

Barriers to Reporting Child Sex Abuse

A National Survey Conducted by Dr. Jim Kitchens, founder
The Kitchens Group
Orlando, Florida

In partnership with Rannah Gray, author
Familiar Evil – named Best True Crime and Best New Nonfiction of 2016

Introduction

In April 2017, Rannah Gray and Dr. Jim Kitchens developed and conducted an online public opinion survey to determine obstacles for adults reporting suspected cases of child sexual abuse. The survey was informed by discussions Ms. Gray heard during talks about her award-winning true crime book, *Familiar Evil*, published in late 2015 by The Lisburn Press. Ms. Gray has spoken to groups throughout the country about her experience exposing a dangerous child predator who had fled the U.K. to become a popular television host in Louisiana. Because of the number of people in England and the U.S. who were manipulated to believe he was a model citizen, the shock of discovering the truth left many questions, including how people handle reporting child sex abuse and what barriers prevent appropriate action being taken.

Recognizing that the subject of child sexual abuse is very difficult to discuss, Dr. Kitchens chose an online survey which he felt would capture more truthful answers. Dr. Kitchens is the founder of The Kitchens Group, one of the oldest public opinion research firms in the country and a leader in Internet polling in America. He has a strong academic background and proven expertise in attitude research. The Kitchens Group has developed methods of measuring the effects of the religious belief systems, subconscious gender and racial biases, and the psychological cross-pressures between economic and environmental concerns of the public.

During talks with groups that included mandatory reporters, Ms. Gray learned they were regularly discouraged from reporting suspected abuse by their superiors, even though failure to report would constitute a felony crime.

In addition to the barriers to reporting which came from Ms. Gray's discussions, she consulted the New Orleans Children's Advocacy Center on current trends they noticed in working to protect children.

Ms. Gray and Dr. Kitchens hope the results of this survey will help inform public education and training on how to handle the response and reporting of suspected child sexual abuse cases.

The Survey Results

The survey opened with the following statement:

We are doing a survey regarding a tough but important issue in America, child sex abuse. Your responses are confidential and will only be used for statistical analysis. Thank you for your help on this important topic.

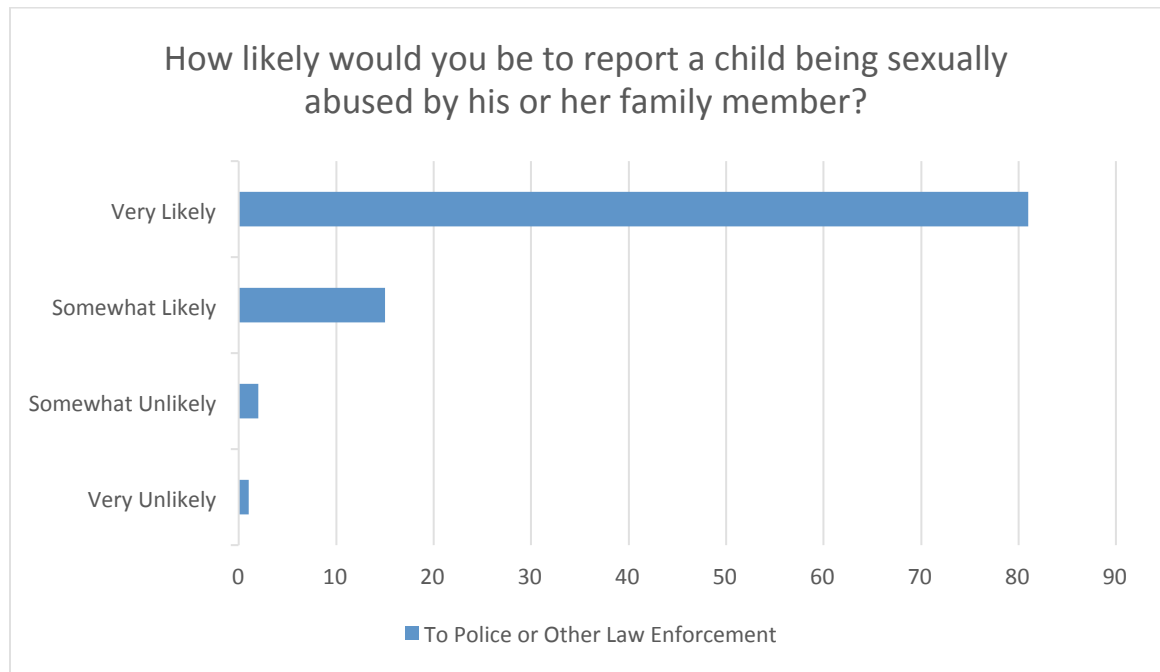
Following are the responses for each question:

If you believed a child was being sexually abused by his or her family member, how likely would you be to contact. . .

