

Unheard

For more than 100 years, adult survivors of child abuse have been silenced and suppressed, their stories unheard by both professionals and by the public. But recent research about the prevalence of child abuse has brought about renewed awareness – and opened a long-awaited dialogue, as well. An illuminating article published in the [Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect](#) more than two decades ago discussed the historical absence of child abuse discussions. The article chronicled child abuse’s troubling cycle of discovery and suppression – and how an awareness of prior cycles can help professionals mitigate attempts to minimize the problem of child abuse. Twenty years after this article was written, child abuse is being “discovered” again, but are victims speaking out – and are they being heard?

According to [Child Abuse.org](#), a report of child abuse is made once every ten seconds in the United States. Every year in the U.S., there are more than 3 million reports of child abuse involving more than 6 million children. In [2012 alone](#), state agencies discovered 686,000 victims of child abuse, which would fill ten football stadiums. But with the propensity for victims of abuse to remain silent their experiences, how many other sports stadiums could be filled with victims whose stories have gone undocumented?

According to a 2011 article in the [New York Times](#), one in five women have reported being sexually assaulted. An article that came out in [the Guardian](#) the same year reported similar figures for child victims of abuse or neglect. But if these are the rates being reported, how many instances of abuse have gone unreported – and how many adult survivors of child abuse are still waiting to be heard?

[Multiple studies](#) have found that most child abuse goes unreported – and as a result, the majority of adult survivors of child abuse have probably remained silent about their abuse, as well. But thanks to widespread coverage of abuse cases such as the [Jerry Sandusky](#) case, the dialogue about child victims of abuse has progressed in a meaningful – and transformative – way. The topic of child abuse has been “discovered” once again, entering mainstream discussions and sparking important conversations about abusers and survivors, of healing and community.

Given the imbalance of power between adults and children, it’s not uncommon for children to be hesitant to come forward when they’re abused. As evidenced by the [Sandusky case](#), adult survivors of abuse can be remiss to recount instances of abuse, even after their abusers have been caught. One survivor, Aaron Fisher, had initially been referred to as “Victim 1.” [He stated](#) that reporting the crimes was even harder than experiencing the abuse – but he didn’t allow his story to remain unheard. The Sandusky case has shown other adult abuse survivors that it’s normal to be hesitant to recount prior instances – and it has also shown adult survivors of child abuse that they don’t have to carry that burden over the course of their lifetimes. No survivor who wants to tell their story should have to be unheard. The dialogue about child abuse has begun – and together, we can add our collective voices to make sure that no survivor remains unheard ever again.