

1 in 5 a victim of child abuse

Alarm at crisis

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AUSTRALIA is on the brink of a child abuse epidemic with one in five children being abused by their parents, a child protection advocate has warned.

But the community is in denial about the extent of the problem, support group Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA) patron Professor Freda Briggs said.

Professor Briggs told a crowded charity event for the group in Sydney that if a disease struck down as many children, governments would do something about it.

Professor Briggs, an emeritus professor from the University of South Australia, said victims can carry the health effects of abuse — physical and mental — throughout their lives.

She said it was outrageous that the only national organisation working with survivors relied on volunteers and “metaphorically the sale of lamingtons”.

Latest figures reveal that more than 266,500 in-danger children were reported to authorities in the 2005/06 financial year, double the number reported in 2000/01.



Victim . . . Keevil

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures show an 84 per cent increase in the number of those notifications that are substantiated, from 30,473 to 55,921 over the same period.

ASCA said shocking figures from the US showed 10 per cent of children reported being hit with an object by their parents and 3 per cent reported other physical abuse.

Child abuse survivor Christine Keevil, 32, urged people to speak up about it.

She said she had been taught “stranger danger” at school with the paedophile always portrayed as a shadowy figure with a hat and long coat.

But she was abused for several years by her father, who died when she was 22, and two other men.

AN EXTREMELY PERSONAL STORY

CHRISTINE KEEVIL made a courageous speech that had a profound effect on a celebrity charity event in Sydney this week. Read her brave words for yourself

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