

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse is a crime and an abuse of trust, power, and authority that may contribute to serious short- and long-term problems for a child. Children who have been sexually abused may also experience verbal, emotional, or physical abuse (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, & Kracke, 2009).

FORMS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

A person sexually abuses a child when he or she exposes the child to sexual acts or behavior. Forms include (Finkelhor, Hammer, & Sedlak, 2008):

- Sex acts that involve penetration
- Touching the child's breasts or genitals
- Making a child touch the perpetrator's breasts or genitals
- Voyeurism (when a perpetrator looks at a child's naked body)
- Exhibitionism (when a perpetrator shows a child his or her naked body)
- Showing a child pornography or using a child in the production of pornography (Putnam, 2003).
- Child sexual exploitation, such as trafficking or sex trafficking
- Internet-based child sexual abuse, such as creating, depicting, and/or distributing sexual images of children online; or stalking, grooming, and/or engaging in sexually explicit behaviors with children online.

WARNING SIGNS THAT A CHILD MAY HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

- Bodily signs (e.g., bed-wetting, stomachaches, headaches, sore genitals)
- Emotional signs (e.g., fear, sadness, mood changes, acting out, refusing to be left alone with certain people)
- Sexual signs (e.g., inappropriate sexual behavior with objects or other children)
- Verbal signs (e.g., knowledge about sexuality that is not age- or developmentally appropriate)

Evidence shows that child sexual abuse is not always obvious and many children do not report that they have been abused (Finkelhor et al., 2008). Children often love and/or trust the people who sexually abuse them, creating further barriers and complications in coming forward. Some fear the consequences of a disclosure and the ramifications it will have on their family. People who sexually abuse children may use force or, more commonly, manipulation to abuse a child and keep him or her from telling others.

WARNING SIGNS THAT A PERSON MAY BE SEXUALLY ABUSING A CHILD

- Person exhibits an unusual interest in a particular child or particular age or gender of children
- Person socializes more with children than with adults and creates opportunities to spend time alone with children
- Person insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with or holding a child even when the child does not want this affection
- Person encourages a lack of privacy around the home and on the part of children and expresses voyeuristic behaviors such as watching children bathe
- Person discusses inappropriate topics with a child
- Person exhibits lack of interest in normal adult sexual relations but is overly interested in the sexuality of a particular child or teen

VICTIMS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Gender: Both boys and girls are vulnerable to child sexual abuse. Research has shown that girls are abused three times more often than boys, whereas boys are more likely to die or be seriously injured by their abuse (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996).

Age: Children of all ages, from birth to age 17, are sexually abused. In a recent survey, adolescents ages 14 to 17 are by far the most likely to be sexually victimized; nearly one in six adolescents (16.3%) was sexually victimized in the past year and more than one in four (27.3%) had been sexually victimized during their lifetimes (Finkelhor et al., 2009).

PEOPLE WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE

Gender: Based on law enforcement reports, 96% of people who sexually abuse children are male (Snyder, 2000).

Age: Most perpetrators are adults. Law enforcement reports show that 76.8% of those who perpetrate sexual assaults are adults; 23.2% are juveniles who sexually abuse children, and 19.5% of perpetrators are between the ages of 12-17 (Snyder, 2000).

Relationship to the child: Children are most often sexually abused by people they know and trust. People who sexual abuse children can be in positions of authority and esteemed by the community. Family members are the perpetrators in 34% of reported cases against juveniles (Snyder, 2000).

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CRIME REPORTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Understanding victim behavior and its social context is critical to understanding the obstacles victims face in reporting. Research shows that rates of false reporting are frequently inflated, in part because of inconsistent definitions and protocols or a weak understanding of sexual assault. Misconceptions about false reporting rates have direct, negative consequences and can contribute to why many victims don't report sexual assaults (Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa, & Cote, 2010).

REPORTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The majority of sexual assaults, an estimated 63%, are never reported to the police (Rennison, 2002). The prevalence of false reporting cases of sexual violence is low (Lisak et al., 2010), yet when survivors come forward, many face scrutiny or encounter barriers.

- Some victims distrust law enforcement.
- Completing the forensic exam or "rape kit" can be difficult for victims.
- Victims fear that they will not be believed or fear retaliation. Often, victims are pressured by others not to tell.

VICTIM EXPERIENCE

Sexual assault victims commonly struggle with a range of emotions that make it difficult for them to report or disclose abuse. Some reasons might include:

- Often, victims who do report will delay doing so (Archambault & Lonsway, 2006) for a variety of reasons that are connected to neurobiological and psychological responses to their assault (D'Anniballe, 2010).
- Victims may worry about how reporting will affect their family or friends (Campbell, 1998). Further, they may be fearful of family fracture if the person sexually assaulting them is a family member (Campbell & Raja, 1999).

