

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE FACTS

Child sexual abuse is a crime that happens across race, religion and class and has lifetime effects. It includes any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer<sup>i</sup>. Child sexual abuse is often predicated on silencing the victim, and as a result, reporting and disclosure is low. Even without knowing the full scope of child sexual abuse instances, most experts will agree that 500,000 children will be impacted by child sexual abuse per year<sup>ii</sup>.

Annually, YWCA associations provide nearly 980,000 women and children with gender based violence services. At YWCA, we know that not all violence is acknowledged or responded to equally and that some victims go unrecognized altogether. Child sexual abuse survivors are often left out of the mainstream dialogue about gender-based violence altogether despite their heightened risk. YWCA is the largest network of domestic violence service providers in the country and is also dedicated to promoting women's and children's health and safety through a variety of local programs, legislative advocacy, and issue education.

### FACTS

- A common myth is that child sexual abuse is perpetrated by strangers and pedophiles. But most people who sexually abuse children are our friends, partners, family members, and community members. About 93 percent of children who are victims of sexual abuse know their abuser<sup>iii</sup>. Less than 10 percent of sexually abused children are abused by a stranger.
- Children are at heightened risk for sexual violence. Nearly 70 percent of **all** reported sexual assaults occur to children ages 17 and under<sup>iv</sup>.
- One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old<sup>v</sup>.
- 12.3 percent of women were age 10 or younger at the time of their first rape/victimization, and 30 percent of women were between the ages of 11 and 17<sup>vi</sup>.
- More than one-third of women who report being raped before age 18 also experience rape as an adult<sup>vii</sup>. Survivors of child sexual abuse are also more likely to experience rape and intimate partner violence in adulthood.<sup>viii</sup>
- 96 percent of people who sexually abuse children are male, 76 percent are married men<sup>ix</sup>, and 76.8 percent of people who sexually abuse children are adults<sup>x</sup>.
- The younger the victim, the more likely it is that the abuser is a family member. Of those molesting a child under six, 50 percent were family members. Family members also accounted for 23 percent of those abusing children ages 12 to 17<sup>xi</sup>.
- Abusers tend to utilize a manipulative process called “grooming” in order to gain the family’s and victim’s trust, providing them with more access to the child. Grooming behaviors may include<sup>xii</sup>:
  - Special attention, outings, and gifts
  - Isolating the child from others
  - Filling the child’s unmet needs
  - Filling needs and roles within the family
  - Treating the child as if he or she is older

- Gradually crossing physical boundaries, and becoming increasingly intimate/sexual
- Use of secrecy, blame, and threats to maintain control
- Child sexual abuse can have lifetime impacts on survivors—especially without support. It can impact educational outcomes, lead to heightened symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, higher suicidality, drug abuse, higher likelihood of teen pregnancy and chronic health issues.<sup>xiii</sup>
- More than 90 percent of girls in juvenile justice systems self-disclose trauma.<sup>xiv</sup> In fact, justice-involved girls are victimized by sexual violence at an earlier average age, and for a longer average duration, than other forms of abuse<sup>xv</sup>.
- In primary care settings, physical or sexual abuse in childhood is reported by approximately 20 to 50 percent of adults; among patients with depression, irritable bowel, chronic pain, or substance abuse, prevalence of reported childhood physical or sexual abuse runs as high as 70 percent.<sup>xvi</sup>

## HOW ADVOCATES AND NONPROFITS CAN HELP

**It is important not focus our attention on prevention efforts that place the expectation of abuse prevention on children. It is the job of adults to protect children. Talk about child sexual abuse in your communities to help break the silence and stigma.**

- Children who have experienced abuse often keep it a secret. One of the best ways to prevent child sexual abuse and to act as supportive first responders when a child discloses is by maintaining healthy, open relationships with children in your life—so they know you are a safe adult they can tell if something happens.
- Believe them—very few allegations of child sexual abuse are false. If a child discloses abuse, believe them, support them, and know the mandated reported laws in your community.
- Try to remain calm, so that the child doesn't blame themselves for the abuse. If you react with anger, the child may change or recant their story to avoid the feeling that people are “angry at them” when abuse is still happening.
- Help set boundaries for children, and pay attention when you feel that other adults are crossing boundaries with children, like demanding physical touch (hugs, kisses), spending alone time with a child in a school or church setting. Help uphold and model boundaries and allow children to create boundaries for themselves.
- Advocate for organizational policies (within your organizations and in other community organizations) that reduce one adult/one child interactions—group settings are safest.

- Let children know that they have the right to make decisions about their bodies. Empower them to say no when they do not want to be touched, even in non-sexual ways (e.g., refusing hugs) and to say no to touching others.
- Teach children accurate names of private body parts so that they know what to call them if they ever experience inappropriate sexual touch.
- Avoid focusing exclusively on “stranger danger.” Keep in mind that most children are abused by someone they know and trust, including family members.<sup>xvii</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> Child Sexual Abuse Fact Sheet. (April 2009). Child Sexual Abuse Committee of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

<sup>ii</sup> The Children’s Assessment Center, Houston, Texas.

<sup>iii</sup> Child Sexual Abuse Statistics. (2015). Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), <https://www.rainn.org/articles/child-sexual-abuse>

<sup>iv</sup> National Crime Victimization Survey, Statistic calculated by staff at Crimes against Children Research Center. 2002.

<sup>v</sup> Townsend, C., & Rheingold, A.A., (2013). Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners: studies. Charleston, S.C., Darkness to Light. Retrieved from [www.D2L.org](http://www.D2L.org).

<sup>vi</sup> Statistics About Sexual Violence. (2015). National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

<sup>vii</sup> Statistics About Sexual Violence. (2015). National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> The Abel and Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study and the 1999 U.S. Census Statistical Abstract

<sup>x</sup> Statistics About Sexual Violence. (2015). National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

<sup>xi</sup> Child Sexual Abuse Statistics (2014). Darkness to Light.

<sup>xii</sup> Child Sexual Abuse Statistics (2014). Darkness to Light.

<sup>xiii</sup> Child Sexual Abuse Fact Sheet. (April 2009). Child Sexual Abuse Committee of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

<sup>xiv</sup> Julian D. Ford, et al. (2007). Trauma Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: Critical Issues and New Direction. Retrieved 15 January 2017 from [http://www.ncmhjj.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2007\\_Trauma-Among-Youth-in-the-Juvenile-Justice-System.pdf](http://www.ncmhjj.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2007_Trauma-Among-Youth-in-the-Juvenile-Justice-System.pdf).

<sup>xv</sup> Malika Saada Saar, Rebecca Epstein, Lindsay Rosenthal, Yasmin Vafa, Center for Poverty and Inequality | Georgetown University Law Center, The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: the Girls’ Story [http://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015\\_COP\\_sexual-abuse\\_layout\\_web-1.pdf](http://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015_COP_sexual-abuse_layout_web-1.pdf)

<sup>xvi</sup> Springer, K. W., Sheridan, J., Kuo, D., & Carnes, M. (2003). The Long-term Health Outcomes of Childhood Abuse: An Overview and a Call to Action. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 18(10), 864–870. <http://doi.org/10.1046/j.1525-1497.2003.20918.x>

<sup>xvii</sup> Adapted from 7 Steps to Protecting our Children: A guide for Responsible Adults. Darkness to Light, 2015. For more tips on Protecting children <http://www.d2l.org/atf/cf/%2Fpercent7B64AF78C4-5EB8-45AA-BC28-F7EE2B581919%2Fpercent7D77%2Fpercent20Steps%20to%20Protecting%20Our%20Children.pdf>