1. the police or other law enforcement agencies

(1) very likely (2) somewhat likely, (3) somewhat unlikely (4) very unlikely

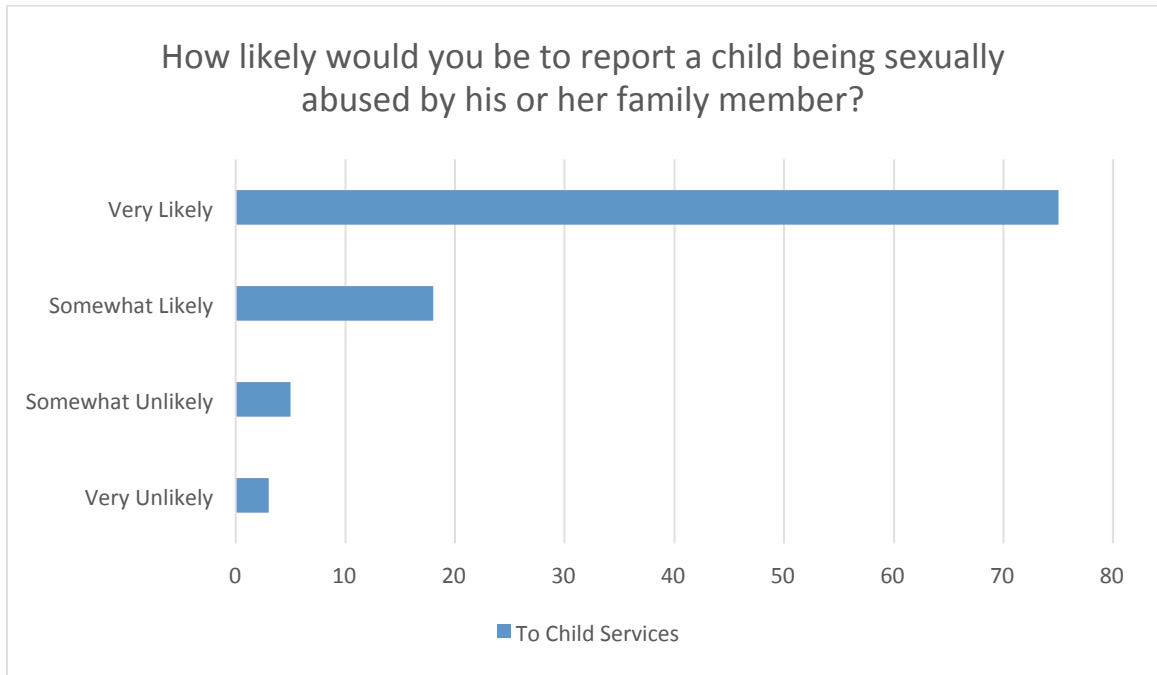
(1) 81% (2) 15% (3) 2% (4) 1%



2. child services officials

(1) very likely (2) somewhat likely, (3) somewhat unlikely (4) very unlikely

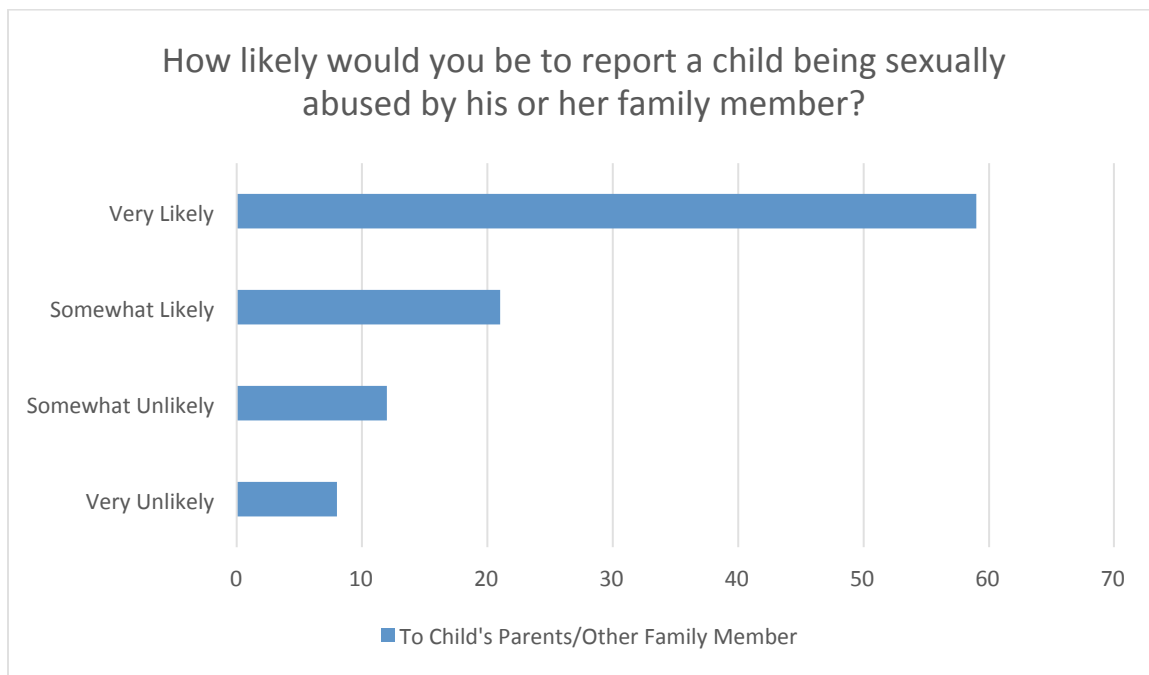
(1) 75% (2) 18% (3) 5% (4) 3%



3. the child's parents or other family members

(1) very likely (2) somewhat likely, (3) somewhat unlikely (4) very unlikely

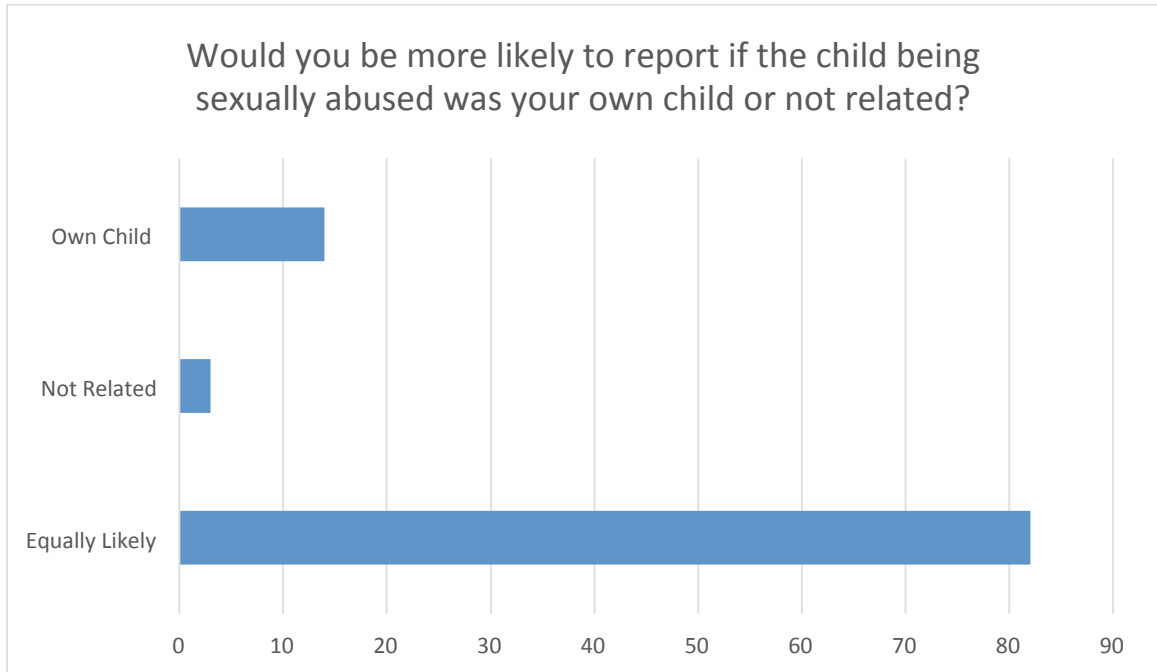
(1) 59% (2) 21% (3) 12% (4) 8%



Before any potential obstacles are introduced, 75-81% of respondents said they were “very likely” to report suspected sexual abuse of a child by a family member to either law enforcement or child services. The population segment least likely to report to law enforcement, by a differential of 14 percentage points, were respondents over 65 years of age. The age group most likely to report were age 51-65 (84%) and the age group least likely to report were over 65 (70-%). The survey later reveals only a small percentage of respondents over age 65 said they would know what to do if they believed abuse was occurring, which could account for the drop in reporting. Only 59% said they would report the abuse to the child’s parents or family members, possibly because they see them as involved in the abuse or complicit. Again, the lowest percentage of respondents who would report to parents or family members were those over age 65, with only 46%. Law enforcement ranked highest as the choice to report, which is a positive.

4. If you believed a child was being sexually abused, would you be more likely to report it (1) if it was your own child or (2) if it were not a child related to you or (3) equally likely you would report it in either case.

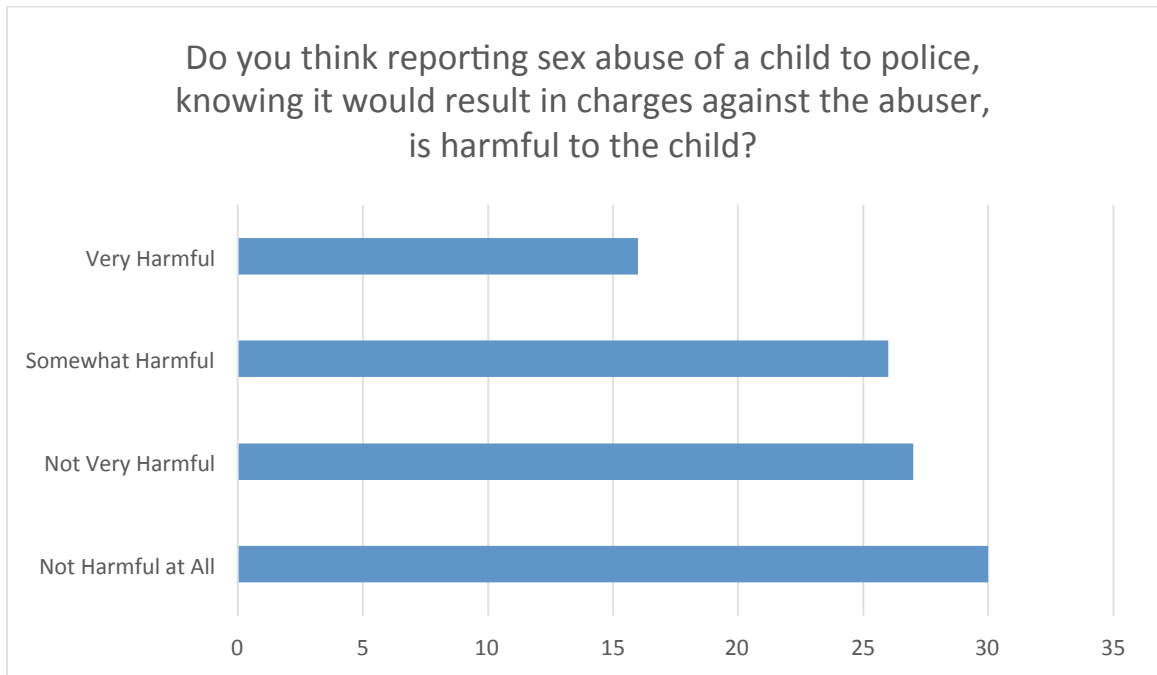
(1) 14% (2) 3% (3) 82%



Respondents across the board said they are equally likely to report the abuse of their child or an unrelated child. The group responding that they were most likely to report the abuse of their own child were respondents age 18-34.

5. Do you think reporting suspected sex abuse of a child to the police, knowing it would result in charges against the abuser, is (1) very harmful to the child, (2) somewhat harmful to the child, (3) not very harmful to the child, (4) not harmful at all to the child.

(1) 16% (2) 26% (3) 27% (4) 30%



With 42% of respondents saying they believe reporting child sex abuse is harmful to the child, this issue represents a significant psychological deterrent to reporting.

People say they don't report suspected child sex abuse for a number of reasons. How much would each of the following factors worry you about reporting an incident of suspected abuse...

(1) cause me a great deal of worry, (2) cause me some worry, (3) would not cause me much worry, (4) would not worry me at all

6. worry that you are wrong in your suspicions about the abuse

(1) 27% (2) 45% (3) 18% (4) 10%



Fear of being wrong about suspicions of abuse was the largest concern among respondents, with 72% saying this would worry them, providing a strong rationale for them to use for not reporting. 78% of respondents ages 18-34 said they would worry about being wrong in their suspicions. This response indicates a lack of knowledge, meaning respondents are not certain of what to look for or they know they are making judgements and do not trust their ability to determine what constitutes abuse. This result is a very strong indicator of the need for additional public education.

