



# **Parents as Protectors:** The Involvement of Parents in Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

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# Two Pathways of Parental Protection:

**1** The creation of **safe environments** where CSA is less likely to occur.  
Achieved through effective parent supervision, monitoring and involvement.


**2** Fostering **child well-being**, lessening the child's risk of being a vulnerable target.  
Derived from adequate parenting practices, parent-child relationships and communication.

**Parents as Protectors rather than Educators**



# Parents as Protectors (PaP) CSA Module

CSA education module to be added to existing, evidence based parenting programs - educating parents about the creation of safer environments.

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- A photograph of a diverse group of people, including men, women, and children, smiling and looking towards the left. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery and a blue tent.
1. Pathway 2 is well address by evidence-based parenting programs
  2. Non-attendance at standalone CSA programs
  3. Stigma
  4. Targeting at-risk parents

1. Creation of safe environments through parent supervision, monitoring and involvement
2. Child well-being derived from adequate parenting practices, relationships and communication



# Parents as Protectors

## Why Involve Parents?

Evidence of the Process Of Abuse and Risk Factors.

Drawbacks of Child-focused Prevention

Effectiveness

Appropriateness

Unintended consequences

## Problems of Current Parental Involvement.

Parents' Reluctance to Educate

Unintended Outcomes


## New Directions.

The Parents as Protectors Module



# The Process of Abuse: Offender Modus Operandi

## Who, How, When and Where



<u>Supervision</u>	<u>Involvement</u>	<u>Grooming</u>	<u>Vulnerable children</u>	<u>Deterrence</u>
Exploit a lack of carer involvement and supervision Time alone	CSA requires a potential offender, a potential victim and the absence of a capable guardian	Trust, special relationship, isolation, cooperation, non-disclosure Parents & families too	Emotionally needy, socially isolated, disabilities, low social skills	Not easily deterred, resistance may stop episodes but not abuse, resistance over years



“

# The Process of Abuse: Victim Experience

“Tom made me feel good about myself and I quickly grew to love him. When the holiday came to an end I missed him dreadfully” (Briggs, 1995, p. 19).

“I thought he was kind of funny, he was really nice. Someone I could talk to, someone who cared about me. Cared enough to ask the questions nobody else did” (Berliner & Conte, 1990, p. 32).

## Recognise

“...when my mom was sick, ..she asked me to phone him so he will come and help me with my siblings. I told her I can manage that, but she told me that she will feel safer if he is here” (Katz & Barnett, 2016).

“My son was so angry with us when we discovered what was happening and stopped the tutor from coming. He still hasn't forgiven us for reporting him.” (Age 14. Personal communication, 2018)

”



“

# The Process of Abuse: Victim Experience

“It was only one time that I told him I didn’t want to, but he was so upset with me, and everything he did was so painful that I even got injured and couldn’t pee, so I never repeated this mistake again” Katz, Tsur et al., 2020).

## Resist

“Oh my god, oh my god, why was I always freezing up? They say you should fight back, and I just could not move ” (Katz & Barnett, 2016).

“...I am sure I was part of it. I should not have gone with him and I should have told him to stop. I blame myself ... for not doing everything I should have done” (Katz et al., 2020).

“He did not physically force it on me; it’s just that I knew I shouldn’t say no or resist, I just understood it” (Katz & Nicolet, 2020).

”



“

# The Process of Abuse: Victim Experience

“I didn’t want them to grow up with no Dad... I felt like I was taking their Dad away from them...I can’t let them live without their Dad” (Age 14. McElvaney, 2014, p. 937).

## Disclosure

“I felt sorry for Mom. She had a lot of problems, and Dad was pretty mean to her and . . . well I felt sorry for her and didn’t want to burden her with my problems” (Age 15. Jenson et al., 2005).

