



“Consent is KEY”

A report on exposure to sexual crime
among children who identify as LGBTQIA+



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@ECPATsverige

+46 (0)8 598 920 00

info@ecpat.se

www.ecpat.se

www.dittecpat.se

www.ecpat.se/hotline

www.ecpat.se/vuxenstod

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Author

Jonas Karlsson, Researcher, ECPAT

Research

Vera Kaldal, Advisor, ECPAT

Madelaine Forsberg, Advisor, ECPAT

Editor

María Matseke, Head of Communications, ECPAT

Layout

Anna Frödell, Graphic Designer, ECPAT

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ECPAT Sweden is a child rights organisation working to combat the sexual exploitation of children. We disseminate knowledge about sexual crime and take measures to prevent children and young people from being sexually abused. We conduct awareness-raising efforts and advocacy work directed at those in power, and we collaborate with public authorities, the business community and other organisations. Our operations are divided into three parts: ECPAT Hotline, a website for the reporting of suspected sexual exploitation of children; Ditt ECPAT (Your ECPAT), a helpline for children and young people; and ECPAT Vuxenstöd (ECPAT Adult Support), a helpline for parents and other adults close to children.

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Young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ have much to teach their peers and the adult world through their well-developed and nuanced reasoning regarding consent and vulnerability.

Foreword

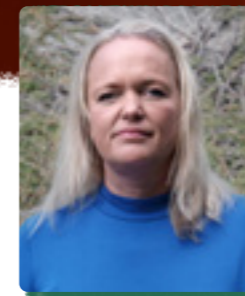
THIS REPORT IS DIRECTED at adults close to children and aims to increase knowledge and understanding of vulnerability to sexual crime among children who identify as LGBTQIA+. The aim is also to share important knowledge about children's views on sex and relationships online.

Children who identify as LGBTQIA+ (regardless of gender identity) are, to a higher degree than children who do not identify as LGBTQIA+, vulnerable to exploitation by a perpetrator who exploits them through the purchase of sexual acts or purchase of their nude photos. ECPAT's survey shows that boys who identify as LGBTQIA+ or non-binary have been exploited by a perpetrator through the purchase of sexual acts to a greater extent than other groups, with more than ten percent of the children who answered questions about vulnerability to sexual crime stating that they have "sold sex", which is more than five times greater than the figure for the children in the reference group who do not identify as LGBTQIA+. Previous research has also shown this to be the case. When we talk about vulnerability to sexual crimes online, the focus can easily end up on girls and the vulnerability of girls to such crimes. But the discussion on sexual abuse needs to be broadened to also highlight the vulnerability of non-binary children and boys who identify as LGBTQIA+.

The perceptions and experiences of children and young people must be the starting point for an ongoing conversation between adults and children – at home, at school and in everyday life. Young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ have much to teach their peers and the adult world through their well-developed and nuanced reasoning regarding consent and vulnerability. At the same time, it is our responsibility as adults to ensure that children receive information and knowledge about

rights, consent and different sexual orientations and gender identities – they are entitled to nothing less!

If we, as adults, take our responsibility and ensure that young people's environments – both online and outside the internet – are also safe and secure for children who identify as LGBTQIA+, they will to a greater extent share with us their perceptions of the positive aspects of life online and their experiences of exposure.



Anna Karin Hildingson Boqvist

Anna Karin Hildingson Boqvist
Secretary-General, ECPAT Sweden



Ingela Holmertz

Ingela Holmertz
Secretary-General, RFSU

Summary

THIS REPORT is based on ECPAT Sweden's (ECPAT) story-based survey "Nude Online" from 2022 and focuses on vulnerability to sexual crime among children who identify as LGBTQIA+, and their views on sex and relationships on the internet. **Of the 6,919 children who answered the question of whether they identify as LGBTQIA+, 1,133 children stated that they did.** The responses submitted by these 1,133 children were analysed by a focus group consisting of four children who all identified as LGBTQIA+.

It is difficult to categorically state that children who identify as LGBTQIA+ are more vulnerable to sexual crimes than other children according to this survey. It is, however, apparent that boys who identify as LGBTQIA+ are subjected to sexual crimes to a much greater extent than boys who do not. The same does not apply to girls who identify as LGBTQIA+. Non-binary children (the only clearly identified transgender identity in our material) are equally vulnerable to sexual crimes as girls and also have similar attitudes regarding sex, relationships and obtaining information on the internet.

Children who identify as LGBTQIA+ (regardless of gender identity) are, to a higher degree than those who do not identify as LGBTQIA+, vulnerable to exploitation by perpetrators who purchase nude photos or exploit them through the purchase of sexual acts. The survey shows that boys who identify as LGBTQIA+ and non-binary have been exploited through the purchase of sexual acts to a greater extent than other groups, which the findings from previous research have also shown. In previous research, the non-binary group has stood out more, although to our knowledge there is no study that has compared the group of boys who identify as LGBTQIA+ with the non-binary group.

The report findings show that children who identify as LGBTQIA+ perceive the internet as more important for obtaining information about sex and relationships, compared to children who do not identify as LGBTQIA+. The children's responses also illustrate noticeable differences when it comes to their views on or experience of consent, bodily autonomy and age differences. In the survey and focus group responses, it is clear that children who identify as LGBTQIA+ have longer and more complex reasoning than other groups with regard to these issues.

Furthermore, the report shows that children who identify as LGBTQIA+ state to a lesser extent than other groups that they have subjected other children to sexual crimes on the internet.

The report findings show that children who identify as LGBTQIA+ perceive the internet as more important for obtaining information about sex and relationships, compared to children who do not identify as LGBTQIA+.

We know that, for young people who identify as LGBTQIA+, the internet entails a greater opportunity to meet like-minded people, but also an increased risk of being subjected to harassment compared to young people who do not identify as LGBTQIA+.

Background

The internet has become a natural part of children’s everyday lives for social interaction, entertainment and obtaining information. Internet use sometimes contributes to better mental health and well-being for children and young people when they come into contact with like-minded people.¹ There is much to suggest that the importance of the internet may be even greater for children who identify as LGBTQIA+. We know that, for young people who identify as LGBTQIA+, the internet offers a greater opportunity to meet like-minded people, but it also entails an increased risk of being subjected to harassment – compared to young people who do not identify as LGBTQIA+. This report on children’s vulnerability to sexual crime, which is based on the survey “Nude Online” (2022) concerning sexual victimisation of children, therefore focuses on children who identify as LGBTQIA+ and their experience of the internet; both the positive aspects and their vulnerability to online sexual crimes.

IN THIS REPORT we use the term non-binary, which is a term that can be used to refer to a person who does not identify as either a woman or a man. For some, non-binary means feeling both female and male; for others, they view themselves as being between these two gender identities, while many non-binary people do not identify with any gender at all. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term for gender identities that do not conform to the binary gender norm.³

Hereinafter, we will use the term LGBTQ+ for the sake of readability, apart from when we talk about descriptive statistics. In the survey, we asked the children if they identify as LGBTQ+. This is to some extent a problematic definition, as the group is heterogeneous and includes several different types of sexual orientations, sexual practices, gender identities and forms of relationship. We have

nevertheless chosen to retain this definition in order to avoid the creation of groups that are too small, as this would make it impossible to perform meaningful analyses of the material. The children referred to in the report as the reference group are the children who chose not to identify as LGBTQ+, which in itself does not necessarily mean that they, in their practices or in their gender identity, cannot be included within LGBTQ+. The group that responded that they are unsure whether they identify as LGBTQ+, and those who did not wish to state their gender identity, have been excluded from the report findings. Children who chose the option “other” with regard to gender identity are not reported in diagrams or tables, but they may be represented in the quotes presented in the report. Despite its limitations, this categorisation of the children provides an opportunity to examine vulnerability linked to whether children identify as LGBTQ+.



When we use the expressions “child”, “children” and “young people”, we do so on the basis of the definition provided in Article 1 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, where it is stated that a child is a human being below the age of 18 years.

The children who participated in the survey were asked to answer the question of whether someone has subjected them to a sexual crime. In the survey, we have chosen the terminology that the children themselves use. The children were asked to indicate if they have been exposed to unwanted nude photos (also called “nudes”), if they have been threatened to send nude photos, if they have had their nude photos

spread, if they have been offered compensation for nude photos or sex, if they have ever sold nude photos or sex, and if they or someone they know has engaged in sugar dating. We are aware that using terms such as “selling sex”, “sugar dating” and “spreading nude photos” may be perceived by the reader as diminishing the seriousness of the crime, but in order for children and young people to understand what we mean, we want to use their terminology.

We will therefore consistently use these terms in the report when presenting the children’s perceptions and experiences, but we will use the legal terminology when describing the crime so as not to diminish the seriousness of the crime.



Definitions of terms

LGBTQIA+ is a collective term that includes several types of sexual orientations and gender identities.

Homosexual: A person who has a romantic and/or sexual attraction to other people of the same sex.

Bisexual: A person who has a romantic and/or sexual attraction to other people regardless of their sex or gender.

