

CHILD-SAFETY BASE RATES · INDEPENDENT ESTIMATE

How many people in Sweden have a sexual interest in children?

A prevalence estimate, the path from attraction to offending, and why the detection model uses one base rate — not ethnicity.

10.6M

Population (SCB, 2025)

4.2M

Adult men

~42,000With pedophilic attraction
(~1%)**~2,900**Active and flaggable on
Facebook**This brief measures risk signals, not guilt**

This brief estimates prevalence to calibrate a child-safety triage model. The figures are order-of-magnitude estimates drawn from published research, not a census. A model score is a **risk signal for human review** — never a determination that any individual has a sexual interest in children or has committed an offence.

SUMMARY

The estimate in brief

Sweden has about **4.2 million adult men**. Applying the prevalence rates measured in peer-reviewed community research, on the order of **40,000 to 210,000** have some sexual interest in children, depending entirely on how narrowly that is defined. The commonly cited clinical estimate of about 1% gives roughly **42,000**.

Far fewer act on it, and far fewer still are **active, detectable online predators** at any given moment — on the order of a few thousand per platform. Each of these is a different question with a different denominator, and the gap between them is the whole reason a detection score must be reviewed by a person before anything follows.

Key figure

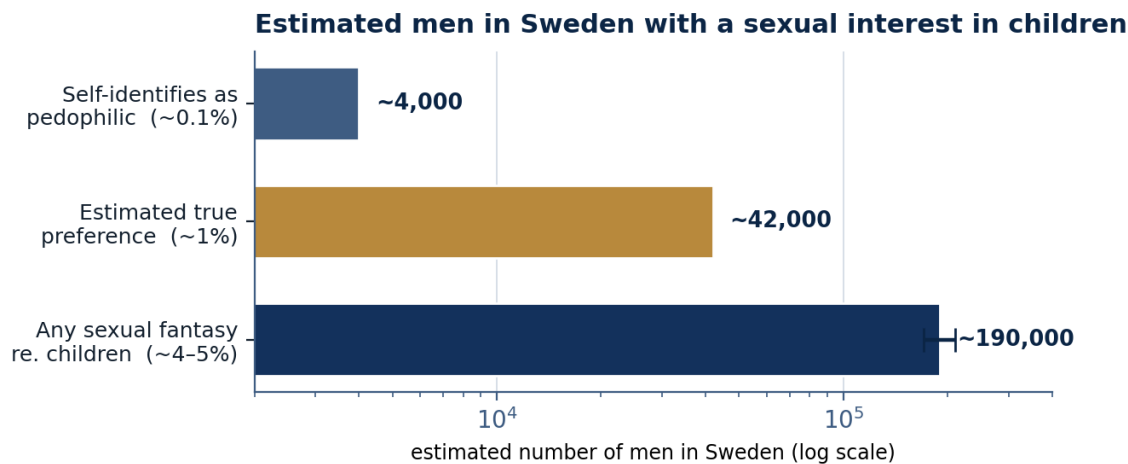
About **42,000** men in Sweden plausibly have a pedophilic attraction (a roughly 1% base rate among men). This figure follows from the **universal prevalence among men alone** — it neither requires nor is explained by immigration (see Section 4).

PREVALENCE

Who has a sexual interest in children

The answer depends on definition, which is why we show three. Rates are for men; women's prevalence is much lower and poorly measured, so the population figures below are men-based.

Definition	Prevalence (men)	Estimate, Sweden	Source
Self-identifies as pedophilic	~0.1%	~4,000	Dombert 2016 [1]
Estimated true pedophilic preference	~1%	~42,000	Seto; Dunkelfeld [2][3]
Any sexual fantasy about prepubescent children	~4-5%	~170,000-210,000	Dombert 4.1% [1]; Seto [2]



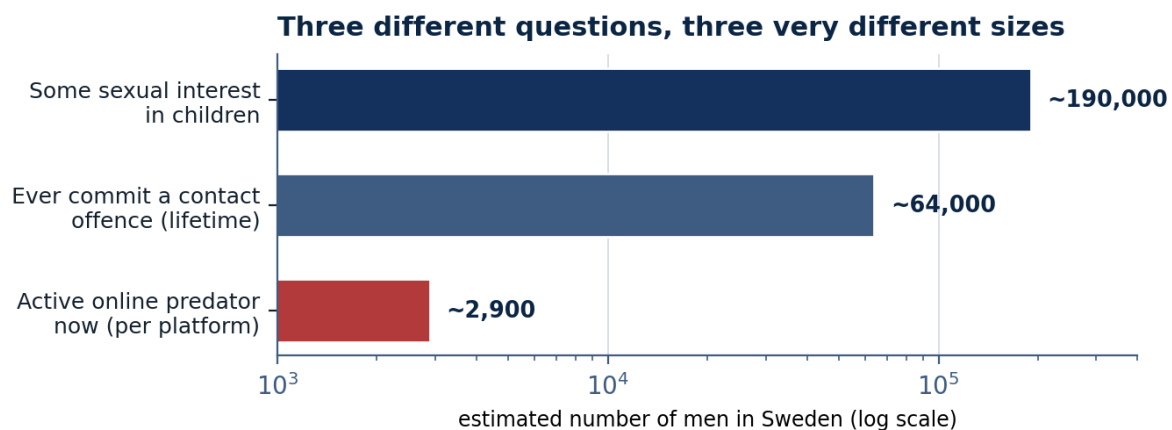
Illustrative application of peer-reviewed prevalence rates to ~4.2M Swedish adult men. Definitions drive the estimate.

