Stories of Strength: Report on Child Sexual Abuse & Community Recommendations for Prevention
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—Mark Brady, Ph.D., Neuroscience Educator and author, The Committed Parent blog

Acknowledgements

This paper was made possible through the Ms. Foundation for Women’s Ending Child Sexual Abuse Initiative and the NoVo Foundation for innovations in grant making to end child sexual abuse and build community between activists, advocates, and survivors.

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Joan Horsky, WBC of Greater Los Angeles
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Deborah Koenigszberg, Inter-GIVE, West LA
Emily Austin, Peace Over Violence
Harpenen Lee, California Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Heather Carnscheidt, My Friend’s Place

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Darkness to Light
Enough Abuse Campaign
generationFIVE
Kingsbridge Heights Community Center

Project Coordinator:
Emily Austin, Peace Over Violence

Research and Writing Team:
Patti Giggs, Peace Over Violence
Steve LePore, Jr.
Alex Ross, WomenHelpingWomen, National Jewish Council of Women

Design:
Cayla McClure, Peace Over Violence

Hilal Sammer, Ina
Kim Beth, Valley Trauma Center
Kemberly Madry, WBC of Greater Los Angeles
Lori Velazquez, Los Angeles Unified School District
Melodie Knaupp, Peace Over Violence
Monica Segars, Los Angeles Police Department
Patricia Gilligan, Peace Over Violence
Riverside Dr. Aliah Major
Stephanie Flinnauay, Women Helping Women, National Jewish Council of Women
Steve LePore, Jr.
Sue Lathemcain, Children’s Hospital Los Angeles
William Bardsen, Osher Mind Body Medicine Program
Barbara Fourmi-Helgason, Department of Family and Child Services
Present Child Abuse New Jersey
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Stop It Now!
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Stories of Strength:
Report on Child Sexual Abuse & Community Recommendations for Prevention
Introduction

Stories of Strength: Report on Child Sexual Abuse and Community Recommendations for Prevention is a collaboration between Peace Over Violence, a sexual, domestic, and children and youth violence prevention center and 1in6 an organization dedicated to helping male survivors of sexual abuse. We are grateful for this opportunity to join forces in the Ms. Foundation for Women’s Ending Child Sexual Abuse National Initiative. The goal of this initiative is to inspire and ignite a national movement to prevent and ultimately end child sexual abuse.

Our two agencies jumped at the chance to collaborate on this critical issue that traumatizes children and fractures the adults they become. This paper documents our exploration of the issue of child sexual abuse in dialogue with the community, local stakeholders, and survivors themselves.

Through convenings, research, community dialogue, focus groups, and interviews with survivors, the purpose of this report is to explore the issue of child sexual abuse and to organize a movement of concern, awareness, and action locally in Los Angeles County. One of the main goals of this project is to work toward reducing the stigma of child sexual abuse through surfacing the victim/survivor stories of pain (often filled with resilience and strength) and increasing the number of survivors willing, ready, and able to speak out and tell their stories publicly through our speakers bureau: Voices Over Violence.

Breaking through the silence and shame that surrounds this trauma is key. We aim to re-imagine a community that collectively faces this scourge, creates trusted spaces for healing and develops new and effective ways to prevent it.

In the past few years we have become painfully aware of the pervasive and endemic issue of sexual violence toward children, youth, and adults. Behind bars in prisons, within the military, in religious organizations, on campuses of universities and schools, sexual violence happens everywhere. These institutions public and private, including the institution of the family, house where victimization and perpetration happen. When it involves children as a society we are moved emotionally and can run from shock to anger, despair, and numbness. Scandals come and go, catching our attention for a time and yet we can’t seem to hold onto the issue long enough to really do something significant about it. Obviously, preventing child sexual abuse is a complex issue that requires complex actions and remedies. But if we don’t have a stamina to hold the issue as a community and seek community solutions then unfortunately we will not progress.

We invite you to join with us in local and national initiatives, indeed to think globally and act locally. This is our call to action: to imagine a future without sexually abused children, both girls and boys. Let’s pledge to reduce the one in four girls and one in six boys statistic. What might that look like and what might we do to make it happen? As a community let’s try... together.

