

## **Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Aggression in Children**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper surveys the literature on child sexual abuse and the symptoms in school-age children, focusing on sexual aggression in children as the most indicative symptom in child victims and the most disruptive to the school. Society likes to think that child molestation is relatively rare. Statistics show this is not so. While the figures vary, an average of them indicates that one out of every three girls and one out of every five boys will be sexually abused before they reach age eighteen (The Advocacy Center, "The Facts About Youth Sexual Abuse" [http://www.theadvocacycenter.org/adv\\_abuse.html](http://www.theadvocacycenter.org/adv_abuse.html).) Up to 95% of child molestations can be prevented. Talking to children honestly, and from an early age about not letting others touch their private parts and telling them that it is appropriate to tell an adult if someone tries, can go a long way to stopping this social problem.*

**Keywords:** child sexual abuse, sexual aggression, victim, school-age children, child molestation, inappropriate touching, sexual predator, reporting child abuse

This paper surveys the literature on child sexual abuse and the indicators and symptoms in school-age children, focusing on sexual aggression in children as the most indicative symptom in child victims. While not all child victims of sexual abuse demonstrate sexual aggression, it is perhaps the indicator that most disrupts the school program and can even cause other children to become victims, usually of children a year or two older. Although there are many studies correlating the sexual victimization of children with problems later in adult life, these will not be considered, as not pertinent to the school program. However we will briefly consider the well-documented repeated or additional victimization in adolescence, but not adulthood<sup>1</sup>.

While in general, society still likes to think that child molestation is a relatively rare occurrence, the statistics show that this is not so. And the statistics are probably lower than reality due to the failure of so many victims to tell an adult. While the figures vary, an average of them indicates that one out of every three girls and one out of every five boys will be sexually abused before they reach age eighteen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Terri L. Messman-Moore and Patricia J. Long, "Child Sexual Abuse and Revictimization in the Form of Adult Sexual Abuse, Adult Physical Abuse, and Adult Psychological Maltreatment," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* May 2000 vol. 15 no. 5 489-502, accessed March 18, 2015. doi: 10.1177/088626000015005003

<sup>2</sup>The Advocacy Center, "The Facts About Youth Sexual Abuse." Accessed February 21, 2014, [http://www.theadvocacycenter.org/adv\\_abuse.html](http://www.theadvocacycenter.org/adv_abuse.html).

Moreover, children are still taught about “stranger danger” but 90% of child sexual abuse victims know the perpetrator in some way and 68% are abused by a family member.<sup>3</sup> Both girls and boys are victimized in approximately equal numbers.<sup>4</sup> Moreover this is an issue for the pre-primary and primary schools, as 20% of child sexual abuse victims are under the age of eight<sup>5</sup> and most never tell. Children experience abuse at every socioeconomic level, across ethnic lines, cultural lines, religious lines and at all perpetrator levels of education.<sup>6</sup> When someone says, “Oh, that doesn’t happen here,” they are deluded. We would like to believe that life is like the happy children in books, but that is just not the case.

Children can be sexually molested by college graduates as well as by high school dropouts; by married, single, divorced and those in common law relationships; by the rich as well as by the impoverished; by perpetrators who practice every religion, even by the devout; and by people of every race and every ethnic background.<sup>7</sup>

It is worldwide and it isn’t going to go away just because we don’t like it. Of utmost importance to educators, it disrupts the classroom, lunchtime and recess periods of schools. We will consider what can be done by teachers when they are faced with possible indicators of child sexual abuse and what they must do under the law.

### ***1. Different Types of Child Sexual Abuse***

According to an Australian study by Goldman and Goldman, 82% of their sample reported some kind of sexual experience with another person before the age of thirteen, with 60% being with other children. Children’s sexual experiences with adults, classified as child sexual abuse due to the age of the perpetrator, were reported to be experienced by 28% of the girls and 9% of the boys. The mean age of the victims of the incidents reported was 9.8 years for girls and 10.3 years for boys. The mean age of the adult sexual abusers of girls is 30.5 years and 22.4 years of boys. Over 90% of abusers were men, the girls experiencing mainly heterosexual advances. Twenty-four percent of abusers were strangers compared with 76% known to the children.<sup>8</sup> This study replicated a similar study done in the U.S.

#### **1.1 Child on Child Sexual Abuse**

The definition of child-on-child sexual abuse is when a preadolescent child is sexually abused by one or more other children or adolescents, where no adult is directly involved. This includes sexual activity between children that occurs against the victim’s will, often due to threats or coercion.<sup>9</sup> Whether the offender uses force, threats, trickery or emotional manipulation, cooperation is compelled. When sexual abuse is perpetrated by one sibling upon another, it is known as “inter sibling abuse”, a form of incest. There is a strong causal relationship that has been established between child and adolescent offenders and these offenders’ own prior victimization, by either adults or other children.

