

Australian Community Perceptions and Attitudes of Child Sex Offender Prevention: An Analysis of Media Articles

Research Aims

To conduct an analysis of themes presented in Australian media articles to identify potential community perceptions and attitudes of child sex offender prevention in Australia.

Methodology

- Analysis of themes from 140 Australian media articles written about child sexual abuse and/or prevention.
- Sample was comprised of media articles published between 2013-2020.

Key Findings

Lack of consensus on effective prevention

- 39% of the articles in the sample demonstrated support for harsher legislative action such as mandatory minimum sentences, maximum life penalties and the presumption against bail.
- 19% of the articles in the sample demonstrated concern and resistance against harsher legislation in relation to public child sex offender registers, mandatory minimum sentencing and mandatory reporting.
- 16% of the articles in the sample demonstrated support for alternative prevention methods such as reintegrative programs and anonymous hotlines.

Law enforcement as Australia's 'go-to' for prevention

- 36% of the articles in the sample reported police-led intervention strategies as the most dominant preventative action in Australia. Of these articles, 29% reported on the strong capabilities and effectiveness of law enforcement, while 7% positively reinforced the requirement of funding and resources for law enforcement.

Prevention through education and awareness

- 30% of the articles in the sample reported on the importance of education and awareness in preventing child sexual abuse. In particular, parents were frequently encouraged to communicate effectively with their children about potential risks, while community members were reminded of their moral and legal responsibilities to protect and monitor children.

Implications and Recommendations

- Given the media's potential for influence on public perceptions, prevention efforts should consider the dominant opinions on harsher prevention methods that are being presented to and consumed by the Australian public.
- If media articles are representative of public perception, then the Australian public are likely to be more receptive and supportive of police-led prevention strategies.
- Prevention that promotes education and raising awareness is likely to be supported.
- These findings and patterns should be considered alongside research evidence, in order to ascertain if media articles and potentially associated public perceptions are reflective of evidence-based and effective policy, practice, and prevention.