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Australian Institute of Criminology

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**Abstract** | This study examines the rate of sexual violence perpetration in a community sample of adult Australians. Data were collected through a survey of a proportional quota-based sample of 5,076 Australian residents aged 18–45 years.

Just over one in five respondents (22.1%,  $n=1,124$ ) had perpetrated one or more of the forms of sexual violence examined since turning 18 years of age, and one in 10 (9.9%,  $n=504$ ) had done so in the past 12 months. Men were significantly more likely than women to have perpetrated any and each form of sexual violence examined, and to have perpetrated multiple forms of sexual violence.

Findings address the pressing need for estimates of the prevalence of sexual violence perpetration in Australia, which are critical to efforts to address it.

## Perpetration of sexual violence in a community sample of adult Australians

Laura Doherty and Christopher Dowling

Sexual violence is a significant safety, health and welfare issue in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020). Evidence strongly suggests that it is also one of the most gendered forms of violence, committed overwhelmingly by men against women. Australia's *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (Department of Social Services 2022) was developed to strengthen and coordinate the efforts of Commonwealth, state and territory governments to address violence against women and children, including sexual violence. Critically, this plan emphasises the importance of adequate data to measure success in preventing, intervening in and responding to violence.

Understandings of the prevalence of sexual violence in Australia have been based primarily on rates of self-reported victimisation. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey indicates that one in five adult women and one in 15 adult men in Australia have been victims of sexual violence since the age of 15 (ABS 2023c). Other national data, including the Recorded Crime – Victims administrative data (ABS 2023e) and National Student Safety Survey (Heywood et al. 2022), report similarly high estimates. Further, while limited national data are available, evidence suggests that the prevalence of sexual violence victimisation may be higher among people who are homeless; who have a disability; who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or use another term (other than heterosexual) to define their sexuality (ie LGB+); who are transgender, gender diverse or intersex; who have previously been a victim of sexual violence or abuse; and who are culturally and linguistically diverse and/or are First Nations people (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020; Kuo, Mathews & Abrahams 2018; Mitra-Kahn, Newbiggin & Hardefeldt 2016; Neame & Heenan 2003; Powell, Flynn & Hindes 2022; Wolbers et al. 2022).

However, little on the prevalence of sexual violence *perpetration* can be inferred from rates of self-reported victimisation. These data are important for understanding the drivers of perpetration and for focusing prevention efforts on perpetrators rather than victims (Flood et al. 2022). Current understandings of perpetration in Australia are primarily derived from police and criminal justice system administrative data (ABS 2023d). However, perpetrators who have contact with the criminal justice system represent only a small proportion of those who have perpetrated sexual violence (Flood et al. 2022; Quadara 2014). The vast majority of offences and perpetrators are never reported to police (ABS 2023f; Daly & Bouhours 2010), and attrition rates are high for those that are, meaning few actually progress to prosecution and conviction (Daly & Bouhours 2010; Tidmarsh & Hamilton 2020).

Little contemporary research has examined the self-reported prevalence of sexual violence perpetration in Australia. Those few studies that do have focused on disparate and specific forms of this violence. For example, in their survey of a national sample of adult Australians, Powell, Flynn and Hindes (2022) found that 4.2 percent of respondents (6.5% of men and 2.3% of women) had perpetrated technology-facilitated sexual abuse or image-based abuse at least once in their lifetime. Further, recent research by Salter and colleagues (2023) analysing responses to a national survey of adult Australian men found that 9.4 percent had engaged in a sexual act with someone under 18 years of age when they were over 18 years of age.

There are a larger number of international studies on rates of sexual violence perpetration in the community, though findings vary considerably. For example, one review of 113 studies conducted in Europe identified perpetration rates ranging from zero to 80 percent among boys and men, and from less than one percent to 40 percent among women and girls (aged 12–25 years; Krahé et al. 2014). Another review of 78 studies of sexual violence perpetration among college men in the United States and Canada found an average perpetration rate of 29.3 percent (Anderson et al. 2021). Such variation may be explained by the use of different measures of sexual violence (eg different questions or survey tools; Anderson et al. 2021).

