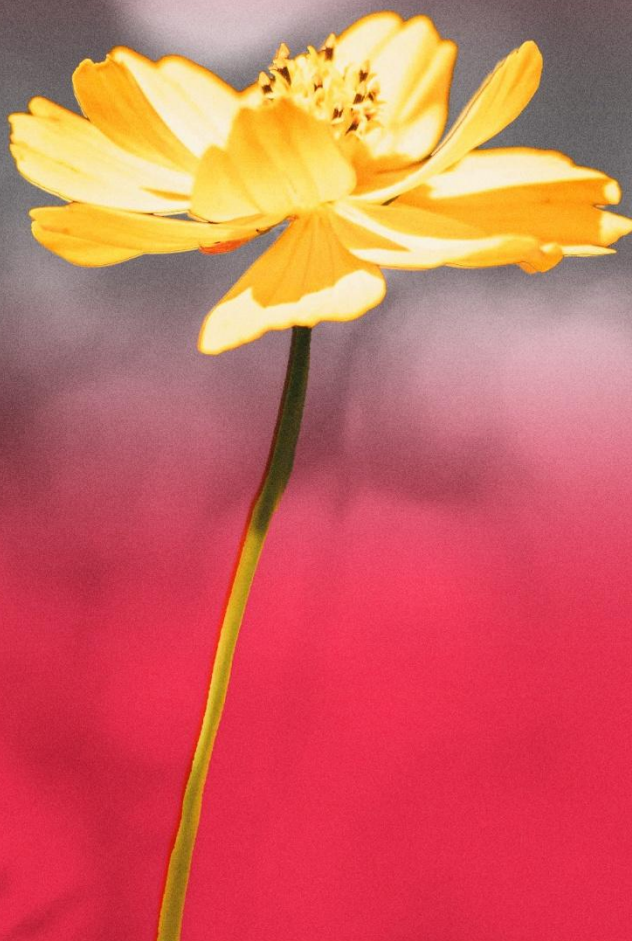


Our Voice Latvian Survivors

Experiences of Victims and Survivors of
Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation



Introduction

In Latvia, as elsewhere in the world, child sexual abuse is a serious and pressing problem for society. In 2025, the State Police registered 300 criminal offences against the morality and sexual integrity of children¹, however, the real number of child victims is significantly higher than official statistics suggest, as many children do not tell about their experiences for years or never disclose them. Latvian media also report an increasing number of cases of child sexual abuse in various environments – including within families, educational institutions, sports organisations, religious communities and elsewhere. At the same time, Latvia has taken significant steps to strengthen child protection. In 2026, amendments to the law were adopted that significantly extend the statute of limitations for the most serious sexual crimes against children, giving victims greater opportunities to seek justice even many years after the offence.²

Given the scale of this phenomenon and the urgent need for action, this report presents insights from 734 Latvian-speaking victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation who responded to the [Global Our Voice Survivor Survey](#), between 17 July 2024 and 2 August 2026. A detailed overview of the survey methodology can be found here: <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/our-voice-global-report>. The findings provide insight into the experiences of victims and survivors, including the circumstances in which sexual violence occurred, the challenges surrounding disclosure, and the long-term consequences of childhood sexual violence. This report aims to contribute to a better understanding of the realities faced by victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in Latvia, and to support efforts to strengthen prevention, child protection, access to support and opportunities for justice and healing.



I should add that I come from a very good family, where we all care about each other, where our parents loved us, raised us well, talked about problems, etc. But it still happened to me.

I wasn't raped, but I was touched—it is disgusting to imagine that heavy breathing against my neck, even though I only realized more than 20 years later what it actually was.

Quote from survivor in response to the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey.



¹ State Police 2025 Annual Report <https://www.vp.gov.lv/lv/media/31463/download?attachment>.

² Ministry of Justice. Amendments to the Criminal Law come into force, extending the statute of limitations for serious crimes against children (2026). <https://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/stajas-speka-grozijumi-kriminallikuma-pagarinot-noilgumu-smagiem-noziegumiem-pret-berniem>.

Key Findings



Nearly four in ten Latvian-speaking survivors first experienced sexual violence between the ages of 3 and 6.



Latvian-speaking survivors often experienced sexual violence on multiple occasions and in different forms.



Most Latvian-speaking survivors were sexually abused by someone they knew.



Three in ten Latvian-speaking survivors never disclosed. Of those who did, a third waited more than two decades.



More than eight in ten Latvian-speaking survivors experienced long-term consequences of sexual violence.