Patti Giggans    Steve LePore
Executive Director     Executive Director
Peace Over Violence   1in6
This paper is the result of a review of the research and literature around child sexual abuse, and the stories from the focus groups and conversations Peace Over Violence and 1in6 have been having with the Los Angeles community. Through community-informed research, we not only engaged our local communities, but developed recommendations from the issues and trends we identified during the research and writing process. We conducted four focus groups with communities that are not usually asked about child sexual abuse nor included specifically in the development of prevention and policy plans. We worked with a group of deaf survivors, female gang-affiliated survivors, male survivors, parents and their child survivors, and research experts in child sexual abuse. We also conducted stakeholder interviews with the Los Angeles Department of Family and Child Services, directors of sexual assault services, school administrators, and child sexual abuse therapists. We analyzed and summarized the information gathered and asked for further input from our Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Advisory Council (CSAP Advisory Council) which is composed of survivors, child sexual abuse service providers, experts, school staff, law enforcement, child protective services, therapists, and community stakeholders. We also got input from Peace Over Violence’s survivor speaker’s bureau, Voices Over Violence, with whom we ran an in-service training on how to make presentations and engage the media when telling their stories publicly. The recommendations presented in this paper were reviewed and adopted by the CSAP Advisory Council, and serve as a current action plan in our local effort to end the silence and stigma around child sexual abuse through community-based Days of Dialogue.

Methodology
Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is a serious and complex social issue that affects a wide swath of intersecting areas: public safety, health, criminal justice, human rights, child development, mental health, and education to name a few. While the victim/survivor is central to the trauma of child sexual abuse, this abuse moves beyond the impact on one person and has ripple effects in our society, families, places of worship, institutions of learning, parenting strategies, and future relationships. The stories of strengths collected for this paper are more than a one-dimensional narrative; they are the real stories of strength.

As the story unfolded, the public was horrified by the cover-up as the stories of abuse came forward. A lot of the coverage focused on institutions negligence in dealing with the abuse—the scandal of a cover-up. Church practices and policies, and resulted in billions of dollars in abuse-related settlements. A lot of major child sexual abuse scandals and news coverage have occurred over the past few decades but have recently become more prominent. From 2002 to 2006, the Catholic Church sexual abuse story brought much attention to the institutional response, and the accumulation of public pressure forced changes in the Catholic Church practices and policies, and resulted in billions of dollars in abuse-related settlements. A lot of the coverage focused on institutions negligence in dealing with the abuse—the scandal of a cover-up.

"...The age and gender of the child, the age and gender of the perpetrator, the nature of the relationship between the child and perpetrator, and the number, frequency and duration of the abuse experiences all appear to influence some outcomes. Thus sexually abused children constitute a very heterogeneous group with many degrees of abuse from whom more specific generalizations hold."

Child sexual abuse is sexual contact with a child that occurs as a result of coercion, force, and/or an imbalance of power due to age differences, authority over the child, and/or familiar or other relationships for caring for children. It is estimated that one in six men (16%) and one in four women (25%) experience child sexual abuse.

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Child sexual abuse increases the chances of class, race, and gender. Twenty-five percent of women and 14% of men report being a victim of child sexual abuse. In a report on child sexual abuse in 2005 from the United States Health and Human Services, 13% of all children with a substantiated case of abuse or neglect experienced sexual abuse. According to the National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, the most vulnerable age range for children to experience sexual abuse is between eight and twelve years of age, and the average age of first abuse for girls is 9.4 years, and boys is 9.7 years.

Child sexual abuse is connected to vulnerability. In some ways, child sexual abuse is an equal opportunity assault on the soul. It happens in our most privileged, rich households, and our poorest households. All children are vulnerable given the dynamics of adult-child relationships, authority, and rights. Some youth populations are especially vulnerable due to cultural/language barriers, physical isolation, repressive gender norms, lack of family support structures, and lack of empowerment, opportunity and hope.

From a survey of current research, the children most at risk for child sexual abuse are the ones who have less familial support, are less empowered, and are more physically dependent. Significant racial differences, and a cultural/religious risk for child sexual abuse. Furthermore, the absence of one or both parents is a significant risk factor for child sexual abuse and the presence of a stepfather doubles the risk of sexual abuse. One study found that non-Hispanics had a higher sexual abuse rate than Hispanics. Among homeless youth, 16% to 35% report having experienced childhood sexual abuse and in some studies, they are an area where more women perpetrate child sexual abuse. Some women exhibit increased emotional and behavioral issues compared to African-American or white girls.21 Sexual abuse is also associated with family issues such as domestic violence and parental impairment due to illness and substance abuse.16, 17

In addition, it appears clear that some populations are especially vulnerable and face barriers in reporting the abuse as well as seeking treatment/healing.

• Girls and young women continue to be at greater risk and repeat risk for sexual abuse. In the recent National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 12.7% of females experienced their first completed rape as minors, before the age of 15.18 This statistic highlights the general vulnerability of young women to sexual assault, nearly half of female victims’ first assault was child sexual abuse.

• Childcare settings are a common context within which children can be abused, and according to some studies, they are an area where more women perpetrate child sexual abuse.

• Incarcerated youth experience high rates of sexual abuse within the juvenile justice system. In one study, an estimated 12% of surveyed youth reported experiencing one or more incidents of sexual victimization by another youth or facility staff in the past 12 months.19 Abuse by staff was significant, reporting an incident involving facility staff, and 10% and males and 6.7% of females reported sexual activity with facility staff. Although general prevalence studies find that the vast majority of child sexual abuse perpetrators are male, the Bureau of Justice reports that approximately 19% of all incarcerated youth reporting sexual misconduct said they had been victimized by female staff.

• Among homeless youth, 14% to 35% report having experienced childhood sexual abuse and in Los Angeles, 13% of homeless youth (4% of females, 9% of males) reported being victims of sexual abuse while living on the streets.20 Further, child sexual abuse is also a risk factor for youth becoming homeless/runaway.


Fink, A., Mullen, P., Martin, J., Anderson, J., Romans, S., & Herbison, G. (2008). Child sexual abuse perpetrators are male, the Bureau of Justice reports that approximately 95% of sexual abuse.


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Who Perpetrates Child Sexual Abuse

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse are most likely acquaintances (51% for female survivors, 31% for male survivors) or family members (29% for females, and 11% for males). For boys, 40% of child sexual abuse was perpetrated by strangers (compared to only 2% of child sexual abuse by strangers among females). And perpetrators are predominantly male—94% among female victims, 81% to 83% among male victims. In a national survey published in 1990, half of the offenders were seen which persons of authority perpetrate child sexual abuse.

Impact of Child Sexual Abuse

The losses involved with childhood sexual abuse are considerable. An early, timely unfolding childhood is lost. Innocence is lost. Trust is lost. Safety is lost. Peace of mind is lost. Sisters are lost. (possibly uncle–brother–nephew) and often roam as well. Moral real estate is lost. Sacred sanctity of self is lost. Honor is lost. Unbowed, these losses inevitably begin to weigh on us with increasing gravity. Driving cannot be avoided any longer. Full emotional and social development.

Child sexual abuse impacts physical, emotional, social, and neurodevelopmental, during a critical time of growth—childhood. Because abuse never happens in a vacuum, at the very least abuse personality disorders, high risk sexual behaviors and sexually transmitted diseases, as well as sexual revictimization, and subsequent problems in intimate relationships and family.62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67 Greater severity of sexual abuse, as well as sexual abuse by trusted perpetrators are all associated with more severe and pervasive trauma, and worse mental health outcomes.44, 45, 46, 47

ADULTS 14 13

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Report from Specific Vulnerable Groups

Men as Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse

Men are an underresearched and isolated population of survivors of child sexual abuse, and they face complex barriers in reporting and seeking help for child sexual abuse. One in six men are survivors of child sexual abuse.54 And certain groups of men experience even higher rates of child sexual abuse. For example, there is a higher percentage of gay/lesbian men among gay/lesbian male children.55, 56

Due to undercurrents of homophobia, traditional gender roles that pigeonhole men as unemotional, physically strong, and perpetrators not victims, and a lack of tailored resources for men, men face numerous barriers to disclosing their experience with child sexual abuse. These barriers to disclosure are discussed in the 1991 report from specific vulnerable groups, which states that “half of the victims are boys—but when the general population is surveyed, the number declines dramatically.”

Men as Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse

Many male survivors of child sexual abuse fear becoming a perpetrator. As one child abuse prevention advocate stated, “Men need to hear that just because they were a victim of child sexual abuse, they are not doomed to be a perpetrator of child sexual abuse.” While all survivors struggle with shame, boys and men face additional social stigma when reporting child sexual abuse to authorities, family members, and even primarily female-staffed survivor support services. Outreach and response to male survivors of child sexual abuse is evolving, thanks in part to the development of 1in6.org, an organization dedicated to helping men seek help and healing around their experiences of child sexual abuse.

The impact of the Penn State child sexual abuse scandal and the ongoing trials, testimonies, and institutional responses has led to a moment of clarity about the sexual abuse of children, especially male children, and especially male victims, in a way that underscores the complexity of the issue and its connections to our very social construct. Survivor stories from both the black and white, the heard and the silenced, the voiceless and the voiceful, in the sad story of Penn State, in the gray of hôpital massié and excesses and secrets. It calls for our condemnation. Somehow, it also calls for our compassion. How else might we learn to talk and so truly learn from these horrific events? To be truly aware of each other’s human plight.

Deaf Community

The language barriers and isolation of the deaf community creates a tremendous amount of complexity and difficulty in reporting child sexual abuse. In our focus group, one deaf survivor shared, “I didn’t know the words for child sexual abuse. No one communicated with me.”59 She started having behavior problems and difficulty in reporting child sexual abuse. In our focus group, one deaf survivor shared, “I didn’t know the words for child sexual abuse. No one communicated with me.”59 She started having behavior problems and difficulty in reporting child sexual abuse. In our focus group, one deaf survivor shared, “I didn’t know the words for child sexual abuse. No one communicated with me.”59 She started having behavior problems and difficulty in reporting child sexual abuse. In our focus group, one deaf survivor shared, “I didn’t know the words for child sexual abuse. No one communicated with me.”59 She started having behavior problems and difficulty in reporting child sexual abuse.

In our interviews with survivors, one client reported that his father asked him if he was gay after being a victim of child sexual abuse.56 This myth—that exposure to sexual abuse causes one to become gay/lesbian—can cause tremendous pain and confusion for male survivors. Not only does it assume sexual orientation is choice or purely dependent on life experiences, it perpetuates a spirit of hyper-masculinity and voiceless secrets. It calls for our condemnation. Somehow, it also calls for our compassion. How else might we learn to talk and so truly learn from these horrific events? To be truly aware of each other’s human plight.

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Angeles gang-affiliated women who were victims of child sexual abuse, survivors reported a direct affiliation, relationship violence, and sexual violence. A recent study reported that 60% of the gang-affiliated women in that sample had experienced childhood sexual abuse. 71 In a focus group of Los Angeles gang-affiliated women, and breaking apart the family. She said “I grew up and kept it to myself.”67 I told my mom about the abuse and then felt bad for burdening my mom. 68 Survivors stated that they turned to gangs in response to feelings of abandonment by mothers who were not trusted nor notified. One survivor told her mother about abuse by her stepfather, and called her a slut and whore. 77

These women also connected their experiences of child sexual abuse to their entanglement in the gang activity and their early child sexual abuse. Although these experiences are true for many child sexual abuse survivors, a resounding theme in the focus group was the connection between choosing a gang and being a victim of sexual abuse.83

The impact of their experiences resonated throughout their lives. One woman said, “I don’t want another little girl to go through what I went through... people thinking you might not remember or you’re young, but you remember who hurts you.” 84 When she told her mom about the abuse, her mom told her she was abused by her stepdad. The woman said it as damaging to the relationship with stepdad: “what, I’m going to say that my husband cheated on me with my daughter” 85 Another survivor shared that her aunt sexually abused her until she liked the sexual abuse by her stepfather, and called her a slut and whore. 70 Although these experiences are true for many child sexual abuse survivors, a resounding theme in the focus group was the connection between choosing a gang and their early child sexual abuse.

Family support was nearly nonexistent in these survivors’ narratives and as seen in other interviews, the complexity of abuse within the family often silences survivors. A survivor who was molested by her grandfather when she was 3 or 4 had an intergenerational story of child sexual abuse. She told us, “My grandfather was anyone I love my grandmother so much. I never wanted to hurt her. She was a beautiful lady.” When she finally told her mother about the abuse, her mother told her that she had to face her (her abuser) and confront him. Her mother told her that her grandfather had sexually abused her (like mother) also.78

Women, Gangs and Child Sexual Abuse

Throughout this work with local gang intervention programs, we are connecting the dots between gang affiliation, relationship violence, and sexual violence. A recent study reported that 60% of the gang-affiliated women in that sample had experienced childhood sexual abuse.72 In a focus group of Los Angeles gang-affiliated women who were victims of child sexual abuse, survivors reported a direct connection between their gang activity and previous experiences of child sexual abuse.73 Survivors stated that they turned to gangs in response to feelings of abandonment by mothers who were not trusted nor notified. One survivor told her mother about abuse by her stepfather, and called her a slut and whore.83 Many of the women in the sample had come from homes with a stepfather and/or mother’s boyfriend living in the home, which as discussed above the risk of child sexual abuse for girls.84 Generally, the mother knew about the abuse but law enforcement was not trusted nor notified. One survivor told her mother about abuse by her stepfather, and the mother replied “if they take your sister and brother, it’s your fault.”70

The use of drugs in connection with sexual abuse was an overarching theme for the group. One survivor shared that she got angry with her parents when they didn’t believe that her uncle was molesting her, and then she turned to heroin.80 This same survivor shared that she doesn’t trust other women because her aunt sexually abused her when she was 4 or 5, and her mom did not believe her when she told her about the abuse. She told us she doesn’t have any good childhood memories.75

These women also connected their experiences of child sexual abuse to their entanglement in the criminal justice system. One survivor served 13 years in prison for shooting a man who was raping her. She said she saw her stepfather’s face (who abused her when she was a child) when she was a young woman, but you remember who hurts you.” When she told her mom about the abuse, her mom told her...
"Life ain’t going to be easy." The survivor shared, "If someone tells me I’m not doing something right, it brings me back and I think ‘you’re a bad little girl.’ He would say that to me as he molested me... When I grow up, I’m going to protect my kids."84

Another survivor commented on the complexity of consequences and effects of child sexual abuse: "when you get molested, it affects you your whole life. You see child molesters on the news only get 3 years and this affects the children forever. I always feel like I’m a bad person, but I’ve had to be like this to survive."85 And another woman stated: "they [the abusers] destroyed the woman I could have been... I don’t want to talk about it, because then it means it happened. It fucked up all my relationships. I get all fucked up inside when getting hugged or anything."
Child sexual abuse is notoriously underreported due to a wide array of factors—the power dynamic between children and adult abusers, connections to family, intimidation by the abuser, lack of resources and connection to resources, disenfranchisement and lack of voice, and barriers imposed by society, institutions and cultures.

Studies show that between 31% and 67% of children disclosed the abuse during childhood, and 59% to 72% disclosed at some point over their lifetime. A national survey of women who had been sexually assaulted as minors found that 28% of them never told anyone prior to the research interview, and 67% waited at least 5 years before disclosing the abuse to someone. In another study, only 16% to 62% of girls with documented cases of child sexual abuse in their history self-reported such abuse. 88

When the Silence?

Children rarely disclose sexual abuse spontaneously.89 And recantation for child victims of child sexual assault is common. Young children frequently lack the language or the understanding of what constitutes abuse, and they do not have the cognitive ability to understand that their rights are being violated.90 For others, the timing was related to a significant other realizing there was abuse.91 For some, it was the survivor’s connections to domestic and sexual violence agencies whom the child instinctively seeks safety from.87 Protective services can start the whole process and even break apart the family.101

When my grandfather first molested me, I remember thinking, ‘life is never going to be the same after this.’ I never told anyone because I love my grandma so much and I never wanted to hurt her. She was a beautiful lady. I just couldn’t break her heart.

Child abuse prevention and intervention services are complicated when child sexual abuse is perpetrated by a family member. Survivors and their families experienced the complexity of emotions and responses when a trusted family member betrays that trust, when one has conflicting feelings toward the perpetrator, and when the family has difficulty acknowledging the abuse.100

The truth is that child sexual abuse is most often perpetrated by someone that the child knows—not the ‘stranger danger’ that parents warn their children about.94 In 90-95% of cases of child sexual abuse the victims know the abuser.95

Child sexual abuse prevention and intervention services are complicated when child sexual abuse is perpetrated by a family member. Survivors and their families experienced the complexity of emotions and responses when a trusted family member betrays that trust, when one has conflicting feelings toward the perpetrator, and when the family has difficulty acknowledging the abuse. The parent expressed this complication—‘Yes, he tried to abuse my daughter, but he is the father of my two little boys. It is so hard to let him out of our life. I’m constantly balancing what is best for my children.’100

Also, there is a profound developmental impact on a child being betrayed by the very person from whom the child instinctively seeks safety. Neurobiologist call this “fright without solution” because the person from whom the child instinctively seeks safety may be the very person harming them.106 The developmental and neurological consequences of this incomparable dilemma significantly increase a child’s lifelong risk factor for mood disorders, dissociative symptoms, and a host of interpersonal and behavioral symptoms.107

Child sexual abuse prevention involves a series of responses by various agencies across the country. Under mandatory reporting laws for child abuse and neglect, reports are filed with both law enforcement and the Department of Child and Family Services. As one mother stated, ‘Children are our streets. We seek safety and protection. Neurobiologist call this “fright without solution” because the person from whom the child instinctively seeks safety may be the very person harming them. The developmental and neurological consequences of this incomparable dilemma significantly increase a child’s lifelong risk factor for mood disorders, dissociative symptoms, and a host of interpersonal and behavioral symptoms.’

Child sexual abuse also makes victim-blaming and shaming, not only because others literally blame the victims, but also because the children blame themselves for the abuse and what happens after disclosure. Survivors report that they felt responsible for the abuse, and media coverage of sexual abuse cases often reinforces a culture of victim-blaming.

An important but often neglected point in the study of child sexual abuse within the family is how child sexual abuse can affect other children in the same family. Also, there is a profound developmental impact on a child being betrayed by the very person from whom the child instinctively seeks safety. Neurobiologist call this “fright without solution” because the person from whom the child instinctively seeks safety may be the very person harming them. The developmental and neurological consequences of this incomparable dilemma significantly increase a child’s lifelong risk factor for mood disorders, dissociative symptoms, and a host of interpersonal and behavioral symptoms.”

Bree Callaham (Interview, Nov 16, 2011).

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Inside the Family

Why the Silence?

He said he would kill my mother and my little brothers. I believed him.

If he could do this to me, he was capable of anything.

**Why the Silence?**

The child was a beautiful lady.

So I didn’t tell.

She was a beautiful lady.

I’m constantly balancing what is best for my children.

I believe her.

Child sexual abuse is most often perpetrated by someone that the child knows—not the ‘stranger danger’ that parents warn their children about. In 90-95% of cases of child sexual abuse the victims know the abuser.

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Cultural Barriers

Language and cultural barriers still exist. Latino immigrant survivors and their reportants often indicate that they feared prosecution or the possibility of separation from their kin. For example, when young boys returned to their homes in Latin American countries, they faced pressure from their kin to keep their experiences a family matter. When young boys returned to Los Angeles, they were often greeted by family members who were terrified of what their return might mean. They couldn’t express that trauma or fear without losing their masculinity. These fears were further amplified by cultural pressures and the inability to describe their experience as sexual abuse when it involved a female perpetrator.

Institutional Barriers

Institutions and service agencies are common settings for child sexual abuse because they are places where adults or older children have power over younger children and they have histories of ignoring child abuse. For example, both day care centers and Catholic Church closed systems, with their own law enforcement, disciplinary panels, and codes of conduct, have been implicated in the sexual abuse of children. It is critical for those involved in child sexual abuse prevention and treatment to address the power imbalances and the role of institutions in child sexual abuse.

New policies such as those put in place by the Penn State child sexual abuse scandal and the Catholic Church scandals before it, have proven insufficient for responding to sexual violence and child sexual abuse. Institutions could benefit from greater transparency and accountability. They need to influence and help institutions open up to tackling these tough issues.

In conclusion, the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) in Los Angeles County, sometimes critical lapses in cross-communication between DCFS and law enforcement officers occur—especially when dealing with a large service area, diverse communities, and the jurisdictional differences between agencies, such as law enforcement and child protective services. Even if a report is made, the underlying child sexual abuse is not always caught and many cases of child sexual abuse are neither investigate nor prosecuted. In response to these gaps, several community-based and law enforcement organizations have been established to set the stage for cross-communication and coordination.

In Los Angeles, there are several model programs that coordinate therapy and healing with the criminal justice system. One such place is Stuart House, where child sexual abuse is responded to with co-located service agencies, such as law enforcement and child protective services. Stuart House has a comprehensive treatment program that provides individual, family, and group therapy services for child victims and their families, as well as training for law enforcement and social workers in the investigation and prosecution of sexual abuse.

As evidenced by the Penn State child sexual abuse scandal (and the Catholic Church scandals before it), some institutions are slow in responding to allegations of child sexual abuse and have systemic barriers to reporting it to authorities, and some fail to respond at all. University systems are essentially closed systems, with their own law enforcement, disciplinary panels, and codes of conduct, which have proven insufficient for responding to sexual violence and child sexual abuse. Institutions could benefit from greater transparency and accountability. We need to influence and help institutions open up to tackling these tough issues.
with these services to provide care to the children and families, while also working on public policy and advocacy to improve prevention of and response to child sexual abuse.