7. worry that the accused might sue you for making the accusation

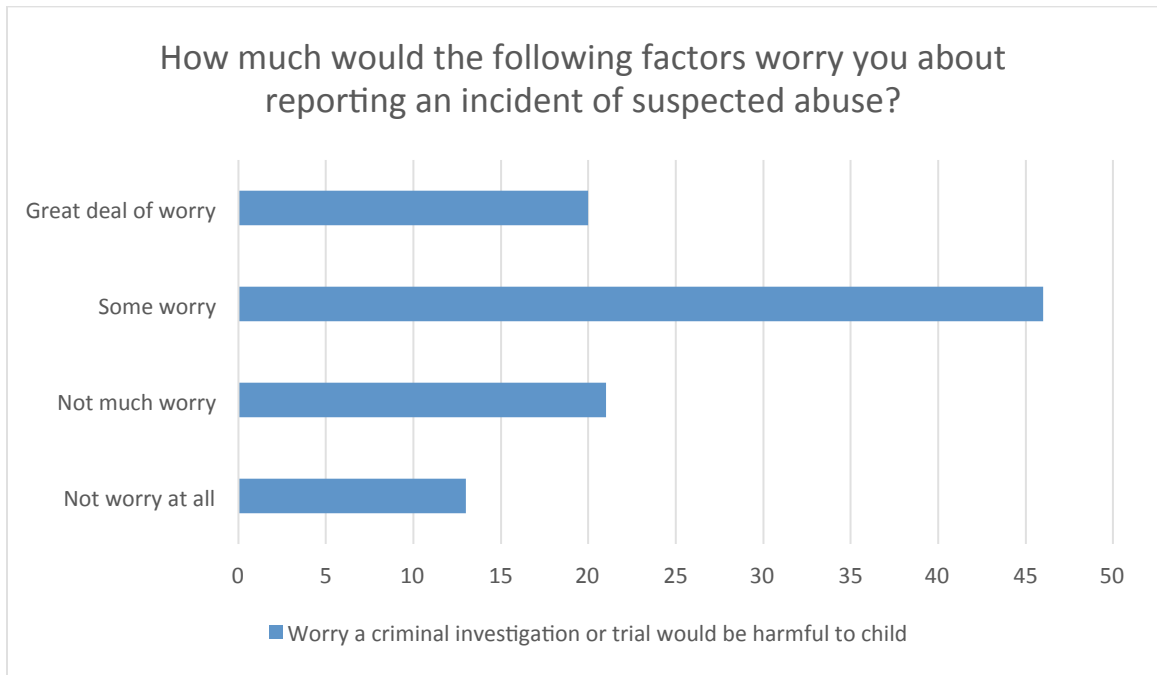
(1) 18% (2) 31% (3) 25% (4) 27%



Almost half of the respondents (49%) said they would worry about an accused abuser suing them over reporting, which also provides a very significant deterrent for reporting abuse. The age group most concerned about being sued was respondents over 65 years of age, with 55% saying this was a concern for them.

8. worry a criminal investigation or trial would be harmful to the child

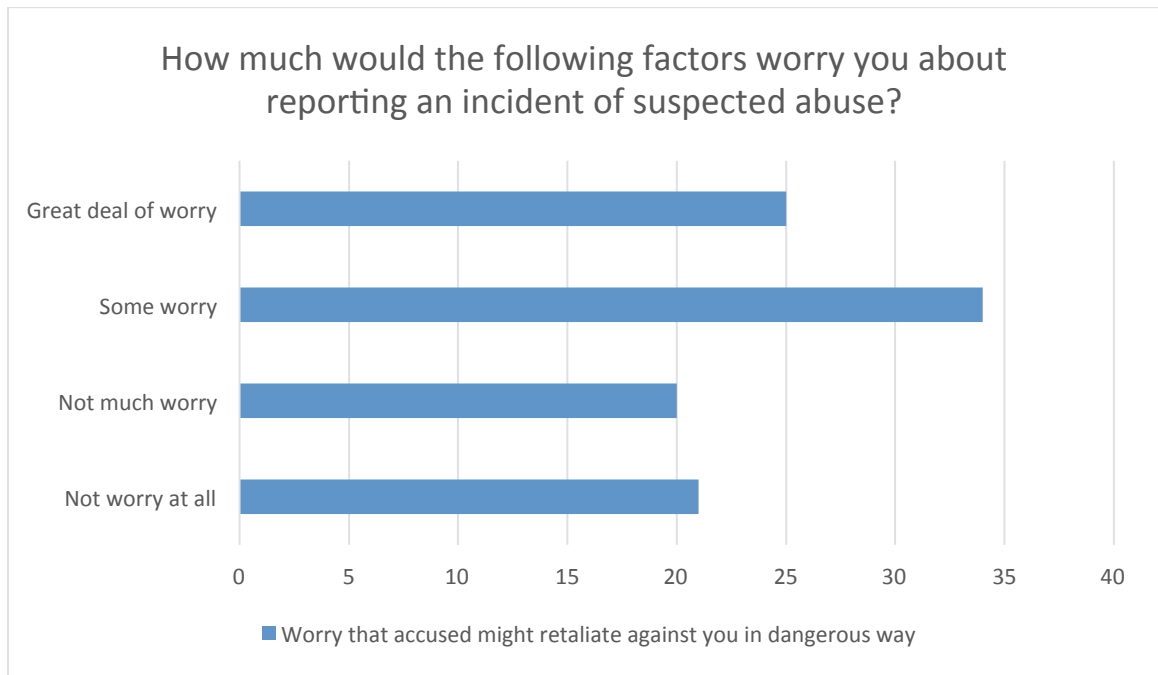
(1) 20% (2) 46% (3) 21% (4) 13%



Two thirds of respondents (66%) said they would worry that a criminal investigation into the abuse or trial would be harmful to a child, providing adults with a rationale for not reporting. The group expressing the greatest amount of concern were respondents ages 18-34 with 72% saying they would worry that reporting abuse to police would be harmful to the child.

9. worry the accused might retaliate against you in some dangerous way

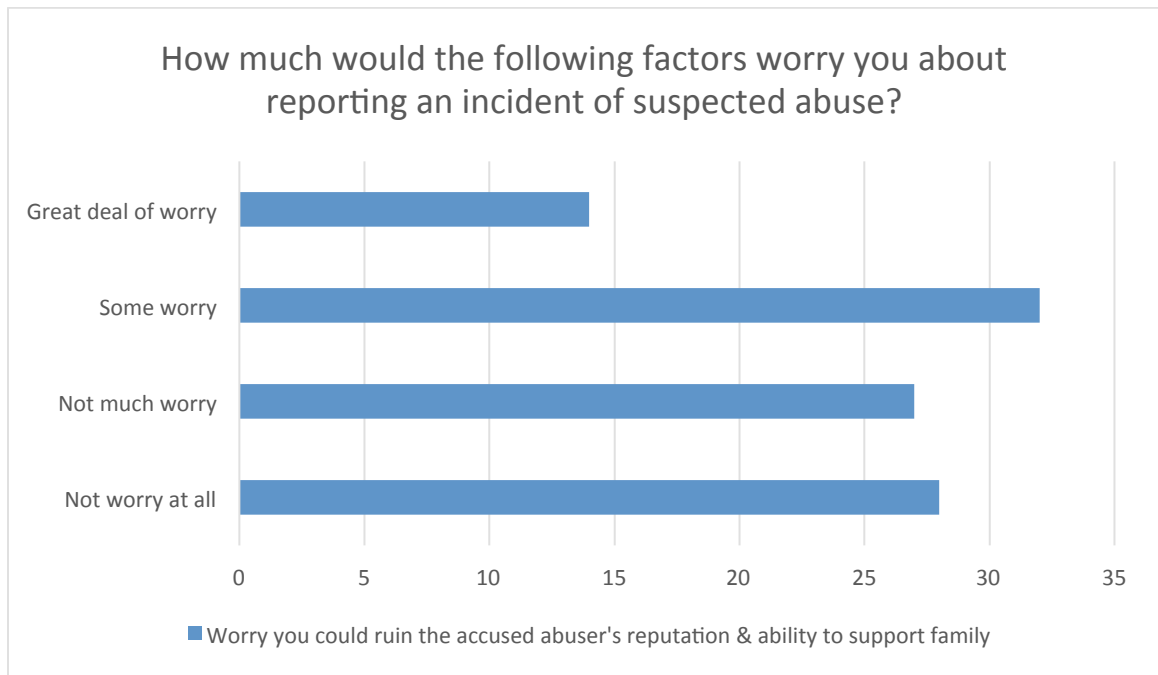
(1) 25% (2) 34% (3) 20% (4) 21%



Additionally, 59% fear the accused might retaliate against them. This response means that people recognize child sex abuser may be dangerous people beyond their abuse of children. Respondents expressing the most concern over potential retaliation were those ages 18-34 (70% were concerned) and those over age 65 (69% were concerned).

