

Our Voice Male Survivors

Experiences of Victims and Survivors
of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation



#OurVoice

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Protect Children is a non-governmental child-rights organization based in Finland, working globally to end all forms of sexual violence against children. We adopt a holistic, research-based approach to address the issue from multiple angles.

The **International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI)** is part of Anglia Ruskin University. Its vision is to use applied research to support the global response to exploitation and abuse in all its forms. IPPPRI's team of researchers are committed to delivering world-leading research innovation with international impact. Its work focuses on a range of pressing public protection issues including online child sexual abuse, workforce wellbeing, extremism and counter-terrorism, and victim-survivor advocacy and support.

The **Justice Initiative** is a European initiative aiming to restore justice for past victims of abuse across Europe and strengthen child protection for future generations. Protect Children, the leader of the Justice Initiative Nordic Hub, developed the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey with support from the Justice Initiative.

This report contains direct quotes from survivors related to child sexual abuse. Some content may be distressing or triggering for readers, particularly those with lived experience of trauma. Please take care while reading and seek support if needed.

Foreword

As children, we are at our most vulnerable. When the trust of a child is broken, the scars run deep, and the shame that follows can suffocate survivors for decades, making it almost impossible to speak out.

I have dedicated much of my life to ending child abuse and to fighting, through my foundation, for greater visibility for survivors across Europe. I am proud of launching the Swiss Reparations Initiative in 2017. By accepting the government's counterproposal to said initiative and seeking justice for more than 12,000 victims of abuse, Switzerland has set a strong example. With the introduction of the Justice Initiative and the establishment of Resolution 2533 at the Council of Europe, our mission has found a pan-European platform and widespread support from people who want to follow in Switzerland's footsteps. The member states of the Council of Europe are now committed to achieving full reparations for any violence committed against children regardless of their age and with no time limit in relation to the date of the offences.

Through the work with my foundation, I have listened to countless stories, some from men in their seventies who have carried their pain in silence their entire lives. Encounters like these reveal why reports such as this one are so vital. In many societies boys and men are taught that emotions are a sign of weakness. This myth teaches boys to swallow their pain and needlessly prolong their suffering. The underrepresentation of boys and men in this survey is a reminder of the work left to do in the destigmatisation of survivors.

We must remember that silence does not equate to healing. Too often, silence means that pain has been buried, ignored and tied to a feeling of profound solitude. Just as every child deserves to be protected, every survivor deserves to be heard. It is our obligation as a society to break the stigma around childhood sexual abuse and to listen with compassion to the voices of those affected.

This report is part of that effort: to shed light on the dark realities of abuse and to open our ears to the voices that have been silenced by shame and fear for far too long.

Dr. h.c. Guido Fluri

President of the Guido Fluri Foundation and initiator of the Justice Initiative



How difficult it is for a man to feel broken, or to even recognize that we are broken.

If we don't acknowledge our brokenness, it becomes incredibly hard to find a healthy male role model who could help us - someone who embodies strength, honesty, and vulnerability.

The absence of these role models only deepens and worsens the identity crisis, which is one of the consequences of childhood sexual abuse.

- Male Survivor from Protect Children's Our Voice Advocacy Group





Introduction

Child sexual abuse affects an estimated 1 in 7 boys,¹ yet their experiences remain significantly underrepresented in research and public discourse.² This lack of visibility has fuelled misconceptions, reinforced stigma, and left major gaps in support tailored to male survivors.³ More broadly, child sexual abuse and exploitation are widespread violations of children's rights, affecting 1 in 5 girls as well,⁴ and leaving lifelong consequences for those who experience it.⁵

Historically, male survivors have been disproportionately victimised in institutional settings such as scouting, churches, sports organisations, and boarding schools.⁶ Research and inquiries across multiple countries show that while most victims of institutional child sexual abuse are girls, boys are overrepresented in these contexts compared with family settings.⁷ Several factors contribute to this increased vulnerability. Offenders often have unsupervised access to boys in institutions, and hypermasculine environments may reinforce traditional gender roles and socialisation around self-sufficiency, making it harder for boys to disclose abuse.⁸

Boys' higher presence in certain institutions, such as custodial facilities and boarding schools, or their roles in religious settings, for example as choir or altar boys, also increases risk. Victimisation intersects with other factors including race, class, and disability status.⁹ This intersectionality contributes to overrepresentation of boys in state care, detention, special education, indigenous groups, and working-class contexts within church-run or state-run institutions.¹⁰

Patterns of abuse have shifted, with online platforms and digital environments creating new risks, including sexual extortion and live-streamed exploitation. Teenage boys have become the most common targets of financial sexual extortion, which has risen dramatically in recent years.¹¹

¹ Cagney, J., Spencer, C., Flor, L., Herbert, M., Khalil, M., O'Connell, E., Mullany, E., Bustreo, F., Singh Chandan, J., Metheny, N., Knaul, F., & Gakidou, E. (2025). Prevalence of sexual violence against children and age at first exposure: a global analysis by location, age, and sex (1990-2023). *Lancet* (London, England), 405(10492), 1817–1836. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(25\)00311-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)00311-3)

² Kavenagh, M., Hua, N., & Wekerte, C. (2023). Sexual exploitation of children: Barriers for boys in accessing social supports for victimization. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 142. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106129>

³ O'Gorman, K., Pilkington, V., Seidler, Z., Oliffe, J. L., Peters, W., Bendall, S., & Rice, S. M. (2024). Childhood sexual abuse in boys and men: The case for gender-sensitive interventions. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 16. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/tra0001520>

⁴ Cagney, J., Spencer, C., Flor, L., Herbert, M., Khalil, M., O'Connell, E., Mullany, E., Bustreo, F., Singh Chandan, J., Metheny, N., Knaul, F., & Gakidou, E. (2025). Prevalence of sexual violence against children and age at first exposure: a global analysis by location, age, and sex (1990-2023). *Lancet* (London, England), 405(10492), 1817–1836. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(25\)00311-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)00311-3)

⁵ World Health Organization (2017). *Responding to children and adolescents who have been sexually abused: WHO clinical guidelines*. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550147>

⁶ Wyles, P., O'Leary, P., Tsantefski, M., & Young, A. (2025). Male Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse: A Review. *Trauma, violence & abuse*, 26(1), 183–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380241277272>

⁷ McNeish, D. & Scott, S. (2023). Key messages from research on child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. CSA Centre. <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/key-messages/institutional-csa/>

⁸ Salter, M. (2016). Organised abuse and the politics of disbelief. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*

⁹ Hurcombe, R., Redmond, T., Rodger, H., King, S. (2022). Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Ethnic Minority Communities. In: Gill, A.K., Begum, H. (eds) *Child Sexual Abuse in Black and Minoritised Communities*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06337-4_7

¹⁰ Wyles, P., O'Leary, P., Tsantefski, M., & Young, A. (2024). Male Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse: A Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 26(1), 183–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380241277272>

¹¹ NCMEC. (2025). Sextortion. <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/sextortion>

Despite these risks, sexual abuse of boys remains underreported, under-recognised, and under-treated, and actual figures are likely far higher than official statistics suggest.¹² Delayed recognition within research, societal stigma around sexual abuse and sexuality, and lack of male-centred services further exacerbate the problem.¹³ This report aims to shed light on the specific experiences and needs of male survivors of childhood sexual violence, in order to support inclusive and effective prevention, support, and recovery.

Methodology

In this report, we analyse responses to the [Global Our Voice Survivor Survey](#), an international survey of adults who have experienced sexual violence in childhood. The aim of the initiative is to amplify the voices and wisdom of victims and survivors. A full overview of the methodology is available here: www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/our-voice-global-report.

Between 4 November 2023 and 5 June 2025, 23,087 individuals responded to the survey. Of the respondents, 21,050 (91%) identified as female, 1,431 (6%) as male, 300 (1%) as non-binary, 176 (1%) as other, and 130 (1%) preferred not to disclose their gender. In this report, we present the responses of male respondents and compare them to those of female respondents,¹⁴ exploring gender-based similarities and differences in survivors' experiences. We explore the nature of abuse, long-term impacts, disclosure, and support and coping behaviours.

