

Book 2

# Child Sexual Assault.

**NO  
EXCUSES**

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**Never,  
ever.**

# Introduction

This booklet has two important goals. The first is to encourage people to discuss child sexual assault openly and break the silence protecting those who commit this crime.

The second goal, which depends very much on the success of the first, is to create a climate in which child victims of sexual assault feel safer about coming forward for help without being blamed or disbelieved.

Most of those who sexually assault children are relatives, close family friends, or people known and trusted by the child. Their position of trust, and the child's powerlessness, make it easy for them to conceal the crime and persuade or frighten the child to keep quiet about it. The fact that most people are reluctant to talk about child sexual assault involving relatives or trusted friends only adds to the fear and isolation of the children.

This booklet aims to help break that silence and encourage people to look at:

- those who commit the crime***<sup>1</sup>
- the excuses they make***
- the attitudes which influence their behaviour***
- the reasons for these attitudes***

In examining some of the underlying causes of child sexual assault, the booklet challenges not only the attitudes of individual offenders but also some of the factors within society which contribute to inappropriate adult sexual behaviour towards children.

Although many of the issues raised are sensitive and disturbing they need to be discussed if society is to reach a better understanding of the complex nature of child sexual assault.

Without this increased understanding, there is little hope of achieving effective solutions.

<sup>1</sup> Because studies show that 90 percent of child sexual assault offenders are male and 90 percent of their victims female, this book refers to offenders as "he".

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# Identifying the problem

Before examining how society can prevent or reduce child sexual assault and protect children, it is very important to identify the problem accurately – first by defining what the Child Protection Council means when it refers to child sexual assault and second by challenging some of the false impressions people have on the subject.

## Definition<sup>2</sup>

Child sexual assault occurs when an adult or someone bigger than a child uses his power or authority over the child and takes advantage of the child's trust and respect to involve the child in sexual activity. Child sexual assault does not refer only to sexual intercourse, although sexual intercourse is often involved. Child sexual assault includes fondling genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a finger, penis, or any other object. It may also include exhibitionism and suggestive behaviour. In all cases, the offender has more power than the child and misuses that power to take advantage of the child.

## False Impressions

Until quite recently, child sexual assault was hardly ever discussed. The silence which surrounded this subject not only made it difficult for the facts to emerge but also allowed false impressions to go unchallenged. Now that the silence has been broken, people are becoming more aware of the facts and many old, mistaken ideas are disappearing. For example, most people now realise that "stranger danger" is only a small part of the problem and that approximately 85 percent<sup>3</sup> of cases of child sexual assault involve the child's relatives, family friends, or someone known and trusted by the child.

Although the false impressions are gradually being replaced by the facts, some mistaken ideas still remain. Many people continue to believe that offenders must be "sick" or "perverted", even though all evidence shows that very ordinary men, often 'pillars of the community', are often involved. People seem to feel more comfortable if

<sup>2</sup> Child sexual assault is not a technical term. It refers to a range of offences contained in our criminal law. This definition indicates the general nature of child sexual assault; it does not try to reproduce the complex legal provisions.

<sup>3</sup> This figure is supported by statistics compiled over the last five years by the Department of Youth and Community Services.

Spolno  
napadanje djece

**NEMA  
ISPRIKA**

they can dismiss the vast majority of those who sexually assault children as "sick" – just as, until recently, people found it easier to dismiss them as "strangers". The problem about clinging to false impressions is that they hide the truth and make effective solutions difficult to find.

Another false impression is that child sexual assault happens only in poor or "problem" families. In fact it happens in all types of families – rich or poor, large or small, well educated or not.

Many people also believe that child sexual assault is just another form of child physical abuse when in fact there are some important differences between the two. With child physical abuse, both men and women commit the offence although women, who are usually the ones who spend the most time with children, are slightly in the majority. With child sexual assault, on the other hand, it is overwhelmingly men who commit the offence, even though women are the ones who spend most time with children.

