

# **END VIOLENCE TOGETHER**

## **For The Dignity Of Every Woman**

### **FACT SHEET**

#### **ADULT SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

The effects of child sexual abuse are serious and long-lasting. Most survivors do not disclose the abuse or receive help until they are adults.

#### **DEFINITION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

Child sexual abuse includes any unwanted sexual contact, including involving a child in pornography or prostitution (sexual exploitation).

The abuser may have been a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver or guardian, or the abuser may be a stranger.

An abuser may use a number of different tactics to gain access to a child, exert power and control over them, and prevent them from telling anyone about the abuse or seeking support. Abuse is a misuse of power and a violation of trust. The abuse may happen once or it may occur in a repeated and escalating pattern over a period of months or years. The abuse may change form over time.<sup>1</sup>

Legally, “child” means anyone under 19. The Criminal Code of Canada includes the following offenses related to child sexual abuse:<sup>2</sup>

- Sec. 151: Sexual interference with a person under age 14
- Sec. 152: Invitation to sexual touching with a person under age 14
- Sec. 153: Sexual exploitation of a person aged 14 and under 18
- Sec. 155: Incest

Bill C-2 Sec. 163 (163.1 – 163.1 (4.1)): covers child pornography  
Under Bill C-2 there has also been changes to sentences in the above sections of the Code.

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Place Your Agency Information Here

### **Duty to Report: Child, Family and Community Service Act:**<sup>3</sup>

The Act is BC's child protection legislation and it includes a duty to report where a person has reason to believe that a child needs protection. Under s. 14 of the act, anyone with a reason to believe that a child needs protection must report the circumstances to a child protection worker at the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Section 13 of the act lists specific situations where protection is needed. These include (please refer to the act for a comprehensive list):

- Cases where the child has been, or is likely to be, sexually abused or exploited by the child's parent
- Cases where the child has been, or is likely to be physically harmed, sexually abused, or sexually exploited by someone else and the child's parent does not protect the child
- Cases where the child is emotionally harmed by the parent's conduct

For reporting purposes, in BC a child is anyone who is under 19 years of age.

The Criminal Code also specifies the age at which children can consent to sexual activity (any sexual contact from kissing to intercourse). The age of consent is currently 14, although the federal government has introduced legislation (June 2006) to raise it to 16. The age of consent is 18 where the sexual activity involves exploitative activity or where there is a relationship of trust, authority or dependency. Bill C-2 also contains numerous other sections pertaining to child prostitution and pornography. The Criminal Code provides what is often referred to as a "close in age" or "peer group" exception: a 12 or 13 year old can consent to engage in sexual activity with another person who is less than 2 years older and with whom there is no relationship of trust, authority or dependency.<sup>4</sup>

### **STATISTICS**

- The Ontario Health Survey Supplement, carried out between 1990 and 1991, found that 12.8% of females and 4.3% of males reported experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 17.<sup>5</sup> Previously, the Badgley Report used broader definitions of child sexual abuse and reported higher prevalence rates. In that study, 54% of girls and 31% of boys under the age of 21 reported sexual abuse.<sup>6</sup>
- A more recent study estimates that approximately one in three girls and one in six boys will experience some form of unwanted sexual contact before they reach 16.<sup>7</sup>
- In incidents of sexual assaults against children and youth:
  - 38% of offenders were fathers
  - 30% of offenders were brothers
  - 30% of offenders were male-extended family members
  - 1% of offenders were spouses/ex-spouses

- Of sexually abused girls, 53% are abused by their biological fathers; 15% by stepfathers, and 8.8% by uncles.<sup>8</sup>

## **REPORTING**

Childhood sexual abuse – especially incest – is rarely reported and, when reported, is difficult to prove. Only 2% of childhood incest cases and 6% of extra familial sexual abuse cases were reported to police. Conviction resulted in 0.5% of the incest cases and 1.3% of the extra familial cases.<sup>9</sup>

## **IMPACT ON THE ADULT SURVIVOR**

Child sexual abuse has serious consequences for the survivor, lasting into adulthood and affecting many, if not all, aspects of the survivor's life.

A large number of people who experience child sexual abuse do not report the abuse and do not receive support or counselling until much later in life if at all.

There are many reasons why survivors do not disclose the abuse, both as children and as adults. These include fear, shame, self-blame and confusion about whether the experience was abuse or not – they may have been told that it was normal. As well, many people who were sexually abused as children will go through periods during which they have no memories or only partial memories of the abuse. They may not remember the abuse until they are adults.<sup>10</sup>

## **Psychological Impact**

- Sexual abuse in childhood usually creates emotional and psychological difficulties that last into adulthood. Incest may cause even greater harm because of the betrayal and the complications of the close personal relationship.<sup>11</sup>
- Psychological reactions generally fall under the umbrella description of “post traumatic stress syndrome.” All trauma survivors, including child abuse victims may exhibit these symptoms. These include<sup>12</sup>:
  - Depression – guilt/shame, low self-esteem, grief;
  - Anxiety – phobias, flashbacks, trauma symptoms;
  - Sexual difficulties;
  - Interpersonal problems – destructive relationships, problems sustaining relationships, distrust, isolation, poor social skills, parenting problems;
  - Substance abuse, eating disorders, self-mutilations, suicide attempts, self-defeating behaviors;
  - Perceptual disturbances – visual (shadowy figures), auditory (footsteps), tactile (sense of being touched);
  - Somatic complaints – pelvic pain, migraines, sleep disturbances;
  - Aggressiveness – sex offending, physical abuse.
- Male survivors exhibit many of the same symptoms as females, but may also react in significantly different ways. Boys and men often tend to “act out” their trauma through aggressiveness and violence, while girls will “act in” their rage through self-destructive acts. Far more abused boys than girls will go on to sexually abuse others. One study of convicted sex offenders found that 38%

provided confirmed evidence of being sexually abused as children, and another 17% provided probable evidence.<sup>13</sup>

### **Physical Impact**

- Among child and youth survivors of family-related sexual assault, 10% of females and 8% of males had a physical injury.<sup>14</sup>
- Survivors experience 2-2.5 times more pelvic pain, pelvic inflammatory disease and breast disease than non-abused women. Bladder and yeast infections are 1.5 times more common.<sup>15</sup>
- Survivors of childhood sexual abuse have 3.5 times more learning disabilities than non-abused populations.<sup>16</sup>
- Compared to non-victims, rape victims were 13 times more likely to have actually made a suicide attempt.<sup>17</sup>
- Women who have been raped are twice as likely to suffer from bulimia nervosa or binge eating disorder.<sup>18</sup>
- 50% of women treated for substance abuse were sexually abused as children.<sup>19</sup>
- 25% of incest survivors become pregnant as a result of the incest.<sup>20</sup>
- 55% of pregnant adolescents have been sexually abused by an adult.<sup>21</sup>
- Most survivors of child sexual abuse have their first experience of intercourse 2 years earlier than other women. They also have more sexual partners before the age of 18 and a larger total number of sexual partners.<sup>22</sup>
- 63% of child sexual abuse survivors report being sexually assaulted as adults, compared to 36% of women who are not survivors.<sup>23</sup>
- Women who were subjected to physical or sexual abuse as children or adults are at greater risk of health problems including: injury, chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, anxiety and clinical depression.<sup>24</sup>

### **RESOURCES**

There are approximately 400 programs to assist with violence against women and children in BC. These include:

- Community-Based Victim Assistance Programs
- Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs
- Outreach Programs
- Transition Houses
- Children Who Witness Abuse Programs
- Second Stage Houses
- Safe Homes

To find a program in your community you can call:

VictimLINK (Victim Information and Referrals) is a Multi-lingual line.

- Call toll-free in BC at 1-800-563-0808, 24 hours every day
- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call Information Service Vancouver's TTY Service at (604) 875-0885. If calling from outside the Lower Mainland, call collect

## CONTACT US

- If you want more information
- If you need help
- If you want to volunteer or make a donation

**PLACE YOUR PROGRAM AND CONTACT INFORMATION HERE:**

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