10. worry you could ruin the accused abuser's reputation and ability to support the family

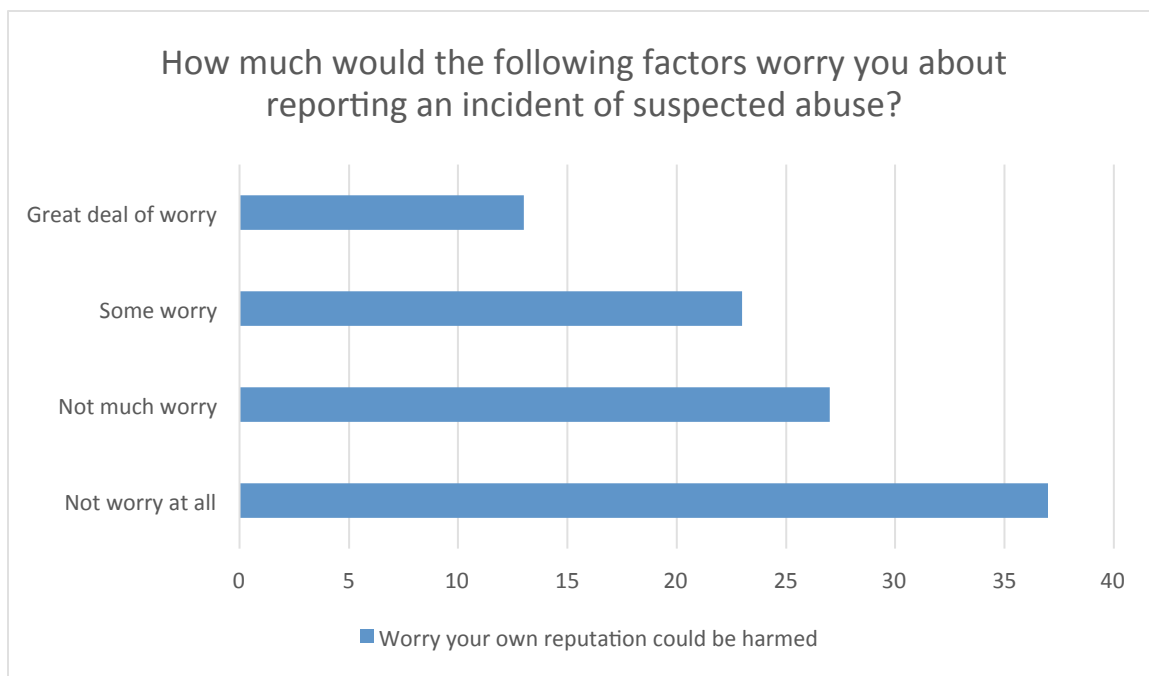
(1) 14% (2) 32% (3) 27% (4) 28%



Fewer respondents, but still 46%, expressed worry that reporting child sex abuse would ruin the accused person's reputation and ability to support the family. Respondents ages 18-34 expressed the most concern with 54% saying they would worry about this when deciding whether to report.

11. worry your own reputation could be harmed

(1) 13% (2) 23% (3) 27% (4) 37%

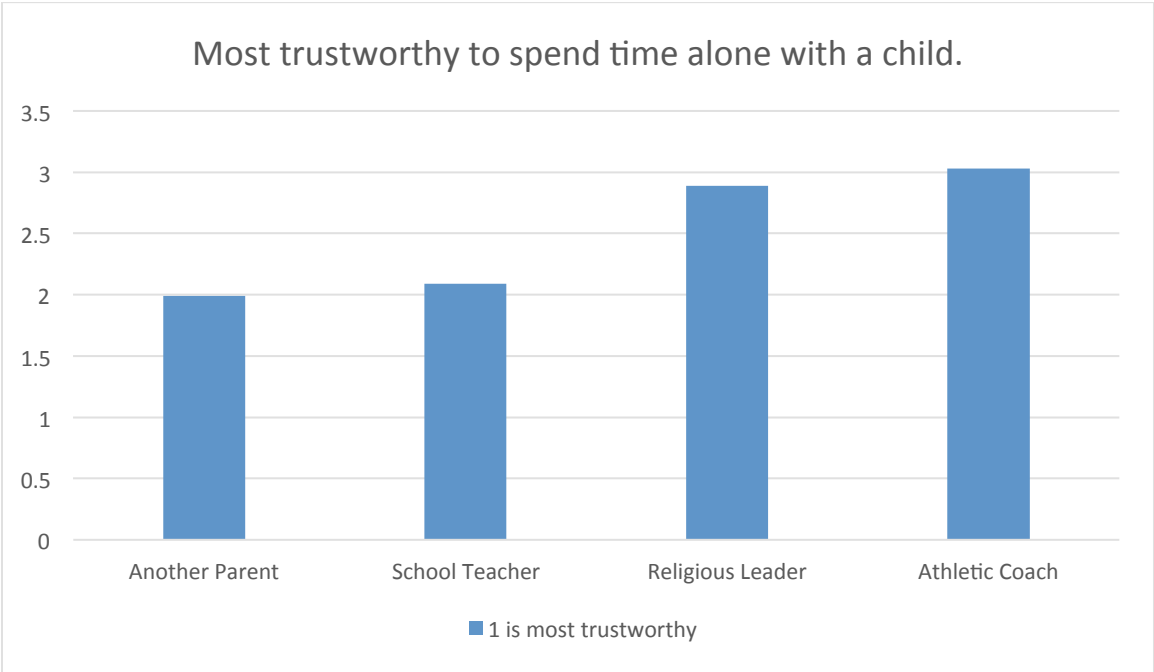


More than one-third of respondents, or 36%, worried about their own reputations being harmed if they reported suspected sexual abuse of a child to authorities. Respondents age 18-34 were the most concerned with 44% saying they worry that reporting would be harmful to their reputations.

Considering respondents are likely affected by multiple worries about reporting, it is clear that tremendous psychological barriers are in play when a person is deciding whether or not to report suspected abuse. These concerns should be addressed and answered in public education and training programs.

12. In terms of people you feel are most trustworthy to spend time alone with a child out of regular school or leisure activities, please rank the following people, with 1 being the person you would feel is most trustworthy, 2 being the next most trustworthy, and so forth.

Athletic coach	3.03
School Teacher	2.09
Another parent	1.99
Religious leader	2.89



Note: This is a ranking, so the lower the number the more trustworthy they person is perceived.

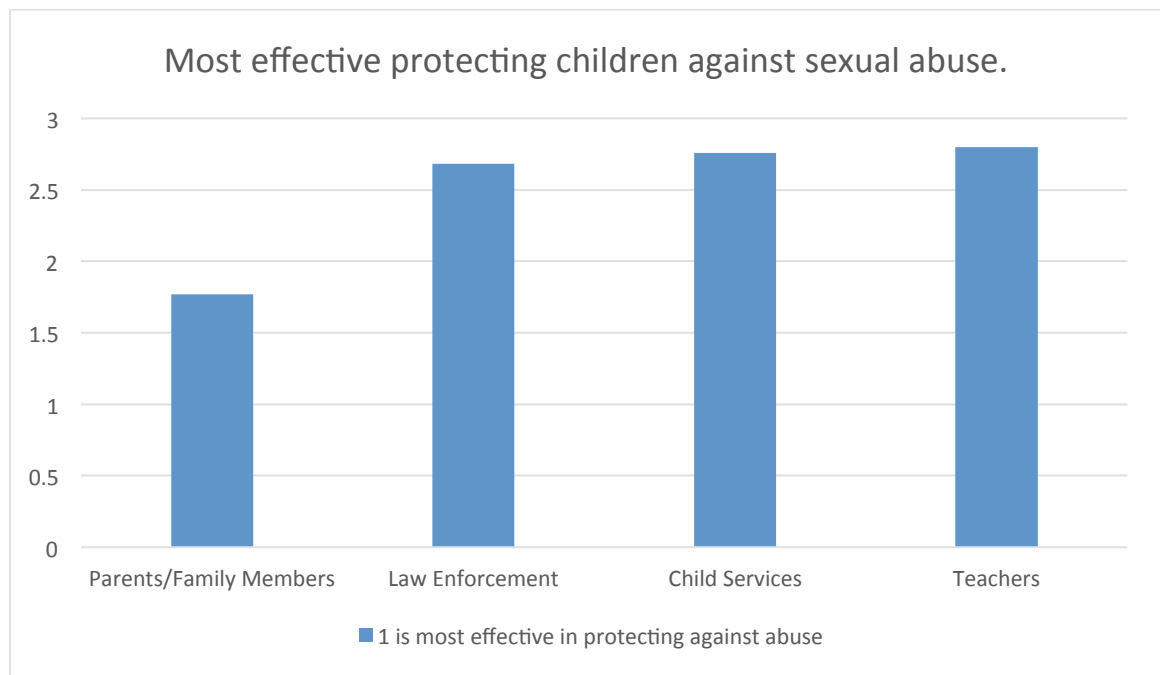
13. In terms of who you feel can be most effective in protecting children against sexual abuse, please rank each of the following people, with 1 being the most effective, 2 being the next most effective, and so forth.

