

# **Almost 90 percent of children reported experiencing sexual violence**

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Almost 90% of teenagers aged 12-18 claim to have been victims of some level of sexual violence, according to a study conducted jointly by the University of Haifa and Ben Gurion University (Israel). The research surveyed 1,036 high school students. Additionally, 82% of the boys and 76% of the girls reported said that they had been subjects of violent physical assault.

Prof. Rachel Lev-Wiesel from the University of Haifa's School of Social Work, one of the authors of the study, noted that the results showed a distressing increase in the incidence of violence – both sexual and physical - over the past few years.

The number of criminal files opened by the police for assault against children rose from 6,370 in 1998 to 8,805 in 2005. According to the National Council for the Child, the number of children treated for suspected violent attacks or abuse in 2005 stood at more than 37,000, a rise of 120% over the past decade. Of the 37,000, 30.5% were reported physical violence, 9.9% sexual, 13% psychological and 36.8% varying degrees of neglect.

Prof. Lev-Wiesel stressed that the aim of the research was to examine the personal and social factors that help adolescents cope with the trauma of a violent assault. A questionnaire was completed anonymously by over 1,000 high school students. The questionnaire measured six variables: demography, physical and sexual assaults, PTSD, potency and social support from family and friends.

According to the researchers, there is a distinct correlation between a child's feeling of potency and the level of traumatic symptoms exhibited following a violent attack. The study found a distinctive difference in the personal resources and the level of psychological distress of the children who suffered violent attacks as opposed to those who did not – whether the violence was limited to one incident or continuing and whether the attack was considered minor or severe. Boys in the study reported a higher incidence of sexual and physical violence than girls.

"The results of the research show that a feeling of potency and support of family and friends are important resources which have the potential to reduce the resulting trauma following assault. In addition to the importance of developing programs to decrease the incidence of violence, there is a need for programs for empowerment and strengthening personal resources that will protect those who have already fallen victim to violence," summarized Prof. Lev-Wiesel.

The results of the study were presented at a conference, held on October 10, 2007, in cooperation with the University of Haifa, announcing the establishment of a non-profit organization founded by academics, professionals in the fields of social services and healthcare, lawmakers and the media to fight the rising incidence of violence and propose concrete solutions for aiding victims.

Source: University of Haifa

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