Trans: Applies to gender rather than sexuality. This term includes several different gender identities that deviate from society's norms linked to gender identity and gender expression. For example, many trans persons do not identify with the gender they were born with.

Queer: Applies to identity rather than gender or sexuality. This term includes groups and people with the desire to question heterosexual norms through, for example, gender identity, sexuality and/or form of relationship.

Intersex: A person who is born with atypical sex organs, sex chromosomes or sex glands.

Asexual: A term that can be used to describe other types of sexual preferences, including people who do not feel sexual attraction or lust.

Plus sign (+): Used to denote remaining sexual orientations/identities/expressions that do not comply with the concept of heteronormativity².

Heterosexual: A person who has a romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of another sex than their own.

Cisgender/Cis person: A person who identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Non-binary: A person whose gender identity is neither woman nor man. However, non-binary does not mean the same thing for everyone who identifies with it.

Binary: A gender perspective that only allows for the existence of two distinct genders (i.e. man and woman).

Types of crime

Below we describe examples of the crimes that may arise under Swedish law in the situations we asked the children about in the survey and in the analysis group.

Received unwanted nude photos

If a child over the age of 15 has been sent an unwanted nude photo, the child may have been subjected to the crime of **sexual molestation**. If the child is under the age of 15, the child may have been subjected to the crime of **sexual molestation of a child** (chapter 6, section 10 of the Swedish Penal Code). It is illegal to send nude photos to a person who has not given their consent in advance. If the child is under the age of 15, it is illegal to send nude photos to the child regardless of whether or not the child has consented. Children under the age of 15 can never consent to sexual acts.

Threatened to send nude photos

If a person threatens a child with the threat of committing a crime against the child in order to get the child to send a nude photo, the child may have been subjected to the crime of **unlawful coercion** (chapter 4, section 4 of the Swedish Penal Code). Even badgering someone to send a nude photo may constitute the crime of **sexual molestation / sexual molestation of a child** (chapter 6, section 10 of the Swedish Penal Code).

Had nude photos spread

A person who spreads nude photos of a child may be guilty of the crime of **child pornography offence** (chapter 16, section 10a of the Swedish Penal Code) and **unlawful breach of privacy** (chapter 4, section 6c of the Swedish Penal Code).

Offered compensation for nude photos

A person who offers a child money or some other form of compensation for a nude photo may be guilty of the crime of **attempted exploitation of a child for sexual posing** (chapter 6, section 8; chapter 6, section 15; and chapter 23 of the Swedish Penal Code) or **attempted child pornography offence** (chapter 16, section 10a; chapter 16, section 17; and chapter 23 of the Swedish Penal Code).

Received compensation for nude photos

A person who gives a child money or some other form of compensation for a nude photo may be guilty of

the crime of **exploitation of a child for sexual posing** (chapter 6, section 8 of the Swedish Penal Code) or **child pornography offence** (chapter 16, section 10a of the Swedish Penal Code). However, it is not illegal for a child, or an adult, to sell nude photos of themselves.

Offered compensation for sex

A person who offers a child money or some other form of compensation to commit or endure a sexual act may be guilty of the crime of **attempted exploitation of a child through the purchase of a sexual act** (chapter 6, section 9; chapter 6, section 15; and chapter 23 of the Swedish Penal Code).

Received compensation for sex

If a child receives compensation for sexual acts, the child has not done anything illegal. It is the person who has exploited the child who has committed a crime. If the child is under the age of 15, it may be a case of **rape of a child** (chapter 6, section 4 of the Swedish Penal Code) or **sexual assault of a child** (chapter 6, section 6 of the Swedish Penal Code). If the child is 15 – 17 years old, it instead concerns the crime of **exploitation of a child through the purchase of a sexual act** (chapter 6, section 9 of the Swedish Penal Code). However, in certain cases it may concern the crime of rape even when the child is 15 years or older and has received compensation. This may be applicable in situations where free will on the part of the child by law cannot be considered to exist.



Our method and activities

ECPAT'S SURVEY was carried out via a vignette-based questionnaire. The children were presented with the experiences of other children in the form of short stories and were then asked to respond with a piece of advice they would give to a child in the situation described in the story. The responses (the pieces of advice) mirror children's reflections on the stories from previous surveys. In connection with the stories, we also asked the children if they themselves or a friend had experienced something that reminded them of the situation described in the story. They were also given the opportunity to provide a free-form text response. In addition to the vignettes, the children were asked to answer a number of background questions, three attitude questions and questions concerning three focus areas where the answers consisted of more traditional survey questions, as well as free-form text responses. Finally, the children were given the opportunity to submit their own story.

Unlike filling out a traditional survey, the children could choose to stop at any time. When they provided responses in relation to at least one of the stories, their responses were used in the analysis. For children who identify as LGBTQ+, there were 11 stories in total, of which each child could respond to a maximum of three. With the exception of non-binary, the selection of which three stories the children responded to was completely random. Non-binary were randomised to three stories, as the responses would otherwise have been too few to enable us to make meaningful comparisons with other children. At the same time, this means that the group is completely unrepresented in other stories. The children received information about the survey via social media (Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok) during two weeks in June 2022. They could choose for themselves whether or not they wanted to participate.



The child as analyst

WE INVITED CHILDREN who identify as LGBTQ+ to participate in an analysis group to interpret and analyse the material presented above. Throughout the report, we will present reasoning and quotes from our four analysis group participants. Five topics were discussed with the analysis group: "information and sexual relationships on the internet", "consent", "age difference", "bodily autonomy" and "sex for compensation". ECPAT's researchers provided the participants in the analysis group with a brief account of what the survey responses showed in relation to each topic. They read out two or three quotes from the free-form text responses, which the analysis group participants were asked to analyse.

It was apparent that certain topics were perceived as more sensitive than others, in particular the questions concerning age difference and exploitation of children through the purchase of sexual acts. There was also a desire to reach consensus in the group, which may have influenced the discussion. One factor which may have distinguished the children in the analysis group from the children who responded to the survey is that they were all part of an organised activity that provides support for people who identify as LGBTQ+.



Descriptive statistics

A TOTAL OF 13,344 CHILDREN aged 10–17 participated in the survey, and of these, 6,919 children between the ages of 13 and 17 answered the question of whether they identified as LGBTQ+. All children were asked to indicate which gender identity they identify as – girl, boy, non-binary, prefer not to say, or other. Of the children who answered the question of whether they identify as LGBTQ+, 1,349 of them were

excluded from the report due to the fact that they either answered "prefer not to say" or "other" in relation to gender identity and/or "unsure" or "prefer not to say" in relation to whether they identify as LGBTQ+. Table 1 shows the average age and proportion of children with the various gender identities in the group of children who identify as LGBTQ and the children in the reference group.

Table 1

	LGBTQIA+	Reference
Average age – girls	15.77 years	15.64 years
Average age – boys	15.89 years	15.97 years
Average age – non-binary	15.23 years	-
Proportion of girls	67.9%	46.8%
Proportion of boys	22.9%	53.2%
Proportion of non-binary	10.1%	-
Total number	1,133	4,437

There is much to suggest that the internet and social media play a more important role in identity building for young people who identify as LGBTQ+ than for young people who identify as heterosexual and cis persons.

Previous research

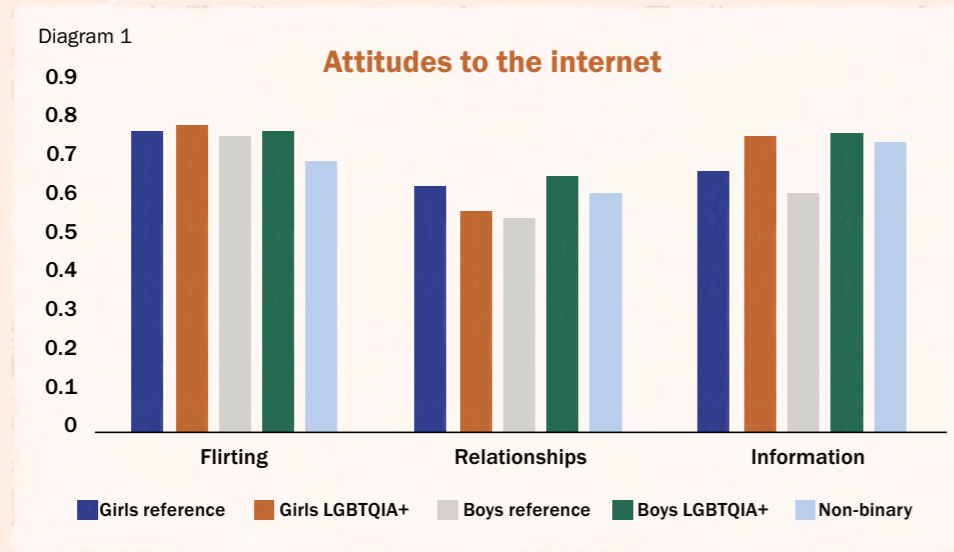
WE HAVE FOUND ONLY limited research that has specifically studied children who identify as LGBTQ+. The majority of the studies that have been carried out study either young adults or a mix of children and young adults. In the research and studies presented below, the term "young people" is used in reference to children, young people and adults aged 11–30. The definition of who is included in the group, and whether these individuals have then been divided into further groups, also varies. However, it is common to merge people who identify as LGBTQ+ into one group, without taking into account the differences that exist between children of different gender identities, which weakens the results.

