

Penalties and Sentences (Sexual Offences) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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As a Social Worker who has provided direct psychosocial support to victim-survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and having a good understanding of perpetrator behavior and patterns, I can press that presenting as a “good character” is a tool used by perpetrators to manipulate first responders, place themselves in a position of power, gaslight victims and access vulnerable people (including children).

According to the ABS Personal Safety Survey (ABS, 2006), of all those who reported having been victimised sexually before the age of 15 years:

11% were victimised by a stranger. More commonly, child sexual abuse was perpetrated 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%)

Female victims were most likely to have been abused by another male relative (35.1%), followed by their father or stepfather (16.5%), a family friend (also 16.5%), an acquaintance or neighbour (15.4%), another known person (11%) or a stranger (8.6%). Very small proportions were sexually abused by another female relative (1%) or their mother or stepmother (0.6%)

Male victims were most likely to be sexually abused by another known person (27.3%), followed by a stranger (18.3%), another male relative (16.4%), an acquaintance or neighbour (16.2%), or a family friend (15.6%). Small proportions were sexually abused by their father or stepfather (5%) (ABS, 2017).

As you can see, most sexual abuse is perpetrated by known people to the victim. No appropriately protective parent allows a person who presents as a ‘bad character’ to have access to their children. Presenting as a ‘good character’ is part of the violence and grooming. If someone has abused a child, whether their parent/Brother/Sister/Spouse/Employer/Colleague/Neighbour thinks they are a good person IS NOT RELEVANT.

As a parent of a toddler, I would be absolutely devastated if my child was ever abused and the perpetrator’s sentenced was influenced by a good character reference. How can such a crime as horrendous as sexual violence be carried out by a person who is of good character? This part of the sentencing process for offenders needs to change. Women, children and all people of Australia adequate need protection and justice.