

Child Sexual Abuse*

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* Parts of this chapter are based on the previous edition of the report (Sajkowska, 2017) and have been used with the author's consent.

For a child, sexual contact with an adult is an experience that may often have lifelong negative consequences. Their persistence and severity depend on a range of factors, such as the child's developmental stage at the time of the abuse, his or her relationship with the perpetrator, the duration of the abuse, and the child's disclosure and support received (Beisert & Izdebska, 2012).

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is in conflict with the norms and laws of nearly all cultures and societies in the world, and yet it was not until the 1980s that it became acknowledged as a major social problem. That was also the time when cases of CSA started to be recorded and when researchers began to explore the prevalence and mechanisms of the problem. Child sexual abuse turned out to be very difficult to describe, as only a small percentage of all cases are disclosed and reported. The difficulty is also related to the dynamically changing picture of the problem. These changes are determined by a variety of factors that influence the scope of the CSA definition and the possibility to identify behaviours regarded as sexual abuse. For example, the development of new technologies created broad opportunities to target potential child victims, to engage in sexual contact online, and to distribute pornographic content (photos and videos) involving children. Not only perpetrators' *modi operandi* have been expanding, but also new areas of children's traumatic sexual experiences are being discovered. In recent years, the public in many countries has been shocked by a wave of disclosures of clergy abuse and cases of child sexual abuse by staff members of different care institutions, which are disclosed by the victims after many years, in adulthood (historical abuse). Additionally, the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine has heightened the risk of child sexual abuse. At the same time, increased public awareness and changes in legislation (e.g., mandatory reporting of sexual abuse) are potentially reducing the dark figure of CSA cases. Those numerous overlapping processes make it difficult to get a freeze frame image of the problem.

In 2014 Poland ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as the Lanzarote Convention. Preventive programmes, education, systemic therapeutic assistance for victims of sexual abuse, and child-friendly justice – these are the challenges faced by the Polish government after signing the Convention. Its signatories are also obliged to collect data about child sexual abuse. The goal of this chapter is to gather and review up-to-date available data on CSA in Poland.

Definitions

The World Health Organization defines child sexual abuse as:

the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person (Sajkowska, 2002, p. 7).

Child sexual abuse includes both situations involving physical contact between the child and the perpetrator (*contact sexual abuse*), and interactions that are sexual despite the lack of such physical contact (*non-contact sexual abuse*). The perpetrator may make the child engage in such activities by use of coercion or by abusing his or her position of power, control, and authority. Such power may be based on family relationships or on the child's relationships with adults who hold a position of control or authority in a range of institutions. Strategies used by perpetrators to sexually abuse children include coercion, manipulation, and grooming. It should be emphasised, however, that for children below the age of consent, any sexual contact with the child is considered sexual abuse, regardless of whether the offender used or did not use any coercion (ECPAT, 2016).

Non-contact child sexual abuse includes all forms of verbal harassment and exposing children to pornographic content. Non-contact abuse is increasingly occurring by use of new technologies (the internet, smartphones).

A separate category used in this context is commercial sexual contact with children, referred to as child sexual exploitation. A child is a victim of sexual exploitation when he or she takes part in sexual activities in exchange for something (e.g., a gain or benefit, or even the promise of such) from a third party, the perpetrator, or by the child her/himself (ECPAT, 2016).

Child sexual abuse is not explicitly defined in Polish legislation. The answer to the question of what kinds of behaviours are considered sexual abuse by the Polish law, can be found in appropriate articles of Chapter XXV of the Penal Code (PC), "Offences against Sexual Freedom and Decency". Those articles can be divided into provisions that protect all citizens (including minors) from specific sexual acts, such as rape (Article 197), abusing a relationship of dependence to coerce another person to sexual intercourse or another sexual act (Article 199), or incest (Article 201), and ones that regulate specifically sex crimes against minors: sexual intercourse with a minor under

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I told my parents what happened, but they didn't believe me. They said my uncle only wanted to hug me. I'm afraid the police won't believe me, either.

16-year-old girl

A quote from phone calls and emails to 116 111 Helpline for Children and Young People