Studies show that young people who identify as LGBTQ+ use the internet to a greater extent than other young people as a source of information regarding issues relating to general and sexual health.⁴ Research also shows that young people who identify as LGBTQ+ explore their sexuality on the internet to a greater extent than other young people. The sexual exploration that takes place online includes, for example, looking for sex partners and participating in sexual relationships or exchanges by sending sexual images and messages.⁵ There is also much to suggest that the internet and social media play a more important role in identity building for young people who identify as LGBTQ+ than for young people who identify as heterosexual and cis persons (a person who identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth).^{6, 7}

While the internet thus seems to offer great opportunities for children and young people who identify as LGBTQ+, there are also risks.

In a research review examining the link between social media use and depression among young homosexual and bisexual people, the authors suggest that social media can be a haven for the group where they can connect with like-minded people. At the same time, social media can contribute to the deterioration of such individuals' mental health as they are bullied online to a greater extent than heterosexual people of the same gender identity.

Despite what can be claimed to be a more tolerant social climate these days, people who identify as LGBTQ+ bear witness to a greater exposure to sexual abuse, to having sold sex¹⁰ and that they have been bullied and/or threatened over the phone.¹¹ It is more common among boys and non-binary than among girls to have been exploited through the purchase of sexual acts.¹² In research that includes boys and girls but not non-binary, the researchers have seen that boys' and girls' first experience of such sexual exploitation often occurs in the teenage years.¹³ It has also been found that young people who identify as LGBTQ+ are more exposed to sexual exploitation than older people within the same group. In the Public Health Agency of Sweden's survey, young transgender people indicated a worse general state of health and higher level of vulnerability to abuse, discrimination and violence than older transgender people.¹⁴ The same applies to young homosexual and bisexual people, who have been shown to be more exposed to sexual harassment, abuse and violence than both young people who do not identify as homosexual or bisexual and older homosexual and bisexual people.¹⁵



The internet as a protected space

WHEN WE DESCRIBE CHILDREN who have been subjected to sexual crimes online, it is important to remember that this is only one of many aspects of the internet. The internet can be a place for security and fellowship, not least for children who identify as LGBTQ+. In the quote below, we see a non-binary child giving the adult world a reminder that we should not go too far in our desire to protect them, and that the internet can often offer protection for marginalised or vulnerable groups.

This is sometimes our only place that is safe and non-judgemental, so please don't remove our safety net just because you've heard frightening stories. There will always be people who want to take advantage of us, so don't get rid of what's important to us in some attempt to protect us. (Non-binary, LGBTQ+, 15)

An important part of the teenage years is exploring one's sexuality, flirting and having romantic relationships, and it is clear from the survey that this often occurs on the internet these days. Previous research has shown that this can be particularly important for children and young people who identify as LGBTQ+. In the "Nude Online" survey, we asked three questions that measure whether children perceive the internet as a good place to flirt, whether they feel that the internet is an important part of a romantic relationship, and whether they feel that the internet provides good information about

sex and relationships. Diagram 1 shows how many of the children fully or partly agree with these statements.

Of the children who answered the survey, a majority fully or partly agree with all three statements. No major differences can be seen between the groups with regard to the importance of the internet for flirting. When it comes to the importance of the internet for relationships, a lower proportion of girls who identify as LGBTQ+ and boys in the reference group agree with the statement compared to the other groups. On the other hand, it is clear that a larger proportion of children who identify as LGBTQ+ fully or partly agree with the statement that the internet is a good source of information about sex and relationships. It is also worth noting that there are slight differences in the survey responses between children of different gender identities who identify as LGBTQ+.

Our results are consistent with the finding in previous research that young people who identify as LGBTQ+ use the internet to a greater extent for information about sex. The report can thus underline the importance of the internet for knowledge acquisition and identity building for these children. One explanation could be that knowledge about sexuality or gender identity that is not included in the binary gender norm is difficult to obtain elsewhere, for example through sex education at school.

The internet as a source of information for the children in the analysis group

THE CHILDREN IN THE ANALYSIS GROUP feel that the internet is a place that can be both safe and unsafe. They felt that the best thing about the internet is the groups reserved for children who identify as LGBTQ+, where they can be themselves and receive support if they are experiencing difficulties in their everyday life.

Mm, there are some people who say, like, if you tell them what you've been through and such, then they say something like, "oh, you were great for going through this". There are very kind people (Child 1)

They also feel that there are other places where they feel unsafe and where strangers can harass them because of their sexual expression or gender identity. They often feel that other children harass them because the other children have grown up in homophobic families.

Yeah, there are, like, a lot of homophobes and children who haven't grown up (Child 3)

That God doesn't like this... that the Bible says this is wrong (Child 4)

It is apparent that the children do not feel that school provides the information they need, and that they feel that children who identify as LGBTQ+ therefore search for knowledge on the internet.

At school you hardly get to know anything, and you might end up asking classmates who don't know much about it (Child 1)

About what the different sexualities mean, the different identities. We don't talk about that at school (Child 4)

Not only does this create a need for the children to search for information themselves, it also leads to them becoming responsible for educating both their classmates and their teachers on issues concerning LGBTQ+.

And everyone in the class kind of just looks at me because I'm the best at it in the class (Child 3)

I've been told that too (Child 4)

It can vary a lot. It could be something like, "why are you gay?" or "why are you trans?", or it could be something like "what are the different pronouns?" (Child 1)

The children perceived this as both violating their integrity and making them responsible for something they don't want to be responsible for.

These "why are you gay" questions, I think they're just... What?! (Child 3)

It makes you want to ask them: Why are you straight? (Child 2)

When asked what would be most important to make children who identify as LGBTQ+ feel safe, they return to the issue of school and the need for both pupils and staff to receive information – and that scope needs to be allowed for identities that are outside the norm.

I agree with what you said, but maybe also, like, maybe from preschool class until a little higher, not just the fourth grade but also, like, maybe – I don't know – higher. You don't have to talk about it every day, like a Swedish lesson, but maybe, like, just once a year you could maybe have something, some lesson about it each year, or something like that (Child 1)

"Perhaps at school they could discuss it a little more and, like – now and then at school they might say that it's okay to love whoever you want – but it would be good if they could discuss it a little more and make it a bigger thing, so that it doesn't just become a thing that they mention, without really talking about it"

(CHILD 2)

Vulnerability to sexual crime among children who identify as LGBTQIA+

THE INTERNET FULFILLS an important function for many children, but it is also a place where they can be subjected to sexual crimes. Previous research shows that children who identify as LGBTQ+ are more vulnerable to sexual crimes on the internet, and it is therefore important that we listen to the children who have these experiences.¹⁶ In the free-form text responses, a number of children who identify as LGBTQ+ bear witness to the fact that they have been subjected to various sexual crimes, both online and outside the internet.

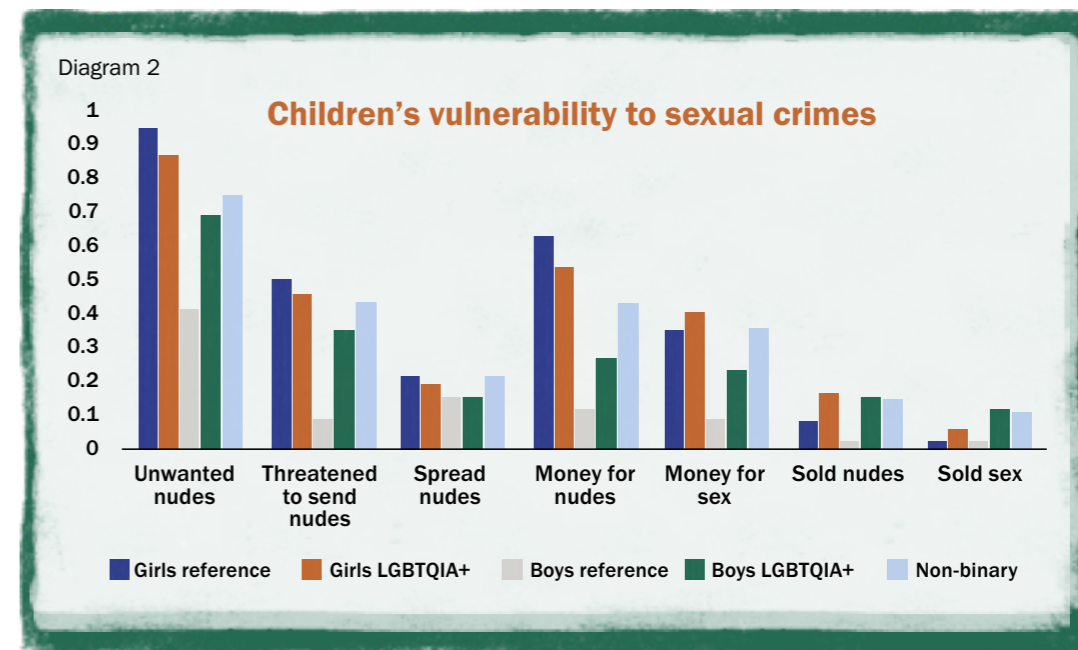
I received unwanted [nudes] a number of times when a person posted my phone number online and asked others to harass me (Non-binary, 17, LGBTQ+)