Jon A. Shaw et al conclude that “Children victimized by other children manifested elevated levels of emotional and behavioral problems and were not significantly different from those who had been sexually abused by adults.” This does not necessarily contradict other studies. Debbie M. Sperry and Brenda O. Gilbert note the victim’s failure to report to any adult in more than 75% of their subjects.

Additionally they state:

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<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of Justice. “Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics.” Bureau of Justice Statistics. Accessed February 21, 2014, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/saycrle.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>Safe Horizon. “Child Abuse Facts.” Accessed March 1, 2015, <https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-child-abuse>

<sup>5</sup><http://naasca.org/2012-Resources/010812-StatisticsOfChildAbuse.htm>

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Gene G. Abel and Nora Harlow, *Child Molestation Prevention Study*, 2001, rev. 2002, accessed March 28, 2015. <http://www.childmolestationprevention.org/pdfs/study.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ronald J. Goldman Ph.D. and Juliette D.G. Goldman Ph.D., *The Prevalence and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse in Australia*, *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and Family*, Volume 9, Issue 2, 1988, DOI: 10.1080/01591487.1988.11004405, accessed March 28, 2015. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01591487.1988.11004405#.VRaAGRxW-iw>

<sup>9</sup>Jon A Shaw, John E Lewis, Andrea Loeb, James Rosado, Rosemarie A Rodriguez, “Child on child sexual abuse: psychological perspectives,” *Elsevier*, Volume 24, Issue 12, December 2000, Pages 1591–1600, doi:10.1016/S0145-2134(00)00212-X

Compared to abuse by peers, abuse perpetrated by adolescents/adults was more intrusive and intrafamilial. Both groups rated their experiences as equally negative, and reported equally pervasive outcomes. Those abused by adolescents/adults reported significantly higher scores on the Psychopathic Deviate, Psychasthenia, and Schizophrenia scales compared to nonabused controls; similar findings did not emerge for those abused by child peers. Less than a fourth in either abuse group reported disclosing their experience to a parent. Among those who did not disclose, participants abused by child peers anticipated less support from both parents and more anger from their mothers.

Moreover, a strong causal relationship has been established between child and adolescent offenders and these offenders' own prior victimization, by either adults or other children.<sup>10</sup> This is different than what research on adult offenders reveals. Of all child sexual abusers, twenty-three percent were under eighteen years of age.<sup>11</sup> Children who have been victims sometimes become perpetrators. One boy of ten years tricked his younger and smaller cousin of seven years to lower his trousers and show him his buttocks. The older boy then bent the younger one over the arm of the sofa and raped him.<sup>12</sup> While this particular incident happened in the home, the same child perpetrator sexually abused numerous other small boys in his neighborhood and at school. Incidents like this disrupt all classes at a school, as the children have an effective "grapevine" of communication. Even if they were not victims, they hear about it and may not feel safe at school.

At a preschool, one girl repeatedly pulled down the panties or trousers of other children who were climbing the ladder to the slide ahead of her. The acting out stopped there as the children would yell, cry or pull up their clothes and hurry up the ladder to escape. We did not get a follow up on this to see if she responded to discipline.<sup>13</sup>

Sixty-seven percent of the victims of sexual assault that were reported to law enforcement agencies in the U.S. were under the age of eighteen; 34% of all victims were under age twelve. One out of every seven victims of sexual assault that were reported to law enforcement agencies were under age six. Forty percent of the offenders who victimized children under age six were themselves under the age of eighteen.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.2 Adult on Child Sexual Abuse

On the other hand, child sexual abuse by an adult often takes a more subtle form. More often than not the perpetrator is someone the child knows: a friend of the family, an uncle, an older brother, even a father or stepfather. We use the masculine words because female perpetrators make up only between four and five percent of all sexual abusers according to Cortoni and Hanson in their 2005 study.<sup>15,16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Alison Gray, William D. Pithers, Aida Busconi, Paul Houchens, "Developmental and etiological characteristics of children with sexual behavior problems: treatment implications," Elsevier, Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 23, Issue 6, June 1999, Pages 601–621, accessed March 18, 2015, [doi:10.1016/S0145-2134\(99\)00027-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(99)00027-7)

<sup>11</sup>Neighborhood Watch News, April 2006, accessed March 28, 2015 .