Gender	n	%
Male	1431	6 %
Female	21050	91 %
Other	176	1 %
Non-binary	300	1 %
Prefer not to say	130	1 %
	23087	100 %

Throughout the report we present quotes from the responses of male victims and survivors. By amplifying their voices, this report seeks to address longstanding gaps in knowledge, reduce stigma, and inform services, policies, and public understanding about the realities of childhood sexual violence.

The full data presented in this report can be found in the **Data Annex**, available here: <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/our-voice-male-survivors>



Children have to be heard, seen, and taken seriously.

- German-speaking survivor



¹² Landberg, Å., Svedin, C. G., & Jonsson, L. S. (2022). Patterns of disclosure and perceived societal responses after child sexual abuse. *Child abuse & neglect*, 134, 105914. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105914>

¹³ Denov, M. (2004). Perspectives on male sexual abuse: A critical review of the literature. *Child Abuse & Neglect*; O'Leary, P., & Barber, J. (2008). Gender differences in silencing following childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*.

¹⁴ Where gender differences were statistically significant, the comparative analysis was repeated with a randomly selected smaller subset of female participants to ensure robustness. Only results which remained statistically significant throughout this process are reported here.

Key Findings

1. Experiences of Sexual Violence

<u>Age at First Abuse</u>	➤ Many boys first experienced sexual violence before age 10, and were generally older than girls.
<u>Nature of Abuse</u>	➤ Boys experienced different types of sexual violence to girls, most commonly nude genital touching.
<u>Perpetrators</u>	➤ Most perpetrators were men known to the boy, though boys were more likely than girls to have been abused by women.
<u>Perpetrator Age</u>	➤ Boys were mostly abused by adults, but were more likely than girls to have been abused by someone under 18.

2. Disclosure

<u>Disclosure Time</u>	➤ Male survivors disclosed less often and usually after longer delays than female survivors.
<u>Recipients</u>	➤ When they did disclose, they were most likely to tell a friend rather than family or professionals.
<u>Barriers</u>	➤ Shame was the most common barrier to disclosure, which differed to female survivors.
<u>After Disclosure</u>	➤ For most male survivors, disclosure rarely led to support or investigation.

3. Long-Term Consequences

<u>Consequences</u>	➤ Most male survivors experienced long-term negative consequences, though fewer did so than female survivors.
<u>Types of Impact</u>	➤ Male survivors described unique impacts, mostly depression, that differed from those of female survivors.

4. Support & Coping

<u>Access to Support</u>	➤ Few male survivors received support to cope with the consequences of sexual violence.
<u>Coping Strategies</u>	➤ Many coped by ignoring the abuse, and were more likely than girls to blame themselves and withdraw socially.

1. Experiences of Sexual Violence

Age at First Abuse: Many boys first experienced sexual violence before age 10, and were generally older than girls

When asked when the sexual violence they endured began, over half of male survivors (57%) reported that it began when they were under ten years old. The most common response (30%) was that the abuse began between the ages of seven to nine. On average, boys were older than girls when they were first victimised.¹⁵

“[The abuse took place] from when we were little until we were around 13-14, at least for me. Verbal and physical abuse continued long after that.”

- Norwegian-speaking survivor

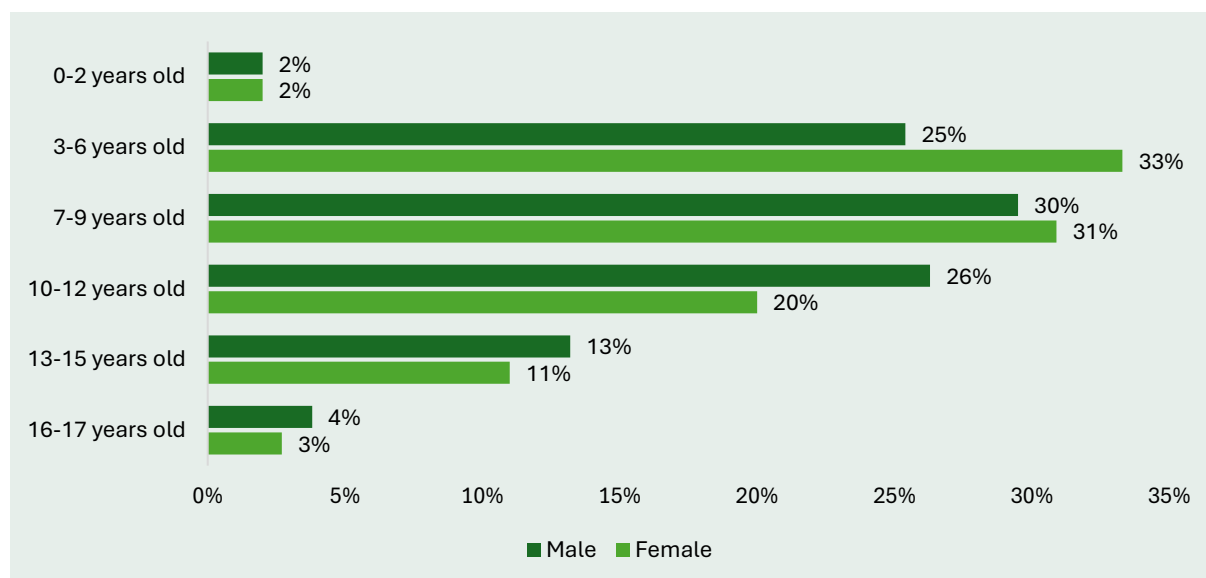
“The first incident occurred at the age of 10.”

- Croatian-speaking survivor

“The first time was a couple of incidents while we were very young (3 yrs old).”

- English-speaking survivor

Figure 1: Age at first victimisation



¹⁵ $t(1582.83) = 7.21, p < .001, d = .20$

Nature of Abuse: Boys experienced different types of sexual violence to girls, most commonly nude genital touching

Male survivors experienced a wide range of types of sexual violence, with patterns of abuse that differed from those reported by female survivors. The most common form of abuse experienced by boys, reported by 44% of male survivors, was nude genital touching. This included having their nude genitals touched or touching another person's nude genitals because this person either allowed this to happen or asked, manipulated, or forced them to do so.

"He threatened me that if I didn't do it, he would go after my little brother, and I thought that if I told my parents they would give me away, so I preferred to offer myself in exchange for him leaving my brother alone."

- Spanish-speaking survivor

"I had to touch the genitals of the other person. He took my penis out of my trousers and masturbated me until I was finished."

- German-speaking survivor

"He forced me to penetrate him."

- Spanish-speaking survivor

"Kisses, hugs against the priest's cassock, he would press my face against his cassock against that hard thing that I didn't know what it was but now I know was his erect member, provocations asking if he wanted to masturbate him and he wanted me to, insisting that I kiss him and hug him and touch him. Another priest would hit us until we fell to the floor in pain, screams, humiliating punishments, he would pull down my underwear so he could look at my genitals, he would masturbate over my bare ass forcing me to kneel with my eyes closed. Expulsion from school."

- Spanish-speaking survivor

Boys were more likely than girls to experience another person touching their genitals with their mouth,¹⁶ being penetrated by the perpetrator,¹⁷ and performing a sexual act as part of an exchange (e.g., for money or alcohol).¹⁸ They were also more likely to have experienced performing a sexual act on another child or having a sexual act performed on them by another child,¹⁹ and being made to watch sexually explicit acts or materials.²⁰ Boys were less likely than girls to be a victim of touching when clothed,²¹ and of having another person imitate penetration on them without it leading to penetration.²²

¹⁶ $\chi^2(1) = 77.86, p < .001, V = .06$

¹⁷ $\chi^2(1) = 74.58, p < .001, V = .06$

¹⁸ $\chi^2(1) = 32.98, p < .001, V = .04$

¹⁹ $\chi^2(1) = 43.41, p < .001, V = .04$

²⁰ $\chi^2(1) = 14.14, p < .001, V = .03$

²¹ $\chi^2(1) = 119.66, p < .001, V = .07$

²² $\chi^2(1) = 24.61, p < .001, V = .03$

“I can't eat pancakes because the person who committed the violence against me would always make pancakes for me after the acts. The psychological abuse and manipulation was just as horrible as the act itself.”