Me and a friend, a guy, we were very close, not close as in together, but more, like, horny for each other. In any case, we often flirted with each other, and then he started asking me to send nudes. I said no, but he just kept nagging and asking. So eventually I did send him some nudes, and then he sent some back. But he said that he would spread the photos if I didn't continue. My face wasn't shown in the photos, but I was still worried that people would see that it was me, as they might be able to recognise the room. Eventually he ended up spreading the photos because I refused to continue, so I called the police (Girl, 17, LGBTQ+)

The children answered questions about different types of vulnerability to sexual crimes and were also given the opportunity to share their experiences, which the children in the above quotes chose to do. Diagram 2 shows how the children answered the questions. The clearest result was that the proportion of boys in the reference group who had been subjected to sexual crimes was significantly lower than in the other surveyed groups, i.e. girls in the reference group, girls who identify as LGBTQ+, boys who identify as LGBTQ+ and non-binary (where all but one of the children identify as LGBTQ+). The girls in the reference group are the group where the largest proportion has been subjected to several categories of sexual crime. Boys who identify as LGBTQ+ have been subjected to sexual crimes to a significantly higher degree than the boys in the reference group, but in most cases they have been victimised to a lesser extent than girls in both the reference group, the LGBTQ+ group, and the non-binary group. Having nude photos spread is the crime category where the difference between the groups is the smallest.

"I've bartered with one of my rapists that I will have sex with him if he gives me a litre of vodka in payment so that me and my friends can party. I've been deceived and disgusted by myself every time."

(GIRL, 17, LGBTQ+)



Children who identify as LGBTQ+ (regardless of gender identity) have, to a higher degree than the reference group, been subjected to exploitation by someone who has purchased nude photos or exploited them through the purchase of sexual acts. The survey shows that boys who identify as LGBTQIA+ and non-binary have been exploited through the purchase of sexual acts to a greater extent than other groups, which the findings from previous research have also shown.

Overall, it can be stated that it is difficult to categorically claim that children who identify as LGBTQ+ are more vulnerable to sexual crimes than other children in this study. It is, however, clear that boys who identify as LGBTQ+ are more exposed than the boys in the reference group, but they are less vulnerable than the girls in the reference group, apart from when it comes to being exploited through the purchase of sexual acts or having sold nude photos. Girls who identify as LGBTQ+ are not more exposed than the girls in the reference group, although again with the exception of exploitation through the purchase of sexual acts. With regard to non-binary children, they are exposed to a slightly lower degree than girls who identify as LGBTQ+, apart from when it comes to having their nude photos spread, selling nude photos and being exploited through the purchase of sexual acts, where they are at the same level as boys who identify as LGBTQ+. Previous research has often shown that non-binary children are more exposed than other children when it comes to being exploited through the purchase of sexual acts, but these previous studies do not take into account whether or not the participating boys and girls identify as LGBTQ+.



It is clear that boys who identify as LGBTQ+ are more exposed than the boys in the reference group, but they are less exposed than the girls in the reference group, apart from when it comes to being exploited through the purchase of sexual acts.



The girls in the reference group are those who to the greatest extent have sent nude photos without the consent of the recipient and received nude photos that have been spread without consent.

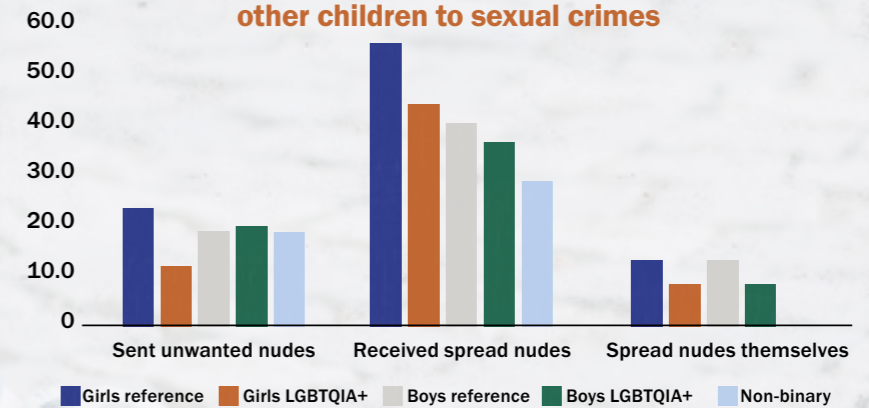
Children who victimise other children

IN THE SURVEY, we asked if the children had subjected other children to sexual crimes. We asked if they had sent nude photos without the recipient's consent, if they had received nude photos that they knew had been spread without consent, and if they had spread someone else's nude photo without consent.

The pattern we see in diagram 3 – the children's responses to the questions regarding whether they had subjected other children to sexual crimes – differs from the pattern in diagram 2 regarding children's vulnerability to sexual crimes. The LGBTQ+ group has to a lesser extent spread nude photos against someone's will, and no child in the non-binary group stated that they had spread someone else's nude photo. When asked if they have received other children's nude photos that have been spread without consent, the children who identify as LGBTQ+ answered in the affirmative to a lower degree than children of the same gender identity in the reference group. With regard to the question of whether they have sent nude photos of themselves without the recipient's consent, the differences in the answers are small apart from when it comes to girls who identify as LGBTQ+, who have done this to a lesser extent than the other groups. The girls in the reference group are those who to the greatest extent have sent nude photos without the recipient's consent and also received nude photos that have been spread without consent. One possible explanation that is to some extent supported in the free-form text responses is that girls believe that the nude photos they send are always welcome and that they do not therefore need to ask for consent.

Diagram 3

Children who have subjected other children to sexual crimes



Children's attitudes and experiences in the grey zone

THE MAIN PART of the "Nude Online" survey focuses on how children relate to the vignettes – the short stories about sexual vulnerability on the internet. The majority of the stories focus on vulnerability to sexual crimes, but there are also a number of stories that do not necessarily depict illegal acts. These stories often illustrate events that take place in a grey zone and depict types of behaviour that may be perceived by the adult world as problematic and risky, but which are perceived by many children as acceptable and understandable. As research has shown that young people who identify as LGBTQ+ use the internet to a greater extent for voluntary sexual exploration, it is particularly interesting to examine their perspectives on these stories. In connection with the vignettes, we also asked the children if they themselves have experience of situations similar to those described. The children were also given the opportunity to comment on the vignettes. In the following sections, we will focus on differences in experience between the groups and will only mention differences in attitudes in the cases where these are clear.

As research has shown that young people who identify as LGBTQ+ use the internet to a greater extent for voluntary sexual exploration, it is particularly interesting to examine their perspectives on these stories.

The selfie – flirting and a question of consent

ONE OF THE VIGNETTES describes a flirtatious relationship between two people where one of them is considering sending a nude photo as part of the flirting.¹⁷ After the vignette you can see the five response options that were presented to the children in the survey.

Li and Ellen meet at training and get along well. They flirt with each other. Li comes home one evening, takes a nude in the bathroom and is pleased with how it turns out. Li considers sending the nude to Ellen as a tease.

[Note: the "Nude Online" survey was conducted in Swedish, and in the survey, the version of the vignette presented here referred to Li with the gender-neutral Swedish pronoun "hen" instead of "she" or "he".]

- 1 Even if you know a person, I don't think it's ever good or smart to send pictures of your body.
- 2 I think it's okay if these two have got something going on and are flirting or are together, but otherwise you shouldn't send nudes to other people.
- 3 I don't think you should ever send nudes unless the other person has said that it's okay. No one wants to receive unwanted nudes.
- 4 As long as you can trust the person and you know that they won't spread the photo, I think it can be fun and exciting.
- 5 I think it's better if you exchange nudes in a case like this.

Table 2 shows how many of the children have their own experiences of a situation similar to the one described in the vignette about Li and Ellen. Around half of all girls in the reference group and half of the girls and boys who identify as LGBTQ+ state that they have experience of a similar situation. Among the boys in the reference group, approximately one in three state that they have experience of this type of situation. This suggests that it is more unusual for boys in the reference group to send nude photos as part of a flirt than it is for the other groups.

