

**Queensland Crime Commission
Queensland Police Service**



Project AXIS

Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: The Nature and Extent

JUNE 2000

This paper will be available for a limited time on the Queensland Crime Commission's web site
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Foreword

The Queensland Crime Commission (QCC) and the Queensland Police Service (QPS) are pleased to release this first volume of the report *Child sexual abuse in Queensland: The nature and extent*. This report is one of the products of Project Axis — a joint initiative of the QCC and QPS to inquire into child sex offending in Queensland.

Child sexual abuse is a highly emotive issue which, from time to time, receives considerable media attention. As with all other crimes, the media — naturally enough — tend to focus on the more extreme and sensational cases, and it is often difficult for members of the community to obtain an accurate picture of the nature and extent of the problem. The primary aim of this report is to provide the public of Queensland with relevant, reliable, objective and contextualised information about the risks posed by child sex offenders to their families and to the community more generally. This is an integral step in the process of developing more effective and longer lasting responses to child sexual abuse.

This volume takes a broad look at child sexual abuse. This has been possible through the contributions of many individuals and organisations with relevant expertise, and we take this opportunity to thank all those who assisted throughout the project (see the Acknowledgements for a list of contributors to this volume).

Project Axis is not confined to the publication of this report but includes tactical investigations and other initiatives. Many offenders have been identified, investigated, and successfully prosecuted through the combined efforts of the Police Service and the Commission and, where appropriate, these results are included in the report. In so doing, we have tried to strike a proper balance between the right of the community to know more about child sex offenders, and the overriding need to protect the integrity of ongoing investigations and preserve the confidentiality of sensitive operational information.

Importantly, the publication of the Project Axis reports is only one of the many steps in the ongoing process of discharging the QCC's function in relation to criminal paedophilia. Volume 2 will examine how we, as a society, are dealing with the problem, including the responses of the government and the wider community. This will involve examination of the policies, procedures, structures and practices adopted by various institutions to see whether they are adequately addressing the needs of potential victims, and meeting legitimate public expectations in dealing with offenders.

Child sex offending represents a heavy social and financial cost to the community. The public must have confidence in the State's ability to protect basic community values by safeguarding children from the harm of sexual interference. The QPS and QCC are actively working towards improving the detection, prosecution and treatment of offenders in the hope of increasing child protection.

Finally, we would like to publicly acknowledge all those who have worked on the project. We also gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Overview Committee, comprised of Dr Ann Scott (QPS), Dr David Brereton (CJC) and Mrs Robin Sullivan, the Children's Commissioner.

T. F. Carmody SC
Crime Commissioner

J. P. O'Sullivan APM
Police Commissioner

Acknowledgements

The QCC and the QPS gratefully acknowledge the effort of the Project Axis team and Task Force Axis, along with the many other staff of both organisations who have contributed to this project.

Several key agencies and individuals assisted the project by providing information and preparing material for inclusion in this volume. Their contribution was invaluable. They include staff from the following agencies:

- Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland, especially Clare Tilbury, Beverly Fitzgerald and Merrick Ilett;
- The Criminal Justice Commission, especially Margot Legosz;
- The Children's Commission, especially Julie Harcourt and Sue Howard;
- The Department of Corrective Services, including staff at the prisons who facilitated the conduct of interviews and the prisoners who participated in those interviews;
- The Office of Economic and Statistical Research, especially Julianne Buckman and Cathy McGreevy;

In addition, the QCC and QPS are grateful for the assistance provided by Hetty Johnson (People's Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse), Karen Walsh (Esther Trust) and Bernadette McMenamin (End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking).

Special thanks are given to the many victims of child sexual abuse who have shared their experience in the hope of improving the community's knowledge and understanding of the problem.

This volume is accompanied by two other publications — *Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Selected Research Papers* and *Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Offender Characteristics and Modus Operandi* — from which material has been drawn for inclusion in this report. Thanks are extended to Associate Professor Simon Petrie, Dr Juliette Goldman and Carol Ronken, Dr Michael Dunne and Margot Legosz, Professor Patrick Parkinson, Dr Chris Goddard and Bernadette Saunders, and Dr Stephen Smallbone and Dr Richard Wortley.

There have been many other individuals and agencies who have contributed to the project and whose assistance will be duly acknowledged in Volume 2.

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CJC	Criminal Justice Commission
CRC	Criminology Research Council
CRISP	Crime Recording Information System for Police
CSAIU	Child and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit
DCS	Department of Corrective Services
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking
Forde Inquiry	Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions
FYCCQ	Families, Youth & Community Care Queensland
NCA	National Crime Authority
PJCNCA	Parliamentary Joint Committee of the National Crime Authority
QCC	Queensland Crime Commission
QCSC	Queensland Corrective Services Commission
QLRC	Queensland Law Reform Commission
QPS	Queensland Police Service
Smallbone and Wortley Study	Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Offender Characteristics and Modus Operandi
Wood Royal Commission	Commission of Inquiry into the New South Wales Police Service

Executive Summary

The Queensland Crime Commission (QCC) was established in 1998 to investigate major and organised crime in Queensland, and has a standing reference to investigate criminal paedophilia. Criminal paedophilia encompasses all offences of a sexual nature committed in relation to children, including offences relating to obscene material depicting children.

The QCC, jointly with the Queensland Police Service (QPS), established Project Axis as a wide-ranging inquiry into child sex offending in Queensland. This, the first of a two-volume public report on child sex offending, is one of several activities resulting from Project Axis, and addresses key issues relating to the nature and extent of the problem. Volume 2 of the report will examine the adequacy of current responses to child sex offending by government and the community generally.

This report draws on information collated from a wide variety of published and unpublished sources which has been compiled in a separate, and much more extensive law enforcement oriented document. This report also incorporates the findings of independent research into child sex offending undertaken by the Australian Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Griffith University, which was jointly funded by the QCC and the Criminology Research Council.

To accompany this report, the QCC has released two further publications:

- a collection of research papers prepared by individual academics entitled *Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Selected Research Papers*
- the full report of the research project undertaken by the Australian Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance entitled *Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Offender Characteristics and Modus Operandi* (the Smallbone and Wortley study).

Key findings

Reported and unreported child sexual abuse

- Research has estimated that between 7 and 45 per cent of females and between 3 and 19 per cent of males have been victims of sexual abuse during their childhood.
- Official data show that levels of reporting of child sex offences increased in the years 1995 and 1998.

- The majority of child sex offences reported to police are classified as indecent assaults on children. In prevalence studies, these activities are generally described as genital touching or exposure.

Victim characteristics

- Female children are particularly vulnerable to child sexual abuse, with 72 per cent of offences reported to QPS involving female children. However, the Smallbone and Wortley study suggests that male victimisation is underreported.
- Child sexual abuse mostly involves children aged 5 to 14 years, according to QPS and Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland data.
- Family and social background characteristics have been identified as risk factors for sexual victimisation. These include:
 - living with a non-biologically related adult male
 - living away from the mother
 - being socially isolated from peers
 - having a low family income
 - growing up in a small town
 - having a poor relationship with parents.
- Child sexual abuse is a fundamental predictor of poor physical and mental health and social functioning.

Offender characteristics

- Nearly all child sex offenders are males and range in age from 14 years to older than 73 years.
- Child sex offenders are most likely to be known to their victims and to perpetrate abuse in their own or their victim's home.
- The average number of victims of offenders who abuse children within their families (intra-familial offenders) is generally small, although these offenders abuse their victims over a longer period and perpetrate the highest number of abusive acts per child.

- The average number of victims of extra-familial offenders (who abuse children outside the family) is higher than intra-familial offenders, although these offenders commit fewer abusive acts per child over a shorter period of time.
- Mixed-type offenders (who offend within and outside the family) were the smallest group in Smallbone and Wortley's study. However, the average number of victims for this group is highest and these offenders commit a high number of abusive acts per victim over long periods of time.
- 'Specialisation' in sex offending is not as common as once thought. Many child sex offenders have previously been convicted for other non-sexual criminal offences.
- Studies show that child sex offenders often come from disruptive or dysfunctional family environments, and studies show that some child sex offenders disproportionately report having been sexually abused as children.

Targeting children for sexual contact

- Offenders most often seek victims close to home. For intra-familial offenders this clearly involves their own children. Extra-familial and mixed-type offenders seek victims among the children of friends, or other children with whom they already have some social relationship. Mixed-type offenders were more likely than other offenders to seek children in public locations such as public toilets and parks.
- While a fifth of offenders found victims within organisations with which they were involved, relatively few offenders reported joining the organisation for the specific purpose of locating victims.
- The most commonly reported strategies for gaining time alone with a child revolve around domestic routine, emphasising the close-to-home nature of child sexual abuse. Strategies reported by mixed-type offenders to get time alone with a child suggest that this group engage in a higher degree of planning for their offending, compared to intra-familial and extra-familial offenders.

The 'grooming' of children for sexual contact

- Offenders report that gaining the trust of a child is more commonly achieved through forming an emotional relationship with the child rather than buying the child's trust with gifts.
- Offenders engage in a gradual process of desensitising the child to sexual activity by progressively exposing them to sexual touching or to pornography. For offenders who abuse children outside their families, many report having known the child for more than six months before initiating sexual contact.

Disclosure of child sexual abuse

- Prevalence studies suggest that about half of the victims of child sexual abuse never report the abuse to another person.
- Less than a fifth of those who report abuse to police do so within a month of the incident, according to QPS data. Many will not disclose until they reach adulthood.
- Data indicate that less serious offences, and offences committed by someone unknown to the child, are more likely than other offences to be disclosed at the time of the incident.
- QPS data indicate that male victims are less likely to report incidents within a year (34%) than females (46%).
- There are many reasons why children fail to disclose abuse, including: a failure to recognise the activity as abnormal or abusive; fear, embarrassment or shame; or a lack of skills to communicate the abuse. In addition, offenders often employ a range of strategies to prevent the child from disclosing.
- Most children who do disclose sexual abuse tell their mothers first. However, relatively few complaints are made to an official agency such as police.

Associations among offenders

- The available evidence in Australia and elsewhere suggests that most child sex offenders offend in isolation and there is little, if any, identifiable organised offending.
- There is general acceptance that networks of child sex offenders, primarily social and informal in nature, do exist in Australia and in Queensland, but most networking does not usually lead to the commission of joint sex offences against children.
- Prisons provide an environment in which some child sex offenders establish contact with other offenders, and these friendships or associations are often maintained after release from prison.
- Child sex promotion groups, which were a popular means of maintaining contact among offenders in the 1980s, no longer appear to operate in any formalised manner.
- The Internet is increasingly used by child sex offenders to facilitate networking, mainly for the distribution and exchange of child pornography.

Implications of the findings

Improving disclosure

The low level of disclosure of child sexual abuse is one of the central impediments to agencies in providing appropriately targeted responses to the problem. There are a range of strategies which may improve rates of disclosure by victims, including providing children with education about appropriate physical and sexual behaviour. In addition, increasing the community's confidence in the outcomes of reporting child sexual abuse officially may also improve disclosure.

Focusing on prevention

Prevention of child sexual abuse is perhaps the most important response to the problem, and several important ways of achieving this is through:

- education of parents and children about child sex offending and offenders' modus operandi, although care is required to avoid high levels of paranoia in the community
- targeting of particularly vulnerable children for inclusion in programs aimed at improving their social and emotional well-being
- targeting of particularly dysfunctional or disruptive families for strategies aimed at reducing the risk of children developing generally delinquent behaviour, which may lead to them, as adults, offending against children.

Strategies aimed at offenders

There is no single strategy that will stop all individuals offending against children. This report has demonstrated that there are discrete sub-types of offenders, motivated differently, each group requiring specially tailored treatment responses. Serial offenders with a clear sexual preference for children will require quite a different approach to one-off offenders. The following initiatives aimed at discouraging potential offenders could be considered:

- encouraging offenders to avoid factors in their immediate environments, such as pornography or being alone with a child, that may trigger unwanted sexual feelings
- using public television as a medium for intervention, especially in light of Smallbone and Wortley's findings that watching television with potential victims is a common feature of grooming.

Community responses

A final strategy to prevent child sex offending is to create an underlying community environment that is intolerant of activities of this nature and supportive of victims. It is hoped that the Project Axis report will assist the community to develop an appropriate social climate.

Further research

Several issues identified in this report indicate a need for more research on child sex offending, particularly:

- surveying a large, randomly selected sample of the population in Queensland at regular intervals to gather more information about victims, offenders and incidents that have occurred locally, and to gauge the effectiveness of relevant services and prevention strategies
- surveying male victims of child sexual abuse to discover the impediments to disclosure experienced by boys
- conducting research with male victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to identify risk factors for boys
- research with offenders to gather more detailed information about what made individuals cease their offending behaviour
- research with specific groups of offenders, such as intra-familial offenders, which may lead to better targeting of prevention and treatment programs.

Chapter one

Introduction

The Queensland Crime Commission (QCC) was established by the *Crime Commission Act 1997* (the Act). Its core function is to investigate major and organised crime referred to it by its nine member Management Committee.¹ The QCC also has a standing reference to investigate criminal paedophilia.

Background to the QCC's work on criminal paedophilia

In the years immediately prior to the establishment of the QCC, the problem of paedophilia had received significant attention in Queensland. There were a number of factors that contributed to this high level of consciousness about paedophilia, including:

- The Commission of Inquiry into the New South Wales Police Service (Wood Royal Commission) which began on 18 March 1996 in New South Wales and which revealed allegations that high ranking individuals were involved in paedophilia and that some corrupt practices existed between serving police officers and paedophiles (Wood 1997).
- Newspaper articles which examined the history of paedophilia in Queensland, drawing parallels with the circumstances of the Wood Royal Commission, particularly alleged social and political failures to address the issue (see for example 'Evil fed by adults who ignore it', *The Courier Mail*, 30 Mar. 1996).
- Allegations reported in April 1996 that former wards of the State who had been sexually abused as children would launch a class action against the Queensland Government (*The Courier Mail*, 11 Apr. 1996). These allegations subsequently resulted in the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions (Forde Inquiry).
- The introduction in May 1996 of a Bill to establish the Children's Commission with a range of functions directed at supporting vulnerable children and, in particular, to accept and research complaints of paedophilia and child abuse. The Children's Commission was subsequently established in September 1996 by the *Children's Commission and Children's Services Appeals Tribunals Act 1996*.

¹ The QCC's Management Committee consists of: the Crime Commissioner as Chair; the Police Commissioner; the Chairperson of the Criminal Justice Commission; the Chairperson of the National Crime Authority; the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee; the Children's Commissioner; and two community representatives, one of whom has a civil liberties background.

- The publication in August 1997 of the Children’s Commission report, *Paedophilia in Queensland*.²
- A series of newspaper articles and radio interviews that aired allegations of a police cover-up of paedophile activities at about the same time as the Children’s Commission report was produced. For example, on ABC radio, a former staff member of the Children’s Commission stated that the Commission had received evidence from a police officer concerning various police operations in Queensland, one of which involved the seizure of a snuff movie. He stated that the movie depicted a child being sodomised and disembowelled and that the movie had been made on the banks of the Brisbane River at Pinkenba. It was also asserted that an investigation of the matter had identified a ring of paedophiles but no action was taken and the investigation had been aborted. These allegations were subsequently published in *The Courier Mail*, which had in the previous week published a number of other allegations about police cover-ups (*Inquiry into Allegations of Misconduct in the Investigation of Paedophilia in Queensland: Kimmins Report*, CJC, August 1998) (the Kimmins report).
- Allegations by the then Member for Whitsunday that a range of paedophile-related activity was taking place in Whitsunday resorts, and that police may have been protecting it since the early 1990s (the Kimmins report).

Throughout 1996 the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) was considering whether to undertake an investigation into child sex offending. The jurisdiction of the CJC was limited to investigating child sex offending that constituted official misconduct or major or organised crime which could not be effectively dealt with by the police service. The CJC had determined that, in respect of the major or organised crime aspect, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) was adequately responding to allegations of paedophilia. The CJC contributed to QPS intelligence reviews and considered that it fulfilled its statutory responsibility of overseeing the QPS in that respect.

In August 1997, the CJC and the QPS established a joint task force, Project Triton, to examine allegations of official misconduct connected with paedophile allegations. The allegations included those raised by the former staff member of the Children’s Commission, those raised in *The Courier Mail* and those raised by the Member for Whitsunday, which implied cover-ups of paedophilia and impropriety by public officials at all levels over many years, particularly from the early 1980s onwards. Project Triton resulted in the publication of the Kimmins report.

The Kimmins report found that, while the allegations of police cover-ups received widespread and prominent publicity, upon investigation not one allegation had substance in fact. In many instances, the report noted, the allegations did not bear ‘the slightest scrutiny’ (Kimmins report 1998, p.ix).

² The Children’s Commission was asked by the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care to report to the Parliament on paedophilia in Queensland within 12 months of its establishment. The Children’s Commission does not have an ongoing responsibility to report annually on paedophilia.

It should be noted that the Project Triton Investigation was limited in its terms of reference, described by Mr Mulholland QC³ as follows:

I wish to make it perfectly clear at the outset that the matters comprising the five references in the Project Triton investigation are not concerned with the question whether there is or was substance in the particular allegations of paedophilia. The Project Triton investigation is concerned with whether police officers have failed to investigate certain allegations of such activities or covered them up — matters plainly within the jurisdiction of the Commission (Kimmins report 1998, p. 1–2).

Because of the jurisdictional constraints of the CJC, Project Triton did not investigate whether or not there was any organised or networked child sex offending in Queensland.

In the context of the public debate about these startling allegations in 1996–97, a proposal for the creation of the QCC was put forward. The pursuit of paedophilia was given particular significance by the Parliament. Firstly, Parliament recognised that there was a need ‘to more proactively address this abhorrent criminal activity’ (Cooper, MLA 1997, p. 4109). In addition, for the first time it acknowledged that uncovering the ‘complex, secretive and sophisticated curtain of organised crime and paedophilia, particularly networked paedophile groups’ specifically demanded the application of extraordinary powers by a specialist law enforcement agency in order to have a significant impact in this area. Finally, the Parliament determined that the investigation of paedophilia was of such importance that it conferred a standing reference from the QCC’s Management Committee for the investigation of criminal paedophilia. (Cooper, The Hon. T.R. MLA 1997, ‘Crime Commission Bill, Second Reading’, *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, Queensland Legislative Assembly, 30 Oct.).

Under the Act, criminal paedophilia is defined to mean activities involving offences of a sexual nature committed in relation to children, or offences relating to obscene material depicting children. This definition encompasses all child sex offences.⁴ For QCC purposes, a ‘paedophile’ and a ‘child sex offender’ are really one and the same.

Since its establishment, the QCC, jointly with the QPS, has performed the function of investigating child sex offending in Queensland with particular focus on organised and networked offending.

³ Mr Mulholland QC subsequently resigned and was replaced by Mr Kimmins.

⁴ Refer to Appendix 1 for a full description of child sex offences.

The roles of the QCC and QPS in investigating criminal paedophilia

The QPS has always had jurisdiction to investigate child sex offences in Queensland. In recognition of the prevalence of child sex offences and the particular difficulties associated with their investigation, the QPS has established the Child and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit (CSAIU) and Task Force Argos, which are specialist units dedicated to investigating complaints of child sexual abuse made to the QPS. Juvenile Aid Bureaux throughout the State also investigate allegations of child sexual abuse and draw upon the assistance of these specialist units where necessary.

These units predominantly conduct 'reactive' investigations into child sex offending in that they respond to complaints. The demands placed upon the CSAIU and the Task Force by the increase in complaints of child sexual abuse leave few, if any, resources to devote to a more proactive approach. Further, the QPS has access only to ordinary police powers in their investigations.

In contrast, the QCC is equipped with some special powers and uses these powers in proactive investigations of criminal paedophilia, especially organised or networked child sex offending. The QCC also has a broader jurisdiction than the QPS in some respects. For example, the QCC's charter extends to conducting investigations in relation to child sex offences where the offender, or the victim, is ordinarily resident in Queensland, regardless of where the offences actually take place.

The QPS contributes to QCC investigations by providing fully resourced police task forces to help with QCC investigations under arrangements between the Police Commissioner, the Crime Commissioner and the Management Committee.

The QCC and the QPS have developed a close working relationship in the investigation of child sex offences. Their approach is a cooperative and complementary one that avoids any confusion of roles and unnecessary duplication of scarce law enforcement resources and involves the development of a number of joint initiatives, such as Project Axis.

Overview of Project Axis

The QCC, jointly with the QPS, established Project Axis as a wide-ranging inquiry into child sex offending in Queensland. Project Axis' dominant purpose is to study the nature and extent of child sex offender activity (particularly the potential for repeat and multiple offending) within the State, assess its past, present and likely future impact, and develop better and more effective ways of dealing with it.

The project commenced with a law enforcement focus, and extended into a broader analysis of child sex offending and the responses to the problem by relevant government agencies, other institutions and the wider community.

Project Axis involves a combination of approaches to the problem:

- strategic intelligence and research activities
- tactical investigations.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Strategic intelligence and research activities inform and often generate tactical activities and, in turn, the tactical results guide future research and intelligence.

The intelligence and research activities of Project Axis were directed towards identifying and describing:

- the nature and prevalence of offending;
- the defining characteristics of offenders and their victims;
- patterns of offending, including methods used to target children;
- the relevant environmental or contextual factors that facilitate, or fail to inhibit, child sexual abuse.

Other research has focused on:

- the effectiveness of existing oversight and accountability systems within institutions whether state, church, or community, in preventing, or at least facilitating and encouraging the reporting of, child sexual abuse;
- the adequacy of the responses of the child protection and criminal justice systems;
- the current approaches to the treatment, rehabilitation, supervision and management of child sex offenders both in custody and in the community;
- identifying and assessing other approaches to the problem of child sexual abuse, both interstate and overseas, including systems for the registration and notification of offenders in the community.

The QCC and QPS recognise that their expertise is in law enforcement and that the issues raised by child sexual abuse exist in a much broader community context. Accordingly, a wide variety of sources have been used to gather information for the project. These are described below. Collectively, this information has been compiled in a separate, unpublished and much more extensive law enforcement oriented document that will be available as a resource for the QCC and QPS.

Public submissions

The QCC publicly launched Project Axis on 10 August 1998, when the Crime Commissioner invited the public to lodge submissions with the QCC on issues relating to child sexual abuse. Advertisements calling for submissions were also placed in *The Courier Mail*.⁵ The QCC conducted two information seminars to which 96 stakeholders were invited and 62 attended. The QCC also wrote directly to 174 relevant organisations and interested individuals requesting submissions on specific issues.

Project Axis received 28 submissions — 6 from individuals and 22 from organisations. A total of 97 calls were received from victims and members of the public on a dedicated phone line established for the purpose.

Accounts of victims/survivors

The QCC surveyed 104 adult survivors of child sexual abuse who completed a questionnaire about their experiences of child sexual abuse in Queensland (refer to Appendix 2 for a full description of the Project Axis survey of survivors). A number of these survivors agreed to be interviewed about their experiences. The project team also consulted closely with a number of victim support services. All victims/survivors who agreed to be involved were assured that their identities would be kept confidential, and that their responses would be used to inform Project Axis without disclosure of details likely to identify them.

The project team also sought information about young people involved in prostitution prior to 18 years of age. Information was received from young people who had been involved in prostitution, youth support services and Juvenile Aid Bureaux in Queensland.

⁵ The *Courier-Mail* is the only state-wide daily newspaper in Queensland.