- English-speaking survivor

“I was sent toys and pressured into phone sex.”

- Norwegian-speaking survivor

Nearly one tenth of male respondents (7%) experienced online or technology-facilitated abuse. In 3% of cases, the abuse related to trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation. These results did not significantly differ from female respondents. It is important to note that the survey used a convenience sample, meaning participants self-selected to take part. As such, these findings do not represent overall prevalence rates in the population but reflect the experiences of the specific group of survivors included in this survey.

Three-quarters of male respondents (75%) were subjected to childhood sexual violence on multiple occasions. This was less common than for female respondents (82%).²³

These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that the nature and dynamics of abuse often vary depending on the gender of victims.²⁴

“We didn't live in the same city but met occasionally, frequent contact from the time I was 14. Pretty classic grooming, lovebombing/exclusion etc. Most of the psychological violence/control was over phone calls, text messages and social media.”

- Norwegian-speaking survivor

“By the age of 15 I must have received over 100 nude photos, most of them from adult men. I was groomed by a man living abroad, this started when I was 12.”

- Finnish-speaking survivor

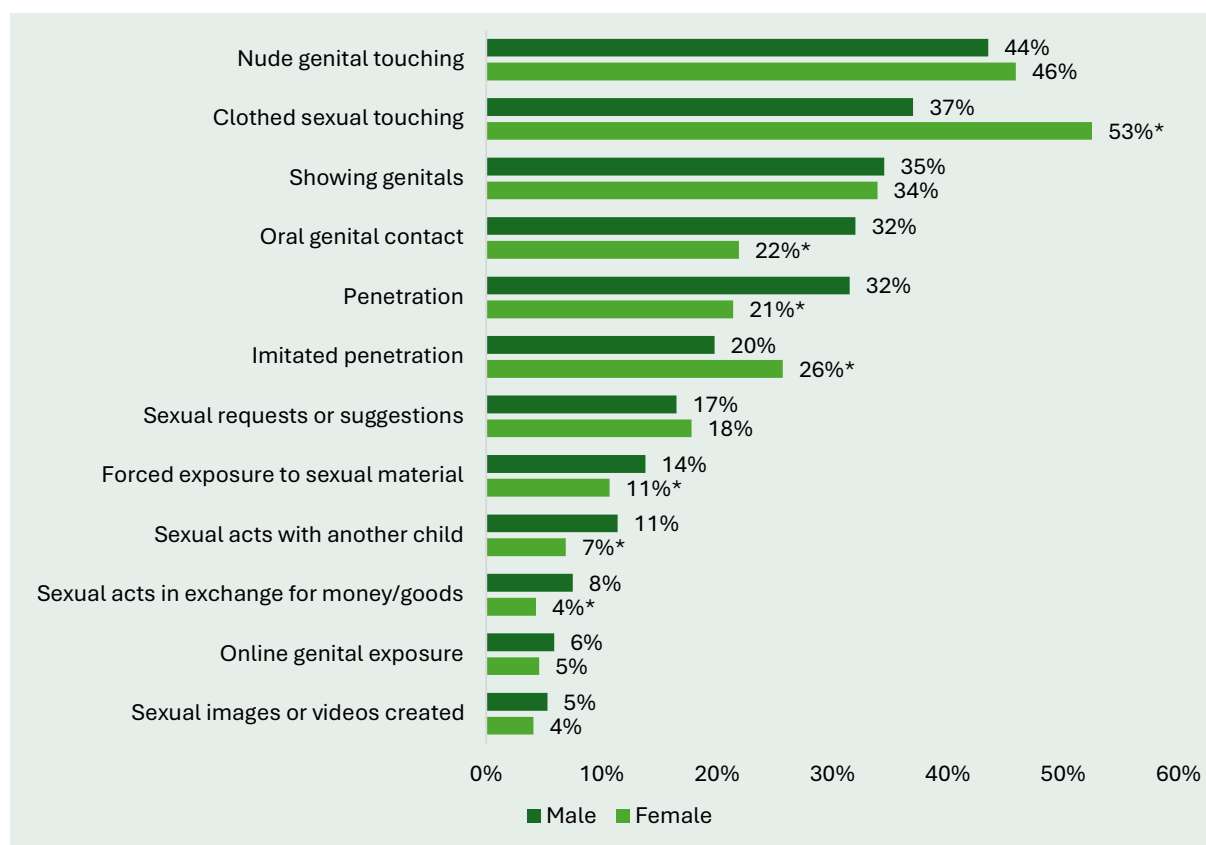
“He sold me for favors to other parish priests and people in power.”

- Spanish-speaking survivor

²³ $\chi^2(1) = 34.56, p < .001, V = .04$

²⁴ Maikovitch-Fong, A. K., & Jaffee, S. R. (2011). Sex differences in childhood sexual abuse characteristics and victims' emotional and behavioral problems: Findings from a national sample of youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34(6), 429-437. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2009.10.006>

Figure 2: Types of sexual violence endured by respondents



Where differences were statistically significant, it is marked with an asterisk.

Note: Respondents could select more than one option for this question. Percentages therefore add up to more than 100%.

Perpetrators: Most perpetrators were men known to the boy, though boys were more likely than girls to have been abused by women

A large majority of male respondents (86%) knew the perpetrator(s) before the abuse began. The perpetrator was commonly in their or their family's circle of trust (79%). This was less common than for female respondents, of whom 92% knew the perpetrator²⁵ and for 91% the perpetrator was in their circle of trust.²⁶ Over a third of male survivors (35%) reported that the abuse was perpetrated by more than one person. This did not differ significantly from female survivors' experiences.

“[The abuser] was a cousin who became close to our family at some point.”

- French-speaking survivor

“We live in the same yard, but in different houses. He is my uncle.”

- Portuguese-speaking survivor

²⁵ $\chi^2(1) = 53.65, p < .001, V = .05$

²⁶ $\chi^2(1) = 211.70, p < .001, V = .10$

“A teenage girl who used to babysit me.”

- Croatian-speaking survivor

Male respondents most commonly reported having met the perpetrator through their social circle (37%), but were less likely than females to have met them this way,²⁷ and by living in the same household.²⁸

Men were more likely than female respondents to have met the perpetrator through their community.²⁹ They were twice as likely than women to know the perpetrator through an institution (e.g., school or foster care)³⁰ or a hobby.³¹ They were four times as likely to have met them in a religious community.³² These findings are consistent with previous research, which finds that boys are more likely than girls to experience institutional abuse, especially in religious settings.³³

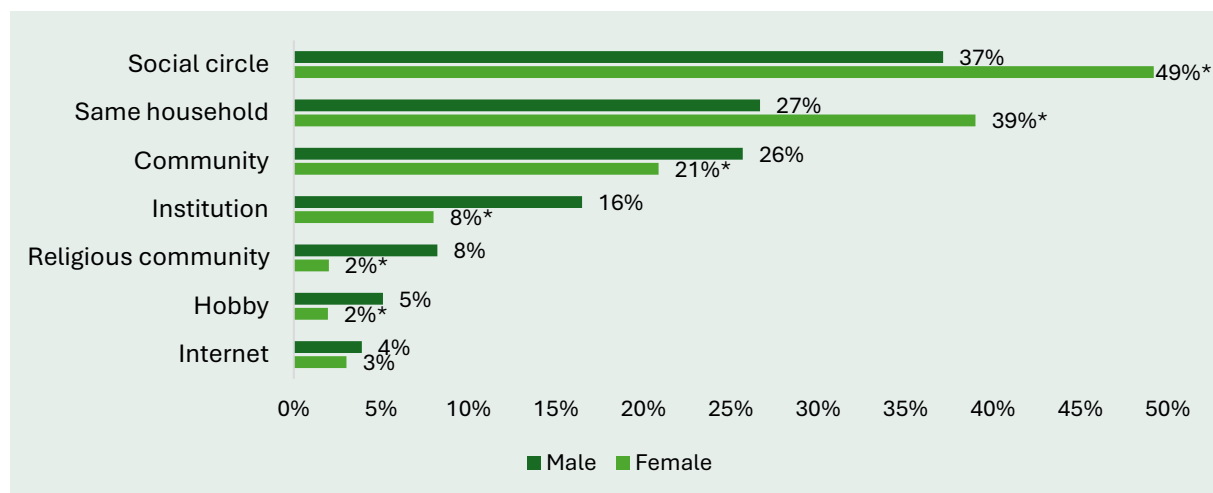
“A priest preparing a first-grade class for First Communion. During religion classes.”