## Profile of offenders

*"Attempts at characterising the offender as psychopathic, schizophrenic, or poor and underprivileged have failed. There is only one thing the vast majority have in common: their masculinity."* (New South Wales Child Sexual Assault Task Force Report, 1985)<sup>4</sup>

In looking at the facts about child sexual assault, a picture of who the most common offenders are begins to emerge. A national study conducted in the United States in 1981 found that in approximately 90 percent of child sexual assault cases the offenders were male and 90 percent of victims female.<sup>5</sup> Australian studies reinforce this finding.

An incest phone-in conducted in Sydney in 1984 found 99 percent of offenders were male and 99 percent of victims female. A similar phone-in in Adelaide in 1983 recorded that 97 percent of offenders were male and 90 percent of victims female. Tables from both the Sydney and Adelaide phone-ins also provide some useful insights into the relationship of victims to offenders.

非禮兒童

是永無藉口  
的行爲

Although this booklet concentrates on male offenders and female victims, this does not mean the minority of women who commit child sexual assault are being ignored. Nor does it indicate any less concern about the effect of child sexual assault on boys or boys' need for advice, counselling and support. On the contrary, the offence is just as grave and boys' needs are just as great. There is, however, no avoiding the significant role gender plays in child sexual assault and no honest assessment of the problem can ignore this fact.

Сексуален  
напад на дете

НЕМА  
ОПРАВДУВАЊА

Никогаш,  
никогаш.

Sydney Survey – 1984		Adelaide Survey – 1983	
Offender	%	Offender	%
Father	57.4	Father	42.3
Uncle	12.4	Uncle	11.5
Brother	10.3	Brother	8.4
Stepfather	6.8	Stepfather	5.7
Grandfather	5.6	Grandfather	6.6
Male cousin	1.8	Other male relative*	8.3
Defacto male (live-in)	1.5	Male acquaintance*	15.4
Brother-in-law	1.2	Mother	1.3
Mother	0.9	Other female relative	0.4
Male legal guardian	0.3	Female acquaintance	0.4
Son	0.3	Multiple assailants	4.3
Mother's boyfriend	0.3	Male stranger	2.2
Stepmother	0.0	Not available	0.4
Defacto female	0.0		
Sister-in-law	0.0		
Female legal guardian	0.0		
Grandmother	0.0		
Female cousin	0.0		
Other	0.0		

\*"Other male relative" includes defactos, foster fathers, siblings, stepbrothers, brothers-in-law and cousins. "Male acquaintance" includes friends of the child's family, neighbours, mothers' boyfriends and males acquainted with the family through employment.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the NSW Child Sexual Assault Task Force to the Premier, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. Study Findings: National Study of the Incidence and Severity of Child Abuse and Neglect. Department of Health and Human Services Publications, Washington D.C., 1981.

# The excuses offenders make

Here are some of the common excuses made by relatives or family friends who sexually assault children. Although most people will find these excuses dishonest or hard to accept at face value, the Child Protection Council believes they reveal some important underlying attitudes – particularly attitudes to women and children.

## EXCUSE

**“All fathers do this.”**

## ATTITUDE

Underlying this excuse is the attitude that children are their father's property. While our society no longer accepts the view of women as the property of their husbands, the ideas of 'ownership' of children, and parents' absolute rights over children, are still strong. The offender uses these common attitudes to excuse his behaviour. By claiming that “all fathers do this” he also tries to trick the child into thinking no crime is being committed and that there is nothing unreasonable about his demands.

## EXCUSE

**“I'm just giving you some sex education.”**

## ATTITUDE

This excuse is commonly used by fathers, uncles, grandfathers and other relatives who sexually assault children. Taking advantage of the child's trust they pretend to be doing something to benefit the child when in fact they are acting only from selfish motives.

Assalt Sesswali  
luq il-Tfal.

L-EBDA

SKUŻA

Qatt  
u Qatt

## EXCUSE

**“My wife is frigid/ill/pregnant/goes out to work.”**

## ATTITUDE

This excuse relies on one of society's popular myths about male sexuality: that men's sexual urges are 'uncontrollable' and that it is a wife's responsibility to see that her husband's sexual needs are met so that he is not 'forced' to turn elsewhere – for example to his own children. This excuse neatly shifts the blame for the crime of child sexual assault from the offender to his wife.