Interviews with offenders

The QCC conducted interviews with 18 offenders in custody in south east Queensland, during which they were asked a broad range of questions about their offending behaviour. Participants in interviews have not been identified, and their identities are confidential to the QCC.

Law enforcement agencies' information

Project Axis has also had access to classified reports from law enforcement agencies. Much of the information in the law enforcement reports cannot be included in this public document, but the contextual and other knowledge gained increased the project team's knowledge about child sex offending throughout Australia and the efforts of law enforcement agencies to address the problem.

Examination of tactical investigations

Current and completed tactical investigations by the QCC and the QPS were examined to increase knowledge of the characteristics of offenders, victims and methods of offending in Queensland. In addition, this examination provided useful information on the effectiveness of investigative methods.

QCC investigative hearings

The QCC has the power to conduct investigative hearings. People reasonably suspected of having relevant information may be compelled to attend the hearings and can be directed to answer questions on oath. The investigative hearing power enables the QCC to obtain information from unwilling sources in cases where the receipt of information is justified by the balance of public considerations.

Self-incriminatory answers provided under compulsion are not admissible in later legal proceedings and therefore answers are not compelled unless there is no alternative. The QCC regards seriously any decision to use its coercive powers. Resort to the hearing power is reserved for those cases where less intrusive or less coercive means have not been, or are unlikely to be, effective.

It is important to note that any use of the QCC's coercive powers is subject to monitoring and review by the QCC Management Committee.

Investigative hearings were conducted into criminal paedophilia with a view to:

- advancing investigations into suspected child sex offenders;
- obtaining information about how child sex offenders operate — to assist investigative, research and intelligence activities.

The QCC privately questioned a number of convicted child sex offenders to gain a better insight into offenders' behaviour such as recruitment and grooming of victims, methods of identifying and gaining access to vulnerable children, and attitudes to victims. In addition, hearings assisted to identify another suspected child sex offender who has since been charged with child sex offences (refer to Operation Gecko on p. 95 of this report).

Information provided by independent schools, community groups and churches

Information on their policies and procedures for responding to allegations of child sexual abuse, either within or outside the institution, was provided by:

- fifty-five non-government schools

- fifty community and sporting organisations
- fourteen of the major churches and related institutions.

The organisations also provided information regarding any employment screening procedures for staff and volunteers whose work brings them into contact with children.

Review of literature

Project Axis has drawn on published research conducted in Australia and internationally to understand the nature of child sex offending. In particular, previous studies of victims and offenders have provided important detail about child sexual abuse which is unavailable in official statistics.

Academic contributions

Project Axis has adopted a collaborative approach with academics who have specialist knowledge in the area of child sexual abuse, in order to enhance law enforcement knowledge and understanding of broader issues that impact on such offending. This collaboration has resulted in the production of a companion publication to this volume, containing selected research papers contributed to Project Axis.

Information from relevant government agencies

Information has been provided by a range of government agencies including the QPS, Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland (FYCCQ), the Department of Justice and the Attorney-General, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Department of Corrective Services (DCS),⁶ the Children's Commission of Queensland, Office of Economic and Statistical Research,⁷ Education Queensland, Queensland Health and the CJC. These agencies have provided:

- data on a range of issues concerning child sexual abuse
- information about policies and procedures regarding alleged or suspected child sex offending
- written contributions from a number of individual staff.

The contributions of agencies are noted in the Acknowledgements.

⁶ Formerly known as the Queensland Corrective Services Commission.

⁷ Formerly known as the Government Statistician's Office.

Review of legislation and proposals for reform in Queensland and in other jurisdictions

While Project Axis has been underway, the Queensland Parliament has introduced legislation relevant to child sexual abuse. For example, the *Child Protection Act 1999* was introduced late last year and further amendments were passed earlier this year. The Government has also circulated a draft of the *Commission for Children & Young People Bill 2000* which broadens existing provisions for screening of employees in child-related employment.

In addition, the Queensland Law Reform Commission (QLRC) is due to report on the receipt of children's evidence in the Queensland courts in the latter half of this year. Project Axis is liaising with the QLRC to ensure that the work on the Project is complementary to, and does not duplicate, the QLRC work.

Relevant legislation and reform proposals in other jurisdictions, such as the New South Wales *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998* and the United Kingdom *Protection of Children Act 1999*, have also been examined to assist in developing responses suitable to Queensland.

Reports by other Queensland agencies

As noted earlier in this chapter, the Children's Commission published a report, *Paedophilia in Queensland* (1997), which provided useful contextual information. Project Axis has given careful regard to its findings and Volume 2 of this report⁸ will look more closely at the implementation of those recommendations made by the Children's Commission.

Around the time that Project Axis was launched, the Forde Inquiry was established by the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services. The Forde Inquiry focused on all forms of child abuse, sexual and otherwise, occurring in licensed state and church-run institutions. The QCC liaised closely with the Forde Inquiry to ensure a cooperative and complementary approach. The findings of the Forde Inquiry will be considered in more detail in Volume 2 of this report.

Other Project Axis initiatives

Project Axis is the title given to the overarching project undertaken by the QCC and QPS on child sex offending in Queensland, and which comprises a number of subsidiary projects including:

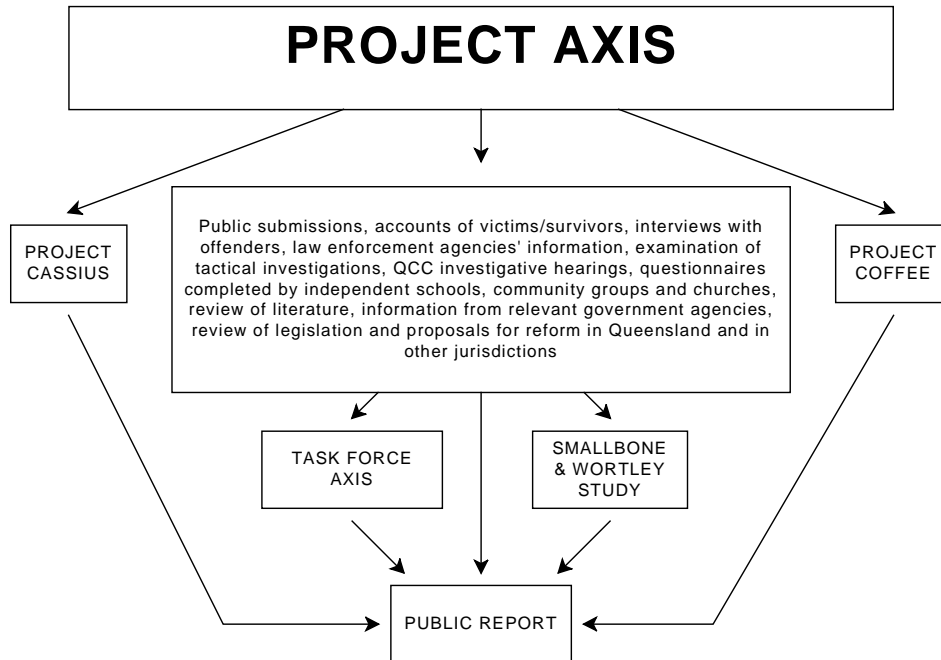
- Task Force Axis tactical investigations of serial child sex offenders;

⁸ See p. 14 for a description of the contents of Volumes 1 and 2.

- Project Cassius strategic intelligence assessment of networks of child sex offenders;
- Project Coffee tactical intelligence activities on Internet use by child sex offenders;
- QCC collaboration with the Criminology Research Council (CRC) and the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Griffith University, to conduct independent original research into child sex offenders in Queensland (the Smallbone & Wortley study);
- the production of this public report by the QCC and QPS on child sex offending.

The relationship between these activities is depicted in Figure 1 and each project is explained in more detail below.

Figure 1: Project Axis and associated initiatives



Task Force Axis

Task Force Axis was established by the QCC and QPS in January 1999 to extend investigations of tactical information received by Project Axis and to proactively target suspected serial extra-familial⁹ child sex offenders.

The QCC and QPS considered that this was the most appropriate use of task force resources given that:

⁹ Extra-familial offenders offend against children outside the family.

- CSAIU already investigates intra-familial¹⁰ child sex offending but due to its considerable workload, is presently forced to operate predominantly on a reactive rather than proactive basis. The nature of intra-familial offending makes it difficult to investigate proactively because society is unlikely to tolerate the use of intrusive proactive techniques within the home.
- serial extra-familial offenders — although as this report suggests, a relatively small proportion of the offender group — offend against a large number of victims.

As well as investigating serial child sex offenders, Task Force Axis provides an opportunity for the QCC and the QPS to cooperate in developing more effective policing strategies.

Tactical results to date

During the period May 1998 – May 2000, the QCC in partnership with the QPS, participated in 13 proactive operations under the criminal paedophilia reference. As a result of these investigations, 21 individuals have been charged with a combined total of nearly 600 offences.

To date, four of the 21 individuals have been convicted of the following offences relating to the sexual abuse of children:¹¹

- 2 counts of homosexual intercourse with a person under 12 years and 3 counts of sexual intercourse with a person under 12 years and in authority (NSW charges) — imprisoned for 11 years
- 5 counts of indecent dealing with a boy under 16 years and 8 counts of indecent dealing with a boy under 14 years — imprisoned for 6 years
- 5 counts of possession of a child abuse computer game — fined
- 1 count of possession of a child abuse computer game — fined

A further two offenders have been cautioned in relation to the following child sex offences:

- 1 count of making a child abuse computer game, 1 count of sale of an objectionable computer game, and 2 counts of possession of child abuse material
- 1 count of possession of a child abuse computer game.

Two offenders were also convicted of drug offences. In addition, more than 500 criminal charges relating to child sex offences are pending against 13 individuals.¹²

¹⁰ Intra-familial offenders offend within the family.

¹¹ See Appendix 1 for description of child sex offences.

Project Cassius — a strategic intelligence assessment

As the original concept of Project Axis broadened, the QCC and QPS initiated a second project under the Axis umbrella — Project Cassius — which commenced in December 1999. The project aims to determine the nature and extent of identifiable networks and organised offenders and will provide advice to the law enforcement community on these and related issues. It will examine the factors that facilitate the establishment of networks and communication within networks in order to develop new investigative methodologies for targeting these offenders.

The project team conducted extensive consultations with State and Federal law enforcement agencies to gather existing intelligence on networked and organised offenders. The team will produce a restricted law enforcement report in the latter half of 2000. Where possible, preliminary results of Project Cassius have been included in this report.

Tactical targeting and investigations by the QCC and QPS based on intelligence developed by the Project Cassius team are carried out on an ongoing basis.

Project Coffee

In mid-1999, the QCC commenced a proactive project to examine the use of the Internet by child sex offenders. The project aims to covertly identify, locate and prosecute active child sex offenders and their networks who are using the Internet to commit, organise or aid in the commission of child sex related offences or recruitment of victims. The Project liaises with other law enforcement agencies within Australia and overseas to identify persons who are producing and distributing child pornography in the form of videos, photographs or computer images. Project Coffee will also assess the appropriateness or effectiveness of relevant legislation and make submissions to Parliament in relation to any legislative deficiencies.

Collaborative survey of offenders: the Smallbone and Wortley study

In September 1998, the QCC approached the Australian Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance at Griffith University to discuss the possibility of collaborative research focused on child sexual abuse. In accordance with the QCC's charter to investigate criminal paedophilia, discussion focused on current gaps in empirical knowledge about the perpetrators of child sexual abuse. It was clear that, while further intelligence about the activities of child sex offenders was needed to support efforts in the detection and prosecution of offenders, a broader strategy that included primary and secondary prevention would require more detailed and reliable data than were

¹² Considerations such as the need to avoid prejudicial pretrial publicity and the confidentiality of law enforcement methodologies make it inappropriate to provide more detail in relation to the matters mentioned.

presently available. In particular, it was agreed that detailed information on the background, characteristics, and modus operandi of child sex offenders was urgently needed. In addition, and in accordance with the QCC's charter to investigate organised crime, it was agreed that information on networking and collaboration among convicted child sex offenders was essential.

In February 1999, an application was made to the CRC for partial funding of the study, the balance of which was provided by the QCC. The CRC application was successful, and the project — conducted by the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance — proceeded on the basis of joint funding from the QCC and the CRC.

The project, conducted by Dr Stephen Smallbone and Dr Richard Wortley, involved a descriptive study of 323 males convicted in Queensland of child sex offences. The principal purpose of the study was to gather and analyse various data on a large number of convicted child sex offenders, and to consider the findings in terms of their implications for the prevention, detection, and investigation of child sexual abuse in Queensland. It is important to note that, while the study was commissioned by the QCC, the study was conducted independently of the QCC.

The survey of offenders has several strengths in comparison to many similar studies in that:

- the sample was not limited to offenders participating in treatment programs
- demographic and offence history data were collected on all 323 offenders
- extensive self-report data was provided by 182 of the offenders¹³
- it was made clear to the 182 offenders that their responses could not affect any decisions made about their incarceration, in order to limit the potential for offenders to misrepresent themselves
- the reliability of the responses¹⁴ was tested and the study showed moderate to high levels of agreement over time.

The methodology employed for the project is described in Appendix 2 of this report.

The results of the study, referred to in this report as the Smallbone and Wortley study, have been used extensively throughout this report. The full report on the project, entitled *Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Offender Characteristics and Modus Operandi*, is available from the QCC, and the executive summary can be accessed via the QCC web site www.crimecom.qld.gov.au.

¹³ Participants were offered anonymity and were informed that, in any case, all information would be treated confidentially, and that no identifying information would be revealed outside the research team. It was made clear to participants that the research team was independent of the DCS.

¹⁴ They did this by asking a number of respondents to complete the same questionnaire a second time two months later.

Limitations of this report

This report does not specifically explore child sexual abuse in either indigenous or ethnic communities, nor abuse of intellectually disabled children. This is by no means to detract from the importance of these issues. However, this project has taken a broad approach to the issue of child sex offending in Queensland, and the QCC and QPS alone do not have the specialist skills needed to fully investigate the special nature of these offences.

The QCC acknowledges anecdotal reports of a concerning rise in abuse in indigenous communities. It is also aware that unemployment, violence, health, cultural, historical and social issues must feature in any consideration of the responses to child sexual abuse.

At the commencement of Project Axis, the QCC made contact with a number of indigenous organisations. However, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence was later established to identify and report on the specific factors contributing to violence and abuse against women and children in indigenous communities, strategies for dealing with violence, and the effectiveness of existing programs.

The Crime Commissioner, Mr Tim Carmody SC, and the Chairperson of the Task Force, Ms Boni Robertson have agreed to establish future partnerships between the Commission and the Gumurrii Centre.¹⁵ As a result of the release of the Task Force report late last year, a summit is to be convened to discuss strategies to manage and respond to abuse within the indigenous community.

The aim of this public report

This report, to be produced in two volumes, draws on the results of Project Axis research, strategic intelligence assessments and tactical operations to inform the community about child sex offending in Queensland. This, the first volume, addresses the following issues:

- the nature and extent of child sex offending in Queensland, presenting official data on child sex offending and the results of studies aimed at gauging the prevalence of child sexual abuse;
- the victims of child sexual abuse, including the age and gender of victims, the identification of risk factors and the effects of the abuse on victims;

¹⁵ The Gumurrii Centre is part of Griffith University, and provides additional tutoring and support services to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to undertake tertiary studies successfully.

- child sex offenders, including their age and gender, and the relationship between them and their victims;

- targeting and grooming tactics used by child sex offenders;
- victims' disclosure of child sexual abuse, including the number of victims who disclose, to whom they disclose and when, and responses to disclosure;
- associations among child sex offenders.

The second volume, to be produced shortly after this volume, will examine the adequacy of current responses to child sex offending by child protection agencies, law enforcement, the education system, community groups, the churches, the courts and corrective services systems and the community generally. Where appropriate, recommendations for reform will be made.

To accompany this report, the QCC has published a collection of research papers prepared by academics for Project Axis. These papers provide more detailed coverage of selected topics related to child sex offending. The document is entitled *Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Selected Research Papers* and is available from the QCC web site www.crimecom.qld.gov.au.

Chapter two

The nature and extent of child sex offending

Estimating the extent of child sex offending in the community is very difficult. The high level of under-reporting of sexual assault generally, and of child sexual abuse in particular, means the community may never know the 'true' extent of the problem.

This chapter presents the most reliable information available about the extent and nature of child sex offending in Queensland. It begins by describing some research which has attempted to gauge the 'true' extent of child sexual abuse in Queensland, Australia and internationally. It then presents data on the extent of 'reported' child sex offences in Queensland.

The prevalence of child sexual abuse

Crime victim surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) use large, random surveys of the general population to describe the extent in the general community of victimisation from certain crimes. These crime victim surveys ask female respondents about their experience of sexual assault, and have found a high degree of consistency over time in the reported incidence of sexual victimisation, at about 0.6 per cent of the female sample (Government Statistician's Office¹⁶ 1997). However, crime victim surveys conducted by the ABS only include adults in the survey sample and only ask females questions about 'sexual assault' generally, rather than about 'child sexual abuse' specifically.

Estimates of the extent of child sexual abuse come from research projects that employ a range of sampling techniques and aim to estimate the number of victims of child sexual abuse in the population. These are called prevalence studies. Prevalence studies invariably involve asking adults about sexual abuse that occurred in their childhood, and therefore rely on the accuracy of respondents' recollections and their willingness to disclose.

Prevalence studies

Table 1 presents the rates of child sexual abuse reported in 15 prevalence studies conducted in Australia and overseas. It is important to note that the wide variation in rates can be attributed to methodological differences between the studies (Leventhal 1998), such as:

¹⁶ Now known as the Office of Economic and Statistical Research.

- the sample surveyed (for example university students, women only);
- the response rate to the study;
- the method of data collection used in the study (for example, face to face or telephone interviews, postal surveys);
- the definition of child sexual abuse used in the study;
- the definition of childhood — that is, the age at which a person is considered a child;
- the accuracy of the memories of those surveyed;
- the willingness of those surveyed to disclose abusive experiences.

To illustrate the range of variation in methodology, sample source, response rates and definitions of abuse, Table 1 details each of these characteristics.

Table 1: Studies that aim to gauge the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the population

Study	Country	Definition of child sexual abuse	Sample characteristics and response rate (where reported)	% reporting abuse	
				Female	Male
Finkelhor 1979	USA	Sexual contact, exhibitionism or sexual overtures relating to children prior to age 17 involving a much older person	Students in social science classes in 6 New England schools (530 females, 266 males) — 68%	19	9
Russell 1983	USA	Exploitative or unwanted sexual experiences of children prior to age 18	Women residents of San Francisco (930 females) — 50%	38	–
Finkelhor 1984	USA	Sexual events prior to age 16	Representative households with children aged 6 to 14 years (334 females, 187 males) — 74%	15	6
Kercher & McShane 1984	USA	Sexual exploitation of children	Random sample of Texas residents who have a driver's licence (593 females, 461 males) — 53%	11	3
Sedney & Brooks 1984	USA	Contact and non-contact sexual experiences as a child	Volunteers through social science course and through campus advertisements (301 females)	16	–

Study	Country	Definition of child sexual abuse	Sample characteristics and response rate (where reported)	% reporting abuse	
				Female	Male
Baker & Duncan 1985	UK	Involvement of child in activity sexually stimulating to perpetrator prior to age 16	Representative national sample of persons 15 years and older (808 females, 745 males) — 87%	14	9
Timnick 1985	USA	Attempted or completed contact; taking nude photos; exhibitionism prior to 18 years	Random national telephone survey (1,252 females, 1,374 males)	27	16
Bagley & Ramsay 1986	Canada	At least manual assault on child's genital area prior to age 18	Stratified sample of western city (377 females) — 94%	22	—
Fromuth 1986	USA	Sexual events prior to age 17	College psychology students at Auburn University (482 females)	22	—
Siegel et al. 1987	USA	Pressured or forced to have sexual contact prior to age 16	Stratified sample of two Los Angeles mental health catchment areas (1,647 females, 1,480 males) — 68%	7	4
Briere & Runtz 1988	Canada	Sexual contact prior to age 15	College students (278 females)	15	—
Mullen et al. 1988	NZ	Genital contact prior to age 13	Random sample of five parliamentary constituencies (314 females) — 90%	10	—
Goldman & Goldman 1988	Aust	Sexual events prior to age 16	Social science students from 10 tertiary institutions in Victoria (603 females, 388 males) — about 90%	28	9
Fleming 1997	Aust	Unwanted sexual experiences with an adult prior to age 16 that involved some genital contact	Random sample of Australian females selected from the electoral roll (710 females) — 66%	20	—
Goldman & Padayachi 1997	Aust	Unwanted sexual acts prior to age 17	Social science students at the University of Queensland (287 females, 140 males)	45	19

Source: Leventhal 1990 (with additions).

These studies show that somewhere between 7 and 45 per cent of females, and 3 and 19 per cent of males, report having been victims of sexual abuse during their childhood. Several Queensland, Australian and international studies are described in more detail below.

Queensland prevalence figures

While research into the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Queensland is rare, there are several studies that warrant attention. A recent survey of 427 students by Goldman and Padayachi (1997) found that:

- Nineteen per cent of males and 45 per cent of females reported at least one unwanted sexual act prior to the age of 17. These unwanted sexual acts included non-contact abuse (such as photographing the child naked and exposing the child to genitalia), and activities such as sexual kissing and hugging. The rate drops by about 5 per cent for both males and females when non-contact incidents are excluded.
- Incestuous abuse¹⁷ was reported by 9 per cent of males and 19 per cent of females.
- The mean age of onset of unwanted sexual acts was 9.0 years for male and 9.9 years for female victims.
- Almost 80 per cent of all victims experienced the unwanted acts before they reached 13 years of age.

Another Brisbane study which has recently been finalised found that over half (55%) of the women in a sample of 400 clients of Family Planning Queensland had experienced an unwanted sexual event at least once before the age of 16 years (Ffrench & Dunne 1998; Legosz et al. unpublished). Of those women who reported having experienced an unwanted sexual event, only 36 per cent had told anyone of it prior to their disclosure during the research. Furthermore, only eight victims (3.5% of all victims) had complained to police.

Other Australian prevalence figures

A Victorian-based study of 991 tertiary students (Goldman & Goldman 1988) found that 28 per cent of females and 9 per cent of males reported incidents of sexual abuse as children, occurring at a mean age of 10.3 years for boys and 9.8 years for girls. These incidents predominantly involved touching or fondling in a sexual way.

¹⁷ Although the authors do not define this term, the context suggests that it means an unwanted sexual act perpetrated by a relative.

An Australian postal survey conducted by Fleming (1997) reported findings from a large study conducted in 1994 which was designed primarily to ascertain the prevalence of child sexual abuse among Australian women. Of the 710 women surveyed, 20 per cent reported having experienced child sexual abuse (defined as an unwanted sexual experience with an adult that involved some genital contact). A further 15 per cent reported some sexual experience that was unwanted or distressing during childhood, of which 3 per cent involved a peer.

International comparisons

International studies reveal a similar pattern to Australia-wide and Queensland-based studies — that is, that the rate of child sexual abuse is much higher than is generally detected or recorded in official statistics. For example:

- The National Victim Center has estimated that, in the United States, almost 700,000 women are raped each year and that 61 per cent of the victims are under the age of 18 (Browne & Finkelhor 1986).
- A random telephone survey of 2,000 children aged 10 to 16 years conducted in the United States found that at least 11 per cent of the respondents had experienced a sexual incident, with 7.5 per cent of respondents reporting genital violence¹⁸ (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman 1994).
- National random surveys from Barbados, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United States revealed that between 27 per cent and 34 per cent of women interviewed had been sexually abused during childhood (Handwerker 1993; Hankell & Randall 1993; Draaijer 1988; Martin et al. 1993; Schei 1990; Lewis 1985; Finkelhor et al. 1990).

