

# Prevalence – Full Sample

# Child Maltreatment in Australia

**1st** Nationally representative Australian prevalence data about the 5 types of child maltreatment, and multi-type maltreatment.

Survey of **8500** Australians aged >16

Among all Australians:

**32.0%** experienced physical abuse

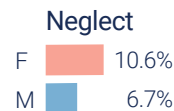
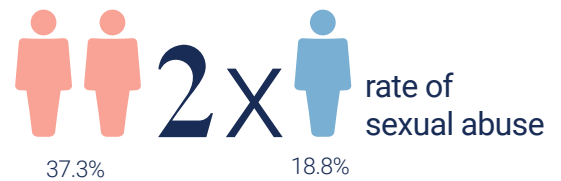
**28.5%** experienced sexual abuse

**30.9%** experienced emotional abuse

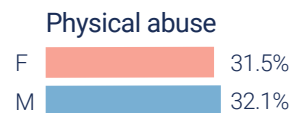
**8.9%** experienced neglect

**39.6%** experienced exposure to domestic violence (EDV)

Girls experience three of the maltreatment types more often than boys



Girls and boys experience comparable levels of:



Mathews B et al. (2023) The prevalence of child maltreatment in Australia: findings from a national survey. Med J Aust. 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)

NOTE: All percentages refer to maltreatment in childhood up to age 18.

# Prevalence – Youth

# Child maltreatment in Australian young people aged 16-24

**1st** Nationally representative Australian prevalence data on how many young people aged 16-24 years have experienced child maltreatment.

Surveyed **3500** Australians aged 16-24

Among 16-24 year olds:

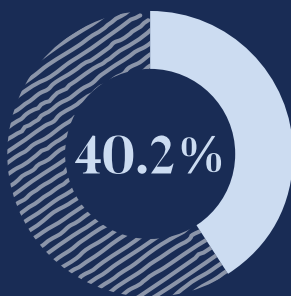
**28.2%** experienced physical abuse

**25.7%** experienced sexual abuse

**34.6%** experienced emotional abuse

**10.3%** experienced neglect

**43.8%** experienced exposure to domestic violence (EDV)



experienced: **>1 type of abuse**



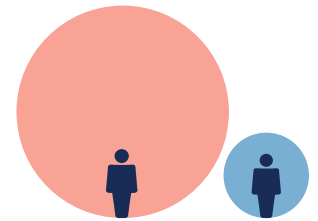
**25.4%** experienced: **3-5 types of abuse**

Girls experience:

**2.4 x**

the rate of **sexual abuse**

35.2% vs 14.5%



Girls experience:

**1.5 x**

the rate of **emotional abuse**

40.5% vs 26.9%

**Higher rates of neglect**

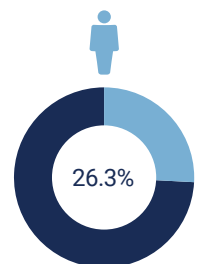
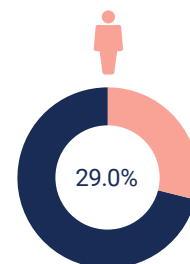


12.5% vs 7.2%

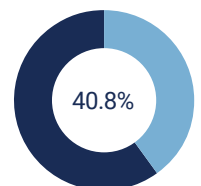
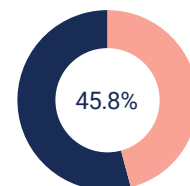


Girls and boys experience comparable rates of:

**Physical abuse**



**EDV**



Mathews B et al. (2023) The prevalence of child maltreatment in Australia: findings from a national survey. Med J Aust. 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)

NOTE: All percentages refer to maltreatment in childhood up to age 18.

# **Multi-type Maltreatment – Full Sample**

# Multi-type maltreatment

The ACMS has identified, for the first time, how many Australians have experienced multi-type maltreatment. This data is based on a representative sample of Australians aged 16-65 and older.