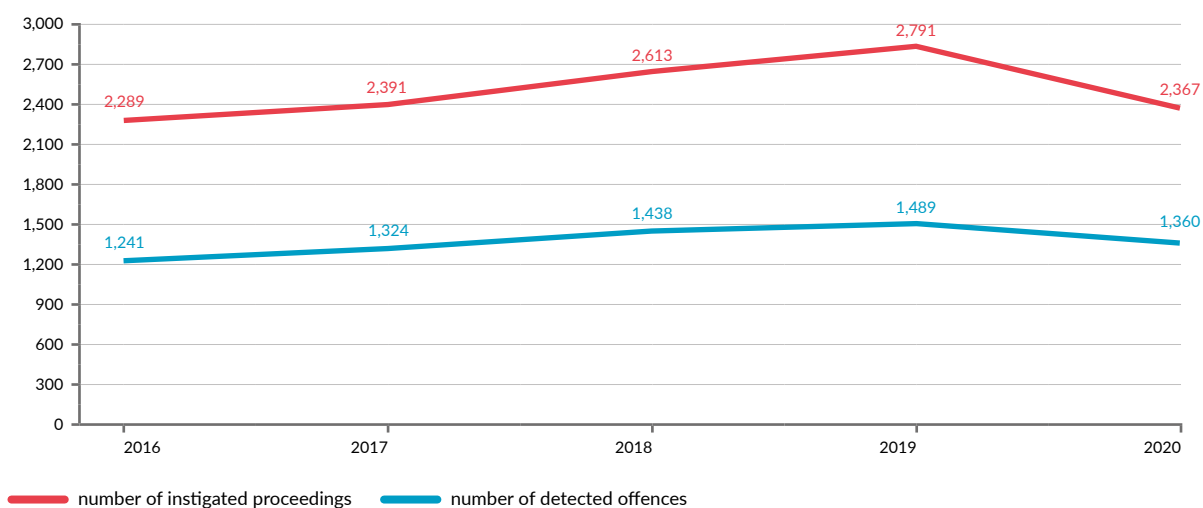
the age of 15 (Article 200) or exposing a minor to pornographic content (Article 202). A key element of legal definitions is the age of consent, which is 15 in Poland (Article 200 of the Penal Code). Sexual offences against children are discussed in more detail in another chapter of this report, “Children in legal procedures”.

The present chapter focuses on child sexual abuse by adults. Detailed information on abuse, including sexual abuse, by peers is provided in the chapter titled “Peer Victimization”.

Prevalence and dynamics of csa

Official data reveals the prevalence of sexual offences, which can be also committed against child victims. Police statistics concerning Article 200 of the Penal Code (sexual abuse of a minor) show that more than 2000 proceedings are instigated each year, and the annual number of offences detected under this article is 1200–1400 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The numbers of proceedings instigated and offences detected under Article 200 of the Penal Code (sexual abuse of a minor) in 2016–2020



Source: Own analysis based on: <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/kodeks-karny/przestepstwa-przeciwko-6/63501,Seksualne-wykorzystanie-maloletniego-art-200.html>.

Table 1 presents the numbers of minor victims of sexual abuse offences based on first-instance convictions between 2016 and 2021.

Among the offences listed in the table, the highest number of child victims were reported under Article 200 § 1 of the Penal Code – more than 600 child victims annually – followed by Article 197 § 3 of PC – about 100 minors each year. The majority of victims of sexual offences are females; in many cases they constitute more than 80% of all victims (colour-marked).

Table 1. The numbers of child victims of crimes related to sexual abuse, based on first-instance convictions between 2016 and 2021

		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Art. 191a PC	Recording and publishing the image of a naked person without their consent	11	8	19	11	18	16
Art. 197 § 1 PC	Rape (sexual intercourse)	49	65	47	36	48	54
Art. 197 § 2 PC	Rape (another sexual act)	20	35	27	23	26	32
Art. 197 § 3 PC	Rape 1) together with another person, 2) against a minor under 15, 3) against an ascendant, descendant, or adopted child, or a brother or sister	111	120	98	124	88	100
Art. 197 § 4 PC	Rape with particular cruelty	0	9	5	2	12	1
Art. 198 PC	Sexual abuse by taking advantage of mental disability or helplessness	10	10	13	15	17	18
Art. 199 PC	Sexual abuse by taking advantage of a dependence relationship or a critical position	11	14	19	28	14	17
Art. 200 § 1 PC	Sexual intercourse with a minor under 15	636	699	607	614	590	652
Art. 200 § 3 PC	Presenting pornographic material to a minor under 15	39	48	61	56	40	80
Art. 200 § 4 PC	Presenting sexual acts to a minor under 15	43	45	43	42	58	19
Art. 200a § 1 PC	Grooming (intention to meet with a minor under 15 for sexual purposes)	16	13	14	17	16	27
Art. 200a § 2 PC	Grooming (proposing sexual contact to a minor under 15)	58	91	77	82	56	63
Art. 201 PC	Incest	2	2	3	6	3	14
Art. 202 § 1 PC	Public presentation of pornographic content	3	11	4	2	3	6
Art. 202 § 3 PC	Producing, possessing, and presenting pornographic material that involves a minor or is related to displaying violence or using an animal	11	13	12	9	9	26
Art. 202 § 4 PC	Recording pornographic material that involves a minor	9	12	20	13	8	11
Art. 202 § 4a PC	Storing, possessing, or accessing pornographic content that involves a minor	14	15	72	44	25	28
Art. 202 § 4b PC	Producing, publishing, presenting or possessing pornographic material that features an image of a minor involved in sexual acts	9	8	1	0	1	0
Art. 202 § 4c PC	Participating in a presentation of pornographic content involving a minor to achieve sexual gratification	0	0	0	1	3	0
Art. 203 PC	Coercing another person to prostitution	0	14	1	1	3	0

Source: Own analysis, based on the Ministry of Justice data.

