

## Children's Safety Facts and Figures

### Child abuse (prevalence):

- In Australia a child is reported abused or neglected every 1.5 minutes. <sup>1</sup>Conservative estimates suggest 10 – 20% of Australian children (upwards of 550,000) are abused or neglected each year. <sup>2</sup>

### Child sexual abuse:

- Up to 30 percent of children experience child sexual abuse of any kind and between five and 10 percent experience severe abuse. <sup>3</sup>
- Almost 90% of children are abused by someone they know, often someone they trust. More commonly, by a male relative (other than the victim's father or stepfather; 30.2%), a family friend (16.3%), an acquaintance or neighbour (15.6%), another known person (15.3%), or the father or stepfather (13.5%) <sup>4</sup>
- About one third of abuse is perpetrated by another child or young person, <sup>5</sup> most commonly boys between the ages of 12 and 17yo <sup>6&7</sup>
- All children are at risk of sexual abuse regardless of their age, gender, social class, race, religion or ethnicity. However an increased risk exists for children with a physical disability, increased vulnerability associated with dependency, institutional care and communication difficulties, a low socioeconomic status, the absence of one or both parents or parental impairments (e.g. illness or alcoholism) <sup>8</sup> and indigenous children. <sup>9</sup>
- Most child abuse occurs in the victim or perpetrator's home. <sup>10</sup>
- The vast majority (over 80%) of child sexual abuse incidents for all ages occur in one-perpetrator/one-child circumstances. <sup>11</sup>
- Research has shown that perpetrators use a range of grooming strategies to identify and build a connection with a potential victim, including: identifying children who are particularly vulnerable; identifying vulnerable or receptive families (e.g. single mothers); isolating the child from other children or their guardian; making a child feel that they hold a "special status"; over time, desensitising the child to sexual touch; ensuring they become

<sup>1</sup> Child Family Community Australia (2017). Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics (online). Available <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-neglect-statistics> [Accessed 31.8.20].

<sup>2</sup> NAPCAN (2007). *Child Abuse and Neglect Fact Sheet* (online). Available <http://www.napcan.org.au/what.htm>. [Accessed 3.4.07].

<sup>3</sup> Ogloff, J.R.P., Cutajar, M.C., Mann, E., & Mullen, P. (2012). Child sexual abuse and subsequent offending and victimisation: A 45 year follow up study. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* no. 440. Canberra: AIC.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006). *Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005*. Cat. No 4906.0. Canberra: ABS.

<sup>5</sup> Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., & Chaffin, M. (2009). *Juveniles who commit sex offences against minors*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice

<sup>6</sup> Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., & Chaffin, M. (2009). *Juveniles who commit sex offences against minors*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice

<sup>7</sup> Der Bedrosian, J. (2018). When the abuser is a child, too. *John Hopkins Magazine*, Spring 2018.

<https://hub.jhu.edu/magazine/2018/spring/children-who-are-child-sexual-abusers/>

<sup>8</sup> Quadara, A., Nagy, V., Higgins, D. & Siegel, N. (2015). *Conceptualising the prevention of child sexual abuse: Final report* (Research Report No. 33). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>9</sup> Bailey, C., Powell, M., & Brubacher, S. (2017). Reporting rates of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in two Australian jurisdictions. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 68, 74-80.

<sup>10</sup> Snyder, H. (2000). Sexual assault of young children as reported to law enforcement: Victim, incident, and offender characteristics. A NIBRS Statistical Report. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

<sup>11</sup> Snyder, H. (2000). Sexual assault of young children as reported to law enforcement: Victim, incident, and offender characteristics. A NIBRS Statistical Report. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

“indispensable” to significant adults in the child’s life and putting themselves in a position of trust.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Online Grooming:**

- 25% of youth (aged 8 – 17yo) had been contacted by a stranger in the previous 12 months, and 10% had been sent inappropriate content online (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018).<sup>13</sup>

#### **Disclosures:**

- Child sexual abuse is the most silent and under-reported crime. Child sexual abuse survivors most often wait decades before they disclose the abuse (21.45 years on average). Only 8.2% of participants told someone within one year of when the sexual abuse started.<sup>14</sup> Very few victims disclose the abuse at the time it is occurring for fear of others’ reactions, including disbelief, they often feel shame, embarrassment, guilt and responsibility.
- One third of Australians would not believe children if they disclosed they were being abused.<sup>15</sup>
- Almost a third of respondents (32%) believed that children make up stories about being abused. A further 24% of respondents could not make up their minds whether or not to believe children’s stories about being abused.<sup>16</sup> Children very rarely make up stories about abuse.

#### **Reporting abuse:**

- 1 in 5 Australians lack the confidence to know what to do if they suspected that a child was being abused or neglected.<sup>17</sup>

#### **The cost:**

- In 2016-17, the estimated annual burden of violence against children and young people in Australia was \$34.2 billion (Deloitte Access Economics, 2019).<sup>18</sup> The long term personal and community effects of violence against children are immense, and include increased risks of substance addiction, personal violence, homelessness, poor health, educational failure, poor employability, mental illness, depression and suicide. As a result, past victims of abuse and neglect are grossly over-represented in prison populations, as perpetrators of crime, and amongst the most economically and socially disadvantaged members of our society.

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<sup>12</sup> Quadara, A., Nagy, V., Higgins, D. & Siegel, N. (2015). Conceptualising the prevention of child sexual abuse: Final report (Research Report No. 33). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>13</sup> Office of the eSafety Commissioner (2018). State of play: Youth, kids and digital dangers. Canberra: Office of the eSafety Commissioner.

