

Child Sexual Abuse and Public Opinion in Massachusetts

A Report to

**THE MASSACHUSETTS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP**

Conducted by

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS POLL
MASSACHUSETTS KIDS COUNT**

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1. PURPOSE

In October 2002, Massachusetts was selected by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, as one of three states in the country to develop innovative new strategies to prevent child sexual abuse. These strategies include training and communications programs that focus on educating the general public, parents, professionals and other adults about how to prevent the perpetration of and respond to possible child sexual abuse.

The three-year grant is administered by Massachusetts Citizens for Children which serves as lead agency for the Massachusetts Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Partnership. The Partnership is a statewide collaborative comprised of 22 public and private sector agencies. Later this year, the Partnership will select three communities to serve as pilot sites to implement its prevention strategies over the next two years.

Many current child sexual abuse prevention programs focus on teaching children how to protect themselves from abuse. Experts now recognize that broader initiatives to educate and inform adults about risk and protective factors and prevention strategies need to be explored. The Partnership is focusing on increasing awareness and responsibility in the adult community for the prevention of child sexual abuse. Public opinion surveys are being used to better understand public knowledge and attitudes in these areas and to track changes in public opinion over time. Survey findings will help guide message development, public education initiatives, and recruitment efforts for training programs.

This is the first in a series of benchmark and tracking surveys on public opinion about child sexual abuse and prevention conducted for the Partnership by the University of Massachusetts Poll and Massachusetts Kids Count. This survey, of Massachusetts adult residents, was conducted from February 27, 2003 through March 5, 2003. Subsequent surveys will be conducted in the pilot site communities and statewide.

2. METHODOLOGY

The following data summarize findings from a telephone survey conducted from February 27, 2003 through March 5, 2003. Interviews were conducted by interviewers under the supervision of a university trained field supervisor.

A random digit dial sample was drawn using the Waksberg method. Quotas were met for sampling location and gender. A random respondent selection was used. A total sample of 325 Massachusetts residents was achieved; results from the total sample can be interpreted as accurate to within 6% with a 95% level of confidence.

Respondent cooperation, response rate and call completion were satisfactory and similar to other Massachusetts studies conducted by the research team. The sample performed within expectations for a random digit dial sample.

3. TOPLINES

15% said they were sexually abused as a child.

- 21% of women
- 9% of men

43% thought child sexual abuse was a “very” or “somewhat” serious problem

- Women more likely than men to think it’s a problem

Broad recognition that children are most likely to be abused by an adult family member (47%) or a family friend or neighbor (19%)

- 6% thought Older Child or Teen
- 5% thought clergy

Nearly half would participate in a training program to recognize and respond to child sexual abuse.

Overwhelming number (69%) thought adults more than children (6%) should take responsibility for preventing child sexual abuse.

Comparison of what people said they would do if they suspected someone they did not know well of sexually abusing a child with someone they knew well:

If know person well:

Three times more likely to confront the suspected perpetrator.

