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## In city, 1 in 4 report childhood sex abuse

**The Joseph J. Peters Institute released the study. Everyone in Phila. likely knows a victim, an institute official said.**

**By Vernon Clark**  
**Inquirer Staff Writer**

Nearly one in four adults in Philadelphia reported having been sexually abused as a child, according to a study released yesterday.

And only about two out of five people who reported being sexually abused as a child ever reported such abuse to an adult, according to the Joseph J. Peters Institute, a Philadelphia nonprofit that focuses on preventing child abuse.

"We're talking about 270,000 adults in Philadelphia who were abused as a child. That's a lot," said Michael Stinson, director of prevention services for the institute, at Broad and Chestnut Streets.

He said the study, conducted between March 15 and April 23, used a statistically random telephone survey of about 600 people. "We broke the city down by zip code to make sure we got an array of opinions," Stinson said.

He said the study has a margin of error of 2 1/2 to 4 percentage points. Stinson said the national average is slightly lower than that of Philadelphia.

Based on the survey, it is likely that everyone in Philadelphia knows someone who has been sexually abused as a child - "a friend, a neighbor, perhaps a family member or even themselves," Stinson said. He said that, nationally, about 500,000 children are sexually abused each year.

Stinson said the study was conducted to "show Philadelphians how underreported child sexual abuse is" and how it often occurs close to home.

"In 90 percent of the cases, the child knows the offender, so it's not strangers who are doing this," Stinson said.

Children who are sexually abused are more likely to suffer from depression, become delinquent, and abuse alcohol and drugs later in life, Stinson said. When those children grow up, they are less likely to hold a job or keep a family intact, he said.

"When you add up the cost to society, we're paying a big price for this," Stinson said.

Shelly Yanoff, executive director of Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, a child-advocacy organization, said she was surprised that the number of adults who reported being sexually abused as children was so high.

"We are increasingly learning about children who are sexually abused," Yanoff said. "They are less physically healthy and emotionally healthy.

"We, as a society, have to make it safer for people to report" child sexual abuse, Yanoff said. "And we have to provide more prevention to help kids know it's OK to say no and to provide the protection they need."

[Resources for victims](#) can be found on the Institute's website.

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Contact staff writer Vernon Clark at 215-854-5717 or [vclark@phillynews.com](mailto:vclark@phillynews.com).