<http://www.co.washington.or.us/Sheriff/OtherServices/CrimePrevention/upload/NWN-2006-04-April.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Confidential interview with Maria Palmer, MSW, social worker in San Diego County, California, December 15, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Rhonda Haskins, Principal, First Baptist Preschool, Caldwell Texas, May, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, accessed March 28, 2015.

<http://www.emaso.com/links/ref-articles/ref12e/ref12e.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Theresa A. Gannon and Franca Cortoni, Understanding the Prevalence of Female-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse and the Impact of That Abuse on Victims, 15 DEC 2010, Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. DOI: 10.1002/9780470666715.ch2 accessed March 28, 2015,

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470666715.ch2/summary>

<sup>16</sup> ABC News, accessed March 28, 2015. <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=92325>

Taking advantage of time alone with the child, the abuser gradually gains their confidence, offering them snacks, toys and playing games with them. They may provide comic books and magazines for the child, leading up to introducing pornographic material. After weeks of grooming the victim, the abuser gradually introduces touching in more and more familiar ways until it reaches the point of intimacy. The child probably could not say the exact date that the relationship changed from friends to abuser and victim.<sup>17</sup> They have been slowly drawn in and often don't know where to turn for help. This feeling of lack of support is played on by some abusers who tell the child that they have a reputation as liars and won't be believed.

Men who sexually molested boys said that they are completely heterosexual in adult relationships. While other men who molested girls were horrified when asked if they had also molested any boys. Some married men abused children with sexual techniques that their wives refused to do.<sup>18</sup>

Convicted sexual assault offenders and rapists serving time in State prisons reported that two-thirds of their victims were under the age of eighteen, and 58% of those--or nearly four out of ten who were imprisoned violent sex offenders--said their victims were aged twelve or younger. According to police-recorded incident data, in 90% of the sexual assaults of children less than twelve years old, the child knew the offender. Four datasets (the FBI's UCR arrests, State felony court convictions, prison admissions, and the National Crime Victimization Survey) all indicate a sex offender is generally older than other violent offenders, usually in his early 30's, and more likely to be white than other violent offenders.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.3 Pedophilia

Pedophilia or paedophilia is considered to be a psychiatric disorder in which an adult or older adolescent experiences a primary or exclusive sexual attraction to prepubescent children, generally younger than age eleven. Pedophiles molest 88% of all children victimized by adults sexual abusers.<sup>20</sup> Pedophilia is the most significant causal factor in child molestation. Like child sexual abusers in general, pedophiles have no special characteristics which would identify them. They come from all socioeconomic classes, all races, all religions, all ethnicities. They are most frequently men.

NAMBLA, whose initials stand for the North American Man/Boy Love Association<sup>21</sup> advocates, "sex before eight – or it's too late." It is shocking that such an organization could be imagined, much less that it exists but they proudly state that it was founded in 1978. They share their motto with the The René Guyon Society, a group that is said to advocate sexual relationships between their members and children of either sex. The society was named after René Guyon, a former French judge who served on the Supreme Court of Thailand and who wrote on sexual ethics in his work *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*, among other books. The René Guyon Society states as their goal to "rid children of too much body guilt."<sup>22</sup>

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17 Washington County, Oregon, Neighborhood Watch News, April 2006, accessed March 28, 2015.

<http://www.co.washington.or.us/Sheriff/OtherServices/CrimePrevention/upload/NWN-2006-04-April.pdf>

18 Maria Palmer, MSW, social worker, San Diego County Department of Child Protective Services, California.

19 Sex Offenses and Offenders, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, accessed March 28, 2015.

[http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/virtual\\_disk\\_library/index.cgi/5772776/FID183/abstract/soo.htm](http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/virtual_disk_library/index.cgi/5772776/FID183/abstract/soo.htm)

<sup>20</sup> Gene G. Abel and Nora Harlow, Child Molestation Prevention Study, 2001, rev. 2002, accessed March 28, 2015.

<http://www.childmolestationprevention.org/pdfs/study.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> accessed March 28, 2015. <http://www.nambla.org/>

<sup>22</sup> Stephen T. Holmes and Ronald M. Holmes, *Sex Crimes: Patterns and Behavior*, SAGE Publications, Jun 18, 2008

The René Guyon Society has been identified, along with the North American Man/Boy Love Association, as an organization "challenging the assertion that sexual abuse is bad because of its effects on children."<sup>23</sup> But if a child is unable to vote or give consent to a legal contract, how can they be expected to make a reasonable decision about something that will have impact on the rest of their life? Especially if they are younger than eight years of age. Most studies show that the reasoning abilities of children are not yet mature.