DEFINITIONS

Since 1929, crime data, such as reported rapes, has been submitted voluntarily by police departments regarding certain crimes. The data becomes a part of the FBI's *Uniform Crime Report (UCR)*.

From the 1920s until 2011, *UCR* defined rape as "carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will." This definition covered only penetration of a woman's vagina by a penis, and excluded other forms of sexual violence. In January 2012, revisions to the *UCR's* definition were announced which broadened it to expand victims and forms of sexual violence.

The new definition is "penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object,

or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.” (FBI, 2012).

Through the *UCR*, the FBI issues guidelines and definitions related to processing sexual assault cases. Although not all police departments follow these guidelines, they do seek to process and clear cases from their active case log.

The *UCR* identifies three main ways to clear a case: cleared by arrest, cleared by exception, and unfounded (Archambault & Lonsway, 2007). Each category has subdivisions. The unfounded category has two subdivisions: false allegations and baseless.

- **Unfounded report:** A case that is investigated and found to be false or baseless. The “unfounded” classification is often confused with false allegations, in part because the definitions may seem similar. For example, unfounded cases include those that law enforcement believes do not meet the legal criteria for rape. It does not mean that some form of sexual assault may not have occurred, but only that from the legal perspective, in that jurisdiction, the case does not meet the legal criteria or it is “baseless.”
- **False report:** A reported crime to a law enforcement agency that an investigation factually proves never occurred.
- **Baseless report:** A report in which it is determined that the incident does not meet the elements of the crime, but it is presumed truthful.

UNSUBSTANTIATED REPORTS

The term ‘unsubstantiated report’ is not generally used for *UCR* purposes, but is often used in regular language and child abuse reporting. To be unsubstantiated, a report must “provide insufficient evidence to determine whether or not crime occurred” (Archambault, n.d.).

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WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence occurs when someone is forced or manipulated into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Reasons someone might not consent include fear, age, illness, disability, and/or influence of alcohol or other drugs. Anyone can experience sexual violence, including children, teens, adults, and elders. Those who sexually abuse can be acquaintances, family, trusted individuals or strangers, and of these, the first three categories are most common.

FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence is a broad term and includes rape, incest, child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, unwanted sexual contact, sexual harassment, exposure, and voyeurism.

Sexual violence is a social justice issue that occurs because of abuse, misuse, and exploitation of vulnerabilities. It is a violation of human rights and can impact a person's trust and feeling of safety. Acts of sexual violence are not only about control and/or sex, but the rape culture exists, in part, because of disparities in power that are often rooted in oppression.

Sexual violence happens to people of all ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, abilities, professions, incomes, and ethnicities. These violations are widespread and occur daily in our communities, schools, and workplaces.

IMPACT ON SURVIVORS

Each survivor reacts to sexual violence in her/his own unique way. Some may tell others right away what happened, many will wait weeks, months, or even years

before discussing the assault, if they ever choose to do so. It is important to respect each person's choices and style of coping with this traumatic event.

Whether an assault was completed or attempted, and regardless of whether it happened recently or many years ago, it may impact daily functioning.

IMPACT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Impact on individuals: Sexual violence can affect parents, friends, partners, children, spouses, and/or coworkers of the survivor. In order to best assist the survivor, it is important for those close to them to get support. Local social service providers offer free, confidential services to those affected by sexual violence.

Impact on communities: Schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, campuses, and cultural or religious communities may feel fear, anger, or disbelief when a sexual assault happens. Additionally, there are financial costs to communities. These costs include medical services, criminal justice expenses, crisis and mental health service fees, and the lost contributions of individuals affected by sexual violence.

VICTIM REACTIONS

Victims may experience a wide range of reactions including:

- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Depression
- Difficulty concentrating
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Anxiety or phobias
- Eating disorders
- Substance use or abuse
- Low self esteem
- Guilt, embarrassment, self blame
- Anger or sadness
- Fear, distrust
- Vulnerability

FACTS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- People who sexually assault usually violate someone they know – a friend, date, classmate, neighbor, coworker, or relative.
- Victims are never at fault for a sexual assault. Often, the media may unintentionally imply a victim is to blame by mentioning, for example, what the victim was wearing, whether the victim was drinking; these comments lead to victim-blaming.
- People who sexually assault often use coercion, manipulation or “charm.” In some cases, they may use force, threats, or injury. An absence of physical injuries to the victim does not indicate the victim consented.