Data on child sex offences

This section presents a CJC analysis of QPS data on reported child sex offences in Queensland.

All offences reported to, or detected by, police are recorded on the Crime Recording Information System for Police (CRISP). CRISP is an electronic, relational database that replaced the existing paper-based crime reporting system at the QPS in 1994. CRISP came on-line state-wide in December 1994.

¹⁸ Sexual incidents were defined as: (1) serious non-contact incidents, which included a perpetrator touching the child in a sexual way (but without contact with the genitals) or exposing him/herself to the child; (2) contact incidents, which included a perpetrator touching the sexual parts of a child, penetrating the child or engaging in any oral-genital contact with the child. Genital violence was defined as any episode involving actual violent contact with the child's genitals.

Data from CRISP were provided by the Expert Support Unit, QPS to the CJC. The CJC requested all reported cases of sexual offences where the complainant was aged 16 years and under at the time of the first offence for the years 1994¹⁹ to 1998. The data included:

¹⁹ As the CRISP system was not fully operational state-wide until December 1994, reported offence data for 1994 are incomplete. 1994 data have been excluded from any trend analysis but included and noted where data are aggregated.

- the type of offence
- the number of charges and actions undertaken
- police details (such as region, unit and officer number)
- offender and complainant details (such as gender, birth date, and the relationship between the individuals concerned).

All substantiated (either solved or unsolved), unsubstantiated and withdrawn offences were included in the analysis, while cancelled offences²⁰ were excluded.

It is important to understand the rules used by the QPS for counting sexual offences. Each separate encounter between an offender and a victim may result in one or more offences. Where it results in a single offence, the QPS counts one offence. However, where a single incident occurring at a specific time and place includes several offences — such as one offence of rape and two offences of indecent assault — only the most serious offence (in this case rape) will be counted by the QPS.

An offender may commit numerous offences against the same victim. Where the offending incidents occur at different times or places, the most serious offence for each incident is counted.

The effect of QPS counting rules for sexual offences is that the data represent the number of *offences* reported to police, rather than the number of *victims* or *offenders*. This means that a count of 10 offences may involve a combination ranging from 10 victims and 10 offenders, to a single victim and a single offender. Further, each ‘counted’ offence may have been committed in conjunction with other less serious offences which remain ‘uncounted’.

Limitations of QPS data²¹

As noted above, CRISP is an operational system and was not designed for research or statistical purposes. Accordingly, there are limitations associated with the use of CRISP data, and the analysis and interpretation of these data should be viewed with caution. Several key limitations are described below.

First and foremost, the state-wide, staged introduction of CRISP was not completed until December 1994, which means that CRISP data for 1994 are incomplete. For this reason, 1994 data have been excluded from analysis of trends, although they have been included where data are aggregated. In addition, 1995 CRISP data may underestimate the number of offences reported to police due to issues associated with the implementation of the new system.

²⁰ An offence is cancelled when a report has been entered in error.

²¹ The QPS are taking steps to address some of these data problems.

The rules governing police use of CRISP require certain fields to be completed, while other fields are optional. For example, while the age of the offender must be recorded by police, the age of the complainant is an optional data field (although police are encouraged to record this information). In the CJC analysis of QPS data, 27,073 sexual offences were identified for the years 1994–1998, but 6,450 had missing data relating to the age of the complainant. The offences with missing age data were excluded from the analysis due to the risk of mis-classification, but it is likely that a proportion of these offences involved children. Hence, the analyses presented in this report will be an underestimate of the extent of reported child sexual abuse in Queensland in the relevant period.

The age of the complainant as listed in the police data has been used for deciding which offences to include in analyses presented in this report. However, the CJC has expressed some concerns about the accuracy of the recorded age,²² and this may also affect the extent to which the data reflect the level of reported child sexual abuse.

Finally, as noted earlier, CRISP counts the number of offences, not the number of complainants or offenders. Accordingly, each offence will include a victim and an offender. This will overestimate the number of complainants and offenders, as some of them may have been the subject of more than one counted offence. This should be borne in mind when interpreting the QPS data on the characteristics of victims and offenders presented in this report.

Care is required in drawing conclusions from QPS data because of the above limitations. However, as QPS data are the best source of information available about officially reported child sex offences, they have been presented in this report and, where available, other data have been used to provide some validation for conclusions drawn. In particular, data from FYCCQ have been included in this chapter.

It must be noted that FYCCQ data do not relate to ‘offences’ as such, but to substantiated notifications of child sexual abuse. A matter constitutes a substantiated notification when a child has suffered harm, or is at risk of harm due to the action or inaction of a parent, care provider or person living in the child’s home. The number of substantiated notifications of child sexual abuse made to FYCCQ for the financial years 1993–94 to 1997–98 was provided by the Office of Child Protection. The data included information about the age and sex of notifications for the most recent year (1997–98).

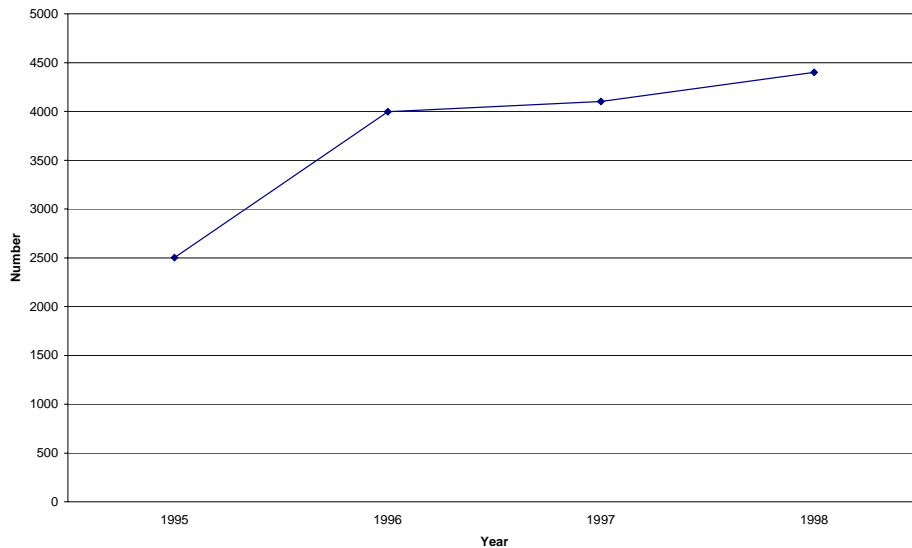
Number of reported offences

Figure 2 presents the number of sexual offences against children reported to the QPS between 1995 and 1998. It shows that in 1998 there were 4,402 child sex offences reported to the QPS, and that there has been an increase in the number of sexual

²² Calculations undertaken by the CJC on the age of the victim (by subtracting the complainant’s date of birth from the date of the first reported offence) produced results at variance with the police data. In at least half of the cases the age in the police database varied by one year or more from that calculated manually.

offences against children reported in Queensland since 1995 when there were 2,502 offences reported. Figure 2 also shows that there was a large increase in the number of reported offences in 1996. This increase reflects a large number of offences of previous abuse by two serial child sex offenders who were apprehended in that year.²³ This may help to explain the sharp increase in reported offences between 1995 and 1996.

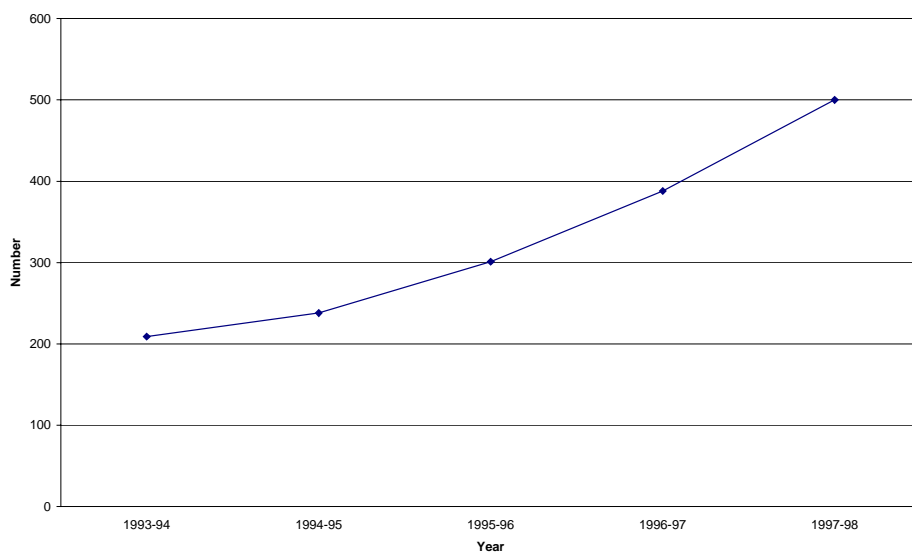
Figure 2: Number of reported sexual offences against children — 1995–1998



Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data

Figure 3 shows that the number of notifications of child sexual abuse made to FYCCQ for the period 1993–94 (209 notifications) to 1997–98 (500 notifications) has steadily increased, although the numbers are much smaller than those reported to police.

Figure 3: Number of substantiated notifications of child sexual abuse — 1993–94 to 1997–98



²³ It is estimated that the number of offences relating to these two offenders was in the vicinity of 1,000 offences.

Source: FYCCQ, unpublished data

An increase in the number of offences reported to police does not necessarily indicate an increase in actual offending. The increase, or part of the increase, may be the result of a change in reporting behaviour. Reporting of offences may be affected by several factors, including changes in:

- The perception by members of the community as to whether an actual offence has taken place or whether it is serious enough to report to the police. These perceptions may change over time and greater community awareness may increase reporting.
- Confidence in the response of the criminal justice system. Those who have little faith in the system may not report offences to the police and a growth in confidence may result in an increase in reporting.
- The availability of crime compensation to victims. Greater availability may encourage more reporting.
- The number of agencies available in the community to support victims. An increase in victim support services may result in increased reporting.
- The stigma attached to victims of sexual offences. Greater community awareness of victims of child sexual abuse may increase the likelihood that offences will be reported.

In addition, two major public activities regarding child sex offending occurred in Queensland during the time the data were collected for this report and may have impacted on reporting rates. These were:

- Operation Paradox, a national community awareness campaign against child sexual abuse in Australia, conducted by the QPS in Brisbane in September 1997. It aimed to increase community awareness of child sexual abuse and the role police play in protecting children at risk.²⁴
- A special child sexual abuse hotline instituted by the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care²⁵ during a four month period in 1996. More than 400 phone calls were received by the hotline. Twenty-eight cases were referred to the police and two to the CJC. Nearly 70 per cent of callers to the hotline were adults reporting abuse experienced during their childhood, among them a number who alleged abuse while residents in the 1950s and 1960s at St. Joseph's Home at Neerkol near Rockhampton.

²⁴ See p. 88 for further details of Operation Paradox.

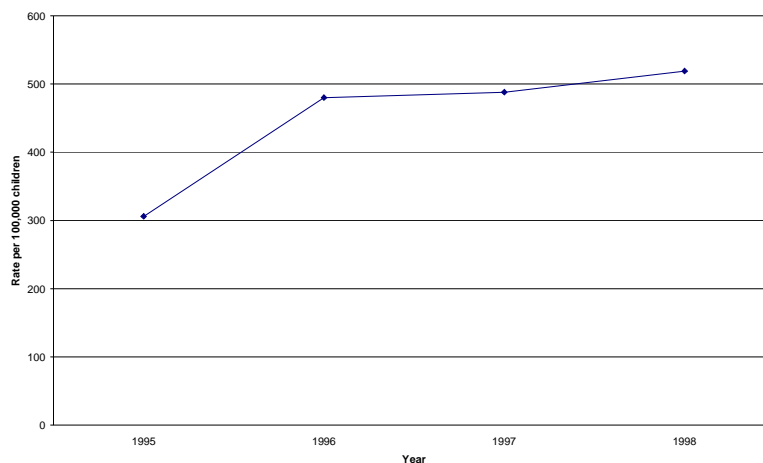
²⁵ Now known as FYCCQ.

Finally, the Wood Royal Commission investigation into paedophilia in New South Wales in 1996 gained significant media attention in Queensland and may also have affected rates of reporting child sex offences.

Rate of offending

The number of reported child sex offences and notifications for child sexual abuse should be compared with the total population of Queensland children to assess whether the increasing number of reported offences is simply an effect of an increase in the population. Figure 4 shows that the rate per 100,000 Queensland children of reported child sex offences increased from 306 to 519 during the period 1995–1998. Figure 5 shows that the rate of substantiated notifications for child sexual abuse increased from 25 to 56 per 100,000 Queensland children during the period 1993–1994 to 1997–1998.

Figure 4: Rate of reported child sex offences per 100,000 Queensland children — 1995–98

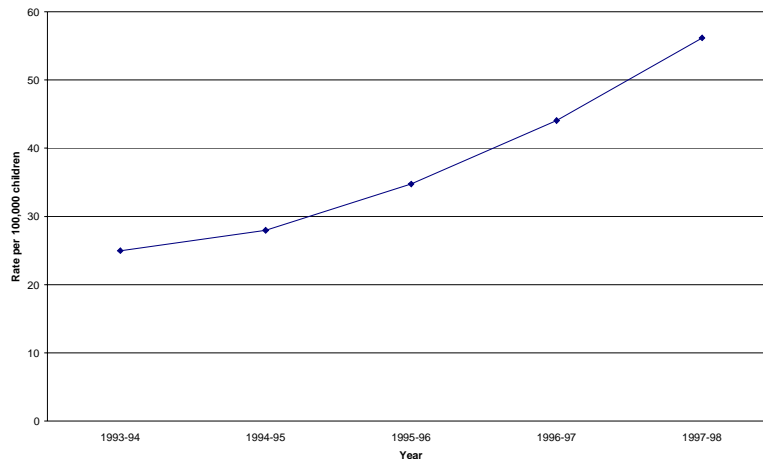


Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data; ABS 1997b, 1998, 1999.

Note:

1. See text preceding Fig. 2 for a possible explanation for the sharp increase in reported offences from 1995 to 1996.
2. Population data included all children aged 16 years and under for each year.

Figure 5: Rate of substantiated notifications for child sexual abuse per 100,000 Queensland children — 1993–94 to 1997–98



Source: FYCCQ, unpublished data; ABS 1997b, 1998, 1999.

Note:

1. Population data included all children aged 17 years and under for each year.

Nature of offences

Child sexual abuse prevalence studies have identified a range of offending behaviour engaged in by adults against children, including:

- taking nude photographs of children
- sexual hugging or kissing
- exposure of genitals
- touching or fondling of genitals or breasts (of either child or adult)
- simulated or attempted penetration
- full penetration.

The most commonly reported type of abuse of both males and females was genital touching, by the child or the adult, and the least commonly reported activity was full penetration (Goldman & Goldman 1988; Goldman & Padayachi 1997; Fleming 1997; Ffrench & Dunne 1998).

Table 2 lists the types of experiences reported by respondents to two surveys — Fleming 1997 and Ffrench and Dunne 1998. The same questionnaire was used in both surveys, so the responses can be compared, although different sampling techniques and methodology were used. The table shows that experiences reported by both samples are remarkably close, with exposure or touching of genitalia the most commonly reported incidents.

Table 2: Type of sexual experiences reported in two Australian surveys

Sexual experience	Per cent of sample	
	Fleming 1997 (national survey)	Ffrench & Dunne 1998 (Queensland survey)
Exposed genitalia to them	24	24
Masturbated in front of them	7	9
Tried to sexually arouse them	15	12
Touched breast/genitalia	27	21
Made them arouse perpetrator	14	9
Rubbed genitals against body	17	13
Touched victim's genitals with mouth	3	4
Attempted vaginal intercourse	12	4
Vaginal intercourse	7	9
Attempted anal intercourse	1	4
Anal intercourse	1	1
Other sexual experience	6	1

Source: Fleming 1997; Ffrench & Dunne 1998

QPS data presented in Table 3 show that the most common offence reported to police between 1994 and 1998 was 'indecent assault on children'²⁶ which accounted for over three quarters of all reported child sex offences. Rape, unlawful carnal knowledge and incest formed the next highest categories of child sex offences, together representing 11.5 per cent of all reported offences against children.

²⁶ The category 'indecent assault on children' includes: carnal knowledge by anal intercourse of any person not an adult; permit a male person not an adult to have carnal knowledge of him or her by anal intercourse; defile by threats, fraud, drugs (including alcohol); without legitimate reason, wilfully expose a child under the age of 16 to any indecent object or indecent film, videotape, audiotape, picture, photograph or printed or written matter; wilfully expose a child to pornography; without legitimate reason, take any indecent photograph or record, by any means of any device, any indecent visual image of a child; indecent treatment of children under 16. See Appendix 1 for further description of these offences.

Table 3: Number and proportion of reported child sex offences by type of offence — 1994–98

Offence	Number of offences	Per cent
Indecent assault on children	12,348	78.3
Rape	1,080	6.8
Wilful obscene behaviour	757	4.8
Unlawful carnal knowledge	550	3.5
Sexual offences — consent proscribed	252	1.6
Sexual offences (other)	227	1.4
Incest	184	1.2
Indecent assault on adults	165	1.0
Attempted rape	115	0.7
Assault with intent to commit rape	54	0.3
Indecent practices between males	21	0.1
Indecent assault (other)	17	0.1
Procuring prostitution	3	–
Bestiality	1	–
Total	15,774	100.0

Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data

Note:

1. Data presented here include offences reported to the QPS in 1994. As the CRISP system was not fully operational state-wide until December 1994, reported offence data for 1994 are incomplete.
2. The offences of 'indecent assault on adults' and 'bestiality' were included in the analysis as the complainants in these cases were, according to CRISP, less than 16 years of age at the time of the first offence.

The Smallbone and Wortley study²⁷ asked child sex offenders the nature of the sexual acts they performed on their child victims. The most commonly reported activities were touching the genitals, breasts or buttocks of the victim, engaging in oral sex with the victim, or rubbing their penis against the body of the victim. In addition, about two-thirds of offenders reported they had the child touch the offender's penis. More intrusive offences were reported by nearly half of offenders (for example, 44% of offenders reported that they put their finger into the vagina of the victim).

Other child sex offences

There are two areas of child sex offending which are not well covered in the prevalence studies or in the reported offences. These are described below:

Child prostitution

While child sex offences generally are underreported, child prostitution is particularly so because the child involved in prostitution is usually also committing an offence. There

²⁷ The Smallbone and Wortley study is described in Chapter 1 of this report and again in Appendix 2.

are some cases, such as a recent Queensland case,²⁸ where the child's involvement in prostitution is a result of coercion by family members or others, and forms part of a larger pattern of child sex offending. However, research in Queensland confirms findings in Australia generally that child prostitution is mostly opportunistic in nature.

Project Axis sought information from young people²⁹ engaged in sex for favours, youth outreach and community health services and police throughout the State. The findings confirmed those of the End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking (ECPAT) report (1998) and other reports:

- there is little evidence of organised child prostitution in Australia;
- most young people engage in sex for favours or for survival, exchanging sex for food, accommodation or drugs;
- the young people engaging in such activities tend to be homeless, unemployed or from dysfunctional family backgrounds, and may have a history of physical or sexual abuse. Many also engage in a high level of drug use.

Queensland agencies reported in 1998 that they were aware of 127 children or young people who were known to engage in commercial sexual activities,³⁰ and a further 193 whose involvement was suspected (ECPAT 1998). More recently, reports to Project Axis suggest that there are currently about 112 known cases of youth involvement in prostitution in Queensland. Despite the introduction of legislation legalising brothels in Queensland, prostitution involving a child remains a very serious criminal offence.

Child sex tourism

Child sex tourism refers to the activities of those who travel to other countries, especially Third World countries, for the purpose of engaging in sex with children. This is a growing international problem and there is evidence that some Australians are engaged in this activity. As the activities occur overseas, offences of this nature are not represented in reported offences in Queensland. However, a number of offenders are resident in Queensland, and local law enforcement agencies have a role to play in dealing with the global problem.

Child sex tourism is a growing problem in Asia, and Thailand is described as the 'trafficking hub' of Asia. It is difficult to gauge the true extent of the problem but it has been estimated that between 200,000 and 800,000 children in Thailand alone are victims. The victims of child sex tourism are often forced or sold into prostitution as young as 10 years of age (ECPAT 1996).

²⁸ This case involved parents who sold their child for sex to a man in Queensland. The parents and the man are currently serving lengthy sentences of imprisonment.

²⁹ Many of these young people were over the age of 18 years when interviewed by Project Axis but were reporting activities which occurred when they were under the age of 18 years.

³⁰ ECPAT uses this term to refer to the exchange of sex for cash or kind.

Some child sex offenders are attracted to certain countries due to the relative ease of access to children that they provide. The enforcement of laws prohibiting this behaviour in these countries is considered 'lax'. Governments, recognising the importance of the tourism industry to their countries, may elect to turn a blind eye to such activity. Further, corruption of local authorities is endemic in some countries, with police officers and other public officials being susceptible to bribery.

In 1994, the Commonwealth *Crimes Act 1914* was amended to include Part IIIA (Child Sex Tourism)³¹ which prohibits Australian citizens or residents from engaging in sexual activity with children under the age of 16 years in an overseas country. The Act also makes it an offence to encourage, benefit or profit from any activity that promotes the sexual exploitation of children.

The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions advised 9 individuals have been charged with offences under the Act, with the following results:

- 7 people have been convicted (including 1 from Queensland, 2 from New South Wales, 3 from Victoria and 1 from Western Australia)
- 1 person from Victoria was acquitted
- 1 person from the Australian Capital Territory had his charges dismissed.

Key findings

- Prevalence studies conducted in Australia and overseas estimate that between 7 and 45 per cent of females and between 3 and 19 per cent of males have been victims of sexual abuse during their childhood. This wide variation is most probably due to differences in sampling, response bias and methodology used in these studies, and to differences in perception, definition, recollection of events and recording and coding of responses. A recent Queensland study estimates around 14 per cent of males and 40 per cent of females experienced unwanted sexual contact before the age of 17 years (Goldman & Padayachi 1997).
- Official data show that levels of reporting of child sex offences have increased:

³¹ These amendments were introduced in response to the United Nations Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 which recognised the need for national and international cooperation in protecting children. Article 34 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, to which Australia is a signatory, provides:

State Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes State Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

- offences reported to the QPS increased from 2,502 in 1995 to 4,402 in 1998 (CJC analysis of QPS data);
- substantiated notifications of child sexual abuse made to FYCCQ increased from 209 in 1993–94 to 500 in 1997–98.
- A range of offending behaviour is reported in prevalence studies, offences reported to the QPS, reports from survivors of child sexual abuse and offenders self-reported activities. The data suggest that:
 - the majority of child sex offences reported to police are classified as indecent assaults on children.³² In prevalence studies, these activities are generally described as genital touching or exposure;
 - more intrusive offences represent smaller proportions of offences described in these sources.
- The most important source of data about child sex offences is police data. Unfortunately, because the QPS CRISP system is an operational database, and not designed for research or statistical purposes, the data have some key limitations which require cautious interpretation and inclusion of validating information wherever possible.