“ . . he had convinced me that if anyone found out, I would be the one people found disgusting, so I actually started to protect him if anyone got suspicious” (Easton et al., 2014)

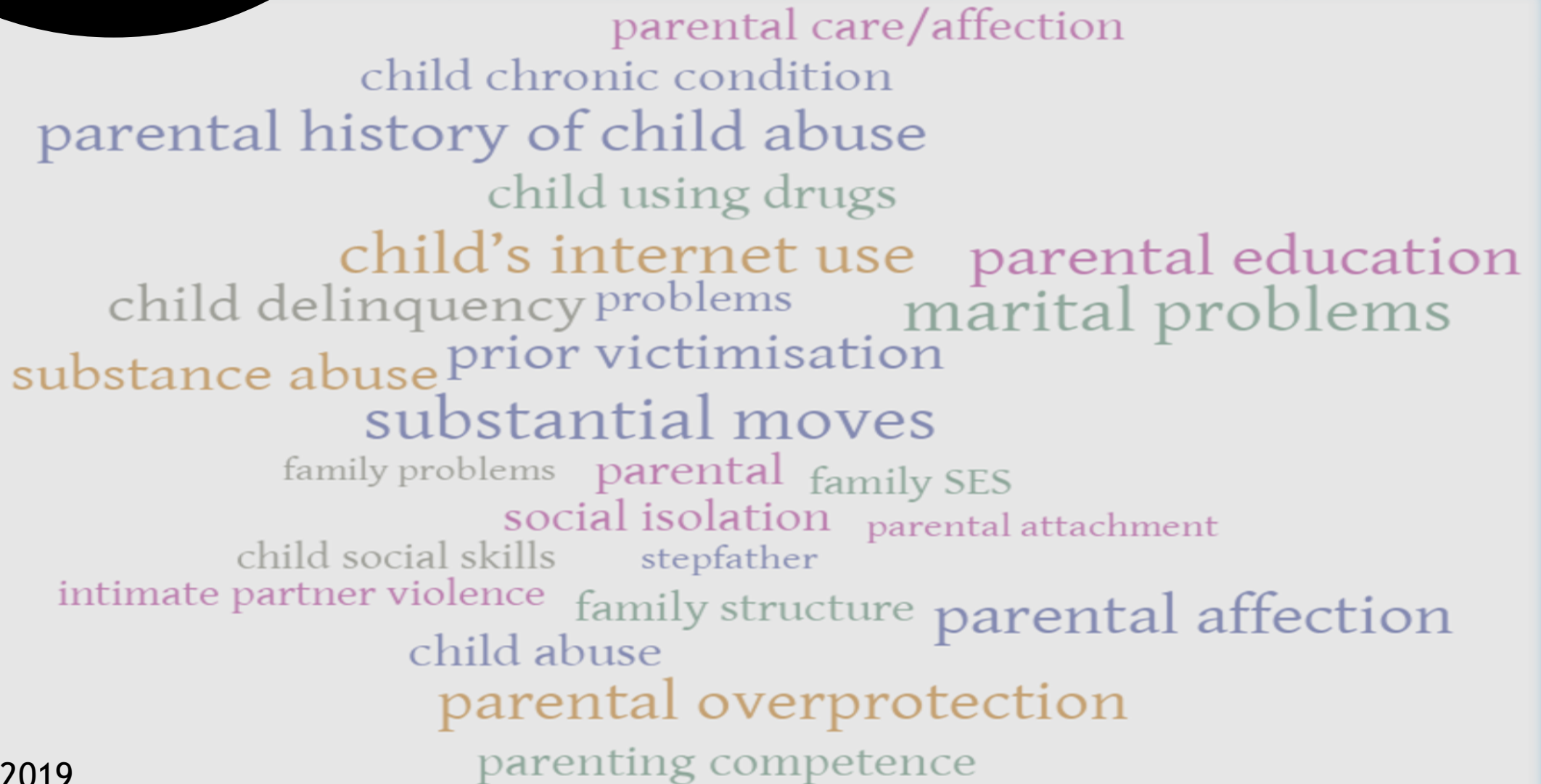
“I love him - I don’t want anything bad to happen to him” (Katz, Tenerb et al., 2020).

