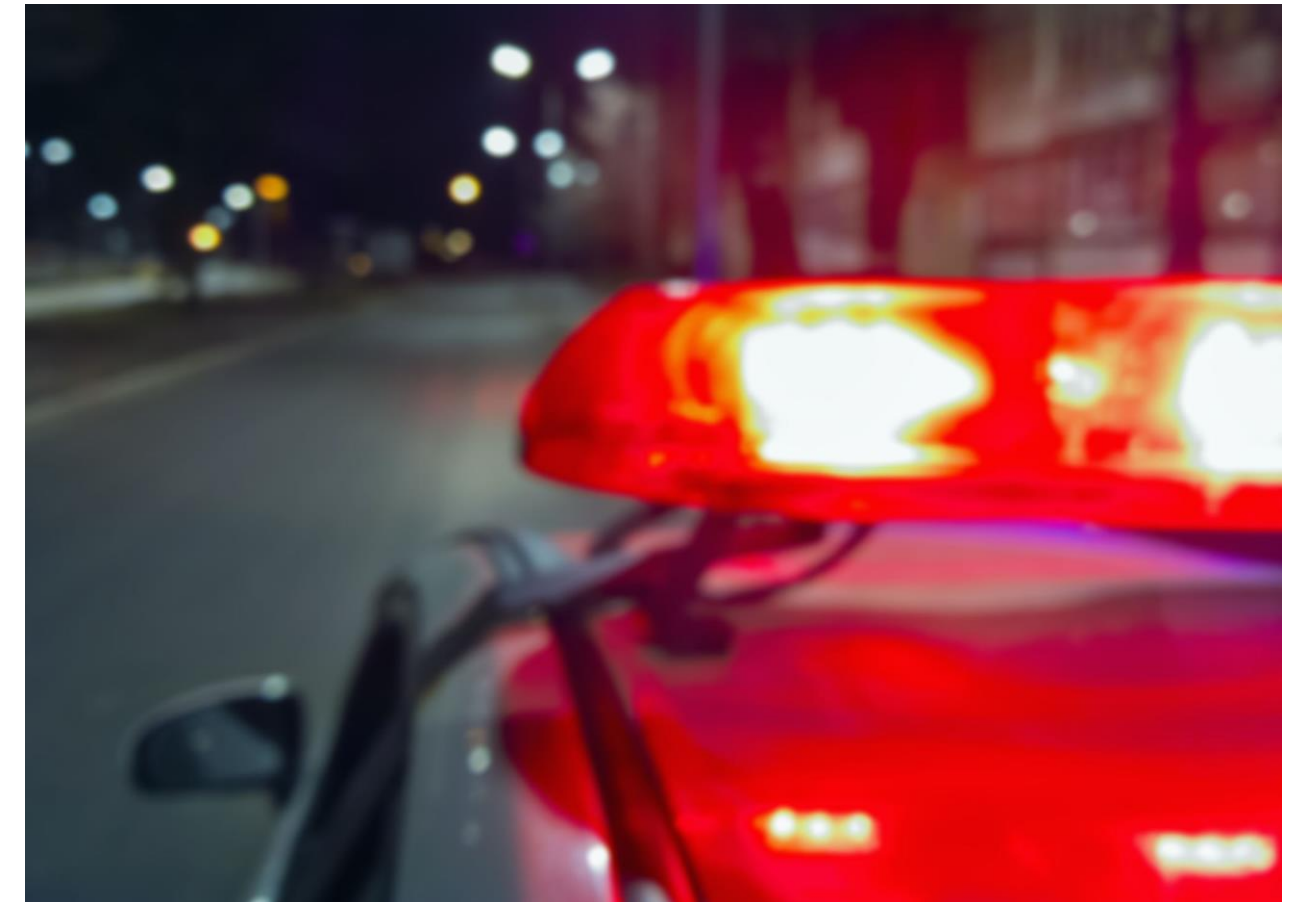
These findings come from data collected between July 2022 and  
July 2023