- Polish-speaking survivor

“He held the Silver Beaver, recognized as a great Scoutmaster. Which he was, except for me and another guy.”

- English-speaking survivor

Figure 3: How respondents knew/met the perpetrator



Where differences were statistically significant, it is marked with an asterisk.

Note: Respondents could select more than one option for this question. Percentages therefore add up to more than 100%.

²⁷ $\chi^2(1) = 76.98, p < .001, V = .06$

²⁸ $\chi^2(1) = 80.32, p < .001, V = .06$

²⁹ $\chi^2(1) = 18.34, p < .001, V = .03$

³⁰ $\chi^2(1) = 140.50, p < .001, V = .08$

³¹ $\chi^2(1) = 61.53, p < .001, V = .05$

³² $\chi^2(1) = 217.59, p < .001, V = .10$

³³ Wyles, P., O'Leary, P., Tsantefski, M., & Young, A. (2024). Male Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse: A Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 26(1), 183-198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380241277272>

Most male survivors (90%) reported that the perpetrator(s) were male. This was a lower percentage when compared to female survivors (98%).³⁴ Boys were almost three times as likely (19%) to have been abused by a female perpetrator than girls (7%).³⁵

“Foster parents as i was moved from foster home to foster home.”

- English-speaking survivor

“1. Daughter of an acquaintance of my parents' family 2. Domestic helper in my own family.”

- Finnish-speaking survivor

Perpetrator Age: Boys were mostly abused by adults, but were more likely than girls to have been abused by someone under 18

The majority of both male and female respondents reported that they were abused by an adult (someone over 18). However, in more than four out of 10 cases (44%), male respondents reported that the perpetrator(s) were under the age of 18. This indicates that there may be high rates of peer-to-peer abuse of boys. Boys were more likely to have been victimised by a someone under the age of 18 than girls, who were victimised by someone under 18 in 33% of cases.

“At the end of primary school it was people in the same class. 14-17 it was a person who was three years older than me.”

- Norwegian-speaking survivor

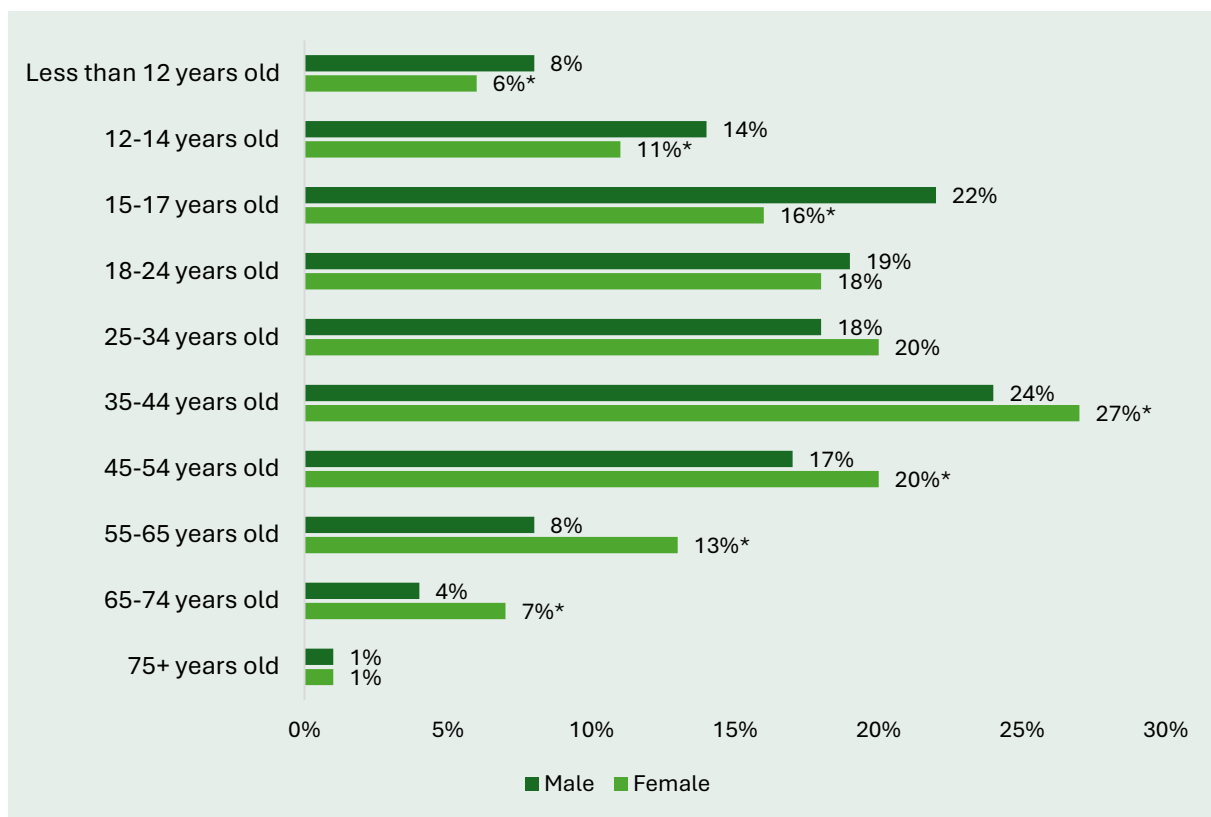
“The senders of the nude photos could have been of a wide range of ages, the oldest was certainly at least 60 years old.”

- Finnish-speaking survivor

³⁴ $\chi^2(1) = 340.03, p < .001, V = .12$

³⁵ $\chi^2(1) = 277.80, p < .001, V = .11$

Figure 4: Perpetrator age at time of sexual violence



Where differences were statistically significant, it is marked with an asterisk.

Note: Respondents could select more than one option for this question, for example if there were multiple perpetrators. Percentages therefore add up to more than 100%.

2. Disclosure

Disclosure Time: Male survivors disclosed less often and usually after longer delays than female survivors

Two in five male respondents (41%) had never disclosed the sexual abuse to anyone, compared with one in three female respondents (32%). Among the male survivors who did disclose, it often took them a long time to do so. One third of male survivors (33%) disclosed more than 21 years after the sexual violence took place. This meant that male survivors were both less likely than female survivors to disclose overall³⁶ and took longer to disclose³⁷ than female survivors.

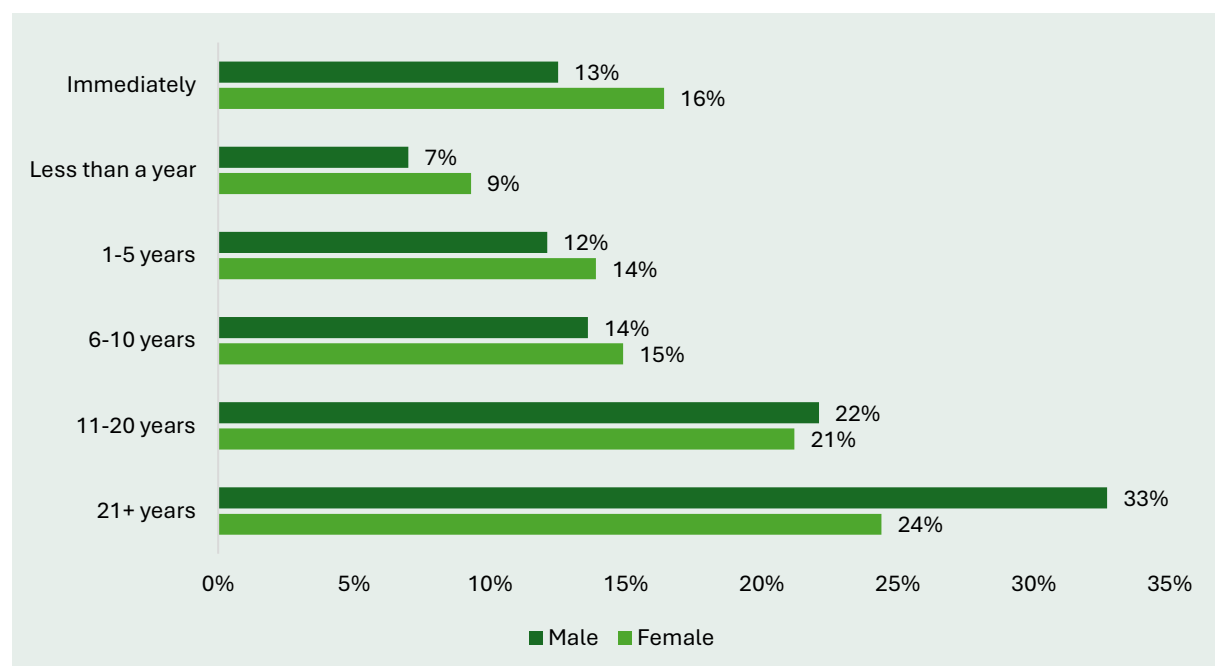
“I didn’t tell it myself; my brother was present during what happened to me and he told it on my behalf.”

