

Statements for Journalists:

General Information about Sexual Abuse & Adult Male Sexual Abusers



- Sexual abuse is a public health issue that impacts everyone – individuals, communities, institutions, and society as a whole. Too frequently our current cultural response to this important problem tends to focus on intervention and prevention *after* sexual abuse has already occurred. ATSA encourages and supports a public health approach to sexual abuse as this focuses our efforts on prevention of sexual abuse both *before* and *after* it happens. Comprehensive public health approaches also ensure the health of an entire population, not just individuals.
- To prevent sexual abuse, having a common definition is integral. Sexual abuse is a broad term that includes any sexual or sexually motivated behavior that is the result of someone being forced, coerced, or manipulated into witnessing or experiencing unwanted sexual activity without their consent.
- While it may be a surprising or difficult fact to acknowledge, sexual abuse exists in all communities, although there are certain groups who are at higher risk for victimization such as children, people with disabilities, cultural minorities, and LGBTQ communities. Although greater awareness of sexual abuse has resulted in increased reporting rates over the past two decades, many sexually abusive incidents are still not reported. Due to this, the true rate of sexual abuse is difficult to determine. However, positive progress has been made in recent years to address and prevent sexual abuse within our communities. Research on individuals who have been convicted of sexual crimes has also provided us with a great deal of information about the most common characteristics of sexual abuse.
- Studies have indicated that the majority of sexual abuse is perpetrated by males (approximately 95%) and the majority of sexual abuse is also perpetrated by someone known to the victim, such as a family member, acquaintance, teacher, coach or friend. Research indicates that, among people who sexually abuse children, 93% abused a child they knew and approximately 7% sexually abused a stranger. Although adults have a slightly higher likelihood of being sexually abused by a stranger, 73% of rapes against females age 12 and older were perpetrated by someone they knew. For male victims, only 15.1% reported being raped by a stranger. Due to these facts, strategies which focus on “stranger danger” do not adequately address the reality of sexual abuse. Additionally, when individuals who commit sexual abuse are labeled as “monsters” or “evil,” it often has the unintended consequence of increasing denial in the very people who can make a difference (i.e., family members, communities) as it is extremely difficult to view those we care about and love in such negative terms.

- **When we hear the term “sex offender,” often a single image or type of person comes to mind. That image is often influenced by how sexual abusers are portrayed in films, on television, or in the popular media. The reality is not so clear cut - adults who commit sexual abuse are an extremely diverse group of people crossing socioeconomic, educational, gender, age and cultural lines. They also engage in sexually abusive behavior at differing rates, for varying reasons, and present with different levels of risk for future sexually abusive behavior.**
- **Due to the diversity of adult males who commit sexual abuse, there is no single “profile” or “type”- they range in age, engage in abusive behavior at differing rates, and often present with complex and interconnected motivations. Some may have multiple convictions and/or may engage in a wide variety of sexually abusive or deviant behaviors, whereas others may only engage in one type of behavior or one incident of sexual abuse.**
- **Research has revealed that the majority of adult males convicted of sexual crimes do not continue committing sexually abusive behavior (i.e., reoffend) and the rate of sexual reoffense (i.e., rearrest and/or reconviction) is lower than what the public generally believes. Large scale studies have identified sexual reoffense rates of between 7% and 15% after approximately five years.**
- **Sexual reoffense rates also reflect the diversity of adult males convicted of sexual crimes, as reoffense rates vary based on a number of different factors, such as the person’s type of sexual offending, age, and length of time they have been offense free in the community. For example, one study found that adult males who sexually abused children within their family (i.e. biological relatives or stepchildren) reoffended at 6% after 5 years while adult males who sexually abused boys reoffended at 23% after 5 years. Recent research also indicates that recidivism risk decreases substantially over time if an offender remains in the community offense free. For example, after 16.5 years in the community without a new sexual crime arrest, even high risk sexual offenders are no more likely to be arrested for a new sexual crime than criminals with no history of sexual offending. Understanding these differences is integral to maximizing effective interventions and policies which promote community safety and prevent future sexual abuse.**
- **As our goal is to prevent sexual abuse and ensure there are no more victims, it is vital to provide treatment and support services for adult males who commit sexual abuse. Assisting individuals who commit sexual abuse to discontinue their abusive behavior, hold them accountable for their behavior (past and current), and teach them the necessary skills to engage in appropriate (i.e., non-abusive) behavior is an important component of a comprehensive system to prevent sexual abuse.**
- **Treatment interventions for adult males who commit sexual abuse are designed to target factors related to their abusive patterns of behavior and enhance appropriate skills and competencies that reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Treatment is an important component of a comprehensive approach to preventing sexual abuse as research has shown that there are lower rates of reoffense for treated versus untreated adult males who commit sexual abuse. Treatment interventions for adult males who commit sexual abuse also continue to improve as we learn more about the prevention of sexual abuse.**

- Sexual abuse is a complex and emotional issue which impacts us all. The prevention of sexual abuse requires not only a well-planned and comprehensive response founded on research, but also the involvement of every individual, family, and community. It is only through education, collaboration, and the involvement of everyone – community members, violence prevention professionals, victim advocates, law enforcement professionals, treatment professionals, journalists, and policy makers – that the prevention of sexual abuse can become a reality.

To learn more about the above topics, please see:

- [8 Things Everyone Should Know About Sexual Abuse & Sexual Offending](#)

References

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