



Stop It Now!®

Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

What Do U.S. Adults Think about Child Sexual Abuse? Measures of Knowledge and Attitudes Among Six States

A Briefing Sheet

Much is assumed, but very little is known systematically about adult views on the issue of child sexual abuse prevention. "What Do U.S. Adults Think about Child Sexual Abuse?" reports on our analysis of survey data from over 5,000 adults collected from ten telephone surveys commissioned by Stop It Now! and its local affiliates between 1992 and 2007. This Briefing Sheet summarizes the report's key results and implications in order to help policy makers, prevention advocates and concerned citizens communicate the importance of these findings in their work.

Key Results

- 95% believe that children who are sexually abused are often abused by someone the child knows.
- 64% agreed that many children who are sexually abused are abused by other children or adolescents.
- 72% agreed that it is likely that adults who sexually abuse children live in their communities.
- 91% said that if they were in a situation where they thought a child was being sexually abused they would intervene.
- 8% reported that they knew of another adult who might have been sexually abusing a child in the past year. Of those, 65% said that they took action – and 22% stated that they did nothing.
- 96% agreed that "Child sexual abusers who are in prison for the sexual abuse of a child should get treatment while they are there."
- 69% agreed that "Treatment programs can help abusers stop their sexual abuse of children"

Key Findings

Prevalence rates

The percentage of adults (29% of women and 14% of men) who stated that they experienced sexual abuse in childhood is consistent with child sexual abuse prevalence rates established in other research with adults.

Knowledge and awareness is high.

Awareness, concern and knowledge about child sexual abuse is relatively high among U.S. adults. The majority of respondents know that people who sexually abuse live in their communities, are mostly known to the child, and are often other children themselves.

Action falls short of awareness and good intentions

There is a disconnect between widespread adult awareness and concern over the issue of child sexual abuse and the low-level of recognition of situations in people's daily lives and among their own relationships.

Most adults support treatment for people who sexually offend

Nearly all adults support specialized treatment for those who are convicted of sexually abusing children, and a clear majority believe treatment can help people stop and control their abusive behavior.

Key Implication

Prevention policies and program efforts can move beyond a primary focus on raising adult awareness to removing barriers to – and providing concrete support for - prevention action in daily life.

Recommended Actions

For Policy and Research

- Fund child sexual abuse prevention efforts at levels commensurate with the severity of the problem.
- Commission a follow-up national survey to measure change in public attitudes and beliefs, as well as pinpoint opportunities for individual engagement.
- Fund more evaluation of current prevention programming.
- Investigate the effectiveness of current public policies on sex offender management and how they impact families dealing with child sexual abuse situations.

For Individual Action

- Talk with five people about the study results, share what you know about preventing child sexual abuse – and tell us about your experience.
- Learn and implement daily preventive behaviors such as learning about children’s sexual development [http://www.stopitnow.org/age_appropriate_sexual_behavior] knowing what to ask about hiring policies at your daycare center, [http://www.stopitnow.org/parent_questions_school_policy] and carrying out everyday actions to keep children safe from sexual harm [http://www.stopitnow.org/dont_wait_everyday_prevention]
- Be concerned in advance of a situation of abuse: learn to recognize worrying behaviors that may signal someone’s sexual interest in a child [<http://www.stopitnow.org/warnings>] and know the resources [http://www.stopitnow.org/helpful_links] for accurate information, guidance and support to overcome barriers to taking action.
- Advocate for affordable and widely available treatment for all involved.

A link to the full report and related documents can be found at:
www.StopItNow.org/rdd_survey_report

Stop It Now![®] prevents the sexual abuse of children by mobilizing adults, families and communities to take action before a child is harmed. We provide support, information and resources for adults to take responsibility for creating safer communities.