

# Profile and frequency of meeting sexual partners online in Australia: Findings from the second Australian Study of Health and Relationships

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## Introduction, methods and results

### Introduction:

Despite regular use of the internet and smartphones by Australians, few data on the prevalence and characteristics of those seeking sexual partners using these technologies exists at the population level.

### Methods:

Using data collected in 2012-13 from a representative national survey of Australian residents aged 16-69 years we estimated the prevalence of searching for sexual partners online in the past year, with data weighted to match the Australian population. We used logistic regression to determine factors associated with searching for potential partners online.

### Results:

As shown in table 1;

- 5.4% of survey respondents reported searching for potential partners online in the last year.
- 3.1% of survey respondents reported meeting somebody in person.

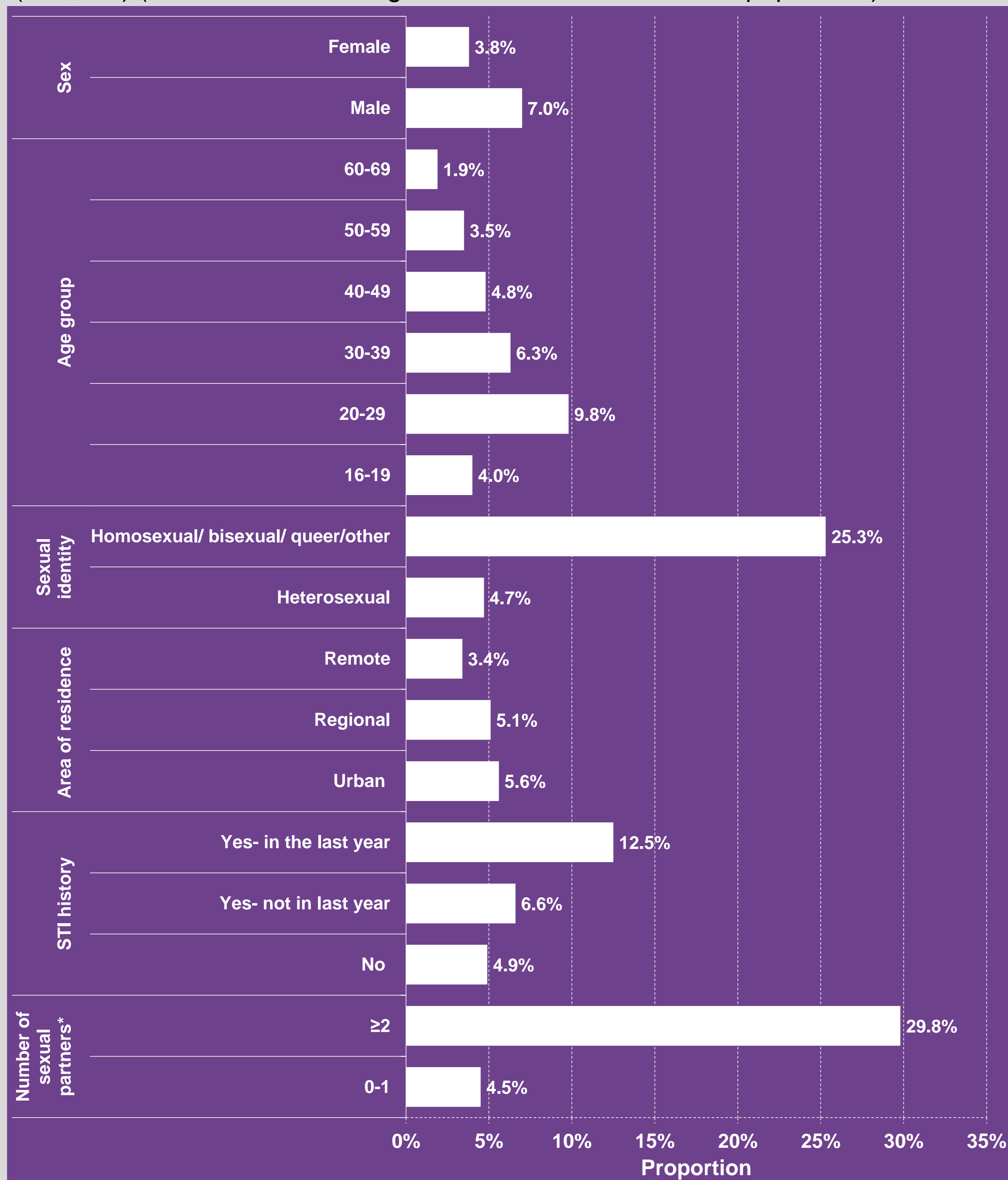
As shown in figure 1;

- Searching for partners online was most prevalent among 20-29 year olds and decreased with increasing age.
- A quarter of non-heterosexual respondents reported searching for partners online in the past 12 months compared with less than five percent of heterosexual respondents.

As shown in table 3;

- Characteristics independently associated with searching for partners online were; male sex, two or more sexual partners in the last year, identifying as non-heterosexual and a history of STIs.