## Method

### Sampling and data collection

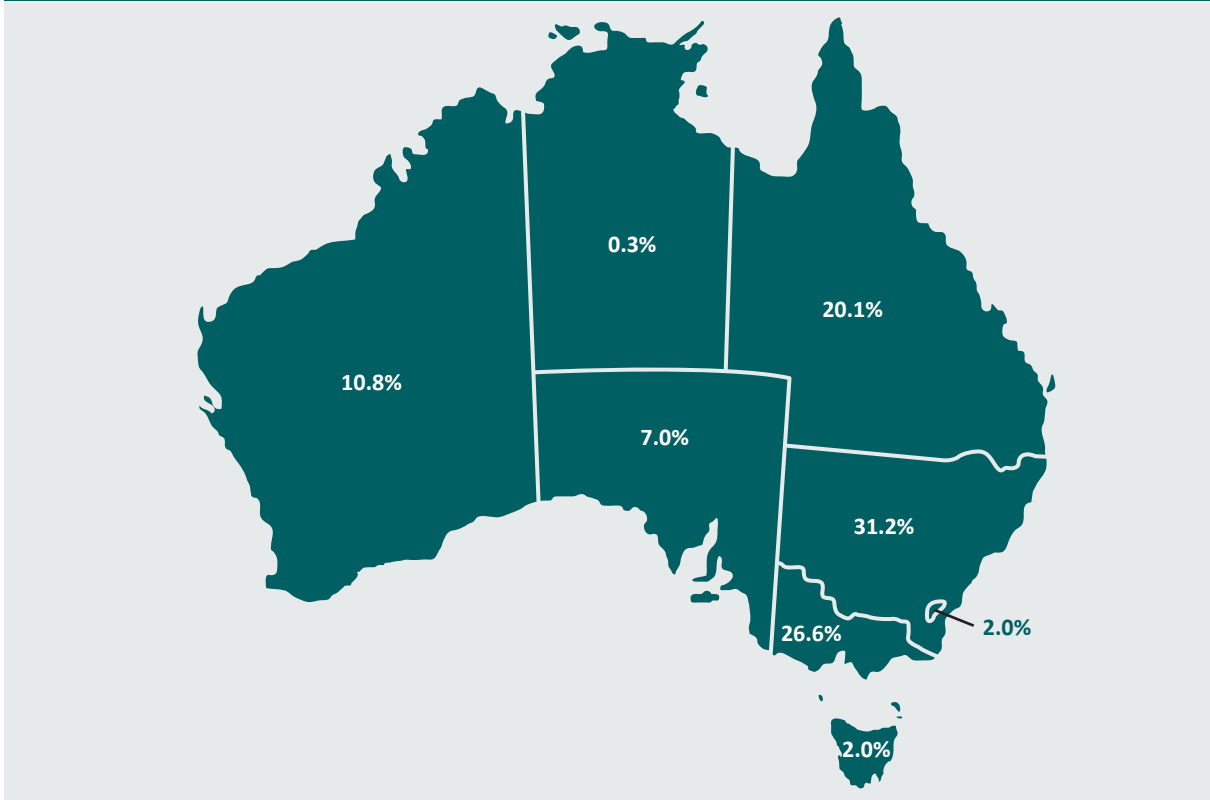
This research examines rates of self-reported sexual violence perpetration among a community sample of adult Australian residents. Data for this study were drawn from an online survey of Australian residents aged 18–45 years. The broader purpose of this survey was to understand the relationship between pornography use and sexual violence perpetration and victimisation.

The survey was conducted by Roy Morgan Research between 9 May and 9 June 2022 using their Single Source panel and a non-probability panel managed by Pureprofile. Proportional quota-based sampling was used to ensure the sample was representative of the spread of the Australian population aged 18–45 years. Quotas were based on the Australian population stratified by sex, age and usual place of residence, derived from ABS data (ABS 2023a). Participants were first recruited from Roy Morgan Research’s Single Source panel, which comprises individuals recruited through a rigorous cluster sampled, face-to-face survey approach. The raw completion rate for invitations sent to this panel was 2.2 percent; however, there is no way of verifying how many of these invitations were received by panellists. A completion rate for Pureprofile panellists was unable to be calculated as the number of invitations sent to members of this panel was unavailable. While the completion rate is slightly lower than for other online panels (Pennay et al. 2023), this was not unexpected due to the sensitive nature of the questions asked (Tourangeau & Yan 2007).

After screening and cleaning (eg removal of respondents with nonsensical and poor-quality responses, including ‘speeders’ and ‘straightliners’) the final sample consisted of 5,076 respondents. Weighting of the data by gender, age and area of residence was required to ensure that the sample reflected the proportional spread of the Australian population aged 18–45 years, using data from the ABS (ABS 2023b). All statistics presented in this paper are weighted.

The sample was broadly reflective of the spread of the Australian population aged 18–45 years across state/territory of residence (Figure 1). Fifteen percent of respondents identified as LGB+ (14.6%,  $n=739$ ), including 276 men, 412 women and 51 gender diverse respondents (Table 1). Almost one in 10 respondents (8.4%,  $n=428$ ) were from a non-English-speaking background. This is not directly comparable to the Australian population (22.3%; ABS 2022), likely because respondents were asked to nominate the language they spoke most often at home, whereas ABS Census participants are asked about all languages spoken at home (ABS 2022). That said, respondents to this survey were also less likely than the general population to say that they had been born overseas (19.9% vs 27.6%), suggesting that the difference may not be fully explained by different measurements.

**Figure 1: Respondents by usual place of residence ( $n=5,076$ )**



Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

<b>Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (n=5,076)</b>		
	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Man	2,485	49.0
Woman	2,536	50.0
Gender diverse	55	1.1
<b>Sexuality<sup>a</sup></b>		
Heterosexual	4,274	84.2
LGB+	739	14.6
<b>Age (years)</b>		
18–19	326	6.4
20–24	856	16.9
25–29	935	18.4
30–34	970	19.1
35–39	953	18.8
40–45	1,037	20.4
<b>Language spoken most often at home<sup>b</sup></b>		
English	4,629	91.2
Other	428	8.4
<b>Country of birth<sup>c</sup></b>		
Australia	4,050	79.8
Overseas	1,012	19.9

a: Denominator includes 63 respondents who did not provide this information

b: Denominator includes 19 respondents who did not provide this information

c: Denominator includes 15 respondents who did not provide this information

Note: Weighted frequencies and percentages may not add to total due to rounding and missing data

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

## Survey items and definitions

Sexual violence survey items were informed by a review of the literature and existing data collection tools for sexual violence perpetration (eg Koss et al. 2006; Krahe & Berger 2013; Mosher & Anderson 1986; Rueff & Gross 2017; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson & Anderson 2003), and modified for the purpose of this survey (eg use of gender-neutral language). As the use of terminology implying greater culpability (eg ‘sexual assault’ and ‘rape’) has been associated with lower response rates (Flood et al. 2022), questions were asked about specific sexual behaviours using non-stigmatising language. This also ensured that the behaviours respondents were being asked about were unambiguous. The items were divided into three categories for the purposes of this paper: sexual harassment and coercion, sexual assault and image-based sexual abuse (IBSA; see Table 2).

