

RESEARCH BASED TEMPLATE

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Intimate partner violence and unwanted sex among young people in Australia

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Background:

Unwanted sexual experiences and intimate partner violence (IPV) are significant concerns for young people's sexual wellbeing. However, there is limited Australian research on young people's experiences and related support needs. This paper presents recent national data on young people's experiences of IPV, unwanted sex, and help-seeking.

Methods:

Data were drawn from the 2024–2025 Australian Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health (SSASH 8), a national cross-sectional survey of secondary students aged 14–18 years (n=4,396). Descriptive analyses examined self-reported experiences of IPV, unwanted sex, and help-seeking behaviours.

Results:

Among the 61% of participants who had ever been in a sexual or romantic relationship (n=2,596), experiences of IPV were common. Overall, 37% (23% of total sample) reported feeling frightened of a partner; 31% (19%) experienced technology-facilitated harassment or tracking; 44% (27%) reported verbal abuse; and 18% (11%) reported physical violence. Young women and trans young people were consistently more likely than young men to report all forms of IPV.

One in five participants (21%) reported experiencing unwanted sex, with higher prevalence among young women (27%) and trans young people (28%) compared to young men (9%). Reported contexts included avoiding upsetting a partner (13%), persistent pressure (12%), intoxication (6.4%), and physical force (5.8%). One in four (25%) of those who had experienced unwanted sex sought help.

While most participants (76%) reported confidence in refusing sex, confidence was lower among young women. Concerns about misinterpreting sexual cues were reported by 41% overall, and were more common among young men, trans, and LGBTQ+ participants.

Conclusion:

IPV and unwanted sexual experiences are prevalent among Australian young people, with marked gender and sexuality disparities. These findings underscore the

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need for earlier, inclusive, and comprehensive relationships and sexuality education, alongside strengthened and accessible support pathways for younger adolescents.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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