- Spanish-speaking survivor

“It became clear bit by bit over years of therapy.”

- German-speaking survivor

Figure 5: Time between sexual violence and disclosure



Where differences were statistically significant, it is marked with an asterisk.

³⁶ $\chi^2(1) = 41.98, p < .001, V = .04$

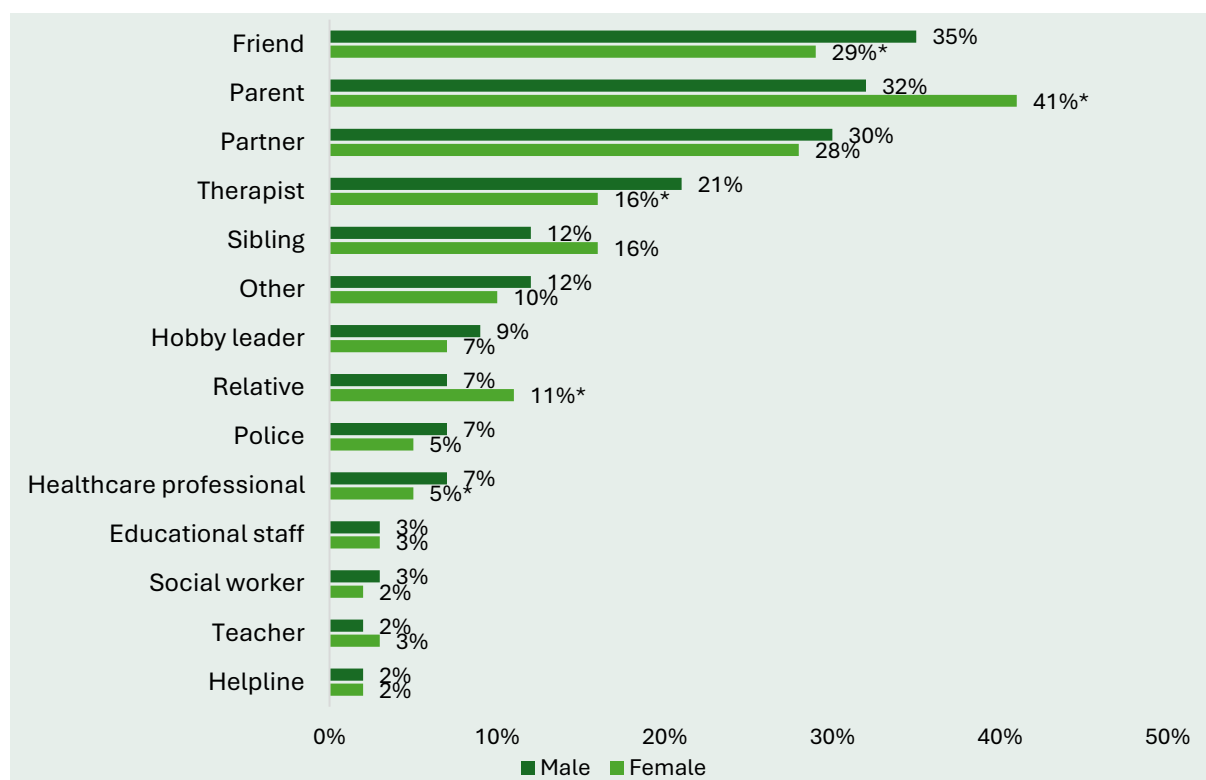
³⁷ $t(1, 14965) = 5.78, p < .001, d = .21$

Recipients of Disclosure: When they did disclose, they were most likely to tell a friend rather than family or professionals

When male survivors did disclose sexual violence, they most commonly confided in a friend (35%), while female survivors were more likely to tell a parent (41%).³⁸ Overall, both male and female survivors were most likely to disclose to a parent, friend, or partner. Compared with women, men were significantly more likely to first disclose to a therapist³⁹ or healthcare professional⁴⁰ and less likely to initially tell a parent⁴¹ or other relative.⁴²

Male survivors' later disclosures and lower likelihood of disclosing to a parent or relative immediately after the abuse are closely linked to feelings of shame. Societal stereotypes that expect boys to be self-reliant and capable of defending themselves,⁴³ along with broader gendered attitudes, can undermine recognition of male victimisation, even within the home. This delayed disclosure represents a significant disadvantage, as it limits access to a safe and supportive environment that could help to restore a sense of security. Research shows that perceived parental care is the key protective factor against revictimisation and plays a crucial role in supporting a child's healing process.⁴⁴

Figure 6: To whom respondents first disclosed



Where differences were statistically significant, it is marked with an asterisk.

Note: Respondents could select more than one option for this question. Percentages therefore add up to more than 100%.

³⁸ $\chi^2(1) = 11.07, p < .001, V = .03$

³⁹ $\chi^2(1) = 13.21, p < .001, V = .03$

⁴⁰ $\chi^2(1) = 6.96, p = .008, V = .02$

⁴¹ $\chi^2(1) = 25.44, p < .001, V = .04$

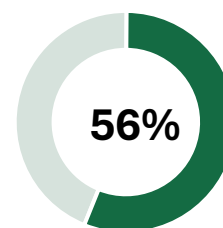
⁴² $\chi^2(1) = 11.43, p < .001, V = .03$

⁴³ Catherine Esnard & Rafaele Dumas (2012): Perceptions of male victim blame in a child sexual abuse case: effects of gender, age and need for closure, *Psychology, Crime & Law*, DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2012.700310 To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2012.700310>

⁴⁴ Scoglio AAJ, Kraus SW, Saczynski J, Jooma S, Molnar BE. Systematic Review of Risk and Protective Factors for Revictimization After Child Sexual Abuse. *Trauma Violence Abuse*. 2021 Jan;22(1):41-53. doi: 10.1177/1524838018823274. Epub 2019 Jan 22. PMID: 30669947.

Barriers to Disclosure: Shame was the most common barrier to disclosure, which differed to female survivors

Shame was the most common barrier to disclosure for male survivors, significantly reported by 56% compared with 50% of female survivors.⁴⁵ Other frequently reported barriers included lacking the courage to disclose (37%), believing it would not help (33%), and thinking no one would care (28%). Male survivors were also more likely than female survivors to minimise the abuse, with 27% reporting that they thought the violence was “not so serious” compared with 19% of female survivors.⁴⁶



of male survivors were too ashamed to disclose

“I thought it was my fault that it happened.”

- Polish-speaking survivor

“It is complicated and demanding and many people may have different traumas and different perspectives. There is a risk that those you tell may not be able to understand emotionally or psychologically, regardless of education, or realize how it can also affect development, especially when it happens at an early age.”

- Swedish-speaking survivor

Over time, these patterns shifted. Male survivors continued to minimise the abuse as a long-term barrier (27% compared with 16% of female survivors),⁴⁷ whereas female survivors were more likely to continue citing shame as a barrier (51% compared with 42% of male survivors).⁴⁸

“I had repressed it for many years.”

- Norwegian-speaking survivor

“When it happened, I didn’t understand it was wrong.”

