

# Breaking the silence on child sexual abuse



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Breaking the Silence on Child Sexual Abuse: How Mainstream Media can influence the masses and help prevent child sexual abuse •Introduction

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Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a hot topic these days on the Oprah Winfrey show. Over the past twenty years, Ms.

Winfrey, a sex abuse survivor, has used her television platform to be a voice for victims and survivors throughout the world. Ms. Winfrey originally broke barriers simply by sharing her personal story and by doing so allowed others to proceed forward in sharing their stories. In the last six months, Ms.

Winfrey has interviewed child molesters and rapists, giving insight to parents on what to look for and how to protect their children. More men have come forward expressing their stories of childhood sexual abuse at the hands of mother, caretakers, etc. Ms.

Winfrey has interviewed celebrities such as McKenzie Phillips who spoke candidly about her incestuous relationship with her father. This topic stirred up a lot of controversy in mainstream media but the backlash was unforgiving, unsympathetic and placed blame on the victim. Once people began speaking in favor of Phillips and advocacy groups and psychologists came forward the flaming controversy quickly burnt out. In mainstream media CSA is a cool to non-existent topic. It has been considered a taboo subject for decades and in 2010 victims are still afraid to speak out for many reasons.

The top two reasons are the stigma of shame and fear of the abuser. It is difficult to address due to the sensitivity of the topic, as well as the near-invisibility of its victims. Many of our leaders from police to judges are ignorant, misinformed or not informed at all in how to handle a CSA case. Especially when there are no visible scars or the victim is now an adult. The place of blame on the victim and protection of the abuser from authorities has been greatly unjust, causing many victims to stay silent and abusers to repeat molestation offenses.

CSA along with a largely unjust judicial system has negatively impacted the lives of children, many of which grow up to have mild to severe psychological and sociological issues, including post traumatic stress disorder, self-destructive and violent behaviors. According to stopcsa. org literature, a non-profit CSA advocacy organization, “ CSA costs the nations billions of dollars each year between medical and psychiatric treatment, social services, special education, and legal and judicial and incarceration costs. With the US in the worst financial deficit to date these findings should be enough proof and motivation to end this specific problem affecting present and future generations. Furthermore, “ CSA has been definitively implicated as a precursor to, and a part of, the commercial sexual exploitation of children. ” (www. stopcsa. org literature) What is Child Sexual Abuse • “ Any sexual act between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one exerts power over the other. • Forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act.

This, of course, includes sexual contact. It also includes non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism and

communicating in a sexual manner by phone or Internet. •An agonizing and traumatic experience for its victims. •A crime punishable by law. ” (www.darkness2light.org) Statistics Statistics show that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are molested by the age of 18 in the United States. There is massive underreporting of the problem due to fear, shame, and a resistance to believe minors’ disclosures of abuse: only one in 10 children tell. 1) 42 percent of women and 33 percent of men never disclose the experience to anyone. (2) Information about CSA is difficult to gather due to the sensitivity of the issue itself. However, it is known that CSA affects 15 to 33 percent of females and 13 to 16 percent of males. How Common is CSA CSA is far more common than many U. S. leaders and many citizens want to admit or address. The fact is that the statistics are only a portion of victims who have either come forward voluntarily, or by child protective service records. CSA is considered a worldwide pandemic amongst researchers today.

Who Are Pedophiles Pedophiles are most often family members, teachers, coaches, parents, clergy’s, neighbors and friends of the family. They are not on average the stranger lurking in the dark waiting to grab your kid. These stranger types do exist but the average child molester is known and trusted by the family, has access to the child and takes a while grooming the child to keep the act a secret. “ Research has shown that a perpetrator molests an average of seventy-three children. Men who molested out-of-home girls averaged twenty victims.

Men who assaulted out- of-home boys averaged 150 victims each. ” (3) The Consequences of CSA For the molester: The chances of being caught for any sexual offense (exhibitionism, voyeurism, adult rape and child molestation)

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are 3%. For the victim: Child sexual abuse has severe consequences including decreased school performance, delinquency, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, anti-social behaviors, incarceration, promiscuity, teen pregnancy (60 percent of teens who become pregnant were sexually abused as children), prostitution (95 percent of teen prostitutes were sexually abused) and HIV.

Decades of research documents that adult's who were sexually victimized as children have a higher likelihood of being negatively impacted in their adulthood by numerous types of psychological and physiological ailments and sociological pathologies. (4)(5) Breaking the Silence on Child Sexual Abuse One way to decrease the effects of CSA is to bring it out of the darkness – thereby opening the door to action (similar to what's been done with breast cancer and HIV/AIDS). Given the challenges related to addressing CSA (i. e. shame, stigma, fear, and discomfort), public awareness and education campaigns have already confronted numerous obstacles, such as difficulty providing candid, actionable information to the public. In order to reach the masses effectively and responsibly, advocacy, training, and education programming must be designed to overcome or address the numerous problems encountered by prevention advocates. How mainstream media can help in the prevention of child sexual abuse There's strength in numbers. The greater the spotlight that is put on preventing child sexual abuse results in less vulnerable children and parents for predators.

The more child sexual abuse is discussed, the more victims will learn that it's not their fault and they are not alone. The more victims that come forward via local and national media, especially those in power who can influence

media executives and lawmakers, the less stigma is placed on victims, stifling their healing process. In order for authorities (judges, police) and policymakers to react emphatically towards the victim and punish the perpetrator more often and more harshly there needs to be a comprehensive educational outreach plan in place.

All of this can happen with greater media exposure. Doctors, researchers, advocates, activists, lawyers, parents and survivors throughout the US and abroad are all ready to assist in carrying out a massive informative plan of action. All that is needed is mainstream media executives on board. 7Steps to Protect Children ([http://www. darkness2light. org/7Steps/7steps. asp](http://www.darkness2light.org/7Steps/7steps.asp)) Step 1: Learn the facts Realities—not trust—should influence your decisions regarding your child. Step 2: Minimize Opportunity

If you eliminate or reduce one-adult/one-child situations, you'll dramatically lower the risk of sexual abuse for your child. Step 3: Talk about it Children often keep abuse a secret, but barriers can be broken down by talking openly about it. Step 4: Stay Alert Don't expect obvious signs when a child is being sexually abused. Step 5: Make a Plan Learn where to go, who to call and how to react. Step 6: Act on Suspicions The future well-being of a child is at stake. Step 7: Get involved Volunteer and financially support organizations that fight the tragedy of child sexual abuse. Conclusion

Without sufficient information, increased awareness, and a sense that leaders, stakeholders, and the public can take action and therefore feel empowered/minimize helplessness, the adequate address of CSA by various segments of society is unlikely. Oprah has done a commendable job with

being a voice for CSA in the media. However, one person on one TV station discussing CSA a few times each year is not enough. It's going to take a collective of human energy and massive media support to spearhead a movement which leads victims out of seclusion and feeling powerless into the light of hope and victory.

There's strength in numbers and with enough people speaking out against this horrid life-changing experience, the energy will transpose into healing and eventually eradicate the victim's silence of being sexually abused.

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