



GENDER **STAT**
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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Introduction

No two estimates of the incidence and prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) are the same. Reporting institutions and research studies vary greatly, including by the terms and definitions they use, types of violence analyzed and populations studied (age, gender, sexual identity, location, etc.). This installment of Gender Stat references the major government agencies that collect national statistics on CSA:

- **Department of Justice's** Bureau of Justice Statistics through the *National Crime Victimization Survey*;
- **Federal Bureau of Investigation**, which collects statistics from law enforcement agencies around the country via the National Incident-Based Reporting System and *Uniform Crime Reports*;
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's** (CDC) *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey*, which includes a *Summary Report*, *Report on Intimate Partner Violence* and *Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation*; and
- **Children's Bureau of Department of Health and Human Services**, which annually produces a report from child protective services agencies around the US. The *Child Maltreatment Report* collects data on all reported violence and neglect committed against children.

Disclosure is a built-in assumption of these reporting mechanisms. That is, these agencies' statistics are based on cases that have been officially reported and are moving through an official findings process. Because so much CSA goes unreported, over the past two decades, researchers have been using **prevalence or adult retrospective studies**, which ask adults to discuss details about their childhood experiences. This approach provides opportunities for adults to disclose histories of CSA and serves to enrich the overall data pool on the topic.

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The data in this Gender Stat includes information from the agencies noted above as well as analysis, studies, briefs and fact sheets from research, policy and advocacy organizations. Their information comes from national statistics and research projects of varying sizes.

Prevalence

The Department of Health and Human Services' *Child Maltreatment 2012* estimates that 686,000 children were the subject of abuse or neglect in 2012 through the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. Just over 9 percent (63,000) of the children were victims of CSA, potentially alongside neglect and/or physical abuse.

The CDC's *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey 2010* reports that 42 percent of all female rape victims in the US were raped for the first time before the age of 18 — and close to 80 percent were raped before turning 25. Perpetrators targeted 67 percent of girls and women when they were 11 to 24 years old. Nearly 28 percent of male rape victims were first raped before the age of 10.

Girls and boys are abused for the first time at the **average age** of 10 years old, as reported by the National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse. Children are most vulnerable between 8 to 12 years of age.

Of victims aged 12 to 17, 8 percent are boys; when looking at CSA victims age 12 and under, 26 percent are boys.

In the school building and throughout the day, middle and high school students face sexual harassment and unwanted sexual advances — cat-calling, leering, touching, groping, flashing, telling and sending sexually explicit jokes and texts/emails, etc. In a national **survey** of approximately 2,000 students by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), 48 percent had been sexually harassed at school. Unwanted sexual jokes, comments and other verbal harassment were the most common (for 46 percent of girls and 22 percent of boys), while nearly one-third of students experienced technology-based attacks via email/texts and social media.

The **Wisconsin Coalition against Sexual Assault** created the following chart, based on statistics from the *Child Maltreatment 2008* report, to show rates of CSA by race. It is worth noting that the statistics in this chart are based solely on cases that have gone through child protective services agencies and therefore may disproportionately include lower income families and families of color, both of which contend with this type of intervention at higher rates. Accordingly, there may be a disproportionate representation of class and race. (Finklehor also **cautions** that data are inconclusive on whether higher incidence of CSA occurs among certain races and economic classes.)

Race and Child Sexual Abuse

Race	Number
African-American	10,953
American Indian or Alaska Native	460**
Asian	444
Hispanic	13,728
Multiple	1,164
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	120
Unknown	7,174
White	33,959
Total	68,002 (data from 49 states)

**There has been recent analysis to investigate possible higher rates of CSA and other forms of sexual violence among Native American communities.

Risk factors

There is a general consensus among researchers that being a girl is an automatic risk factor for CSA because girls are victimized at a much higher rate than boys. Additional risk factors for both girls and boys that have been identified by David Finkelhor on the Future of Children website include violence in the home; inadequate supervision by parents or trustworthy adults; divorce or conflict between parents; and prior incidents of sexual victimization.

Perpetrators

Perpetrators of CSA are often patient, manipulative and willing to put a lot of energy into molding a relationship with a victim, which makes it difficult for the victim to easily detach. The National Center for Victims of Crime website, like many others, captures the general process of cultivation (often called grooming) that allows a perpetrator to gradually introduce sexual acts into a relationship with a child. An amended version of the process follows:

- **Identifying and targeting the victim.**

- **Gaining trust and access.**
- **Playing a role in the child's life** by observing the child and to assess how best to approach and interact with her/him. One **research team** suggests that perpetrators use one of two strategies: they will become the "family infiltrator" who gains familiarity with a family by helping out and offering services such as babysitting, then gradually creates opportunities to be alone with the child "naturally." The other method uses the "sophisticated rape track," in which the perpetrators' status or position (this could include same-age or older siblings, extended family such as uncles, cousins, close family friends, teachers, doctors, etc.) helps them to appear nonthreatening and offers multiple opportunities to be in contact with a child frequently enough to establish an intimate relationship through manipulation.
- **Isolating the child.** Offering rides to take the child out of his or her surroundings, separating the child from others to gain access to the child alone, so that others cannot witness the abuse.
- **Creating secrecy around the relationship.** The perpetrator may reinforce the special connection with the victim when they are alone or through private communication with the victim (such as letters, emails or text messages), and strengthen it with admonitions against telling anyone, lest others be unhappy about it. The perpetrator may threaten the victim with disclosure, suicide, physical harm to the child or loved ones or other traumas if s/he tells.
- **Initiating sexual contact.** It may begin with touching that is not overtly sexual and appears to be casual (arm around the shoulder, pat on the knee, etc.). By breaking down inhibitions and desensitizing the child, the perpetrator can begin overtly touching the child.
- **Controlling the relationship.** Perpetrators rely on the secrecy of the relationship to keep it going, and to ensure that the child will not reveal the abuse. Children are often afraid of disclosing the abuse. They may have been told that they will not be believed, or that something about the child "makes" the abuser do this to them. The child may also feel shame, or fear that they will be blamed. Often, the perpetrator threatens the child to ensure that s/he won't disclose the abuse.

Adult perpetrators

According to the **Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center**, adult perpetrators are responsible for two-thirds of CSA cases. Among them, up to 90 percent are male. Females account for less than 10 percent of CSA offenders. Female perpetrators have a history of CSA at almost twice the rate of male perpetrators. Adult perpetrators of CSA are economically diverse, working at a wide variety of occupations, living in every part of the US and representing every educational level.

The sexual violence advocacy organization **1in6** suggests that acquaintances (31 percent) and family members (29 percent) are the two groups that most target girls for CSA; for boys, the percentages are 33 percent and 11 percent, respectively. **Strangers attack** boys at a much higher rate (40 percent) than they do girls (2 percent).

According to Finkelhor, most CSA offenders are **not likely to reoffend** if caught, though most do not get caught. Researching recidivism rates in Washington State in 2009, he found that 3 percent of CSA perpetrators committed a CSA-related offense, and 25 percent committed another type of offense in the five years after being convicted of the initial crime. In comparison, 48 percent of felony offenders (any type) committed another offense in the same time frame. (It is worth noting that in light of the small sample size and the fact that so few CSA perpetrators are caught, these numbers may tell an incomplete story.)

A 2004 **report** by educational researcher Carol Shakeshaft estimates that nearly 10 percent of US students (more than 4.5 million students) were subject to "sexual misconduct by an employee of a school sometime between kindergarten and 12th grade." The students shared the information via self-disclosing surveys rather than through official school adjudication processes.

Researchers interviewed 41 perpetrators in treatment, 15 percent of whom said they chose their profession exclusively to gain access to victims. An additional 42 percent said that access to victims was at least partial motivation for landing a certain job.

