

October 1, 2013

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 WEDNESDAY 02 OCTOBER, 2013

Study reveals older people in Scotland are more likely to spot signs of sexual abuse than younger people and younger people are less likely to take action if they have concerns

The findings of a survey to test the current thinking of adults in Scotland about child sexual abuse – who does it, how they do it, what would be seen as a ‘risk and what action would be taken if abuse was suspected – are published today (October 2nd).

The baseline survey was commissioned by Stop it Now! Scotland, the National Programme for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Tayside Police and was conducted by Advance Behaviour Change in the Tayside area. Questionnaires were sent to 1200 households, with a 26% return rate. 18 respondents participated in in-depth follow-up face-to-face or telephone interviews. The initial results were analysed by Tayside Police Performance and Planning Unit.

Key findings include:-

- The majority of the public underestimated the rate of reported child sexual abuse at 10% of female children and 3% of male children rather than the rate of 20% and 5% suggested by research
- When posed with four possibly abusive scenarios, older people were more likely to identify potential risk than younger people and they were more likely to act on their concerns
- Based on the same four scenarios, females generally appeared to be more likely than males to believe the child was at risk and also more inclined to act on their suspicions
- More than seven out of ten respondents would be prepared to take some form of action if faced with any of the described scenarios with the main course of action typically to contact the police in the first instance or to speak to the child’s parent(s)
- The police and Social Services would be the first points of contact for people if they suspected that a child was at risk of being sexually abused but this differed in respect of some of the scenarios provided

A number of key barriers emerged when interviewees were asked about what might prevent them from taking action:

- The fear of falsely accusing someone of sexual abuse
- Perceived personal repercussions, such as personal injury, damage to reputation
- Lack of evidence or uncertainty around the facts
- Impact on the child, such as separation from their family and/or community and placed in alternative public care

The report concludes by making a number of recommendations:

- That future information delivery is undertaken in a targeted and planned way. For example, findings indicate the importance of targeting younger people with key messages so they can identify potentially risky situations and feel confident in taking action
- Consideration is given to the need for further enhancing existing public facing resources or creating new resources to support the provision of information, public engagement and the prevention of child sexual abuse in Scotland
- That baseline survey activity is conducted in other areas of Scotland to gather further insights into the views and responses of adults in communities about the prevention of child sexual abuse and sex offending

Detective Chief Superintendent Gillian Imery, Head of Public Protection for Police Scotland, said:

"Child protection is a very high priority to Police Scotland and we welcome the publication of this research by Stop it Now! We recognise that sexual crimes against children are under-reported and it is helpful to understand some of the complex reasons for this.

"Police Scotland works in close partnership with local Social Work Departments, Education, Health, and third sector organisations to improve awareness and to identify all children and young people who may be at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation. The multi-agency approach is crucial. We work together to determine the most appropriate and effective responses to protect children and young people.

"Members of the public should be confident that all sexual crimes reported to Police Scotland will be professionally and thoroughly investigated. We will ensure that each child receives a tailored and sensitive approach by the use of specially trained officers. We continue to encourage all members of the public who have concerns about a child or young person that they believe may be at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation to contact Police Scotland on the non-emergency telephone number 101. Alternatively concerns may be reported to local Social Work Departments or via Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111."

Stop it Now! Scotland National Manager, Martin Henry, said:

"Sexual abuse is a real concern among communities and families in Scotland – and rightly so. To effectively tackle the problem we need to understand communities' concerns and the barriers faced by individuals when considering taking action.

"Prevention efforts in the past have mainly focussed on educating children and young people about 'risk' and giving them strategies for dealing with such situations – while this is important the successful prevention of child sexual abuse depends on adults across communities taking responsibility for identifying behaviours of concern and taking early action to prevent abuse occurring.

"These results are an important step forward in helping to understand public fears and concerns and to engage with the public to help them protect children from sexual abuse. We must be more informed and targeted in how the public are provided with information and the tools to help them protect children effectively in the future. Scotland's children deserve nothing less."

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

For further information or copies of the report please Contact Deborah Denis, Stop it Now! Media and Communications Manager on +44 (0) 1372 847160, +44 (0) 7540 690315 or ddenis@stopitnow.org.uk.

1. About the research

The survey was carried out during November 2011 and was the first baseline survey of its type conducted in Scotland. The questionnaire was sent out to 1200 households in Tayside. The returns were impressive - with a 26% return rate. Further to this a number of respondents participated in follow up face-to-face or telephone interviews. The initial results were analysed by Tayside Police Performance and Planning Unit. Governance for the survey activity was provided by Tayside MAPPA Strategic Oversight Group.

Findings have been presented to major stakeholders including Scottish Government, Police Scotland and MAPPA.

2. About Stop it Now! Scotland

Stop it Now! Scotland is part of Stop it Now! UK and Ireland. It aims to prevent child sexual abuse by increasing public awareness and empowering people to act responsibly to protect children. Stop it Now! Scotland is funded by The Scottish Government. Stop it Now! believes that it is the responsibility of all adults to take positive action to prevent the sexual abuse of children. Stop it Now! works with government, the police and child protection agencies, to promote public education and prevent child sexual abuse. The Stop it Now! Helpline UK has been operating since 2002 and aims to prevent child abuse by encouraging abusers and potential abusers to seek help and by giving adults the information they need to protect children safely. The Helpline is funded by the Ministry of Justice (of the Westminster Government) and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation with charitable donations. www.stopitnow.org.uk/scotland

Stop it Now! is a project of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF) - the only UK-wide child protection charity dedicated solely to reducing the risk of children being sexually abused. LFF works with entire families that have been affected by abuse including: adult male and female sexual abusers; young people with inappropriate sexual behaviours; victims of abuse and other family members. Drawing on their expert knowledge about child sexual abuse they offer a broad range of services for professionals and members of the public. These include: assessments, intervention and treatment of known offenders, case specific advice and support, training and development courses and workshops, educational programmes for internet offenders and their families, circles of support and accountability and internet safety seminars for schools (teachers, parents and children). www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk