

A survey found 1 in 6 Australian men admit sexual feelings for children. So is pedophilia increasing?

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One in six (or 15.1% of) Australian men aged over 18 recently surveyed said they had sexual feelings for a child or teen younger than 18 years.

This data was part of a [study](#) by UNSW Sydney and Jesuit Social Services. Researchers asked 1,945 men about their attraction to [children](#) via an online recruitment process.

The researchers also found:

- around one in ten (9.4%) Australian men has sexually offended against children
- around half of this group (4.9%) reports sexual feelings towards children, while the others may be offending for situational or opportunistic reasons
- of the men with sexual feelings towards children, 29.6% wanted help.

Compared to men with no sexual feelings for or offending against children, the 4.9% of men with sexual feelings and previous offending against children were more likely to:

- work with children
- be married
- have higher levels of social support
- earn higher incomes
- be a victim of child [sexual abuse](#).

This contradicts the notion that people who are sexually attracted to children and are willing to act on it are social outcasts and statistical outliers.

Overall, the study was well designed and conducted. However, the authors acknowledge some limitations. The majority (64.8%) of participants self-identified as white, 64.4% were born in Australia, and 92.8% identified as heterosexual. Therefore, members of specific minority populations may not have had an equal chance or inclination to participate, which could impact how representative the findings are.

What is pedophilia?

[Pedophilic disorder](#) is a diagnosis assigned to adults (those aged over 16 years, and five years older than the child/children to whom they are sexually attracted) who have a recurrent and intense sexual attraction specifically to prepubescent children—generally those 13 years or under.

The [majority](#) of pedophiles are male. Previous estimates suggest between [3%](#) and [5%](#) of the adult male population have pedophilic disorder. Estimates suggest it's [lower in women](#).

Is pedophilia increasing?

This is unlikely. Instead of the new data indicating more men are becoming sexually attracted to prepubescent children, it's more likely to indicate problems with previous sampling strategies.

For example, many previous studies gathered data from either survivors of child sexual abuse, or those who have been found guilty. Because studies were so targeted, they may have failed to capture a broader sample, which was more reflective of overall attitudes and behaviors.

While there doesn't seem to be an increase in people who are sexually attracted to children, the internet has made it much easier for pedophiles to act on their desires and access child sexual abuse material, or groom children from a distance anonymously.

A study in the United States found that, of children aged 10 to 15 surveyed, 35% [reported](#) being the victim of either internet harassment or unwanted sexual solicitation.

Can you cure pedophilia?

Pedophilia cannot be "cured," but it can be treated with hormone medication therapies, [cognitive behavior therapy](#) (CBT), and psychosocial methods such as group therapy.

Drug treatments for pedophilic disorder that include testosterone-lowering drugs [have shown](#) positive results in reducing sexual interests and behaviors. However, more data needs to be collected on larger sample populations before conclusions can be drawn.

A 2021 study also found CBT can be effective at [reducing pedophiles' hypersexuality](#) (compulsive sexual behavior). CBT aims to change the thoughts and behaviors relating to pedophilia, with success measured by a reduction in the desire to offend against children.

What can we do to protect children?

We cannot stop predatory men attempting to access children—either in person, or more frequently online.

But we can, as parents and guardians and the broader community, put safeguards in place to ensure they are not victimized. As the

UNSW/Jesuit Social Services study notes, these [include](#):

- improving safety of online dating sites to reduce the likelihood of predators targeting single parents to access children
- increasing safeguards in environments where children are particularly vulnerable, such as daycare centers and sporting clubs
- increasing support for men who are sexually attracted to children, but who want help, via organizations such as [StopItNow](#) as well as within family and friend groups when worried about someone's behavior.

It's also important to educate children about how to be safe online, and whom to report to if they are concerned.

The best way to protect children is to be proactive as a society.

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