# The outcome: 19 arrests in STOPIT's first year

- Launched in July 2022
- A total of 1,526 notifications received by July 2023

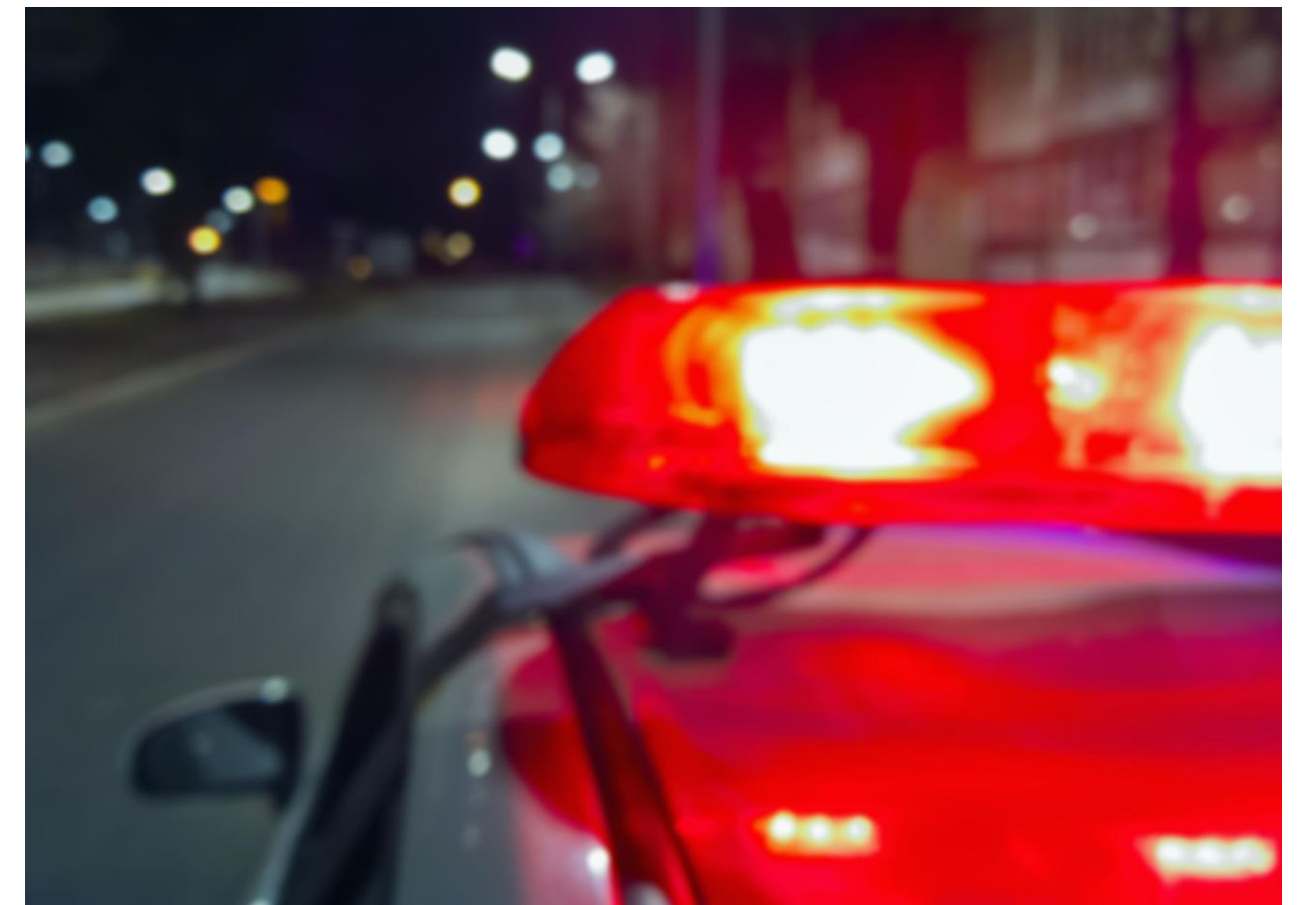
! 272 were related to USB incidents, resulting in **19 offenders being arrested**

- Majority of notifications were made by Metro train travellers



# The outcome: tracking research findings

- Increased public trust in Victoria Police
- Greater willingness to report incidents of unwanted sexual behaviour, especially for women
- 9 in 10 public transport users expect a response from police after making a report using STOPIT. The fact that the STOPIT service sends every user a response email manages this expectation



# Some of the arrests so far...

A 20-year-old man was charged after performing allegedly explicit acts towards **five women** on several train lines between March-August 2022

A 51-year-old man was charged with sexual assault after allegedly making inappropriate sexual comments and touching a woman at Southern Cross Station

A 44-year-old man was charged with two counts of sexual activity directed at another after boarding a train. A commuter **took a photo** of the incident and sent it to police using STOPIT. **Police then linked the offender to a second incident**

A 33-year-old man was charged after two witnesses saw him allegedly perform an explicit act towards a woman on the train. **Both witnesses notified police through STOPIT.**

# Thank you!

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