According to data from the Ministry of Justice, there are about 600 convictions annually under Article 200, section 1 of the Penal Code (sexual intercourse with a minor under the age of 15) (Table 2).

Table 2. Numbers of persons convicted under Article 200 § 1 of the Penal Code between 2016 and 2021

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
First-instance convictions	582	597	592	571	517	639

Source: Own analysis, based on the Ministry of Justice data.

Unfortunately, it cannot be concluded that – as the above data might suggest – sexual abuse affects several hundred children in Poland annually. The prevalence of the problem is definitely much bigger. The data presented above is limited to the incidents that were disclosed and then substantiated through a legal procedure, which is particularly difficult for children who may be sexually abused by adult family members and friends. Another element which is important for disclosing child sexual abuse and, consequently, for how accurately the problem is reflected in official data, is societal willingness to disclose the problem (Włodarczyk, 2014). According to researchers, although law enforcement statistics provide a valuable picture of the current reportability of the problem, they are not a reliable source of information about the prevalence and characteristics of the phenomenon itself (Izdebska & Pilarczyk, 2019).

A much more complete picture of the prevalence of sexual abuse emerges from social surveys conducted among both children (asking about their own experiences) and adults (retrospective studies asking about the respondents' childhood experiences). Data about the prevalence of childhood abuse can be found in two surveys conducted by the Empowering Children's Foundation (ECF) in 2017 and 2018.

The first one was a retrospective study conducted on a sample of students at five universities in different parts of Poland. The survey used the *Adverse Childhood Experiences* (ACE) Questionnaire. Its methodology focused on studying the relationship between adverse childhood experiences (including abuse) and health outcomes.

The survey found that 4.8% of the respondents had been sexually abused in childhood by persons 5 years older or by adults. Women were significantly more likely than men to report such experiences (6.6% vs 2.5%). Among the four categories of sexual abuse that were included in the study (unwanted touch by an adult, being forced to touch

the other person's body, attempted sexual intercourse, and actual sexual intercourse), the biggest proportion of the respondents (3.57%) were sexually touched by an adult or a person 5 at least years older. For all four categories of sexual abuse, the analysis included experiences below the age of 15 or between the ages of 15 and 18, if they were against the respondent's will (Makaruk et al., 2018).

The other survey was conducted in 2018 on a sample of children and young people aged 11–17 (questions about sexual abuse were asked to adolescents in the 13–17 age group). Thus, it is the most recent study that reflects the situation in 2018, rather than at least dozen years earlier, as was the case with the retrospective study. The methodology of the 2018 survey was based on the *Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire* (JVQ), which focuses on examining the prevalence of different forms of violence and abuse against children.

The following categories of child sexual abuse were included in the study:

1. Non-contact sexual abuse:
 - verbal sexual harassment, referring to the experience of someone hurting the child's feelings by writing or saying sexual things about him or her,
 - online grooming, defined as making friends on the internet with someone who later tried to persuade the child to engage in some sexual activity,
 - sexual exposure, understood as showing a child one's private parts without his or her consent.
2. Contact sexual abuse:
 - unwanted touch by a peer, i.e., touching a child against his or her will, forcing a child to touch another person or to engage in other sexual acts,
 - sexual contact under the age of 15 with an adult, understood as sexual contact between a child under 15 and a person over 18, even if it was wanted by both of them;

- unwanted touch by a familiar adult, i.e., an adult family member or another known person touching the child's private parts when it is inappropriate, or making the child touch his or her private parts or engage in other sexual acts;
- unwanted touch by an adult stranger, i.e., an unfamiliar adult touching the child's private parts when it is inappropriate, or making the child touch his or her private parts or engage in other sexual acts;
- commercial sexual exploitation, understood as sexual contact in exchange for money or other gains (Izdebska & Pilarczyk, 2019).

The largest number of adolescents have experienced sexual abuse by a peer (4%), followed by sexual contact under the age of 15 with a adult (2%), unwanted touch by a familiar adult (2%), and unwanted touch by an adult stranger (2%). The smallest proportion of the respondents experienced commercial sexual exploitation: 0.5% (Table 3).

Table 3. Experiences of different forms of contact sexual abuse – overall and by gender and age, in the lifetime (%; N = 822; 2018)

Contact sexual abuse	Total	Girls	Boys	<i>p</i> *	13–14 y.o.	15–17 y.o.	<i>p</i> *
Unwanted touch by a peer	4	6	1	0.000	2	5	0.050
Sexual contact under 15 with an adult	2	2	3	0.599	1	3	0.000
Unwanted touch by a familiar adult	2	3	0	0.002	1	2	0.182
Unwanted touch by an adult stranger	2	2	1	0.064	1	2	0.246
Commercial sexual exploitation	0	0	1	0.280	1	0	0.648

* $p < 0,05$ indicates a statically significant difference.