³² As defined in footnote 26 in this chapter.

Chapter three

The victims of child sexual abuse

The low rate of official reporting of abuse makes it difficult to gain an accurate description of the victims of child sexual abuse — those victims who make an official report may not be representative of the wider population of victims in the community. In addition, data arising from reported cases of child sexual abuse record only minimal information about the characteristics of those involved in the offences, such as age and gender. More detailed information about victims is collected by researchers and academics through studies which aim to measure the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the population.³³

This chapter presents the limited information available about child victims and adult survivors of child sexual abuse with particular reference to:

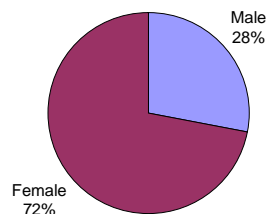
- characteristics of victims of child sexual abuse
- the longer term consequences of child sexual abuse.

Characteristics of victims of child sexual abuse

Gender

Both prevalence data and reported offence data indicate that girls are at a higher risk of being abused than boys. As Figure 6 shows, nearly three quarters of child sex offences reported to the QPS between 1994 and 1998 involved female complainants.

Figure 6: Reported offences: Gender of complainants — 1994–98



Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data

Note:

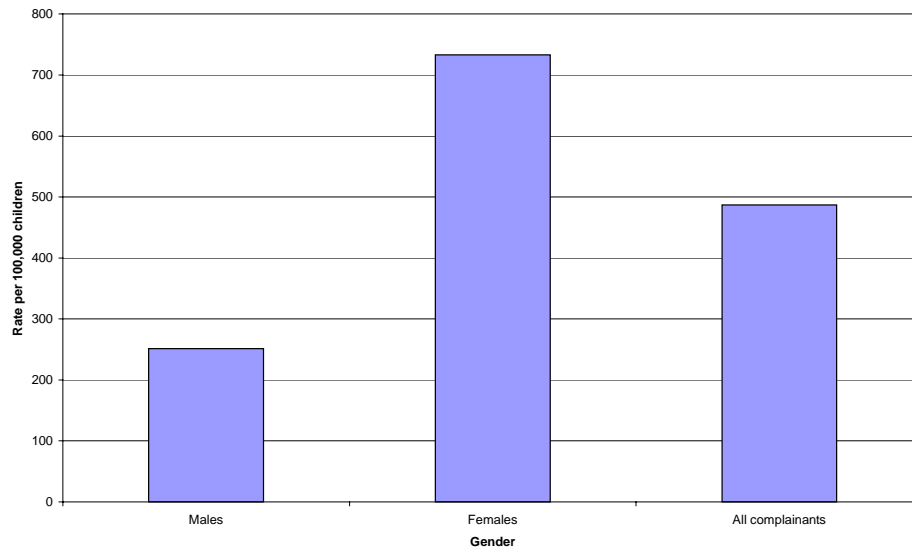
1. This figure excludes 32 offences where information about the gender of the complainant was missing.

³³ See Chapter 2 for a description of key prevalence studies.

2. Data presented here include offences reported to the QPS in 1994. As the CRISP system was not fully operational state-wide until December 1994, reported offence data for 1994 are incomplete.

Figure 7 presents the rate of child sex offences reported to police in 1997 per 100,000 Queensland children by gender. It shows that there were 486 child sex offences per 100,000 Queensland children. There were 733 offences against girls per 100,000 girls compared to 251 offences against boys per 100,000 boys. This shows that female children are victimised at three times the rate of male children.

Figure 7: Rate of reported sexual offences against children per 100,000 Queensland children — 1997



Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data; population data source: ABS 1997b.

Notes:

1. Data presented here relate to children aged 16 years or less.
2. This figure excludes 32 cases where gender data were missing.

Similarly, other data show:

- Girls were almost three times more likely to be the subject of a substantiated notification of sexual abuse made to FYCCQ.
- Girls were roughly three times more likely to be offenders' first victims than boys, according to the Smallbone and Wortley study.
- Most prevalence studies have found that girls are abused between 1.5 and 5 times more frequently than boys. Studies of child sex offenders indicate that around 60 to 70 per cent of offenders target only girls, 20 to 33 per cent only boys, and 10 per cent children of either sex (Grubin 1998).

Smallbone and Wortley found that the majority of offenders only target females (68%). Offenders who offend within the family (intra-familial offenders) represented the largest group in their sample, and they reported 92.4 per cent of the victims of their first sexual contact with a child were females.

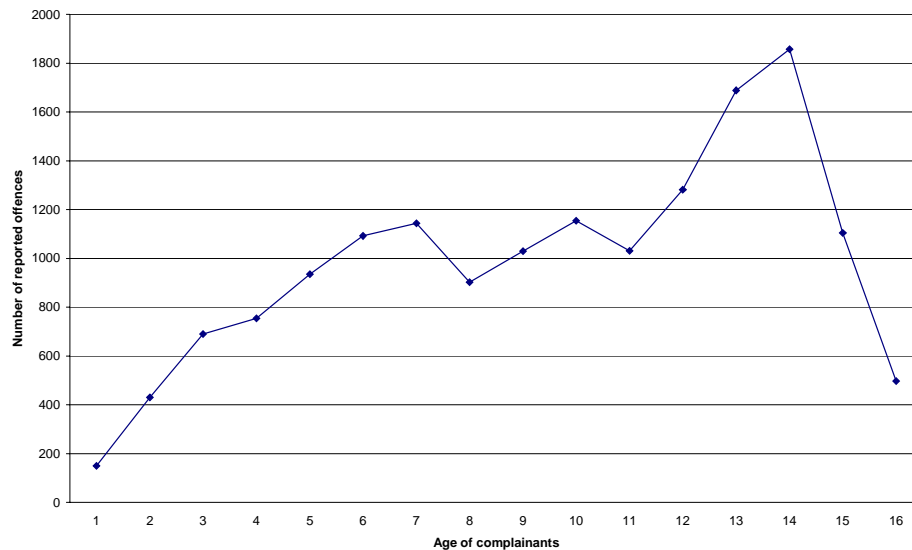
However, this does not mean that the majority of victims acknowledged by offenders were female. As is discussed in Chapter 4, those offenders who prefer boys tend to have a higher number of victims than those who prefer girls.

Smallbone and Wortley surveyed offenders about the number and gender of victims — both those the subject of convictions and those who were not. Offenders reported that 74 per cent of victims with whom they had sexual contact were boys, while boys accounted for only 52 per cent of the officially recognised victims (i.e. those associated with criminal convictions). This suggests that male sexual abuse is particularly underreported, as has been suggested by others (Watkins & Bentovim 1992; Poropat & Rosevear 1992).

Age

Children are at risk of abuse at any age. However, Goldman and Padayachi (1997) report Queensland children are particularly vulnerable to abuse between the ages of 7 and 12. QPS data show that the risk of abuse increases up to age 14 with 90 per cent of reported offences involving victims within this age group (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Age of complainants at the time the first reported sexual offence occurred — 1994–98



Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data.

Note:

1. Data presented here include offences reported to the QPS in 1994. As the CRISP system was not fully operational state-wide until December 1994, reported offence data for 1994 are incomplete.
2. Where multiple offences were perpetrated by a single offender against a single victim, the age of the victim is taken as at the first occurrence of the offence and applies to all subsequent offences. It is likely that the method of counting will therefore tend to over-state offences against younger complainants.

According to FYCCQ data on substantiated harm to children, most sexual abuse (349 cases, or 69.8% of all such cases reported) involved children in the 5–14 year age group. Smallbone and Wortley report the mean age of their first victims as 11 years with no significant difference across offender sub-types. Less than 2 per cent of offenders reported offending against victims aged 4 years and under.

Fleming's 1997 prevalence study of child sexual abuse found that, for 144 adult women who reported child sexual abuse, the mean age for first experiences of child sexual abuse was 10 years, and more than two-thirds (71%) of the women were aged under 12 when the first incident took place.

Other risk factors

Researchers have attempted to identify the social and family backgrounds associated with adults who report having been victims of child sexual abuse. It is important to understand when reading this material, that merely having the characteristics mentioned here does not necessarily predict that a person will become a victim of child sexual abuse (Finkelhor 1984). It is impossible to predict who will become a victim of abuse, but through mapping the characteristics and situations of adults who report childhood victimisation, common features can be identified which may contribute to prevention strategies.

Other than age and gender, a number of circumstances have been identified which might increase the likelihood of a child becoming a victim of sexual abuse. According to the literature (see Fleming, Mullen & Bammer 1997), environmental and other factors found to be associated with victimisation include:

- living with a non-biologically related adult male;
- living apart from the mother for at least some part of childhood;
- parental disability or illness;
- social isolation from peers, having few close friends and having no-one to confide in;
- growing up in a rural or small town rather than a city;
- a poor relationship with parents, particularly receiving little attention from mother;
- a violent or highly conflictual relationship between parents;
- a limited parental income;
- experiencing physical abuse.

Finkelhor (1984) emphasised the importance of the characteristics of the child's parents in the risk of victimisation. Having a step-father, for example, was one of the strongest risk factors, more than doubling a girl's vulnerability to abuse. Finkelhor (1984) was able to explain, however, that this involved a number of factors:

- Step-fathers were found to be five times more likely to abuse their step-daughters than natural fathers.
- Being a step-daughter also increases a girl's contact with sexually predatory men — girls are five times more likely to be victimised by a friend of their parents; some of these are friends of the step-father and may not feel the same restraint they might if this were the biological daughter of the friend.
- Paradoxically, some step-daughters are victimised prior to meeting their step-father — a circumstance that may be explained by the mother bringing sexually opportunistic men into the home while she is seeking a suitable partner.

The high vulnerability of girls who have step-fathers is therefore a function of both the presence of a step-father and the earlier exposure of the daughter to men brought into the home by the mother.

With such factors in mind, Finkelhor (1984) constructed a Risk Factors Checklist for identifying girls at risk of abuse.³⁴ This checklist included eight factors that were the most strongly related to the likelihood of a girl becoming a victim of sexual abuse, being:

- the presence of a step-father
- having lived at some time without a mother
- not being close to the mother
- having a mother who never finished high school
- having a sex-punitive mother³⁵
- receiving no physical affection from the father
- having a low income
- having two friends or fewer in childhood.

For girls with none of these characteristics in their backgrounds, victimisation was virtually non-existent. Among those with five of the factors, two-thirds had been

³⁴ Finkelhor (1984) did not have enough male respondents to his initial survey, and hence did not have a sufficient statistical basis to develop such a tool for boys.

³⁵ This refers to a mother who is often punitive when faced with the child's sexual development and behaviour.

victimised and the presence of each additional factor increased the child's vulnerability by 10 to 20 per cent (Finkelhor 1984). Some have been critical of this checklist, suggesting that it places undue emphasis on the role of the mother upon whom the overall responsibilities are believed to fall (Whatley & Trudell 1988 as cited in NSW CPC 1995).

Fleming, Mullen and Bammer (1997) also found in their study of Australian women, that different factors emerged for abuse before and after the age of 12 years. Social isolation and experiencing the death of a mother were significant risk factors associated with child sexual abuse before the age of 12. For child sexual abuse after that age, physical abuse and a mentally ill mother were risk factors. For abuse perpetrated by a family member, the significant predictors of child sexual abuse were physical abuse, having no-one to confide in, having no caring female adult and having an alcoholic father. For girls abused by someone outside the family, the significant predictors were physical abuse, social isolation, the mother's death and having an alcoholic mother.

While child sexual abuse can be perpetrated against any child, the studies described here highlight circumstances that may increase the chances of abuse, particularly of girls, and could form the basis of further development of prevention and intervention strategies.

The consequences of child sexual abuse³⁶

Child sexual abuse is a fundamentally important predictor of poor health and poor social well-being. Its presence explains a significant proportion of poor health in the population, and there is a clear 'dose-effect' relationship (i.e. poorer outcomes follow the most severe and prolonged abuse). There is consistency in findings across many studies that used different populations and research methods.

This section will describe the main consequences for both physical and psychological well-being that have been experienced by both child victims and adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

Physical health consequences

Sexually transmitted infections

Few studies are available to predict the actual risk of directly acquiring a sexually transmitted infection (STI). However, it is thought that sexual victimisation in childhood or adolescence may increase an individual's chance of contracting an STI in adulthood by affecting his/her future sexual behaviour.

Several studies have indicated that young women who have been sexually abused during childhood began consensual intercourse significantly earlier than non-victimised

³⁶ This section was contributed by Dr Michael Dunne of the Centre for Public Health Research, Queensland University of Technology, and Ms Margot Legosz of the Research and Prevention Division, CJC.

women (Elders & Albert 1998, Handwerker 1993), and are more likely than others to have had multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex and an STI (Fergusson, Horwood & Lynskey 1997; Miller, Monsoon & Norton 1995). For men, physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse in childhood is highly correlated with lack of condom use in adulthood (Heise, Moore & Toubia 1995).

According to a recent study by Fergusson, Horwood and Lynskey (1997), these activities reflect a 'causal chain', such that child sexual abuse is associated with an earlier onset of sexual activity, which in turn heightens the risk of contracting an STI. The types of STI commonly found in victims/survivors of sexual abuse of all ages include gonorrhoea, *Trichomonas vaginalis*, genital warts, *Chlamydia trachomatis* infection, herpes simplex virus infection, HIV and syphilis (American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Adolescence 1994).

Pregnancy

Sexual abuse often leads to pregnancy. In the United States, it has been estimated that the prevalence of pregnancy attributed to rape ranges from 11 to 23 per cent (Elders & Albert 1998). A study conducted at a maternity hospital in Lima, Peru, found that 90 per cent of young mothers aged 12 to 16 were victims of rape — the majority by their father, stepfather or another male relative (Rosas 1992).

As well as directly causing pregnancy, some research indicates that young women with a history of child sexual abuse are generally at greater risk of teenage pregnancy, due to their greater sexual promiscuity and risk taking (Fergusson, Horwood & Lynskey 1997; Zierler et al. 1991).

General physical health

Sexual abuse appears to increase the risk for a range of physical health problems, including ongoing pain, gastro-intestinal symptoms (vomiting, diarrhoea, food intolerance), gynaecological problems, and some neurological symptoms such as fainting, paralysis and walking difficulties. In addition, there may be elevated rates of chronic physical disability and diabetes (Golding 1994; Choquet et al. 1997; Pecukonis 1996).

Whether these health problems reflect direct physical effects, or indicate a more general psychosomatic disorder,³⁷ is not clear. The most direct effects on physical health arise through STIs and concurrent physical abuse. Indirectly, child sexual abuse clearly is a major life stress, and as with other serious trauma, the resultant stress could reduce immune responses that could increase vulnerability to diseases (Koss, Woodruff & Koss 1990). A history of child sexual abuse often increases the risk of detrimental health-related behaviours, such as smoking, heavy drinking and illicit drug use (Choquet et al. 1997; Epstein et al. 1998; Holmes 1997). Further, given that family break-up and poorer

³⁷ A psychosomatic disorder is a physical disorder caused by, or notably influenced by, the emotional state of the victim.

economic circumstances often follow incidents of child sexual abuse, individuals may find themselves with fewer of the economic and social resources that are necessary for promoting and maintaining physical health (Golding 1994).

Social and mental health consequences

Common sense, and accumulated experience in legal and clinical services, clearly indicate that many victims/survivors of child sexual abuse suffer both acute and chronic psychological and social problems. This is confirmed by a wealth of published research. What follows is a brief summary of the major findings from some recent studies.³⁸

Anxiety disorders

Fearfulness and anxiety-related symptoms have been frequently described as short-term and long-term effects in sexually abused children. The primary symptoms include sleep disturbances, insomnia and nightmares, phobic avoidance, generalised worry, over-sensitivity and poor concentration (McLeer et al. 1998; Mullen et al. 1993; Ussher & Dewberry 1995). A recent study in Philadelphia of 142 sexually abused children aged 6 to 16 years, found these children to have significantly more worry, over-sensitivity, poor concentration and higher physiological anxiety than were present either in children in the control group or in clinically-referred children with no history of sexual abuse (McLeer et al. 1998).

Post-traumatic stress disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is sometimes referred to as rape trauma syndrome for victims of sexual assault, and can be divided into two phases:

- The acute phase may last for hours or days and is characterised by a distortion or paralysis of the individual's coping mechanisms. Outward responses vary from complete loss of emotional control to an apparent well controlled behaviour pattern. The signs may include generalised pain throughout the body; eating and sleep disturbances; physical symptoms; and emotional complaints such as depression, anxiety and mood swings. In the days and weeks that follow, non-specific anxiety is often expressed in the form of a variety of complaints such as musculo-skeletal problems, headaches and insomnia.
- The long-term phase is characterised by flashbacks, nightmares, phobias, and gynaecologic and menstrual complaints. This long-term phase may occur months or years after the event and may involve major lifestyle adjustment.

Severe abuse is strongly predictive of PTSD, which may have more severe and longer lasting symptoms in child victims of sexual abuse than adult victims (Goodwin 1985). It

³⁸ For more extensive reviews, especially of early research, see Browne and Finkelhor (1986) and Beitchman et al. (1991 & 1992).

has been estimated that between 32 and 80 per cent of victims/survivors of sexual abuse suffer from PTSD (Kilpatrick, Edmonds & Seymour 1992; American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Adolescence 1994).

Studies designed to explore more fully the PTSD symptoms of sexual abuse in children revealed the most frequently observed symptoms to be acting as if the traumatic event was happening again, avoidance behaviour, phobias and aggression (McLeer et al.1998).

Dissociation disorders

Dissociation, or alteration in consciousness resulting in impairment of memory or identity, has been observed in children traumatised by sexual abuse (Bucky & Dallenberg 1992; Dancu et al. 1996). Signs of early dissociation in children are forgetfulness with periods of amnesia, excessive fantasising and daydreaming, trance-like states, sleepwalking, the presence of an imaginary companion, and blackouts. Dissociative problems appear to be greatest among people with the most severe abuse, including forced sexual intercourse as a child and repeated episodes of assault (Briggs & Joyce 1997; Draijer & Langeland 1999). Children and adults presenting with multiple personality disorder, the most extreme form of dissociation, are often victims of severe physical or sexual abuse (Beitchman et al. 1992).

Depression and low self-esteem

Depression and low self-esteem are common among women and men with a history of child sexual abuse (Brayden et al. 1995; Dinwiddie et al. 2000; Miller et al. 1995; Donald 1998; Roosa, Reinholtz & Angelini 1999). A sense of betrayal, exploitation, stigmatisation, shame, guilt and helplessness may become incorporated into the child's self-image, and might, in turn, relate to levels of depression (Finkelhor & Browne 1986). Depression might also relate to the level of support within the family, good support acting as a buffer against poor emotional outcomes (Runtz & Schallow 1997). The nature of the post-disclosure crisis, such as parental separation or placement of a sibling in foster care, may also affect the degree of depression experienced after the event.

Risk of suicide and serious self-harm

Survivors of child sexual abuse are at greater risk of:

- suicidal behaviour such as suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts (Standing Committee on Social Issues 1994; Statham et al. 1998);
- deliberate self-harm such as self-mutilation (Choquet et al. 1997; Coxell et al. 1999; Wiederman, Sansone & Sansone 1999; Briere & Gil 1998);
- chronic self-destructiveness including eating disorders, failures in self-care, risk taking, accident proneness, and habitual self-defeating behaviour such as severe substance abuse (Boudewyn & Liem 1995; Mullen et al. 1993).

Sexual dysfunction

Disturbances in sexual behaviour are among the most striking and dramatic symptoms observed in sexually abused children. Sexual hyper-arousal (such as compulsive masturbation and promiscuity) and sexually aggressive behaviour, with a tendency to repeat and re-enact the sexual victimisation, have been frequently described in the literature. Many victims appear to be unable to differentiate between affectionate and sexual relationships (Green 1993).

Among adults, it has been reported that as many as:

- 45 per cent of survivors encounter orgasmic failure
- 38 per cent have prolonged abstinence from sexual activity
- 35 per cent have altered sexual response
- 25 per cent have altered emotional response (Dupre et al. 1988).

Female child sexual abuse survivors more commonly report problems in achieving and maintaining sexual arousal than other women, while males more commonly suffer from erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation and low sexual desire in comparison with those who had not been victims of adult-child sexual contact (Laumann, Paik & Rosen 1999).

Inter-personal relationships

Difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships may also be a common experience for sexual abuse victims. Many have difficulties with issues of control, anger, shame, trust, dependency and vulnerability (Drossman 1992). Women with a history of child sexual abuse have poorer self-esteem and problems with intimate relationships, and these are most severe for women who experienced forced sexual intercourse as a child, compared with other forms of sexual abuse (Fleming et al. 1999).

Some child sexual abuse victims also experience difficulty when they become parents. There is some evidence to suggest that children of parents who have experienced child sexual abuse may be at greater risk of parental neglect and maltreatment than other children (Banyard 1997; Zuravin & DiBlasio 1992; Zuravin et al. 1996). Of course such effects may be the result of the relationship between abuse and higher rates of depression or other psychopathology, lower self-esteem, problematic family relationships (in which incest might have occurred) and fewer social supports (Banyard 1997).

Recent Queensland data

A local study³⁹ undertaken in Brisbane jointly by the Queensland University of Technology and Family Planning Queensland, has confirmed similar adverse effects among women who report a history of sexual abuse before the age of 16 years (Legosz et al. unpublished). Preliminary analysis of data suggests statistically significant associations between child sexual abuse and the following:

- sexual abuse (or re-victimisation) as an adult
- being in a violent relationship as an adult
- higher rates of depression and eating disorders
- poorer reported levels of general health
- higher levels of unhappiness
- higher rates of alcohol dependency and drug use
- increased risk of STIs and sexual dysfunction
- consensual sexual activity at a younger age
- significantly more sexual partners
- an increased likelihood of being on a pension.

Costs of child sexual abuse

There are both tangible and intangible costs of child sexual abuse. Donato, Shanahan and Higgins (1999) identified the intangible costs likely to be incurred by victims as including:

- pain and suffering and a lowered quality of life;
- loss of affection and enjoyment;
- premature death or suicide;

³⁹ This longitudinal study used standardised instruments so that the findings can be compared to other research and other populations, applied specific definitions of abuse that cannot be open to wide interpretation, and is based on a random sample of 400 women attending a women's health clinic.

- second generation costs, such that the emotional, social and financial effects of victimisation may become a legacy for a future generation.

The tangible costs to victims include:

- medical and mental health care, both immediate and long-term costs;
- victim services, some expenses of which are charged directly to the victim;
- lost school days, and the consequent loss of the long-term benefits of education;
- lost work days, both of the victim and the victim's family.

Intra-familial child sexual abuse often has additional costs, with people other than the victim or offender also affected. The changes facing a family during the first six months after substantiation commonly include a change of address, the relocation of the abuser, the removal of the child, a change of schools, marital breakdown and the involvement of helping agencies. In some cases the abusive partner may refuse to pay maintenance, and the non-offending partner, usually the mother, may be forced to resign from work in order to attend court proceedings (Mulligan 1986). Added to these personal costs to victims and their families are the costs associated with reporting and prosecuting child sexual abuse through the criminal justice system.

To the broader community, the costs of child sexual abuse include the costs of prevention efforts aimed at the problem, the costs of law enforcement and the legal system, the costs associated with incarcerated offenders, the costs of victim support services and general healthcare costs, and the costs of increased social security payments where the family is no longer intact.