Juvenile perpetrators

Approximately 30 percent of CSA offenders are juveniles, according to Finkelhor, who is director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center. A 1999 study from the Department of Justice describes sexually abusive youth as primarily between 13 and 17 years of age and predominantly male. The study divided the offenders into two subgroups: those who offend against peers and adults versus those who offend against children, as the following chart shows.

Comparing Two Sub-Groups of Sexually Abusive Youth

Characteristics	Offend Against Peers or Adults	Offend Against Children
Victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominantly assault females. • Assault mostly strangers or acquaintances (Hunter et al, in press). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females victimized at slightly higher rates. • Nearly half assault at least one male. • Up to 40 percent of victims are either siblings or relatives (Hunter et al, in press).
Offense Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to commit in conjunction with other criminal activity. • More likely to commit offenses in public areas (Hunter et al, in press). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on opportunity and guile, particularly when victim is a relative. • Trick child by using bribes or threatening loss of relationship (Hunter et al, in press, Kaufman et al, 1996).
Social and Criminal History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to have histories of non-sexual criminal offenses. • Generally delinquent and conduct-disordered (Hunter et al, in press, Kaufman et al, 1996, Richardson, et al, 1997). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deficits in self-esteem and social competency are common. • Often lack skills and attributes necessary for forming and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships (Awad and Saunders, 1989, Monto et al, 1998).
Behavior Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display higher levels of aggression and violence (Awad and Saunders, 1989, Monto et al, 1998). • More likely to use weapons and cause injuries to their victims (Awad and Saunders, 1989, Monto et al, 1998). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently display signs of depression (Becker et al, 1991). • Youths with severe personality and/or psychosexual disturbance may display high levels of aggression and violence (Becker and Hunter, 1993).

A study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* in 2013 explored characteristics and motivations of young adult (age 14 to 21) perpetrators of sexual violence, or of any type of forced sexual contact, up to and including rape. Ten percent of the

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study's participants said they had committed sexual violence in their lifetime, most often starting at around age 16 with their dating partners as the primary target of their actions. Few — only 14 percent — consider themselves responsible for the violence, while 50 percent placed blame on the targets of their sexual violence. Likewise, a small study in California shows that male teen athletes — football and basketball players in particular — are twice as likely to have assaulted their girlfriends as their non-athlete peers.

When & where CSA takes place

When

According to The [Children's Assessment Center of Houston](#), CSA by adults takes place most often at 8 a.m., noon and 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. For older children, ages 12-17, assaults peak in the late evening hours. For juvenile offenders, 1 in 7 incidents of CSA take place on school day afternoons between 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., with a peak from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Home

Perpetrators most often sexually abuse their victims in a home. A [report](#) from the Child Advocacy Center of Houston shows that 84 percent of sexual victimization of children under 12 years old took place in a residence — either the victim's or the perpetrator's — which was also true for 71 percent of victims ages 12-17.

School

By staff

Women perpetrate 43 percent of CSA incidents in K-12 educational settings whereas men perpetrate 57 percent. More than a quarter (28 percent) of the CSA incidents are same sex: 15 percent male-male and 13 percent female-female.

Perpetrators took advantage of their positions within the school setting to sexually abuse students: Teachers had the highest rate of offense at 18 percent, followed by coaches at 15 percent and substitute teachers at 12 percent.

By other students

AAUW [surveyed](#) 2,000 middle and high school students in 2011. The majority of adolescent perpetrators of sexual harassment stated either that they did not think sexual harassment was serious (44 percent) or that they had acted in jest (39 percent).

Sexual Harassment and Violence Among Middle School Youth

Unwanted physical contact	21.6%
Rumor-spreading	18.9%
Verbal sexual commentary	18.2%
Homophobic name-calling	17.9%
Other	23.4%

In a [2014 study](#) overseen by educational psychologist Dorothy Espelage, approximately 1,400 middle school students, 22 percent of youth who were harassed reported that they experienced sexual harassment in the form of unwanted or forced physical contact.