Table 2: Sexual violence behaviours	
Item	Survey question
<b>Sexual harassment and coercion</b>	
Pressured someone for dates or sexual activity	Have you ever made repeated requests to go out on dates with someone, to 'hang out', or to engage in sexual activity with them even after they said they were not interested?
Pressured someone to take drugs or alcohol before requesting sexual activity	Have you ever pressured or insisted someone else take drugs or alcohol, or take more drugs or alcohol than they wanted to, before requesting sexual activity with them?
Pressured someone to participate in unprotected sexual activity	Have you ever pressured or repeatedly asked someone to engage in unprotected sexual activity (eg without the use of condoms or other forms of contraception), when they had already told you they were not interested?
Threatened or blackmailed someone to participate in sexual activity	Have you ever threatened or blackmailed someone (eg by threatening to harm them or to share intimate images of them) as a way of trying to get them to engage in sexual activity with you?
Emotionally or psychologically manipulated someone to participate in sexual activity	<p>Have you ever emotionally or psychologically manipulated or coerced someone to try and get them to engage in sexual activity with you?</p> <p><i>Emotional or psychological manipulation and coercion includes situations where you:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>said that it would damage the relationship if they didn't have sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>said that they didn't love you if they didn't have sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>said that there was something wrong with them if they didn't have sex with you (eg they're a prude or frigid)</i></li> <li>• <i>made them feel guilty for not having sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>made them feel bad about themselves for not having sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>insisted that they had to follow through or that they had previously said yes to having sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>ignored them if they refused to have sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>were rude to them if they refused to have sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>suggested you would find someone else if they refused to have sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>tried to isolate them from their family or friends if they didn't have sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>threatened to harm them if they didn't have sex with you</i></li> <li>• <i>threatened to harm yourself if they didn't have sex with you</i></li> </ul>

Table 2: Sexual violence behaviours (cont.)	
Item	Survey question
<b>Sexual assault</b>	
Non-consensual kissing	Have you ever kissed someone when they didn't want you to?
Non-consensual touching	Have you ever touched, groped, fondled, grabbed, pinched, or rubbed against someone else when they did not want you to?
Non-consensual sexual intercourse	Have you ever had penetrative sex with someone or made them have penetrative sex with you without their consent?  <i>Penetrative sex refers to situations where something (like a penis, fingers, sex toy or other object) is inserted inside someone else's mouth, vagina or anus.</i>
Stealthing and related conduct	Have you ever removed protection or forced someone else to remove protection (eg condom, diaphragm or other forms of contraception) during sex when the other person didn't know or didn't want you to?
<b>Image-based sexual abuse</b>	
Recording intimate, nude or sexual images or videos of another person without their consent	Have you ever recorded intimate, nude or sexual images or videos of someone when they didn't want you to?
Sharing or threatening to share intimate, nude or sexual images or videos of another person without their consent	Have you ever shared or threatened to share intimate, nude or sexual images or videos of someone when they didn't want you to?

Respondents were asked whether they had perpetrated each behaviour in the 12 months prior to completing the survey, more than 12 months ago (but from 18 years of age onwards), both in the past 12 months and more than 12 months ago, or never. Due to the survey provider's mandatory reporting obligations, it was not possible to ask respondents about sexual activity specifically with persons under the legal age of consent.

A relatively large proportion of respondents (11.1%,  $n=563$ ) were unable or unwilling to disclose perpetration of sexual violence for one or more data items. This may be because respondents chose not to report, or to under-report, behaviours perceived as socially undesirable (Follingstad & Rogers 2013; Tourangeau & Yan 2007). However, the survey was designed to minimise nonresponse for this reason by warning respondents up-front of the types of questions they would be asked, and emphasising the anonymity of responses throughout. Such strategies have been demonstrated to increase rates of self-disclosure (Follingstad & Rogers 2013). Missing data may also be attributable to respondents being unable to recall whether they had perpetrated any of the behaviours (Strang et al. 2013), or respondents not recognising their behaviour as sexually violent (Flood et al. 2022; Walsh et al. 2021).

## Analysis

This paper presents the weighted perpetration rates for different forms of sexual violence in the sample, overall and by gender. Gender diverse respondents were excluded from gender-disaggregated analyses due to small numbers. Rates are presented for perpetration ever during adulthood (ie in the 12 months prior to completing the survey and/or more than 12 months ago but after turning 18 years of age) and in the past 12 months only. Chi-square tests of independence identified statistically significant differences in rates of perpetration between men and women. This produces a Pearson  $\chi^2$  statistic, which was corrected for the survey design and converted into an  $F$  statistic. A statistically significant result means that the observed distribution between groups was not the same as the expected distribution. The threshold for statistical significance was  $p < 0.05$ , which means there was a less than five percent likelihood that the observed result occurred due to chance, assuming no difference in the population from which the sample was drawn.

Respondents with missing data were included in the denominator of all rate calculations to ensure that rates of perpetration were not overinflated. However, this means that findings may underestimate the actual rate. Where items were aggregated into the categories of sexual violence presented in Table 2 for analysis, respondents who answered in the affirmative to any of these items were included in the numerator of rate calculations, even if they did not provide responses to other items in these categories. Rates of missing data across all items and categories of sexual violence perpetration were only slightly higher for men than women, and differences only exceeded the threshold for statistical significance for two items ('Emotionally or psychologically manipulated someone to participate in sexual activity' and 'Stealth and related conduct'; Table 3). Given these results, it was judged that the inclusion of respondents with missing data in the denominator of rate calculations would not lead to a differential underestimation of perpetration rates across men and women to any meaningful degree.