Parents or other family members 1.77

Teachers 2.80

Child Services 2.76

Law Enforcement 2.68



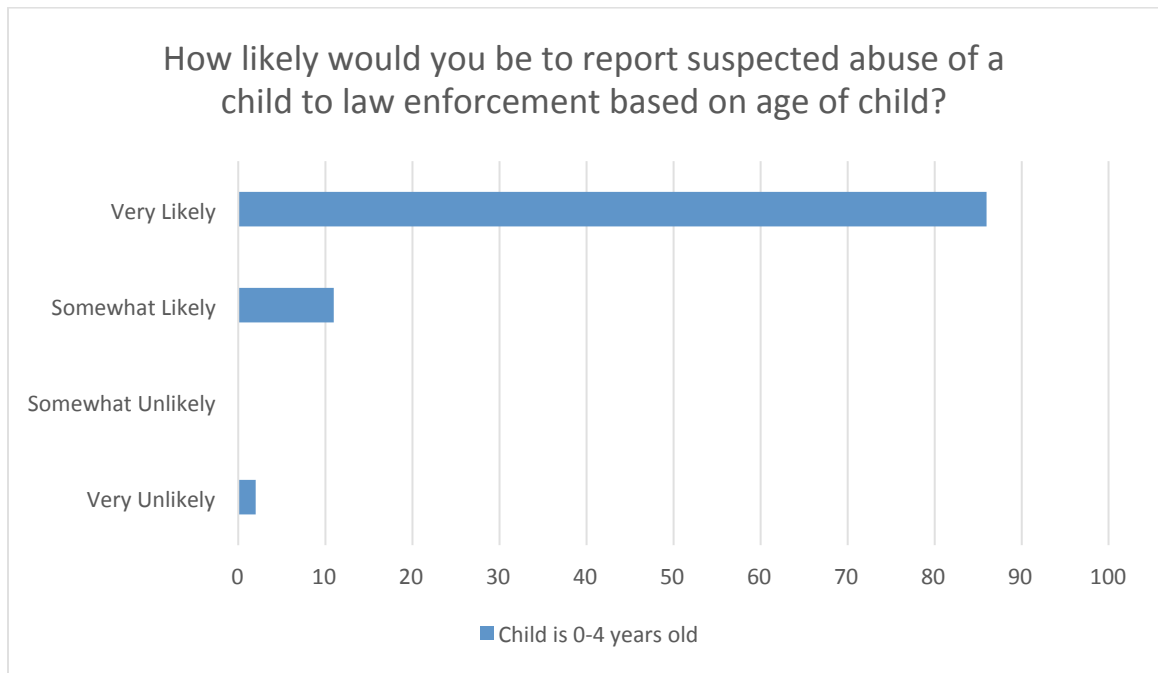
Following parents, law enforcement is still seen as the most effective in protecting children from sex abuse.

How likely would you be to report suspected sexual abuse of a child to law enforcement officials if the child were. . .

(1) very likely (2) somewhat likely (3) somewhat unlikely (4) very unlikely

14. 0 to 4 years old

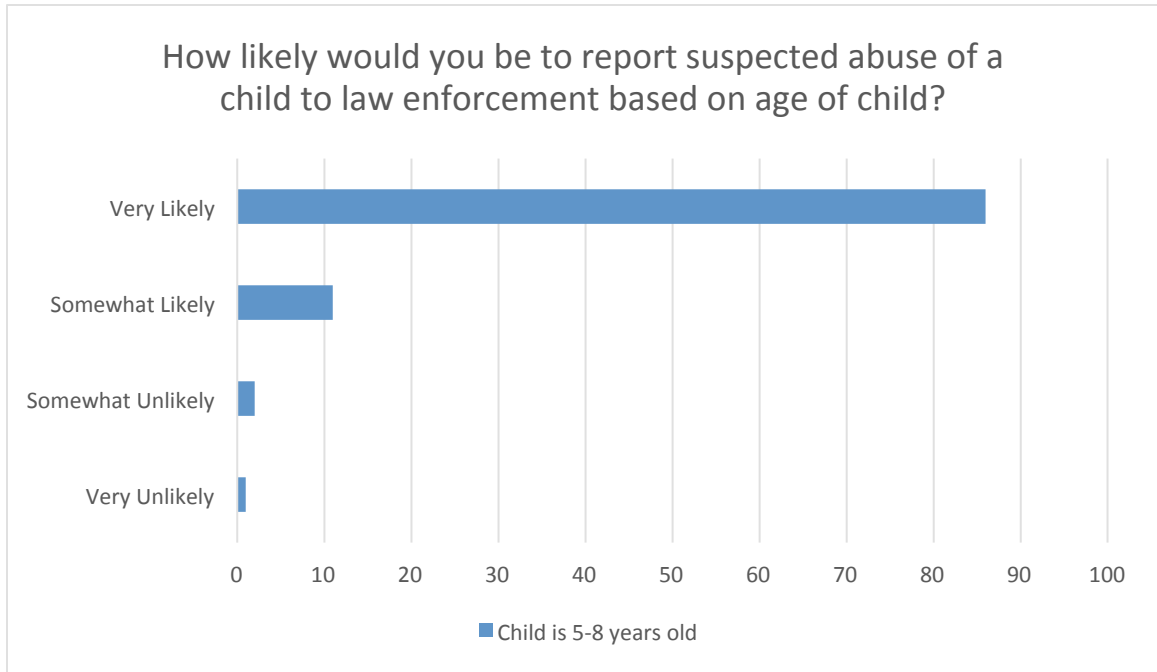
(1) 86% (2) 11% (3) 0% (4) 2%



For children under four years of age, 86% of respondents saying they were very likely to report suspected child sex abuse to the police, and 97% of those over age 65 saying they were very likely to report to police.

15. 5 to 8 years old

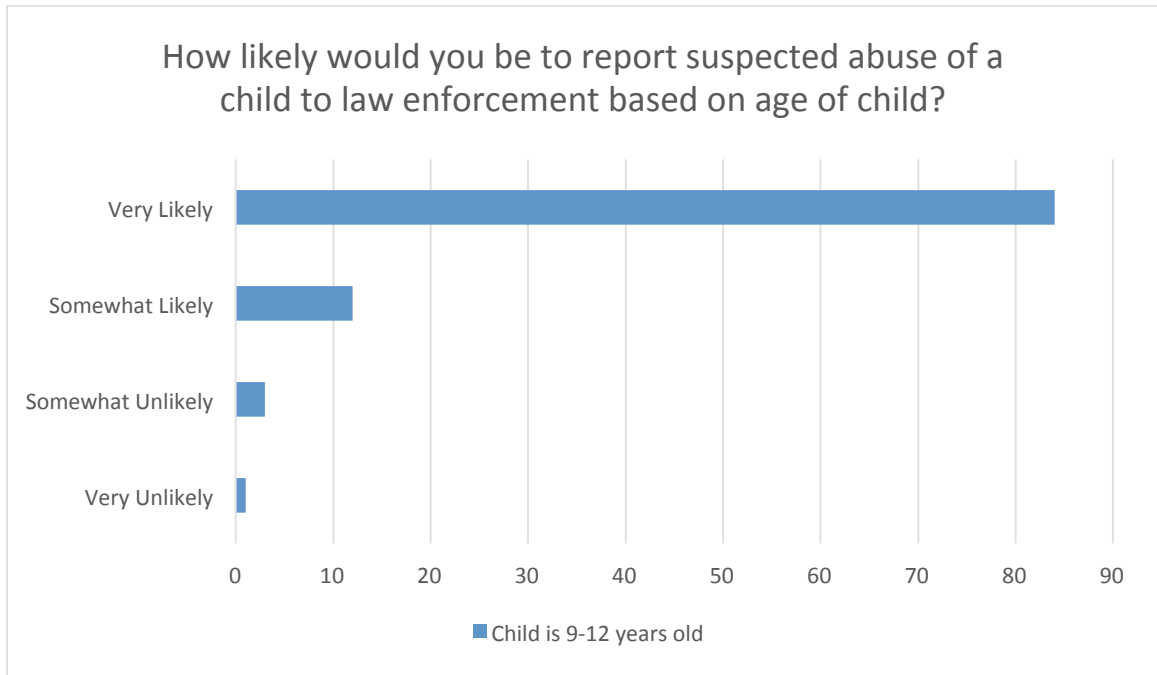
(1) 86% (2) 11% (3) 2% (4) 1%



Respondents also said they were very likely to report to police the abuse of a child 5-8 years old.

