



Stop It Now!® Wisconsin

Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

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Report highlights

Child sexual abuse: Attitudes, beliefs, and actions taken

Stop It Now!® Wisconsin commissioned a random digit dial survey of 800 residents in the Milwaukee and Wausau areas to measure attitudes, beliefs, and actions taken about child sexual abuse. Survey results will

guide the Stop It Now! Wisconsin's efforts to empower adults and communities to take action to prevent the perpetration of child sexual abuse.

Who we are

Stop It Now! Wisconsin is a public health campaign that engages adults and communities to help stop child sexual abuse before it begins. The initiative is co-sponsored by the Children's Trust Fund and the Child Abuse Prevention Fund of Children's Hospital and Health System, and is one of the recommendations in *Wisconsin's State Plan to Prevent Child Maltreatment*.

The mission of this comprehensive initiative is to prevent child sexual abuse by helping adults and communities take action to protect their children. Strategies include:

- Raise awareness of adult and community responsibility for child sexual abuse prevention.

- Educate adults and communities about high-risk situations and warning signs exhibited by potential abusers.
- Build skills and resources to respond appropriately when abuse is suspected.
- Increase the knowledge and understanding of healthy sexual development in children and families.
- Challenge those who are inappropriate or abusive, and families and friends who influence them, to seek help, stop the abuse and face accountability.

Survey summary

This study shows that while awareness of child sexual abuse is high, Wisconsin residents have a fairly limited understanding of the issue. Adults are aware that most child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child knows, and they tend to agree that it is important for victims of child abuse to receive professional help such as therapy or counseling. Adults are not aware that many child victims are abused by adolescents or other minors, and they do not believe that abusers can stop abusing children if they get appropriate treatment.

Adults also know that abusers live in their communities, but they do not know how to recognize

someone at risk to abuse and are unclear about what action to take when they are concerned about an adults' behavior around children. Wisconsin residents lack information that could help them prevent abuse before a child is harmed. Most adults would take action if they suspect child sexual abuse but are unaware of places to go for information and guidance or of resources available for someone who would like treatment to stop sexually abusing a child.

Stop It Now! Wisconsin's goal is to move from awareness of child sexual abuse to taking action to prevent it.

Primary findings

Child sexual abuse is a problem in Wisconsin.

Stop It Now! Wisconsin's survey indicates that Milwaukee and Wausau residents overwhelmingly perceive child sexual abuse to be a problem in Wisconsin. National surveys have estimated that one in five girls and one in 10 to 20 boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years of age.*

Of the adults surveyed, about one-fifth (20.3%) reported being sexually abused as a child. Minority residents and women are more likely to disclose child sexual abuse. Of the adults surveyed in Milwaukee and Wausau, almost one in four women and one in eight men reported being sexually abused as a child, which is higher than the national average.

Adults need to go beyond awareness of child sexual abuse to taking action to prevent child sexual abuse. This survey also indicates that for every victim we are aware of, there are many more who have not disclosed or whose disclosures were not reported.

Residents believe that victims of child sexual abuse should receive professional help, but are less likely to believe that abusers can also benefit from appropriate treatment.

Almost all residents believe it is important for victims of child sexual abuse to receive professional help such as therapy or counseling. Those surveyed are less likely to believe (61.6%) that some abusers would like to get help to stop abusing children. Only one in three people believe that abusers can stop abusing with appropriate treatment.

Those adults who do believe that abusers would like to receive help to stop abusing children are unsure where to refer that person for help or treatment. Almost half (45%) of those surveyed responded that they "don't know" where to refer an adult who would like help.

To prevent child sexual abuse, people need to know that specialty treatment works, is available, and how to access it.

Residents are more familiar with signs of a sexually abused child than signs of an adult abuser.

Most residents (70.5%) are able to convey potential warning signs, such as emotional or behavioral problems, of a child who has been sexually abused. Nearly one-half (48.7%), however, said they did not know what the warning signs might be and more than one-tenth (11.8%) believe that there are no warning signs for adult abusers. Still others believe that child sexual abusers have overt characteristics, such as mental instability or paranoia, that make them identifiable.

Almost all (90.1%) residents consider child sexual abuse to be a problem in Wisconsin.

Minority residents (32.7% black and 32% Hispanic) are more likely to disclose abuse than white residents (17.4%).

Women (23.8%) disclose abuse at a higher rate than men (12.7%).

Milwaukee area residents (22.8%) are more likely to disclose abuse than Wausau residents (14.5%).

Nearly all residents (97.2%) believe it is important for victims of child sexual abuse to receive professional help.

Almost two out of three people (62.7%) do not believe that abusers can stop abusing with treatment.

Women (77.1%) are more likely than men (53.4%) to express interest in educational information about child sexual abuse.

Milwaukee residents (72.2%) are more likely than Wausau residents (58.4%) to express interest in educational information about child sexual abuse.

Respondents' quotes about child victims:

"I think that they become withdrawn and they go into their own little world and they hide things well."

"Some would be hiding it out of shame and some would just be locked up emotionally..."

* Finkelhor, D. "Current Information on the Scope and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse." *The Future of Children: Sexual Abuse of Children*, The David and Lucille Packard Foundation, 1994.

Women (76.2%) are more likely than men (58.3%) to believe they know the warning signs of a child who has been sexually abused. Also, Milwaukee residents (72.6%) are more likely to know the warning signs of a child victim than Wausau residents (59.2%).

When asked about potential signs of an adult who has sexually abused a child, white residents (14%) were more likely to respond that there are **no** warning signs than black (3.7%) or Hispanic (2.8%) residents.