Item/category	Men	Women	<i>p</i>	Overall <sup>a</sup>
<b>Sexual harassment and coercion</b>	3.7	2.9	0.120	3.3
Pressured someone for dates or sexual activity	1.9	1.6	0.524	1.8
Pressured someone to take drugs or alcohol before requesting sexual activity	1.6	1.2	0.268	1.4
Pressured someone to participate in unprotected sexual activity	1.5	1.3	0.475	1.4
Threatened or blackmailed someone to participate in sexual activity	1.0	0.8	0.441	0.9
Emotionally or psychologically manipulated someone to participate in sexual activity	2.4	1.5	0.017	1.9
<b>Sexual assault</b>	7.3	6.1	0.120	6.7
Non-consensual kissing	5.2	4.6	0.344	4.9
Non-consensual touching	4.1	3.2	0.105	3.7
Non-consensual sexual intercourse	1.4	1.0	0.134	1.2
Stealthing and related conduct	1.4	0.6	0.007	1.0
<b>Image-based sexual abuse</b>	1.5	1.1	0.322	1.3
Recording intimate, nude or sexual images or videos of another person without their consent	1.3	0.9	0.270	1.1
Sharing or threatening to share intimate, nude or sexual images or videos of another person without their consent	1.2	0.9	0.317	1.0
<b>Any sexual violence</b>	7.2	6.7	0.504	6.9

a: Includes 55 respondents who were gender diverse

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

## Limitations

There are several elements of the methodology which give cause for caution in generalising findings to the broader Australian population. The sampling method (ie proportional quota-based sampling from an opt-in online research panel) and sample weights were designed to ensure representativeness of the spread of the Australian population in terms of age, gender and usual place of residence. However, people born overseas and those from a non-English-speaking background were under-represented. Further, the representativeness of the sample in relation to other characteristics (eg sexuality) is unknown.

This paper examines rates of perpetration among respondents aged between 18 and 45 years only. This is because the primary aim of the survey was to understand the relationship between pornography use and sexual violence among a national sample of Australian residents who were likely to have had easy access to the internet during their teenage and early adult years. Relatedly, questions only ask about sexual violence perpetrated during adulthood, omitting any sexual violence perpetrated by respondents when they were younger. While comprehensive, the different forms of sexual violence examined are not exhaustive, and do not include sexual activities with persons under the legal age of consent or certain sexual health related forms of abuse. Despite the similarities between men and women in rates of missing responses, research suggests that the under-reporting of sexual violence perpetration is more likely among men than women (eg Jeffry & Senn 2024).

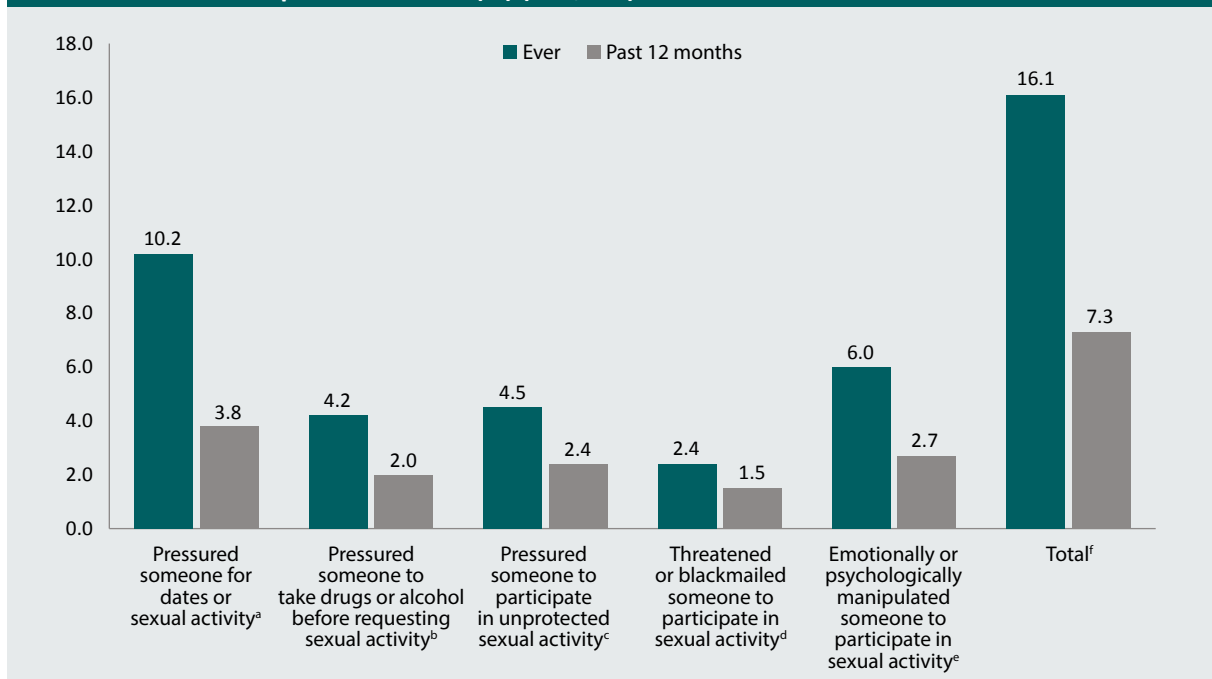
This means that any comparison of men and women on self-reported sexual violence perpetration may underestimate the true magnitude of gender-based differences. Finally, as mentioned, a notable proportion of respondents were unable or unwilling to provide responses to some or all of the perpetration items. Safety concerns may have precluded potential respondents from participating in the survey as questions were also asked about sexual violence victimisation.

