

# ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Study points to ways to improve services for young people who engage in harmful sexual behaviours**

Young people make up a significant proportion of individuals engaging in unwanted or harmful sexual behaviours against children.

A new research report published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) shows that many young people who engage in these harmful sexual behaviours have their own history of childhood trauma, including exposure to domestic and family violence.

This research, led by Dr Antonia Quadara from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, found that young people who engage in harmful sexual behaviours require holistic interventions that involve specialist services and multiple partner agencies.

The researchers mapped the therapeutic service responses that are available across the country to young people with harmful sexual behaviours, and sought the perspectives of program managers and practitioners working in the field.

"We're talking about children and young people who are not paedophiles, not monsters—they're not predators," said one practitioner who was interviewed for the project. "They're kids whose lives, for lots of different reasons... [led] them to engage in that behaviour ... It can be corrected—and is, in almost all cases, quite successfully."

However, the study found that there are variations and gaps in services, and that information about service availability is not readily accessible.

"Specialist services operate in a complex environments, which may make service provision for this group of young people especially challenging," said Dr Quadara.

The report recommends the establishment of a public repository of information about services for young people with harmful sexual behaviours, and suggests that funding bodies should dedicate resources to collaborative research into tailored therapeutic work with young people who engage in harmful sexual behaviours.

"Ensuring these therapies are implemented properly is a crucial part of ensuring effective early intervention to stop the sexual abuse of children," said Dr Quadara. "While the main goal is to prevent the behaviour from occurring again, effective therapies also support the young person to take responsibility for their behaviour and develop healthy and respectful relationships."

The researchers have also published principles of good practice, which should be used to guide practitioners in their therapeutic work with young people with these behaviours.

“This research will also support practice designers and funders in ensuring the most effective approaches are being used, and that appropriate resourcing is made available,” said ANROWS CEO Dr Heather Nancarrow.

### **Finalising ANROWS’s current research into perpetrator interventions**

The publication of this and three other reports brings to a close ANROWS’s three-year Perpetrator Interventions Research Stream.

This program of research has published the findings of 13 projects, in partnership with researchers from many of Australia’s prominent research institutions. The research has produced and shared important knowledge on effectively engaging men in behavior change programs, tailoring interventions for specific groups of men (such as young people, LGBTQ groups, men from refugee or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds), and improving collaborative practices.

“These projects show the diversity of work ANROWS has undertaken to hold men who use violence accountable and stop their violence,” said ANROWS CEO Dr Heather Nancarrow.

“The insights provided by this research are crucial for those designing and funding services and for policy-makers who are ensuring our national strategies are focused and effective.”

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### **About ANROWS**

Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety Limited ([ANROWS](https://www.anrows.org.au)) is a not-for-profit independent national research organisation.

ANROWS is an initiative of Australia’s National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022. ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia to produce, disseminate and assist in applying evidence for policy and practice addressing violence against women and their children.

ANROWS is the only such research organisation in Australia.