## Survey of Australians aged 16-65+



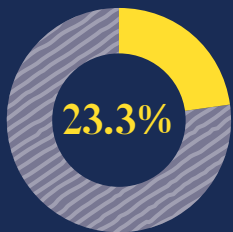
**Multi-type maltreatment** is when a child experiences **more than one type** of maltreatment in any combination of:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Exposure to domestic violence



2 in 3 children who are maltreated experience: >1 or more types of maltreatment

2 in 5 Australians experienced: 2 or more types of maltreatment

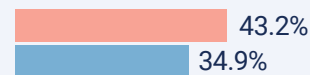


experienced: 3-5 types of maltreatment

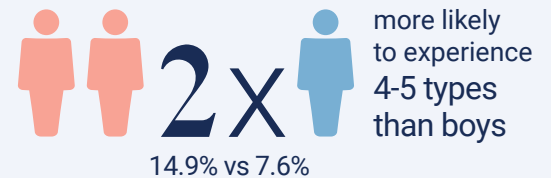
3.5 % of Australians experienced: all 5 types



More girls than boys experience **multi-type maltreatment**



Girls are almost:



Each form of hardship (parental separation, family mental illness, family substance problems and family economic hardship)

## Doubles

the risk of **multi-type maltreatment**

The top 6 most frequently experienced multi-type maltreatment combinations include

**exposure to domestic violence**

Higgins DJ, et al. (2023). The prevalence and nature of multi-type child maltreatment in Australia. Med J Aust. 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)

# **Multi-type Maltreatment – Youth Sample**

# Multi-type maltreatment in youth

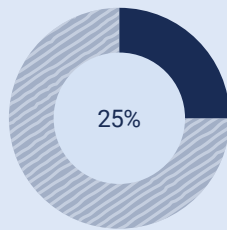
The ACMS has identified for the first time how many Australian young people aged 16-24 have experienced multi-type maltreatment. Multi-type maltreatment is when a child experiences >1 different type of maltreatment (physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or exposure to domestic violence)

## Survey of 3500 Australians aged 16-24

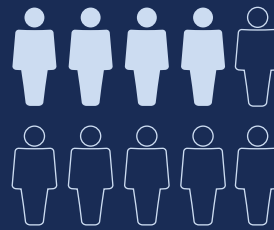


### Multi-type maltreatment is concerningly common.

**1 in 4** young people experience: 3-5 types of abuse



**4 in 10** young people have experienced: >1 type of abuse



40.2%



3.7% of Australian young people have experienced: all 5 types of child maltreatment

Girls are more likely to experience: **>1** type of maltreatment



Girls are:



more likely to experience 3-5 types



more likely to experience all 5 types

Each form of hardship (parental separation, family mental illness, family substance problems and family economic hardship) more than

# Doubles

the risk of multi-type maltreatment

Children who experience multi-type maltreatment are more likely to have a mental disorder



# and



health risk behaviours as adults

Multi-type maltreatment is associated with worse mental health and health risk behaviours, and greater health service utilisation than single-type maltreatment.

Higgins DJ, et al. (2023). The prevalence and nature of multi-type child maltreatment in Australia. Med J Aust. 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)



# **Mental Health – Full Sample**

# Child maltreatment and mental health disorders

We examined associations between Australians' experience of any type of child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and exposure to domestic violence) and subsequent mental health disorders) using a diagnostic instrument.

Surveyed **8500**  
Australians aged 16-65+

Australians who experience maltreatment are:

**2.8 x** more likely to have any mental disorder  
48% vs 21.6% \*


**4.6 x** more likely to have current PTSD  
7.8% vs 1.3% \*


**3.1 x** more likely to have current generalised anxiety disorder  
16.1% vs 4.3% \*


**2.6 x** more likely to have current severe alcohol use disorder  
6.1% vs 1.9% \*

**3.2 x** more likely to have had major depressive disorder  
24.6% vs 8.1% \*

Child maltreatment is **strongly associated** with mental health disorders in Australia.