16. 9 to 12 years old

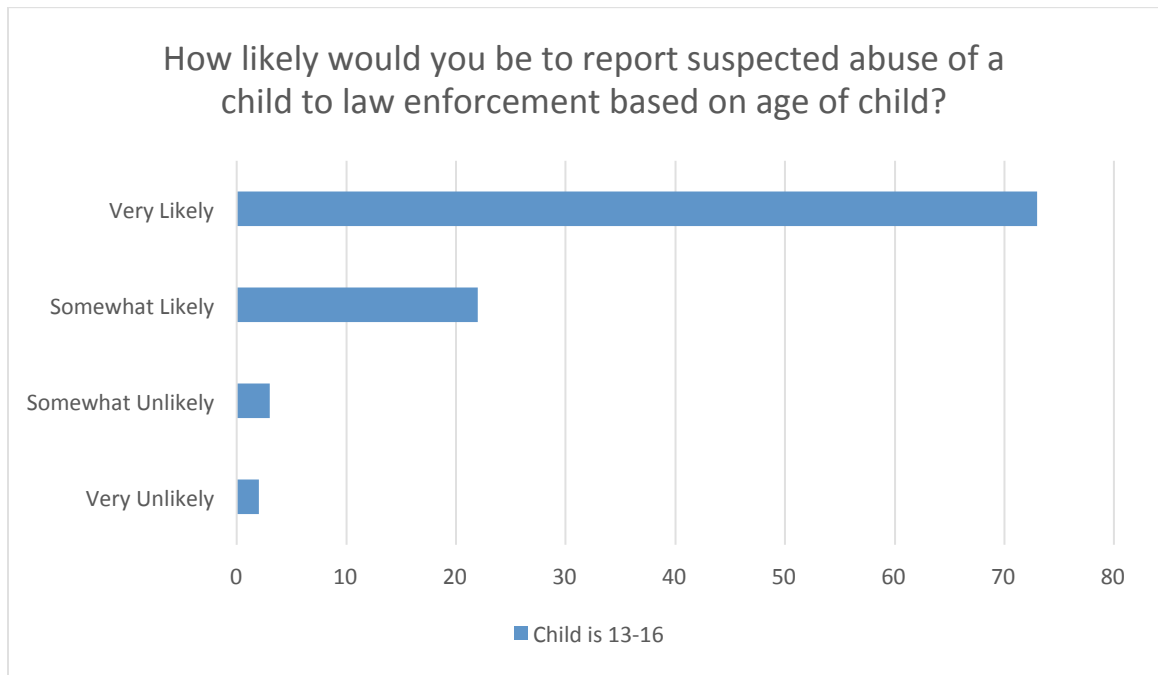
(1) 84% (2) 12% (3) 3% (4) 1%



Respondents gave almost the same response for reporting the abuse of children ages 9-12 years old.

17. 13 to 16 years old

(1) 73% (2) 22% (3) 3% (4) 2%

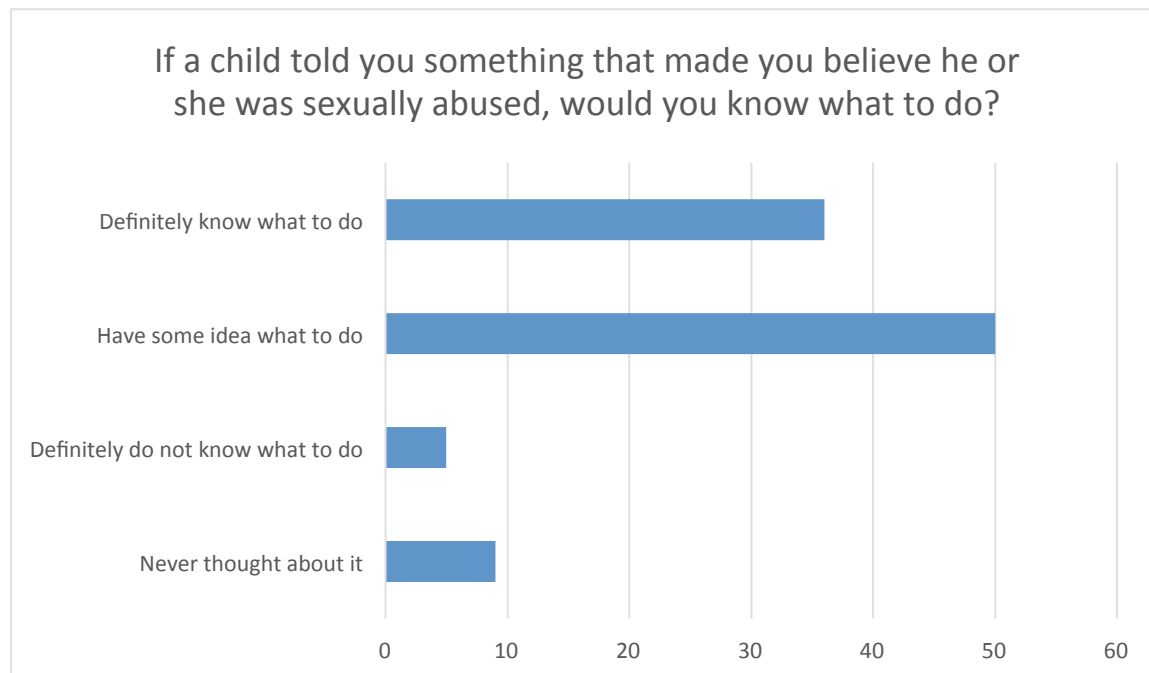


The most interesting finding here is that the percentage of people who say they are very likely to report sexual abuse declines dramatically after the child becomes a teenager. The percentage of male respondents dropped by 16 points when the child became a teen and the percentage of adults 65 and older declined by as much as 24 points as the child reached became a teen ager.

It is worth noting that a May 26, 2017 New York Times article by Nicholas Kristof reports that child marriage, or marriage of a minor under 18 years of age, is legal in every U.S. state and laws in 27 states do not set a minimum age to marry, resulting in approximately 248,000 children being married in the U.S. between 2010 and 2014.

18. If your child or a child you know told you something that made you believe he or she may be being sexually abused, would you say you. . .

- 36% (1) definitely know what to do to help the child
- 50% (2) have some idea of what to do to help the child
- 5% (3) definitely do not know what steps to take to help the child
- 9% (4) have never thought about even being in this situation

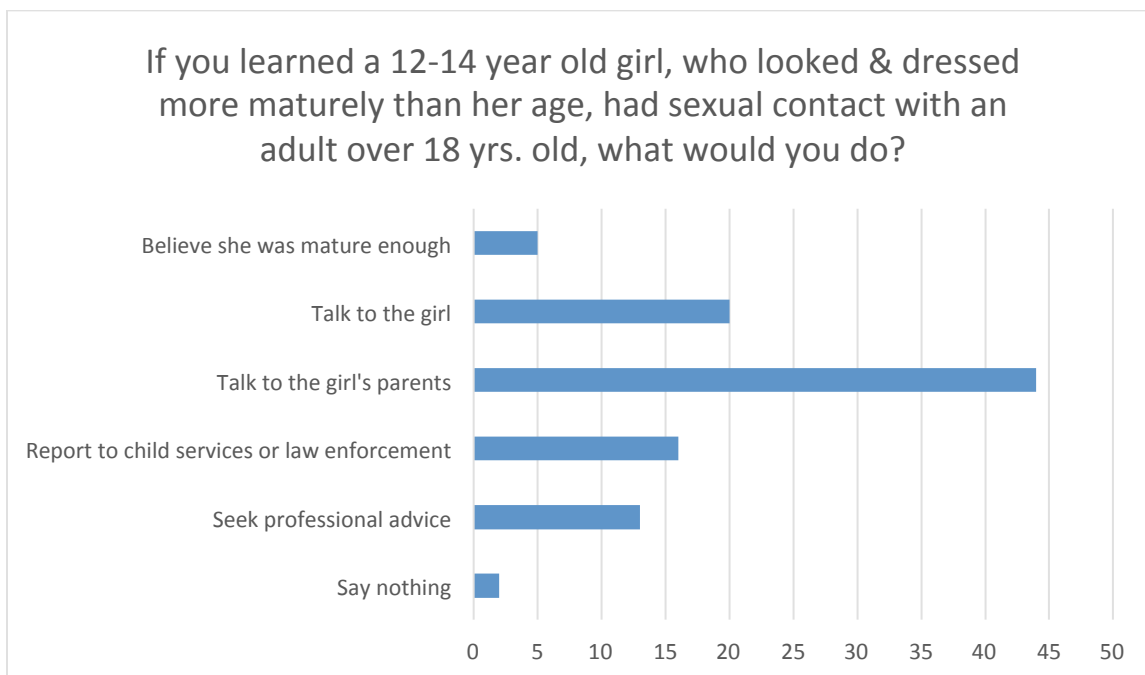


Only about one-third of the respondents say they would know what to do if they thought a child was being sexually abused. Only 18% of respondents over 65 years old say they would know what to do.