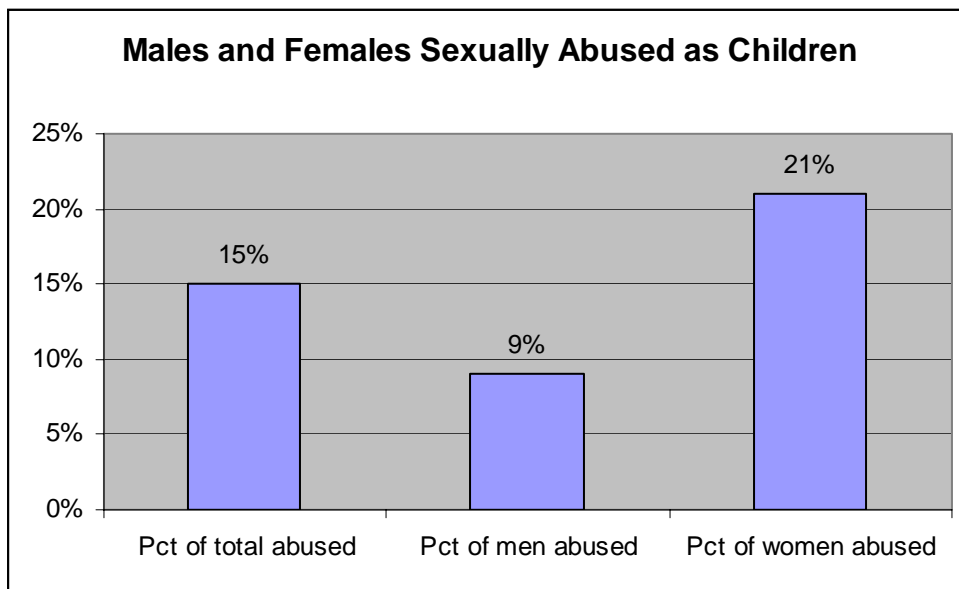
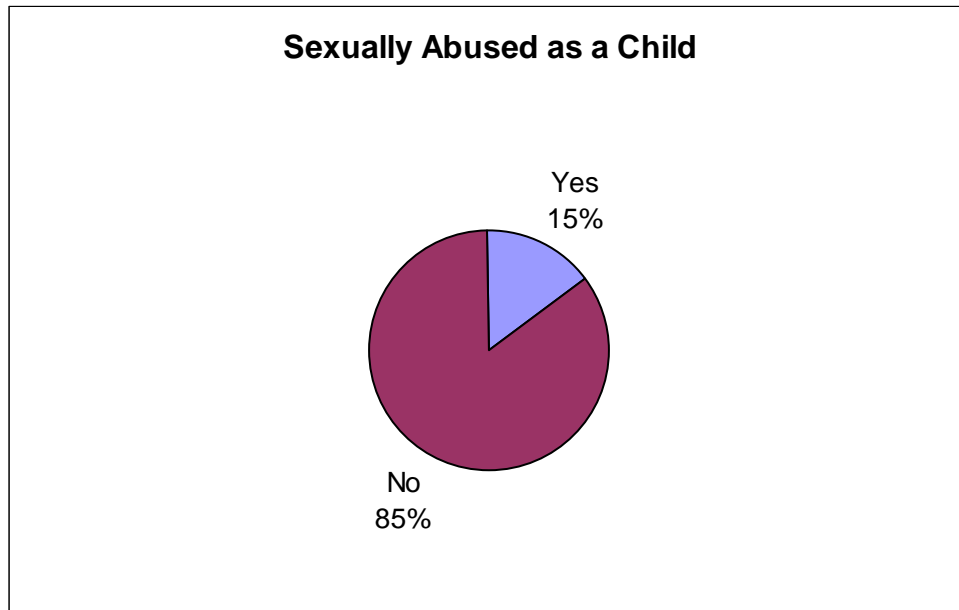
And, less likely to call the authorities.