”



# Risk Factors

## Why Involve Parents and Parenting?



Assink et al., 2019

Why Involve Parents in Prevention

WordItOut



# Risk Factors

## Why Involve Parents and Parenting?

### Supervision/ Monitoring

- Child's frequent use of the internet
- Child use of drugs and alcohol and being sexually active
- Child engaging in violent, delinquent behavior
- Parental absence

### Warmth/ Involvement

- Low quality parent-child relationship
- Low parental attachment
- Parental overprotection
- Low levels of parental care/affection
- Social isolation of the child

### Parenting/Family

- Lack of communication
- Concurrent child abuse in the home
- Problems in the family system functioning
- Low level of child social skills
- Low parenting competence



# Children as Prevention Targets

1. Effectiveness
2. Appropriateness
3. Consequences



## 30 Years of Effectiveness Research

**Finkelhor et al., 1995**

- 1457 10-16 year olds.
- Programs did not reduce victimisation incidence & did not prevent injury as result of a victimisation.

**Finkelhor et al., 2014**

- 3391 5-17 year olds.
- Even high quality programs did not reduce the incidence of sexual victimisation, or disclosures.

**Ko & Cosden, 2001**

- 137 teens.
- No significant effect. Majority used recommended prevention strategies: 46%: positive effect, 43%: negative outcomes, 11%: combination.

**Gibson & Leitenberg, 2000**

- 825 Undergraduates.
- 8% and 16%: CSA education = lower rates of subsequent CSA

**Kenny et al., 2020**

- 1502 Undergraduates
- 5% and 10%: CSA education = lower rates of subsequent CSA

**Rudolph et al. (Prop. 2022)**

- Currently 300 university students.
- No difference at the moment, but small sample size.

**Pelcovitz et al., 1992**

- 22 6-10 year olds.
- Longstanding abuse. No disclosure. All attended a CSA program.

Why Involve Parents in Prevention





# Appropriateness

Places burden of responsibility for prevention on to the victims themselves

## Assumptions:

- identify the nuances of an abusive or exploitative encounter  
“Significant numbers of adults are unable to distinguish between “a friendly pat, an affectionate hug or a sexual advance” (Berrick & Gilbert, 1991, p. 110).
- counter the manipulations or threats of an abuser
- challenge the authority of an adult
- forego affection, attention and/or material incentives
- be willing to report someone they may like/love and burden the responsibility of disclosure

## Developmental Issues:

Young children struggle with concepts such as:

- a family member attempting to touch their genitals,
- a ‘good’ person doing something bad,
- ambiguity,
- discrimination involved in identifying an abusive situation.



# Appropriateness: Adult Experiences

“...young women are experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace today. Eighty per cent of them felt unable to report it. It is unrealistic and inaccurate to expect this to be stopped by the people it’s happening to” (Guardian, 2017)

“But not everyone is quick enough on their feet or feels secure enough to speak up - we should not be asking students and junior faculty to do that. We need to be training [senior] people to [intervene],” (Guardian, 2017)

#metoo

“....you’re asking women to suffer a double punishment. Practically if not explicitly, it’s not much different from saying it’s their fault” (Guardian, 2017)