- Societal conditions that allow sexual violence to continue include tolerance of sexual harassment and street harassment, restrictive ideas about masculinity, believing that women should be responsible for keeping themselves safe, comments that joke about rape, consumption of violent pornography, the belief that alcohol will make sexual encounters better or women more willing to have sex, viewing the use of commercial sex (stripping, pornography, prostitution/escort services) as normal male activities and beliefs that certain groups are better than others (sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.)

WAYS TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Primary prevention approaches acknowledge that sexual violence is preventable, and this approach seeks to change cultural norms by teaching people to not violate others. Risk-reduction approaches seek to decrease a particular person's risk for victimization, such as a self-defense class. Some primary prevention approaches:

- Be a role model for respectful relationships/behaviors
- Speak up when hearing harmful comments or witnessing acts of disrespect or violence
- Create policies at workplaces, agencies, and schools
- Coordinate community prevention efforts
- Talk with legislators and ask them to support prevention and victim services

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STATISTICS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE U.S.

- 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives (a)
- 51.1% of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner and 40.8% by an acquaintance (a)
- 52.4% of male victims report being raped by an acquaintance and 15.1% by a stranger (a)
- 91% of the victims of rape and sexual assault are female, and 9% are male (n)
- In 8 out of 10 cases of rape, the victim knew the perpetrator (k)
- 8% of rapes occur while the victim is at work (d)

COST/IMPACT OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

- Each rape costs approximately \$151,423 (c)
- Annually, rape costs the U.S. more than any other crime (\$127 billion), followed by assault (\$93 billion), murder (\$71 billion), and drunk driving, including fatalities (\$61 billion) (k)
- 81% of women and 35% of men report significant short- or long-term impacts such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (a)
- Health care is 16% higher for women who were sexually abused as children and 36% higher for women who were physically and sexually abused as children (l)

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

- 30% of women were between the ages of 11 and 17 at the time of their first completed rape (a)
- 12.3% of women were age 10 or younger at the time of their first completed rape victimization (a)
- 27.8% of men were age 10 or younger at the time of their first completed rape victimization (a)
- More than one-third of women who report being raped before age 18 also experience rape as an adult (a)
- One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old (e)
- 96% of people who sexually abuse children are male and 76.8% of people who sexually abuse children are adults (m)
- 34% of people who sexually abuse a child are family members of the child (m)
- In 2009, about one-third of arrests for internet sexual offenses in which the victim was identified involved child sexual abuse (l)
- It is estimated that 325,000 children per year are currently at risk of becoming victims of commercial child sexual exploitation (l)
- The average age at which girls first become victims of prostitution is 12-14 years old and the average age at which boys first become victims of prostitution is 11-13 years old (l)
- Only 12% of child sexual abuse is ever reported to the authorities (g)

SEXUAL ASSAULT ON CAMPUS

- 20% - 25% of college women and 15% of college men are victims of forced sex during their time in college (b)
- A 2002 study revealed that 63.3% of men at one university who self-reported acts qualifying as rape or attempted rape admitted to committing repeat rapes (i)
- More than 90% of sexual assault victims on college campuses do not report the assault (b)
- 27% of college women have experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact (f)

CRIME REPORTS

- Rape is the most under-reported crime; 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to police (n)
- The prevalence of false reporting is low between 2% and 10%. For example, a study of eight U.S. communities, which included 2,059 cases of sexual assault, found a 7.1% rate of false reports (j). A study of 136 sexual assault cases in Boston found a 5.9% rate of false reports (i). Researchers studied 812 reports of sexual assault from 2000-2003 and found a 2.1% rate of false reports (h).

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THE NSVRC AT A GLANCE

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

Founded by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) in 2000, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) identifies, develops and disseminates resources regarding all aspects of sexual violence prevention and intervention. Funded by grants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Justice, NSVRC's work includes training, technical assistance, referrals, advocacy, capacity-building, research, coordinating Sexual Assault Awareness Month, co-sponsoring national conferences, awards and events, and creating web-based and print resources. In addition, NSVRC has the world's largest library collection related to sexual violence.

PCAR is the oldest and largest state anti-sexual violence coalition in the U.S. and represents 51 sexual assault centers. Annually, these centers provide free, confidential services to thousands of adults and children.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Teal is the color of sexual violence prevention. The symbol for sexual violence prevention is a teal ribbon.
- April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM).
- Visionary Voice Awards, distributed annually in April, recognize individuals across the U.S. in various professions who are doing outstanding work to end sexual violence.