Not all pedophiles are members of these organizations. But teachers should be aware that organizations do exist, some less formally than NAMBLA and the Rene Guyon Society. Pedophiles go online and even make sexual excursions to other countries, sometimes accompanied by one of the victims they have groomed who will be sold or traded to another pedophile. This doesn't even bring up the issue of child sexual exploitation as junior prostitutes because those children do not usually attend school.

## **2. Possible Indicators in Children of Sexual Victimization**

There is no specific behavior that can prove that sexual abuse has occurred. In fact, Ross LeGrand warns:<sup>24</sup>

Lists of behavioral indicators for suspected sexual abuse have been widely publicized in the media and in the professional literature. The difficulty is that the problem behaviors claimed to be signs of sexual abuse are general signs of stress in children. To spread these lists without appropriate cautions and information about their limitations can generate confusion and mistakes. The same behavioral signs were used almost a century ago as behavioral signs for detecting masturbation in children.

Nevertheless, there are signs that are suggestive of abuse. A combination of three or more of the signs should be reported for investigation by a social worker for the possibility of child sexual abuse. The indicators of child sexual abuse as stated in many reference materials are as follows:<sup>25,26</sup>

- Sexual knowledge beyond the child's developmental stage
- Preoccupation with sex indicated by language, drawings, or behaviors
- Inserting toys or objects in genital openings
- Sexual behaviors toward other children that seem aggressive, or unresponsive to limits or redirection
- Excessive masturbation, sometimes in public, not responsive to redirection or limits
- Pain, itching, redness, or bleeding in the genital areas
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, anger, crying to excess, or withdrawal
- Loss of appetite, difficulty eating or swallowing
- Cutting, burning, or self-mutilating behaviors
- Avoidance of certain people, places, or activities which the child will not explain
- An older child behaving like a much younger child: wetting the bed or sucking a thumb, for example
- Suddenly having money

Regression, thumb-sucking and bed wetting are not unusual in children who have experienced sexual abuse, especially in the preschool ages of two-five years old. In addition, these younger victims, although they say that an activity is fun, they may look angry or sullen in a way that doesn't look like they are having fun to an adult.<sup>27</sup> Sexual behavior may be a learned form of relating to others that sexually abused children manifest. For educators, it is important to differentiate between normal sexual play and sexually acting out.

<sup>23</sup> Michael W. Smithson, 2003. Encyclopedia of Murder and Violent Crime. Sage Publications. p. 349. ISBN 076192437X.

<sup>24</sup> Ross Legrand, Hollida Wakefield, and Ralph Underwager, *IPT*, "Alleged Behavioral Indicators of Sexual Abuse," accessed March 17, 2015, [http://www.ipt-forensics.com/journal/volume1/j1\\_2\\_1.htm](http://www.ipt-forensics.com/journal/volume1/j1_2_1.htm).

<sup>25</sup> Parenting a Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused, A Guide for Foster and Adoptive Parents, Child Welfare Information Gateway, July 2013; [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f\\_abused.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f_abused.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, accessed March 28, 2015.

<http://www.nsopw.gov/en/Education/RecognizingSexualAbuse?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.secasa.com.au/pages/trauma-responses-in-children/>

Alison Gray et al found that “More than half of the children engaging in developmentally unexpected sexual behaviors had been abused both sexually and physically by more than two different perpetrators. One-third of the people who had maltreated these children were less than 18 years old. These children had acted out against an average of two other children. High levels of distress in the children and their caregivers were evident across a number of psychometric and historical variables.

“Children with sexual behavior problems exhibited a number of functional impairments commonly associated with maltreatment, including learning and psychiatric disorders. Their caregivers and families manifested several characteristics that deter children’s recovery from maltreatment, including an impaired attachment between parent and child. The scope of the children’s problems requires that treatment extend beyond the therapist’s office to include schools and other agencies or individuals with whom the child and families have regular contact.”<sup>28</sup>

### **3. Normal Sexual Curiosity in Children**

Children have natural curiosity about their own bodies and about the bodies of others. They don’t experience sexual desire in the same way that adults do, but many, perhaps most, enjoy touching their own bodies and being touched by others. Humans are social creatures and thrive on touch. Even newborns enjoy touching their genitals and find pleasure, show evidence of experiencing physiological arousal such as vaginal lubrication and erection. Throughout childhood, masturbation is not unusual. Sexual exploration with others is quite common whether with the opposite sex or with another child of the same sex when they are of approximately the same physical size and the same age (up to two years older or younger). These explorations should be consensual and fairly brief--children do not have long<sup>29</sup> attention spans. They may “play doctor,” ask where babies come from, or play “show me yours and I’ll show you mine” games. Role play is common in helping children learn about relationships and taking turns playing every role should not cause distress; even the boys must take a turn at being “Mommy” so that the girls have a go at playing “Daddy.”

