

Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: Facts for Prevention – Health Impact

One study suggests that one in four girls and one in seven boys will be the victim of some type of sexual abuse or assault before the age of 18ⁱ. With 75 million children in the United Statesⁱⁱ, this translates to almost 15 million children who will be sexually victimized and abused over the next 18 yearsⁱⁱⁱ. The exploitation of children, and its resulting host of negative health outcomes, should be dealt with as a public health concern^{iv}.

Consider child sexual abuse in a social context^v:

- Child sexual abuse is **1.1** times more common than the rates of teen pregnancy. Three in ten girls in the United States become pregnant by age 20^{vi}.
- Child sexual abuse is **1.7** times more common than childhood obesity, which impacts approximately 9 million children over the age of 6 in the United States^{vii}.
- Child sexual abuse is **28** times more common than mental retardation in children. In 2003-2006, about 7 of 1,000 children were reported to have been diagnosed^{viii}.
- Child sexual abuse is **75** times more common than pediatric cancer. Approximately 10,730 new cases of pediatric cancer are expected to be diagnosed in children under 14 in 2008^{ix}.
- Child sexual abuse is **167** times more common than autism in children, which impacts as many as 12 in every 10,000 children^x.

Adapted with permission from the National Children's Advocacy Center, 2008

Research indicates that:

- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study estimates that 25% of females and 16% of males have experienced sexual abuse as children. The same study, indicates that sexual abuse has been associated with significant negative short-term and long-term health impacts for the victims^{xi}.
- Child sexual abuse impacts health care costs across a lifespan. Healthcare costs are 16% higher for women who experienced child sexual abuse and 36% higher if they experienced both sexual and physical abuse^{xii}.
- Children now spend 45 hours a week with media, 17 hours with their parents, and 30 hours in school. A strong connection has been proven between media exposure and childhood obesity, smoking, and sexual activity^{xiii}.
- Media viewing is a critical risk factor for aggression, linking media viewing and physical behavior^{xiv}.
- Teens exposed to high levels of televised sexual content were twice as likely to experience a pregnancy during the three-year period, compared to teens with lower levels of exposure^{xv}.
- Boys 12-17 who regularly viewed pornography on the Internet had sex at an earlier stage in their lives and were more likely to initiate oral sex, apparently imitating what they had watched^{xvi}.
- 22% of all teen girls (and 11% of teen girls ages 13-16) say they have electronically sent, or posted online, nude or semi-nude images of themselves. About 33% of teen boys and 25% of teen girls say they have had nude/semi-nude images, originally meant to be private, shared with them^{xvii}.
- Girls exposed to sexualizing and objectifying media are more likely to develop body image dissatisfaction, eating disorders, depression, low self-esteem and possibly lower academic functioning. The American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls noted that consequences of sexualization ranged from mental health issues to negative impact to girls' and women's physical health^{xviii}.

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- ⁱ Dube SR, Anda RF, Whitfield, CL, Brown DW, Felitti VJ, Dong M, Giles WH. Long-Term Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Gender of Victim. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2005;28:430–438.
- ⁱⁱ Table 2: Annual Estimates of the Population by Sex and Selected Age Groups for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2007 (NC-EST2007-02). Source: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau. Release Date: May 1, 2008.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.* Under 18 Males: 37,817,635 (1 in 7 = 5,402,519) Under 18 Females: 36,084,098 (1 in 4 = 9,021,024) for a total of 14,423,543 children under the age of 18.
- ^{iv} JA Mercy. “*Having New Eyes: Viewing Child Sexual Abuse as a Public Health Problem.*” *A Journal of Research & Treatment*, 1999; Pamela McMahon & Robin Pruett. “*Child Sexual Abuse as a Public Health Issue: Recommendations of an Expert Panel.*” *Behavioral Science*, 2004, volume 11, number 4, pages 257-266.
- ^v **Extrapolated from:** Newlin, Chris. Keynote Address - Putting Child Abuse Into Social Context: How Does it Relate to Other Issues Affecting Children? 9th Current Thinking/New Directions Conference; Hyannis, MA; September 25-26, 2008.
- ^{vi} The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (2006) *Fact Sheet: How is the 3 in 10 statistic calculated?* Washington, DC: Author.
- ^{vii} Childhood Obesity in the United States: Facts and Figures. (2004) Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. Washington, DC: National Academies.
- ^{viii} Measure D7: Children Reported to have Mental Retardation, by Race/Ethnicity and Family Income. America’s Children and the Environment (ACE). (2000, 2003) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Data from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey.
- ^{ix} A Snapshot of Pediatric Cancers. (2008) National Cancer Institute. Washington, DC: U.S. National Institutes of Health.
- ^x National Institutes of Health. (2001). *Fact Sheet: Unraveling Autism*. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health.
- ^{xi} Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). (1997 & 2007) The Adverse Childhood Experience Study. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.
- ^{xii} Bonomi, A., M. Anderson, F. Rivara, E. Cannon, P. Fishman, D. Carrell, R. Reid, and R. Thompson. (2008) Health Care Utilization and Costs Associated with Childhood Abuse. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 23(3) 294-300.
- ^{xiii} Nunez-Smith, M., E. Wolf, H. Huang, P. Chen, L. Lee, E. Emanuel, and C. Gross. (2008) Media and Child and Adolescent Health: A Systematic Review. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media, Inc.
- ^{xiv} Boxer, P., R. Huesmann, B. Bushman, M. O’Brien, and D. Mocerri. (2008) The Role of Violent Media Preference in Cumulative Developmental Risk for Violence and General Aggression. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. Article in press. Received 2 July 2008/Accepted 21 August 2008.
- ^{xv} Chandra, A., S. Martino, R. Collins, M. Elliott, S. Berry, D. Kanouse, and A. Miu. (2008) Does Watching Sex on Television Predict Teen Pregnancy? Findings from A National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. *Pediatrics*. 122(5): 1047-1054.
- ^{xvi} Kraus, S., and B. Russell. (2008) Early Sexual Experiences: The Role of Internet Access and Sexually Explicit Materials. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. 11(2): 162-168.
- ^{xvii} Sex and Tech: Results From a Survey of Teens and Youth Adults. (2008) Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy & Cosmogirl.com.
- ^{xviii} APA Taskforce on the Sexualization of Girls. (2007) Report of the APA Taskforce on the Sexualization of Girls. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.