Source: Włodarczyk et al., 2018.

When it comes to gender, girls are more likely than boys to report unwanted touch by a peer and by a familiar adult. No significant gender differences have been found for the remaining categories. In the vast majority of cases, sexual abuse by a peer (81%) or by an adult (familiar: 64%, stranger: 92%) was perpetrated by males (Włodarczyk et al., 2018).

Non-contact sexual abuse is the most likely to take the form of verbal abuse (10%), followed by online grooming (9%) and sexual exposure (9%; Table 4).

Table 4. Experiences of different forms of non-contact sexual abuse – overall and by gender and age, in the lifetime (% , N = 822, 2018)^a

Non-contact sexual abuse	Total	Girls	Boys	<i>p</i> *	13–14 y.o.	15–17 y.o.	<i>p</i> *
Verbal sexual abuse	10	17	4	0.000	6	13	0.002
Online grooming	9	13	4	0.000	4	11	0.000
Sexual exposure	9	11	8	0.067	8	11	0.160

* $p < 0,05$ reflects a statistically significant difference.

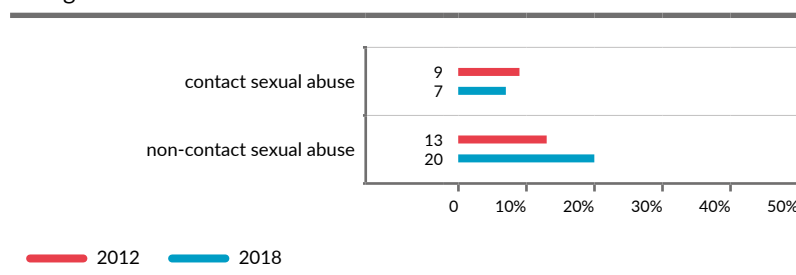
^a The 2018 report uses the term “abusive sexual experiences”, but it refers to the same experiences.

Source: Włodarczyk et al., 2018.

Girls were significantly more likely than boys to experience verbal sexual abuse and online grooming. In the vast majority of cases, the perpetrators of verbal sexual abuse (72%), online grooming (76%), and sexual exposure (88%) were males. Adolescents were the most likely to be verbally abused by familiar adults who were not family members (60%), followed by strangers (33%), and their intimate partners (14%). Similarly, the perpetrators of sexual exposure were more often familiar persons (56%) than strangers (35%; Włodarczyk et al., 2018).

Overall, 7% of the adolescents participating in the study experienced contact sexual abuse, while 20% reported non-contact abuse. Comparing to the first edition of the study in 2012, the proportion of children reporting sexual abuse was slightly lower (by 2 percentage points), while the proportion of adolescents experiencing non-contact sexual abuse increased (from 13% to 20%; Figure 2). This finding does not necessarily mean that the prevalence of sexual victimisation increased; instead, it may reflect a higher tendency to disclose abusive experiences (Izdebska & Pilarczyk, 2019).

Figure 2. Experiences of contact and non-contact child sexual abuse at the age of 13–17 in 2012 and 2018¹



Source: Own analysis based on a database of 2012 and Włodarczyk et al., 2018.

Even more recent data on the prevalence of children's experiences of abuse and neglect by their loved ones, comes from 2020, when the ECF used questions similar to those that were asked in 2012 and 2018, but limited to the initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemics, the period from mid-March to the end of June 2020.

¹ A report by Włodarczyk and Makaruk (2013), which analyses data collected in the 2012 study, provides the results of all the children surveyed, aged 11–17. Since in 2018 questions about sexual abuse were only asked to respondents over the age of 13, the above figure presents the 2012 data for children in the 13–17 age group. Thus, the data is different than in Włodarczyk and Makaruk (2013) or Włodarczyk and Sajkowska (2013).

That study used a different methodology (CAWI) and was conducted among respondents aged 13–17, so its results are not comparable with findings from the first two waves of the survey. Importantly, however, it demonstrated that in the initial period of the pandemics, when leaving home and contacts with people outside the close family context were severely restricted, and schools, closed under the lockdown measures, moved their classes online, children were still sexually abused.

Contact sexual abuse was reported by 2.6% of the respondents, and non-contact abuse – by 9.2%. Non-contact sexual abuse occurred in the form of receiving unwanted nude photos (5.2%), verbal sexual abuse (4.6%), and online grooming (3.4%). Contact sexual abuse took the form of unwanted sexual contact with an adult (1.8%) or a peer (1.2%), or sexual contact between a person under 15 (i.e., under the age of consent) and an adult (1.0%) (Szredzińska & Włodarczyk, 2021).

