

# Sexually abused boys engage in more unsafe sex

March 6 2012, By Sharyn Alden

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Boys who are victims of sexual abuse are far more likely to engage in unsafe sexual behavior as teenagers, finds a new review in the current *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Sexually abused boys were twice as likely to engage in unprotected sex, three times as likely to have multiple sexual partners and five times as likely to cause pregnancy compared to boys with no sexual abuse history.

Researchers reviewed 13 sets of data from 21 years of published surveys

of over 30,000 [adolescent boys](#) in [secondary schools](#). They examined links between young males who had been sexually abused and three areas of [risky sexual behavior](#): unprotected sexual intercourse, multiple [sexual partners](#) and unintended pregnancy. The effect of sexual abuse was smallest on [unprotected sex](#). Having an abuse history seemed to have the largest effect on outcomes such as teen pregnancy.

“Parents need to be aware that boys can be victims of sexual abuse from women as well as men and that they may not tell their parents because of their parents’ preconceived conceptions of sexual abuse,” said, lead author, Yuko Homma, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of British Columbia School of Nursing in Vancouver.

Homma pointed out that sexual abuse prevention should be included in health education as it can happen to anyone. “Parents should talk to their sons about sexual abuse as parents of girls do,” she said. “Screening for sexual abuse histories among both boys and girls is important to help prevent risky sexual behavior later on.”

“Because sexual abuse of males has been relatively ignored, we hope more people pay attention to this issue,” Homma added. “Although not all sexually abused boys have engaged in risky sexual behaviors, caring people and professionals should support abuse survivors and enhance their resilience to cope with such traumatic events.”

“Findings of this study are in line with many findings on risky sexual behaviors even though there may be a gender difference in the prevalence of a risk or behavior,” commented Deborah M. Capaldi, Ph.D., a senior scientist with the Oregon Social Learning Center in Eugene. Capaldi added, “Overall, we suffer from ‘gender fallacy’ where we tend to overlook gender similarities and exaggerate gender differences. This can lead to inadequate approaches to public health problems such as sexual abuse of children.”

**More information:** Homma, Y. et al. (2012). The relationship between sexual abuse and risky sexual behavior among adolescent boys: a meta-analysis. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, In Press.

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