Respondent Demographics

Gender: The majority of Latvian-speaking victims and survivors who responded to the survey identified as female (97%), while 2% identified as male, and 1% as non-binary.

Age: 35% of survivors reported to be between 35 and 44 years old, 26% reported to be below 35 years old, and 38% reported to be over 44 years old.

1. Nearly four in ten Latvian-speaking survivors first experienced sexual violence between the ages of 3 and 6.

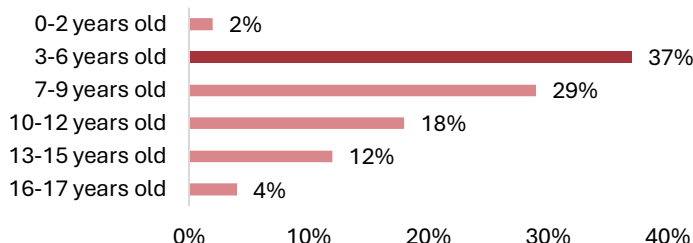


My mother regularly made me watch sex, verbally humiliating me, while my father physically touched me when I was a newborn. This continued until I left home at the age of 20.

Survivor who experienced sexual violence at ages 7–9.

Nearly four in ten (37%) were first subjected to sexual violence between the ages of 3 and 6, and 29% reported that the abuse first occurred between the ages of 7 and 9. Additionally, 18% of survivors reported first experiencing sexual violence between 10–12 years, and 12% between 13–15 years.

How old were you when you were first subjected to sexual violence?



2. Latvian-speaking survivors often experienced sexual violence on multiple occasions and in different forms.

For many Latvian-speaking survivors, childhood sexual violence was not a single incident: **three in four (76%) reported that they experienced sexual violence more than once.**

The experiences reported by survivors varied in nature and included different forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, both in person and facilitated by technology. On average, respondents selected 2.5 different types of sexual violence, highlighting that many survivors experienced multiple forms of abuse.

Is there anything you would like to say to strengthen the rights of victims and protect children?

[Number of respondents: 492]

It is important to talk about it and not hide the reality. This is very difficult to do in a society where victims are still blamed for what happened to them. It is also very important to educate people about what psychological trauma is and how it affects people, including memory and brain function, etc. My message is: prevention!! And open, honest language. The shame should be placed on the perpetrator.

A child should know where to turn if they cannot rely on their parents' support.

Encourage children not to remain silent and to tell an adult what happened. I regret that I did not tell anyone, but I was ashamed—and I still am.

Adults should pay more attention to children's emotions. Ask how their day went, etc. Listen to them.

Changes in a child's behaviour and feelings should be noticed, because they may not always have the ability or courage to talk about what happened.

Is there anything we may not have asked that you find important to share about your experience? [Number of respondents: 310]

