



AAS Childhood Sexual Abuse and Suicide 2014

One third of sexual assault victims were under the age of 12.¹

Lifetime prevalence of childhood sexual abuse in the U.S. is approximately 10% and also often occurs with **physical and emotional neglect**.²

Common coping strategies among those sexually abused are: anxiety, denial, self-hypnosis, dissociation, and self-mutilation; being the passive victim or conformist.³

“Sexual victimization... creates an overwhelming sense of *powerlessness, worthlessness, and a felt inability to change or control one’s environment*. It creates self-loathing... it facilitates internalized feelings of shame, not the guilt of feeling one has done something bad, but a more pervasive sense of *being bad*. It creates **self-blame**.”⁴

During the ages of **12-17**, females have the highest incidence of both forcible and non-forcible sexual abuse.³

“Sexual abuse is associated with changes in the metabolism of serotonin: ‘the impact of trauma on the brain’s stress response systems can make children more vulnerable to later stressful events and to the onset of pathology... and suicidality’” (158)⁵

¹ Molnar, B., Berkman, L., & Buka, S. (2001). Psychopathology, childhood sexual abuse, and other childhood adversities: Relative links to subsequent suicidal behavior in the U.S. *Psychological Medicine*, 31(6), 965-977. doi: 10.1017/S0033291701004329

² McCloskey, K., & Raphael, D. (2005). Adult perpetrator gender asymmetries in child sexual assault victim selection: Results from the 2000 National Incident-Based Reporting System. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse: Research, Treatment, & Program Innovations for Victims, Survivors, & Offenders*, 14(4), 1-24. doi: 10.1300/J070v14n04_01

³ Valente, S. (2005). Sexual abuse of boys. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 18(1), 10-16. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6171.2005.00005.x

⁴ Shapiro, S. (1992). Suicidality and the sequelae of childhood victimization. In S. Shapiro & G. M. Dominiak (Eds.), *Sexual trauma and psychopathology*. NY: Lexington Books.

⁵ Goldsmith et al., (2000). *Reducing Suicide: A National Imperative*. Washington, DC: Institute of Medicine.

Linking Childhood Sexual Abuse to Suicide and Suicidal Behavior

- “...the risk of suicide becomes greater as the length and frequency of abuse increases.”⁶
- Among adolescents, suicide attempters report more sexual abuse than non-attempters^{7,8,9}
- In a longitudinal study, among adolescent males, childhood sexual abuse was found to be associated with risk for suicide ideation and attempt.¹⁰

Among those sexually abused as children, odds of suicide attempts were **2-4 times higher among women and 4-11 times higher in men** compared to those not abused and controlling for other adversities.¹

- Victims of child sexual abuse were more likely to report having a psychiatric disorder in the last 12 months, which puts victims at a higher risk of a suicide attempt than those without a history of childhood sexual abuse.¹

Adults with a history of childhood sexual abuse had significantly higher rates of Axis I disorders and suicide attempts.¹¹

If you know someone is suicidal and/or a victim of childhood sexual abuse, please contact a mental health professional, or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

⁶ Kaplan, S. L. (1996). Physical abuse of children and adolescents. In S. J. Kaplan (Ed.). Family violence: A clinical and legal guide (pp. 1-35), Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association Press, Inc

⁷ Hernandez, J., Lodico, M., & DiClemente, R. (1993). The effects of child abuse and race on risk-taking in male adolescents. Journal of the National Medical Association, 85, 593-597

⁸ Riggs, S., Alario, A., & McHorney, C. (1990). Health risk behaviors and attempted suicide in adolescents who report prior maltreatment. Journal of Pediatrics, 116, 815-821.

⁹ Wagner, B., Cole, R., & Schwartzman, P. (1995). Psychosocial correlates of suicide attempts among junior and senior high school youth. Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 25, 358-372.

¹⁰ Fergusson, D., Horwood, L.J., & Lynskey, M. (1996). Childhood sexual abuse and psychiatric disorder in young adulthood: Psychiatric outcomes of childhood sexual abuse. Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 35(10), 1365-1374.

¹¹ Perez-Fuentes, G., Olfson, M., Villegas, L., Morcillo, C., Wang, S., & Blanco, C. (2013). Prevalence and correlates of child sexual abuse: A national study. Comprehensive Psychiatry, 54(1), 16-27.

Resources

Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN): www.rainn.org

Sexual Assault Resource Agency: <http://www.sexualassaultresources.org/>

Suicide.org: <http://www.suicide.org/rape-and-suicide.html>

National Association of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse: www.naasca.org

Pandora's Project: <http://www.pandys.org/crisissupport.html>

American Association of Suicidology: <http://www.suicidology.org>

American Association of Suicidology

AAS is a membership organization for all those involved in suicide prevention and intervention, or touched by suicide. AAS is a leader in the advancement of scientific and programmatic in suicide prevention through research, education and training, the development of standards and resources, and survivor support services. For membership information, please contact:

American Association of Suicidology

5221 Wisconsin Ave., N.W.

Second Floor

Washington, D.C. 20015

Tel. (202) 237-2280 Fax (202) 237-2282

www.suicidology.org

info@suicidology.org

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