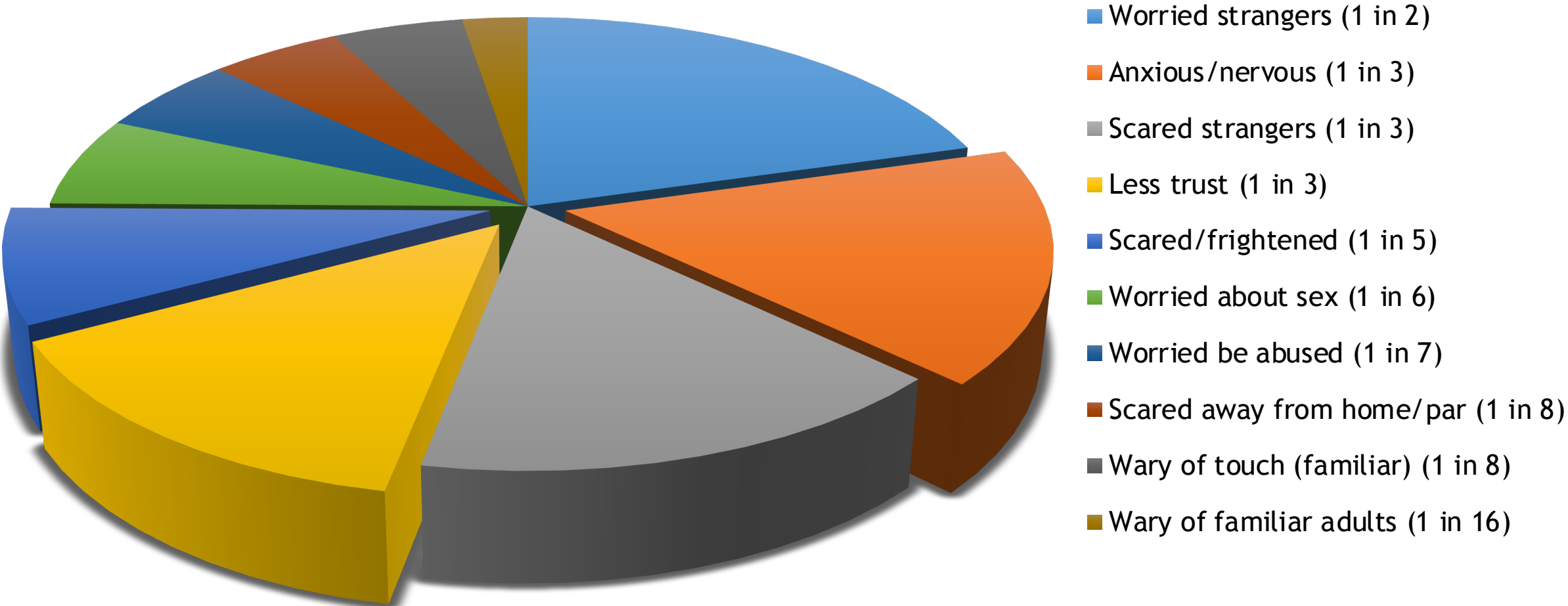
# Unintended Consequences

Fear of adults/strangers  
Worry  
Dependence  
Anxiety  
Fear  
Nervousness  
Wariness of touch  
Worry about being abused  
Nightmares  
Bed-wetting  
School avoidance

“No matter how sensitively this is presented this is a disturbing message delivered at a time in children’s lives when it is important to have a sense of trust that parents and caregivers will nurture and protect them” (Berrick & Gilbert, 1991, p. 110).



# Negative Consequences of School Program as Reported by Young Adults



Why Involve Parents in Prevention



# PROBLEMS WITH INVOLVING PARENTS

For 40 years parents have been encouraged to tell their children:

- often, & from a young age,
- about CSA, using concrete examples,
- reinforcing that perpetrators can be trusted others, family members and teenagers/other children,
- with a description of the incentives offenders may use.

