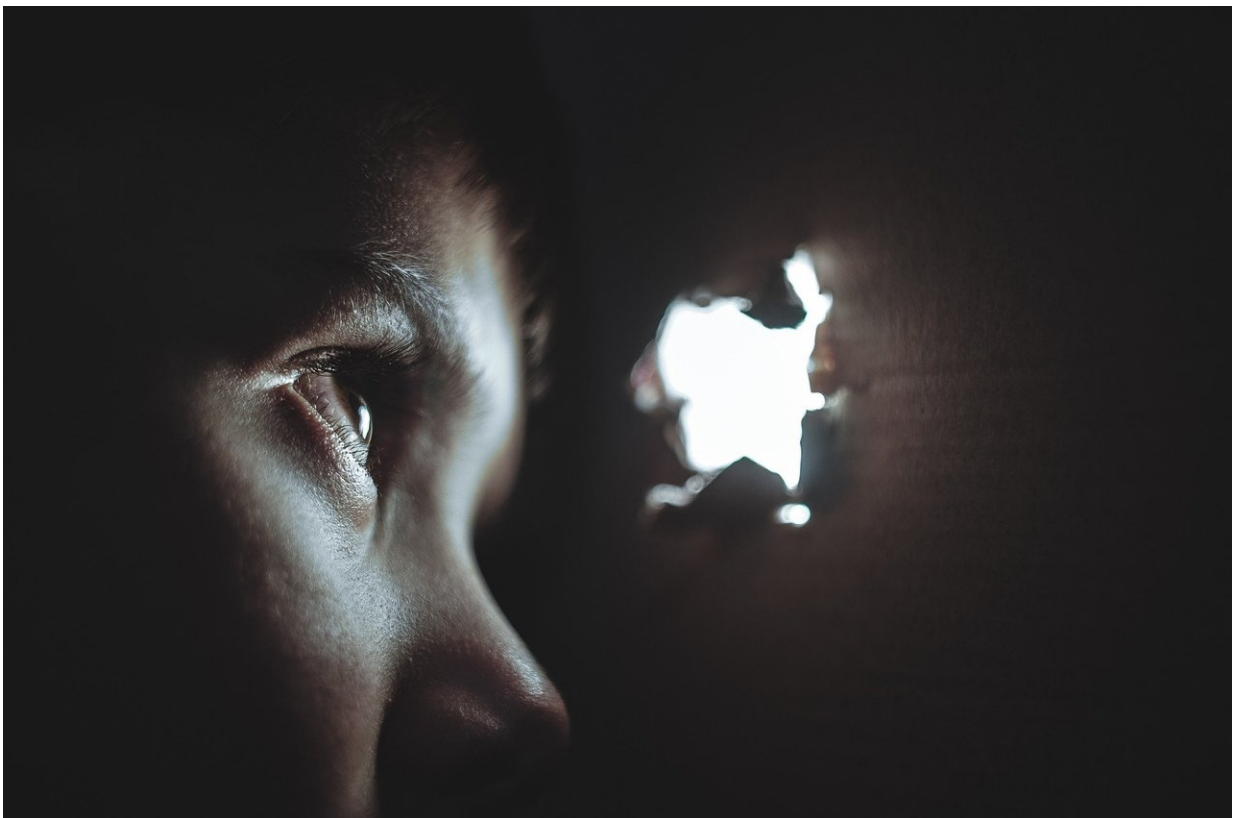


Only 27.5% of adult victims of child sexual abuse tell someone about the experience while still a child

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Three researchers of the University of Malaga have just published a paper that brings to light sexual abuse experiences suffered in childhood

by more than a thousand Spanish adults –according to a sample that is representative of the Spanish population in terms of age, gender, and region– evidencing the silence surrounding this type of aggression, since only 27.5% of those surveyed who said they had suffered abuse confirmed they had disclosed it when they were children.

"Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse in Spain: A Representative Sample Study," conducted within the R&D&I project "Assessment and prevention of child [sexual abuse](#) in the Spanish population" and financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), has recently been published in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

On the basis of this study, 10 different types of child sexual [abuse](#) experiences have been identified, with and without [physical contact](#) with the perpetrator: 1) being rubbed against someone else's genitals intentionally, 2) being fondled, 3) having one's private parts touched, 4) being asked to touch someone else's private parts, 5) being kissed, 6) being shown someone else's private parts intentionally, 7) being asked to show one's private parts, 8) being forced to perform a sexual act involving penetration, 9) being requested sexual material in photos or videos or being photographed or recorded directly, and 10) being shown pornographic material.

In order to consider these experiences in the study, they had to occur during childhood (less than 18 years old), in an improper manner, that is, not being part of a game with other minors on an equal footing, and with someone older or superior in terms of strength, development, position or authority.

"Alarming results"

"After many years without representative data published in our country, thanks to this study we have been able to know the prevalence of these

experiences, with alarming results," says its main author, Marta Ferragut, researcher of the Department of Psychobiology and Behavioral Sciences Methodology, who has conducted this project with the Professors of the UMA María José Blanca and Margarita Ortiz-Tallo.

Thus, 41.5 percent of the surveyed men and women reported that they had experienced at least one of the ten types of abuse assessed. According to Ferragut, this means that two out of five Spanish adults have suffered any form of sexual abuse when they were children, surpassing the figures of the European Council estimating one out of five. Moreover, 2.8 percent of them reported that they had suffered some abuse experience involving penetration, which means one out of 35 minors.

In general terms, abuse occurs in primary school, after the age of 6. The experts alert, however, that the results determine that prevalence of abuse is higher in females for eight of the ten experiences considered, emphasizing that there are no big differences between boys and girls when the abuse consisted in being forced to perform a sexual act involving penetration, while the prevalence of the experience of being shown pornographic material is higher in males.

Generational differences

Likewise, this study explores differences between generations, evidencing that the youngest adults, known as "Generation Z," are the most likely to report their experiences related to sexual abuse. In particular, three of the experiences identified –two of them related to technology.

"Technology makes it easier to perpetrate abuse, since it enables perpetrators to keep distance from the victim, potentially expanding the range in which they can act. At the same time, not having contact and

not "touching or being touched" makes it difficult for victims to detect it or identify it as abuse," explains the expert.

However, the researcher also alludes to its use with positive effects, for example, to offer information and tools for detection and prevention, although, according to this study, at the moment, "technology is more of a risk than a help."

The Professors of the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Malaga Marta Ferragut, María José Blanca and Margarita Ortiz-Tallo will keep working in this line of research, which findings, as they assert, may help to establish social policies and develop effective prevention programs.

More information: Marta Ferragut et al, Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse in Spain: A Representative Sample Study, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/08862605211042804](https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211042804)

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