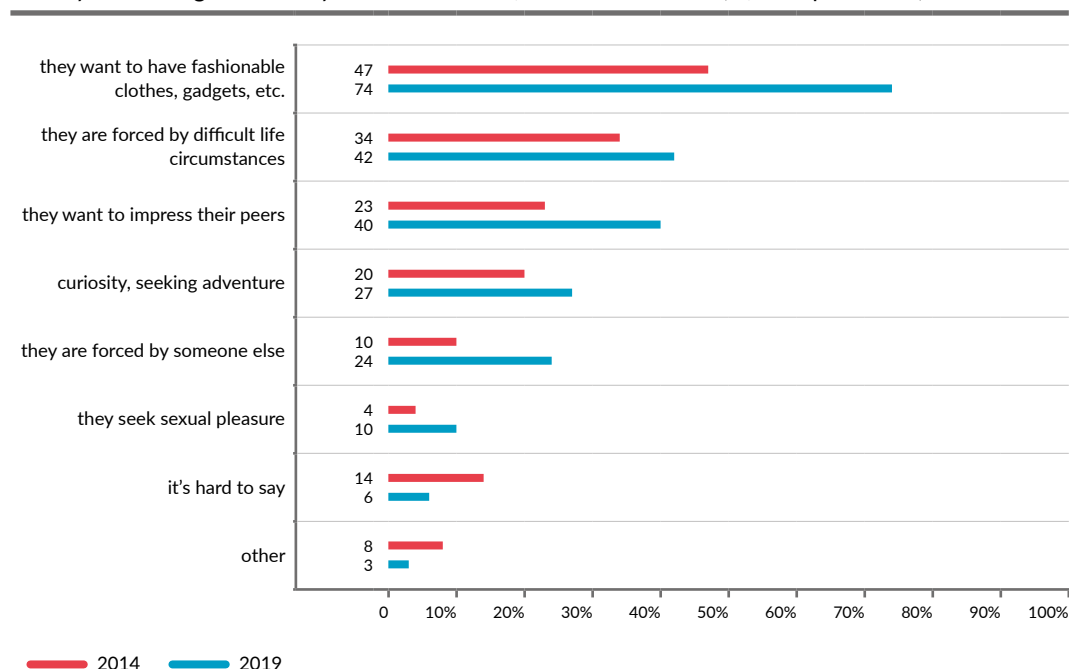
Societal attitudes toward sexual exploitation of children

As already mentioned, what is of key importance for dealing with child sexual abuse is the public perception of the problem, which may foster or hinder reporting, intervention, and prevention. It is particularly important when it comes to commercial sexual exploitation of children, referring to a child taking part in sexual activities in exchange for a gain or just a promise of it, from a third party or the perpetrator. Importantly, we should not use the term *child pornography*, as it may imply that the phenomenon is a legitimate form of sex work or that the child has given an informed consent to prostitute him- or herself (ECPAT, 2016).

The need to emphasise this terminology concern may suggest, however, that such attitudes toward sexual exploitation of children are present in the society. Indeed, their presence has been confirmed by research. In a 2019 survey 74% of Poles believed that one of the reasons why children and young people engaged in sexual contact with adults, was their desire to have fashionable clothes or gadgets. In 2014 the same answer was chosen by 47% of the respondents. The remaining reasons indicated by the participants in the 2019 survey included difficult life circumstances (42%), young people's desire to impress their peers (40%), and being forced or coerced by another person (24%). In comparison to the 2014 survey, the percentages of all specific answers were significantly higher, while the proportion of the “hard to say” and “other” responses decreased (FDDS, 2019; Figure 3).

At the same time, more than half of Poles think that sexual exploitation of children in Poland is a real problem that affects many people. Sixty three percent of the respondents expressed such an opinion about young people sharing their nude photos in exchange for money or other benefits, 61% – about engaging in sexual activities in exchange for means of subsistence, and 60% – about exchanging sex for regular financial support. In comparison to 2014, in 2019 more respondents considered all those phenomena to be real problems in Poland. What did not change was the participants' opinion about young people engaging in sexual activity in exchange for gifts (51% in 2014, 50% in 2018; Figure 4).

Figure 3. Poles' opinions about reasons why children and young people under 18 engage in sexual activity in exchange for money or other benefits, in 2014 and 2019 (% , multiple choice)