Table 2	Girls reference	Girls LGBTQIA+	Boys reference	Boys LGBTQIA+	Non-binary
Experience %	51.9	49.1	29.3	50.9	35.6



"Even though it's 'just' a picture, exchanging nudes is a sexual act, and both people must agree to it before sending anything. It doesn't matter if the people are more heavily involved or if they've just gotten to know each other. Consent is KEY"

(GIRL, LGBTQ+, 16)

In the survey responses, we can see that the biggest difference regarding this vignette has to do with consent when sending nude photos. Most of the children think that it is okay to send nude photos as part of a flirt, and in this respect the gender differences are small. It is more common for girls to think that it is only okay if there is explicit consent from the recipient (in other words, it is not sufficient to simply believe that it is okay). Between girls and boys, both in the reference group and in the LGBTQ+ group, there is a difference of approximately 15 percent. The difference between those who identify as LGBTQ+ and those who do not is even greater, at around 20 percent. This difference is also noticeable in the free-form text responses, where many of the children who identify as LGBTQ+ emphasise the importance of consent. The reasoning they give emphasises that it is okay to send nude photos if both people want to; in other words, they do not attach blame for the act as such but rather focus on the fact that consent must be obtained before sending a nude photo.

You should never send nudes without asking, unless you have previously established that both people are comfortable and okay with it (Boy, LGBTQ+, 14)

Feeling good about yourself – sending for validation

ONE OF THE VIGNETTES in the survey has to do with sending nude photos to people to receive validation in the form of compliments.

Alva has just turned 16. Two years ago she sent a nude to a guy she met online, and he told her that she was cute and sexy. Alva thought it felt good when he gave her compliments. When she received questions from another guy, she sent a nude even though they didn't know each other. He was also nice and gave her compliments. In the past two years she has sent nudes to a lot of guys, some she has flirted with and others she doesn't know at all, but she never sends nudes to anyone who knows who she is or where she lives. She feels that this makes her feel good. The photos haven't been spread as far as she knows, but she doesn't really care one way or the other. She's always careful to ensure that no one will be able to see that it's her in the photos, so that she can deny it if something were to happen.

- 1 I think this is completely the wrong reason to send nudes. This is like an addiction, and she should find other ways to feel good.
- 2 I think it's her body and her choice. If she doesn't care if they are spread, I don't think there is any problem.
- 3 I think this is more dangerous than she seems to understand. Photos can be spread, and even if she tries to remain anonymous, things can go wrong.
- 4 I think that it can be nice to receive validation when you're a little insecure about something, and that this can be a good and safe way to get such validation.
- 5 She doesn't know who she's sending the nudes to. I think that she should consider that she might end up sending them to someone who is much older or much younger, and that's not okay.

Alva thought it felt good when he gave her compliments. When she received questions from another guy, she sent a nude even though they didn't know each other. He was also nice and gave her compliments.

Table 3 shows how many children have experience of situations that remind them of the vignette in which Alva sends nude photos to receive validation. It is apparent that it is common for children in all groups to have sent nude photos in order to receive validation, but that this is even more common in the group of children who identify as LGBTQ+. This difference is particularly clear in the group of boys who identify as LGBTQ+, where experience of this type of situation is more than twice as common as it is for boys in the reference group.

Table 3	Girls reference	Girls LGBTQIA+	Boys reference	Boys LGBTQIA+
Experience %	50.2	62.0	25.3	53.8

The results are consistent with the hypothesis that children who identify as LGBTQ+ use the internet to a greater extent as an arena for their sexual exploration. Many of the children who identify as LGBTQ+ provide an explanation as to why they feel that the internet is a good place to seek validation, a response that is almost completely lacking in the reference group.

“Sometimes you want to get the kind of validation that you can’t find from family or friends. Sending nudes that are anonymous can enhance your self-confidence in a relatively safe way.”
(OTHER, HBTQ+, 17)

I can really relate to this as I have a need for validation, so I kind of want to hear that I’m nice, etc. if I were to send something, which in turn would make me feel pretty good.
(Girl, LGBTQ+, 14)

The sexual exploration that takes place online is not always viewed as unproblematic among the children, regardless of whether or not they identify as LGBTQ+. Children who have experience of having sent nude photos for reasons similar to Alva in the vignette, may have changed their mind about this behaviour afterwards, and some may now even view it as harmful behaviour.

Something I know myself, is that it’s an underlying psychological flaw to need such validation. (Boy, LGBTQ+, 16)

I’ve been in the same situation. I oversexualised myself as a form of self-harming behaviour and didn’t realise it at the time. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 17)

Other children feel that it is wrong to send nude photos in order to receive validation but acknowledge at the same time that this can be a way of dealing with other difficult situations where the alternatives can sometimes be perceived as worse.

It’s a kind of addiction. I myself use it as a way of dealing with my rape. I know it’s wrong, but I’d rather do this than drink or do drugs. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 16)

“Some of my friends and I have or have had problems with sending nudes as a kind of coping mechanism and to receive validation. It’s nice at the time, but later you feel like crap.” (Girl, LGBTQ+, 16)

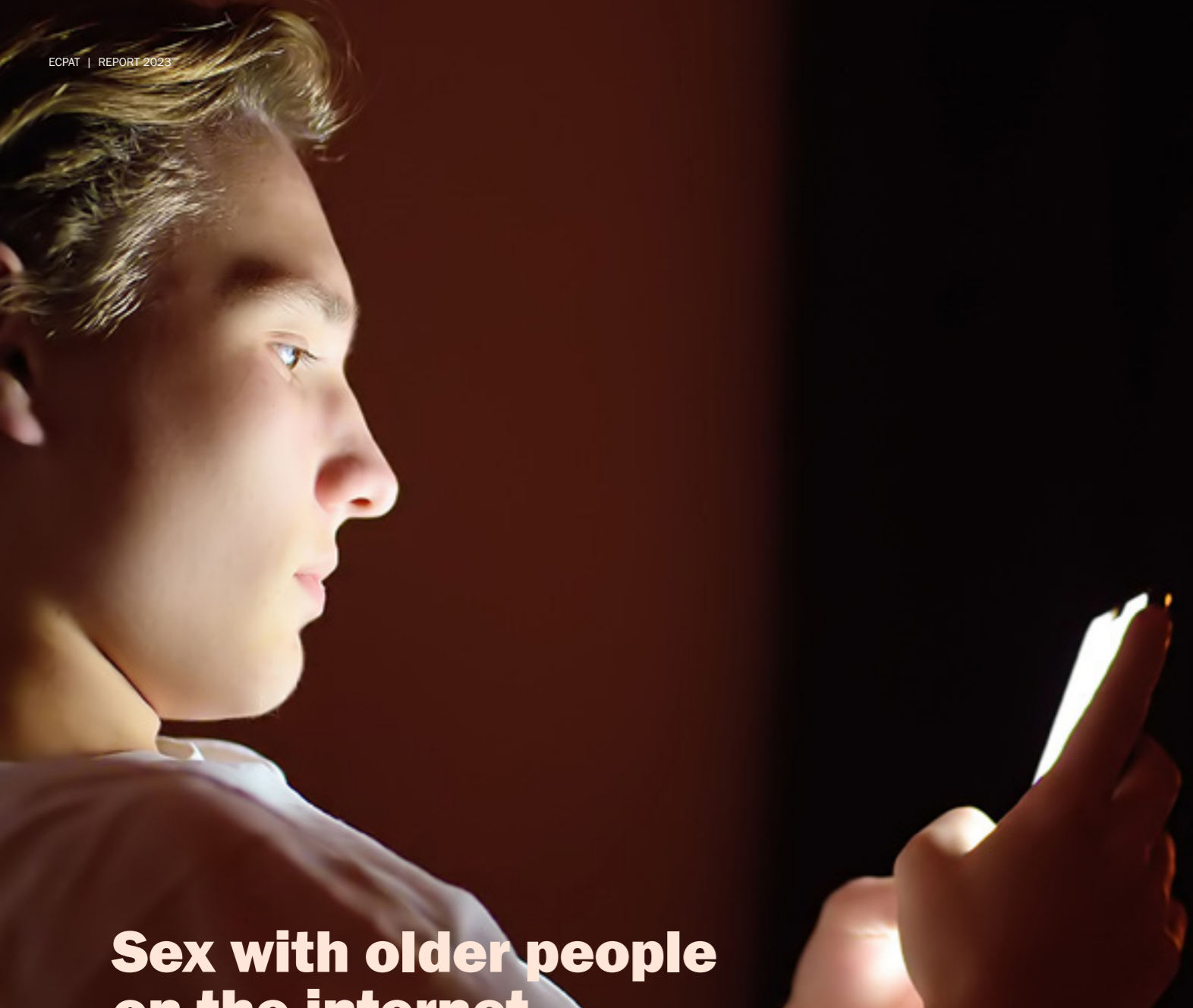
Sending nude photos in order to receive validation is interpreted by a number of children as a problematic way of dealing with self-doubt and feeling bad. At the same time, children who identify as LGBTQ+ make it clear that the solution is not to blame Alva, but instead to help her find other ways to feel good. This type of reasoning is not usually highlighted by children who do not identify as LGBTQ+. **It is not the actual sending of nude photos that is considered problematic, but rather the underlying need to receive validation from others in order to feel good.** The children also point out that the need for validation may mean that Alva exposes herself to risks that she perhaps isn’t able to foresee.

