Sound the Alarm

What you should know about child sexual abuse

December 6, 2012 By Kate Ferguson

People who sexually abuse children are not sleazy, shifty-eyed strangers hiding in the shadows waiting to pounce on innocent youngsters. Instead, according to the American Psychological Association (APA), studies show that most of these sexual offenders are family members or other people the child knows. What's more, although men commit most instances of sexual abuse, women are also offenders.

Because data can be difficult to gather, child sexual abuse remains a difficult issue to track and define. But "there is general agreement among mental health and child protection professionals that child sexual abuse is not uncommon and is a serious problem in the United States," the APA says.

Below are a few additional APA research findings about the disturbing issue:

- Despite a common myth, homosexual men aren't more likely to sexually abuse children than heterosexual men.

- All children, regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, culture and economic background are at risk of sexual abuse. In addition, child sexual abuse occurs in rural, urban and suburban areas, in rich and poor families and areas, and in countries around the world.

- Sexual abuse is greatly underreported. This makes accurate estimates of prevalence difficult. What's more, CDC research estimates that roughly one in six boys and one in four girls are sexually abused before age 18.

- Older children (12 and up) and girls are at greater risk of child sexual abuse. But boys are more

likely to be victimized by someone outside the family.

- Kids with a disability or history of victimization, or with one or both parents absent are at an increased risk of child sexual abuse.

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