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 18. With 75 million children in the United States, this translates to almost 15 million children who will be sexually victimized and abused over the next 18 years. The exploitation of children, and its resulting host of negative health outcomes, should be dealt with as a public health concern.

Consider child sexual abuse in a social context:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Child sexual abuse is 167 times more common than autism in children, which impacts as many as 12 in every 10,000 children.

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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Media viewing is a critical risk factor for aggression, linking media viewing and physical behavior.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Compiled by the National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Exploitation
www.missingkids.com/preventioncoalition - March 2009


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.