These days, many young people are dependent on validation in order to feel good. And sure, we do need a certain amount of validation, but only to a certain limit. Alva runs the risk of becoming fixated on her appearance and not feeling good when she doesn’t receive as many compliments. Instead, it might be good for her to try to learn to feel good on her own, because she is the most important person in her life. It can be difficult if you place power over your well-being in the hands of others, because it’s not possible to control what they do or how many compliments they give you. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 15)

Overall, a picture emerges in which many children, especially among those who identify as LGBTQ+, send nude photos to receive validation while often feeling torn about their own behaviour at the same time.

I think that the most important thing is not to judge or blame Alva in any way. This is an unhealthy and potentially dangerous way to receive validation and feel good, and she should therefore get help to feel better about herself so that she doesn’t feel the need to seek validation in this way. At the same time, it’s her body and her choice, and she seems relatively aware of the risks, but she’s also only a child, albeit an older child, who should be protected from the potential dangers involved. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 16)

Overall, a picture emerges in which many children, especially among those who identify as LGBTQ+, send nude photos to receive validation while often feeling torn about their own behaviour at the same time. In these responses, the children view the sending of nude photos as problematic and sometimes as a way of dealing with other problems in their lives. This suggests that, within the LGBTQ+ group, exploring one’s sexuality on the internet is not always considered unproblematic. The fact that many children talk about sending nude photos as a way of dealing with feeling bad may also point to shortcomings in the support provided by society for children and young people who identify as LGBTQ+ and who suffer from mental illness or have been harmed in some other way.



Sex with older people on the internet

ONE OF THE VIGNETTES in the survey illustrates a sexual contact on the internet between a boy in the ninth grade and a 26-year-old man.

Gustav is in the ninth grade and hasn't yet come out to his schoolmates or his family. But he has an account in a Discord group with other homosexual guys and men. Gustav feels that this is a safe space where he can talk about most things. He has also made contact with Axel, who is twenty-six years old and someone whom Gustav trusts. Axel tells Gustav that it took a

long time for him to come out to his family, that he was in upper secondary school at the time, but that it went well when he did. He says that Gustav should tell his family, but Gustav wants to wait a little longer. They talk about sex, and one evening things get quite steamy and Gustav takes a nude and sends it to Axel. Things go quiet for a while, and then he receives a nude back from Axel. They keep exchanging nudes, both photos and videos, until they are satisfied. They are careful not to show their faces. This happens a couple more times in the weeks that follow.

- 1 I think that this is perfectly fine. Both of them were on board with it and seemed to like it.
- 2 I think it's stupid to send nudes to someone you only know online. You never know what the other person might do with the pictures, but it's good not to show your face anyway.
- 3 Axel is an adult, and I think that it's disgusting of him to exchange photos with someone who isn't yet an adult.
- 4 There are so many older men who try to get pictures of children, and I don't think that Gustav should give him what he wants.
- 5 I think it was good that he didn't show his face. Everything is safe then.

If we look at the extent to which the children have stated that they themselves have experience of this type of situation (table 4), we can see that the proportion is greater in the LGBTQ+ group compared to the children in the reference group. This is particularly apparent for the boys, with almost six out of ten boys who identify as LGBTQ+ saying that they have experience of a similar situation, compared to just over one in ten boys in the reference group. **Even within the LGBTQ+ group there is a clear difference, with 20 percent more of the boys who identify as LGBTQ+ having experience of this type of situation compared to girls who identify as LGBTQ+.** The opposite applies to boys and girls in the reference group, where a significantly larger proportion of girls have experience of this type of situation compared to boys. One conceivable reason could be the existence of homophobic views in the children's immediate environment – something we can see in many of the free-form text responses in the survey – and which are primarily directed at boys. This creates a fear of exploring one's own sexuality outside the internet in many boys who identify as LGBTQ+. It is therefore not surprising that they seek sexual relationships online, and that an older person may be perceived as safer. It can be easier to meet people of the same sexual orientation on the internet, and the anonymity available there can offer a certain degree of protection from harassment outside the internet.

Table 4	Girls reference	Girls LGBTQIA+	Boys reference	Boys LGBTQIA+
Experience %	33.3	41.8	12.9	59.4

In the quote below, we see how a girl reasons about the situation described in the vignette and what reality can look like for a young LGBTQ+ person. The girl reasons about age differences and relates this to the LGBTQ+ community at large and the special risks for children who identify as LGBTQ+.

I think that this is an incredibly good example to discuss, as many children within the LGBTQ community are exploited in this way. Perhaps you haven't come out yet or you have people who don't accept you, and you feel like no one will ever want you. And then an older person comes along, with more experience of both the LGBTQ community and life in general, and they indicate that they want you, so that you feel heard and loved. However, a situation where a 26-year-old is interested in a 15-year-old is neither healthy nor okay. My question for men like Axel is: why can't you find someone your own age? Could it be that the fault lies with you, rather than everyone else? (Girl, LGBTQ+, 16)

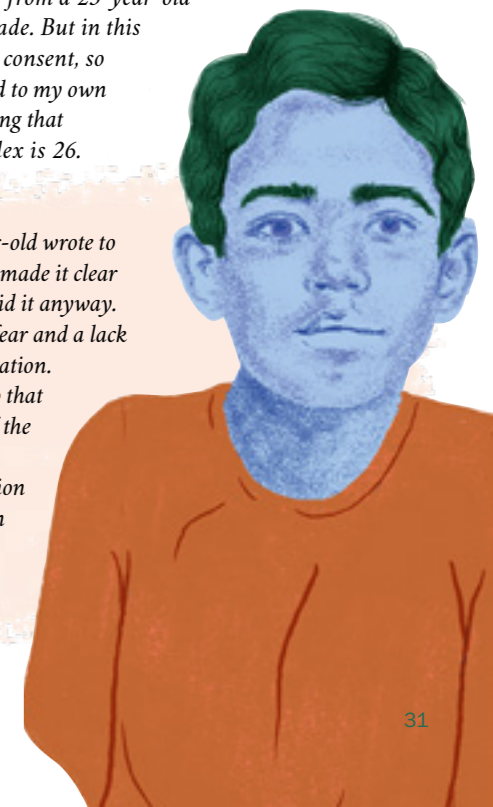
Another girl also reasons about the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ people who have not come out yet, but her reasoning differs from the girl in the previous quote by not reflecting on or problematising the age difference between Gustav, who is in the ninth grade, and Axel, who is 26 years old.

It's easy to be influenced before you've come out, and you can easily feel safe with someone just because they've been in a similar situation. The important thing is to act carefully and thoughtfully. But if it seems to be something that both people like and no one is being pressured into it, I'd say that it's okay. It's especially good that they didn't show their faces, because you never know what might happen (whether or not you know the person). (Girl, HBTQ+, 16)

In the free-form text responses, two other children describe their own experience of having been exposed to situations similar to the one described in the vignette.

I received unwanted nudes from a 23-year-old when I was in the sixth grade. But in this case they both kind of had consent, so that's a difference compared to my own experience, but it's still wrong that Gustav is a minor while Alex is 26. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 17)

When I was 14, an 18-year-old wrote to me and sent me dick pics. I made it clear that I was only 14, but he did it anyway. I went along with it out of fear and a lack of knowledge about the situation. I asked if he was "kinky" so that I could then take the role of the dominant person and thus gain control over the situation and somehow find a certain degree of security in what was happening. (Boy, LGBTQ+, 15)





Selling nude photos

One of the vignettes in the survey has to do with selling nude photos.

CHARLIE IS 17 AND IS IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL.

She is tired of having no money and no job. Her mobile phone is in poor condition, and the battery runs out too quickly. Her parents just say that they can't keep buying her a new phone all the time. A friend tells her about a man she knows online who buys photos. **She says that he is not some sort of creep and that he pays well. All she needs to do is take a nude and he will send her a thousand kronor.** She says that she never takes pictures of her face and that the internet is full of nude pictures so who cares. Charlie adds the guy that her friend told her about, and he DMs her and asks if she wants to sell a nude and get paid via Swish. He says that she'll get more if she shows her face.



- 1** Even if she gets paid, I think that this is really dangerous. He could threaten her with these pictures, and through her phone number he can find her for real.
- 2** If someone wants to pay that much for a single nude, I would also sell photos. 1,000 kronor is a lot of money!
- 3** Personally I wouldn't sell nudes to someone I don't know, but I don't see anything wrong with other people doing it. As long as you don't show your face, the person buying the nude doesn't have the upper hand to blackmail you with it.
- 4** I think that it's better for her to be patient, and that she should discuss with her parents about how she can pay off the cost of a new phone and that she should find a job.
- 5** I think it's really sad and horrible that her friend is encouraging her to do this.

IF WE LOOK AT THE proportion of children who have experience of a situation that reminds them of the one described in the vignette (table 5), we can see that this is most common among girls (both in the reference group and in the LGBTQ+ group) and in the non-binary group. Boys who identify as LGBTQ+ have experience of this type of situation to a lesser extent than the girls in both groups (about one in five boys compared to one out of three girls). Compared to the boys in the reference group, it is however much more likely that boys who identify as LGBTQ+ have experience of this type of situation – three times more likely, to be exact.