Although there are exciting innovations and collaborations, the systems that coordinate response, rehabilitation, and punishment for child sexual abuse have also fostered sexual abuse for decades. Just Detention International has worked since 1998 to spread awareness of sexual abuse within the prison systems. From their research, it appears that minors in the juvenile justice systems are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. About 12% of juvenile detention youth reported sexual victimization by a peer or facility staff in the past 12 months. 120 In any setting where restrictions are put on a youth’s freedom—such as in a foster care group home or a juvenile detention facility—we must pay particular attention to the safety of minors. Not only is there a greater risk of experiencing child sexual abuse in these settings, but these youth are already more likely to have encountered such abuse or been exposed to other types of violence and trauma in the past.

Institutions also insulate themselves from association with child sexual abuse. In faith-based communities, Protestant, Jewish, and other non-Catholic religions have suggested that clergy abuse is a Catholic problem, resulting from their vows of celibacy, positions of absolute authority, and homosexuality. 121 A professor of theology added that faith institutions often distance themselves from issues like child sexual abuse because the church is supposed to be the place where they do everything right, rather than being honest about some of the things that go wrong. 122 Acknowledging that child sexual abuse can happen everywhere, and that all faith-based communities could misuse trust, faith, and authority, is an important step in tearing down those self-protective and silencing barriers.

The systemic problems evidenced in the recent coverage of high profile child sexual abuse cases underscore the need to more critically examine not only our society’s response to child sexual abuse, but why child sexual abuse has not been eradicated given the universal moral disproval. It calls into question our current systems and suggests that truly removing child sexual abuse from our cultures requires more than simply incarceration and mandatory reporting. In this spirit of innovation and thoughtful progression within and outside of current institutional response to abuse, we make several recommendations for action.

121 in6.org Symposium (Dec 8, 2011).
122 Id. SPIRIT COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY

VIOLENCE

OVER

SPirit

VIOLENCE

OVER

PEACE

OVER

VIOLENCE
Recommendations

“Safety and security don’t just happen, they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear.”

—Nelson Mandela

After dialogue with stakeholders, an extensive review of current research on child sexual abuse, and reflection on the experiences shared by survivors of child sexual abuse, we propose the following policy recommendations to advance the child sexual abuse prevention movement.

• Create a thoughtful and strategic dialogue around child sexual abuse: we have the opportunity to harness language to impact the movement to end child sexual abuse. Appropriate use of research and personal stories have to make clear the scale and wide-ranging consequences of the issue in ways that engage people, not turn them away. We also need to use positive and hopeful messaging as much as possible.123

• Cultivate Storytelling: reignite and reinvent the child sexual abuse prevention movement through empowering survivors and those who support survivors to share their stories of strength.

• Think creatively and innovatively about the current criminal justice response: perform ongoing assessments of mandatory reporting laws, sex criminal registries, and other criminal justice deterrents, and their impact on responding to and preventing child sexual abuse.

• Engage communities in deeper conversation around gender norms, perceptions of masculinity and femininity, and how that relates to child sexual abuse and healing for survivors: this includes socialization of male violence and ideology that contributes to the victimization of girls and women, as well as taboo and less talked about issues, such as male victims of child sexual abuse, and framing and responding to female perpetration of child sexual abuse.124

• Recognize the complexity of child sexual abuse: the dialogue between policy makers, criminal justice institutions, social services, and communities must take into account the impact of trauma on childhood development and connection of child sexual abuse to criminal behavior. It is not enough to respond to the one law broken, we have to begin to understand why that law was broken and to see people as people with experiences and exposure to trauma.

• Reimagine how to include rehabilitations/treatment/compassion for perpetrators of child sexual abuse to forward for-reaching and impactful prevention strategies that move our society toward the eradication of child sexual abuse, not simply individualized response and punishment.

• Include treatment for exposure to child sexual abuse as part of the rehabilitation agenda for various vulnerable populations, including gang-affiliated women and juvenile justice systems.

• Recognize and re-frame the sexualization of children in the media and popular culture. As forwarded by a leader in child sexual abuse prevention, Cordelia Anderson, social change is needed to counter the normalization of this sexual harm and exploitation.124

• Increase funding for and programmatic support of child sexual abuse awareness and prevention programs for children and parents in our schools, places of worship, and community centers: This has to include strategies and services for parents who are themselves survivors of child sexual abuse.

