

10 Facts About Child Sexual Abuse - Statistics on Child Sexual Abuse

Most Victims Molested By Someone They Know and Trust

By [Linda Lowen](#), About.com Guide

Nov 29 2011

[Child sexual abuse](#) is a devastating crime whose victims are those least able to protect themselves or speak out and whose perpetrators are most likely to be repeat offenders. Many pedophiles follow career paths that provide steady contact with children and earn them the trust of other adults. Priests, coaches, and those who work with troubled youth are among the professions that child molesters have gravitated toward.

Unfortunately, child sexual abuse is also a significantly under-reported crime that is difficult to prove and prosecute. Most perpetrators of child molestation, incest and child rape are never identified and caught.

The following 10 facts and statistics, drawn from the [National Center for Victims of Crime "Child Sexual Abuse" fact sheet](#), reveals the scope of child sexual abuse in the U.S. and its devastating long-term impact on a child's life:

1. **The almost 90,000 cases of child sexual abuse reported each year fall far short of the actual number.** Abuse frequently goes unreported because child victims are afraid to tell anyone what happened and the legal procedure for validating an episode is difficult. (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry)
2. **An estimated 25% of girls and 16% of boys experience sexual abuse before they are 18 years old.** Statistics for boys may be falsely low because of reporting techniques. (Ann Botash, MD, in *Pediatric Annual*, May 1997.)
3. Of all victims of sexual assault reported to law enforcement agencies
 - 67% were under age 18
 - 34% were under age 12
 - 14% were under age 6

Of offenders who victimized children under age 6, 40% were under age 18. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000.)

4. Despite what children are taught about "stranger danger," **most child victims are abused by someone they know and trust.** When the abuser is not a family member, the victim is more often a boy than a girl. The results of a three-state study of reported rape survivors under age 12 revealed the following about offenders:
 - 96% were known to their victims
 - 50% were acquaintances or friends
 - 20% were fathers
 - 16% were relatives
 - 4% were strangers

Advocates for Youth, 1995)

5. Often, **a parent's connection (or lack thereof) to his/her child puts that child at greater risk of being sexually abused.** The following characteristics are indicators of increased risk:
 - parental inadequacy
 - parental unavailability
 - parent-child conflict
 - poor parent-child relationship

(David Finkelhor. "Current Information on the Scope and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse." *The Future of Children*, 1994)

6. **Children are most vulnerable to sexual abuse between the ages of 7 and 13.** (Finkelhor, 1994)
7. **Child sexual abuse involves coercion and occasionally violence.** Perpetrators offer attention and gifts, manipulate or threaten the child, behave aggressively or use a combination of these tactics. In one study of child victims, half were subjected to physical force such as being held down, struck, or violently shaken. (Judith Becker, "Offenders: Characteristics and Treatment." *The Future of Children*, 1994.)
8. **Girls are the victims of incest and/or intrafamily sexual abuse much more frequently than boys.** Between 33-50% of perpetrators who sexually abuse girls are family members, while only 10-20% of those who sexually abuse boys are intrafamily perpetrators. Intrafamily abuse continues over a longer period of time than sexual abuse outside the family, and some forms -- such as parent-child abuse -- have more serious and lasting consequences. (Finkelhor, 1994.)
9. **Behavioral changes are often the first signs of sexual abuse.** These can include nervous or aggressive behavior toward adults, early and age-inappropriate sexual provocativeness, alcohol consumption and the use of other drugs. Boys are more likely than girls to act out or behave in aggressive and antisocial ways. (Finkelhor, 1994.)
10. **The consequences of child sexual abuse are wide-ranging and varied.** They can include:
 - chronic depression
 - low self-esteem
 - sexual dysfunction
 - multiple personalities

According to the American Medical Association, **20% of all victims develop serious long-term psychological problems.** They may take the form of:

- dissociative responses and other signs of post-traumatic stress syndrome
- chronic states of arousal
- nightmares
- flashbacks
- venereal disease
- anxiety over sex
- fear of exposing the body during medical exams

("Child Sexual Abuse: Does the Nation Face an Epidemic - or a Wave of Hysteria?" *CQ Researcher*, 1993.)