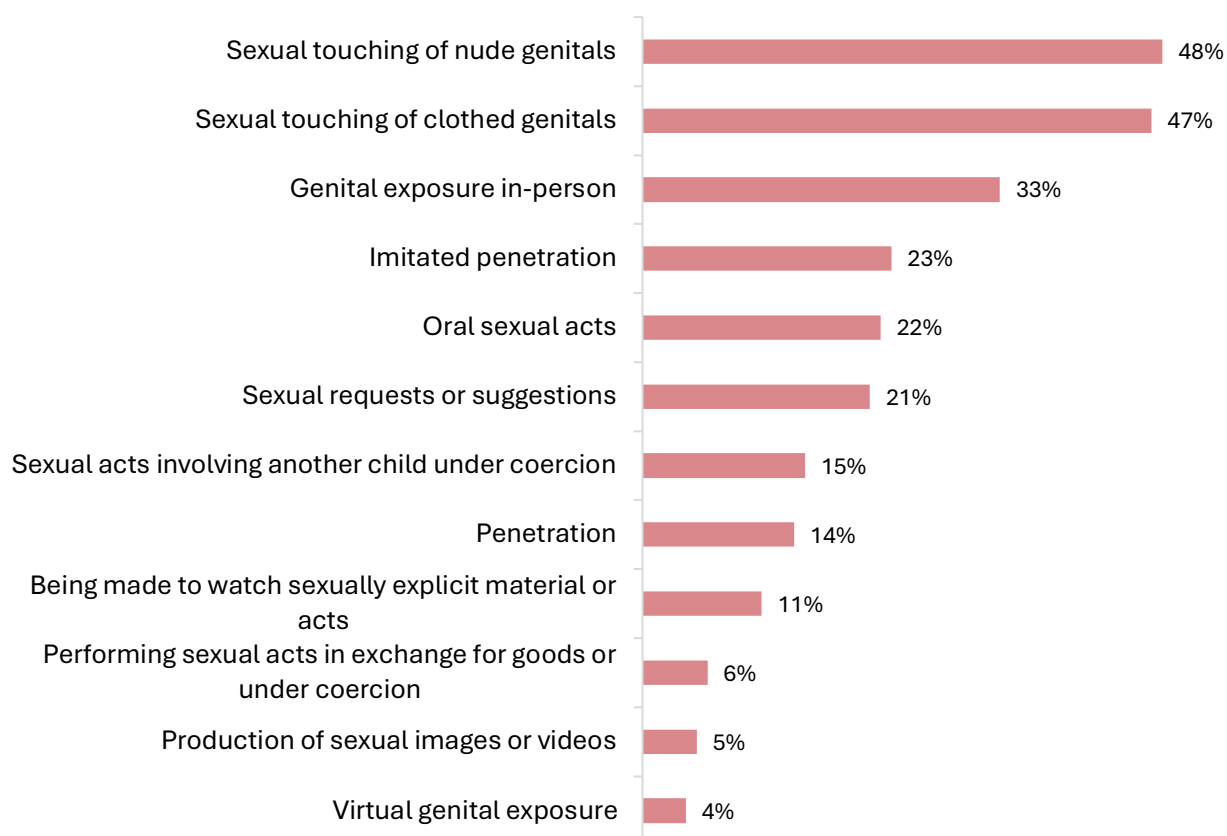
Now, looking back, I understand why I suddenly became a somewhat cruel and unempathetic teenager, why my grades deteriorated rapidly, and why I had problems at school and communicating with my parents. I somehow attributed it simply to going through adolescence, and only as I grew older did I understand it.

It is difficult to assess what consequences what happened has left and what impact it has had that I never had the opportunity to talk about it with anyone. At such a young age, they are more simply memories, but it is difficult to evaluate them.

The worst thing is not that I was sexually abused, but that my mother knew about it and did not help me.

The will to live is the strongest drive, and it helps us get through everything that hurts. What does not break us makes us stronger. These people are very strong.

Types of childhood sexual abuse experienced by respondents



For a smaller, but still significant, group of survivors, technology also played a role in the abuse. **7% reported that the sexual violence they experienced as children occurred online**, either completely or partially, or was facilitated by technology.³



A secret mobile phone was used, which the perpetrator, who was my music teacher, gave me so that he could contact me and send me sexually explicit messages without my parents finding out.



I received messages from fake profiles on draugiem.lv, from boys my age who showed an interest in me. An emotional connection was established, during which I was pressured to send revealing photos. There were at least three such cases. The last one ended with me refusing to send photos, after which the photos I had previously sent were distributed to my schoolmates.



Uncontrolled access to social media and telephone communication, through which I was exposed to inappropriate content and communication, i.e. messages, pictures, SMS, videos, etc. of a sexual nature.



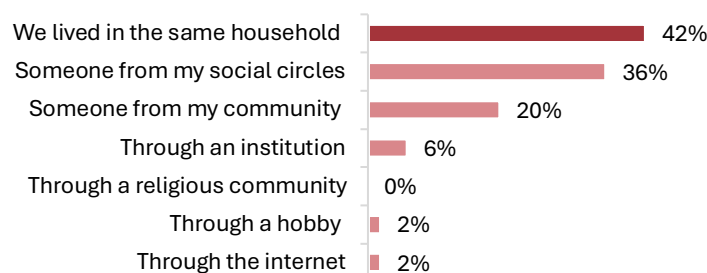
It was a conversation with an older man on Omegle, which was popular at the time. I went there simply to joke around and have fun, but this man started chatting with me and steered the conversation towards sexual content. The conversation was extremely inappropriate overall.

³ It is important to note that these findings do not represent the overall prevalence of technology-facilitated and contact crimes of sexual violence against children. Rather, they reflect the experiences of the specific group of Latvian-speaking survivors reached by this survey. For further information on the experiences and impacts of online child sexual abuse and exploitation, see Protect Children's recent research report, *Our Voice: Survivor Experiences of Online Abuse. Understanding the Distinct Impacts of Online and Offline Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation*. <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/our-voice-report-online-child-sexual-abuse-survivors>

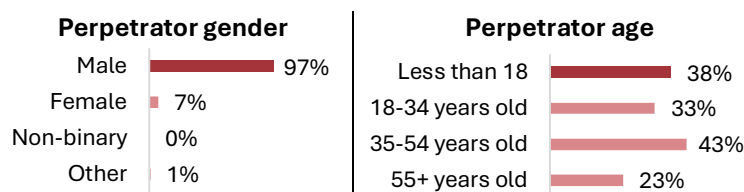
3. Most Latvian-speaking survivors were sexually abused by someone they knew.