Key findings

- Female children are particularly vulnerable to child sexual abuse with 72 per cent of child sex offences reported to QPS involving females. However, Smallbone and Wortley findings suggest that male victimisation is significantly underreported.
- Child sexual abuse mostly involves children aged 5 to 14 years, according to QPS and FYCCQ data. According to child sex offenders, the average age of their first victim is 11 years (Smallbone & Wortley).
- Family and social background factors which have been identified as risk factors include:
 - living with a non-biologically related adult male
 - living away from the mother

- being socially isolated from peers
 - having a low family income

 - growing up in a small town

 - having a poor relationship with parents.
- Child sexual abuse is a fundamental predictor of poor physical and mental health and social functioning. There is also a pronounced ‘dose–effect’ relationship, where very severe abuse (especially forced intercourse at an early age, and repeated episodes of sexual abuse) leads to poorer outcomes.

 - From the community’s perspective, the cost of providing appropriate health and support services to victims of child sexual abuse is substantial, as is the cost of dealing with offenders.

Chapter four

Characteristics of child sex offenders

Understanding child sex offenders and their behaviour is essential for a number of reasons. A thorough knowledge of the characteristics of offenders, and how they go about perpetrating sexual abuse, can assist in designing more effective prevention and detection strategies and developing treatment programs.

This chapter will describe the main characteristics of child sex offenders and their behaviour. The broad term ‘child sex offender’ encompasses a range of offenders — from those who offend once against a single child to those who offend against multiple victims over a long period of time. While child sex offenders are difficult to categorise, academics and law enforcement agencies have used a number of different approaches to group them along the ‘offending spectrum’. For example, offenders can be categorised according to their sexual interest. Lanning (cited in Wood 1997) identifies the ‘situational’ offender as being one who does not necessarily have a sexual preference for children, but who finds himself in a situation where children are available to him. On the other hand, the ‘preferential’ offender has a primary sexual interest in children and displays highly predictable behaviour because of this.

Offenders can also be categorised according to their relationship with their victim. For example, those who only abuse children within their family are referred to as ‘intra-familial’ offenders and those who only abuse children outside their families are referred to as ‘extra-familial’ offenders. Drawing this kind of distinction may, however, be misleading as some studies have found that a significant proportion of intra-familial offenders also offend outside the home. A study by Abel et al. (1988) of 199 incest offenders found that 66 per cent had offended against non-family members. Similarly, a study by Becker and Coleman (1988, as cited in Howitt 1995) reported that nearly half the offenders who offended against girls inside the home had also abused females outside the home, and one in ten had offended against boys outside the home. Recognising these findings, Smallbone and Wortley have included a third category in their study — the ‘mixed-type’ offender who offends both within and outside the family.

This chapter describes the characteristics of child sex offenders generally and, where appropriate, of sub-groups.

Gender

All available evidence suggests that the overwhelming majority of child sex offenders are male. For example:

- 87 per cent of child sex offences reported to the QPS between 1994 and 1998 were committed by males, compared to 3 per cent committed by females. Ten per cent of data on the gender of offenders was missing.
- Figures received from DCS indicate that only one out of 424 child sex offenders admitted to Queensland correctional centres for the years 1994 to 1998 was female.

Some commentators have taken the position, however, that the proportion of child sex offenders who are female has been substantially underestimated. The literature suggests that this may be due to:

- the reluctance of victims to report abuse
- a general unwillingness to believe that women can be perpetrators of sexual abuse (Banning 1989, as cited in Tomison 1995)
- greater social acceptance of older female/younger male relationships (Wood 1997).

Finkelhor and Russell (1984) have estimated that 5 per cent of the abuse of girls and 20 per cent of the abuse of boys is perpetrated by women. In an Australian study of child sexual abuse by Goldman and Goldman (1988) involving 991 post-secondary students, 5 per cent of the abuse of female respondents was reported as having been perpetrated by a female offender. However, more than 90 per cent of reported abusers in the Goldman and Goldman (1988) study were male, suggesting that while abuse by women may be more common than previously thought, it is still a relatively infrequent event.

Female perpetrators, unlike male perpetrators, rarely act alone. It has been estimated that in around half to three-quarters of cases involving female offenders, the female is accompanied by a male partner (Rudin, Zalewski & Bodmer-Turner 1995; Hunter & Mathews 1997, as cited in Grubin 1998). It is also thought that the majority (60%) of cases involving female offenders are intra-familial, and that about a fifth of cases involving an adolescent female offender occur during the course of babysitting (Risen & Koss 1987; Mathews, Hunter & Vuz 1997, as cited in Grubin 1998).

Age

Table 4 presents a breakdown of offences reported to police in Queensland between 1994 and 1998 by the offender's age and gender. The data clearly demonstrate that, while offenders come from all age groups, the bulk of offences reported were committed by males in the 31 to 40 year age group.

Table 4: Offender's/suspect's gender and age at the time the first reported sexual offence occurred — 1994–98

Age at first sexual offence (years)	Female		Male		Total	
	Number of offences	%	Number of offences	%	Number of offences	%
0–9 ³	11	2.4	61	0.4	72	0.5
10–16	22	4.9	1,343	9.8	1,365	8.9
17–20	213 ⁴	47.3	882	6.4	1,095	6.9
21–30	73	16.2	2,847	20.7	2,920	18.5
31–40	54	12.0	3,700	26.9	3,754	23.8
41–50	49	10.9	2,013	14.7	2,062	13.1
51–60	7	1.6	1,783	12.9	1,790	11.3
61+ ⁵	9	2.0	709	5.2	718	4.6
Missing age data	12	2.7	383	2.8	395	2.5
Missing gender data	-	-	-	-	1,603	10.2
Total	450	100.0	13,721	100.0	15,774	100.0

Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data

Notes:

1. Note that these figures do not and cannot refer to individuals. Rather, they refer to the number of reported offences where the offender/suspect was in the particular age and gender group.
2. Where multiple offences were perpetrated by a single offender against a single victim, the age of the offender is taken as at the first occurrence of the offence and applies to all subsequent offences. It is therefore likely that the method of counting will tend to over-state offences by younger offenders.
3. Note that the ages are not consistently grouped until the 30 year age group and later. The age categories of 0-9, 10-16 and 17-20 differ from those used in QPS official statistics, but were used here to demonstrate: (a) the number of offenders younger than 10 years of age who would not be held criminally responsible for the offence, even though they might have been involved in the crime and (b) the number of offenders who would be tried as juveniles (16 years and younger) rather than adults.
4. 196 of these offences were perpetrated by a single offender against a single victim.
5. There were 7 offences committed by offenders in their nineties, 22 offences committed by offenders in their eighties, 166 offences committed by offenders in their seventies, and 288 offences committed by offenders in their sixties.
6. Data presented here include offences reported to the QPS in 1994. As the CRISP system was not fully operational state-wide until December 1994, reported offence data for 1994 are incomplete.

Child sex offenders form the oldest group of offenders in the prison population. DCS indicate that the average age of offenders admitted into custody in Queensland at the time of their first incarceration for a child sex offence from 1994 to 1998 was 39 years, while the average age of prisoners in Queensland correctional centres incarcerated for any offence as at 30 June 1998 was between 25 and 29 years (QCSC 1998).⁴⁰ This suggests that child sex offenders start offending at a later age than other offenders. However, it may be that some child sex offenders, although commencing offending at a much younger age, are not detected until they are older.

Research indicates that many offenders themselves report having commenced offending much earlier:

⁴⁰ The Queensland Corrective Services Commission became the Department of Corrective Services (DCS) on 1 May 1999.

- The self-reported average age at first offence for incest offenders was between 23.5 and 27.1 years, and for extra-familial child sex offenders between 18.2 and 21.6 years (Abel & Osborn 1992).
- Another series of studies found that 56 per cent of male victims (Showers et al. 1984 and Rogers & Tremaine 1984, as cited in NSW CPC 1995) and up to a quarter of female victims (Farber et al. 1984, as cited in NSW CPC 1995) were abused by adolescent perpetrators.
- The National Children’s Home (1992, as cited by Masson 1995) has estimated that between a quarter and one-third of sexual abuse cases are perpetrated by a young offender, while others have estimated that around 20 per cent of child sex offences are committed by adolescents (Davis & Leitenberg 1987 as cited in James 1996).

Smallbone and Wortley found that many child sex offenders do not start offending until their thirties, although some reported offending as early as 14 years. The average age at which offenders reported their first sexual contact with a child was relatively high — 33 years for intra-familial offenders, 30 years for extra-familial offenders and 31 years for mixed-type offenders. However, offenders’ ages at the time of first sexual contact with a child victim ranged from 14 years to 73 years.

Marital status

Contrary to the myth of the unmarried child sex offender, many offenders either are, or have been, married at some point in their lives. As would be expected, this is particularly the case with those who offend within their own families.

According to the Smallbone and Wortley study, the majority (72%) of child sex offenders had at some time been married or had lived in a de facto relationship, including 29 per cent who were currently married or in a de facto relationship (see Table 5). More than one-third (39%) were currently separated or divorced. Extra-familial offenders (52%) were significantly more likely than the other offender sub-types to have never been married.

Table 5: Marital status of child sex offenders

Marital status	Per cent of each group				
	Intra-familial offenders (n=79)	Extra-familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed-type offenders (n=30)	Deniers (n=13)	Combined (n=182)
Married	23.1	13.3	10.3	7.7	16.7
De facto	15.4	5.0	13.8	23.1	12.2
Divorced	35.9	15.0	20.7	30.8	26.1
Separated	16.7	6.7	13.8	23.1	13.3
Widowed	1.3	8.3	3.4	–	3.9
Never married	7.7	51.7	37.9	15.4	27.8

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Sexual orientation

Although victim gender is often used to infer the sexual orientation of offenders (e.g. a male offender whose victims have been boys may be termed a homosexual child molester, and so on), even repeated sexual contact with male or female children may not accurately reflect the offenders' sexual interests in adult men or women. Some researchers have noted, for example, that many male offenders who have engaged repeatedly in sexual contact with boys do not identify as homosexual, and may in fact not respond sexually to adult males (Marshall 1997).

In the Smallbone and Wortley study, offenders were asked to nominate their sexual orientation with respect to adults. As Table 6 shows, more than three quarters (76%) of the combined offenders identified as exclusively heterosexual, with intra-familial offenders (95%) and deniers (92%) more likely than extra-familial (59%) and mixed-type offenders (53%) to see themselves as heterosexual. Mixed-type offenders (13%) were more likely than other offender sub-types to declare an asexual orientation with respect to adults (i.e. attracted neither to women nor men).

Table 6: Sexual orientation of child offenders

Orientation	Per cent of each group				
	Intra-familial offenders (n=79)	Extra-familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed-type offenders (n=30)	Deniers (n=13)	Combined (n=182)
Attracted to women only	94.9	59.3	53.3	91.7	76.1
Attracted to men only	2.5	15.3	13.3	–	8.3
Attracted to both women and men	2.5	23.7	20.0	8.3	12.8
Attracted to neither women nor men	–	1.7	13.3	–	2.8

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Relationship to the victim

Most child sex offenders offend against children who are known to them (Grubin 1998). Indeed, Smallbone and Wortley found that only 7 per cent of the child sex offenders surveyed reported that there was no relationship between themselves and the children involved.

In the offences reported to QPS in 1997–98, the relationship of the offender to the complainant was most commonly that of ‘relative’ (see Table 7). The offender was known to the complainant, in at least some respect, in the majority of the reported offences.

Table 7: Reported child sex offences — the relationship of offender to complainant — 1997–98

Relationship	1997		1998	
	Number of offences	Per cent	Number of offences	Per cent
Acquaintance	354	8.6	804	18.3
Friend	144	3.5	406	9.2
Professional	171	4.2	144	3.3
Relative	1,350	32.9	1,696	38.5
Otherwise known	465	11.3	514	11.7
Unknown to complainant	380	9.3	306	7.0
Missing data	1,238	30.2	532	12.1
Total	4,102	100.0	4,402	100.0

Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data

Notes:

1. ‘Acquaintance’ includes: family friend, house mate, flatmate, neighbour, new acquaintance.
2. ‘Friend’ includes girlfriend and boyfriend.
3. ‘Professional’ includes client, colleague, associate, teacher, tutor, carer, foster parent, guardian, educator, student.
4. ‘Relative’ includes mother, father, step-mother, step-father, sister, half-sister, brother, half-brother, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law, grandmother-in-law, grandfather-in-law, grandmother, grandfather, step-grandmother, step-grandfather, cousin, step-cousin, cousin-in-law, grandson, grandson-in-law, aunt, step-aunt, aunt-in-law, uncle, step-uncle, uncle-in-law, niece, step-niece, niece-in-law, nephew, step-nephew, nephew-in-law, child of the complainant.
5. ‘Known’ includes non-family member.
6. The relationship between the offender and the victim was not consistently recorded until May 1997. This may explain why there are fewer missing data in 1998.
7. Missing data includes cases where the suspected offender has not been identified by the police.

Respondents to the Project Axis survey of survivors were also asked about the relationship between the perpetrator and themselves. According to these respondents, the vast majority of offenders were family members, followed by family friends (refer to Table 8). Again, only a small number of offenders were unknown to the victim.

Table 8: Relationship between victims and offenders — Project Axis survey of survivors

Relationship to victim	Number of offenders	Per cent
Family member	108	51.2
Family friend	36	17.1
Stranger	16	7.6
Clergy	15	7.1
Guardian/foster parent	3	1.4
Teacher	6	2.8
Other	27	12.8
Total	211	100.0

Source: Project Axis survey of survivors

Notes:

1. Altogether the 104 survey participants provided information on 212 offenders. Information about one offender was missing.

Smallbone and Wortley considered whether mixed-type offenders offend initially within or outside a family context, since this may assist in determining whether they are situational or preferential offenders. Their results indicate that more than half (59%) of mixed-type offenders begin offending within families. This suggests that mixed-type offenders do not necessarily target families after they have already established their sexual interests in children.

It is not surprising that most offenders are known to their victims, given the extent to which many offenders engage in deliberate tactics to befriend and gain the trust of their victims before committing the abuse (refer to Chapter 5 for a full description of the 'grooming' tactics undertaken by child sex offenders).

Number of victims

There is a popular perception that all child sex offenders offend against large numbers of child victims. This perception may be encouraged by the greater media coverage of cases involving a single offender who has offended against several victims over many years. The evidence suggests, however, that most child sex offenders offend against only a few victims and that only a small number offend against large numbers of victims (Grubin 1998). For example, Weinrott and Saylor (1991), in a Washington study of 67 men attending a sex offender treatment program admitted to more than 8,000 sexual contacts involving 959 children. The number of victims ranged from 1 to 200, with a median⁴¹ of 7. However, it should be noted that the offenders attending this program had been committed to hospital as 'sexual psychopaths' and could therefore be considered as representing the most serious child sex offenders.

In the Smallbone and Wortley study, 169 offenders who admitted having committed at least one sexual offence against a child disclosed offences concerning a total of 1,010 children — 748 boys and 262 girls. Convictions related to about a third (39%) of these victims.

Almost half of the offenders in the Smallbone and Wortley study reported having offended against a single child, a further 16 per cent reported having offended against two children, and fewer than 10 per cent of offenders reported more than ten victims. Only two offenders reported 100 victims or more. There were marked differences in the average number of victims reported by the offender sub-groups:

- intra-familial offenders disclosed 1.5 victims
- extra-familial offenders reported 6.1 victims

⁴¹ This means that half of the sample had seven or more victims and half had seven or fewer victims.

- mixed-type offenders reported 20 victims.

Number of abusive acts

As noted in Chapter 2, there is little doubt that official statistics fall far short of accurately representing the true extent of child sex offending. Studies of self-reported offences by child sex offenders indicate that convictions represent only a small proportion of their offending behaviour. A study of 29 convicted child sex offenders found that, while the group had been convicted of 271 offences, they recalled committing a total of 14,971 sexual offences (Tucci 1995).⁴²

Another significant finding of the Abel et al. (1987) study was that while extra-familial offenders commit only one or two sexually abusive acts against their victims (1.2 for those with a preference for girls and 1.9 for those with a preference for boys), intra-familial offenders commit a significantly higher number. Those intra-familial offenders who offended against girls committed an average of 45.2 acts and those who offended against boys an average of 36.5 acts.

The findings of the Abel et al. (1987) study indicate that, while individual extra-familial offenders with a preference for offending against boys commit the greatest total number of acts against by far the largest number of victims, they generally offend against those victims only once or twice. Similarly, extra-familial offenders with female victims generally commit only one abusive act against them. In contrast, those who offend within the family have a small number of victims but commit a much larger number of abusive acts against each of their child victims.

Smallbone and Wortley also reported the average number of sexual contacts per child of the offenders in their study. Table 9 compares the three sub-groups of offenders, showing that intra-familial and mixed-type offenders report a higher number of abusive acts per child.

Table 9: Average number of sexual contacts per child

Number of times	Per cent of each group		
	Intra-familial offenders (n=79)	Extra-familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed-type offenders (n=30)
1	20.8	27.6	18.5
2-10	40.3	55.2	44.4
11-20	18.2	13.8	14.8
21-50	13.0	3.4	14.8
> 50	7.8	-	7.4

⁴² It should be noted this study was of residential clients of a UK clinic and these offenders were more serious offenders and unlikely to be representative of the majority.

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Smallbone and Wortley also surveyed offenders about the average time taken for sexual contact with each child. Almost a quarter of all contacts took less than 5 minutes, 60 per cent took less than 15 minutes and 98 per cent were completed within an hour.

Duration of sexual ‘relationship’ with child

The secretive nature of child sexual abuse often conceals extended periods of abuse. Smallbone and Wortley surveyed offenders about the duration of the offending relationship and the results are reported in Table 10. Offenders reported that the duration of the sexual relationship ranged from less than a day to more than a year.

Just over half of the mixed-type offenders (52%) and 45 per cent of the intra-familial offenders offended against a child for more than a year. Extra-familial offenders were less likely to offend against a child for a long period, with nearly 40 per cent of this group reporting the duration of sexual contact as less than one day.

Table 10: Reported average duration of sexual ‘relationship’ with child

Duration of offending relationship	Per cent of each group		
	Intra-familial offenders (n=79)	Extra-familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed-type offenders (n=30)
Less than one day	21.1	38.9	18.5
1–7 days	9.9	3.7	11.1
1 week – 2 months	7.0	16.7	7.4
2–6 months	11.3	16.7	7.4
6–12 months	5.6	18.5	3.7
More than 12 months	45.1	5.6	51.9

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

QPS data on the number of years between the first and final offences reported by complainants to the police show that 44 per cent of offences occurred over more than one year, 5 per cent of which occurred over more than five years.

Location of offences

The literature indicates that 80 per cent of child sex offences occur in the home of either the victim or the offender (Bradford et al. 1988, as cited in Grubin 1998). Information presented in Table 11 shows that most offences against children reported to the QPS between 1994 and 1998 occurred at premises defined as a dwelling (such as a house, unit, caravan park, or motel). Relatively few offences occurred at premises defined as either government locations (4%) or on business premises (2%).

Table 11: Location of reported offences — 1994–98

Location	Number	Per cent
Dwelling	11,637	73.8
Outside	2,053	13.0
Other/unknown	1,251	7.9
Government location	586	3.7
Business location	244	1.5
Missing data	3	–
Total	15,774	100.0

Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data

Notes:

1. 'Dwelling' includes: house, unit, caravan park, motel, outbuilding.
2. 'Outside' includes: agriculture, beach, boarding, boat ramp, bushland/scrub, car park, in transit, marine, open space, private grounds, recreational, rest area, river, street, wharf.
3. 'Government location' includes: church, community, correctional centre, education, government, hospital, library, medical, railway, terminal.
4. 'Business location' includes: bank, food shop, garage, licensed premises, manufacturing, office, restaurant, shop, shopping area, warehouse.
5. Data presented here include offences reported to the QPS in 1994. As the CRISP system was not fully operational state-wide until December 1994, reported offence data for 1994 are incomplete.

This pattern of locations for offending is also reflected in the Project Axis survey of survivors, in which about 90 per cent of respondents reported that the abuse occurred in a house, and for nearly 50 per cent of respondents this was their family home. In the Smallbone and Wortley study, offenders most commonly reported abusing children in the offender's home (refer to Table 12). In many cases, these offences would also have taken place in the child victim's home as most intra-familial offenders offended in their own home.

Table 12: Locations for taking children for sexual contact

Location	Per cent of respondents (n=169)
Your own home	68.9
Going for a car ride	27.4
Isolated or out of the way places (e.g. vacant lot)	25.6
An out of the way place in the child's home	19.5
A friend or relative's home	17.1
The bush	15.5
Other	9.6
A park	9.5
Public toilet	7.1

Swimming pool	5.4
Taking the child for walks	5.4
Playground	3.0
Movie theatre	2.4

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Notes:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.

Convictions for other offences

The child sex offender is often considered to be a ‘specialist’, ‘undeterred’ offender with little or no involvement in non-sex-related crime. This perception has not, however, been supported by some recent studies of convicted child sex offenders (see for example Broadhurst & Maller 1992). It is clear from research conducted overseas that it is not uncommon for child sex offenders to have been convicted of a range of non-sex-related offences (Weinrott & Saylor 1991, Hanson, Scotte & Steffy 1995).

Smallbone and Wortley found that nearly two thirds of the 323 child sex offenders in their sample had previous criminal convictions, most often for property offences (refer to Table 13). This study found a significant difference between offender sub-types in terms of previous convictions for sex offences — while only 11 per cent of intra-familial offenders had a previous conviction for a sex offence, 31 per cent of extra-familial offenders, and 41 per cent of mixed-type offenders had been convicted previously of a sex offence.

Table 13: Percentage of offenders with previous convictions

Type of previous convictions	Per cent of each group				
	Intra-familial offenders (n = 74)	Extra-familial offenders (n = 59)	Mixed-type offenders (n = 29)	Deniers (n = 12)	Non-responders (n = 141)
Property offences	36.5	30.5	44.8	41.7	40.4
Violent offences	16.4	18.6	27.6	41.7	22.0
Sexual offences**	10.8	30.5	41.1	25.0	20.6
Any offences	61.6	61.0	69.0	58.3	60.3

** The difference between offender sub-types is statistically significant: $p < .01$.

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Notes:

1. ‘Deniers’ refers to those offenders in the sample who denied they had committed a child sex offence, even though they had been convicted of one.
2. ‘Non-responders’ refers to those offenders who did not complete a questionnaire, but whose criminal records were included in the analysis of demographic and offence data for the study.
3. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

In conclusion, and an important point to note for law enforcement agencies engaged in detecting child sex offenders, the findings presented here indicate that many sex

offenders also commit non-sex-related offences, and that ‘specialisation’ in sex offending is not as common as once thought.

Offenders’ parental relationships

Although demands for effective treatment of child sex offenders have tended to concentrate research efforts on the more immediate precursors of sex offending behaviour, family background has continued to be a focus for researchers and clinicians concerned with understanding and treating such offenders.

Studies have identified the following characteristics often associated with offenders’ family of origin:

- poor or nonexistent paternal relationships (Dwyer & Amberson 1989)
- unstable and unnurturing home environments (Burgess, Hartman & McCormack 1987)
- family chaos and marital discord (Pithers et al. 1989)
- severe and inconsistent punishment by parents (Aljazireh 1993; Marshall, Laws & Barbaree 1990; Rada 1978).

These findings parallel those from criminological and psychological research linking adverse childhood experiences more generally to delinquency and crime (Loeber & Farrington 1998).