## Findings

### Sexual harassment and coercion

One in six respondents (16.1%,  $n=819$ ) had perpetrated some form of sexual harassment or coercion during adulthood, and 7.3 percent ( $n=372$ ) had done so in the past 12 months (Figure 2). Pressuring someone for dates or sexual activity was the most common form of sexual harassment or coercion perpetrated by respondents both ever in adulthood (10.2%,  $n=519$ ) and in the past 12 months (3.8%,  $n=192$ ).

**Figure 2: Prevalence of sexual harassment and coercion perpetration by type, ever during adulthood and in the past 12 months (%) ( $n=5,076$ )**



a: Denominator includes 89 respondents who did not provide this information

b: Denominator includes 71 respondents who did not provide this information

c: Denominator includes 69 respondents who did not provide this information

d: Denominator includes 45 respondents who did not provide this information

e: Denominator includes 97 respondents who did not provide this information

f: Denominator includes 166 respondents who did not provide information for one or more sexual harassment and coercion items and did not indicate having perpetrated sexual harassment and coercion

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

Almost one in five men (18.2%,  $n=451$ ) and a little over one in 10 women (13.9%,  $n=352$ ) had perpetrated sexual harassment or coercion since the age of 18 years (Table 4). Men were significantly more likely to have perpetrated any and all forms of sexual harassment and coercion, both ever during adulthood and in the past 12 months.

	Past 12 months			Ever		
	Men	Women	<i>p</i>	Men	Women	<i>p</i>
<b>Any sexual harassment and coercion<sup>b</sup></b>	9.2	5.3	0.000	18.2	13.9	0.000
Pressured someone for dates or sexual activity <sup>c</sup>	4.9	2.7	0.000	11.6	8.8	0.001
Pressured someone to take drugs or alcohol before requesting sexual activity <sup>d</sup>	3.0	1.1	0.000	5.7	2.7	0.000
Pressured someone to participate in unprotected sexual activity <sup>e</sup>	3.3	1.5	0.000	5.9	3.3	0.000
Threatened or blackmailed someone to participate in sexual activity <sup>f</sup>	2.2	0.7	0.000	3.3	1.5	0.000
Emotionally or psychologically manipulated someone to participate in sexual activity <sup>g</sup>	3.8	1.6	0.000	7.3	4.5	0.000

a: Sample for analysis excludes 55 respondents who were gender diverse

b: Denominator includes 165 respondents (92 men and 73 women) who did not provide information for one or more sexual harassment and coercion items and did not indicate having perpetrated sexual harassment or coercion

c: Denominator includes 88 respondents (47 men and 42 women) who did not provide this information. Frequencies do not add to total due to rounding of weighted data

d: Denominator includes 70 respondents (39 men and 31 women) who did not provide this information

e: Denominator includes 69 respondents (37 men and 32 women) who did not provide this information

f: Denominator includes 45 respondents (25 men and 20 women) who did not provide this information

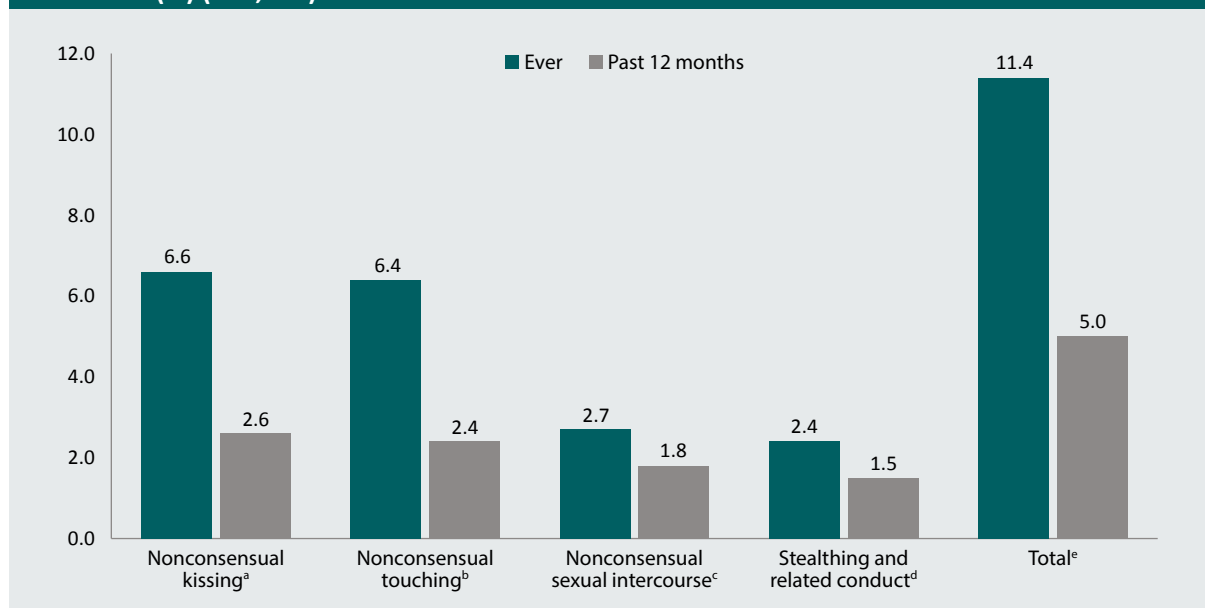
g: Denominator includes 97 (60 men and 37 women) respondents who did not provide this information