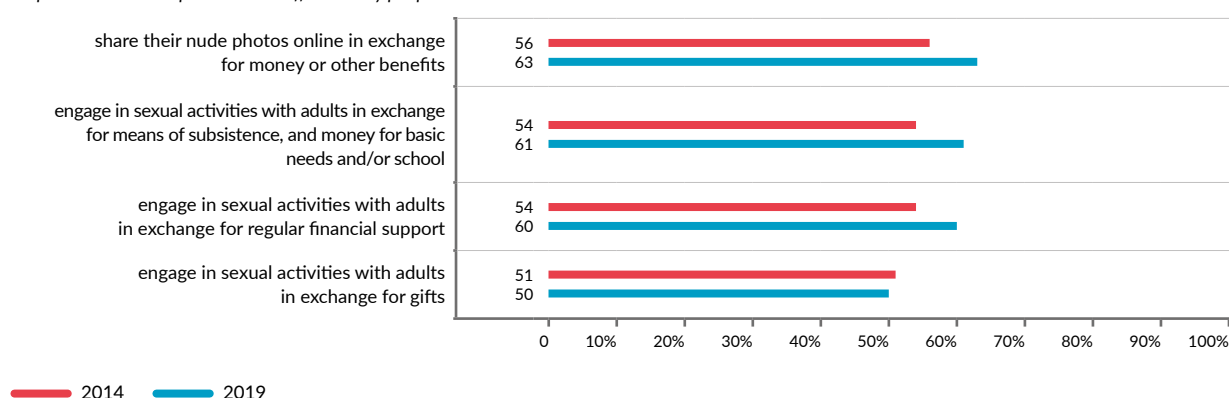
The 2014 survey: CAPI, representative sample N=988 persons under 15; The 2019 survey: CAWI, representative sample N=1001 persons under 15.

Source: own analysis, based on: FDDS, 2019.

Figure 4. Poles' opinions about different forms of sexual exploitation of children in Poland in 2014 and 2019 (%)

A boy or girl aged 16–17...

Responses: It is a real problem that affects many people in Poland



The 2014 survey: CAPI, representative sample N=988 persons under 15; The 2019 survey: CAWI, representative sample N=1001 persons under 15).

Source: own analysis, based on: FDDS, 2019.

Consequences of sexual victimisation

The relationship between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and health-risk behaviours was examined by a US survey conducted on a sample of 13,494 respondents. The results demonstrated that childhood abuse and family dysfunction contributed to health problems in adulthood. That survey and many other studies found a strong relationship between ACEs and smoking, substance abuse, depression, suicide attempts, and violence perpetration (Bellis et al., 2014b; Felitti et al., 1998; WHO, 2006).

The association between health-risky behaviours and adverse childhood experiences is most probably mediated by ACEs' effect on the developing mind. Early traumas may lead to structural and functional changes in the brain and in its stress systems. This, in turn, affects such functions as emotional regulation or fear response, which may increase these individuals' tendency to engage in risky behaviours later in life (Anda et al., 2006).

ACEs have also been found to be associated with changes in the nervous, hormonal, and immune systems. Research suggests that stressful childhood experiences may lead to significant biological responses, and consequently have an effect on physiological stress responses in adulthood (Danese & McEwen, 2012).

A 2017 survey, conducted by the ECF on a sample of Polish university students, found a relationship between sexual abuse and health-risky behaviours. The odds ratio (OR) – the ratio of the odds of an event in one group and the odds of the same event in a comparison group – was calculated for each of several risky behaviours. In comparison to those who were not sexually abused in childhood, survivors of child sexual abuse were six times more likely to have more than three sex partners (OR = 6.27), over four times more prone to substance abuse (OR = 4.26), 3.5 times more likely to engage in self-harm (OR = 3.50) and to attempt suicide (OR = 3.41), three times more likely to report early smoking initiation (OR = 3.08), early sexual initiation (OR = 2.85) and risky drinking (OR = 2.57), twice as likely to have smoked a hundred or more cigarettes in their lifetime (OR = 2.38), abuse alcohol (OR = 2.18) and miss work or university classes because of stress (OR = 1.83; Makaruk et al., 2018).

However, not all sexually abused children develop some kinds of symptoms. Various studies have found that between 30% and 50% children do not show any symptoms of psychopathology after sexual victimisation (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993; Williams & Nelson-Gardell, 2012).

The main factors that increase the likelihood of long-term consequences of sexual abuse include (Włodarczyk, 2016):

- factors at the microsystem (family) level:
 - early adverse family experiences (such as parental conflict);
 - experiencing other forms of violence or abuse, acceptance of violent behaviours and alcohol abuse in the family;
 - perpetrator proximity (both relational, such as kinship or friendship, and physical – living in the same household);
- factors at the exosystem level (social environment):
 - low socioeconomic status;
 - lack of alternatives related to lack of family and social support;
- factors at the macrosystem level:
 - societal victim-blaming;
 - patriarchy.

Protective factors include support from social services, including access to psychological help, emotional support in the family, and positive bonds with the family and peers (Włodarczyk, 2016).