Recent Queensland studies of sex offender’s childhood attachment⁴³ to their parents suggest that insecure childhood attachment, especially insecure paternal attachment, may be associated with general criminality, and also more specifically with difficulties in sexual and parenting behaviour (Smallbone & Dadds 1998; Smallbone & Dadds, in press). In the Smallbone and Wortley study, offenders were more likely to report secure attachments with their mother than with their father. A third of offenders (33%) in the

⁴³ Childhood attachment refers to the quality of the bond between children and their parents:

- Secure attachment is associated with parental attitudes and behaviour that are consistently warm, responsive, and supportive toward the child. Secure attachment is thought to facilitate empathy development and the capacity for autonomous emotional regulation in the child.
- Anxious or ambivalent attachment, one form of insecure childhood attachment, is associated with parental attitudes and behaviour that are inconsistent, and in some cases intrusive and over-controlling. Children in anxious attachment relationships with their parents have been shown to become preoccupied with receiving reassurance from others, tend to be dependent on others for emotional security, and tend not to be good at regulating negative emotions.
- Avoidant attachment, a second form of insecure childhood attachment, is associated with parental attitudes and behaviour that are cold, distant, and rejecting. Children in such circumstances have been observed to be coercive in their interpersonal relations, and to actively avoid mutually intimate relations.

The distribution of attachment types in normal populations is approximately 62 per cent secure, 15 per cent anxious, and 23 per cent avoidant.

Smallbone and Wortley study remembered their father as rejecting, 37 per cent as violent and 38 per cent as abusive towards them.

Offender's experience of abuse

Considerable research has focused on whether being a victim of child sexual abuse may cause the victim to become an offender later in life. Such a link has not been conclusively established and the sexually abused – sexual abuser hypothesis remains controversial.

The link between being a victim of child sexual abuse and becoming a sexual abuser is usually based on self-reports of convicted child sex offenders. Such reports should be treated with caution as offenders may claim to have been abused in order to diminish responsibility for their offending behaviour and, in some cases, may do so to reduce their punishment.

In their review of studies examining the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse among child sex offenders, Hanson and Slater (1988) found widely disparate estimates ranging from 18 per cent to 67 per cent. They found that offenders with male victims were more likely to have been abused themselves as children than those with female victims (35% compared with 18%). The highest rates of victimisation were reported by those who offended against both sexes (67%), although a comparatively small number of offenders were included in this sub-category. No significant difference in victimisation rates was found between those who abused within the family and those who were extra-familial offenders (27% compared with 24%).

A Queensland study of imprisoned child sex offenders by McCulloch (unpublished) found that 52 per cent of offenders reported having experienced sexual fondling before the age of 12 years with a person four or more years older than themselves. This is compared with 30 per cent of the non-sex offender control group.

Smallbone and Wortley found that more than half (55%) of offenders reported having been sexually abused as children. A greater proportion of mixed-type offenders (73%) reported such abuse than either intra-familial (58%) or extra-familial (53%) offenders.

The available research suggests that:

- victims of child sexual abuse will generally not become child sex offenders;
- not all child sex offenders were victims, although research suggests higher levels of childhood victimisation among incarcerated child sex offenders than other offender groups, and the general population.

While the research is not conclusive, there is nevertheless a need to recognise the possible future effect of sexual abuse when designing programs for treating child victims of abuse, particularly male victims.

Other sexual deviancy

Sexual offending behaviour, especially behaviour that involves children, has been understood to be linked with other sexually deviant behaviour, and this has influenced the treatment of sexual offenders.

Abel and his colleagues (Abel et al. 1988; Abel & Osborn 1992) found that, under conditions of strict confidentiality, the majority of sex offenders reported involvement in numerous paraphilias⁴⁴ during their lives. However, some have criticised the study for its liberal application of diagnostic criteria, and attempts to replicate Abel's findings have found a far lower incidence of multiple paraphilias among sex offenders, including child sex offenders (e.g. Marshall, Barbaree & Eccles 1992).

The Smallbone and Wortley study found the number of offenders with diagnosable paraphilias, other than paedophilia, to be quite low, although there were some significant differences between offender sub-types (mixed-type offenders were more likely to engage in other sexually deviant behaviour). Fewer than five per cent of offenders could have been diagnosed with paraphilias other than those set out in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Offenders with diagnosable paraphilias other than paedophilia

Paraphilias	Per cent of each group			
	Intra-familial offenders (n=79)	Extra-familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed-type offenders (n=30)	Deniers (n=13)
Frotteurism	6.4	8.6	16.7	9.0
Voyeurism	3.8	3.4	13.3	5.4
Exhibitionism	2.6	5.1	13.3	5.4

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. See footnote 42 for a description of paraphilias.
2. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

⁴⁴ The most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV, APA, 1994) lists a number of paraphilias, the essential features of which are: 'recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving 1) non-human objects, 2) the suffering or humiliation of oneself or one's partner, or 3) children or other non-consenting persons, that occur over a period of at least 6 months' (pp. 522-3). The DSM-IV paraphilias are exhibitionism (exposure of one's genitals to a stranger), fetishism (sexual use of non-living objects), frotteurism (sexual touching or rubbing against a non-consenting person), paedophilia (sexual activity with a child), sexual masochism (receiving sexual humiliation or suffering), sexual sadism (administering sexual humiliation or suffering to others), transvestic fetishism (cross-dressing), and voyeurism (observing unsuspecting others). Other, less often encountered paraphilias, grouped together under the non-exhaustive category 'paraphilias not otherwise specified', include necrophilia (sex with dead persons), zoophilia (sex with animals), and sexual activities in relation to a range of specific stimuli (e.g. urine, faeces, enemas).

Key findings

- Nearly all child sex offenders are males and range in age from 14 years to older than 73 years. Many offenders are, or have been, married.
- Child sex offenders are most likely to be known to their victims. About a third of all offenders are family members and less than 10 per cent are unknown to the victim.
- Most child sex offenders offend against only a few victims and only a small number offend against a large number of victims. Intra-familial offenders reported the fewest victims and mixed-type offenders the most — an average of 20 victims.
- While intra-familial offenders have the smallest average number of victims, they abuse their victims over a longer period and perpetrate the highest number of abusive acts per child.
- Extra-familial offenders report a higher average number of victims than intra-familial offenders. However, the duration of the offending relationship with their victims is shorter and they commit fewer abusive acts per child.
- Mixed-type offenders, although the smallest group, appear to be the most committed offenders. This group report long periods of abuse, a high number of abusive acts, and a high number of victims.
- Most offenders (around 70%) perpetrate child sexual abuse in their own, or the victim's home, which are often one and the same.
- Nearly two-thirds of child sex offenders had previous convictions. However, only a fifth of these convictions were for sexual offences, indicating that specialisation in sex offending is not as common as once thought.
- Studies show that child sex offenders often come from disruptive or dysfunctional family environments.
- Some studies show that a proportion of child sex offenders report having been abused as children, although estimates vary widely up to 67 per cent.

Chapter five

Targeting and grooming of victims

The previous chapter shows that child sex offenders are a diverse group of individuals. However, the literature and Project Axis research reveal some distinct patterns in offending behaviour. Some child sex offenders go to great lengths to facilitate access to potential victims. Furthermore, offenders often engage in elaborate grooming processes to prepare the child for sexual activity.

This chapter will describe the victim targeting and grooming processes adopted by some child sex offenders. An understanding of these methods is essential to the development of appropriate prevention programs, including educational awareness programs, and appropriate law enforcement responses.

Targeting potential victims

The majority of child sex offenders abuse children they already know, including children in their immediate family, and to whom they have easy access. Many child sex offenders, through their contact with families or children's organisations, are presented with opportunities to form close relationships with children, to spend time alone with them, and ultimately to offend against them.

Offenders who do not have access to children through their established social networks may develop strategies to enable contact with children for the purposes of identifying and recruiting appropriate targets for their offending. These offenders comprise the relatively small group of men who are preferential child sex offenders.

Preferential offenders may place themselves in environments that involve them in the day-to-day educational and recreational activities of children. Schools, sporting groups, recreational organisations, churches and other community groups have all been environments that child sex offenders have used to source potential victims. While the majority of adults do not pose a risk to children, it is recognised that some child sex offenders may deliberately seek employment or voluntary work that brings them into contact with children and enables them to befriend potential victims (Miller 1997).

Some offenders also target victims in other less organised recreational forums, such as at the beach, local store, and other places where young people spend time. For example, of the offenders interviewed by Project Axis, one had successfully targeted children walking home from school, and another offender had targeted children at beaches and parks.

While relatively few offenders may join organisations for the specific purpose of targeting children, many child sex offenders do find their victims within organisations with which they are involved. For example, the Project Axis interviews with offenders

identified a soccer coach who admitted using his involvement with the sport to make contact with children. Another interviewee offended in his capacity as a scout leader, and a third offended in his capacity as a teacher. In addition, there has been extensive media coverage in recent years of established and alleged child sexual abuse perpetrated within church institutions.

Children are, of course, by their very nature vulnerable. Child sex offenders, however, often identify children who are particularly vulnerable. Children may, for instance, be targeted because they are passive, quiet, troubled or lonely — for example, a study by Budin and Johnson (1989) found that two-fifths of the offenders surveyed mentioned targeting children from single-parent homes. As noted in Chapter 3, children who are socially isolated, who live in a family without a father, or who reside with a non-biologically-related adult male, are at higher risk of becoming a victim of child sexual abuse.

Smallbone and Wortley's questionnaire asked offenders to nominate which strategies they employed to locate children for sexual abuse. Table 15 summarises the responses of those offenders who had offended outside family settings (extra-familial and mixed-type offenders). Overall, the most common locations were a friend's home (40%), a neighbourhood close to where the offender lived (21%), while babysitting (21%), and through an organised activity, such as recreational or sporting clubs (20%). Utilising locations where children unknown to the offender might be found — public toilets (13%), parks (11%), swimming pools (11%), hitchhiking (5%), video arcades (4%) — was relatively uncommon. By and large, extra-familial and mixed-type offenders seek victims close to home — among the children of friends or other children with whom they already have some social relationship.

Notwithstanding this general conclusion, where public places for finding children were selected, they were more likely to be nominated by mixed-type offenders than extra-familial offenders. For example, 22 per cent of mixed-type offenders said that they sought children in public toilets, compared with 9 per cent for extra-familial offenders. Similarly, 26 per cent of mixed-type offenders said they located children in parks compared with 4 per cent for extra-familial offenders.

**Table 15: Locations for finding children for sexual contact
(extra-familial and mixed-type offenders only)**

Location	Per cent of each group		
	Extra-familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed-type offenders (n=30)	Combined (n=90)
At a friend's home	36.5	47.8	40.0
A close neighbourhood	17.0	30.4	21.1
Babysitting	17.0	30.4	21.1
Through an organised activity	18.9	21.7	19.7
Offender's apartment building	13.2	27.3	17.3
Offender's place of employment	15.1	22.7	17.3
A distant neighbourhood	13.2	21.7	15.8
A public toilet	9.4	21.7	13.2
Isolated or out of the way place (e.g. rivers, vacant lots)	9.5	17.4	11.8
A shopping mall	11.4	13.0	11.8
A park	3.8	26.1	10.5
A swimming pool	7.5	17.4	10.5
At church	9.2	13.0	10.5
Allowing the offender's own children to play with the child	5.7	21.7	10.5
A playground	1.9	13.0	5.3
Hitchhiking	5.7	4.3	5.3
The child babysat for other children at the offender's home	–	17.4	5.3
A video arcade	–	13.0	3.9
A movie theatre	–	8.7	2.6

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.
2. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Some offenders position themselves within organisations and within families in order to gain access to children. Smallbone and Wortley surveyed offenders about their use of strategies for getting access to children for sexual contact. Table 16 shows that the most common strategy reported by offenders, especially mixed-type offenders, was to establish a relationship with the parents of a child. Relatively few offenders said they joined youth organisations to access children.

Table 16: Strategies for getting access to children for sexual contact

Strategy	Per cent of each group			Combined (n=169)
	Intra- familial offenders (n=79)	Extra- familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed- type offenders (n=30)	
Established friendships with parents of child offender wanted to have sexual contact with	16.9	28.3	58.6	28.8
Volunteered for child or teen organisation through which sexual contact was made	2.6	6.8	10.1	5.4
Established romantic relationship with a single parent to have sexual contact with a child	–	5.3	10.0	3.7
Volunteered for child or teen organisation for the purpose of obtaining sexual contact	1.3	–	3.3	1.2

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.
2. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

It is interesting to compare this very low percentage of offenders claiming to have joined an organisation for the purpose of locating victims with findings in Table 15 showing that 20 per cent of offenders in fact found victims in such locations. It is worth bearing in mind at this point that not all sexual contacts with children are the result of careful planning by offenders. That is, many sexual contacts with children will be influenced very much by opportunity or other immediate situational factors. This aspect of sexual offending will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this report in the context of prevention strategies.

As has been noted earlier, offenders may target children who are, through a range of circumstances, vulnerable or socially isolated. Two groups of children should be highlighted as being particular targets for preferential child sex offenders. These are:

- Children who engage in prostitution in exchange for benefits such as money, accommodation, food, clothing, safety, drugs or transport. A key problem believed to lead to child prostitution is youth homelessness (Burdekin 1989, PJCNCA 1997, Wood 1997, ECPAT 1998). Experiences of physical, sexual or emotional abuse at home are some of the reasons that young people may leave home (Burdekin 1989). Operation Gecko (described on p.95) provides an example of child sex offenders in Queensland offending against young people who exchange sex for accommodation, alcohol, gifts, etc.

- Children in countries such as Asia, Africa and South America, where laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation of children may not be well developed, or may be poorly enforced. In a number of documented cases, Australian child sex offenders have travelled overseas to destinations where procuring a child for sexual activity is not difficult. While individual child sex offenders have been convicted of offences relating to their abuse of children overseas, the Australian Federal Police have reported that 'child sex tours' do not appear to be planned or organised by any particular agency or organisation (PJCNCA 1995). The QCC and QPS have identified a number of Queensland men who are suspected of travelling overseas to engage in child sex offending and are continuing to investigate this activity.

Another means of targeting children for the purposes of sexual exploitation that has emerged recently is through the Internet.⁴⁵ Using chat rooms⁴⁶ available on commercial Internet services, or bulletin boards,⁴⁷ some offenders may seek to contact and arrange meetings with children. An offender may access 'rooms' established for those living in the same geographic vicinity, or those designed specifically for children. An offender can then check the list of those in the room (if available), read their profiles and select a potential victim (Esposito 1997). The term used by some child sex offenders to describe this activity is 'chicken hawking' (Carr 1998).

The paedophiles liken themselves to hawks who circle in the air [the chatroom] watching activity on the ground (the discussion) then when they spot their prey, their "chicken", they swoop and aim to make off with it (p. 13).

The anonymity of the Internet makes it possible for an offender to misrepresent their identity to a child. For instance, an offender may assume the identity of a 12-year-old girl. While some child sex offenders may take an indirect approach, offering to be the child's friend and subtly inquiring about their sexual experiences, others are more direct, delving into sexual topics and solicitations (Esposito 1997). As in the real world, the offender may engage in a process of 'grooming' the child which may take a few weeks, several months, or even years (grooming of child victims is discussed in more detail later in this chapter). It is quite common for offenders to send children pornography, including child pornography, which is used to lower the child's inhibitions and to desensitise them to the behaviour (Esposito 1997).

In the past, the risk of detection by law enforcement agencies of child sex offenders engaged in this type of activity was minimal, with the offender locating potential victims from the privacy of his/her home. Law enforcement agencies world-wide, however, are

⁴⁵ The internet is a world-wide network of computers capable of communicating with each other in a variety of ways. It comprises two main functions — enabling access to information via the World Wide Web, and providing for communication and exchange of information, through such things as Internet Relay Chat (IRC), bulletin boards, and newsgroups.

⁴⁶ Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is a 'live' network of discussion channels where conversations between users are conducted on private channels in real time. A user from anywhere in the world can connect to the Internet and engage in dialogue with other users using their keyboard. Users can also send and swap files, text, pictures and programs. Users of IRCs are identified by their nickname, which they nominate when they set up the program or reflect content.

⁴⁷ Bulletin boards are communication points where users exchange and collect information based on their particular interests or motivations.

increasingly engaging in successful operations targeting offenders who attempt to use the Internet in this manner. For example, in the United States in 1996 child protection services reported at least 23 cases in which offenders had solicited children in this way (National Criminal Intelligence Service 1999).

The Wood Royal Commission found evidence of child sex offenders using the Internet to contact potential victims, and its report documented a case in New South Wales in which 'boy lovers' made contact with a teenager. The report cautioned against over-reacting to concerns about child sex offenders invading the Internet as this activity is yet to emerge on a large scale or in any organised way. However, the potential for this to occur should be acknowledged.

Investigations conducted by the QCC show that the risk also exists in Queensland — see case study below. Project Coffee has been established by the QCC to monitor the Internet for child sex related activity.

Case study — QCC investigation

The offender came to the attention of the QCC through a chance meeting in a chat room on the Internet. An intelligence analyst accessed a particular chat room and assumed the persona and identity of a 14 year-old boy ('Terry'). Immediately upon entering the chatroom, the offender requested that Terry enter a 'private' chat room.

A conversation in the private chat room ensued. The offender sought to determine where 'Terry' lived, invited him to his house, and sent a picture of himself along with his phone number. Later the same day 'Terry' again contacted the offender in the chat room. During the course of this conversation the offender provided his e-mail address and instant messaging service (ICQ) number. Once again the offender asked 'Terry' to come over to his house and forwarded a pornographic picture.

Three days later 'Terry' again contacted the offender using an ICQ program⁴⁸ rather than the chat room. During the day, a series of short messages was sent between 'Terry' and the offender while the other party was not on-line. At midday, both parties were on-line and they recommenced their conversation in ICQ rather than the chat room. The offender once again asked if 'Terry' would like to come over to his house and sent him pornographic images. Following this conversation, a QPS officer stationed at the QCC obtained a search warrant under the provisions of the *Crime Commission Act 1997* to obtain evidence against the offender with a view to charging him with possession of a child abuse computer game.

In the course of the search, the offender's computer equipment, computer discs, CDs, personal papers, film and data cassettes were seized. The material was delivered to the QPS for examination. After viewing the images that the offender had in his possession, the investigating officer formed the opinion that they were child abuse images and

⁴⁸ The ICQ program allows people to send messages to others even though the receiver may not be on-line at the time.

forwarded them to the Classification Officer for examination. It was determined that the images fell within the definition of a 'child abuse computer game' and as a result were 'refused classification'.

The offender was subsequently charged with five counts of possession of a child abuse computer game. The offender had no previous convictions and pleaded guilty to these charges. A conviction was recorded and he was fined \$4,000. The Magistrate further ordered that the offender forfeit to the Crown his seized computer equipment. The remaining seized property containing child pornography was destroyed.

Many overseas and Australian agencies have already taken the initiative in providing parents and children with useful safety tips and links to child-appropriate sites. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has published 'A parent's guide to Internet safety'⁴⁹ and 'Safety tips for kids on the Internet'.⁵⁰ The Australian Broadcasting Authority, in conjunction with the National Office for the Information Economy, has developed a web site, 'Australian Families Guide to the Internet',⁵¹ to encourage families to use the Internet. Information is provided on risks, suggested rules and available filtering software. The site also contains a number of links to age-appropriate sites for children.

Grooming the child for sexual contact

Many studies, and QCC's own research, have confirmed, that offenders often engage in a lengthy process of 'grooming' the child — whether the child is specifically selected and targeted, or happens to be in close proximity to an offender. The purpose of grooming is, initially, to gain the confidence of the child and, in some cases, of the family. The process often involves elaborate schemes to create an opportunity to be alone with the child, and the gradual stripping away of the child's inhibitions.

Getting time alone with the child

Most offending behaviour takes place when an offender is alone with a child. Smallbone and Wortley collected detailed information from offenders about how they ensured time alone with a child. Their responses, presented in Table 17, show that a wide range of strategies is employed in order to get time alone with children who will later be involved in sexual contact.

⁴⁹ Web reference — <http://www.fbi.gov/library/pguide/pguide.htm>, 20 June 2000.

⁵⁰ Web reference — <http://www.fbi.gov/kids/crimepre/internet/internet.htm>, 20 June 2000.

⁵¹ Web reference — <http://www.aba.gov.au/family/index.html>, 20 June 2000.

Table 17: Strategies for getting time alone with children

Strategy	Per cent of each group			Combined (n=169)
	Intra- familial offenders (n= 79)	Extra- familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed- type offenders (n=30)	
Being at home – it was OK with my wife/girlfriend to be alone there	57.7	27.1	56.7	46.7
Watching TV with them	36.6	32.2	73.3	41.7
Letting them sleep in your bed	31.6	30.5	60.0	36.3
Sneaking into their room at night	38.0	15.3	63.3	34.5
Babysitting	33.3	30.5	30.0	31.7
Going for a car ride with them	26.6	28.8	50.0	31.5
Tucking them into bed	34.2	16.9	43.3	29.8
Taking them places during the day without one of their parents	13.9	28.8	50.0	25.6
Going swimming with them	16.5	22.0	50.0	24.4
Working at different times than one of the child's parents, being unemployed, or staying home from work so that you could have time alone with them	38.2	12.1	36.7	24.1
Taking a bath/shower with them	25.3	11.9	36.7	22.6
Going to isolated or out of the way places (e.g. vacant lots)	15.2	18.6	43.3	21.4
Taking them on overnight trips without one of their parents	10.1	22.0	46.7	20.8
Giving them a bath	17.7	11.9	30.0	17.9
Being together for a holiday	16.5	13.6	30.0	17.9
Letting the child stay up after the parent had gone to bed	19.0	8.5	30.0	17.3
Taking them camping	8.9	18.6	26.7	15.5
Being at a house of a friend or relative who said it was OK for us to be alone there	6.3	16.9	33.3	14.9
Going to a shopping mall	5.1	13.6	16.7	10.1

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.
2. Responses listed in this table include all responses where the proportion of the combined offenders who nominated the strategy was greater than 10 per cent. The full table relating to strategies for getting time alone with children is presented in the report entitled *Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Offender Characteristics and Modus Operandi*. The full report is available from the QCC.
3. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Again for all categories, the close-to-home nature of child sexual abuse is highlighted. The most popular strategies revolve around domestic routine. Some of these have a sexual component that may arouse suspicion — for example, letting the child sleep in the offender’s bed (36%) and taking a shower or bath with the child (23%) (although these are behaviours that most parents engage in from time to time as a normal part of parenting). However, other activities are on the surface quite innocuous or might even be considered indicative of a positive child–adult relationship — for example, watching TV with the child (42%), or taking the child on an excursion (26%). One of the challenges that these data raise, then, is separating normal and appropriate adult behaviour towards children from behaviour that is specifically calculated to get the child alone for the purpose of sexual contact.

Again, differences emerge in these data between offender sub-types that suggest somewhat greater levels of planning and determination among mixed-type offenders than among intra-familial and extra-familial offenders. Certainly, mixed-type offenders generally acknowledge greater utilisation of tactics designed to get time alone with the child. They are, for example, much more likely than the other two sub-types to allow the child to sleep in a bed with them (60% versus 32% and 31%), to sneak into their room at night (63% versus 38% and 15%), take them swimming (50% versus 16.5% and 22.0%), and take them to isolated spots (43% versus 15% and 19%).