- Portuguese-speaking survivor

These patterns highlight how minimisation, shame, and low expectations of support silence many male survivors. This has been noted in other research, which highlights shame and fear of being disbelieved as common obstacles to disclosure for men,⁴⁹ and shows that disclosure is often delayed until adulthood.⁵⁰ For boys in particular, fear of being labelled homosexual has also been identified as a powerful deterrent to disclosure.⁵¹

⁴⁵ $\chi^2(1) = 9.37, p = .002, V = .03$

⁴⁶ $\chi^2(1) = 27.90, p < .001, V = .05$

⁴⁷ $\chi^2(1) = 39.25, p < .001, V = .07$

⁴⁸ $\chi^2(1) = 17.01, p < .001, V = .05$

⁴⁹ Alaggia, R. (2005). Disclosing the Trauma of Child Sexual Abuse: A Gender Analysis. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 10(5), 453–470. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020500193895>

⁵⁰ Easton, S. D. (2013). Disclosure of child sexual abuse among adult male survivors. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 41, 344–355. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-012-0420-3>

⁵¹ Lemaigre C., Taylor E. P., Gittoes C. (2017). Barriers and facilitators to disclosing sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence: A systematic review. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 70, 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.05.009>; McElvaney R. (2015). Disclosure of child sexual abuse: Delays, non-

“The fact that the activity was homosexual.”

- English-speaking survivor

“[...] Stigma of being a male victim of sexual abuse.”

- English-speaking survivor

After Disclosure: For most male survivors, disclosure rarely led to support or investigation

For at least three-quarters of survivors, disclosing the sexual violence did not lead to them receiving help or support. Male survivors were more likely than female survivors to receive support following disclosure (35% vs. 31%).⁵² In most cases, male survivors' disclosures did not lead to a police investigation (88%), and where it did, this investigation did not usually lead to prosecution or a sentence (65%).

Of those who had disclosed, only one third (33%) of male respondents received compensation for the sexual violence they endured, compared to 26% of female respondents. Among those who received compensation, 62% of male survivors and 82% of female survivors reported that it was insufficient to address the impacts of the abuse.

Four in ten male survivors (44%) who had not disclosed reported that the non-disclosure had an impact on their healing process. Female survivors were even more likely to report being affected by non-disclosure (58%).⁵³

These findings may reflect the influence of societal and institutional biases, in which boys are frequently not recognised as victims of sexual violence. Such limited recognition could help explain the poor outcomes in justice processes and access to reparations.

“It is very difficult to access professional help to alleviate the effects.”

- Spanish-speaking survivor

“As a survivor of abuse in my teens, I am one of the lucky few that (seemingly) emerged without debilitating emotional scars. My one serious regret is that I never reached out to identify or report my abuser, and in the process allowed him to potentially abuse others. I think about that often.”

- Finnish-speaking survivor

disclosure and partial disclosure. What the research tells us and implications for practice. *Child Abuse Review*, 24(3), 159–169.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2280>.

⁵² $\chi^2(1) = 6.66, p = .010, V = .02$

⁵³ $\chi^2(1) = 41.74, p < .001, V = .08$

3. Long-Term Consequences

Consequences: Most male survivors experienced long-term negative consequences, though fewer did so than female survivors

The majority of male survivors (78%) reported experiencing negative long-term consequences as a result of the childhood sexual violence they endured. This was a lower percentage when compared to female survivors (85%).⁵⁴

“The biggest [consequence] of all is the hyperanalysis of everything and that I see enemies everywhere and possible dangers and can’t feel safe with anyone.”

- Greek-speaking survivor

“To this day, I feel guilty after every sexual encounter and dirty. I feel like I’m doing something wrong. And I can’t refuse sex to another person because I’m afraid they’ll do it against my will anyway.”

- Polish-speaking survivor

“It destroyed my life forever, and I am beyond repair.”

- Spanish-speaking survivor

Types of Impact: Male survivors described unique impacts, mostly depression, that differed from those of female survivors

Male survivors endured a wide range of negative consequences, most commonly depression, difficulties in forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships, and anxiety or panic attacks, all of which affected at least half of all respondents. Their experiences differed significantly from those reported by female survivors. For instance, male survivors were more likely to report suicide attempts,⁵⁵ poor adjustment or lifestyle instability,⁵⁶ social challenges,⁵⁷ and substance abuse.⁵⁸ On the other hand, female survivors were more likely to report anxiety or panic attacks,⁵⁹ somatic symptoms,⁶⁰ and eating disorders.⁶¹

These patterns reflect broader gender differences in outcomes after experiencing childhood sexual violence, with women frequently experiencing internalising behaviours and men reporting more externalising behaviours (e.g., substance abuse).⁶²

⁵⁴ $\chi^2(1) = 43.49, p < .001, V = .04$

⁵⁵ $\chi^2(1) = 18.59, p < .001, V = .03$

⁵⁶ $\chi^2(1) = 20.79, p < .001, V = .03$

⁵⁷ $\chi^2(1) = 15.24, p < .001, V = .03$

⁵⁸ $\chi^2(1) = 52.63, p < .001, V = .05$

⁵⁹ $\chi^2(1) = 6.76, p = .009, V = .02$

⁶⁰ $\chi^2(1) = 40.14, p < .001, V = .05$

⁶¹ $\chi^2(1) = 52.27, p < .001, V = 0.5$

⁶² Chandy, J. M., Blum, R. W., & Resnick, M. D. (1996). Gender-specific outcomes for sexually abused adolescents. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 20(12), 1219-1231. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134\(96\)00117-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(96)00117-2); Gray, S., & Rarick, S. (2018). Exploring gender and racial/ethnic differences in the effects of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27(5), 570-587. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2018.1484403>

“Using alcohol to cope with contact with other people.”

- Norwegian-speaking survivor

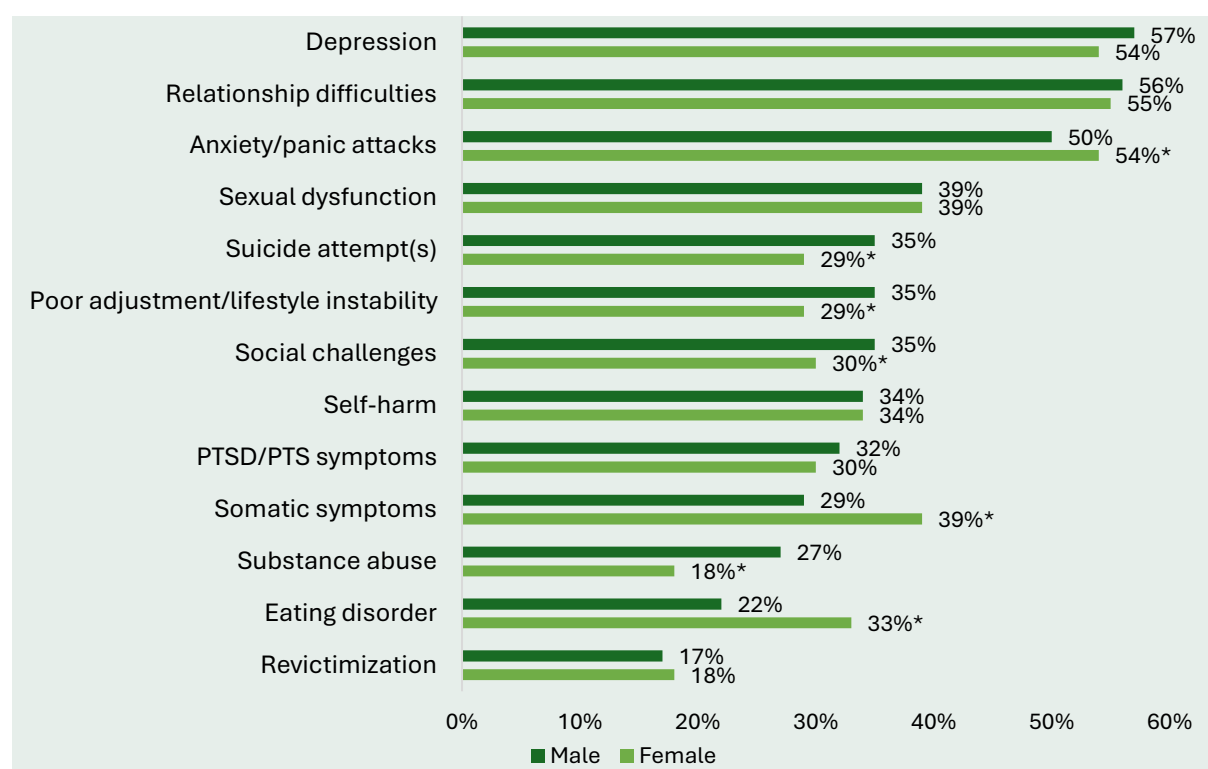
“I have dozens of other impacts: like how I dress (baggy clothes,) impatience with small talk, poor preparation for retirement since in a 'survival' mode most of my adult life, etc.”