In the AAUW [study](#), referenced above, girls were more likely to experience sexual harassment (56 percent vs. 40 percent), and at 18 percent, both girls and boys equally reported being “called gay or lesbian in a negative way.” Most sexually harassed students admitted to harassing their peers (92 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys); more boys admitted to sexually harassing others (18 percent of boys and 14 percent of girls).

In that same [study](#), researchers also found that while students from lower- and higher-income families were equally likely to experience sexual harassment, students from low-income families were more likely to be touched in unwelcomed ways than their peers from higher-income families.

Juvenile detention/incarceration facilities

- Almost 10 percent of young people in state juvenile facilities/state contract facilities [reported](#) being sexually victimized at least once (by another incarcerated juvenile or by staff) in the prior year. Close to 4 percent of youth convicted of a crime [reported](#) that they were forced or coerced into having sexual contact with facility staff. Of those, 86 percent [stated](#) that there was more than one incident; 20 percent reported 11 incidents or more.
- Youth in state-owned and state-operated facilities [were victims of CSA at higher rates of sexual misconduct](#) (8 percent) than youth in local or privately owned/operated facilities (5 percent).
- Female staff perpetrated sexual misconduct with 89 percent of male youth [who reported](#) for the survey; 3 percent of the male juveniles indicated that the sexual contact was with both male and female staff.
- LGBT youth in juvenile facilities [were significantly more likely](#) to be sexually victimized by other juveniles (10.3 percent) than were heterosexual youth (1.5 percent).
- Across race/ethnicity, youth were more likely to be sexually violated by staff than by other youth, as the chart below shows:

Race/Ethnicity of adjudicated youth	Victimized by youth	Victimized by staff
White	4%	6.4%
Black	1.4%	9.6%
Hispanic	2.1%	6.4%

Online

- According to the [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) website, there are close to 22 million unique IP addresses/users worldwide that share in peer-to-peer child pornography networks. Of those, 45 percent (9,793,000) were based in the US.
- Online solicitation or enticement of children increased 230 percent from 2004 to 2008, and the number of cases US attorneys handled in 2006 was 83 percent greater than what they handled in 1994.
- According to a Department of Justice [fact sheet](#) on child sexual abuse, 4 percent of young internet users are aggressively solicited by those seeking to make offline contact with youth. In 27 percent of these incidents, solicitors have asked the young people to send sexually explicit photographs. Close to 15 percent of teens responding to a national survey on internet-based sex crimes involving children said that they had sent sexually explicit photos of themselves to someone they knew only online.
- Nine percent of young internet users have seen disturbing sexual material online without having sought it out.

Rural settings

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center produced the [report *Unspoken Crimes: Sexual Assault in Rural America*](#), which shows the unique challenges of dealing with CSA in rural settings. For example, there are fewer services in general for all forms of sexual violence, including for children. The communities themselves are notable because the small populations, though spread across more land, tend to be closely knit. Potential interveners outside of the home — teachers, nurses, child care providers, etc. — may be less inclined to identify signs and symptoms as CSA because they likely have longstanding friendships with potential perpetrators. Another, similar [report](#) from the National Coalition against Domestic Violence underscores that although the number of CSA victims is higher in urban areas, the rate of CSA is higher in rural areas.

Disclosure: What influences whether victims come forward?

Up to 41 percent of child sexual abuse victims [tell someone about the abuse](#) while they are still children. A number of studies show a range of between 58 percent and 72 percent of CSA victims disclose the information at some point during their lifetimes.

Boys and girls tend to wait before telling someone about being sexually abused: almost half (47 percent) had waited 5 years or more before sharing the information; about a quarter (28 percent) of women participating in one study on victims of CSA had not told anyone until they were asked in the study.