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

## Sexual assault

Just over one in 10 respondents (11.4%,  $n=577$ ) had perpetrated sexual assault ever during adulthood and one in 20 respondents (5.0%,  $n=254$ ) had done so in the past 12 months (Figure 3). The most common forms of sexual assault perpetrated were non-consensual kissing (6.6%,  $n=333$  ever in adulthood and 2.6%,  $n=133$  in the past 12 months) and non-consensual touching (6.4%,  $n=326$  ever in adulthood and 2.4%,  $n=120$  in the past 12 months). While less common, 2.7 percent of respondents ( $n=139$ ) had perpetrated sexual intercourse without the victim's consent and 2.4 percent ( $n=122$ ) had perpetrated stealthing and related conduct ever during adulthood.

**Figure 3: Rate of sexual assault perpetration by type, ever during adulthood and in the past 12 months (%) (n=5,076)**



a: Denominator includes 247 respondents who did not provide this information

b: Denominator includes 187 respondents who did not provide this information

c: Denominator includes 61 respondents who did not provide this information

d: Denominator includes 53 respondents who did not provide this information

e: Denominator includes 343 respondents who did not provide information for one or more sexual assault items and did not indicate having perpetrated sexual assault

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

One in six men (16.3%,  $n=405$ ) and one in 20 women (6.4%,  $n=161$ ) had perpetrated one or more forms of sexual assault ever during adulthood. Men were significantly more likely than women to have perpetrated any and all forms of sexual assault, both ever during adulthood and in the past 12 months (Table 5).

**Table 5: Rate of sexual assault perpetration in the past 12 months and ever during adulthood, by gender (%) (n=5,021<sup>a</sup>)**

	Past 12 months			Ever		
	Men	Women	<i>p</i>	Men	Women	<i>p</i>
<b>Any sexual assault<sup>b</sup></b>	7.4	2.7	0.000	16.3	6.4	0.000
Non-consensual kissing <sup>c</sup>	3.9	1.4	0.000	9.6	3.5	0.000
Non-consensual touching <sup>d</sup>	3.6	1.2	0.000	9.8	3.2	0.000
Non-consensual sexual intercourse <sup>e</sup>	2.6	1.1	0.000	3.9	1.6	0.000
Stealthing and related conduct <sup>f</sup>	2.4	0.6	0.000	3.7	1.2	0.000

a: Sample for analysis excludes 55 respondents who were gender diverse

b: Denominator includes 337 respondents (181 men and 156 women) who did not provide information for one or more sexual violence items and did not indicate having perpetrated sexual violence

c: Denominator includes 244 respondents (128 men and 116 women) who did not provide this information

d: Denominator includes 184 respondents (102 men and 82 women) who did not provide this information

e: Denominator includes 60 respondents (36 men and 24 women) who did not provide this information

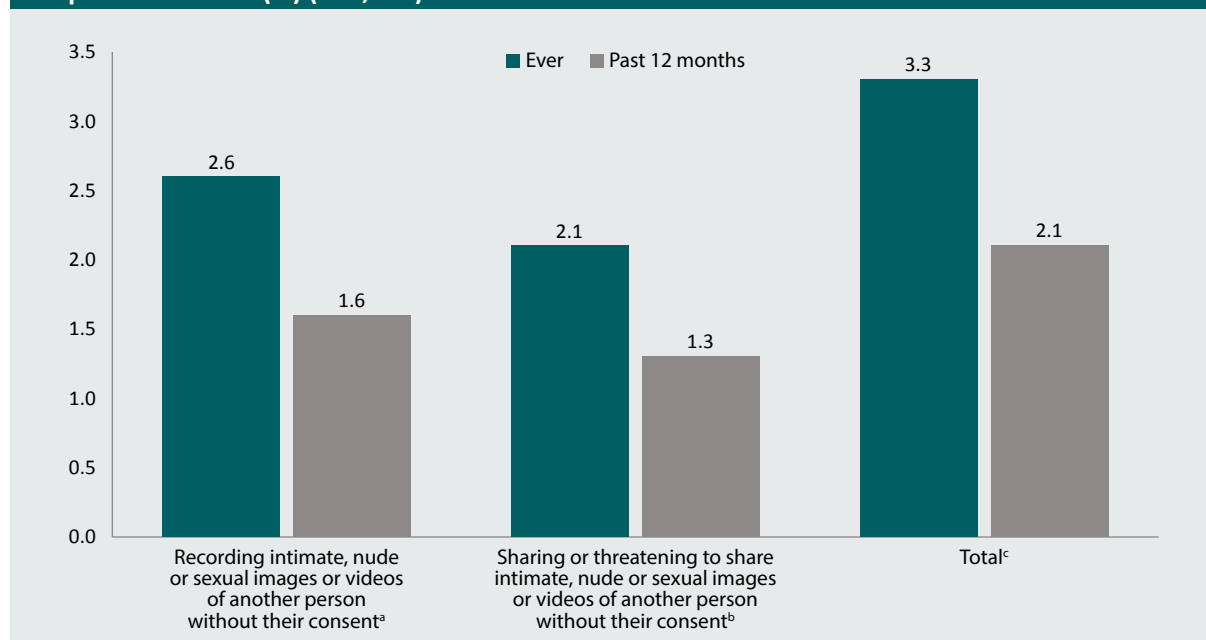
f: Denominator includes 50 respondents (35 men and 16 women) who did not provide this information. Frequencies do not add to total due to rounding of weighted data

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

## Image-based sexual abuse

Three percent (3.3%,  $n=165$ ) of respondents had perpetrated IBSA ever during adulthood (Figure 4). Two percent of respondents had done so in the past 12 months (2.1%,  $n=109$ ).