Table 5	Girls reference	Girls LGBTQIA+	Boys reference	Boys LGBTQIA+	Non-binary
Experience %	34.0	36.6	6.5	19.2	29.9

In the free-form text responses, the children reasoned differently about how a person should react and/or act in these situations. Some of the children are negative about the idea of selling nudes and point out that selling nudes is risky, while others view it as a question of self-worth and/or morality.

Never sell photos, it can end very badly, especially with phone numbers and all that. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 14)

I think that this particular situation is unsafe as the buyer wants her to include her face and will only pay her after the photo has been sent. (Boy, LGBTQ+, 14)

I don't sell nudes and I'd never consider doing it either, because my body is divine and is worth more money than any man could ever count. I'm also a lesbian. But I still get quite a lot of DMs on Instagram and anonymous adders on Snap who ask if I want to sell nudes or if I want to be a sugar baby! (Girl, LGBTQ+, 17)

If the guy is over 18 then it's a really big problem. This story gives me vibes that he is a pedophile and if he is, Charlie should report this to the police instead. I don't know if you can get paid for reporting these issues and assisting in the capture of people like this guy, but if you can then maybe that would be an option for Charlie. (Non-binary, LGBTQ+, 15)

Other children wrote about their own or their friends' experiences of being offered money for nude photos and how they deal with these situations.

Personally I've only been asked if I want to have a sugar daddy or sugar mommy. My teacher keeps saying that we shouldn't send people nude pictures because they will then always be out there online. Plus, if someone gets a person's phone number then it becomes even easier to find out about that person's life. If an

unknown number calls me, I usually use the trick of adding it in Swish and putting in that I'm gonna "swish" one krona. Then, when I enter the bank app, it says who the number belongs to and I know who has called me. Then I just cancel the payment and get on with my life. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 16)

Some random person added me on Snap so I added back but it turned out to be someone who wanted to buy nudes so I blocked them. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 16)

A guy wanted to buy nudes from my friend for 600 kronor, she asked him to swish the money in advance and then she blocked him everywhere like a real girlboss. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 16)

A handful of children reacted to the fact that it is a friend who gives Charlie the tip about a guy she can sell photos to.

Dodgy friend! Personally I don't usually encourage my friends to take up prostitution. (Boy, LGBTQ+, 15)

Charlie should check to make sure that her friend is also safe. (Non-binary, LGBTQ+, 16)

At the same time, other children felt that there can be situations where it is okay to sell photos, although some also pointed out that there may be risks involved in doing so.

Always do what feels best, and be careful. Make sure not to disclose any personal information or anything that could indicate that it is you in the picture. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 17)

"Personally I don't think that there's anything wrong with selling photos per se. I myself have been in some really tough situations and felt that it was the only choice. But if you feel that it's the only way to get some money, you MUST be SUPER CAREFUL!! You never know who is on the other end of the phone and what their intentions might be." (Non-binary, LGBTQ+, 16)

I would've done it and not shown my face or tattoos that could show that it's me.

(GIRL, LGBTQ+, 17)

It is apparent that the children in the survey have differing views on the issue of selling nude photos. Some see it as morally reprehensible, while others view it primarily as a matter of risk assessment. At the same time, it is also apparent that more children who identify as LGBTQ+, especially girls and non-binary, would choose to sell photos if their situation looked like the one described in the vignette. This view is also reflected in the children's experience of vulnerability to sexual crimes.



When it came to the issue of age difference, the children in the analysis group were more torn. They felt that it was more common with large age differences among people who did not identify as LGBTQ+.

The children's analysis of the vignettes

ALL CHILDREN IN THE ANALYSIS GROUP felt that children who identified as LGBTQ+ talked more about consent than other children. One reason they gave for this was that children with LGBTQ+ identity had their boundaries violated more often than other children.

Because they've been through it and didn't feel comfortable about it, so they just want to feel safe. (Child 3)

Interviewer: *What do you mean when you say that they've been through it? Have people not respected their boundaries?*

I mean that they've said no but they've received them anyway. (Child 3)

The children were relatively taciturn in relation to the issue otherwise, and when it came to nude photos, they – unlike the majority of the LGBTQ+ children in the survey – expressed a strong sense of disapproval.

I think that the only reason you should send nude photos or something like that is if it's for medical reasons, like if

you have a sore... Then you know that the doctor is ready for it and that the doctor has been involved in it before. (Child 1)

When it came to the issue of age difference, the children in the analysis group were more torn. They felt that it was more common with large age differences among people who did not identify as LGBTQ+.

If you're younger, I think that it can be a bit like this (I don't feel like this), but there are some younger children who feel that they want to grow up a little faster, and then they date someone who is a little older, because then they feel more mature, but it feels like this is more common among people who are straight. (Child 1)

I think the most common situation is young girls who are with men. That's also the weirdest thing. The men should understand that they are doing something wrong, and the child's parents should also perhaps figure something out. The child might have friends to whom the child may have said that she has a boyfriend who is 30 or so while she is only 13 or so, and then maybe they need to say something to the parents... (Child 3)

When they heard the vignette about a digital sexual contact between a boy and a man, the discussion became more nuanced.

“There are more straight people, so then you can feel more left out”

(CHILD 2)

“There are some places where I feel a bit lonely, a bit lost, but in other places I don't feel that way at all”

(CHILD 1)

“It's... I don't know... Difficult”

(CHILD 2)

The children in the analysis group alternated between viewing the issue of age difference between adults and children as something they generally disapproved of, to sympathising – when presented with a concrete story – with the child in the story and the need to experience a sense of belonging with other people who have the same sexual orientation. This shifting of perspective was consistent throughout the discussion with the children in the analysis group. Initially they chose to adopt a position against a type of behaviour and connect it to heteronormative contexts, only to later express understanding that the situation was complicated when it concerned a child with an LGBTQ+ identity.

In the discussion about selling nude photos, the children were initially strongly disapproving and expressed distaste at the thought of doing so. This distinguishes them from some of the children in the survey, although it was an issue on which the children in the survey also expressed different opinions, even if they were less judgemental than the children in the reference group. When asked what they think about this in relation to bodily autonomy, the children in the analysis group draw a clear boundary. They did acknowledge that there are situations where children may go along with it for various reasons, but stated that it is only a short-term solution.

I think that you should be allowed to do what you want a little more, like eating what you want and so on, but selling nudes is a no-no... It's not exactly the same thing. (Child 1)

But those who want to buy the nudes are also doing something wrong by asking about it, you shouldn't have to be exposed to someone asking you for nudes if you don't want to. But if you do want to then you're bound to regret it later, because the anxiety is always there. You always experience a kind of anxiety from having done something. You kind of get memories of what you've done and then you regret it, but you can't take it back. (Child 3)

When the discussion turned to the issue of mental illness, the children, without changing their opinion that selling nude photos or sex is always wrong, expressed a certain understanding for those who may still choose to do so.

If you have anxiety or depression, you may be more willing to do it because you feel that you want – I don't know – but it feels like you might want to do something for someone else – so then you do something [...] So maybe you end up selling sex and then you know that now that person feels good because of something you've done, so maybe you feel that it's good, but then afterwards you regret it. (Child 2)

Focus area: Exploitation of children through the purchase of sexual acts

When it comes to the issues of selling nude photos or the exploitation of children through the purchase of sexual acts, a greater proportion of children who identify as LGBTQ+ were subjected to such exploitation compared to the reference group. The children were asked questions about how common they think it is to engage in sugar dating and selling sex, as well as whether they themselves or a friend have ever sugar dated. There were different perceptions among the children about the difference – or if there even was any difference – between sugar dating and selling sex. A number of children emphasised that sugar dating is perceived as more voluntary and more frivolous than selling sex, even though both activities include sex for some form of compensation.

Sugar dating

IN THE SURVEY, the question about sugar dating was presented in the following manner: "Do you think that it is common for people your age to receive things like clothes, nice possessions or trips when they have sex with someone they are dating? (in other words, sugar dating)".

Despite the fact that it is problematic, we consciously chose to use the term "sugar dating" and the definition above. We did this because it is common for children and young people to differentiate between sugar dating and selling sex, and many children who engage in sugar dating do not view themselves as falling within the concept of sex for compensation.

They have a lot of similarities if you think about it, although sugar dating feels a little more voluntary than prostitution. Maybe it's not like that at all, but from what I've heard on the internet, the sugar dating world seems very swanky and luxurious, whereas selling sex feels more coercive, and once you start, you can't get out of it. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 16)

"They're very different things. In my opinion, sugar dating doesn't involve coercion. You get a relationship, sex and things. I would do it!"