	Know well	Don't Know well
Call Authorities	37%	52%
Confront adult	34%	10%

4. GRAPHS AND CHARTS

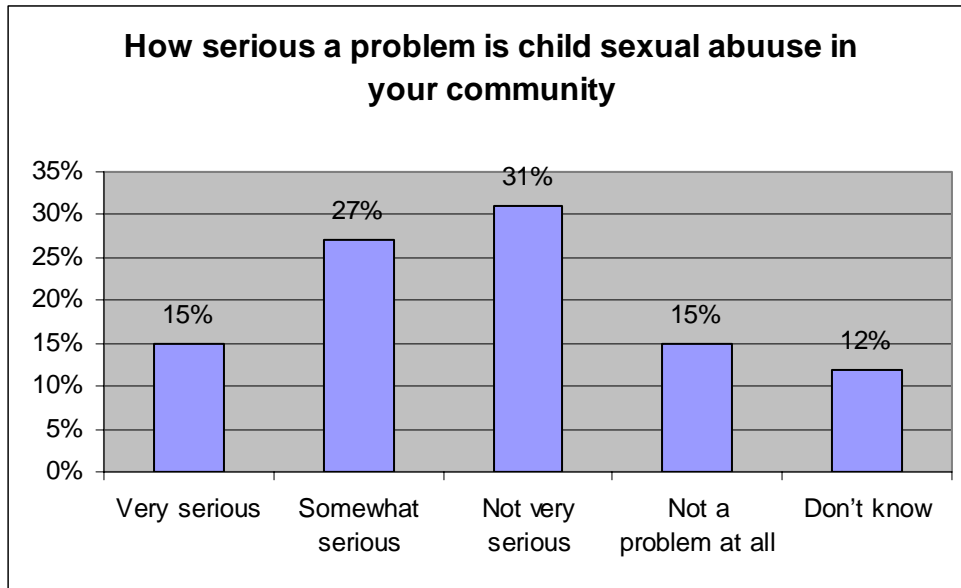
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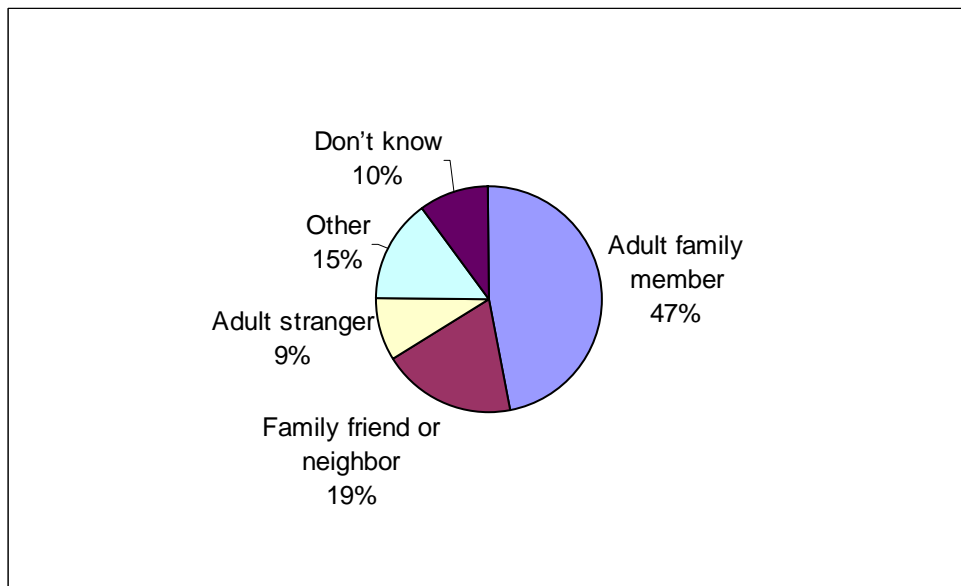