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A [survey](#) of approximately 3,400 adults in the US showed that 74 percent of women and 78 percent of men who were sexually abused before puberty did not share the information with anyone during their childhood.

In two nationally representative surveys (1993 and 1997), the top reasons victims of CSA gave for their reluctance to disclose were embarrassment (25-46 percent), that they would not be believed (23 percent) and that they would be blamed by the people they told about the abuse (18-29 percent).

Bystander inaction

When asked in a [survey](#) by the anti-violence advocacy organization Safe Horizon, although 59 percent of US residents said that they knew someone who had been the victim of CSA, when they suspected that a child was being abused, only 6 percent contacted authorities, 6 percent reached out to police and 19 percent called on child protective services. Approximately 25 percent said they had suspected child abuse but did not act because they did not know what to do.

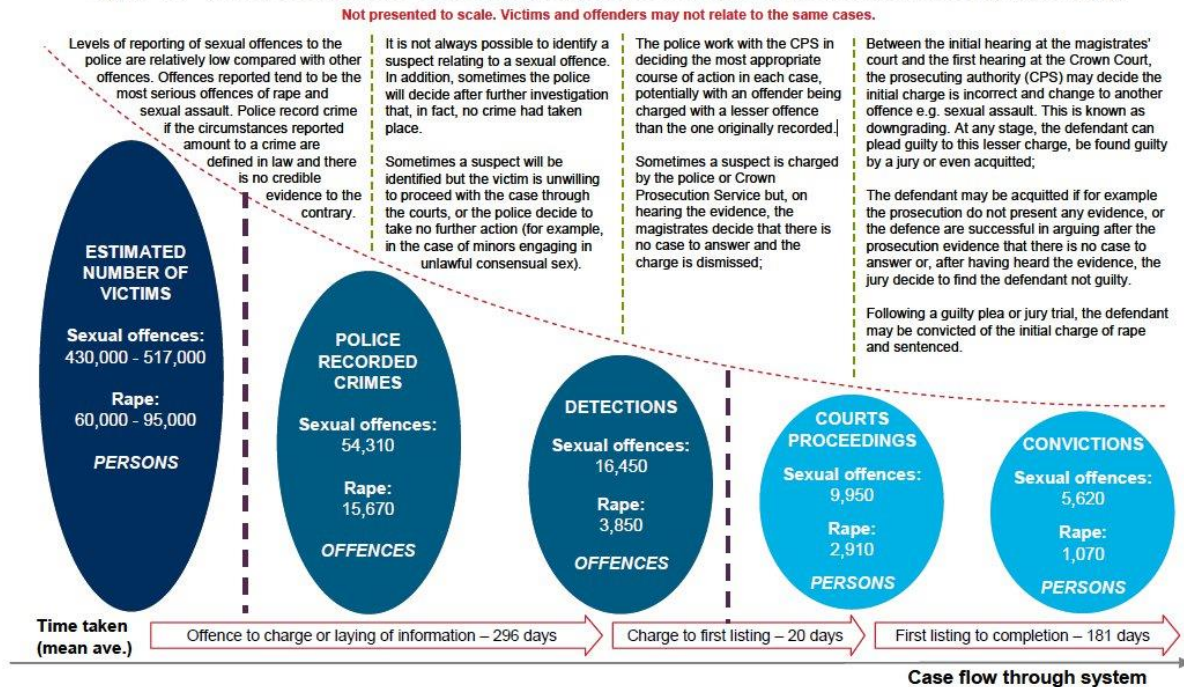
Less than 10 percent of Americans can identify warnings signs of CSA, such as changes in a child's eating and sleeping habits, diminished school performance or fear of being alone with certain adults.

Adjudication

The rates of arrest, prosecution and felony conviction are very low in the US, as evidenced by the following infographic from [RAINN](#). A comparison with such rates in the [United Kingdom](#) shows that the US lags behind.