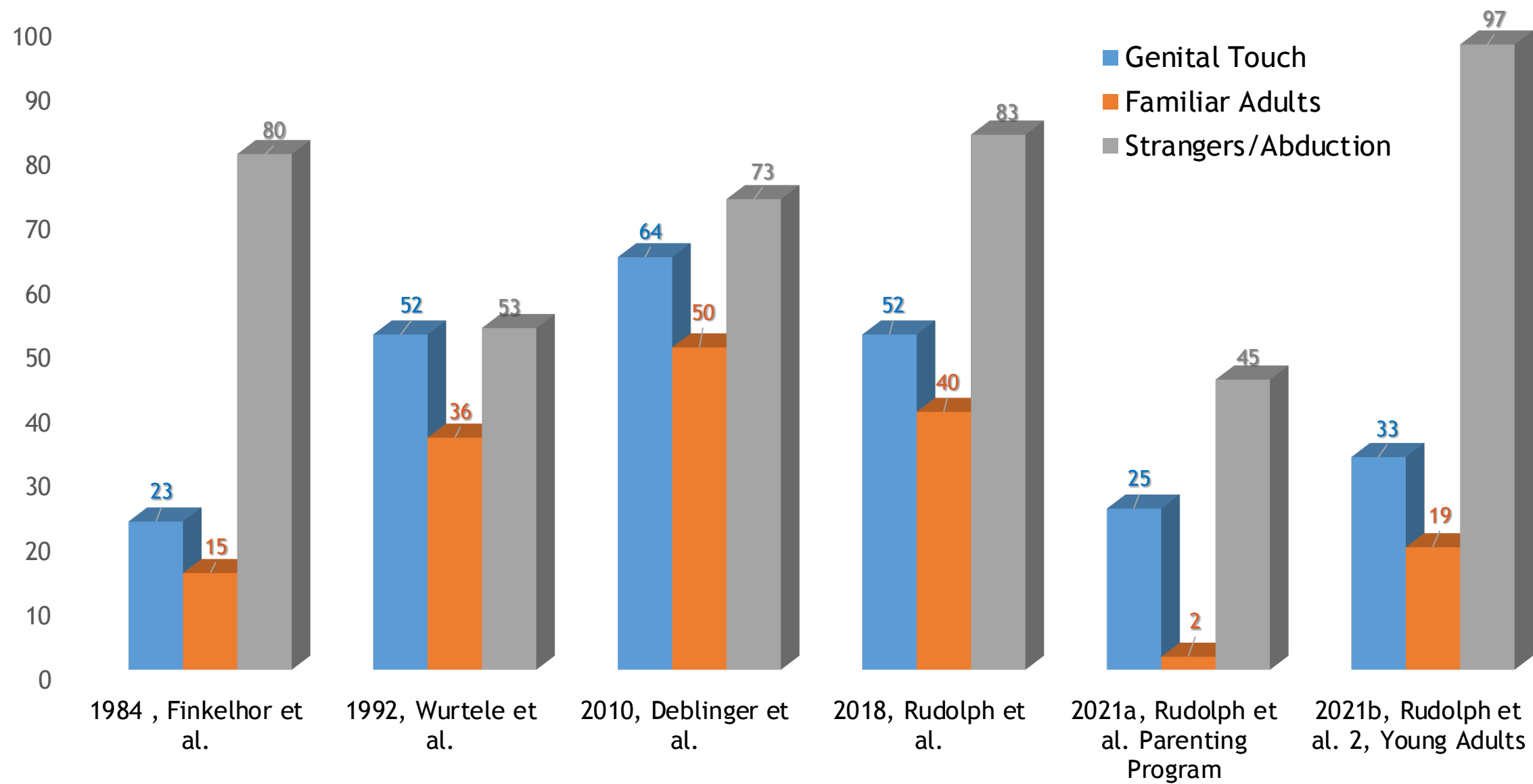
1. Reluctance to Educate

2. Continued focus on victims/Possible

unintended Consequences

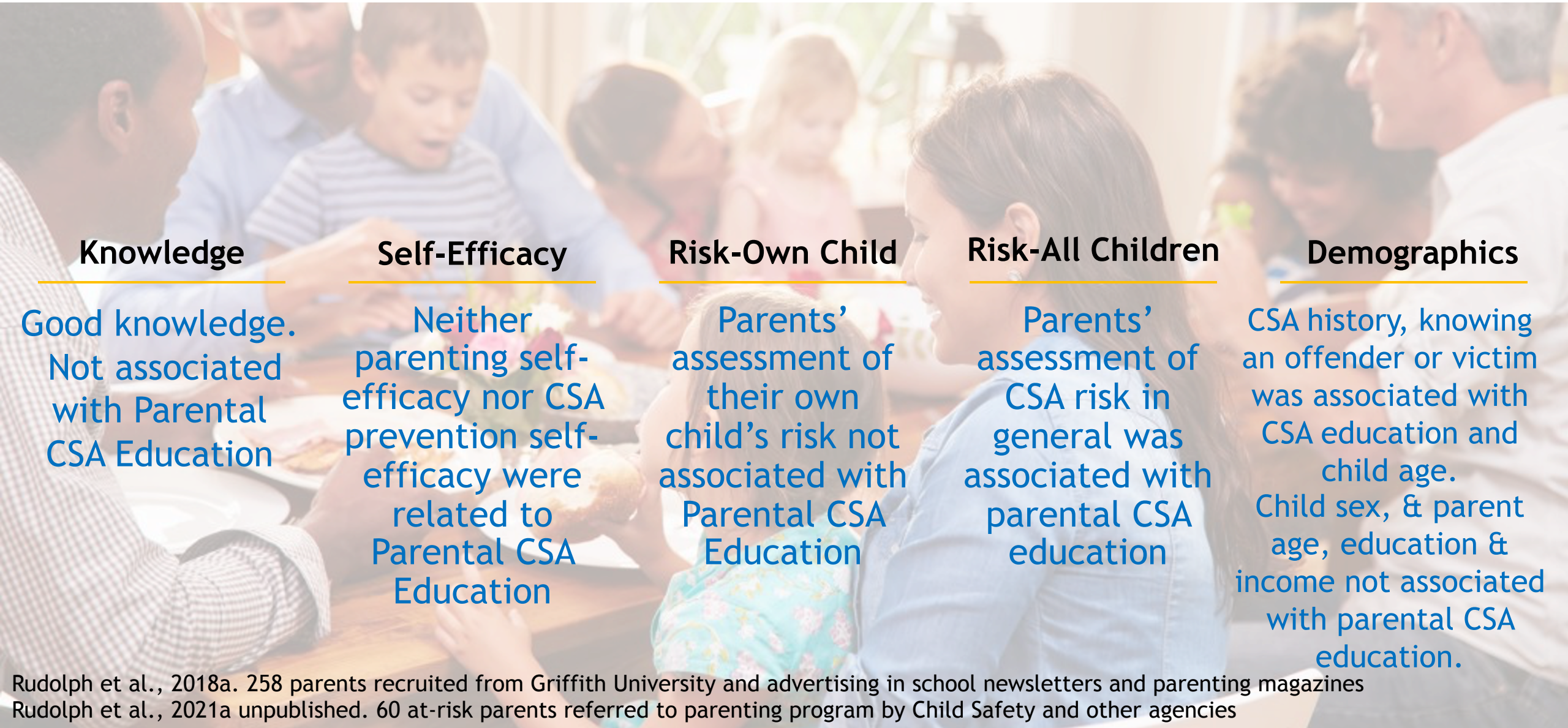


# Parental Reluctance to Educate: 37 Years of Research





# Parental Sexual Abuse Education: Barriers and Facilitators



## Knowledge

Good knowledge.  
Not associated  
with Parental  
CSA Education

## Self-Efficacy

Neither  
parenting self-  
efficacy nor CSA  
prevention self-  
efficacy were  
related to  
Parental CSA  
Education

## Risk-Own Child

Parents'  
assessment of  
their own  
child's risk not  
associated with  
Parental CSA  
Education

## Risk-All Children

Parents'  
assessment of  
CSA risk in  
general was  
associated with  
parental CSA  
education

## Demographics

CSA history, knowing  
an offender or victim  
was associated with  
CSA education and  
child age.  
Child sex, & parent  
age, education &  
income not associated  
with parental CSA  
education.

Rudolph et al., 2018a. 258 parents recruited from Griffith University and advertising in school newsletters and parenting magazines

Rudolph et al., 2021a unpublished. 60 at-risk parents referred to parenting program by Child Safety and other agencies

# Parental Sexual Abuse Education: Qualitative Study

1

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Despite knowing the correct information, parents concentrated on strangers and abduction dangers

2

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Despite thinking that CSA education was important, parents didn't give their children recommended messages

3

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Parents had doubts and concerns about CSA education

Sample: 24 parents {17 ♀, 7 ♂}  
{75% Caucasian, 12.5% Asian, 4% Aboriginal, 4% Hispanic, 4% Middle Eastern}

Rudolph et al., 2018b



# Concentration on Strangers

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The risk “is quite low [...] they are never alone with strangers.”