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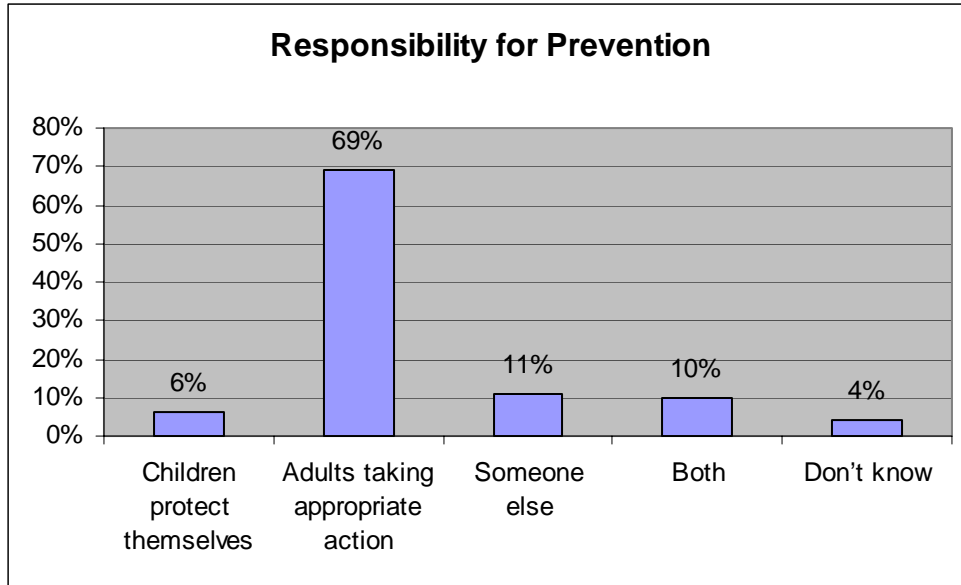
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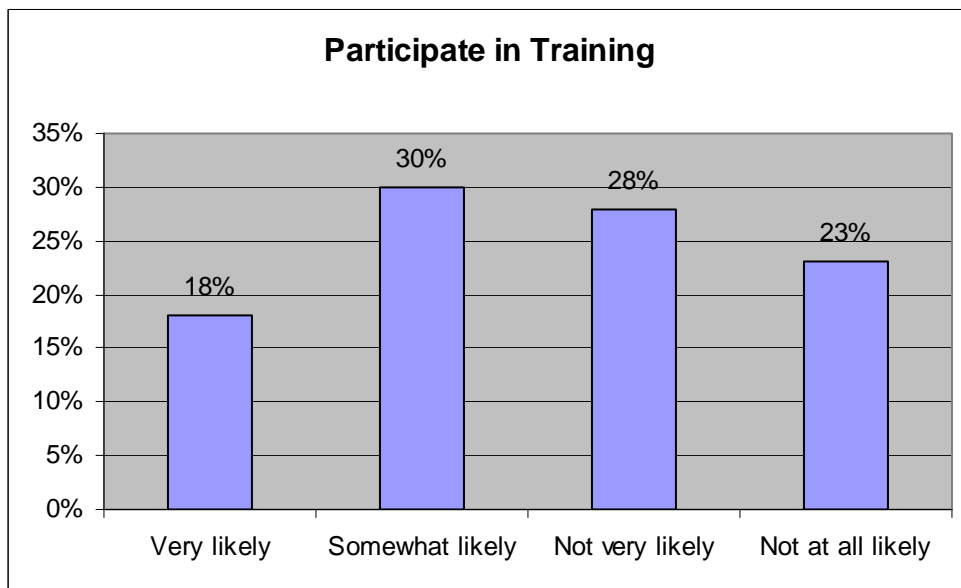
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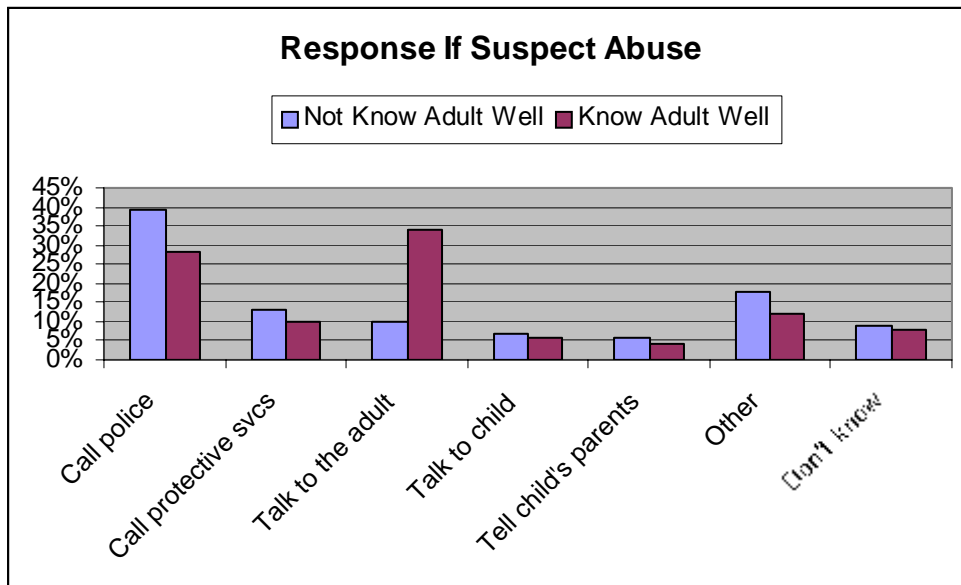
Comparison of what people said they would do if they suspected someone they did not know well of sexually abusing a child with someone they knew well:

If know person well:

- **Three times more likely to confront the suspected perpetrator.**
- **And, less likely to call the authorities**

Q5. If you suspected that *someone you do **NOT** know well **MIGHT BE*** sexually abusing a child but were not sure, what would you do?

