

## 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 in health and safety programs. Girls' empowerment, early childcare, and after school programming are just a few of the youth-focused programs YWCAs provide in communities across the country. YWCA is committed to women and girls' health, safety, and empowerment.

### FACTS

- A common myth is that child sexual abuse is perpetrated by strangers. 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>.
- Over 12 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>.
- Close to 96 percent of people who sexually abuse children are male, 76 percent are married men<sup>viii</sup>, and 76.8 percent of people who sexually abuse children are adults<sup>ix</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>x</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>xi</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>xii</sup>

## HOW ADVOCATES AND NONPROFITS CAN HELP

**Common prevention efforts too often place the expectation of abuse prevention on children. Instead, adults are responsible for protecting 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>xiii</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>

- 
- iv National Crime Victimization Survey, Statistic calculated by staff at Crimes against Children Research Center. 2002.
- v 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).
- vi Statistics About Sexual Violence. (2015). National Sexual Violence Resource Center.
- vii Statistics About Sexual Violence. (2015). National Sexual Violence Resource Center.
- viii The Abel and Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study and the 1999 U.S. Census Statistical Abstract
- ix Statistics About Sexual Violence. (2015). National Sexual Violence Resource Center.
- x Child Sexual Abuse Statistics (2014). Darkness to Light.
- xi Child Sexual Abuse Statistics (2014). Darkness to Light.
- xii Child Sexual Abuse Fact Sheet. (April 2009). Child Sexual Abuse Committee of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
- xiii 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/%7B64AF78C4-5EB8-45AA-BC28-F7EE2B581919%7D/7%20Steps%20to%20Protecting%20Our%20Children.pdf>