## EXCUSE

**“It was the child's fault. She/he led me on.”**

## ATTITUDE

It is surprising how many people are inclined to believe this excuse. It is commonly used by offenders when referring to very young girls – not just in relation to teenage or adolescent girls. It is also being used increasingly about boys who are accused of being 'streetwise' or 'asking for it'. With this excuse, the offender again refuses to accept responsibility for his actions and even goes to the extent of blaming the child. Children are sexual beings and sometimes behave flirtatiously. Often they are copying adult behaviour believing it will gain them attention and affection. They are not seeking an adult *sexual* response and can never be blamed if an adult involves them in inappropriate sexual activity. The adult is responsible, not the child.

## EXCUSE

**“I was just showing affection.”**

## ATTITUDE

By using this excuse, the offender is claiming to be unable to tell the difference between sexual and non-sexual affection and between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour towards children. This excuse is used to play down the seriousness of the assault and also to confuse and trick the child into thinking everything is alright. This is part of a common pattern of deception and abuse of trust when child sexual assault involves relatives or other people the child looks up to.

Violenze sessuali  
ai bambini

NIENTE  
SCUSE

Mai  
e poi mai

## EXCUSE

"It's our special game."

## ATTITUDE

This is another example of the abuse of trust involved in child sexual assault. The offender realises the importance of deceiving the child into thinking nothing is wrong. This deception makes it easier to overcome the child's objections and maintain secrecy.

## EXCUSE

"The child's mother is to blame. She should have known about/stopped it."

## ATTITUDE

Quite a lot of people share the underlying attitude which leads the offender to make this excuse. The underlying attitude is that women somehow know instinctively (or should know instinctively if they are 'good mothers') when their children are in danger or need protecting. Offenders use this excuse to avoid responsibility for their own actions and to pass the blame on to someone else.

## EXCUSE

"It didn't do any harm."

## ATTITUDE

Child sexual assault is known to have many harmful effects which victims often need help and support to overcome. The harmful effects are not always easy to detect and sometimes appear only in later life. By claiming that no harm is done by child sexual assault within the family, the offender hopes to deny the crime and reject any suggestion of blame or responsibility.

***There are NO EXCUSES  
for child sexual assault***

Abuso Sexual À Criança

**NÃO**

HÁ DESCULPAS

Nunca,  
Jamais.

## Examining the causes

Considering the facts about child sexual assault it is reasonable to ask what it is about society, or the way men are reared in our society, that makes child sexual assault largely a male crime?

In his book "Child Sexual Abuse - New Theory and Research"<sup>6</sup>, American researcher David Finkelhor says: "... sexual abuse is a problem which incriminates a particular sex - men - a rather uncomfortable fact for many men to deal with. It makes it harder for them to work enthusiastically on the problem and to avoid defensive responses which can transfer blame from male offender to the (often female) victims. . . ."

The New South Wales Child Sexual Assault Task Force Report reached a similar conclusion when it said: "*The evidence suggests that child sexual assault is more closely related to the general pattern of sexual abuse by males than it is to other forms of child abuse*".

The Task Force was referring to the fact that sexual assault, whether committed against adult women or against girls and boys, is a crime in which the offender is more powerful than the victim. He has greater physical strength, usually more economic power and more authority and status as well.

Children are particularly vulnerable because they are the weakest members of society. The offender uses his greater power to trick, bribe, threaten, and if necessary force a child to take part in sexual activity and then to keep quiet about it. In these circumstances, the child is never able to make a free and informed decision and can never be said to have consented.

El Abuso Sexual  
Contra El Niño

**NO**

SE JUSTIFICA

Jamás.

<sup>6</sup> Child Sexual Abuse - New Theory and Research - David Finkelhor - The Free Press - NY, 1984.