**48%** of those who experience maltreatment go on to develop a **mental disorder**  
compared with 21.6% of those with no maltreatment experience 

1 in 4 who experienced child maltreatment had lifetime: **major depressive disorder** compared to one in 12 who didn't 

**Emotional abuse and sexual abuse** are most strongly related to **mental disorders** 

Child maltreatment influences mental health across life. In people aged 45 and older **mental health disorders** are far more common in those who experienced maltreatment than those who did not.

**38.3% VS 16.6%**

Scott, JG, et al. (2023). The association between child maltreatment and mental disorders in the Australian Child Maltreatment Study. Med J Aust. 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)

\* Odds account for other explanatory factors

# **Mental Health – Youth Sample**

# Child maltreatment and associated mental health disorders in youth aged 16-24

The ACMS team examined the associations between child maltreatment and mental health disorders using the Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview to determine if participants would meet clinically diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder. Child maltreatment is strongly related to mental health in young people.

Child maltreatment includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence.

Youth who experienced child maltreatment are:

**2.9 x** more likely to have any mental disorder

**5.8 x** more likely to have PTSD

**3.3 x** more likely to have generalised anxiety disorder

**4.1 x** more likely to have severe alcohol use disorder

**2.7 x** more likely to have had major depressive disorder

The disparity in any mental health disorder in those youth who experienced child maltreatment compared to those who did not

**60% vs 29.8%**

(After accounting for other associated factors)

Enhanced prevention and early support is **essential.**

Child maltreatment is associated with **dramatically increased** odds of young people having a mental disorder.

Scott, JG, et al. (2023). The association between child maltreatment and mental disorders in the Australian Child Maltreatment Study. *Med J Aust.* 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)

# **Health Risk Behaviours – Full Sample**

# Health risk behaviours

People who have experienced child maltreatment are:

6.2 x

more likely to be  
**cannabis  
dependent**



4.6 x

more likely to have  
**attempted  
suicide**  
in the past 12 months



1.9 x

more likely to be a  
**current  
smoker**



3.9 x

more likely to have  
**self-harmed**  
in the past  
12 months



1.3 x

more likely to  
**binge drink**  
at least weekly



1.2 x

more likely to have  
**obesity**



These increased odds account for other explanatory factors

Child maltreatment dramatically increases the likelihood of three serious health risk behaviours:



Cannabis  
dependence



Self-harm



Suicide  
attempt

Sexual abuse and emotional abuse are most strongly associated with these major adverse outcomes.

Experiencing more than one type of child maltreatment is associated with higher rates of health risk behaviours.

## Associated harm continues over life

By middle age (45 years +), cannabis dependence, self-harm, and suicide attempts were almost non-existent in those who had not experienced child maltreatment.

Lawrence D, et al. (2023). The association between child maltreatment and health risk behaviours and conditions throughout life: The Australian Child Maltreatment Study. Med J Aust. 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)

# **Health Risk Behaviours – Youth Sample**

# Health risk behaviours

Young people aged 16-24 who experienced child maltreatment are:

6.5 x

more likely to be  
**cannabis  
dependent**



almost

4.5 x

more likely to have  
**attempted  
suicide**



in the past 12 months

2.2 x

more likely to be a  
**current  
smoker**



3.5 x

more likely to have  
**self-harmed**  
in the past  
12 months



Not

more likely to  
**binge drink**  
than others



1.3 x

more likely  
to have  
**obesity**



The increased odds shown above account for other explanatory factors

Young people aged

**16-24**

who experienced child maltreatment are  
**significantly more likely**  
to report multiple serious health  
risk behaviours assessed.

Multi-type maltreatment, emotional abuse and sexual abuse are most strongly associated with health risk behaviours, even accounting for other types of child maltreatment.

Health risk behaviours associated with child maltreatment commence in adolescence.

**Enhanced prevention and early support is essential.**

Haslam D et al. (2023). The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology.

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)



# Health Service Use – Full Sample (no youth)

# Health Service Use

Child maltreatment is associated with a **significant increase** in health service use.