Recognizing abuse is important so children get the help they need to heal. To prevent child sexual abuse, adults also need to recognize and intervene when they see adults interacting inappropriately with children.

Residents were able to identify scenarios constituting child sexual abuse, but were less confident about circumstances concerning perpetrators who are women or minors.

When given various scenarios, more than four-fifths of residents were able to identify child sexual abuse when the perpetrator is an adult. When the abuser is specified as a woman or another child or adolescent, nearly one-third of residents do not recognize child sexual abuse.

About two-thirds (63.4%) of residents agree that many sexually abused children are abused by other children or adolescents. About one-fifth (21.5%), however, disagreed with this statement.

Parents need accurate information to understand what sexual behaviors are common in children of various ages so they can recognize behaviors that are uncommon and may be cause for concern.

Most residents would take some form of action if they suspected child sexual abuse, but the degree of action varied based on the relationship to the suspected abuser.

Although most survey participants would take some form of action if they suspected abuse, 42.6% responded that they would take no action if they knew a suspected abuser, and 35.3% would take no action if they knew a suspected child victim.

Residents are more likely (43.2%) to call the police if the suspected abuser is not a friend or family member. If a family member is the suspected abuser, only about one in five respondents (21.5%) would call the police. Parents are much more likely (48%) than non-parents (8.2%) to report a suspected abuser regardless of their relationship to that person.

Adults need resources and support to overcome internal and external barriers to take action when they see warning sign behaviors in adults and youth.

Respondents' quotes about adult abusers:

"I don't know—that is really hard, from what I understand. It is really hard to tell. It could be your next door neighbor, you just don't know."

"Their behavior is somewhat normal. There have been people in high offices found to be dealing in child porn. I think really they are just like anyone else."

"It seems like some of the characteristics are that people have an unspoken discomfort around that person. They have a subtle personality that causes people to feel uncomfortable or bad around them."

Hispanic residents (77.1%) are more likely than residents overall (62.2%) to identify "8-year-old touches private parts of 12 year-old at his request" as child sexual abuse.

Parents (71.6%) are more likely than non-parents (58.2%) to believe that a "19-year-old woman in a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old boy" is child sexual abuse.

Concern about someone in neighborhood who is not a friend:

- 59.6% – report suspected abuser
- 21.1% – do nothing, or don't know
- 11.2% – confront suspected abuser
- 8.1% – seek advice

Concern about a family member:

- 47.4% – confront suspected abuser
- 32.7% – report suspected abuser
- 14.3% – do nothing, or don't know
- 5.6% – seek advice

Survey methodology

Market Street Research of Massachusetts conducted a telephone survey of Wisconsin residents in urban and suburban areas of Marathon and Milwaukee counties. Using a standard Random Digit Dial (RDD) procedure, interviewers surveyed 803 random Wisconsin adults, including 250 residents of urban Milwaukee, 251 residents of suburban Milwaukee, 150 residents of Wausau and Rothschild, and 152 residents from the remainder of Marathon County. All were 18 years of age or older, and the interviews were conducted by phone during a 6-week period in April and May 2006.

All surveys of this type have a margin of error. This survey has a margin of error (+/- 2.6 to 4.4 percentage points) at the 95% confidence level. Results were weighted to account for the higher tendency of older residents to participate in phone interviews. Also, the response rate for this survey was 42.9%.

This is the sixth market survey conducted by Market Street Research on behalf of Stop It Now! programs. For additional details about the survey methodology, visit Stop It Now! Wisconsin's web site at <http://stopitnow.wi.gov>.

Demographics

This survey collected information on respondents' sex, age, highest level of education, marital status, parental status, if children under the age of 18 live in the home, race, and

ethnicity. The Wisconsin sample was compared to the 2006 U.S. Census population estimates.

	Survey respondents	2006 census estimates
Men	31.8%	48.9%
Women	68.2%	51.16%
White residents	74.5%	79.7%
Hispanic or Latino residents	7.3%	4.8%
African American or Black residents	15.9%	12.5%
Single	26.1%	29.9%
Married	47.2%	52.8%

Wisconsin survey latest in a series of studies

Stop It Now! Wisconsin's survey is the latest in a series of studies about sexual abuse of children commissioned for Stop It Now! programs since 1995. In all, nearly 6,000 adults have been interviewed about their attitudes toward sexual abuse of children and about their capacity to act to protect children.

The data collected from local and statewide markets in six states (including Wisconsin), and from one national survey, has helped inform the development of Stop It Now!'s unique focus on preventing sexual abuse before a child is harmed. In addition, results from new surveys in Georgia and Minnesota will be released this spring. A national dataset is currently being analyzed and a report will be issued later this year.

As was true in Wisconsin, the collective survey responses showed that most adults actually know a lot about sexual abuse and where the risks lie—nearly all (more than 90%) were aware that most child sexual abuse is committed by someone who is known and trusted; many (nearly two-thirds) knew that child victims are often abused by adolescents or

other minors; a large majority (60 to 85%) were able to name warning signs of a child who had been abused. Most (4 of 5 surveyed) considered sexual abuse a problem that needs to be addressed; and more than one in five of all respondents reported having been sexually abused as children themselves.

But despite that knowledge, respondents in all surveys lacked effective prevention strategies. Most adults said they would take action if they suspected sexual abuse but were unsure where to turn for information and guidance. And few had information that could help them intervene before a child was harmed. Most did not know how to recognize someone at risk to abuse a child or what to do when faced with concerning behaviors.

Stop It Now!'s national and community prevention programs are designed to address those deficits and to teach adults how to protect children from sexual abuse, before there is a child victim to heal or an offender to punish.