**Figure 4: Rate of image-based sexual abuse perpetration by type, ever during adulthood and in the past 12 months (%) ( $n=5,076$ )**



a: Denominator includes 55 respondents who did not provide this information

b: Denominator includes 54 respondents who did not provide this information

c: Denominator includes 68 respondents who did not provide information for one or more IBSA items and did not indicate having perpetrated IBSA

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

One in 20 men (5.1%,  $n=128$ ) and 1.5 percent of women ( $n=38$ ) had perpetrated IBSA during adulthood. Men were significantly more likely than women to have perpetrated either and both forms of IBSA, both ever during adulthood and in the past 12 months (Table 6).

**Table 6: Rate of image-based sexual abuse perpetration in the past 12 months and ever during adulthood, by gender (%) ( $n=5,021^a$ )**

	Past 12 months			Ever		
	Men	Women	<i>p</i>	Men	Women	<i>p</i>
<b>Any IBSA<sup>b</sup></b>	3.4	1.0	0.000	5.1	1.5	0.000
Recording intimate, nude or sexual images or videos of another person without their consent <sup>c</sup>	2.5	0.7	0.000	4.2	1.0	0.000
Sharing or threatening to share intimate, nude or sexual images or videos of another person without their consent <sup>d</sup>	2.2	0.5	0.000	3.3	1.1	0.000

a: Sample for analysis excludes 55 respondents who were gender diverse

b: Denominator includes 65 respondents (36 men and 29 women) who did not provide information for one or more IBSA items and did not indicate having perpetrated IBSA

c: Denominator includes 55 respondents (31 men and 24 women) who did not provide this information

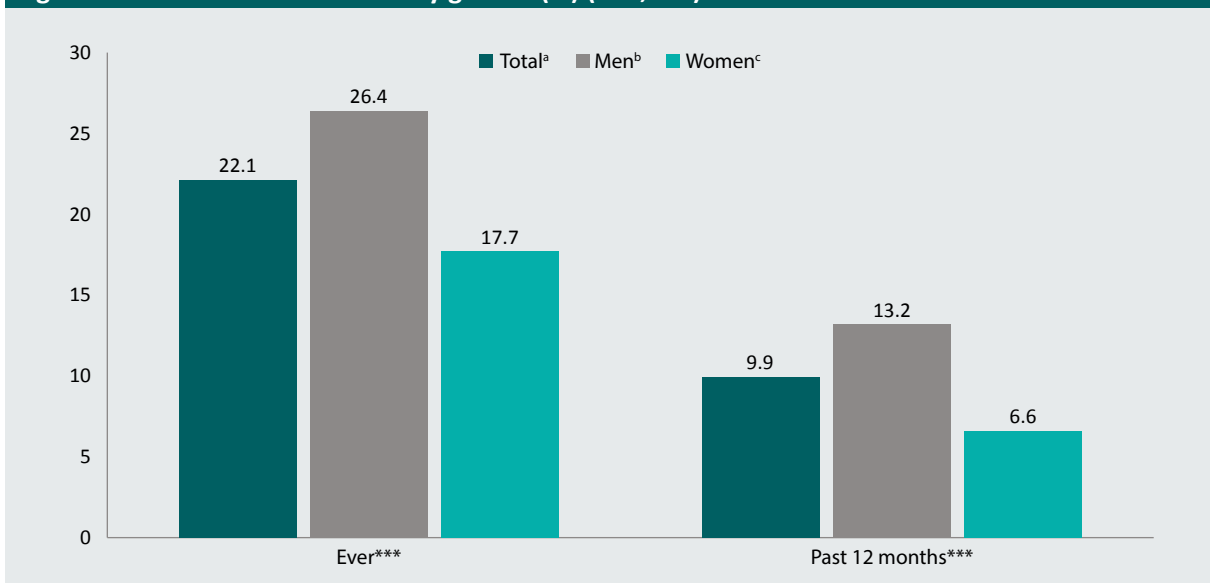
d: Denominator includes 51 respondents (29 men and 22 women) who did not provide this information

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

## Overall

Just over one in five respondents (22.1%,  $n=1,124$ ) had perpetrated one or more of the forms of sexual violence examined since the age of 18 years, and one-tenth (9.9%,  $n=504$ ) had done so in the past 12 months (Figure 5). Men were significantly more likely than women to have perpetrated sexual violence both ever in adulthood (26.4%,  $n=655$  vs 17.7%,  $n=449$ ) and in the past 12 months (13.2%,  $n=328$  vs 6.6%,  $n=168$ ). Importantly, while one in six women reported perpetrating some form of sexual violence during adulthood, and one in 20 reported doing so in the past 12 months, this was primarily attributable to their rates of sexual harassment and coercion perpetration. These forms of sexual violence were the items with the smallest differences between men and women. In contrast, rates of perpetration of all forms of sexual assault and IBSA were two to five times higher for men than women.