In addition to gaining time alone with a child, extra-familial and mixed-type offenders also reported a range of strategies directed toward victims’ parents. Respondents most often reported that they spent time with the child in the presence of the parent, and had also specifically befriended the parents of the child (see Table 18).

Table 18: Strategies aimed at parents/caretakers to get time alone with the child (extra-familial and mixed-type offenders only)

Strategy	Per cent of each group		
	Extra-familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed-type offenders (n=30)	Combined (n=90)
Spent time with the child while parent/caretaker was present	44.4	50.0	46.2
Made friends with the parent/caretaker	44.4	45.8	44.9
Helped parent/caretaker around the house	21.5	45.8	35.9
Offered to babysit victim	22.2	25.0	23.1
Asked neighbours or friends of family to join in family activities	7.4	20.8	21.5
Offered to drive/walk victim to or from school	13.0	33.3	19.2

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Notes:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.
2. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Almost half of the offenders reported spending time with the child's parents while the child was present (46%), or making friends with the parents (45%). More offenders report making friends with the child's parents in Table 18 than report establishing friendships with the child's parents in order to gain access to the child in Table 16. This highlights the probable role of opportunity in sexual offending discussed earlier. It is likely that many offenders will abuse the children of their friends, rather than specifically befriending the parents of children they have targeted for abuse.

In a separate set of questions, offenders were questioned about the parents' behaviour towards them. The majority of offenders reported that parents knew the offender was spending time alone with the child (71%) and that the parents liked the offender (70%). In contrast, only 13 per cent of offenders reported that parents complained about them spending too much time with the child and 16 per cent reported that the child had to lie to their parents when spending time with the offender.

According to a third of offenders, the victim's parents knew about the sexual contact and reported the offenders. Of some concern is the fact that 21 per cent of offenders (including 19% of extra-familial offenders) reported that the parents knew about the abuse but did not report it. These results should be viewed with caution as they are the offenders' account of their beliefs as to the parents' knowledge.

Project Axis interviews with offenders and survivors provided some typical examples of the offenders' relationships with victims' families:

- One of the offenders interviewed for Project Axis was a trusted and long-term family friend of the three children he sexually abused. He said that he put a lot of time and effort into developing the family's trust, helping the children with their homework, reading books to them, giving presents and generally showing affection to them.
- One of the survivors interviewed for Project Axis indicated that the offender would seek the permission of her parents to spend time with her. For example, he would be permitted by the survivor's mother to take her for a walk. After the first offence occurred, the offender maintained a friendship with her and blackmailed and threatened her to ensure her silence. He encouraged the survivor's mother to move into his house after the survivor's parents separated. The survivor was told not to tell anyone because if she did it would break up the family.

Gaining the confidence of children

Child sex offenders often attempt to establish special relationships with their victims to gain the children's trust and ensure their compliance. Some strategies identified in the research include:

- using play or teaching activities;
- using bribes, outings or lifts home;

- using affection, understanding and love;
- using stories, lies, magic or treasure hunts;
- allowing the child to engage in activities that are normally not permitted, such as drinking alcohol, smoking, using drugs or driving;
- asking the child for help.

Those who offend within the family may not need to go to such lengths to gain the confidence of their child victims. Fathers and step-fathers often use their position of authority to facilitate the abuse (Budin & Johnson 1989).

The Project Axis survey of survivors asked respondents about the behaviour of the offender prior to the abuse occurring. Their responses, detailed in Table 19, concur with other information about the modus operandi of child sex offenders.

Table 19: Offenders' behaviour prior to the first offence — Project Axis survey of survivors

Behaviour	Number	Per cent
Spent time with me	79	37
Complimented me	71	34
Blackmailed/threatened me	63	30
Bought me gifts	42	20
Gave me money	37	18
Took me on holidays	25	12
Other	10	5

Source: Project Axis survey of survivors

Note:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.

Smallbone and Wortley also found similar patterns of interaction used by offenders to gain the child's trust. The most common tactics involved attempts to befriend the child and establish some form of emotional relationship with him/her. This included spending a lot of time with the child (68%), touching the child non-sexually (67%), giving the child a lot of attention (65%) and other similar strategies. These attempts to draw in the child emotionally were much more popular than buying the child's trust with gifts — for example, money (34%), privileges (31%), lollies (30%) and toys (16%) — or by giving them alcohol (22%) or drugs (7%). Again, mixed-type offenders acknowledged greater use of these strategies than the intra-familial or extra-familial offenders.

In all, over half (54%) of offenders said they had tried to form a 'real friendship' with their victim, and 43 per cent said they had sought to be 'like a parent' for the child.

Desensitisation of the child

The process of grooming often involves the gradual desensitisation of the child to sexual touching and behaviour. This may entail, for instance, dressing and undressing in front of the child, ‘accidental’ brushes against the child, tickling or wrestling with the child or exposing the child to pornography (Berlinger & Conte 1990; Conte, Wolf & Smith 1989). The offender may then ‘read’ the child’s reaction in order to assess whether it is ‘safe’ to move on to offending. The offender may gradually move on from touching the child on the outside of his/her clothes to more invasive abuse, while each time monitoring the child’s reaction to see if it is safe to continue the activity (Conte, Wolf & Smith 1989; Elliott, Browne & Kilcoyne 1995).

Interviews with survivors conducted as part of Project Axis confirmed the use of these methods. Survivors reported that offenders used a number of different ways of initiating them to the abuse, including introducing them to pornography and starting with non-sexual touching which led to sexual activity over time.

Respondents in the Smallbone and Wortley study reported how they managed to engage children in sexual activity. Their responses, presented in Table 20, also suggest a gradual strategy of desensitising children to offending behaviour. Threats of violence, or the use of violence, were reported relatively infrequently.

Table 20: Strategies to get the child to take part in sexual activity

Strategy	Per cent of each offender group			
	Intra-familial (n=79)	Extra-familial (n=60)	Mixed-type (n=30)	Combined (n=169)
Desensitising victim to sexual contact (e.g. touching them sexually more and more)	41.8	49.2	66.7	48.8
Giving gifts (e.g. giving them gifts from time to time)	25.3	32.2	63.3	34.5
Exposure to pornography (e.g. showing them magazines, pictures, Internet sites or videotapes with naked adults in them)	6.3	23.7	40.0	18.5
Buying victims clothes (e.g. buying them bathing suits)	5.1	1.7	40.0	10.1
Using alcohol and drugs (e.g. giving them beer or alcohol just before or just after the sexual contact)	5.1	6.8	20.0	8.3
Creating victim helplessness (e.g. making them feel like there is nothing they can do to stop it)	3.8	8.5	13.3	7.1
Incapacitation (e.g. getting them drunk with beer or alcohol)	1.3	5.1	16.7	5.4
Engaging the child in pornography (e.g. having them watch other children do sexual things with each other)	–	6.8	16.7	5.4
Threatening with a weapon (e.g. saying you will hurt them with a knife)	–	3.4	6.7	2.4
Threatening to harm others (e.g. saying you will hurt their brothers or sisters)	–	–	3.3	0.6

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Notes:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.
2. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Case study: Project Axis interviews with offenders

One offender admitted to offending against his 3 daughters and step-granddaughter. He would play games with them and take them to special places, such as the beach and swimming pools, and on other outings. One of the games he used to play with the girls was 'hide and seek' and when he found the child during the game he would touch her.

The offender said that he used to allow the girls to see him naked in ordinary situations (when dressing or undressing) so that his nakedness appeared natural to them. He said that he never observed fear or distress in them. He believed that the reason they tolerated the sexual activity without distress had a lot to do with his patience and the gradual process of seduction he used.

The use of pornography by offenders to get a child to take part in sexual activity deserves closer attention. Smallbone and Wortley found that offenders' level of pornography use is high, with about three-quarters of offenders admitting having used pornography at some time. However, only about a fifth of all offenders reported having exposed a child to pornography as a strategy to get the child to take part in sexual activity. Mixed-type offenders were most likely to expose a child to pornography. This group of offenders was also much more likely to have ever used child pornography (28%) than either extra-familial (9%) or intra-familial offenders (4.0%).

Length of time for grooming

The process of grooming a child is often gradual. Intra-familial offenders will usually know their victim/s for a long period before engaging in any sexual contact. Table 21 shows the length of time between when extra-familial and mixed-type offenders first met their child victims and the initiation of sexual contact. Just over half of the mixed-type offenders and 43 per cent of extra-familial offenders had known the child for more than six months before initiating sexual contact.

Table 21: Time between the offender first meeting with the child and the initiation of sexual contact (extra-familial and mixed-type offenders only)

Time	Per cent of each group	
	Extra-familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed-type offenders (n=30)
0–5 minutes	7.4	4.3
5 minutes – 1 hour	11.1	4.3
1 hour – 1 day	3.7	4.3
1 day – 1 month	14.8	30.4
1–6 months	20.4	4.3
6–12 months	14.8	13.0
> 12 months	27.8	39.1

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.
2. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Case study: Project Axis interviews with offenders

An interviewed offender said that sport, and most usually soccer, was the social connection he used to make contact with children, although he also had a genuine love of the sport. He said that he was always welcome in the children's homes and the parents obviously had complete trust in him. He was always friendly, helpful and considered a 'nice guy'. He would give presents and money to some children, and take them away on trips or other outings. He admitted that he usually told lies to the children to help facilitate the abuse, but said he still felt that he genuinely cared for them.

The offender would ask the children to perform odd jobs for him, such as cleaning his car, in order to afford him access to them. It was a useful way to get the children to his house, away from the soccer field.

The offender said that he engaged in a lot of hugging and cuddling at the beginning of the 'relationship' with the children — the seduction phase — and that the early moves made towards them were not sexual in nature. He gradually progressed to watching explicit gay videos with the children prior to engaging in sexual activity with them. He said that at every stage 'no meant no', as he did not want to upset the child. He told the interviewers that to do otherwise would be self-defeating.

He said that in his entire offending career he had resorted to anger only once. On that one occasion he got upset and locked himself inside his bedroom when a child refused to cooperate in sexual activity. His anger, directed at the victim, was manifested by rejection and isolation of the child. It is interesting to note that although he said 'no meant no', this incident tends to indicate that this may not have been the case and that he brought emotional pressure to bear on the child.

The offender said that his only real method of seduction was being friendly to the child. He did not use any particular method to prevent the child from telling others of the

abuse, as he said that he thought he had the boys he offended against ‘on side and that they were friends’.

The success of offenders’ grooming strategies

Grooming strategies are not always successful. Some children attempt to stop the offender from engaging in sexual contact and, sometimes, this will be effective. Table 22 shows the strategies that offenders reported their child victims had used to prevent sexual contact, and whether this had been successful, according to offenders. For example, 45 per cent of offenders said that the child told them they did not want sexual contact. Of this group, 85 per cent said that the strategy had, at least on some occasions, stopped the offender.

The most widely used and apparently effective strategies involved the child showing the offender that the sexual contact was unwanted and distressing. Resisting or calling for help were not commonly reported and were reportedly not very effective when used by children.

Table 22: Offenders’ reports about strategies used by children to stop sexual contact

Behaviour	Per cent of respondents	
	Strategy attempted by child	Where used, strategy was successful
Told you they didn’t want to	45.2	85.9
Said no	39.8	76.8
Told you they were scared	27.7	61.2
Cried	27.5	70.8
Told someone else what was happening	25.9	64.4
Demanded to be left alone	25.9	56.5
Said they would tell someone	19.3	47.1
Told you people weren’t supposed to touch their private parts	18.7	47.1
Tried to get away	15.7	39.3
Fought back	13.8	28.0
Yelled for help	13.8	19.2
Yelled or screamed	13.2	29.2

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.
2. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Key findings

- Offenders most often seek victims close to home. For intra-familial offenders this clearly involves children in their own home. Extra-familial and mixed-type offenders seek victims among the children of friends, or other children with whom they already have some social relationship. Mixed-type offenders are more likely than other groups of offenders to seek children in public locations such as public toilets and parks.
- The Smallbone and Wortley findings suggest that it is likely that many offenders will abuse the children of their friends, rather than specifically befriending the parents of children they have targeted for abuse.
- While a fifth of offenders found victims within organisations with which they were involved, relatively few offenders said they joined the organisation for the explicit purpose of locating victims.
- The most commonly reported strategies for gaining time alone with a child revolve around domestic routine, and emphasise the close-to-home nature of child sexual abuse. Strategies reported by mixed-type offenders to get time alone with a child suggest that this group engage in a higher degree of planning for their offending, than do intra-familial and extra-familial offenders.
- Offenders report that gaining the trust of a child is often achieved through forming an emotional relationship with the child rather than through buying the child's trust with gifts.
- Offenders and victims report that offenders engage in a gradual process of desensitising the child to sexual activity by gradually exposing them to sexual touching or pornography. While intra-familial offenders usually know their victims well before engaging in sexual contact, many mixed-type (52%) and extra-familial (42%) offenders reported having known the child for more than six months before initiating sexual contact.

Chapter six

Disclosure of child sexual abuse

One of the greatest single impediments faced by police and other agencies to the detection of child sexual abuse is the low rate of reporting of abuse by child victims or adult survivors, and by those to whom they disclose. The Queensland branch of Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse,⁵² in its submission to Project Axis, comments:

As we have often stated, we will never know who the offenders are until the victims tell us. This is the bottom line, but still this fundamental truth has not yet been adequately addressed. We have to understand that no matter how many million dollar inquiries we have, they will all come to naught without the testimony of victims.

This chapter⁵³ will examine the following issues relating to disclosure:

- How many victims disclose abuse to another person?
- When do victims disclose abuse?
- Why don't some child victims disclose abuse?
- Who do victims tell?
- The process of disclosure.

How many victims disclose abuse to another person?

There is little information available on how many victims of child sexual abuse ever disclose. Several studies conducted to explore the question of disclosure, however, have suggested that disclosure occurs in very low numbers among victims of child sexual abuse:

- almost half the children in a treatment program for sexual abuse had not disclosed the abuse at all, but the abuse had been discovered as a result of the suspicion of others (Sauzier 1989, as cited in Bussey & Grimbeek 1995);

⁵² The Queensland branch of Advocates of Survivors of Child Abuse has recently separated from Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse and is now known as the People's Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse.

⁵³ Much of this chapter is drawn from material provided by Dr Michael Dunne of the Centre for Public Health Research, Queensland University of Technology, and Ms Margot Legosz of the Research and Prevention Division, CJC.

- the majority of both males and females reporting sexual victimisation in a study by Finkelhor (1979) had not previously told anybody about their experience;
- only half (52%) of the female adult survivors of child sexual abuse in an Australian study reported that they had disclosed the abuse to another person (Fleming 1997).

Research has concluded that the duration, frequency and severity of sexual abuse affects disclosure. For example, victims of less serious abuse are more likely to disclose, than others who experience more serious abuse (Sauzier 1989, as cited in Bussey & Grimbeek 1995).

When do victims disclose abuse?

Not only do relatively few victims ever bring abuse to light, but a substantial proportion of those who do tell someone about it delay this for significant periods of time, often until they reach adulthood. According to Fleming’s 1997 study, fewer than a third (28%) of female victims disclosed, or tried to disclose, at the time of the incident. Almost half of the women who disclosed child sexual abuse did not do so until at least 10 years after the first abusive episode.

The Project Axis survey of adult survivors asked participants how much time had elapsed between the offence and their disclosure. The results, reported in Table 23, show that a quarter of respondents did not disclose the offence until at least 20 years after the first offence. Only 3 per cent disclosed the abuse within a month of the incident and only 4 per cent disclosed within a year. It must be noted, however, that the survey methodology for the Project Axis research involved distributing questionnaires through various support services and advocacy groups. Participants in the study were adults and therefore the survey is likely to contain a higher number of lengthy delayed disclosures than a study of child victims or young adults (see Appendix 1 for a full description of the survey methodology).

Table 23: Delay in disclosure/reporting by adult survivors

Length of delay	Number	Per cent
Within a week	5	2.4
1–4 weeks	1	0.5
1–6 months	2	0.9
6–12 months	1	0.5
1–2 years	–	–
2–4 years	13	6.1
5–9 years	25	11.8
10–19 years	33	15.6
>20 years	51	24.1
Not stated	81	38.2
Total	212	100.0

Source: Project Axis survey of adult survivors

QPS data on officially reported child sexual abuse show that only about 18 per cent of offences were brought to police notice within a month of the incident occurring (see Table 24), and that nearly 43 per cent were reported within the first year. Twenty-seven per cent of the offences were reported to the police five or more years after the offence. These figures are remarkably similar to those reported by Petrakis and O'Connor (1999) in their account of the experiences of the Victorian Police Child Exploitation Squad between 1988 and 1996.

Table 24: Reported offences: Length of delay by gender of complainant — 1994–98

Length of delay	Female		Male		Total	
	Number of offences	%	Number of offences	%	Number of offences	%
Within a week	560	4.9	121	2.7	681	4.3
1–4 weeks	1,709	15.1	462	10.4	2,171	13.8
1–6 months	1,972	17.4	507	11.4	2,479	15.7
6 months – 1 year	982	8.7	413	9.3	1,395	8.9
1–5 years	2,476	21.9	791	17.9	3,267	20.8
5–10 years	739	6.5	288	6.5	1,027	6.5
10–20 years	1,049	9.3	883	19.9	1,932	12.3
More than 20 years	707	6.2	624	14.1	1,331	8.5
Missing data	1,120	9.9	339	7.7	1,491	9.3
Total	11,314	100.0	4,428	100.0	15,774	100.0

Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data

Note:

1. Delay was estimated by subtracting the date of the first reported offence from the date of reporting to police. As previously indicated, some offences took place over many years, which could also explain some of the delay. It is likely that the method of counting will tend to over-state the number of offences falling within the longer delay categories.
2. Data presented here include offences reported to the QPS in 1994. As the CRISP system was not fully operational state-wide until December 1994, reported offence data for 1994 are incomplete.
3. Missing data includes cases where the suspected offender has not been identified by police.

CJC analysis of the QPS data has also shown that factors such as the type of offence reported, the gender of the complainant and the relationship between the offender and complainant, affect the length of delay between the incident and the report to police. For example:

- about three quarters of the offences of wilful obscene behaviour towards child victims were reported within the first month;
- only 15 per cent of other sex offences were reported within the first month;
- a notable proportion of some offences were not reported for at least 5 years — rape (36%); incest (32%); and indecent assault on children (30%).

Table 24 shows that offences where the victim was male, compared with those where the victim was female, were less likely to be reported in the year immediately following the offence (approximately 34% compared with 46%). Offences reported to police involving male victims were more likely than those involving female victims to have occurred 20 years or more previously.

Notwithstanding a large amount of missing data, Table 25 demonstrates the relatively strong effect of the relationship between complainant and offender on reporting rates. A high proportion (85%) of offences committed by strangers (classified as ‘unknown’) were reported to the police within the first year, while significantly fewer offences committed by relatives (32%) and other offenders ‘known’ to the victim (47% on average)⁵⁴ were reported within the same timeframe. Of particular interest is that offences where the relationship of the offender to the victim was ‘professional’⁵⁵ are much more likely to be reported many years after the incident.

Greater social awareness of child sexual abuse (particularly abuse of males) in relation to institutions such as schools and churches, has probably contributed to the high number of complainants coming forward many years after the incident.

Table 25: Reported offences: Length of delay by relationship of offender to complainant — 1994–98

Length of delay	Relationship (per cent of each group)					
	Relative (n=3,721)	Friend (n=636)	Acquaintance (n=1,533)	Known (n=1,515)	Professional (n=370)	Unknown (n=1,058)
Within a week	0.8	1.3	1.7	2.8	–	27.4
1–4 weeks	7.4	11.9	23.5	15.9	9.5	34.4
1–6 months	15.4	23.9	22.4	20.7	14.6	18.5
6 months – 1 year	8.8	9.7	13.4	13.1	5.1	4.9
1–5 years	25.5	48.6	24.2	21.8	17.3	6.3
5–10 years	9.7	2.4	4.4	9.8	1.6	2.6
10–20 years	18.2	0.9	7.2	9.0	19.5	1.6
More than 20 years	14.2	1.3	3.2	6.8	32.4	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: CJC analysis of QPS unpublished data

Notes:

1. Information about the relationship between offender and complainant was missing for 6,938 complaints to police (44%). This is largely because relationship data were not consistently recorded until May 1997.
2. Delay was estimated by subtracting the date of the first reported offence from the date of reporting to police. As indicated, some offences took place over many years, which could also explain some of the delay. It is likely that the method of counting will tend to over-state the number of offences falling within the longer delay categories.
3. Data presented here include offences reported to the QPS in 1994. As the CRISP system was not fully operational state-wide until December 1994, reported offence data for 1994 are incomplete.
4. Refer to the notes to Table 7 for descriptions of the relationship categories used.

⁵⁴ This calculation comprises the categories ‘known’ (52%), ‘acquaintance’ (61%), ‘professional’, which includes client, colleague, associate, teacher, tutor, carer, foster parent, guardian, educator or student (30%) and ‘friend’ (47%).

⁵⁵ ‘Professional’ includes client, colleague, associate, teacher, tutor, carer, foster parent, guardian, educator, student.

Delay in reporting child sexual abuse may, in some cases, be due to later recovery of a repressed memory of child sexual abuse. Repression of memory is a psychological defense mechanism that is believed to block an individual's recollection of unpleasant and emotionally disturbing events (Loftus 1993). It is not uncommon for memories to resurface between 5 and 40 years after the alleged incident originally occurred (Loftus 1993). Some practitioners use Recovered Memory Therapy to assist their clients to recall traumatic emotional events such as child sexual abuse. The weight of professional opinion, however, is that reports of recovered memory should be treated with caution, and should be verified by other means wherever possible (British Psychological Society 1999; American Medical Association 1993; Australian Psychological Society 1995). The implications of repressed memories for the prosecution of alleged offenders will be discussed in Volume 2.

Why don't some victims disclose abuse?

There are a number of reasons why both child victims and adult survivors may not disclose child sexual abuse. Children may fail to recognise the behaviour of the perpetrator as wrong or to identify themselves as victims. They may be unwilling to disclose due to feelings of embarrassment, shame or fear.

Adult survivors of childhood abuse may believe that their disclosure will serve no real purpose as the abuse occurred so long ago. They may also fear that as a result of disclosure they will be seen as somehow damaged or, particularly in the case of male adult survivors, as potential abusers themselves.

Children and power

Any analysis of the reasons children do not report sexual abuse must begin with a clear understanding of the position of children in relation to adults. Children are vulnerable, physically unimposing and dependent on adults for survival. This dependence on adults places a child in a uniquely powerless position. Children are taught, in a range of complex ways, that adults are rarely wrong, and should certainly never be questioned by a child. Combined with a child's need for the attention, approval and protection of adults, the perfect environment for victimisation is created.

Compounding the general powerlessness of children in relation to adults is the fact that most victims know their offender in some way, either as a member of the family, or a trusted family friend. For children who are abused by teachers, priests or other trusted authority figures, the weaker position of the child is particularly marked. Priests and other religious leaders can also take advantage of the fact that children regard them as responsible for defining the boundaries of what is morally right and wrong (Parkinson 1999).

The powerlessness of children is also exacerbated by the fact that child sex offenders often target children who are particularly vulnerable, either due to their social or

physical isolation, or through the absence of either biological parent (see Chapter 3 for a description of the risk factors for sexual victimisation of children).

In this context, it is not surprising that levels of disclosure by children about child sexual abuse are as low as they appear to be.