**1.4 x**

more likely to have had an overnight **hospital admission**

**2.4 x**

more likely to have been admitted for a **mental disorder**

**2.7 x**

more likely to have consulted with a **mental health nurse**

**2.4 x**

more likely to have 6 or more **visits to a GP**

**2.4 x**

more likely to have seen a **psychologist**

**3.0 x**

more likely to have seen a **psychiatrist**

People who have experienced child maltreatment are more likely to have engaged with

**all** health service professionals assessed.



**3+**  
types

Experiencing 3 or more types of maltreatment is associated with the **greatest impact** on health service utilisation.

This health service use appears to be **driven by mental health impacts.** Child maltreatment was not related to increased past year hospitalisations for physical health during the past year.



Pacella R, et al. (2023). Child maltreatment and health service utilisation: findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study. *Med J Aust.* 218 (6).

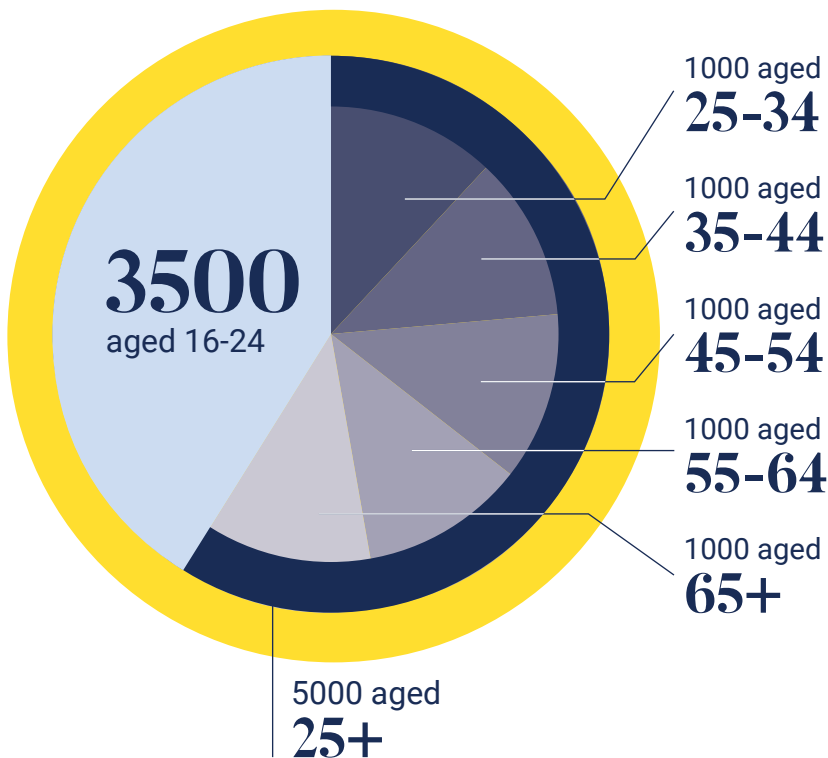
For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)

# Methodology

# ACMS Methodology

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study is the first nationally representative study of the prevalence of child maltreatment and its associated health outcomes in Australia.

- ✓ Gold standard scientific approach
- ✓ Builds on prior work
- ✓ Refined, tested and validated survey instrument



Rigorous protocols to protect participants from distress and harm



**8500** Australians were randomly selected. We collected data via computer-assisted telephone interviews in 2021.

## What we measured

### 5 types of child maltreatment

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Exposure to domestic violence

### 4 mental health disorders

- Major depressive disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Generalised anxiety disorder
- Alcohol use disorder

### Health risk behaviours

- Tobacco use
- Binge drinking
- Obesity
- Cannabis dependence
- Self-harm
- Suicide attempts

For full details of these and all other outcomes measured, see:

Haslam DM, et al. (2023). Methodology of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS): A national survey of the prevalence of child maltreatment and its correlates. Med J Aust. 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)

