

## Attitudes to same-sex adoption

### Changes in legislation

In recent years, same-sex adoption has become legal in the ACT, Western Australia, New South Wales, and most recently, Tasmania. Although same-sex couples in other states can't adopt, they can foster children, and single gay men or women can adopt. How do Australian church attenders view these developments in same-sex adoption? Do they support or oppose such legislation?

In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

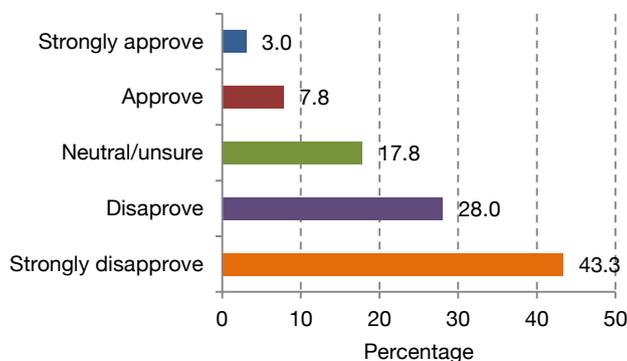
#### **Do you approve or disapprove of allowing same-sex couples to adopt?**

- Strongly approve
- Approve
- Neutral/unsure
- Disapprove
- Strongly disapprove

### Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, a small minority of church attenders strongly approved (3%) or approved (8%) of same-sex adoption. Strong disapproval of same-sex adoption was voiced by 43% of attenders, and a further 28% disapproved, leaving 18% of attenders neutral or unsure about this issue.

**Figure 1: Attitudes to same-sex adoption**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,375).

A national poll conducted in 2013 found that two thirds of Australians either strongly agreed or agreed somewhat that same sex couples should have the same rights to adopt children as heterosexual couples do. This stands in strong contrast to the over two thirds of church attenders who disapproved of same sex adoption in 2011 (although it is possible that views may have shifted somewhat among church attenders in the last two years).

### Age, gender and education

Approval of same-sex adoption was less common among church attenders the older they were. The 15-19 year old grouping had by far the highest approval rate, with over a fifth (21%) approving or strongly approving of same-sex adoption. This contrasts with those 80 and older, where only 4% approved. Those 80 and above were also the least likely to be unsure regarding this issue, and most likely to disapprove (84%, versus 57% of 15-19 year olds).

**Table 1: Attitudes to same-sex adoption by age**

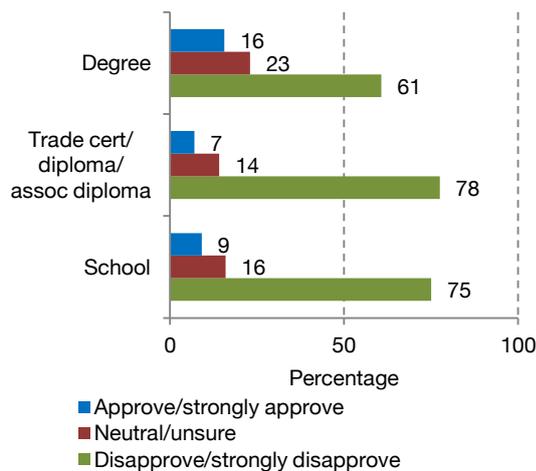
	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	Percentage							
<b>Approve</b>	21	18	13	12	10	11	6	4
<b>Neutral/unsure</b>	22	18	19	21	16	18	19	12
<b>Disapprove</b>	57	64	68	67	74	72	75	84

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,361).

Note: Strongly approve is added to approve, likewise for disapprove.

Views about same-sex adoption differed little between men and women. However, church attenders differed significantly in their views on same-sex adoption depending on their level of education (see Figure 2). Those whose highest level of education was school or a trade certificate/diploma were more likely to disapprove or strongly disapprove of same-sex adoption than those who were university educated. For those with a degree, 61% disapproved, compared to 78% of those with a trade certificate/diploma and 75% of those with schooling only. Church attenders with a degree were also more likely to be neutral/unsure about this issue (23%) than those with a trade certificate/diploma (14%) and those with schooling only (16%).

**Figure 2: Same-sex adoption by education**

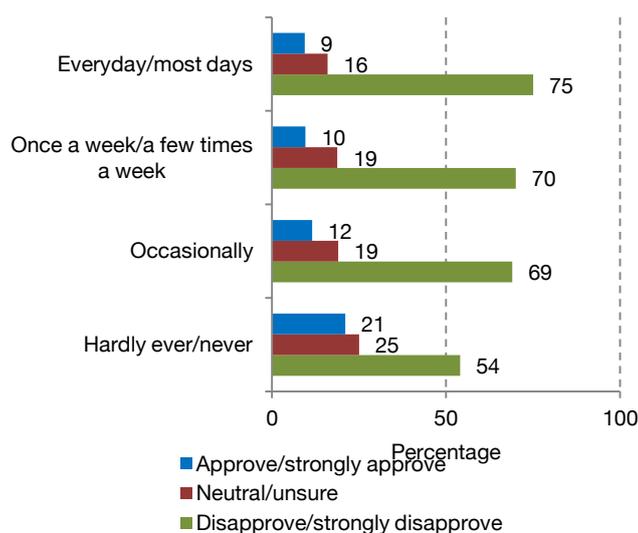


Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,352).

### Religious practice

Do the views of church attenders on same-sex adoption differ depending on how active they are in the church and their faith? Some 74% of weekly (or more frequent) attenders disapproved/strongly disapproved of same-sex adoption. This compares to 56% of those who attended church less than weekly. Church attenders who went to church at least monthly but less often than weekly were particularly uncertain in their views (29% neutral or unsure, versus 16% of more frequent attenders and 14% of infrequent attenders).

**Figure 3: Same-sex adoption by devotional practice**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,353).

Views on same-sex adoption also differ significantly depending on attenders' frequency of private devotions (see Figure 3). Those who 'hardly ever/never' did

private devotions had a 21% approval rate of same-sex adoption. This is higher than those who did them occasionally (12%), once or a few times a week (10%), and everyday/most days (9%).

Attenders who were new to church in the last five years were much more approving of same-sex adoption than longer term attenders (27% vs. 11%). Some 54% of newcomers and 71% of longer term attenders disapproved of same-sex adoption.

### Denominational differences

Uniting Church attenders were the most likely to approve of same-sex adoption, with 19% approving or strongly approving (see Table 2). 'Other Protestant' (85%), Pentecostal (84%) and Baptist/Churches of Christ (82%) attenders were the most likely to disapprove/strongly disapprove. Some 23% of Catholic attenders were neutral/unsure about the issue.

**Table 2: Same-sex adoption by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
<b>Approve</b>	14	4	14	11	3	19	5
<b>Neutral/unsure</b>	14	14	23	13	13	19	10
<b>Disapprove</b>	72	82	64	76	84	62	85

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2 (n=1,375)

Note: Strongly approve is added to approve, likewise for disapprove.

### Summary

The vast majority of church attenders disapprove or strongly disapprove of same-sex adoption. Those who approve or strongly approve in the 2011 NCLS were most likely to be young people, university educated, and less active in their faith – but support for same sex adoption was still a minority position among these groups. Views also differed between denominations, with disapproval lower among Uniting and Catholic attenders than among the other denominations.

### Data sources

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Attitudes to same-sex adoption, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14012. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.