LONG-STANDING PARTNERS

In addition to PCAR and other state anti-sexual assault coalitions across the country, NSVRC works with:

- AEquitas: The Prosecutors' Resource on Violence Against Women, www.aequitasresource.org
- The Poynter Institute, www.poynter.org
- Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA), www.atsa.com
- National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, www.preventtogether.org

WORKING WITH PENN STATE

In December 2011, a three-year partnership with Penn State University was announced. In the wake of the Jerry Sandusky case, Penn State pledged a \$1.5 million grant – the University's share of 2011's Big Ten bowl revenues – to NSVRC and PCAR to support:

- Professional development for employees through prevention, reporting and responsibility training
- Educational outreach initiatives to communities
- Public service media projects
- Developing research priorities on child sexual abuse and violence
- Educational opportunities for students

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[Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Information Packet](#)



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[Housing and Sexual Violence Information Packet](#)



[Sexual Violence in Later Life Information Packet](#)

PEOPLE WHO COMMIT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Often in efforts to prevent and eliminate sexual violence, the focus is on individuals who commit sexual violence and have been prosecuted. In those cases, the main focus shifts to their punishment. Not all offenders end up arrested; 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to police (Rennison, 2002). There are many people who commit sexual violence but are never caught, and it will take a unified community strategy to prevent sexual crimes. With supervision and treatment, many sex offenders can live productive and offense-free lives (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

WHO COMMITS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

There are a lot of misconceptions and stereotypes about people who sexually abuse, however we know these stereotypes do not tell the real story. In general, here are some facts about people who offend:

- People who sexually abuse can be male or female, and span a variety of backgrounds and ages. Some individuals are married with stable relationships, employment and lack a criminal history. They can have strong social ties in the community.
- The majority of sexual violence is committed by someone the victim knows – a family member, intimate partner, coworker, classmate or acquaintance.
- Not all offenders are the same. Some are more likely to reoffend than others, and there are different motivations for offending.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF SEXUALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS IN ADULTS

The presence of risk factors does not mean that abusive behaviors will happen. It is a balance of risk factors and

protective factors that can impact the development of behaviors and affect the likelihood that an individual will sexually abuse. (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

- **Some individual risk factors include:** Poor coping skills, low self-esteem, and sexual attraction or sexual preoccupation. (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).
- **Some family-level risk factors include:** Difficulty establishing and/or maintaining appropriate intimate relationships and a chaotic, unstable, or violent home environment (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).
- **Some community-level risk factors include:** May have difficulty developing meaningful peer networks or a community presence (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

STATISTICS

- About 12% to 24% of known or adjudicated sex offenders will reoffend. When sex offenders do commit another crime, it is often not sexual or violent. (Rates might be low because sex offenses are often not reported.) (Center for Sex Offender Management [CSOM], 2008).

- The longer (known or adjudicated) offenders remain offense-free in the community, the less likely they are to reoffend sexually. The average 10-year recidivism rate from time of release is 20%, the 10-year recidivism declines to 12% after five years offense-free and to 9% after 10 years offense-free (Harris & Hanson, 2004).
- Annually, there are nearly 2,200 juveniles arrested for rape and nearly 9,200 arrested for other types of sex offenses (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2005). Treatment programs can effectively reduce sexual re-offense; adolescents and children are more likely than adults to stop their abusive behaviors (Finkelhor, Ormond, & Chaffin, 2009).
- Approximately 150,000 adult sex offenders are currently in state and federal prisons throughout the United States. Between 10,000 and 20,000 are released to the community each year (CSOM, 2007).
- More than 700,000 registered sex offenders live in communities throughout the U.S. (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2010).
- Between 2007 and 2008, approximately 1,500 sex offender-related bills were introduced in state legislatures, and over 275 new laws were passed and enacted (Vandervort-Clark, 2009).

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

- Often, people who sexually abuse are portrayed publicly as “monsters.” Because of this, people may be less likely to recognize the warning signs of a sexual behavior problem in loved ones or others to whom they are close, because they do not see them as “monsters” (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011). Someone who suspects abuse within a family may be less likely to ask for help and subject family members, including victims, to public exposure (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).
- Once a convicted abuser returns to the community,

he/she is subjected to many of the current legislative policies. The resulting housing and job instability, loss of income, and isolation may increase the risk to re-offend. The instability may also reduce the system’s ability to monitor the offender and hold him/her accountable (Tabachnick & Klein, 2011).

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