

Research reveals prevalence of gender and sexuality diverse Australians, and finds greater risk of all forms of child maltreatment

Australians with diverse sexualities or genders are three times more likely to experience child maltreatment than heterosexual Australians or cisgendered males and females, new research shows.

The research, led by Australian Catholic University (ACU), also reveals that 9.5 per cent of Australians identify as sexuality diverse, with 0.9 per cent identifying as gender diverse. The proportions are higher among 16–24-year-olds where 17.7 per cent are sexuality diverse and 2.3 per cent are gender diverse.

Those with diverse gender and sexuality identities are significantly more likely than cisgendered and heterosexual Australians to experience multiple forms of child maltreatment as well as being most at risk of all five types – physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence.

Sexual abuse carries the greatest risk for Australians with diverse genders, who are almost five times more likely to experience sexual abuse than cisgendered males and females. When compared with heterosexuals, sexuality diverse Australians are also 3.4 times more at risk of sexual abuse.

ACU Institute of Child Protection Studies director Professor Daryl Higgins, who led the new research, said the figures were based on the findings from the landmark Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) of which Professor Higgins was also a chief investigator.

The ACMS survey of 8500 Australians found 62.2 per cent of those aged over 16 experienced child maltreatment, with almost 40 per cent of those experiencing multiple types.

Professor Higgins and his team of fellow researchers used the ACMS data to determine maltreatment rates among sexuality and gender diverse Australians, which revealed a significant association.

“For the first time, we can see the increased likelihood of Australians with diverse identities having experienced any of the five separate forms of child maltreatment and multi-type maltreatment,” he said.

“This significant association may explain some of the health disparities including mental health challenges that have been found for gender and sexuality diverse people.”

The research showed 81.5 per cent of those aged 16 and above who identified with a diverse gender experienced child maltreatment, compared with 65.5 per cent of females, and 58.4 per cent of males. In the 16-to-24-year age group, the number of respondents with a diverse gender who experienced maltreatment rose to 90.5 per cent.

For those who identified as sexuality diverse, 83.9 per cent aged 16 and above experienced child maltreatment, with the figure climbing to 85.3 per cent among those aged 16 to 24. However, for heterosexual respondents, the figures were 61 per cent for those aged 16 and above, and 56.2 per cent among those aged 16 to 24.

Professor Higgins said the increased likelihood of gender and sexuality diverse Australians being subjected to maltreatment as children highlighted the need for targeted preventions and supports.

“The significant over-representation of gender and sexuality diverse Australians experiencing child maltreatment shows we need to develop more targeted policies and services along with greater acceptance and recognition of this diversity,” he said.

“Knowledge about gender and sexuality diversity and this strong association to child maltreatment needs to be integrated into prevention and response strategies including parenting skills and organisational safeguarding.”

Click here for a [link to the study](#).

Key tables from the report available below.

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GENDER DIVERSITY PREVALENCE AND MALTREATMENT:

1. Proportion of the **16–24-year-old population**, by gender, who have experienced any child maltreatment (and % for each subtype):

16-24 YO	%	Population Estimate (n)	Any child maltreatment %	Multi-type maltreatment (2+ types) %	Emotional abuse %	Neglect %	Physical abuse %	Sexual abuse %	Exposure to domestic violence %
Male/Men	49.1	1,380,000	55.5	33.0	26.9	7.2	26.3	14.5	40.8
Female/Women	48.6	1,360,000	65.5	45.6	40.5	12.5	29.0	35.2	45.8
All diverse genders	2.3	65,300	90.5	77.5	71.5	30.6	53.8	62.8	64.8

NOTE: Bold = significantly different from male/men

2. Proportion of the **adult population (aged 16 and over)**, by gender, who have experienced any child maltreatment (and % for each subtype):