# **Child Sexual Abuse – Full Sample**

# Prevalence of child sexual abuse

## Survey of 8500 Australians aged 16-65+

### Overall national prevalence of child sexual abuse in Australia:

# 28.5%



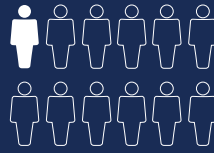
Almost 1 in 4 experienced 1 or more types of **contact child sexual abuse**



Almost 1 in 5 experienced: **non-contact child sexual abuse**



8.7% of Australians experienced: **forced sex in childhood** (rape) 1 in 12



## When a child experiences CSA, it rarely happens only once

Among children who experienced CSA

**78%** experienced it more than **1** time

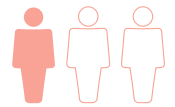
**42%** experienced it more than **6** times

**11%** experienced it more than **50** times

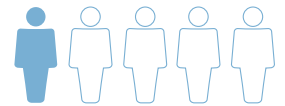
Child sexual abuse in Australia is widespread, enduring and intolerable.

## Overall national prevalence breakdown by sex:

More than 1 in 3 girls experience: **child sexual abuse**



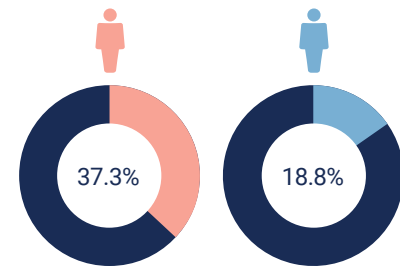
Almost 1 in 5 boys experience: **child sexual abuse**



## Massive gender disparity

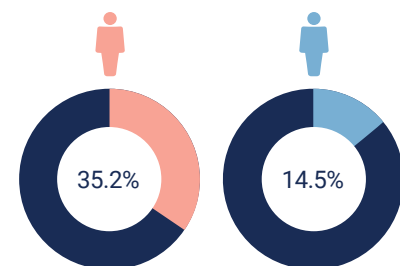
Full sample (aged 16-65+):

Girls experience **double** the rate of **child sexual abuse** than boys



Youth sample (aged 16-24):

Girls experience **2.4 times** the rate of **child sexual abuse**



Mathews B et al. (2023) The prevalence of child maltreatment in Australia: findings from a national survey. Med J Aust. 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)

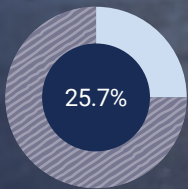
# **Child Sexual Abuse – Youth Sample**

# Child sexual abuse

Survey of **3500**  
youth aged 16-24

The national prevalence of **child sexual abuse** in Australia in those aged 16-24

**25.7%**



**1 in 4**

Australian youth aged 16-24 experienced **child sexual abuse** before age 18

Girls experience

**2.4 x**

the rate of **child sexual abuse**

35.2% vs 14.5%

Massive gender disparity

More than

**1 in 3**

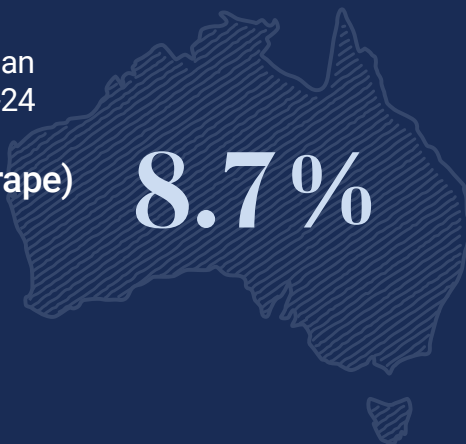
girls experienced **child sexual abuse**



1 in 12 Australian youth aged 16-24 experienced:

**forced sex (rape)** in childhood

**8.7%**



**1 in 7**

boys experienced **child sexual abuse**



As shown by our youth sample aged 16-24, child sexual abuse remains an **urgent national problem.**

Mathews B et al. (2023) The prevalence of child maltreatment in Australia: findings from a national survey. Med J Aust. 218 (6).

For information about the ACMS and support services visit [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)