- English-speaking survivor

“Due to the torture I suffered, I cannot get an erection, I went to a urologist and he told me that the blood flow that produces the erection was cut off.”

- Spanish-speaking survivor

Figure 7: Long-term consequences of childhood sexual violence



Where differences were statistically significant, it is marked with an asterisk.

Note: Respondents could select more than one option for this question. Percentages therefore add up to more than 100%.

4. Support & Coping

Access to Support: Few male survivors received support to cope with the consequences of sexual violence

Most male survivors (65%) did not receive any support for coping with the serious long-term consequences they faced. When they did receive support, they received it primarily from a therapist (77%), or from a variety of other sources, including partners (25%), doctors or other healthcare professionals (24%), friends (24%), family members (18%), crime victim support organisations (11%), social workers (5%), help lines (4%), school counsellors or other educational staff (3%), or the police (2%). These were largely consistent with female survivors, the only difference being that men were twice as likely than women (5%) to have received support from an organisation focused on supporting victims of crime.⁶³ This is possibly due to perceived limited support from other sources, as found in prior research.⁶⁴

“I pay for my psychologist. My many psychiatrists who have been treating my depression and personality disorder for over 35 years.”

- Spanish-speaking survivor

“Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, monthly support groups, participated in monthly groups for 30 years.”

- English-speaking survivor

Male survivors’ access to support and disclosure patterns are strongly influenced by societal norms and gendered expectations. Cultural, familial, institutional, and social pressures often inhibit boys and men from reporting abuse, while stereotypes portraying males as self-reliant reduce recognition of male victimisation.⁶⁵ These influences are reflected in delayed disclosure, lower rates of disclosure to parents or relatives, shame and self-criticism, perceptions of abuse as “not so serious”, and minimal receipt of compensation.

“Can’t afford a counsellor. On a waiting list on the [publicly funded healthcare system].”

- English-speaking survivor

“I talk about it in AA meetings, there is a group that has sex issues.”

- English-speaking survivor

⁶³ $\chi^2(1) = 19.64, p < .001, V = .06$

⁶⁴ Young, S. M., Pruett, J. A., & Colvin, M. L. (2016). Comparing help-seeking behavior of male and female survivors of sexual assault: A content analysis of a hotline. *Sexual Abuse, 30*(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063216677785>

⁶⁵ Mathews B, Bromfield L, Walsh K, et al. Reports of child sexual abuse of boys and girls: longitudinal trends over a 20-year period in Victoria, Australia. *Child Abuse Negl.* 2017;66:9–22; Afnan Attrash-Najjar, Noa Cohen, Talia Glucklich, Carmit Katz, “I was the only one talking about the abuse”: Experiences and perceptions of survivors who underwent child sexual abuse as boys, *Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 140, 2023, 106144, ISSN 0145-2134, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106144>*.

“[I speak to] other victims of abuse on social media.”

- Norwegian-speaking survivor

Professional attitudes may further limit support. In male-dominated fields such as law enforcement and the legal system, unconscious biases about male versus female victims can affect decision-making, investigations, and support provision. Addressing these biases through targeted training and public education is essential to improve outcomes for male survivors.

Coping Strategies: Many coped by ignoring the abuse, and were more likely than girls to blame themselves and withdraw socially

To cope with the long-term consequences of the childhood sexual violence they endured, male survivors reported several coping mechanisms: going along as if nothing was happening (42%), talking to someone (39%), criticising themselves (30%), wishing the situation would go away (28%), avoiding being around people (28%), convincing themselves that things are not as bad (27%), letting their emotions out (24%), taking medication (21%), and working on solving the problems by making a plan of action and following it (20%). Here, the only significant differences between female and male respondents were that male respondents were more likely to report criticising themselves for what happened (30% vs. 26%)⁶⁶, and avoiding being with people (28% vs. 23%).⁶⁷

“I haven’t known how to cope with it. I just live one day at a time.”

- Spanish-speaking survivor

“After 22 years of self-healing and different therapies I’m not ‘done’ yet. It has gotten better over the years, but it is not done.”

- German-speaking survivor

“I contribute to helping children and teenagers.”

- Portuguese-speaking survivor

Some of these coping mechanisms, such as talking to someone, had a predominantly positive impact on male survivor’s coping. However, others, such as criticising themselves for what happened, had a more negative effect. Whilst there were no significant differences in positive coping strategies between men and women, male respondents reported a more negative impact of avoiding being around people,⁶⁸ and making a plan to cope with their problems⁶⁹ than female respondents.

⁶⁶ $\chi^2(1) = 9.19, p = .002, V = .02$

⁶⁷ $\chi^2(1) = 14.27, p < .001, V = .03$

⁶⁸ $\chi^2(1) = 4.54, p = .033, V = .02$

⁶⁹ $\chi^2(1) = 5.43, p = .020, V = .02$

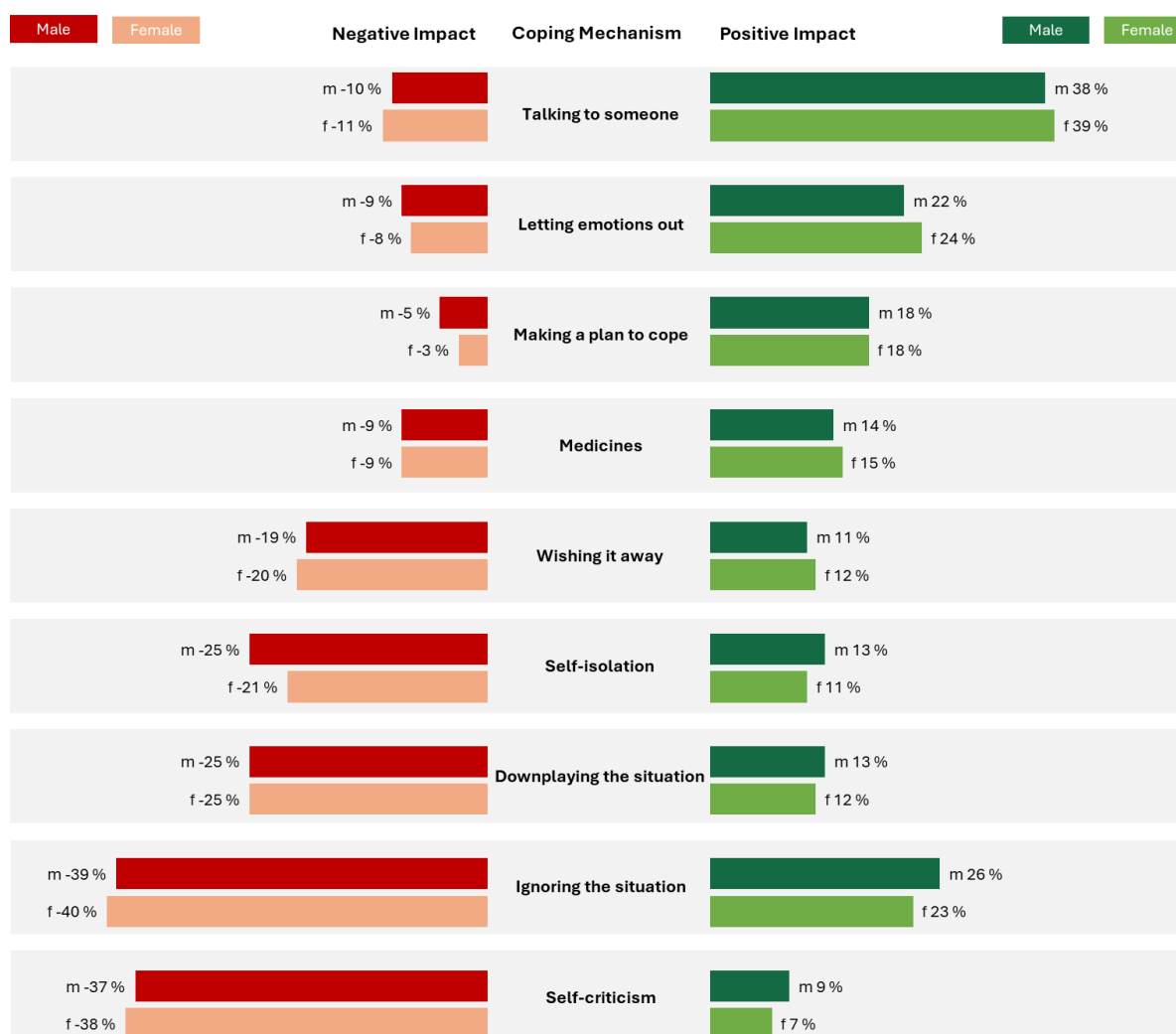
“Talking about it, even if anonymously, is always a feeling of liberation from a burden.”