A good resource that compares normal sexual exploration by children with problem sexual behavior and symptoms of possible child sexual abuse is from Stop It Now!<sup>30</sup> Normal behaviors of children differ by age. According to Stop It Now! normal behaviors include:

#### **3.1 Preschool Age (0 to 5 years)**

Will have questions and express knowledge relating to:

- differences in gender, private body parts,
- hygiene and toileting,
- pregnancy and birth.
- Will explore genitals and experience pleasure.
- Showing and looking at private body parts.

#### **3.2 School-Age (6-8 years)**

Will need knowledge and have questions about:

- physical development, relationships, sexual behavior
- menstruation and pregnancy,
- personal values.
- Experiment with same-age and same gender children, often during games or role-playing.
- Self stimulation in private is expected to continue.

<sup>28</sup>Gray et al, “Developmental and etiological characteristics of children with sexual behavior problems,” Elsevier, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Volume 23, Issue 6, June 1999, Pages 601–621, accessed March 18, 2015, [doi:10.1016/S0145-2134\(99\)00027-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(99)00027-7)

<sup>29</sup>Paul Flanagan, Making molehills into mountains: Adult responses to child sexuality and behaviour, *Explorations: An E-Journal of Narrative Practice* 2010, Number 1, 57–69. Copyright © Dulwich Centre Foundation ISSN 1837-798X accessed March 28, 2015. <http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/explorations-2010-1-paul-flanagan.pdf>

<sup>30</sup>Tip Sheet: Warning Signs of Possible Sexual Abuse In A Child's Behaviors, accessed March 28, 2015. <http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/tip-sheet-7>

### 3.3 School-Age (9-12 years)

Hormonal changes and external influences, such as peers, media and Internet, will increase sexual awareness, feelings and interest at the onset of puberty.

Will need knowledge and have questions about:

- Sexual materials and information,
- Relationships and sexual behavior,
- Using sexual words and discussing sexual acts and personal values, particularly with peers.
- Increased experimentation with sexual behaviors and romantic relationships.
- Self stimulation in private is expected to continue.

When talking to children about possible sexual abuse it is important to remain calm and not show distress in your voice. A teacher who has discovered children behind the tool shed in a compromising position might ask: What were you doing? How did you get the idea? How did you learn about this? How did you feel about doing it? Explain to the children that this behavior is not to be repeated, that the school is not the place for it. If it is normal sexual exploration, the children will respond and not do it again.<sup>31</sup>

### 4. Reporting Suspected Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is complicated form of abuse because it has layers of guilt and shame. It's important to recognize that sexual abuse doesn't have to involve body contact. Exposing a child to sexual situations or material is sexually abusive, whether or not touching is involved.<sup>32</sup>

If a child trusts you enough to tell you about sexual abuse, remember that they rarely lie about such things. It may be hard to believe that someone the child trusts or cares about is capable of sexually abusing the child, but it's highly unlikely that a child will deliberately make false accusations about adult-like sexual behaviours.<sup>33</sup> They may not have the grown-up words to describe what happened but they can sometimes draw a picture of their experience or act it out with dolls.

Touching offenses may include fondling; vaginal, oral or anal intercourse or attempted intercourse; touching of the genitals; incest and/or prostitution. Prostitution in the west is not necessarily on the street but usually privately arranged, admonishing the child to, "Do whatever he tells you to and you'll get a reward afterward." Non-touching offenses may include exposure to pornography; obscene telephone calls; exhibitionism or voyeurism. This is still child sexual abuse and will probably lead to more invasive abuse if not halted.

The pressures on the child to keep silent are tremendous. It takes courage to talk about abuse. A child may claim that sexual abuse did not happen (when it actually did), or take back a disclosure of abuse. Sometimes the child's account of what happened changes or evolves over time. This is a common pattern for disclosure and should not invalidate their story. Remember you are dealing with a child, not a trained police observer.

Many areas have a local or state hotline. These are some others.

#### 4.1 Child Abuse Hotlines

- US or Canada: 1-800-422-4453 (Childhelp)
- UK: 0800 1111 (NSPCC Childline)
- Australia: 1800 688 009 (CAPS)
- New Zealand: 0800-543-754 (Kidslines)
- Other international helplines: ChiWorld.org

Keeping in mind that 68% of the victims were sexually abused by a family member, it may not be best for a teacher to talk to the parents or caretakers about this behavior. Many families do not deal supportively with the victim, viewing him or her as having brought trouble on the family.