Q19 is a split sample

19a. If you learned a young girl 12 to 14 years old, who looked and dressed more mature than her age, had sexual contact with an adult over 18 years old, would you:

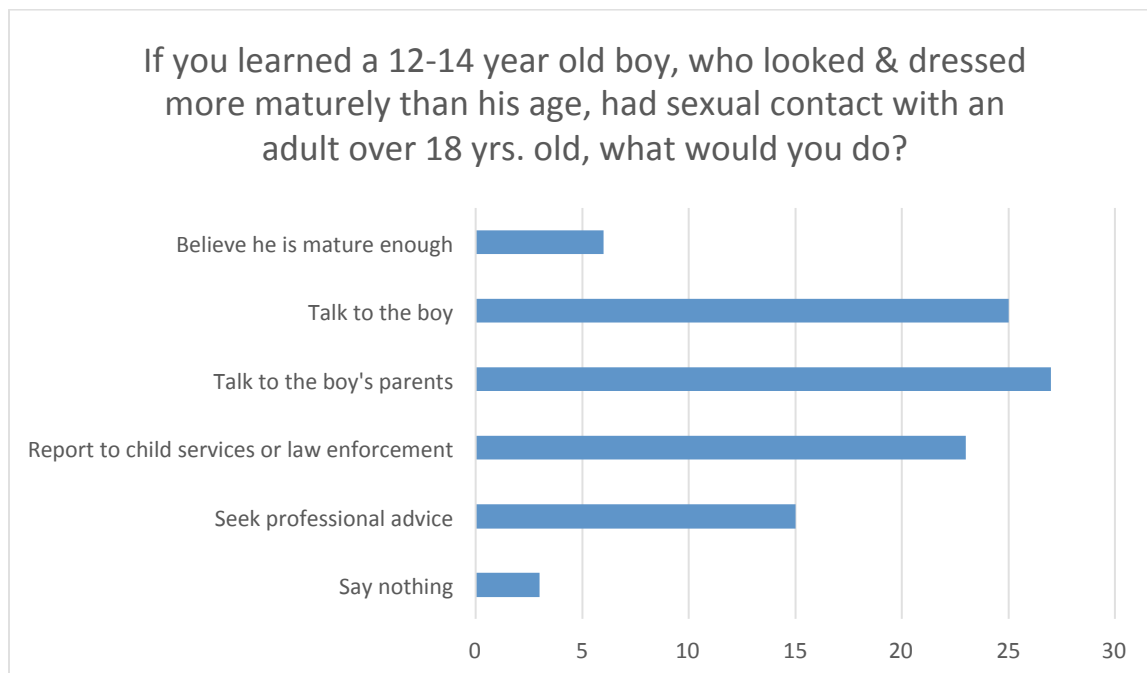
- 5% (1) believe the girl was mature enough to take care of herself;
- 20% (2) talk to the girl to get more information;
- 44% (3) talk to the girl's parents or family members to make sure they were aware
- 16% (4) make a report to child services or law enforcement
- 13% (5) seek advice from a trained professional
- 2% (6) say nothing



44% of the respondents said they would talk to the young girl's parents and 16% said they would make a report to police. Those most likely to talk to the girl's parents were respondents ages 35-50 and over age 65, with 52% of each group saying they would talk to the parents. Respondents most likely to make a report to law enforcement or child services were age 51-65, with 20% saying they would make a report.

19b. If you learned a young boy 12 to 14 years old, who looked and dressed more mature than his age, had sexual contact with an adult over 18 years old, would you:

- 6% (1) believe the boy was mature enough to take care of himself;
- 25% (2) talk to the boy to get more information;
- 27% (3) talk to the boy's parents or family members to make sure they were aware
- 23% (4) make a report to child services or law enforcement
- 15% (5) seek advice from a trained professional
- 3% (6) say nothing



Only 27% of respondents said they would talk to a young boy's parents, but more (23%) stated they would report to law enforcement or child services if a boy age 12-14 had sexual contact with an adult over 18 years of age, than if the victim was a girl. The greatest disparity reported was in 52% of two age groups who reported they would talk to a girl's parents compared to only 22% of respondents ages 18-34 who would talk to a young boy's parents about sexual contact with an adult.

Respondents would clearly handle the issue of a child 12-14 years of age differently based on the gender of the child. With child marriage legal in every state, it is also notable that 77% of marriages involving a child consist of an underage girl married to an adult male, often with significant age differences.

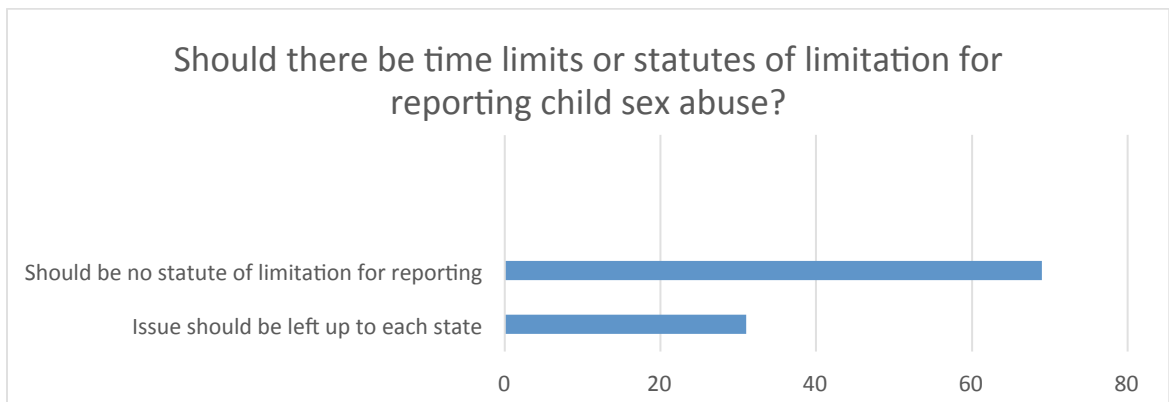
In 2016, the U.S. State Department declared a child marriage, in which one or both of the parties is under age 18, to be a "human rights abuse which produces devastating

repercussions for a girl's life, effectively ending her childhood." Yet religious and social customs and practices have made it difficult to prevent child marriages legally, despite their devastating effects on the health and economic outcomes for young girls.

20. There are time limits, or statutes of limitations, for the reporting of child sex abuse. The limits vary state to state. These statutes prevent people from accusing someone of abusing them as a child after the abused person becomes an adult. Do you think. . .

(1) there should be no statutes of limitation for people charging others with child abuse or (2) this issue should be left up to each state to decide.

(1) 69% (2) 31%



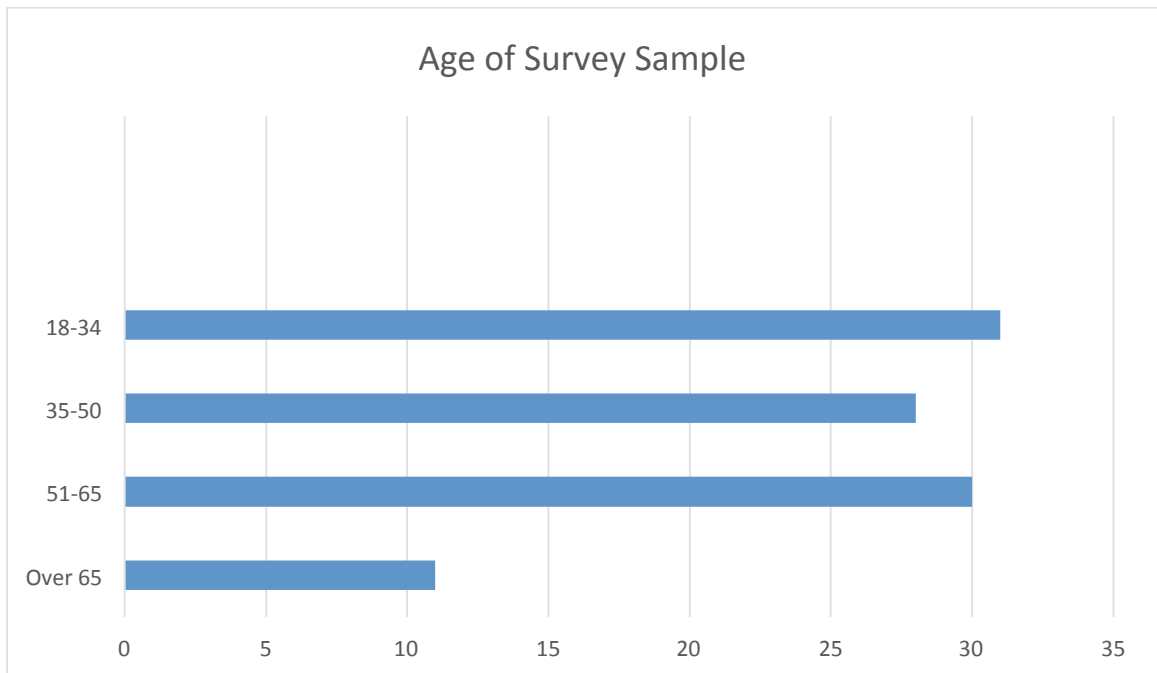
A vast majority of respondents do not want statutes of limitation to reporting child sex abuse. More women than men favor no reporting limitations, 72% to 64%. Most in favor of no limitation are 18-34 year-olds with 73% opposing time limits.

Please provide us the following information, just for statistical purposes.

