



REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

BY DARKNESS TO LIGHT

What are the reporting rates for child sexual abuse and assault?

Only 26% of CSAA survivors disclose their abuse to adults and 12% disclosed to the authorities (Lahtinen et al., 2018). There are several reasons why victims of child sexual abuse do not disclose immediately, if at all. These include guilt, fear of family disruption, self-blame, fear of not believed (Lemaigre, 2017; McElvaney et al., 2014).

In some instances, non-disclosure is due to the experience being considered not serious enough to report (41%) or children did not perceive the incident as child sexual abuse (Lahitnen, 2018).

Delays in disclosure may be a result of emotional abuse from family members and unstable or dysfunctional familial environments. Survivors living with offenders are less likely to disclose abuse as opposed to survivors no longer living with offenders (Tashjian 2016, Leclerc & Wortley, 2015). Issues with disclosure in ethnic minority communities may stem from racism and stereotypes perpetuated by institutions and professionals (Hurcombe et al., 2023). Additionally, stigma may discourage disclosure (Rodger et al., 2020).

How often are reports false?

Although, false allegations do occur they happen at a non-negligible rate (O'Donohue et al., 2018). Less than 5% of all cases are found to be intentionally fabricated (O'Donohue et al., 2018; Trocme & Bala, 2005). 

How many child sexual abuse and assault reports result in prosecution?

- Less than 1 in 5 reported cases of child sexual abuse & assault went forward to prosecution.
 - About half of these cases resulted in a conviction or guilty pleas (Block & Williams, 2019).
- Reasons why cases are not opened or investigated further:
 - case involved two consenting minors,
 - perpetrator was unknown or too young,
 - parents were unsupport or protective of their children,
 - parents defended perpetrating partner instead of their child,
 - case was viewed to be in the interest of the child victims and/or their families (Block & Williams, 2019).





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How do I recognize the signs of abuse?

The majority of sexually abused children do not display signs of child sexual abuse making it often difficult to recognize CSAA in children. The easiest way to identify CSAA is through disclosure; however, majority of children do not disclose or delay disclosure (McElvaney, 2015; Reitsema & Grietens, 2016). If a child does not disclose, we must rely on any available physical or psychosocial signs of CSAA.

Behavioral Signs

- behavioral problems (e.g. acting out, social withdrawal, over-perfect behavior, etc.),
- post-traumatic stress symptoms,
- depressive symptoms (Vrolijk-Bosschaart et al., 2018).
- age-inappropriate sexual behavior (Baker et al., 2008).
- age-inappropriate sexual knowledge (Vizard, 2013).

Physical Signs

- genital pain and genital bleeding (Anderson et al., 2014).
- abdominal pain (van Tilburg et al., 2010).
- cuts or bruising of genitals (Adams et al., 2018).
- STIs (Adams et al., 2018).

But it is important to remember that signs are only found in a minority of CSAA victims. Approximately 95% of cases found no physical findings (Adams et al., 2016).

How do I respond to CSAA?

How you respond to disclosures of child sexual abuse matters. The most important action an adult can do when a child discloses is to believe them.

Survivors often fear being disbelieved making it difficult for them to be believed. Survivors can sometimes choose not to report because they think they're been accused of lying or being invalidated. If a caregiver believed the allegations, they are more likely to disclose the abuse during the forensic interview (Grandgenett et al., 2021). Positive reactions to disclosure allow for survivors to feel optimistic about continuing to share their story (Dworkin & Allen, 2018).





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