<sup>31</sup>Sexual Development and Behavior in Children, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, April 2009, accessed March 28, 2015. [http://nctsn.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/caring/sexualdevelopmentandbehavior.pdf](http://nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/caring/sexualdevelopmentandbehavior.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Child Abuse and Neglect, Help.org, accessed March 28, 2015. <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect.htm>

<sup>33</sup>Parents Protect! accessed March 28, 2015. [http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/what\\_to\\_do\\_if\\_a\\_child\\_tells\\_about\\_abuse.htm](http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/what_to_do_if_a_child_tells_about_abuse.htm)

When there are only one or two of the indicators presented by the child, an adult asking very personal questions may cause the child to be troubled if he or she has not experienced abuse. In some cases it may be better to talk it over with a principal or headmaster of the school.

### **5. Our Own Problem**

Keep in mind that the school personnel are sometimes the perpetrator as noted in Africa and many other countries. Educators pressuring students for good grades is not unheard of in any country. There have been reports on all well-populated continents.<sup>34</sup> In 2004 the U.S. Department of Education reported that "the most accurate data available" shows that "nearly 9.6 percent of [public school] students are targets of educator sexual misconduct sometime during their school career."<sup>35</sup> In Great Britain, between 2008 and 2013, at least 959 teachers and other school staff were accused of having an inappropriate relationship with a pupil.<sup>37</sup> For the most part, these inappropriate relationships occur with students who are primary age or older. In India,<sup>38</sup> and Asia where population density is high, the issue of child sexual exploitation is problematic in addition to other abuses.

#### **5.1 The Virgin Cleansing Myth**

South Africa has extremely high incidences of child and baby sexual abuse. A CIET survey found around 4% of girls and 11% of boys admitted to forcing someone into a sexual encounter of some kind. A related survey among 1,500 schoolchildren, one quarter of the boys said that gang rape was fun. The problem is growing. Some 67,000 cases of sexual assault against children were recorded in 2000 in South Africa, whereas only 37,500 in 1998. Child welfare groups think the number of unreported incidents could be as many as ten times that number. The highest increase in attacks was against victims under age seven. The "virgin cleansing myth"<sup>39</sup> is especially common in South Africa, which has the highest number of HIV-positive citizens in the world. "Child abusers are often relatives of their victims – even their fathers and providers," Eastern Cape social worker Edith Kriel said.

It's true South Africa's statistics are high. Africa has the added burden of high rates of HIV/AIDS and the superstition of the "virgin cleansing myth"<sup>40</sup>. This is the unfortunate and false belief that intercourse with a virgin will cure the sufferer from AIDS or HIV. It is to be hoped that this myth will not spread as the virus has.

#### **5.2 It's Relative**

The most harmful effects of molestation in terms of long-lasting effects on the child appear to be a close relationship to the perpetrator, frequency and duration of abuse and abuse involving penetration, force, or violence, according to Joseph Beitman et al.

When the perpetrator is a relative, it is impossible for the child to escape unless removed from the home, an experience which can be equally traumatic for the victim who often sees it as punishment for having told about the sexual abuse. As with domestic violence, the victim seems to focus on the treats that are given by the perpetrator to the victim in order to obtain compliance rather than the pain and shame that they feel. Perpetrators often tell the child that they are "used goods," no longer desirable by anyone, causing the child to believe that love is to be found nowhere else.

<sup>34</sup>World: Africa South Africa's rape shock, BBC News, January 19, 1999, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/258446.stm>

<sup>35</sup>Carol Shakeshaft, "Educator Sexual Misconduct: A Synthesis of Existing Literature," U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, doc # 2004-09, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/misconductreview/report.pdf>

<sup>36</sup>Joann Grayson Ph.D., "Sexual Abuse by Educators and School Staff," Virginia Child Protection Newsletter, Volume:76, Spring 2006 pp. 1-6. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=235940>, <http://psychweb.cisat.jmu.edu/graysojh/>

<sup>37</sup> James Edgar and agencies, "Almost 1000 Teachers Accused of Sex Abuse," *The Telegraph*, 16 Jan 2014, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10575771/Almost-1000-teachers-accused-of-sex-abuse.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Dr. Loveleen Kacker, IAS Srinivas Varadan, Pravesh Kumar, *Study on Child Abuse INDIA 2007*, Ministry of Women and Child, Development Government of India, 2007, <http://wcd.nic.in/childabuse.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup>Alex Perry, "Oprah Scandal Rocks South Africa," *Time*, Nov. 05, 2007, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1680715,00.html?xid=feed-yahoo-full-world>

<sup>40</sup>PregaGovinder, "Child Rape: A Taboo Within the AIDS Taboo," *Sunday Times (South Africa)*, April 4, 1999.