- Italian-speaking survivor

“Mostly [talking] with my closest friends, but especially with my current partner, the most wonderful person in my life.”

- Spanish-speaking survivor

Figure 8: Positive and negative impact of different coping mechanisms



Where differences were statistically significant, it is marked with an asterisk.

Note: Respondents could select more than one option for this question. Percentages therefore add up to more than 100%.



Conclusion

Male survivors of childhood sexual violence are often underrepresented in research and public discourse, which contributes to stigma, misconceptions, and a lack of support.⁷⁰ By presenting the perspectives of 1,431 male survivors, this report provides insight into the experiences of male survivors of childhood sexual violence, gendered differences, and patterns that require targeted responses.

Key Takeaways

The findings highlight several key implications:

Clinical and Therapeutic Support:

- **Clinical services must be sensitive to gendered differences in experiences of sexual violence, disclosure, and coping.** Male survivors often show trauma symptoms through externalising behaviours such as substance use, social withdrawal, or instability in daily life, rather than visible distress. Some may minimise or avoid acknowledging or disclosing abuse. Services should be prepared to recognise and respond to these less visible signs of trauma.
- **There is a growing need for male-specific support services.** Current gaps in resources leave many boys and men without safe options to disclose and receive appropriate care. At the same time, all general support services should adapt better approaches to address the needs of male survivors, so that men and boys are not limited to male-only services but can access inclusive and effective care across all settings.

Disclosure and Stigma:

- **Safe and supportive environments are essential to encourage disclosure among boys.** Tools such as Protect Children's [#MyFriendToo](#) platform can provide avenues for support, and participation in the [Global Our Voice Survivor Survey](#) helps expand knowledge of male survivors' experiences.
- **Public health campaigns should raise awareness of the severity and long-term impacts of child sexual violence,** highlighting male-specific perspectives to counter stigma and encourage boys and men to speak up.

⁷⁰ Esnard, C. & Dumas, R. (2012). Perceptions of male victim blame in a child sexual abuse case: Effects of gender, age and need for closure. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 19(9), 817-844. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2012.700310>

- **Professional training for healthcare providers, educators, law enforcement, and other frontline professionals should address male victimisation and challenge stereotypes.** Reducing bias will improve recognition of male survivors' experiences and increase access to effective support.

Prevention and Awareness:

- **Prevention efforts should specifically target boys, both offline and online.** Boys are often not encouraged to be cautious in digital interactions, which increases their vulnerability to grooming. Stigma around masculinity and sexuality further shapes how they are targeted, and the barriers to disclosure.
- **Institutions such as school, sports clubs, and religious groups should serve as reparative spaces.** Beyond preventing abuse, they can play an active role in supporting victims, promoting early disclosure, and reducing long-term harm.
- **Addressing online sexual abuse and exploitation is increasingly critical.** Boys are at particular risk of sexual extortion, grooming, and live-streamed exploitation. Education in online safety is crucial for prevention and early detection.

Research and Data:

- **This report revealed future research directions, including:** examining online abuse patterns; the role of under-18 perpetrators, including peer-to-peer and sibling sexual abuse; and investigating professional attitudes and biases towards male versus female victims.
- **Future research should disaggregate data by gender to address gaps in knowledge about male victimisation.** Greater evidence will support more effective detection, prevention, and survivor-centred support.

By addressing these issues collectively, services and institutions can better meet the needs of male survivors, promote earlier disclosure, and provide inclusive and effective support.



I am happy and grateful that there are people who are not looking away anymore.

- German-speaking survivor



Is there anything you would like to say and that would be important for us to share to strengthen the rights of victims and protect children? [N=14,268]

"You are not to blame! You are a victim.

Everything passes... but YOU must seek professional help; this is not a game, this is serious, and it hurts."

- Spanish-speaking survivor

"Being strong enough to speak out."

- Danish-speaking survivor

"Address these topics from an early age, no matter how delicate or tricky they may seem."

"Sexual education. Support. Active listening. The most serious and frequent abuse happens within the walls of the home."

- Spanish-speaking survivor

- Spanish-speaking survivor

"Abolish the statute of limitations; sometimes the problems only become apparent later than the 30th year of life, and the affected person no longer has any legal rights."

- German-speaking survivor

"It is important to protect boys too. Even if the perpetrator is a woman."

- Norwegian-speaking survivor

How do you feel after having participated in this survey? [N=14,878]

"As soon as I found this survey I immediately completed it. We need more knowledge and teaching around the topic of sexual assault/violence, and I hope my responses are helpful."

- English-speaking survivor

"Good. The first time after more than 70 years that I have disclosed what I experienced. Other than that, only in front of my wife."

- German-speaking survivor

"It helps me to see that every day I am better because I am now able to express things I couldn't until recently."

- Spanish-speaking survivor

"I am happy that you are doing the survey because it really helps to counteract the stigmatisation of victims."

- German-speaking survivor

"Agitated, but happy because maybe my answers can help. We urgently need to raise more awareness about this huge issue. People have to wake up and report perpetrator behaviour in their environment, children like me cannot look after themselves, we have to do that for them!!"

- German-speaking survivor

“

I have experienced that being subjected to sexual violence as a child has been a shame greater than life itself. However, through long-term therapy, I came to understand that shame can only be healed by exposure, by speaking out and breaking the wall of silence. I also searched for and longed for a happy life for a long time, until I realized that happiness is not some unattainable goal for me, but rather it is built from small moments of joy. When those moments began to appear more and more frequently, I understood that it is precisely those moments that make up a happy life.

Today, I can say that I have a happy life. Despite my childhood trauma and everything I have experienced due to that, I am sober for 15 years, I am in a long and loving relationship and soon celebrating our 10-year anniversary, and there are many happy moments in my life. I no longer search for the happiness of life – I have found it in recurring moments of joy.

- Male Survivor, Finland

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About Protect Children

Protect Children is a non-governmental child-rights organization based in Finland, working globally to end all forms of sexual violence against children. We adopt a holistic, research-based approach to address the issue from multiple angles.

Learn more about Protect Children: protectchildren.fi

About the International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI)

The International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI) is part of Anglia Ruskin University. Its vision is to use applied research to support the global response to exploitation and abuse in all its forms. IPPPRI's team of researchers are committed to delivering world-leading research innovation with international impact. Its work focuses on a range of pressing public protection issues including online child sexual abuse, workforce wellbeing, extremism and counter-terrorism, and victim-survivor advocacy and support.

Learn more about IPPPRI: <https://www.aru.ac.uk/international-policing-and-public-protection-research-institute>

About the Justice Initiative

The Justice Initiative is a European initiative aiming to restore justice for past victims of abuse across Europe and strengthen child protection for future generations. Protect Children, the leader of the Justice Initiative Nordic Hub, developed the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey with support from the Justice Initiative.

Learn more about the Justice Initiative: justice-initiative.eu

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