



KEY FINDINGS: SURVIVORS' SURVEY PRELIMINARY REPORT

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection is a national charity dedicated to the personal safety of all children. Through our role in operating Cybertip.ca (Canada's tipline), our agency has witnessed the growing proliferation of child sexual abuse material on the Internet.

We are now seeing more and more victims of child sexual abuse imagery whose abuse has been recorded reach adulthood. To better understand the unique challenges faced by this population, the Canadian Centre launched an international survey in January 2016 for adult survivors whose child sexual abuse was recorded and that was, or may have been, distributed online. Since that time, we have had 128 survivors participate in the survey and contribute valuable details and information about their experience.

Survey respondents were predominantly female, with ages ranging from 18 to over 50, and close to 70% of respondents believed the images of abuse had been distributed online. Abuse experiences that took place in at least 5 different countries are represented in the data.

KEY THEMES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

- 1. Recording the sexual abuse of a child has a significant, lifelong impact on the victim.** The fact that images/videos of a child's sexual abuse were created at all, not to mention that they may still be possessed by the abuser and be publicly available for others to access, has an enormous negative impact on the individual. The impact can perpetuate into adulthood and may reduce the ability of an individual to recover and function in society.

73%
worry about being recognized

88%
believe experience impacts education/academics

91%
believe experience impacts employment

93%
believe experience impacts friendships

Solution:

By taking concrete steps to prevent new child sexual abuse material from becoming publicly available, and curbing the public availability of images that have already been posted online, the ongoing harm to survivors and new victims can be reduced.

- 2. Most victims were abused from a young age and by a family member.**

60%
indicated that the single/primary abuser was a parent

56%
abuse began between the age of 0-4 (of those 61% indicated that the abuse continued into adulthood)

56%
reported having been abused by more than one person – some by multiple family members

52%
appeared to have been victims of 'organized abuse' (described below)

Solution:

We need to improve the way in which systems are responding to this population by providing comprehensive training to more professionals about: the dynamics of different abuse situations; how to recognize and respond to abuse committed within the family context; and the impact of trauma and how it can present in the victim. Such training could have an enormous impact on the ability of stakeholders to identify abusive situations and believe survivors when they come forward.



- 3. Most survivors find it difficult to disclose abuse. Threats or physical abuse were commonly used to silence victims or to maintain compliance.** Most survivors who did disclose did not tell when they were children, and of those who did, many were not believed. It is established within research that child sexual abuse is difficult to prevent, detect and intervene given its secretive nature, the powerlessness of the victim, and that disclosure is an incredibly difficult process. Moreover, those children who are abused in a family or organized context may have not had a safe person in their life that they can tell. There were also a significant number of victims who were threatened with depraved and terrifying promises of harm that were exceedingly violent in nature.

Organized Sexual Abuse Theme

At least 66 surveys (52%) fit into the following working definition:

“Abuse that involves children being subjected to sexual abuse by multiple offenders. The range of harm to children may include the creation and sharing of child sexual abuse images, the exchange of children for sexual purposes, as well as possible involvement in sadistic, torture-related and ritualistic abuse. Organized abuse is primarily facilitated and orchestrated by parents and relatives. This type of abuse can be perpetrated against the victim into adulthood.”

53%
were adults at the time of disclosure (37% were children)

67%
of victims were threatened with physical harm (of those, 43% were told they would die or be killed)

25%
of victims were threatened with physical harm to a family member (of those, 55% were told the family member would die or be killed)

Solution:

There is an urgent need to reframe how we are tackling this issue – current intervention responses are inadequate and the existing model that relies on a child disclosing is not feasible. Targeting and investing resources and training to assist police, child welfare and other protective systems to more readily recognize situations of risk will enable these systems to do a better job of uncovering and intervening where warranted, thereby taking the unrealistic pressure off children to disclose in order to be protected.

- 4. The unique needs of survivors of child sexual abuse imagery are not being adequately addressed.** Existing support services are not meeting the specialized needs of survivors. Not only is the victimization experienced by this population completely unique, the impacts of the abusive experience are long lasting and often lifelong. From what we have learned, these survivors have incredible difficulty finding and financing the supports they need, and appear to require different levels and types of support at different points in their adult life. Short term and generic trauma counselling will not lead these survivors to an adequate place of recovery.

64%
currently in therapy

82%
anticipate needing ongoing/future therapy

89%
have seen more than one therapist

47%
changed therapists because the therapist they had could no longer help them or was unable to deal with the issues

Solution:

Survivors would benefit from having ongoing and affordable access to knowledgeable therapists as well as access to an advocate to work with/for them over time, ensuring that they are connected to the services that they need.

Advancing the knowledge of those working in sectors such as education, medicine, law enforcement, and the justice system is vital if we hope to find concrete ways to ensure children are better protected from sexual abuse and exploitation. Given the importance of hearing directly from survivors and sharing the information with professionals in a position to assist children, we have decided to leave the survey open. We are committed to learning from those victimized in this way and believe that the collective voice of survivors around the world is essential to effecting real change. A final report on the project will be issued publicly in the coming months.