If a parent doesn't take the child's report of abuse seriously, deeming it to be a vivid imagination, too much adult TV, or even a lie, then the child's first line of defense fails. If a child feels close to a teacher, he or she may resort to telling the educator about the bad experience.

### **5.3 Mandatory Reporters**

In many western countries teachers are mandatory reporters, meaning that if they suspect child abuse or molest, they are required by law to report it. The U.S., Canada, much of Europe and Australia are among those who have put this law on the books. In eighteen of the U.S. states all citizens are mandatory reporters. The other states limit mandatory reporting to professions which have regular contact with children, which includes teachers. In Canada all citizens are mandatory reporters except in the Yukon Territory where it is limited to professionals who have regular contact with children. In Australia, the mandatory reporter regulations are delineated by state and territory.

Every year the U.S. has about two million allegations that are investigated, affecting one out of sixteen families with children under eighteen years of age. In Australia, investigations rose from a low in 2000-01 (66,265) to a high in 2008-09 (162,259) then declining in 2010-11 (99,649), and increasing again in 2011-12 (106,754). In Canada, investigations increased from 135,261 in 1998 to 235,842 in 2008. Information on investigations was not found for other countries.

These astonishing numbers are only allegations. Each national government has assigned professionals to thoroughly investigate all allegations of child abuse or molest. The U.S. investigations annually substantiate only about 22% of the reports and had "alternative responses" to 9% more which focused on resolving family problems to protect the child. In Canada 36% of the allegations were substantiated by investigation in 2008. While in 2012, the United Kingdom reported 50,573 children were on child protection registers or subject to a child protection plan: England (42,850), Scotland (2,706), Wales (2,890), Northern Ireland (2,127). The different styles of maintaining statistics for each country make comparison complicated, but it is evident that these western nations are addressing the serious problem of child abuse, of which child sexual abuse is only one facet. Other countries may be doing as much, but statistics were not found for them.

Teachers and other mandatory reporters are not meant to investigate or prove the possible child abuse or molestation, only to report what they have observed that is suspicious. Examples might be bruises on the upper arms or thighs (but not the usual skinned knees), sexually aggressive behavior toward other children, and sexually explicit drawings, especially if the child explained it to you. The report can often be made by telephone. The questions that will be asked are usually:<sup>41</sup>

- 1) A description of how the teacher learned of the injuries (and actions taken to assist, if any);
- 2) Name and address of the child and his/her parents/guardians; age, sex, and race of the child;
- 3) Information about previous injuries or neglect (if known);
- 4) Date, time, nature, and extent of the abuse or neglect (if known);
- 5) date of the report;
- 6) The alleged perpetrator's name, address, and relationship to the possible victim (if known);
- 7) Reporter's name, agency, position, address, telephone number, and sometimes a signature.

Obviously a person making a report can answer any part of these questions by saying that they lack information. One need only report the facts that they know. A teacher who reports a suspected abuse can request anonymity to protect herself and her privacy. Some areas grant anonymity to all child abuse reporters. However a false report may cause a police investigation and loss of anonymity.

Mandatory reporters are not required to report the suspected abuse to parents or anyone else except the agency receiving child abuse reports, in fact it is best not to tell the family if the suspected perpetrator is an adult. However, schools may have a policy about informing the principal or headmaster when such a report needs to be made.

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<sup>41</sup> Reporting Sexual Abuse: Helpful Guidelines, Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault, accessed March 28, 2015. [http://www.mocsa.org/mocsa/images/upload/file/MOCSA\\_%20Reporting%20%20Guidelines\(2\).pdf](http://www.mocsa.org/mocsa/images/upload/file/MOCSA_%20Reporting%20%20Guidelines(2).pdf)

It is important not to interrogate the child but to reassure the child that what happened is not their fault. Do not make promises that you can't keep, a temptation when your heart is torn by a child's confidences. Believe the child and report the suspected abuse immediately.

## 6. Conclusion

Reporting suspected child sexual assault does not end the problems in the classroom or on the playground. The investigating agency will work on the case as soon as possible, but the child may remain in school. Social workers have found that leaving the child in the home is preferable to removing him or her unless repeated abuse is imminent. If it is deemed necessary, the child may be removed to foster care and possibly a new school, but chances are that will not happen. What can be done in the mean time to protect other students from aggressive sexual behavior?

Talk to the whole class about appropriate and inappropriate touch, whether from an adult or another child. Talking about sex is like talking about crossing the street--you don't want children hurt. Unless they know about danger, they will not look for it. Remember the statistics. If you have a class of 28-36 students, divided equally between the sexes, then between seven and nine of the girls will be sexually abused before they are eighteen and between three to four of the boys will be sexually abused before they reach eighteen years of age, on average.

Begin talking to children about appropriate and inappropriate touching as young as two<sup>42</sup> or three years of age. Tell them where their private parts are and that their parents may see and touch them to clean them but that normally nobody should. Teach them parts of their body like ears, eyes, and toes, and also teach them the real names of their private parts like "vagina" and "penis" and not cute names. This will give them the correct words to use if someone is hurting them and makes sure the person being told understands what's happening. It's also important to teach both female and male anatomy because the abuser can be of either gender. They need to know how to describe what happens to them. Also tell them when it is appropriate for their parent or caregiver to touch their private parts--the parts that a swimming suit covers, for example, bathing and helping on the toilet. Don't make them feel as if this is a taboo or dirty topic, but do emphasize that private parts are special, for them and no one else to see, unless they are helping the child to keep clean or healthy (like the doctor).

Explain that no one should physically hurt them, especially in their private parts. Also let them know that they can refuse touching if it makes them uncomfortable.<sup>43</sup> Let the children know that they can tell you if someone hurts them in their private parts and that you will not get angry with them. Let them know that they can tell a secret to their parents and it is still a secret. Sexual abuser usually tell the child that what they do together is a secret and they must not tell anyone.<sup>44</sup> This allows the child to tell the parent without feeling they have betrayed a confidence. Most important, these little talks about safety should be casual, repeated and open.

If a parent complains, let them know about the statistics. No one wants their child to be a victim of sexual abuse.

Three facts<sup>45</sup> you can tell those who oppose these relaxed, on-going talks about safety from sexual abusers, whether child or adult perpetrator:

- Today, 95 percent of child molestation can be prevented. We have the knowledge to stop it.
- Today, living in the United States, there are 39 million adults who have survived child sexual abuse.
- Today, more than three million American children are victims. Most of them are struggling alone, believing there is no adult who can help them.

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<sup>42</sup> Sandra Kim, 10 Ways to Talk to Your Kids about Sexual Abuse, Everyday Feminism, accessed March 29, 2015. <http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/02/10-ways-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-sexual-abuse/>

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, NSOPW, accessed March 29, 2015 <http://www.nsopw.gov/en/Education/TalkingChild>

<sup>44</sup> Stop It Now! Tip Sheet: Talking to Children and Teens, accessed March 29, 2015. <http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/tip-sheet-8>

<sup>45</sup> Early Diagnosis and Effective Treatment, Child Molestation Research and Prevention Institute, accessed March 29, 2015. [http://www.childmolestationprevention.org/pages/tell\\_others\\_the\\_facts.html](http://www.childmolestationprevention.org/pages/tell_others_the_facts.html)

In 2010 the worldwide average for deaths from automobile accidents was 93.3 per 100,000 motor vehicles. It was noticeably higher in African nations; 5769.9 in Guinea was the highest, but many African nations numbered vehicle fatalities in the thousands. In the U.S. in 2010 the number of vehicle-related deaths 7.6 per 100,000. This fatality rate has been brought down significantly from 26.008 deaths per 100,000 in 1972. Auto manufacturers played a part by making cars safer, but there were also important campaigns to encourage people to “buckle up” their seat belts and to not drink alcohol and drive. So education played a part in reducing the number of incidents of automobile-related injuries and deaths.

The average rate of child sexual abuse is 22.5%, with the average being 20% for boys and 25% for girls. This figure applies worldwide. Since we know how to lower the number of victims by educating children, shouldn't we make the attempt. It would reduce the number behavioral problems and “acting out” incidents in our schools and make the job of teaching less stressful.

Children are often docile, especially when an older child or adult tells them they must do something. They know that they are growing and learning about the world and think that any person who is older is necessarily more knowledgeable. Children are usually not manipulative or devious, and they don't recognize these things when they are being manipulated. Children are much more likely to be sexually molested<sup>46</sup> than to be hit by a car. Perhaps that is due to years of training them to “look both ways before you cross.” Wouldn't it be wonderful if, ten or fifteen years from now child sexual abuse would be just as rare. And educators would have been the key.

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<sup>46</sup> Howard N. Snyder, Ph.D. National Center for Juvenile Justice, *Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics*, July 2000, accessed March 29, 2015.  
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