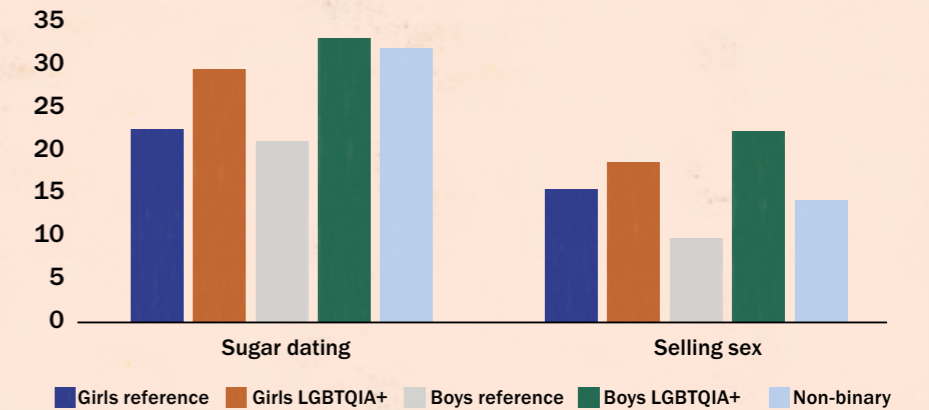
(GIRL, LGBTQ+, 15)

There are also children who rejected the distinction and instead chose to emphasise the similarities between selling sex and sugar dating.

Diagram 4 shows that children who identify as LGBTQ+ are those who to the greatest extent believe that sugar dating or selling sex is quite or very common. We can also see that many of the children differentiate between the two phenomena, as more believe that sugar dating is quite or very common in comparison to what they believe about the prevalence of selling sex.

Diagram 4

Sugar dating and selling sex – quite or very common among children



The diagram shows the proportion of children who believe that it is quite or very common for other children to engage in sugar dating or selling sex.

"Most of the time, the men who are 'sugar daddies' want young beautiful girls and not vulnerable girls. The difference between brothels, only buying sex and sugar dating is that only buying sex has to do with buying power from a vulnerable person, whereas with sugar dating, you get your partner to stay by making them believe that they have the power."

(GIRL, LGBTQ+, 16)



“At our age, as a guy or a girl it’s easy to get sex for free if you want it. So if you sell sex then it’s usually just to get money or something else that you can’t really afford.”
 (BOY, LGBTQ+, 16)

IN TABLE 6 WE SEE how many children either themselves have experience of sugar dating or have a friend who has done it. Children who identify as LGBTQ+ are those who to the greatest extent state that they have sugar dated or have a friend who has done it. There are clear differences between children who identify as LGBTQ+ and children in the reference group; in the LGBTQ group, the boys stand out as those with the greatest experience of sugar dating or knowing someone who has sugar dated, followed by the girls and non-binary. There are, for example, almost four times as many boys who identify as LGBTQ+ who answer yes to this question compared to the boys in the reference group.

Everyone has their own bodies and can do what they want with them, whether in exchange for something or not. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 15)

It feels like an easy way to make money. I remember what it was like to be 16 and not be able to find a job, either privately or through the local public services, so it doesn’t surprise me if this is common among younger people as well. In my group of friends we joke a lot that those who haven’t had sex yet should sell their virginity for money, or that we should pretend to be virgins so that we can sell it. (Other, HBTQ+, 17)

A striking aspect of the children’s quotes is that so many of them perceive sugar dating as relatively unproblematic and view it as falling within the scope of self-determination and bodily autonomy. This is in contrast to the children’s reasoning on the issue of selling nude photos, which more of them viewed as both dangerous and/or morally problematic. However, a few children who identify as LGBTQ+ do make the connection between sugar dating and mental illness and self-harming behaviour – a connection that is common among the children in the reference group.

Table 6	Girls reference	Girls LGBTQIA+	Boys reference	Boys LGBTQIA+	Non-binary
Experience %	13.5	24.1	11.2	40.0	22.6

Judging from the free-form text responses, a number of children who identify as LGBTQ+ have a relatively open attitude towards sugar dating, which is often justified by reference to the individual’s bodily autonomy and the right to one’s own sexuality, even when this entails being exploited through the purchase of sexual acts. This is a very clear difference between the children who identify as LGBTQ+ and those who do not. In the reference group, the activities of sugar dating and selling sex are merged together to a greater extent, and self-harming behaviour is a more common theme when the children in the reference group talk about sugar dating.

People are much more judgmental about this than they should be. There’s nothing wrong with having sex, and there’s nothing wrong with charging money for services you perform for someone else; however, you should be over 18 and completely secure and comfortable in the situation. (Girl, LGBTQ+, 16)

“I don’t think it’s just about money. Many of those who do this often have problems with mental illness, in which case you can view it as self-harming behaviour in a way (if they use it in that way).”

(GIRL, LGBTQ+, 17)

Discussion

THE AIM OF THIS REPORT is to highlight the vulnerability to sexual crime that exists among children who identify as LGBTQIA+, as well as their views on sex and relationships on the internet. It is difficult to categorically claim that children in our survey who identify as LGBTQ+ are more vulnerable to sexual crimes than other children in the study. The girls in the reference group are the group that is most exposed to the categories of sexual crime included in the survey, with the exception of two crime categories: having sold nude photos, and having been exploited for the purchase of sexual acts (having "sold sex"). In both these cases, children who identify as LGBTQ+ (regardless of gender identity) are exposed to a higher degree than the reference groups of boys and girls who do not identify as LGBTQ+. This confirms the findings from other studies, where it has been shown that boys are exploited through the purchase of sexual acts to a higher degree than girls – a difference that, in our survey, is driven by the boys who identify as LGBTQ+. The survey shows that boys who identify as LGBTQ+ or non-binary have been exploited through the purchase of sexual acts to a greater extent than other groups, with more than ten percent of the children who answered questions about vulnerability to sexual crime stating that they have "sold sex", which is more than five times greater than the figure for the children in the reference group who do not identify as LGBTQIA+. This is a finding that we must take seriously. The adult world's preconceived notions that it is primarily girls who are sexually exploited risk resulting in the vulnerability of boys and non-binary children being overlooked and their voices not being heard.

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In this silence, expectations and norms are created and reinforced that diminish and normalise certain children's vulnerability to sexual crimes. In the worst case, this could lead to available measures and support being based solely on the experiences of girls and not taking into account the experiences of boys who identify as LGBTQ+ or non-binary. Without these voices, there is a risk that the children will be left alone in their exposure and that the sexual exploitation and abuse will continue.

It is natural for children and young people to explore their sexuality online, and the internet should be a safe environment in which to do so. It is our responsibility as adults to ensure that children and young people have the tools – in the form of information about their rights, consent and different sexual orientations and gender identities – to which they are entitled. But children rarely talk to adults about how they explore their relationships online, and the knowledge gap between adults and children is large when it comes to online sexual exploration. In this report it is apparent that young people who identify as LGBTQ+ have much to teach their peers and the adult world through their well-developed and nuanced reasoning regarding consent and vulnerability. The perceptions and experiences of children and young people must be the starting point for an ongoing conversation between adults and children – at home, at school and in everyday life – and for the creation of the culture of consent to which young people are entitled. That young people who identify as LGBTQ+ to a greater extent seek support and help from others of the same age is something that is important to problematise, as friends of the same age do not always possess the

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knowledge that children need. In our "Nude Online" survey and via our Ditt ECPAT helpline, we encounter many children and young people who lack knowledge of what is legal and what is not, and in the long run such a lack of knowledge could lead to children being subjected to crimes, or subjecting other children to crimes, without being aware of it. This is particularly apparent when it comes to what the children call "sugar dating" and large age differences in relationships. The children have an open attitude towards sugar dating, which is often justified by reference to the individual's bodily autonomy and the right to one's own sexuality – even when this entails being exploited through the purchase of sexual acts. This is a very clear difference between the children who identify as LGBTQ+ and those who do not.

For children and young people who identify as LGBTQ+, not having come out yet could lead to an increased degree of vulnerability, which may contribute to them seeking sexual relationships on the internet. In many of the free-form text responses in the survey, we can also see the existence of homophobic views in the children's immediate environment, and that these views are primarily directed at boys who identify as LGBTQ+. Vulnerability and harassment can create a fear of exploring one's identity and sexuality outside the internet. It is understandable that children look to adults who send out signals that they accept the child and can provide the security and experiences that the child

lacks. This trust must not be betrayed by members of the adult world by subjecting the child to crime and/or exploiting a position of power. In this context, conceptions of gender also come into play, as the vulnerability of boys and non-binary children to sexual crimes is largely not talked about, regardless of the children's sexual orientation. There is an important discussion to be had for the LGBTQ movement, as children bear witness to the fact that relationships between teenage children and adults are common, and that adults use their power, their experience and children's position of dependency to exploit children in vulnerable situations – for example, young people who identify as LGBTQ+ and have not yet come out. Any situation in which adults sexually exploit children and young people who are simply exploring their sexuality is completely unacceptable, regardless of what the victim's attitude is towards the relationship and/or the crime. Despite the fact that this is, of course, not a problem that is solely limited to the LGBTQ world – and despite the fact that the issue may be extra sensitive as it relates to a vulnerable group – a fear of raising and addressing this issue will only be to the detriment of the children concerned.

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@ECPATsverige

+46 (0)8 598 920 00

info@ecpat.se

www.ecpat.se

www.ecpat.se/hotline

www.dittecpat.se

Bankgiro: 903-4349