For most Latvian-speaking survivors (86%), the perpetrator was someone they already knew. In particular, 85% reported the perpetrator was someone within their own or their family's circle of trust. The perpetrator was often someone who lived in the same household (42%), or someone from their social circle (36%), including relatives, friends or family friends. One in five survivors (20%) reported that the perpetrator was someone from their community. 6% reported that the perpetrator was someone from an institution, 2% from a religious community, 2% from a hobby, and 2% from the internet.

How did you know the perpetrator(s)?



Nearly all Latvian-speaking survivors (97%) identified the perpetrator as male. While survivors most frequently reported that the perpetrator was over 18 at the time of the sexual violence, **two in five Latvian-speaking survivors (38%) reported that the perpetrator was under 18.** This suggests that a significant proportion of survivors experienced peer-to-peer sexual abuse, including sibling sexual abuse.



Childhood sexual violence frequently involved more than one perpetrator. More than four in ten Latvian-speaking survivors (42%) reported that the abuse involved multiple perpetrators.

4. Three in ten Latvian-speaking survivors never disclosed. Of those who did, a third waited more than two decades.

While 70% of Latvian-speaking survivors reported that they had disclosed the sexual violence, 30% had never disclosed their experience. Shame was the most frequently reported barrier to immediate disclosure, with 59% of survivors reporting they had been too ashamed. Other significant barriers included not having the courage (34%) and not believing that disclosure would help them (29%).

How did you know the perpetrator(s)? Or, if you did not know the perpetrator(s) from before, how did you come into contact? [Number of respondents: 731, selected answers: 905]

Grandfather and mother's brother.
Sister's husband.
Father.
Grandfather.
Someone from my mother's workplace.
Schoolmate.
Parents' colleagues.
Stepfather.
Two different doctors.
One of my older brothers.
My boyfriend at the time.
Mother's friend / boyfriend.
A resident of the town.
Singing teacher.
At the hospital.
Someone from my circle of friends.
Great-grandfather.
Draugiem.lv

What could have helped you disclose the sexual violence sooner?

[Number of respondents: 364]

Close relationships that make it possible to talk about sensitive, difficult topics as well.

Education that what happened was not normal and how to respond.

No one helped, even after I told someone. They did not believe me or did not want to believe me.

Knowing that even if rape did not occur, it is still a sexual crime, and that I could safely tell someone about it without feeling guilty or ashamed.

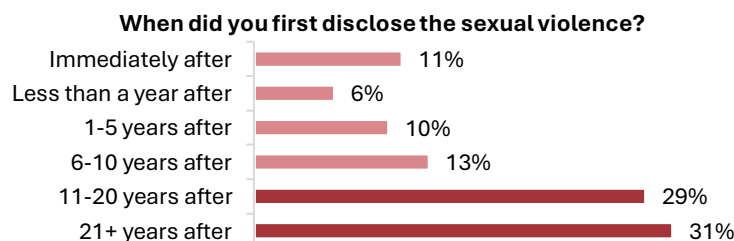
Possibly nothing, because I had been threatened that my parents would abandon me and send me to an orphanage.

Understanding that it would have consequences in my life. Information and understanding that it was not my fault. I felt that I was alone.

If I had known that it was not normal and that this does not happen in every family.

If I had truly understood that it was abuse. At the time I was only a teenager who was proud that older men paid attention to me, and I did not think much about the large age difference. [...] No one expressed surprise that a 13-year-old girl had a boyfriend who was 22 or 27 years old. And so, these situations were normalised.

Among survivors who had disclosed, disclosure often happened many years after the abuse. 60% of survivors reported they disclosed more than ten years after the abuse, including 31% who disclosed more than 21 years later. Only 11% disclosed immediately following the sexual violence.



Latvian-speaking survivors most commonly disclosed to a friend (31%), partner (30%), parent (30%), therapist (30%), or sibling (15%), and were less likely to disclose to the police (2%), teachers or other educational staff (2%), healthcare professionals (1%), or social workers (1%).