**Figure 5: Rate of sexual violence by gender (%) ( $n=5,076$ )**



\*\*\*statistically significant at  $p=0.000$

a: Denominator includes 55 respondents who were gender diverse. Denominator also includes 351 respondents who did not provide information for one or more sexual violence items and did not indicate having perpetrated sexual violence

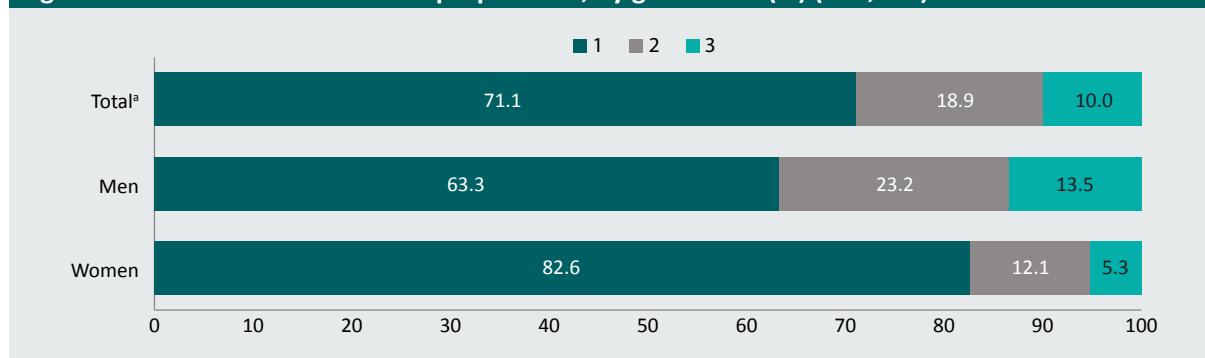
b: Denominator includes 178 men who did not provide information or one or more sexual violence items and did not indicate having perpetrated sexual violence

c: Denominator includes 169 women who did not provide information or one or more sexual violence items and did not indicate having perpetrated sexual violence

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

Of respondents who had perpetrated sexual violence during adulthood ( $n=1,124$ ), most (71.1%,  $n=799$ ) had perpetrated only one form of sexual violence (ie sexual coercion and harassment, sexual assault or IBSA; Figure 6). Perpetration of multiple forms of sexual violence was significantly more common among men than women.

**Figure 6: Forms of sexual violence perpetrated, by gender\*\*\* (%) (n=1,124)**



\*\*\*statistically significant at  $p=0.000$

a: Denominator includes 20 respondents who were gender diverse

Note: Denominators include all respondents who perpetrated one or more forms of sexual violence (ie sexual coercion and harassment, sexual assault and/or IBSA)

Source: AIC Pornography and Sexual Violence Survey 2023 [computer file] [weighted data]

## Discussion

This study examined the rate of sexual violence perpetration in adulthood among a community sample of Australian residents aged 18–45 years. Just over a fifth of respondents (22.1%) had perpetrated at least one of the forms of sexual violence examined during adulthood, and a tenth (9.9%) had done so in the past 12 months. Not surprisingly, the most commonly reported types of sexual violence perpetrated were different forms of sexual harassment and coercion—behaviours employed to engage an unwilling person in sexual activity. Around a sixth of respondents reported having done this during adulthood and a little under 10 percent having done so recently. Meanwhile, one in 10 respondents had perpetrated sexual assault during adulthood (with 5.0% having done so recently). This includes 2.7 percent who indicated having had sexual intercourse with someone without their consent during adulthood and 1.8 percent who had done so recently. Finally, around three percent of respondents had perpetrated IBSA at some point during adulthood, with 2.1 percent having done so recently.

Overall, comparisons of men and women’s perpetration reinforce the gendered nature of sexual violence. Specifically, men were significantly more likely to have perpetrated any and all of the forms of sexual violence examined. This is consistent with prior research based on self-reported perpetration data (eg Anderson et al. 2021; Krahe & Berger 2013; Krahe et al. 2014; Swiatlo, Kahn & Halpern 2020; Walsh et al. 2021), self-reported victimisation data (ABS 2023c; Heywood et al. 2022) and criminal justice system data (ABS 2023d). Overall, 26.4 percent of men in this study had perpetrated some form of sexual violence during adulthood. While not directly comparable, this is similar to the findings of Anderson and colleagues’ (2021) systematic review, which found that 29.3 percent of college men in the United States and Canada had perpetrated sexual violence. Further, one in five Australian women report having been sexually victimised since the age of 15 years, primarily by a man (ABS 2023f), although comparability here is also limited.

Importantly, a sixth of women indicated that they had perpetrated sexual violence of some kind during adulthood, and one in 20 during the past 12 months. It is difficult to compare these findings to the broader literature because of the limited number of studies, substantial variability in prevalence estimates for women's perpetration of sexual violence (eg Krahé et al. 2014) and the lack of robust systematic reviews. It is also important to account for the possibly greater under-reporting of sexual violence perpetration among men than women here (eg Jeffry & Senn 2024). Further research is clearly needed on this. Nevertheless, when broken down into more specific forms of sexual violence, it becomes clear that the largest differences in perpetration rates between men and women relate to more assaultive forms of sexual violence. Additionally, men were significantly more likely than women to have perpetrated more than one form of sexual violence. As such, the results suggest not only that men were more likely to perpetrate sexual violence than women, but also that they perpetrated more serious forms of violence when they did, and possibly more frequently.

This study examined the rates of sexual violence perpetration in a community sample of adult Australian residents. Estimates of sexual violence perpetration which draw on self-reported data, while not without limitations, overcome many of the issues inherent in official data held by police and criminal justice agencies, which have long been relied upon to gauge the prevalence of sexual violence perpetration in Australia. The findings fill an important gap in the Australian evidence base, while also contributing to efforts to monitor and evaluate efforts to reduce sexual violence by providing more accurate estimates of its rate of perpetration.

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