

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION IN NEVADA

Issue Brief- Definition of Child abuse

Complex public health problems such as child sexual abuse require comprehensive solutions that go beyond simple education programs. The causes of child sexual abuse are multiple, complex, and interacting (Bernier and Shime, 2017). Child sexual abuse can be defined as involving, inducing, or coercing a child to engage in sexual acts. It includes behaviors such as fondling, penetration, and exposing a child to other sexual activities (CDC, 2016).

Child sexual abuse continues to impact millions of children and adults in the United States. On a national level, reports to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) show that more than a quarter of a million children are sexually abused and exploited every year (HHS Report, 2020). However, each state reports abuse differently, some states don't report at all, and none of the reports include child sexual exploitation or child sexual abuse materials online. Additionally, children often do not disclose abuse in childhood. Therefore, these numbers drastically underrepresent the actual rates of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the US. Because there is no comprehensive national effort to document child sexual abuse and exploitation rates, there is a lot of variability in incidence and prevalence rates in various reports and publications. Regardless, those who work in child welfare and prevention know that the problem continues at an alarming rate and that much work remains to be done to prevent abuse before it happens.

1 in 4 females
and 1 in 6 males
reported having experienced
some form of sexual abuse
or exploitation before age 18.

In response to the alarming issue of child sexual abuse, in 2013 Nevada's governor created the Nevada Task Force on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (PCSA) by signing Senet Bill 258. The Task Force created a statewide report that can be found here:

<https://dcfs.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/dcfsvgov/content/Tips/Reports/SB258%20Report.pdf>

The Task Force recommendations are based on what was learned through research and testimony and have been grouped into two main categories: Primary and Secondary/Tertiary Prevention. The Task Force also recognizes that efforts must continue towards the implementation of these

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recommendations, including exploring funding sources, as well as identifying agencies and organizations to take the lead in certain areas.

To address this pressing issue, Nevada needs to examine what it is currently doing in the area of child sexual abuse prevention and what the next steps are to improve the prevention efforts at all levels. The social-ecological model will be used as a framework to guide Nevada in creating a strategic plan to achieve the goal of ensuring all children grow up free from sexual abuse and its devastating consequences.

CURRENT SCOPE OF THE ISSUE IN NEVADA

Utilizing current data from multiple agencies and organizations in Nevada we can get a more detailed picture of the scope of the issue, identify where there are gaps in research and data collection and assess current prevention efforts. From the most recent data from July 1, 2020 to July 1,

2021 in Nevada, 7 percent of all substantiated claims of child maltreatment were sexual abuse (DCSF, 2021). There are many contributing factors that can lead to child sexual abuse. While child sexual abuse crosses all socioeconomic boundaries, domestic violence in the house has been shown to increase a child's risk of experiencing abuse and neglect (Dubowitz et al., 2011) Child sexual abuse was the third highest crime reported to the Nevada Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence in 2020 with an estimated 1,165 children being victimized.

In 90%

of cases, the child knows and trusts the person who commits the abuse.

The biennial Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks middle (Lensch et al., 2018b) and high school students (Lensch et al., 2018a) in the state if they have ever been forced to participate in certain sexual activities when they did not want to. In fall of 2017, there were approximately 111,611 middle school students and 141,950 high school students in Nevada (State of Nevada Department of Education, 2017) The results of the 2017 Nevada YRBS 3.9 percent of middle school students (4,353) and 7.3% of high school students (10,362) were forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to, and 10.5 percent of high school students (14,159) were forced to do sexual things when they did not want to.

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Legislation in Nevada

In 2013 **Senate Bill 258**, now codified into NRS 432B.700–730, established the **Nevada Task Force on the Prevention of the Sexual Abuse of Children**.

In 2015 Nevada enacted state policy Senet Bill 394 to ensure that all public schools provide age-appropriate education on personal safety including prevention education in the area of sexual abuse.

In 2017 Nevada passed **AB362, the S.E.S.A.M.E. law**, to Stop the Educator Sexual Abuse, Misconduct, and Exploitation of students. It incorporated into state law provisions of the federal law, the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA), designed to prevent persons who have engaged in sexual misconduct with a minor from obtaining new employment.

Nevada has a law that criminalizes educator sexual misconduct. **Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 200.364** outlaws “sexual conduct between certain employees of a school or volunteers at a school and a pupil pursuant to NRS 201.54, and outlaws sexual conduct between certain employees of a college or university and a student pursuant to NRS 201.550.

Evidence Based Approach

It is a sensitive and complex topic that individuals and communities often struggle to discuss and often lack access to adequate resources for effective response. Prevention efforts in Nevada are trying to address these issues through advocacy, policy, and education. The recommendations set by the PCSA in 2014 act as a guide to show where progress has been made and utilizing data and research to help inform the next steps. Nevada seeks to take an evidenced based approach that encompasses a holistic framework.

Child sexual abuse and exploitation is a public health epidemic that has been shown to negatively impact personal, community, and societal well-being. The social-ecological model is a proven framework for violence prevention that has been developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Within this model, child sexual abuse and exploitation has been shown to adversely impact individuals at the personal and relationship levels, including their physical, behavioral, and

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mental health, interpersonal relations, economic well-being, and more. Similarly, there are negative impacts to the well-being of communities and society. There is an increased burden across all systems in society: education, justice, medical, child welfare, and more. Additionally, there is an economic impact to society. Prior economic impact studies estimate the cost of child sexual abuse in the United States at \$9.3 billion annually (Letourneau et al., 2018). Historical trends have shown that the personal and societal costs continue to rise.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

1. Current data collection of the implementation of SB 394 within Nevada public schools, and prevention methods at private schools, home school and online learning.
 - Continued outreach efforts to all primary and secondary schools in Nevada. Since the onset of COVID-19 there have been an increased number of families that have chosen remote learning for their children. It is important that outreach efforts cast a wide net to encapsulate all children in Nevada.
2. Enhance Access to Professional Development in the Area of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

Recommendations:

 - Prioritized funding and resources to support the implementation of SB 394 that includes training on the signs of child sexual abuse and how to report effectively for staff, teachers, and parents.
 - Help schools create protocols for dealing with disclosures or suspected abuse
 - Support schools in creating protocols for increased communication among schools and local agencies that support child sexual abuse prevention.
3. Create sound policies within educational institutions designed to prevent child sexual abuse by educational professionals.

Recommendations:

 - Identify current policies within each school district and assess the need to support individual schools in developing new policies or updating existing ones.
 - Train educators on updated policies
4. Public Awareness Campaign and Social Media.

Recommendations:

 - Implement a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention campaign in Nevada that targets general community members, policy makers, families, professions (mental health, medical, educators), etc.
 - Create a comprehensive campaign that includes strategies to educate the community (all members) about the nature and scope of the program and how to be involved, communicate key prevention messages that can be shared to reduce risk to children, and advocacy for prevention trainings and policies.

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