

## 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 are 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 each 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 and sexual 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 90% of children who are victims of sexual abuse know their abuser.<sup>iii</sup> Less than 10% of sexually abused children are abused by a stranger.<sup>iv</sup>
- Children are at a heightened risk for sexual violence. 1 in 7 girls and 1 in 25 boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old.<sup>v</sup>
- 43.2% of women were under age 17 at the time of their first rape/victimization.<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>
- 88% of people who sexually abuse children are male,<sup>ix</sup> and while the majority of the people who sexually abuse children are adults,<sup>x</sup> up to 40% of children who are sexually abused are abused by older, more powerful children.<sup>xi</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% were family members. Family members also accounted for 23% of those abusing children aged 12 to 17.<sup>xii</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>xiii</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 they are 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 post-traumatic stress disorder, higher suicidality, drug abuse, higher likelihood of teen pregnancy, and chronic health issues.<sup>xiv</sup>
- More than 90% of children in juvenile justice systems self-disclose trauma,<sup>xv</sup> though girls are twice as likely as boys to report sexual abuse (31.8% versus 15.5%) and four times more likely than boys to have experienced sexual assault (38.7% versus 8.8%).<sup>xvi</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>xvii</sup>

## HOW ADVOCATES AND NONPROFITS CAN HELP

It is important not to 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) or spending time alone 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.

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<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> Finkelhor, D. (2012). “Characteristics of crimes against juveniles.” Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.

<sup>iv</sup> Id.

<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> Sharon G. Smith, Xinjian Zhang, Kathleen C. Basile, Melissa T. Merrick, Jing Wang, Marcie-jo Kresnow, Jieru Chen. (November 2018). “The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief – Updated Release.” Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/2015data-brief508.pdf>.

<sup>vii</sup> Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). “The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report.” Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS\\_Report2010-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS_Report2010-a.pdf).

<sup>viii</sup> Id.

<sup>ix</sup> Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Petta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., and Li, S. (2010). Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved from [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nis4\\_report\\_congress\\_full\\_pdf\\_jan2010.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nis4_report_congress_full_pdf_jan2010.pdf).

<sup>x</sup> Id.

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

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

<sup>xiv</sup> Adult Manifestations of Child Sex Abuse. (August 2011, Reaffirmed 2017). American College of Obstetricians and Physicians. Retrieved from <https://www.acog.org/Clinical-Guidance-and-Publications/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Health-Care-for-Underserved-Women/Adult-Manifestations-of-Childhood-Sexual-Abuse?isMobileSet=false>.

<sup>xv</sup> Julian D. Ford, et al. (2007). Trauma Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: Critical Issues and New Direction. Retrieved 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>xvi</sup> Kerig, Patricia K. and Ford, Julian D. (2015). “Trauma among Girls in the Juvenile Justice System.” National Child Traumatic Stress Network Juvenile Justice Consortium.

<sup>xvii</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. Retrieved from [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).