<sup>14</sup> Easton, S. (2019). Childhood disclosure of sexual abuse and mental health outcomes in adulthood: Assessing merits of early disclosure and discussion. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 93, 208-214.

<sup>15</sup> Tucci, J., Mitchell, J., & Goddard, C. (2010). Doing nothing hurts children: Community attitudes about child abuse and child protection in Australia. Ringwood, Victoria: Australian Childhood Foundation

<sup>16</sup> Tucci, J., Mitchell, J., & Goddard, C. (2010). Doing nothing hurts children: Community attitudes about child abuse and child protection in Australia. Ringwood, Victoria: Australian Childhood Foundation.

<sup>17</sup> Tucci, J., Mitchell, J., & Goddard, C. (2010). Doing nothing hurts children: Community attitudes about child abuse and child protection in Australia. Ringwood, Victoria: Australian Childhood Foundation

<sup>18</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2019). The economic cost of violence against children and young people. Canberra: Deloitte Access Economics.

### **Sexing:**

- 44% of Australian Year 10 – 12 students reported having received a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo or video of someone else,
- 32% reported having sent a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo or video of themselves.
- 6% reported sending a nude or nearly nude photo or video of someone else (Fisher, Waling, Kerr, et al., 2019).<sup>19</sup>

### **Mental health:**

- Almost one-fifth of all young people aged 11 to 17 years experience high or very high levels of psychological distress.  
19.9% of all young people (11 to 17 years) had high or very high levels of psychological distress in the previous 12 months, however for females aged 16 to 17 years and young people with major depressive disorder, this was significantly higher (36.2% and 80.7% respectively).
- One in seven young people aged 4 to 17 years experience a mental health condition in any given year. (13.9% of children and young people (aged 4 to 17 years) met the criteria for a diagnosis of a mental disorder in the last 12 months. 6.9% of children and young people (aged 4 to 17 years) had suffered from an anxiety disorder in the past 12 months)
- Half of all the mental health conditions we experience at some point in our lives will have started by age 14. Over 75% of mental health problems occur before the age of 25.
- Young people are less likely than any other age group to seek professional help. Only 31% of young women and 13% of young men with mental health problems had sought any professional help.<sup>20</sup>

### **Self harm and suicide:**

- One in ten young people aged 12-17 years old will self-harm, one in 13 will seriously consider a suicide attempt, and one in 40 will attempt suicide.
- Suicide continues to be the biggest killer of young Australians
- In 2018, suicide accounted for over one-third of deaths (38.4 per cent) among people aged 15-24 years and over a quarter of deaths (29.4 per cent) among those aged 25-34 years. Suicide remains the leading cause of death of children between 5 and 17 years, with 100 deaths occurring in this age group, at a rate of 2.5 deaths per 100,000 children.
- The rate of suicide among Indigenous young people is significantly higher than among non-Indigenous young people. The age-specific death rate was 8.3 deaths per 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, compared to 2.1 per 100,000 for non-Indigenous children.<sup>21</sup>
- Protective factors that make us more resilient and can reduce suicidal behaviour include: supportive social relationships; a sense of control; a sense of purpose; family harmony; effective help-seeking; and positive connections to good health services available<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Fisher, C. M., Waling, A., Kerr, L., et al. (2019). 6th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2018, (ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 113). Bundoora: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University.

<sup>20</sup> & <sup>21</sup> Beyond Blue (2020). Statistics (online). Available: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/statistics> [Accessed 20.8.20].

<sup>22</sup> Black Dog Institute (2020). Facts about suicide in Australia (online). Available: <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/suicide-self-harm/facts-about-suicide-in-australia/> [accessed 20.8.20].

### **Bullying:**

- Approximately one in four Year 4 to Year 9 Australian students (27%) reported being bullied every few weeks or more often (considered to be frequent). Frequent school bullying was highest among Year 5 (32%) and Year 8 (29%) students.
- Bullying experienced online was also commonly experienced in person. 83% of students who bully others online also bully others in person. 84% of students who were bullied online were also bullied in person.
- Peers are present as onlookers in 85% of bullying interactions, and play a central role in the bullying process.
- Hurtful teasing was the most prevalent of all bullying behaviours experienced by students, followed by having hurtful lies told about them.
- Young people over the age of 15 are less likely than students between 10 and 15 years of age to be involved in online bullying.
- Approximately one in five young people under 18 (20%) reported experiencing online bullying in any one year. The figure of 20% has been extrapolated from a number of different studies which found rates varying from 6% to 44% of students.
- School staff report an average of 2.1% reports per student of online bullying, with 1.2 per 100 for primary schools and 9.1 per 100 students for high schools.
- The majority (72%) of schools reported managing at least one incident of online bullying in the previous year.<sup>23</sup>

### **Witnessing Domestic Violence**

- Children's 'witnessing' or exposure to domestic violence has been increasingly recognised as a form of child abuse, both in Australia and internationally. Almost half of children around the world (48.4%) witness frequent domestic violence each year.<sup>24</sup>
- People who, as children, witnessed partner violence against their parents were 2–4 times as likely to experience partner violence themselves (as adults) as people who had not (ABS 2017b).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Bullying No Way (2020). What is Bullying – Facts and Figures (online). Available <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/WhatsBullying/FactsAndFigures> [Accessed 03.09.20].

<sup>24</sup> Richards, K (2011). Children's exposure to domestic violence in Australia, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice no.419. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology

<sup>25</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018. Cat. no. FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW.