



Australian
Childhood Foundation
Protecting Children

Media Release

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Groundbreaking study uncovers high level of child abuse and neglect in Australia

A groundbreaking national survey has uncovered that 1 in 4 adults have identified a case of child abuse and neglect in Australia in the past five years.

In the lead up to national child protection week, the Australian Childhood Foundation, together with Monash University, has today launched its **"Doing nothing hurts children"** report.

Of those who had identified a case of child abuse, 44% were so worried about the child's safety that they had made a report to child protection authorities or the police. A further 21% had discussed their concerns with a professional. However, 1 in 6 (16%) had done nothing.

Of those who took no action, 24% were unwilling to become involved and 53% were not certain about what to do or who to contact.

Alarming, the report found that just under half of these cases involved the physical abuse (26%) or sexual abuse (21%) of children. 60% of the cases identified involved children 8 years old and younger. The majority of cases had been recognized in the past 12 months, with just under half (45%) of the adults who had identified child abuse taking immediate action on the same day.

Dr Joe Tucci, CEO of the Australian Childhood Foundation, said: "our research continues to uncover the sheer scale of the problem of child abuse. Last year, with Access Economics and Monash University, we found that child abuse costs the Australian community between \$10 billion and \$30 billion each year. This year our research suggests that every fourth person in Australia has identified a child who has been abused or neglected in the past five years. This makes child abuse the most significant problem facing our community."

"Child abuse is a confronting and painful topic to think or talk about. As a community, we collectively feel helpless in the face of child abuse. We struggle to know the right thing to do. But when we are faced with a real child who is experiencing real abuse, the majority of Australians want and do take action," said Dr Tucci.

"However, this survey highlights that there are still major obstacles to protecting children. Sections of the community do not always believe children when they disclose abuse. Some are not confident to recognise the signs of child abuse. Some lack the knowledge about what action they should take," said Dr Tucci.

"This is why we urge the Commonwealth Government in particular to fund a sustained public education program that breaks down the barriers and engages the community in developing a shared sense of responsibility for the protection of children. We need to empower adults with the information that they need to feel as equipped as possible to be able to protect children," said Dr Tucci.

"We need to support the community to move on from the repeated and unhelpful cycle of public shock, public alarm and collective forgetting," said Dr Tucci.

Other Key Research Findings include:

- 93% of Australians agreed that a parent who causes an injury to a child as a result of physically abusing them should be charged by the police.
- 85% of adults surveyed believed that a child who witnesses domestic violence between parents has experienced a form of child abuse.
- 3 out of every 5 adults surveyed stated that they could not bear to look at pictures of children in the media who have been abused or neglected.
- 1 in 3 Australians would not believe children if they disclosed that they were being abused.
- 1 in 5 lacked the confidence to know what to do if they suspected that a child was being abused or neglected.
- 90% of adults surveyed believed that the community needs to be better informed about the problem of child abuse in Australia.
- Unless they come face to face with the issue, collectively Australians rate petrol prices, public transport and roads as issues of greater concern than child abuse.
- 86% of Australians believed that Commonwealth and State Governments should invest more money in protecting children from abuse and neglect.

The survey, the third of a series conducted over six years by the Australian Childhood Foundation, has been released as part of its **Stop Child Abuse Now Campaign**. A nationally representative sample of 722 adults aged 18 years and over in Australia was interviewed by phone in July 2009 by Quantum Market Research.

The report "**Doing nothing hurts children**" was produced by the Australian Childhood Foundation in partnership with Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia at Monash University and Quantum Market Research. The Stop Child Abuse Now Campaign developed by the Australian Childhood Foundation urges all Australians to take action to prevent child abuse. The campaign website provides invaluable information to the public about how to stop child abuse and protect children: www.stopchildabusenow.com.au

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Radio news grabs available for download:

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