

Child Sexual Abuse: Definitions & Statistics

Definition:

- Child sexual abuse is *any* sexual interaction (including fondling, sexual kissing, and oral sex, as well as vaginal or anal penetration) between an adult and a prepubescent child
- A broad definition also includes nonphysical contact, such as people exposing their genitals to children or having children pose nude or stimulate themselves while being filmed or photographed
- It does not matter whether the child is perceived by the adult to be engaging in the sexual activity voluntarily. Because of the child's age, he or she cannot give informed consent; the activity can only be considered as self-serving to the adult

Statistics:

- In 1996, approximately 3.13 million children were reported to Child Protective Services as alleged victims of child mistreatment
- Of these cases, 9%, or roughly 281,000, involved sexual abuse
- From 1991 through 1996, in one-third of all sexual assaults reported to law enforcement officials, the victim was younger than age 12
- About 25% of the sexual assault victims under age 12 were male, and 84% of the sexual assaults on children under age 12 occurred in a residence or home
- The offender was a family member in 47% of incidents, an acquaintance in 49%, and a stranger in only 4%
- Girls are sexually abused 3 times more often than boys

These are the *reported* cases.

Many cases of child sexual abuse are not reported.

General Information:

- The risk of being sexually abused does not vary among ethnic groups, but children from lower-income groups and from single-parent families are more frequently victimized
- Genital fondling and touching are the most common forms of child sexual abuse
- Most victimized children are between 8 and 12 years old

Sources:

Strong, B., DeVault, C., Sayad, B. W., & Yarber W. L. (2002). Human sexuality diversity in contemporary America. New York: McGraw-Hill.

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