## Male and Female Upbringing

Although power is obviously an important factor, on its own it does not explain the statistics for child sexual assault. For example, women are also more powerful than children but rarely choose to sexually assault them.

In his book,<sup>6</sup> David Finkelhor outlines a number of theories on the way men and women are reared and how these may account for the fact that women are much less likely to be involved in child sexual assault.

*"Women learn earlier and more completely to distinguish between sexual and non-sexual forms of affection."*

He expands this by saying that women's upbringing tends, from the beginning, to prepare them for motherhood and give them opportunities for caring for others and showing affection. Men's upbringing, on the other hand, usually includes far fewer opportunities for caring for others and discourages men from showing their need for affection or support. Many men learn to express these needs only through sex. As a result, when they are feeling dependent or in need of support, they are much more likely to look for fulfillment in a sexual form – even with an inappropriate sexual partner such as a child.

Other contributing factors mentioned are:

*"Men grow up seeing heterosexual success as much more important to their gender identities than women do. When their egos... suffer any insult, men are much more likely than women to feel a need for sex as a way of reconfirming their adequacy."*

*"Men are socialized to be able to focus their sexual interest around sexual acts isolated from the context of a relationship. Women, by contrast, are taught to focus on whole romantic contexts and whole relationships."*

*"Men are socialized to see as their appropriate sexual partners persons who are younger and smaller than themselves, while women are socialized to see as their appropriate sexual partners persons older and larger."*

الإعتداء الجنسي على الأطفال

ليس

هناك

ما يبرره

إطلاقاً.

Finkelhor<sup>6</sup> concludes that all these contributing factors

- less emphasis on sex as part of a relationship
- more emphasis on sex as the way to express affection and need
- and the belief that an appropriate sexual partner should be younger and smaller

make it easier for men to develop a sexual interest in a child.

To alter the situation, and reduce child sexual assault, he suggests the following social changes:

- **less emphasis on sexual success as proof of male adequacy**
- **more emphasis on the need for men to share with women the task of nurturing their children**
- **the need for men to "learn to enjoy sexual relationships based on equality"**

*"Men who are comfortable relating to women at the same level of maturity and competence will be less likely to exploit children sexually. As men's relations with women change, so will their relations with children."*

Çocuklara Cinsel  
Tecavüz

HİÇBİR  
MAZERET

KABUL EDİLMEZ

Asla.

## Influence of the Media

As the New South Wales Child Sexual Assault Task Force Report pointed out, the media plays "a crucial role in shaping the myths which abound in the community". To illustrate this point, the Report quoted an extract from "The Silent Children" by L.T. Sanford.<sup>7</sup>

*"The media do not encourage us to have sex; they encourage us through sheer volume and overstimulation to view women as things and to think of sex as something devoid of feeling and responsibility. Sexy women are everywhere, and they seem to be there for the taking. We tolerate, even encourage men to ogle women's bodies and to treat the person of that body as a sex object. Yet the same man whose attitude towards women is that women exist for his entertainment and prerogative could well be the father of young daughters. Why are we so surprised when his attitude culminates in the sexual exploitation of his daughters?"*

In recent years it has become popular to turn young girl models or actors into child sex symbols. The trend started with Brooke Shields and Jody Foster. They have had many imitators and the portrayal in films and advertising of young girls as objects of sexual interest to adult men is now commonplace.

The unrealistic portrayal of children also plays a part in weakening adult inhibitions and encouraging the sexual attraction of adults to children.

It is important for the community to be aware of the impact of the media – whether press, radio, television, or film – and to begin to ask for a more realistic approach to the portrayal of family life and relationships.

The media has already played an important part in increasing community awareness of child sexual assault. By showing a willingness to re-examine the images they portray of men, women and children, the media can make an even more valuable contribution.

Xâm phạm tiết hạnh  
tre thơ

**KHÔNG  
BAO GIỜ**

**CÓ THỂ**

bảo chữa cá.

## What the Government is doing

In December, 1985, in response to growing community awareness and concern about child sexual assault, the Government established the New South Wales Child Protection Council.