21. Which of the follow age categories are you in –

(1) 18 to 34 (2) 35 to 50 (3) 51 to 65 (4) over 65

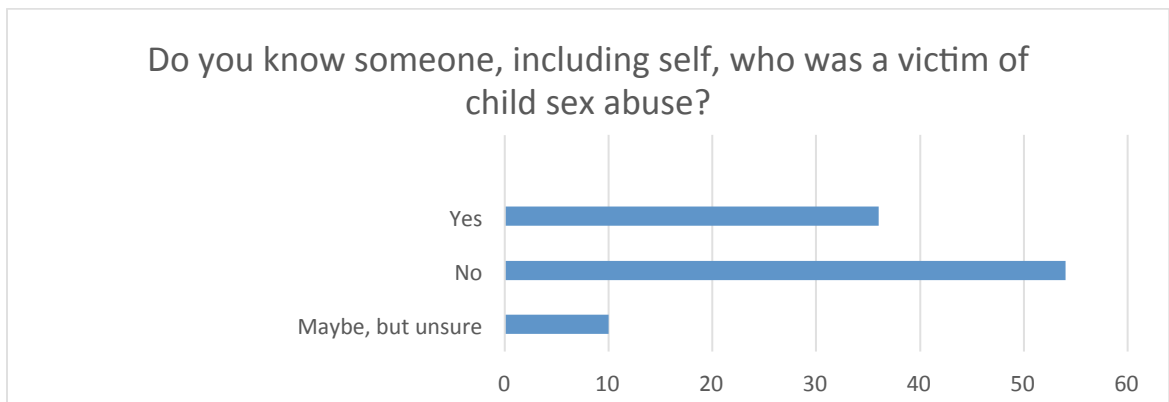
(1) 31% (2) 28% (3) 30% (4) 11%



22. Do you know someone, including yourself, who was a victim of child sex abuse?

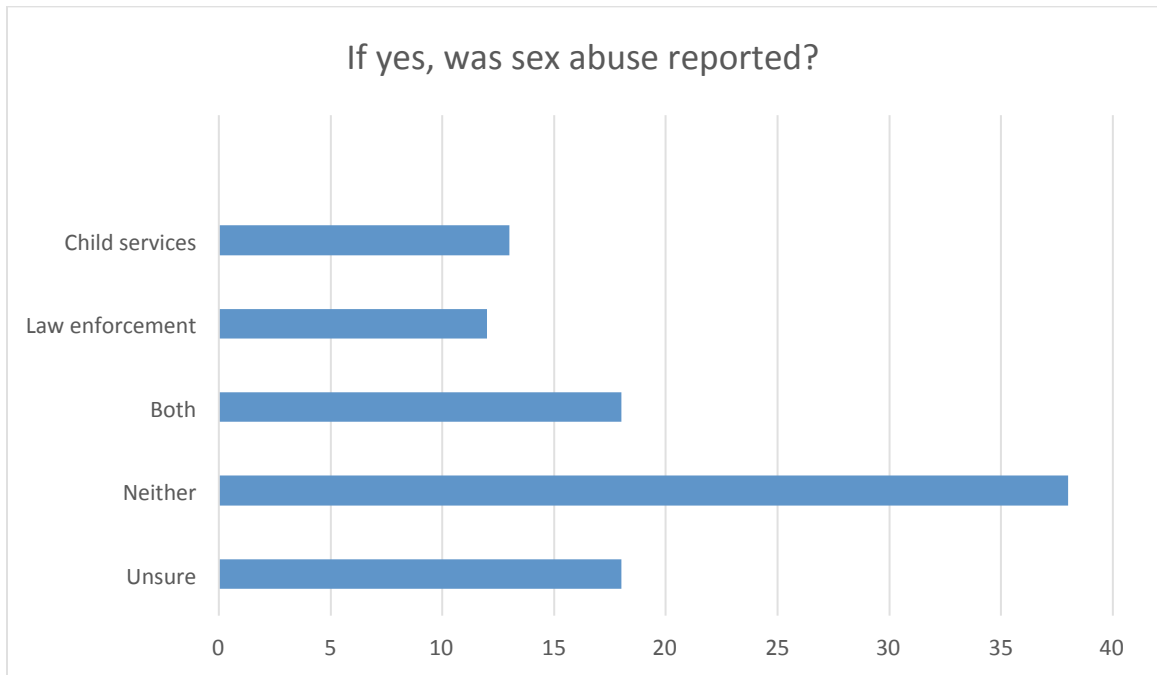
(1) yes, (2) no (3) maybe, but unsure

(1) 36% (2) 54% (3) 10%



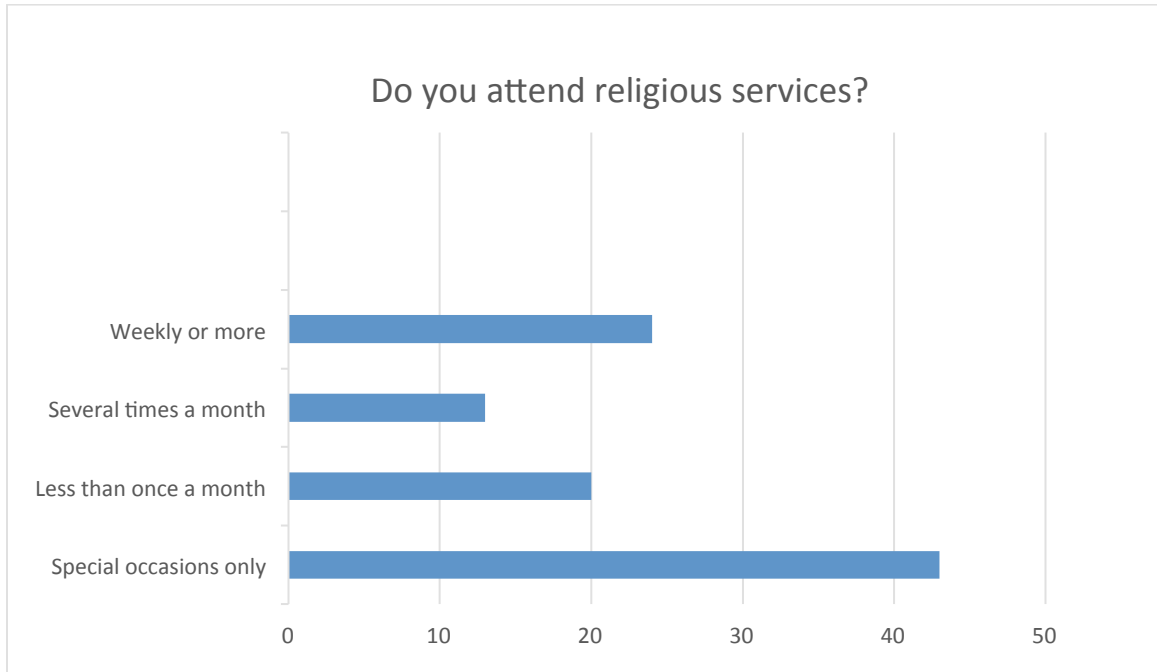
23. If yes, do you know if the sex abuse was reported to (1) child services, (2) law enforcement, (3) both or (4) neither? (5) unsure

(1) 13% (2) 12% (3) 18% (4) 38% (5) 18%



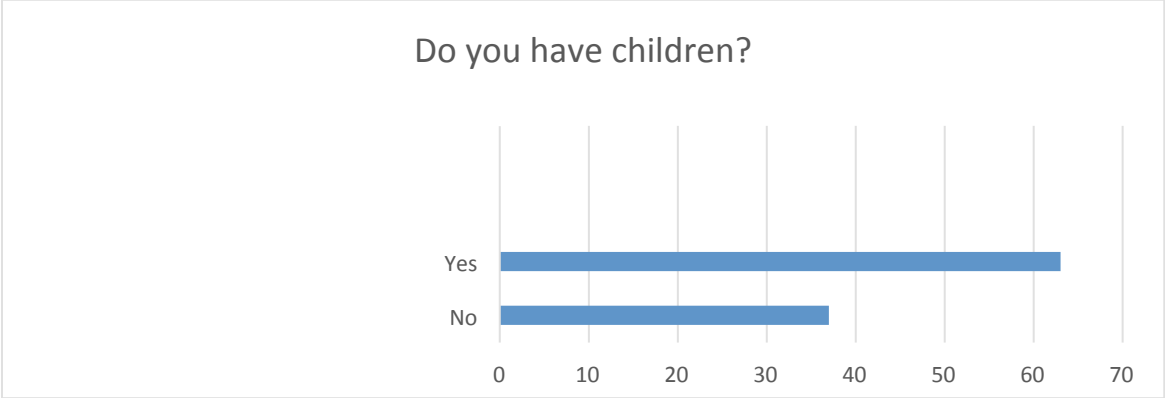
24. Do you attend religious services (1) weekly or more than once a week, (2) several times a month, (3) less than once a month, (4) only on special occasions such as funerals and weddings.

(1) 24% (2) 13% (3) 20% (4) 43%



25. Do you have children? (1) yes (2) no

(1) 63% (2) 37%



26. Are you a (1) man or (2) woman

(1) 42% (2) 58%