Disclosure did not always lead to survivors receiving the support they needed. A significant proportion of Latvian-speaking survivors (60%) reported that their disclosure did not result in them receiving support or help.

5. More than eight in ten Latvian-speaking survivors experienced long-term consequences of sexual violence.

Childhood sexual violence can have profound and lasting impacts on victims' and survivors' emotional and psychological well-being, relationships, and health.



82% reported that the childhood sexual violence had led to long-term consequences.

Among the survivors who reported experiencing long-term consequences, respondents selected an average of 3.9 different types of consequences. The most frequently reported were:

- Anxiety disorder and panic attacks (49%)
- Sexual dysfunction (47%)
- Difficulty forming and maintaining personal relationships (46%)
- Depression (42%)
- Somatic symptoms (27%)
- PTSD/PTS symptoms (26%)
- Self-harming behaviour (25%)

Despite these long-term impacts, **64% of survivors reported that they had not received support to help them cope** with the consequences of the sexual violence.

Which of the following describe [the long-term consequences] the best? [Number of respondents: 595, selected answers: 2331]

While being in a long-term marriage, disgust/aversion can arise during intimate relations because of memories. I dislike it when my spouse has stubble and kisses me because it reminds me of the perpetrator.

I cannot perceive my body as myself; rather, it is like some kind of doll that I control. I also do not recognise myself in the mirror.

Sometimes, without even understanding myself, after sex with my husband, whom I truly love, I feel as though I have been used. It is difficult to describe—he has never forced me, but I feel as I did in childhood, and that feeling is horrible and is often followed by panic attacks.

I allow things that I do not actually want.

I had not thought about it, but now it seems logical—an inability to maintain long-term employment relationships.

A difficult childbirth experience.

I can relax only with alcohol.

Problems recognizing and maintaining my own boundaries; self-esteem problems.

Flashbacks interfere with concentrating on activities.

Even after being with my husband for more than 20 years, I often think about that time during sex.

How do you feel after having participated in this survey? [Number of respondents: 506]

I am grateful that attention is being paid to this topic in Latvia.

I am glad about this survey. First of all, because it will increase people's understanding of the consequences that arise. Secondly, this is a difficult topic, but at least I can share some of my feelings and thoughts with someone.

I feel relieved knowing that it isn't all in my head and that I do actually need help, and I feel that I may even be able to ask for it.

It was important for me to express myself and be seen, even if I am only one percentage point in the survey. Maybe my participation in the survey will change something for someone.

Conclusion

The insights gathered from 734 Latvian-speaking victims and survivors who participated in the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey highlight significant gaps in preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation and in ensuring adequate support for those affected. Victims' and survivors' experiences demonstrate the profound and lasting impact of childhood sexual violence, as well as the barriers many victims and survivors face in disclosing their experiences, accessing support and seeking justice.

The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive, survivor-centred prevention and support systems in Latvia. The fact that nearly a third of survivors who disclosed their experience did so more than two decades after the abuse highlights the importance of giving victims and survivors the opportunity to seek justice long after the abuse occurred. The 2026 amendments extending the statute of limitations for the most serious sexual crimes against children are an important and necessary step, recognising that survivors may only disclose their experiences many years later. In line with the Council of Europe's Resolution 2533 and its recommendations, policymakers should strengthen prevention, ensure access to long-term support and healing, and create conditions in which victims and survivors can safely disclose their experiences and receive recognition and justice.

By implementing these measures, Latvia can strengthen the protection of children and ensure that survivors receive the support, recognition and opportunities for healing they need.



The consequences of childhood abuse often only appear later, much later.

In my case, it was after my children were born, when everything inside you is stirred up and, as a result of emotions/hormones, you realise how much what happened to you actually affected and shaped your understanding of sexuality and intimacy, how much it really broke you, and how many things you did simply to prove that it was not your fault.

Quote from survivor in response to the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey



About Protect Children

Protect Children is a non-governmental child-rights organization based in Finland, working globally to end all forms of sexual violence against children. We adopt a holistic, research-based approach to address the issue from multiple angles.

Learn more about Protect Children: protectchildren.fi.

About the Justice Initiative

The Justice Initiative is a European initiative aiming to restore justice for past victims of abuse across Europe and strengthen child protection for future generations. Protect Children, the leader of the Justice Initiative Nordic Hub, developed the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey with support from the Justice Initiative. Learn more about the Justice Initiative: justice-initiative.eu.

This report has been written by Protect Children and translated by [Centrs drošai bērnbai Dardedze](#).

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