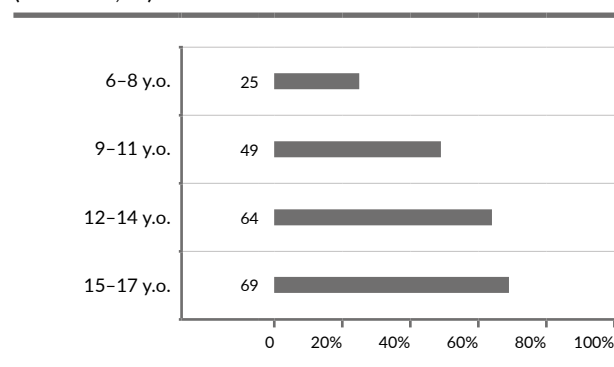
Sex education

Analyses of the effectiveness of prevention efforts point to sex education as an important form of preventing sexual victimisation (Izdebska & Ruchel, 2011). A review of existing research suggests that parents play a vital role in protecting children from sexual abuse (Rudolph et al., 2020).

A 2015 survey by the Institute of Educational Studies (Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, IBE) asked parents of children aged 6–17 whether they or other close family members had talked to their children about the risks of sexual

victimisation. The respondents' reports varied depending on children's age. Parents discussed that topic with nearly half of the children aged 9–11 (49%). For older children – secondary school students (aged 15–17) – the percentage was higher and amounted to 69% (Figure 5). The survey found that a significant proportion of children were not educated by their family members about the risks related to sexual abuse until late school age, while for one third of the children no one in the family had ever raised the topic.

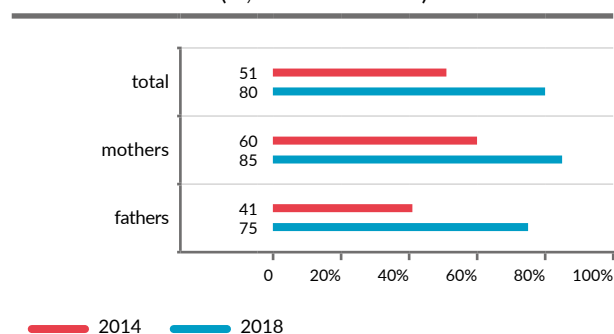
Figure 5. Children's age at the time when close family members talked to them about the risks of sexual victimisation (cyberbullying, rape, harassment), based on self-reports of parents of children aged 6–17 (N = 2526; %)



Source: Own analysis, based on: IBE, 2015.

In the 2018 survey conducted by the ECF, 80% of Polish parents of children aged 5–11 reported they had talked to their children about the risks related to sexual abuse. Mothers were more likely than fathers to have such conversations with their children (85% and 75%, respectively). As compared to the previous wave of the study, there was a huge increase in the percentage of parents who talked to their children about child abuse risks: from 51% in 2014 to 80% in 2018 (Figure 6). The first conversation, on average, took place when the child was about 7 years old, but 24% of the parents talked about it with their five-year-olds. In their conversations with children parents are more likely to focus on the stranger danger than to teach about the risks posed by familiar adults. More than half of the parents (63%) described the conversation as difficult (Figure 7).

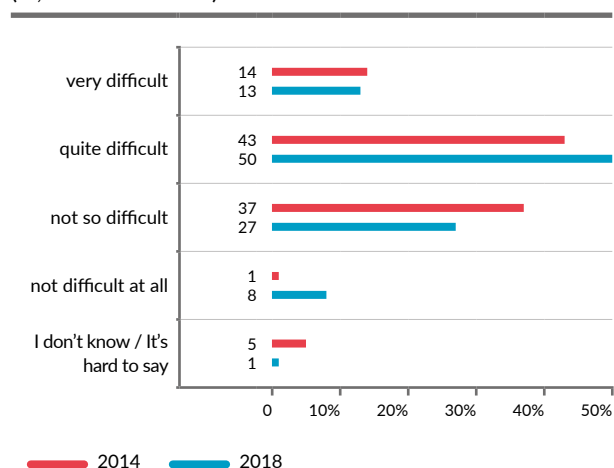
Figure 6. Percentages of parents who talked to their children about CSA (%; 2014 and 2018)



CAWI among parents of children aged 5–11; 2014: N = 505; 2018: N = 539.

Source: FDDS, 2018.

Figure 7. Perceived difficulty of the conversation, rated by the parents who talked to their children about CSA (%; 2014 and 2018)



2014: N = 432; 2018: N = 256.

Source: FDDS, 2018.

Parents who talk to their children about the risks of CSA, most frequently tell them not to talk to strangers, that private parts can only be shown to a parent or a physician, and that the child should not trust anyone (Table 5).