**Figure 1:** Proportion of respondents searching for partners online in the last year (n=8,184) (Data have been weighted to match the Australian population)



\*=1 year recall period, \*\* =6 months recall period, \*\*\*= Ever

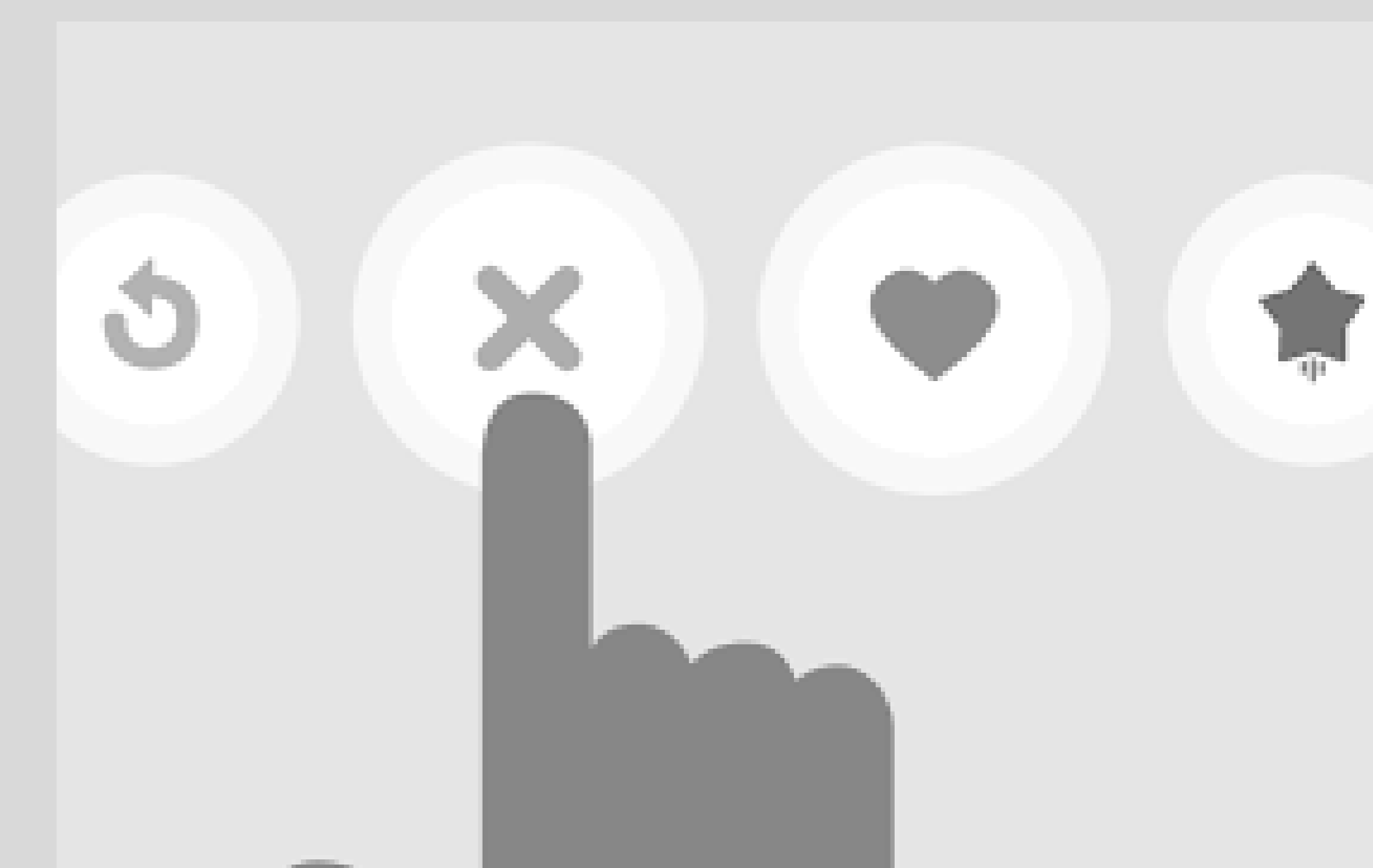
**Table 1:** Proportion of respondents reporting searching for and meeting with sexual partners online (n= 8,184)

	Searched for partners online		Met in person
	Ever	Last year	Last year
Overall	12.1%	5.4%	3.1%
Male	13.5%	7.0%	3.9%
Female	10.7%	3.8%	2.3%

**Table 3:** Factors associated with searching for partners online in the last year (n=8,184)

	OR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	1.92 (1.54 - 2.40)**	3.03 (2.27-4.03)**
Female	Ref	Ref
<b>Sexual Identity</b>		
Heterosexual	Ref	Ref
Homosexual, bisexual, queer or other	6.91 (5.38 - 8.87)**	3.75 (2.78-5.07)**
<b>Age group</b>		
16-19	2.17 (1.13 - 4.15)*	2.58 (1.26 - 5.25) **
20-29	5.71(4.06 - 8.05)**	6.01 (4.16 - 8.68) **
30-39	3.53(2.47 - 5.05)**	4.37 (3.01 - 6.35)**
40-49	2.64 (1.87 - 3.72)**	3.14 (2.19 - 4.50) **
50-59	1.92 (1.33 - 2.77)**	2.17 (1.48 - 3.18)**
60-69	Ref	Ref
<b>Area of residence</b>		
Urban	1.71 (0.80-3.68)	NS
Regional	1.54 (0.70 - 3.35)	NS
Remote	Ref	NS
<b>STI history</b>		
No	Ref	Ref
Yes- not in last year	1.36 (1.08 - 1.71)**	1.32 (1.02-1.71)**
Yes- in the last year	2.77 (1.92 - 3.98)**	2.08 (1.35-3.19)**
<b>Number of sexual partners (last year)</b>		
0-1	Ref	Ref
2	9.13 (7.21 - 11.56)**	8.50 (6.09-11.87)**

NS=not significant; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; OR=Odds Ratio; AOR=Adjusted Odds ratio; CI=Confidence interval



## Conclusions and implications

- Searching for partners online in the last year was relatively uncommon in Australian heterosexuals but more common among non-heterosexuals.
- Those who seek partners online are more likely to have a history of STIs, suggesting they may be more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours.
- Online meet-up sites therefore represent areas for public health interventions targeting at-risk individuals.