• Provide opportunities to cross-train and innovate around access to services for underserved isolated groups, such as male and deaf survivors of child sexual abuse.

• Conduct an audit of child sexual abuse prevention programs: research, document and share where prevention programs exist, how they operate, and what they have learned. Disseminated best practices to prevent child sexual abuse based on prevention programs’ experience and evaluation of their work.

• Create more supportive places to share stories of child sexual abuse: when children disclose they need to feel believed, supported, and protected. Caregivers/parents/authorities need to be trained on how to receive the information and maintain the space for disclosure.

• Promote protective factors for children and families in program development and service delivery.

• Focus on supporting attachment and nurturing, knowledge of parenting, parental resilience, social connections and basic needs support for parents.

See http://www.cordeliaanderson.com/ConteringNormalization

124
This paper documents our exploration of the issue of child sexual abuse in dialogue with the community and local stakeholders. We believe the child sexual abuse continues in part because of the secrecy and stigma associated with it; secrecy that is connected to complexity, institutional ignorance, child vulnerability, and the fact that child sexual abuse is happening in our families and is most likely to be perpetrated by someone the family and child knows and trusts. Silence is a problem—that silence prevents children from talking with the adults that can protect them, it inspires fear and keeps the subject off limits. It creates a space for damaging anti-social behavior to continue. If we don’t talk about it, if we don’t name it and focus on it, it makes it easier to turn a blind eye. It makes it easier to just criminalise and prosecute the behavior, not address the underlying causes. It makes it easier to ignore children and stories of survivors.

The call to action is clear—we as decision makers, former-children, parents, institutions, humans need to re-energise the movement to end child sexual abuse. The fact that child sexual abuse occurs at alarming rates is simply unacceptable. Our communities do not condone child sexual abuse, but we are allowing it to continue. And when we do, we are failing our children. What is needed is a community-based paradigm shift: we need culture and policy change that reflects the complexity of the issue of child sexual abuse.

We can work together to reduce the opportunities for child sexual abuse where our children live, play and learn. We can practice the best prevention strategies, spread awareness and knowledge, hold survivors’ experiences in the center, and end the secrecy on which child sexual abuse thrives. We can socially shift the underlying gender norms and homophobes that silences our boys and men. We can address and call out the community and historical context for the abuse of girls. We can fix the institutions that ignore and marginalise response to child sexual abuse. We can be innovative in our response to and rehabilitation of deviate sexual behavior. We can make healing a point of pride, a celebration. We can return to a social justice framework, instead of continuing to ignore the flaws in criminal justice responses.

We are all responsible and the stakes are high: no less than our future. We can make these changes, and we must. Join us.

Emily Austin
Project Director, Stories of Strength
Director of Policy & Evaluation
Peace Over Violence

Resources

Peace Over Violence
www.peaceoverviolence.org
24-hour Hotlines
626.793.3385
310.392.8381
213.626.3393

1in6
www.1in6.org

California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA)
www.calcasa.org

National Children’s Advocacy Center
www.nationalcac.org

Darkness to Light
www.d2l.org

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN)
www.rainn.org
800.656.HOPE (4673)

Enough Abuse Campaign
www.enoughabuse.org

Stop It Now!
www.stopitnow.org
1-888-445-3669

Just Detention International
www.just detention.org

generationFive
www.generationfive.org

Ms. Foundation for Women
www.msfoundation.org

Video Phones
866.947.8684
866.824.9907

Enough Abuse Campaign
www.enoughabuse.org

Stop It Now!
www.stopitnow.org
1-888-445-3669

Just Detention International
www.just detention.org

generationFive
www.generationfive.org

Ms. Foundation for Women
www.msfoundation.org
Suggested Reading

Nice to Meet Me, Chris Carlton (Mugwump Publishing:2011)
Off Limits: A Parent’s Guide to Keeping Kids Safe from Sexual Abuse, Sandy H. Wurtzel, Ph.D. and Feather Berkower, M.S. W.
The Drama of the Gifted Child, Alice Miller (Basic Books:1997).
Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror, Judith Herman (Basic Books:1997).

Life breaks us all and when we heal, we become strong in the broken places.

This paper is dedicated to all of the survivors who shared their stories of strength with us.