Q6. If you suspected that someone you know well **MIGHT BE** sexually abusing a child but you weren't sure, what would you do?



5. SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND FREQUENCIES

Conducted by The University of Massachusetts Poll and Massachusetts Kids Count
Execution Dates: 2-27-03 thru 3-5-03

n=325 Massachusetts adult residents margin of error +/- 6% 95% confidence level

1. In general, do you feel things in Massachusetts are going in the right direction, or have they gotten off on the wrong track?

Right Direction	45%
Wrong Track	47%
Don't Know	8%

2. What is the greatest problem facing you and your family that your elected officials in state government should be working to solve? **(DO NOT READ LIST)**

Taxes or Budget	33%
Education or Schools	17%
Health Care or Insurance	15%
Affordable Housing	2%
Crime or Drugs	1%
Environment	1%
All Other	21%
Don't Know /Refused	10%

Next I'd like to explore the issue of child sexual abuse. I know this is a sensitive topic, especially in some cultures and households, particularly if you or someone you know has experienced child sexual abuse. But your honest responses will help develop programs to prevent child sexual abuse. Your responses are totally anonymous and you don't have to respond to any question that makes you uncomfortable. First ...

3. How much of a problem do you think child sexual abuse is in your community? Would you say it is **(READ LIST)**

Very Serious	15%
Somewhat Serious	27%
Not Very Serious	31%
Not A Problem At All	15%
Don't Know/Unsure	12%

4. Who do you think a child is most likely to be abused by? Would you say by **(READ LIST)**

Adult Family Member	47%
Family Friend or Neighbor	19%
Adult Stranger	9%
Older Child or Teenager	6%
Clergy	5%
Teacher	1%
Someone Else -Other	4%
Don't Know/Unsure	10%

In order to avoid misunderstandings, the definition of child sexual abuse that we're using is any sexual touching, or penetration of a child by an adult, adolescent, or older child. In addition, we would include behaviors such as exposing oneself, showing pornography to a child or photographing a child in sexual poses.

Our next few questions are about this definition and any instances you might know of that fit the definition. We are **NOT** interested in details and particularly do **NOT** want names.

5. If you suspected that *someone you do NOT know well* **MIGHT BE** sexually abusing a child but were not sure, what would you do? (**DON'T READ RESPONSES**)
6. If you suspected that someone you know well **MIGHT BE** sexually abusing a child but you weren't sure, what would you do? (**DON'T READ RESPONSES**)

	#5 Not Know	#6 Know Well
Call the Police	39%	28%
Call Local Child Protective Svcs	13%	10%
Confront or Ask Adult	10%	34%
Confront or Ask Child	7%	6%
Tell Childs Parents or Family	6%	4%
Do Nothing	6%	2%
Investigation	6%	5%
Refer to Help Line Number	1%	--
Consult With Clergy First	1%	1%
Talk to person Close to Situation	1%	1%
Assault Abuser	1%	1%
Get Proof	1%	1%
Other	1%	1%
Don't Know/Unsure	9%	8%

7. Most responses to child sexual abuse have focused on young children and on teaching them how to protect themselves from adults who may try to sexually abuse them. How effective do you think this approach is in preventing child sexual abuse? Would you way it is (**READ LIST**):

Very Effective	21%
Somewhat Effective	59%
Not Very Effective	11%
Not At All Effective	4%
Don't Know/Unsure	5%

8. Who do you think should take the most responsibility for preventing child sexual abuse? (**READ LIST**):

Children Protecting Themselves	6%
Adults Taking Appropriate	69%
Someone Else	11%
Both -Volunteered	10%
Don't Know/Unsure	4%

9. How likely would you be to participate in a training program offered in your community to learn to recognize and respond to possible child sexual abuse? Would you say you would be **(READ LIST)**:

Very Likely	18%
Somewhat Likely	30%
Not Very Likely	28%
Not At All Likely	23%
Don't Know/Unsure	1%
Refused	1%

10. I'd like to ask one question about sexual abuse in childhood. Again, you do not have to answer if you do not feel comfortable, but your honest answer will help us determine the extent of the problem in Massachusetts. When you were a child, did an adult or older child ever sexually abuse you?

Yes	15%
No	83%
Refused	2%