FROM ATTRACTION TO OFFENDING

Three different questions

Attraction, offending, and active online predation are not the same population. Most people with the attraction never offend; many who offend are not exclusive pedophiles; and only a tiny share are actively pursuing contact online at any one moment.

Community self-report puts **lifetime** sexual contact with a child at about 1.5% of men (~64,000 in Sweden). The number **actively** running predatory contact on a single platform right now is far smaller — roughly 0.02-0.2% of adult accounts, i.e. ~1,200-16,000 on Facebook, base case ~2,900. The intuition that 'very few become predators' is correct for that last, currently-active number — but not for 'ever offends'.



Overlapping populations, not a clean subset. 'Active now' shows the per-platform (Facebook) base case ~2,900.

METHODOLOGY

Why one base rate — and not ethnicity

A natural question is whether immigration changes the estimate. The evidence says: use a single population base rate, for four reasons.

- **Pedophilia is found across all populations at broadly similar rates.** It is a sexual age-orientation, not a cultural trait; there is no credible evidence it is several-fold more common in any ethnic or religious group.
- **Child marriage is not pedophilia.** It overwhelmingly involves post-pubertal adolescent girls and is driven by poverty, custom and law — not attraction to prepubescent children. Conflating the two is a category error.
- **The premise that marriage is 'legal from 9' is inaccurate.** Minimum marriage ages across the Middle East run from about 13 (Iran) up to 18–20, with several states recently raising the floor to 18; Sweden does not recognise child marriages at all.
- **Weighting a detector by national origin would manufacture systematic false positives** against an entire group — a discriminatory harm and a breach of GDPR fairness and the EU AI Act. The model therefore uses one base rate.

This is the same principle that governs the whole system: it flags **behaviour, not identity**, and a flag is a risk signal for human review, never proof of guilt.

UNCERTAINTY

How firm are these numbers

- **Definitions dominate.** Narrow vs broad definitions move the count by 50-fold; always state which one.
- **Self-report bias.** Anonymous surveys capture more than clinical samples but still under- and over-count.
- **Lifetime vs current.** 'Ever offended' and 'active now' differ by more than an order of magnitude.
- **Platform and time.** Facebook holds few Swedish minors; offenders adapt. Any figure is a snapshot.

SOURCES

Sources

- [1] Dombert B. et al. (2016). How Common is Men's Self-Reported Sexual Interest in Prepubescent Children? J. Sex Research. PubMed 26241201.
- [2] Seto M. C. (2017/2018). The motivation-facilitation model and prevalence of pedophilia / hebephilia; review, Frontiers in Human Neuroscience.
- [3] Beier K. M. et al., Prevention Project Dunkelfeld / Troubled Desire (Charité Berlin): ~1% of men report pedophilic interest. troubled-desire.com.
- [4] Online crowdsourcing prevalence study (2022), PMC8848059: self-reported sexual interest in children and harmful behaviour.
- [5] Statistics Sweden (SCB), population by age and sex, 2025. scb.se.
- [6] Population Reference Bureau, Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa (minimum-age law). prb.org.
- [7] Girls Not Brides, country profiles (minimum marriage age; recent reforms). girlsnotbrides.org.
- [8] Fry D. et al. (2025), Online child sexual exploitation prevalence: systematic review and meta-analysis, Lancet Child Adolesc Health.

What this brief measures A prevalence estimate to calibrate a child-safety triage model. It reports risk signals and base rates, not findings of guilt about any individual.	No group targeting The estimate uses one population base rate. The system flags behaviour — not identity, national origin, religion, or belief.
Sources Public statistics (Statistics Sweden) and peer-reviewed research. Estimates are reproducible from the cited rates and population figures.	Uncertainty and correction Figures are order-of-magnitude estimates and may fall outside the stated ranges. Methodological corrections are welcome.