“I’ve taught them what to do if they are grabbed.”

“If a stranger touches you there you need to tell me.”

“Children need to know about the “things that strangers will do and things that can happen.”

“Like, if someone tries to take you...these are the things you should do....  
scream, attack, whatever.””

# Important, but no Comprehensive Education

50% said child education was the most effective method

**BUT:** None gave their children comprehensive sexual abuse prevention messages as recommended by CSA organizations.

2

2 started from a young age {4 or younger}

2

2 mentioned family member

0

0 mentioned teenager/older child

0

0 mentioned incentives {in the context of abuse rather than abduction}

3

3 mentioned specific behaviors {e.g., someone might touch the child's genitals, someone might ask the child to touch their genitals}

Children should be told often, & from a young age, about CSA, using concrete examples and reinforcing that perpetrators can be trusted others, family members and teenagers/other children, with a description of the incentives offenders may use.



# Important, but no Comprehensive Education

“

“I’ve not been specific. I’ve not kind of said, you know about sexual acts or anything like that. I’ve just talked about being comfortable and not being pushed into something you don’t want to do. Basically, I’ve not gone into great detail.”

“I spoke with my 8-years-old once, telling her about the parts of the body and asking: ‘has anyone ever done anything that you weren’t happy with?’ and she said no. And I said, well, if anyone ever does you need to tell an adult that you trust.’ .. I was probably a bit vague.”

”



# Parental Doubts & Concerns

50%

of participants thought education was the best prevention method.

58%

of participants were skeptical that child-education would help their children avoid/resist CSA.

33%

of participants who thought education was the best method of prevention thought it would actually help their child in an abusive scenario.

83%

had concerns that telling their children about the specifics of CSA has negative side effects.