The Council is responsible for co-ordinating and monitoring a four-year programme to reduce child sexual assault and expand services to victims and their families.

From the date the Child Protection Council was set up, to June 1987, the Government provided funds for the following:

- expansion of and addition to community-based, non-government services to child victims of sexual assault throughout the State
- increased numbers of child protection workers in all parts of New South Wales
- increased staff and resources for Government organisations involved in the four-year Child Sexual Assault Programme – the Departments of Youth and Community Services, Health, Education, Attorney-General, Corrective Services and Police
- greatly expanded training and resources for staff in these Departments and in non-government organisations and agencies
- expanded sexual assault services in the Department of Health to provide counselling to child victims of sexual assault throughout the State
- expansion of the Police Juvenile Services Bureau into a Statewide network
- establishment of a Child Protection Unit within the Department of Education with responsibility for training teachers to respond to children who report child sexual assault and to develop curriculum materials to help children protect themselves against sexual assault
- proclamation of sweeping changes to laws relating to child sexual assault including provision for making the courtroom experience less intimidating for a child

Σεξουαλική  
Κοκοποίηση Παιδιών.

**ΔΕΝ**

**ΧΩΡΟΥΝ  
ΔΙΚΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΕΣ**

**Ποτέ,  
ποτέ.**

<sup>7</sup> Sanford, L.T. The Silent Children, A Parent's Guide to the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980.

- establishment of a Special Prosecutor's Unit within the Department of Attorney-General to deal with child sexual assault matters from committal through to trial and to ensure that the child has contact with the same legal representative throughout this process
- establishment of a pre-trial diversion of offenders programme which allows certain categories of offenders who admit their crime to be assessed for suitability for diversion into a treatment programme
- ongoing investigation of ways of making the legal process easier for the child
- development of a Statewide community education campaign through the mass media
- development of a special selection process for choosing foster parents for child victims of sexual assault - including special training, advice, and back-up support.

## ***Child Sexual Assault - No Excuses***

**N**ever blame the child or mother  
**O**nly offenders are responsible - no one else  
**E**xcuses are often made  
**X**cuses are not acceptable  
**C**hildren must be protected  
**U**nderlying attitudes in society are important  
**S**ociety must discuss these issues  
**E**veryone can help  
**S**exual assault of children can be prevented

## **Further reading**

These are some suggestions for further reading. The books listed look at various aspects of the upbringing of men and boys and the influence this upbringing has on their sexuality, behaviour, and attitudes.

**CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, New Theory and Research** by David Finkelhor. The Free Press, New York.

**EVERYMAN** by Derek Llewellyn-Jones. Oxford University Press.

**HOLY VIRILITY: The Social Construction of Masculinity** by Emmanuel Reynaud. Pluto Press.

**INSIDE OUT: Becoming My Own Man** by Jed Diamond. Calif. Fifth Wave Press.

**MEN AND SEX** by Bernard Zilbergeld. London, Souvenir Press. Myths about men and their sexuality.

**NEW IDEAS FOR GIRLS AND BOYS, Booklet 7.** Produced by Community Child Care Co-operative Limited. 404-411 Sussex Street, Sydney 2000. Ph: (02) 212 4600. Ideas for parents and child care workers on how to treat girls and boys more equally.

**REAL MEN LIKE VIOLENCE: Australian Men, the Media, and Violence** by Glen Lewis. Kangaroo Press.

**THE FORTY-NINE PERCENT MAJORITY: The Male Sex Role.** Edited by Deborah David and Robert Brannon. Addison-Wesley, USA.

## **Where to get help**

- To get help for a child victim of sexual assault:
- contact the nearest Community Welfare Centre\* and ask to speak to the duty District Officer; OR
  - telephone the 24-hour Child Protection and Family Crisis Service run by the Department of Youth and Community Services on 818 5555 (for Sydney and suburbs) or 008 42 52 88 (for the rest of NSW).

\* Community Welfare Centres are local offices of the NSW Department of Youth and Community Services. They are listed in the State Government section at the front of the telephone directory under "Youth and Community Services, Dept of".