ALL PARTICIPANTS	%	Population Estimate (n)	Any child maltreatment %	Multi-type maltreatment (2+ types) %	Emotional abuse %	Neglect %	Physical abuse %	Sexual abuse %	Exposure to domestic violence %
Male/Men	48.1	9,950,000	58.4	34.9	25.4	6.7	32.1	18.8	38.0
Female/Women	50.9	10,500,000	65.5	43.2	35.6	10.8	31.5	37.3	40.8
All diverse genders	0.9	196,000	81.5	66.2	58.3	26.4	49.9	51.9	58.2

NOTE: Bold = significantly different from male/men

SEXUALITY DIVERSITY PREVALENCE AND MALTREATMENT:

3. Proportion of the **16–24-year-old population**, by sexuality, who have experienced any child maltreatment (and % for each subtype):

16-24 YO	%	Population Estimate	Any child maltreatment %	Multi-type maltreatment (2+ types) %	Emotional abuse %	Neglect %	Physical abuse %	Sexual abuse %	Exposure to domestic violence %
Heterosexual or straight	81.1	2,270,000	56.2	35.1	29.6	7.9	24.9	20.1	40.7
Sexuality diverse	17.7	498,000	85.3	64.3	58.0	21.6	44.6	51.9	58.6

NOTE: Bold = significantly different from heterosexual/straight

4. Proportion of the **adult population (aged 16 and over)**, by sexuality, who have experienced any child maltreatment (and % for each subtype):

ALL PARTICIPANTS	%	Population Estimate	Any child maltreatment %	Multi-type maltreatment (2+ types) %	Emotional abuse %	Neglect %	Physical abuse %	Sexual abuse %	Exposure to domestic violence %
Heterosexual or straight	90.5	18,700,000	61.0	37.6	29.6	7.9	24.9	20.1	40.7
Sexuality diverse	7.6	1,580,000	83.9	64.1	58.0	21.6	44.6	51.9	58.6

NOTE: Bold = significantly different from heterosexual/straight

Table 8: Odds Ratios (ORs) for experience of child maltreatment, by gender and type of maltreatment, adjusting for age group and SEIFA index of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage

	Men		Women		Diverse genders	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Any child maltreatment	1.00	(ref)	1.37	(1.22 - 1.53)	3.08	(1.46 - 6.53)
Emotional abuse	1.00	(ref)	1.64	(1.45 - 1.85)	3.86	(2.29 - 6.50)
Neglect	1.00	(ref)	1.70	(1.38 - 2.08)	4.77	(2.63 - 8.64)
Physical abuse	1.00	(ref)	0.97	(0.86 - 1.09)	2.15	(1.28 - 3.62)
Sexual abuse	1.00	(ref)	2.57	(2.26 - 2.92)	4.84	(2.86 - 8.16)
Exposure to domestic violence	1.00	(ref)	1.14	(1.02 - 1.27)	2.08	(1.24 - 3.51)

Bold signifies significantly different than heterosexual or straight at $p < .05$

Table 9: Odds Ratios (ORs) for experience of child maltreatment, by sexuality identity and type of maltreatment, adjusting for age group and SEIFA index of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage

	Heterosexual or straight		Sexuality diverse		Don't know/refused	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Any child maltreatment	1.00	(ref)	3.33	(2.56 - 4.34)	0.35	(0.22 - 0.55)
Emotional abuse	1.00	(ref)	2.90	(2.39 - 3.52)	0.52	(0.28 - 0.94)
Neglect	1.00	(ref)	2.61	(2.02 - 3.37)	0.74	(0.31 - 1.75)
Physical abuse	1.00	(ref)	1.98	(1.63 - 2.40)	0.45	(0.26 - 0.80)
Sexual abuse	1.00	(ref)	3.35	(2.75 - 4.07)	0.51	(0.27 - 0.93)
Exposure to domestic violence	1.00	(ref)	2.02	(1.66 - 2.45)	0.47	(0.27 - 0.82)

Bold signifies significantly different than heterosexual or straight at $p < .05$