Fear/anxiety  
Damage to relationships  
Hypervigilance

Loss of trust  
Loss of innocence  
Negative body image



## Victim Focus

# Continued Focus on the Victim And Unintended Consequences

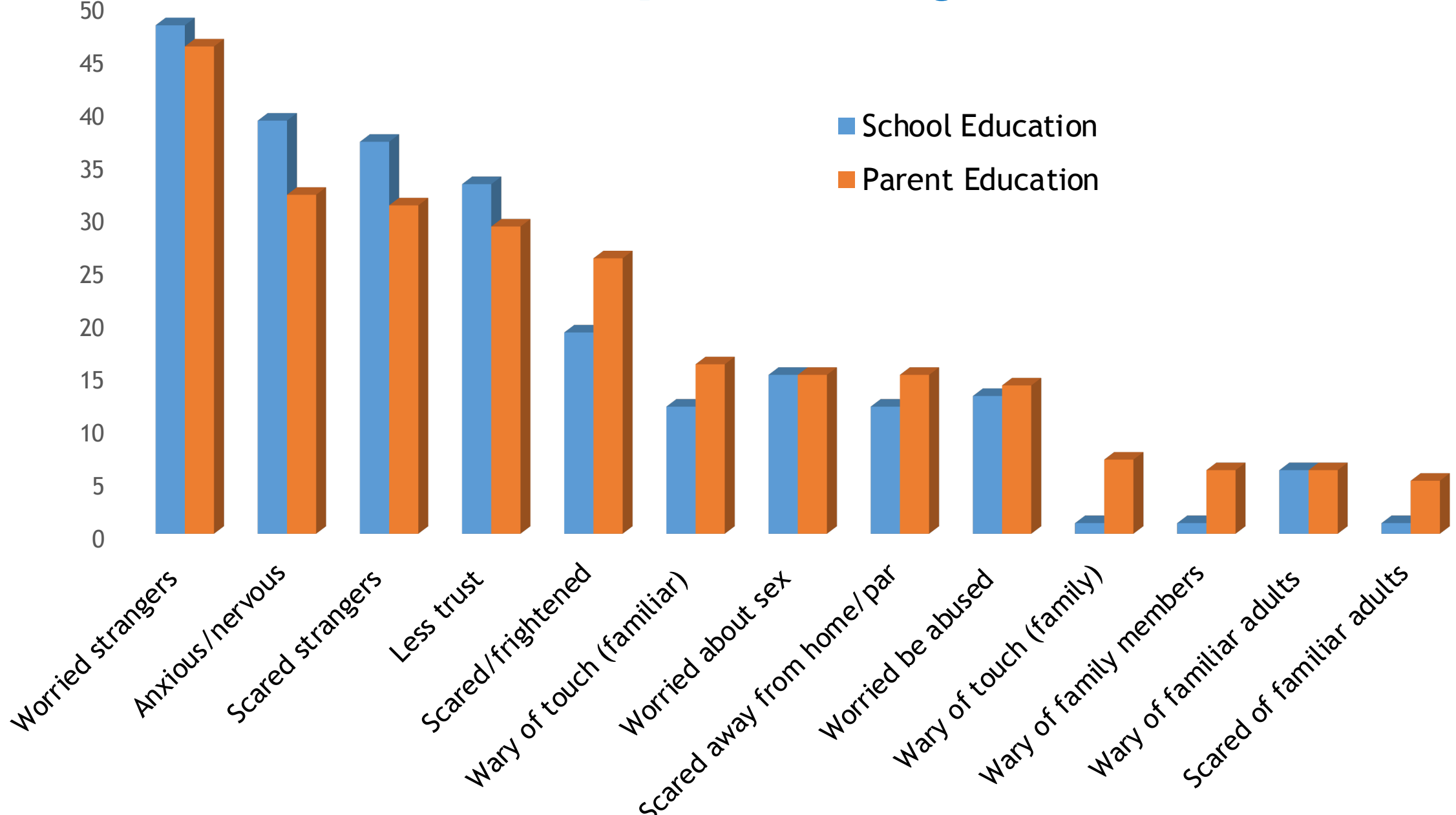
Same Assumptions  
Same criticisms

**No research has assessed:**

- \* effectiveness of parental education in helping children avoid abuse
- \* whether parents telling their children about the specifics of abuse and the identity of possible perpetrators causes unintended harms.



# Comparison of School and Parent CSA Education Consequences as Reported by Young Adults





# Parents as Protectors

Theory and Evidence demonstrates that:

- Parents are an important part of prevention
- That they may be better employed as protectors rather than educators

Adult behaviour change, through the creation of safe environments and child well-being, rather than child behaviour change.



# Parents as Protectors Module

Assisting parents to:

- accept the possibility of sexual abuse happening in their home and family/social circle
- accurately assess their children's risk through the identification of warning signs and risky behaviour/situations
- to lower the risks by being prepared to take action (with tiered response options).

Best achieved through the use of scenarios (possibility digital)

PaP is to be implemented and evaluated with at-risk parents attending Parent-Children Interaction Program at Griffith





A warm, sunlit photograph of a diverse family of seven people (three adults and four children) smiling and posing for a selfie outdoors. The image is partially obscured by a large black circle at the top and text overlays on the left side.

# Summary

## Reasons for involving parents:

- Understanding the Process Of Abuse from the Offenders and Victims perspective
- Risk factors that involve parents, parenting and the home environment
- Drawbacks of Child-focused Prevention
  - Effectiveness
  - Appropriateness
  - Unintended consequences

## Problemss with current (limited) role of parents as educators:

- Parents reluctance to educate their children about CSA
- Parents as educators continues victim-focus and preliminary research shows it may have the same unintended side-effects

## New Directions

- Two Pathways Model - involving parents with the creation of safer environments.
- The Parents as Protectors Module - a one-session module to be adding to existing-evidence based parenting programs