Figure 1.1 – Flow of sexual offence cases from victimisation to conviction (figures displayed are 3 year averages)



Statute of Limitations (SOL)

There is a direct relationship between the statute of limitation and when individuals disclose their abuse. If disclosure comes later in life, the victim may not have a chance to pursue criminal or civil legal action against the perpetrator. The SOL represents an additional hurdle for CSA victims who want to pursue a court case.

Most US states have an SOL, in contrast to many other countries that have none. The US federal criminal system does not have an SOL, and the state policies can be very difficult to follow, differing from one state to another. According to [National Center for Victims of Crime](#), some SOL laws are straightforward (i.e., no SOL), while others are difficult to fathom. For example, Washington State's rule for victims under 14 at the time of the abuse have until they are 28 to bring a case as long as the abuse itself was reported within one year of when it occurred. Some states allow criminal prosecution if the case begins within 10 (e.g., California), 15 (e.g., Washington, DC) or even 30 (Connecticut) years of the victim legally coming of age or their 18th birthday. Others require action before the victim turns 21. In addition, new technology has introduced the "DNA exception," meaning that if there is DNA evidence of child sexual abuse, it will override any SOL restrictions and the case may proceed through the courts.

Costs of CSA

Researchers highlight the costs associated with CSA in different ways. This is an area worthy of additional research because, although the cost of CSA is clearly a part of the two charts below, there is still no data that isolates costs by type of sexual abuse.

The [Children's Advocacy Center of Houston](#) (CAC) has collected different researchers' estimates about aspects of a victim's life that are affected by CSA in order to put a monetary value on the suffering. The information below is pulled directly from the CAC website:

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- The direct cost of mental health is more than \$97 billion annually in 2010 dollars (Mark, et. al., 1998). Indirect costs add another \$110 billion or more annually in 2010 dollars (Rice & Miller, 1996). If CSA victims have a doubled risk for mental health conditions (Rohde et al., 2008; Dube et al., 2005; Waldrop et al., 2007; Day et al., 2003; Kendler et al., 2000; Voeltanz et al., 1999), logic suggests that child sexual abuse is responsible for annual mental health costs of at least \$20 billion.
- The US government estimates that teen pregnancy costs the nation over \$9 billion annually (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2004). If the applicable research (Noll, Shenk, & Putnam, 2009) is accurate, logic suggests that over \$2 billion of this is attributable to child sexual abuse.
- Sexually transmitted diseases cost this nation \$8.4 billion annually (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1997). If the research is accurate (Zierler et al., 1991; Allers et al., 1993; Dekker et al., 1990), logic tells us that over \$1.5 billion of this is attributable to child sexual abuse.
Others have narrowed the scope a bit to look at CSA's economic cost to a specific institution, such as schools. The following information was taken directly from the website Child Sexual Abuse in K-12 Schools in the U.S.

Estimated Costs of Child Sexual Abuse in Schools

While there are no official estimates of the costs related specifically to sexual abuse in schools, Wang and Holton (2007) estimated the annual costs of child abuse and neglect in the US.

Direct costs

- Hospitalization: \$6.6 billion
- Mental Health Care System: \$1 billion
- Child Welfare Services System: \$25.3 billion
- Law Enforcement: \$33.3 million

Indirect costs

- Special Education: \$2.5 billion
- Juvenile Delinquency: \$7 billion
- Mental Health and Health Care: \$67.8 million
- Adult Criminal Justice System: \$27.9 billion
- Lost Productivity to Society: \$33 billion

The sum of these costs is a total of \$103.4 billion. The cost of sexual abuse in schools is some unknown fraction of this total. A few studies have looked at direct legal costs to schools. For example, between 1996 and 2001 in New York City public schools, approximately **\$18.7 million** was awarded to children who were sexually abused by educators (Campanile and Montero, 2001). While these studies leave the total cost largely unknown, they provide some idea that the costs are far-reaching (lost productivity to society, etc.) and likely in the billions of dollars.