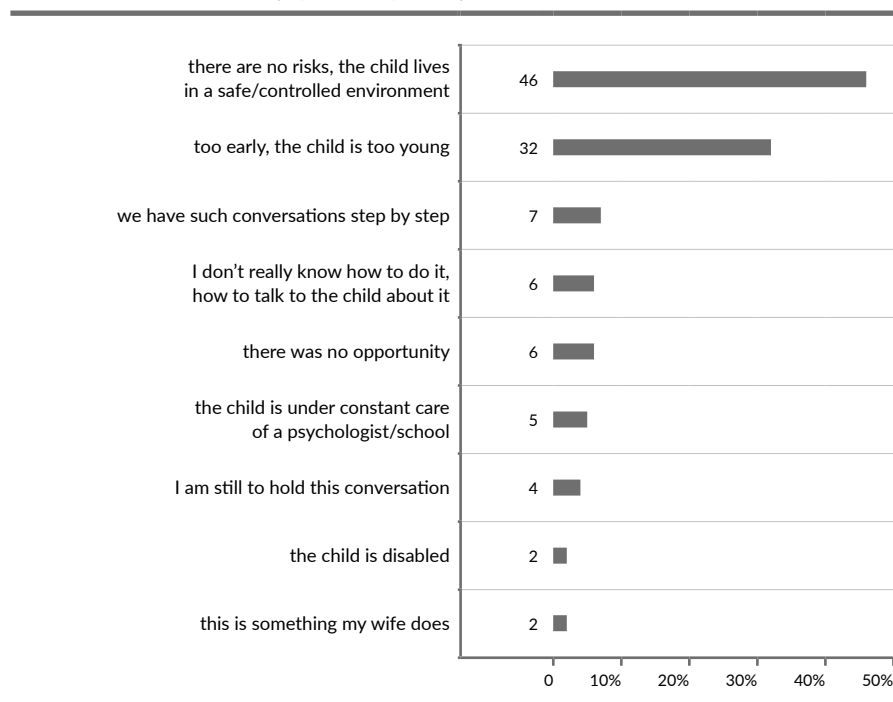
Parents who do not talk to their children about the danger of sexual abuse, mention the lack of CSA risks and their child's age – their belief that the child is too young for such conversations – as the main reasons for not talking to them (Figure 8). As a reminder, the study was conducted among parents of children aged 5–11.

Table 5. Topics most frequently discussed by the parents who talked to their children about CSA (2014 and 2018)

Most frequently discussed topics	
2014 r. (N = 256)	2018 r. (N = 431)
Don't trust anyone	Don't talk to strangers
Bad touch (private parts can only be shown to a parent/physician)	Bad touch (private parts can only be shown to a parent/physician)
Don't talk to strangers	Paedophilia, sexual abuse
Tell parents about everything	Risks in general
Risks in general	Don't trust anyone

CAWI among parents of children aged 5–11; 2014: N = 505; 2018: N = 539.

Source: FDDS, 2018.

Figure 8. Self-reported reasons why parents did not talk to their children aged 5–11 about child sexual abuse (%; N = 539, 2018)

Source: FDDS, 2018.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly emphasised that the protective role of parents is not limited to talking to their children about dangerous situations that may lead to sexual abuse. Instead, it should be performed through the overall parenting approach. It is recommended that protective behaviours are not taught in isolation, but rather become an integral part of the existing evidence-based parenting programmes. One way to address the first aspect of the protective role of parents is to develop a module about CSA prevention and to embed it in general positive parenting programmes (Rudolph et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Knowledge about child sexual abuse is necessary for effective prevention. Researchers emphasise the growing need for “research programmes focusing on individual, environmental, and situational factors related to the onset of perpetrators’ offending behaviours, as well as on risk and protective factors related to the consequences of abuse for children” (Sajkowska and Skierkowska, 2020, p. 39). It is particularly important in light of a growing body of evidence suggesting that universal (or primary) prevention (aimed at the entire population) is not effective enough, and therefore more resources should be

allocated to secondary (selective) prevention, targeted at high-risk individuals, groups, and locations, and tertiary (indicated) prevention, targeted at individuals, groups, and locations where abuse has already occurred, in order to prevent further abuse or secondary victimisation. Smallbone, Marshall and Wortley developed an integrated model of child sexual abuse prevention, adding four areas of intervention – offenders, victims, situations, and communities – to those three levels (Sajkowska and Skierkowska, 2020; Table 6).

In order to be effective, prevention of child sexual abuse has to be evidence-based and subject to continuous evaluation.

Table 6. The integrated model of child sexual abuse prevention according to Smallbone, Marshall and Wortley

	Primary (universal) prevention	Secondary (selective) prevention	Tertiary (indicated) prevention
Offenders	General prevention Developmental prevention	Helplines Counselling for high risk individuals Developmental prevention	Early detection Specific prevention Selective incapacitation Offender treatment
Victims	Personal safety plans Building resilience	Counselling and support for children at risk of CSA	Early detection Harm reduction Preventing secondary victimisation
Situations	Extended guardianship Situational prevention in public spaces, institutions, and home environments	Situational interventions in in high risk places and organisations	Safety plans Prevention of reoffending Situational interventions in institutions where CSA has already occurred
Communities	Public education Community support services Community skill building	Supporting high risk families Interventions in high risk communities	Interventions in communities with high rates of CSA

Source: Sajkowska and Skierkowska, 2020, p. 18.

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