Children may not realise that the behaviour is not normal

Children who are victimised might not perceive the actions of the offender as abusive. As Chapter 3 found, the average age of victims is 11 years. At that age, they may not, because of their ignorance of sexual matters, realise that the activity is abusive (Berlinger & Conte 1990). Often the abuse is presented as a 'normal' expression of affection or a learning experience. In this case, children have little reason to report the abuse and it is unlikely that it will come to the attention of others unless through their inadvertent sexualised statements or behaviour (Finkelhor & Williams 1988, as cited in Bussey & Grimbeek 1995). Parents or other carers who, often with the best of intentions, keep their children innocent of matters relating to sex may unwittingly make them more susceptible to victimisation (Bussey & Grimbeek 1995).

Some children may not identify themselves as victims because the sexual abuse generated feelings of interest, pleasure, amusement or excitement (Nash & West 1985, as cited in Li, West & Woodhouse 1990; Kilpatrick 1992, as cited in McConaghy 1998). Victims who enjoyed any aspect of the sexual behaviour, or who do not resist the abuse at the time, are unlikely to classify sexual acts with adults as abuse. This is particularly so when the perpetrator is female (Briggs 1995). Male victims tend to simply accept responsibility for what has happened to them (Briggs 1995).

It should be noted that while adults may recall feelings of excitement or interest, this does not lessen the impact of the abuse. In fact, those who recall pleasurable feelings during the encounter may find the experience more difficult to deal with as there is an increased likelihood of guilt and confusion (Goldman & Ronken 1999).

Fear, embarrassment, shame and other factors

Even if children are, or later become, aware that what is happening to them is not normal or identify themselves as victims of abuse, there remain a number of factors that may prevent them from disclosing. They include feelings of fear, embarrassment or shame, their desensitisation to the abuse through the grooming process, and a belief that the person told will not be able to help them or will not believe them (see for example Fleming 1997; Anderson et al. 1993).

If the offender is a member of the child's family, children may be anxious not to disclose the abuse for fear that it might result in disruption to their family, and may see themselves as partly responsible for the abuse. Children who are the victims of incest often report feeling that they are somehow responsible or to blame and feel some degree of guilt about the abuse (Bussey & Grimbeek 1995).

Embarrassment is an extremely common reaction in victims of abuse and should not be underestimated as an inhibitor to disclosure. Boys who have been sexually abused by a male offender may experience confusion concerning their sexuality and fear they are homosexual, or may be perceived as such by others as a result of what has taken place (Briggs submission to Project Axis 1998).

Children may lack the skills to disclose the abuse

Children may not tell anyone about the abuse because they see themselves as lacking the skills to communicate the incident effectively (Bussey & Grimbeek 1995). Child sexual abuse is generally associated with feelings of anxiety, helplessness, powerlessness and limited coping ability (Stinson & Hendrick 1992, as cited in Petronio et al. 1996). There is a substantial body of research to suggest that the more individuals judge themselves as not being able to perform a particular task (such as disclosure) the more stress they experience (Bandura, Reese & Adams 1982, as cited in Bussey & Grimbeek 1995). The conclusion may be drawn that the more children regard themselves as incapable of disclosing the abuse, the more stress they experience and the less likely they are to disclose (Bussey & Grimbeek 1995).

Strategies employed by offenders to protect against disclosure

Offenders may also engage in specific strategies to create an environment that further prevents a child from telling someone about their experience. When the abuse starts, the offender will typically warn the child not to tell anyone — the child is sworn to secrecy. In some cases the offender may suggest dire consequences if the child tells, such as the offender or the child being sent away, the family breaking up, or the offender getting into trouble. The offender might also tell the child that no-one would believe the child if he/she told, that telling would hurt others (such as the child's mother), or that people might think badly of the child (Berlinger & Conte 1990).

Offenders may also threaten violence, although the actual use of violence is reported in only a minority of cases (Elliot, Browne & Kilcoyne 1995; Budin & Johnson 1989).

In the case of older victims, the offender may involve the child in illicit activities such as watching pornography, drinking alcohol, smoking or taking drugs, making the child complicit in the offending behaviour and thus reducing the likelihood that the child will tell and disclose his/her own behaviour (Miller 1997).

These strategies act as powerful methods of controlling children. Victims who participated in the Project Axis survey of adult survivors of child sexual abuse, many of whom did not disclose the abuse, reported that offenders commonly used emotional manipulation (e.g. 'this is our secret') and threats (e.g. 'if you tell, bad things will happen') to ensure their silence. In some cases the offenders were successful in making

their victims feel as if they themselves were somehow to blame for the abuse — see the case studies described below.

The Smallbone and Wortley questionnaire asked offenders how they had prevented the victim from disclosing the abuse. Respondents most commonly told the victim that the respondent would be sent to prison if anyone knew, or said they relied on the fact that they had spent large amounts of time with the child (refer to Table 26).

Table 26: Strategies to keep the child from disclosing sexual contact

Strategy	Per cent of each group			Combined (n=169)
	Intra- familial offenders (n=79)	Extra- familial offenders (n=60)	Mixed- type offenders (n=30)	
Giving and withdrawing benefits (e.g. saying that you would go to jail or get into trouble if they told anyone)	41.8	30.5	56.7	60.5
Threats/physical harm to victim (e.g. saying that they would go to jail or get into trouble if they told anyone)	6.3	1.7	10.0	5.4
Threats to others (e.g. hoping the child thought you would hurt one of their family members even though you didn't say you would)	1.3	–	3.3	1.2

Source: Smallbone and Wortley

Note:

1. Multiple responses were permitted.
2. Small variations may exist in the numbers for each group caused by occasional skipping of items by participants. Percentages reported have been adjusted to account for reduced numbers where these occur.

Case studies

Project Axis adult survivors

'By the second time it happened I didn't think anyone would believe me and I felt like I was to blame'.

'I did not report the offences to police because I was only a little girl when it happened and Dad told me to stop being a rude little girl so I felt that it was my fault'.

'I also felt ashamed and blamed myself as if it was my fault'.

Project Axis interviews with offenders

One offender stated that, after the abuse had occurred, he would tell the child not to disclose the abuse to anyone and promised that he would never do it again. To his knowledge, this worked well under the circumstances, as only 3 of his 28 victims ever told their parents about the abuse.

Another offender said that he taught his stepdaughter that sex was a private thing and that people did not talk about it with others. He admitted that he taught her this primarily to try to prevent her from telling someone about the abuse.

A third offender said that after the first couple of attempts at sex, his step-son began to relax, and became less scared and more trusting. The offender threatened emotional rejection if he disclosed the abuse to anyone and told him that 'no one would believe you because you are always doing the wrong thing'.

This offender reported that the first few times his step-son felt uncomfortable with what was happening. The offender was very anxious afterwards and wondered what the boy would say. He did in fact tell his mother of the abuse, but she did not at that time believe him. She told the offender about the disclosure and suggested that her son might be saying these things because he wanted him out of the house.

The factors explored above help to explain why a significant proportion of child sexual abuse remains unreported altogether, and why disclosure is often significantly delayed until the victim identifies an incident or relationship as abusive and feels able to tell someone.

Who do victims tell?

When child victims do choose to tell someone about the abuse, it seems that parents, and particularly mothers (49%), as well as friends (32%) and siblings (29%) are the ones to whom they usually turn (Fleming 1997). A United Kingdom study of child victims found that 41 per cent had disclosed to their mother (Monck & New 1996). Late disclosures of abuse by adult survivors of child sexual abuse are most commonly made to adult partners or non-family friends (Anderson et al. 1993) as well as to counsellors and mothers (Mostyn 1997).

Very few victims of child sexual abuse report the abuse to an official agency:

- An Australian study found that fewer than 10 per cent of female victims of sexual abuse had reported it to the police, a doctor or a helping agency such as a sexual abuse service (Fleming 1997).

- A New Zealand study reported similar rates of disclosure to an official agency, with only 7.5 per cent of abused women reporting or having the child sexual abuse reported to police or to a helping agency (Anderson et al. 1993).
- Very few adult survivors make an official complaint about the offender — the Project Axis survey of adult survivors found that only 17 per cent of offenders had been reported to police.

Heriot (1996) reports that around 75 per cent of mothers⁵⁶ believe their child's allegations of sexual abuse. Of these, only 68 per cent were supportive of their child. This percentage dropped to 44 per cent when the alleged offender was the mother's partner.

Victims and adult survivors of child sexual abuse may also anonymously disclose abuse to a public inquiry such as a 'phone-in'. Presented below are data arising from two such public forums for reporting child sexual abuse — Operation Paradox and Kids Help Line.

Operation Paradox/Crime Stoppers Hotline

Until 1997–98, the public was encouraged to report information on child sexual abuse to the QPS as part of Operation Paradox, a national phone-in conducted annually. A total of 169 child sexual abuse complaints were received during Operation Paradox in September 1996, and 314 during the September 1997 operation (QPS 1997). While Operation Paradox is no longer conducted annually, a permanent hotline — Crime Stoppers — has been established and is in operation 24 hours a day throughout the year.⁵⁷

Kids Help Line

Kids Help Line⁵⁸ provides a valuable resource for children who may feel unable to disclose abuse to friends or family. Of 14,723 counselling calls made in 1998 to Kids Help Line by young people who nominated Queensland as their location, 5 per cent (760 calls) concerned sexual abuse. Kids Help Line (1999) has cautioned that given that 60 per cent of callers choose not to reveal their location, these figures are substantial underestimates.

Girls made approximately 91 per cent of the calls relating to sexual abuse and 83 per cent of callers were aged between 15 and 18 years. The sex and age breakdown of callers is presented in Table 27.

⁵⁶ There has been no equivalent research into the response of fathers.

⁵⁷ The freecall telephone number for Crime Stoppers is 1800 333 000. The Crime Stoppers hotline is not restricted to child sex offences.

⁵⁸ Kids Help Line was established in 1993. The freecall telephone number for Kids Help Line is 1800 55 1800. Children and young people can call Kids Help Line about any issue, any time.

Table 27: Calls to Kids Help Line about sexual abuse by gender and age — 1999

Age in years	Per cent of sexual abuse calls	
	Female (n=692)	Male (n=68)
<5	<1	–
5–9	1	–
10–14	13	2
15–18	76	7

Source: Kids Help Line 1999, unpublished data

Of the callers:

- 60 per cent were no longer experiencing abuse but had unresolved issues as a result of previous abuse
- 9 per cent were at current risk of abuse
- 6 per cent were experiencing occasional abuse
- 16 per cent were experiencing regular abuse
- 8 per cent were seeking information about sexual abuse.

Around 20 per cent of calls were referred to other agencies.

Significantly, during 1998 Kids Help Line counsellors were able to respond to only 37 per cent of all attempted calls to the service, while 63 per cent went unanswered. As with many community-based organisations, the service would clearly benefit from increased funding.⁵⁹

The process of disclosure by children

When a child or adolescent makes a disclosure about abuse, it is often accidental (Sorenson & Snow 1991). Accidental disclosures, which occur largely among pre-school children, can result from:

- the questioning of a child who is known to have been exposed to an alleged or convicted child sex offender
- the exhibition by a child of excessively sexualised behaviour learned from the abusive incident

⁵⁹ The four sources of funding for Kids Help Line are (1) Boystown Family Care; (2) The National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy; (3) corporate sponsors; and (4) trusts and funds (Kids Help Line 1999).

- sexually inappropriate statements made by a child
- disclosure by a friend told of the abuse in confidence. (Sorenson & Snow 1991)

Purposeful disclosures, which occur most often among adolescents, are those consciously made by children to others, and are less common than accidental disclosures. Sorenson and Snow (1991) identified the following causes for deliberate disclosures:

- participation in an educational awareness program;
- the influence of peers, for example responding to a friend who has disclosed abuse;
- proximity to the perpetrator, for example an offender's plan to visit the child's home, which increases the child's anxiety and leads to disclosure;
- timely disclosures, for example an everyday incident triggers a child's memory of an abusive incident, and a parent happens to be present;
- anger at the perpetrator.

When children disclose abuse, it is not usually straightforward. Sorenson and Snow (1991), using a sample of 630 children, documented the complex process of children's disclosure. When questioned by either a concerned parent or an adult authority figure about suspected abuse, children most often initially deny that anything occurred, but follow this with a tentative disclosure. This is, in turn, followed by a second denial, an active disclosure (where the child gives a detailed, first-person account of the abuse), and in some cases a third denial. Finally, most children in the sample confirmed the original disclosure. Rather than a discrete event, therefore, disclosure should be viewed as a staged process, which may involve recantation and denial.

Parents and others should be wary of dismissing what may well be a valid complaint simply because of a failure by the child to provide immediate detail of events, or withdrawal of the child's disclosure (Sorenson & Snow 1991). Parents and others also need to be very careful of the manner in which they respond to disclosures and the manner of questioning the child, as inappropriate questioning can affect the value of the child's evidence in any later criminal proceeding. This will be discussed more fully in Volume 2.

Disclosure has been described as 'terrifying' for a child (Bussey & Grimbeek 1995), and some researchers have attributed the psychological effects of sexual abuse as much to the trauma of the disclosure as to the sexual abuse itself (Berliner & Conte 1990; Finkelhor 1990, as cited in Bussey & Grimbeek 1995). Some research has found significant differences in the psychological adjustment of children depending on how the abuse was disclosed — children who disclosed deliberately display higher levels of anxiety than children who disclosed accidentally (Bussey & Grimbeek 1995). Other studies have identified that an important factor in minimising the negative effects of

disclosure is the level of maternal support for children who have reported abuse (Everson et al. 1989, as cited in Bussey & Grimbeek 1995).

Key findings

- Prevalence studies suggest that about half of the victims of child sexual abuse never report the abuse to another person.
- Less than a fifth of those who report to the police do so within a month of the incident, according to QPS data. Many will not disclose until they reach adulthood.
- Less serious offences are more likely to be disclosed at the time of the incident than more serious offences (CJC analysis of QPS data).
- The gender of the complainant affects the length of the delay between the incident and the report to the police with males less likely to report within a year (34%) than females (46%) (CJC analysis of QPS data).
- The relationship between the complainant and the offender also affects reporting — 85 per cent of offences committed by strangers were reported within the first year, compared with only 32 per cent of offences where the offender was known to the victim (CJC analysis of QPS data).
- There are many reasons why children fail to disclose abuse including: they may fail to recognise the activity as abnormal or abusive; they may be fearful, embarrassed or ashamed; or they may lack the skills to communicate the abuse. In addition, offenders often employ a range of strategies to prevent the child's disclosure.
- Most children who do disclose abuse tell their mothers. However, relatively few reports of child sexual abuse are made to an official agency such as police.
- Victims and adult survivors also make use of forums which provide for anonymous disclosure such as Kids Help Line and Crime Stoppers.

Chapter seven

Associations among child sex offenders

As noted in Chapter 1, a key reason for the establishment of the QCC's charter to investigate criminal paedophilia was to give special focus to determining the nature and extent of organised child sex offending, and to the detection of networks of child sex offenders in Queensland. This chapter describes:

- What child sex offender networks are
- Who are most likely to be part of offender networks
- How child sex offenders make contact with each other, including use of the Internet
- The use and exchange of child pornography among child sex offenders

Child sex offender networks

There has been a perception, often reflected in the media, that underground, highly sophisticated and organised groups or societies of child sex offenders exist in Australia. Australian law enforcement agencies and commissions of inquiry have previously found no evidence to suggest that such a perception has any basis in fact.

Law enforcement agencies draw a distinction between 'networks' of child sex offenders and 'organised groups' of child sex offenders:

- 'networks' of child sex offenders maintain contact with each other to discuss matters of mutual paedophile interest, to describe their experiences and seduction strategies, to swap information, contacts and child pornography, to obtain moral support (PJCNCA 1995), and, in some cases, to share victims (Wood 1997);
- 'organised groups' aim to commit specific criminal offences involving particular children (PJCNCA 1995).

There is general acceptance that networks of primarily a social and informal nature do exist among child sex offenders within Australia, but most networking does not generally lead to the commission of joint sex offences against children.

Networking is more prevalent among preferential rather than situational offenders. Because situational child sex offending is largely opportunistic, it seldom involves any degree of organisation or networking (PJCNCA 1995). An examination of the literature

and law enforcement submissions to the National Crime Authority's (NCA) strategic assessment of organised paedophile activity (July 1997) reveal that, at least in the view of law enforcement agencies, networking paedophiles are overwhelmingly more likely to have a sexual preference for boys than for girls, and for post-pubescent boys rather than pre-pubescent boys (NCA 1997, In-confidence).

The Parliamentary Joint Committee of the National Crime Authority (PJCNA), in their report of 1995, found:

If members of the network commit sexual offences against children, they do so acting independently of the network as such, though they may act in concert with someone they have met through the network (1995, para 3.20).

The PJCNA has questioned the value of investing resources in the targeting or investigation of networks, in light of the fact that they are not generally committing offences (PJCNA 1995). However, the QCC, QPS and other law enforcement agencies consider that there are practical benefits to be gained by targeting networks. Investigating individuals involved in these networks may lead to the identification of other child sex offenders or potential child sex offenders who law enforcement agencies can proactively target for investigation. Interrupting communication among network members may reduce the level of offending by:

- reducing the level of legitimisation, validation and support available to individual offenders or potential offenders;
- inhibiting the exchange of information about strategies for identifying and grooming victims and avoiding detection;
- limiting opportunities for offenders to 'share' victims.

The QPS reported to the PJCNA in 1995 that there was evidence of one network of paedophiles operating in Queensland with at least five members. The activities of this network were believed to include the dissemination and production on a small scale of pornographic material, and travelling overseas to Asian countries, presumably for the purpose of engaging in sexual acts with children.

During Project Axis, the QCC and QPS have found evidence of loose knit associations between known child sex offenders in Queensland. Operations have identified the existence of small networks, typically consisting of two to three offenders. While police investigating child sex offending were unable to provide information on the number of such networks believed to be operating in Queensland, the officers did believe that most child sex offences are committed by offenders opportunistically (as the situation arose) and were not organised in any substantial sense.

Operation Gecko, described below, is an example of the combined efforts of the QPS and QCC resulting in the identification of a network of child sex offenders.

Operation Gecko — a Queensland case study

Operation Gecko was launched by the QPS in September 1996, following receipt of a complaint of child sexual abuse. The operation ran for two years and resulted in the arrest and conviction of five child sex offenders. Two of the offenders had been involved in the scouting movement and had sexually assaulted boys with whom they came into contact in their capacity as Assistant Scout Masters. The other offenders had similarly been involved in youth-oriented sporting groups and associations.

The principal offender was a single male aged in his early 50s with previous convictions for offences against children, who selected his victims from the Woodridge area where he resided. After the offender had located his first victim, he also offended against friends of the victim. He was ultimately convicted of thirty-four offences involving nine victims who ranged in age from 10 to 14 years.

The offender provided the victims with accommodation, cigarettes and alcohol and other gifts, such as bicycles. The offender assigned each of these items a monetary value and encouraged victims to pay off their debts through sexual acts.

The principal offender socialised with other child sex offenders, whom the victims also came to know socially. There was no evidence that the children were 'shared' among the offenders, although some victims had been offended against by up to five offenders. Two of the victims became sex workers for the principal offender, offering sexual acts to strangers in public toilet blocks.

In August–September 1999 the QCC conducted a five day hearing with the offenders convicted as a result of the QPS investigations. The rationale for holding the hearing was that this group of offenders was one of only a few recognised groups of networked child sex offenders who had committed offences against a number of the same children over the same period.

The purpose of the hearing was to identify any common characteristics in the backgrounds of these offenders and to determine the nature, extent and purpose of the contact the members of the group maintained with each other. Information of a tactical nature was also sought in order to identify other members or associates of the group who may have escaped detection and prosecution.

During the course of the hearing, it was discovered that the members of the group had met each other while incarcerated in Queensland correctional centres. The offenders maintained their association upon their release from custody with all considering that they had maintained their association, at least partly, in response to the community's inability to accept them. Most acknowledged that they were wary of each other as they were aware that it would be easy for one of them to report their activities to the police.

The members of this network shared victims in the sense that a boy would 'migrate' from one offender to another when the previous offender had a disagreement with the boy concerned. Most of the offenders stated that it was taboo to poach a boy from another offender in the group, however this sometimes happened.

Valuable tactical information was also obtained during the course of the hearings, resulting in another man being charged with more than 200 child sex offences.

Other networks and suspected networks have been, and continue to be, identified and investigated by the QPS and QCC. For example, three men suspected of forming part of a network operating in Brisbane are currently facing a combined total of 115 charges. These include charges of sodomy, indecent dealing with boys, possession and distribution of child pornography.

How do child sex offenders make contact with each other?

There is a range of ways in which child sex offender networks may be established. Traditionally, contact was initiated through the use of child sex promotion groups, contact magazines and newsletters. More recently, law enforcement agencies have identified prisons as an environment in which child sex offenders make contact. Agencies have also begun to focus on the Internet and its potential for facilitating networking among child sex offenders.

Networking in prison

An opportunity for some child sex offenders to network occurs in the prison environment, as they are usually imprisoned with other child sex offenders for protection from other inmates, and to facilitate the delivery of treatment programs. Evidence was given by prison officials from Cooma Prison in New South Wales to the Wood Royal Commission (1997) that a group of child sex offenders in that prison shared fantasy stories about children and compiled composite videos of children from television shows and advertisements.

Information obtained during the course of the QCC hearings into offenders prosecuted as a result of QPS Operation Gecko (see above) and Project Cassius have confirmed that offenders similarly network in Queensland correctional centres. Often the associations formed in prison continue once the offenders are released. For example, Operation Gecko identified a number of the offenders who met while in prison and resided together after their release from custody.

Smallbone and Wortley found that active collaboration with other child sex offenders was reported generally to be quite rare. Mixed-type offenders (14%) were more likely than the other offender sub-types to have been involved in contact with other child sex offenders prior to being charged with a child sex offence. However, the study found higher levels of reported networking among child sex offenders in prison.

More than a third (37%) of the combined offenders in the study said they had spoken about child sex offending with other prisoners other than through their involvement in prison-based treatment programs. Once again, the mixed-type offenders (57%) were more likely than the other offender sub-types to do so. Project Cassius also found that intra-familial offenders are less likely to network with other offenders, tending to keep

to themselves while serving sentences and maintaining minimal contact with other child sex offenders.

The level of interaction among child sex offenders is perhaps unsurprising given that they are typically accommodated together in prisons. However, this may be of particular concern, especially if such conversations involve gratuitous conversations or 'swapping notes'.

Smallbone and Wortley report that the level of contact by child sex offenders with other prisoners specifically regarding offence-related activities was much lower than the level of networking generally. There was some evidence that problematic prison-based networking activity exists. For example, 18 per cent of the mixed-type offenders said they had been provided with information by other prisoners about how to gain access to children for sexual purposes. Mixed-type offenders were generally more likely than other sub-types to engage in prison-based networking.

Child sex promotion groups

As noted above, one of the reasons for networking by child sex offenders is to validate their sexual preference for children by seeking out other individuals who will accept their behaviour. Child sex promotion groups, many of which are established ostensibly to agitate for children's sexual rights, provide a means of facilitating such contact.

There are numerous known international groups set up as child sex promotion organisations, such as the Paedophile Information Exchange, the North American Man/Boy Love Association, the René Guyon Society and the Boston-Boise Committee. These, and other international pro-paedophile organisations have been in existence since the 1960s. The public goals of these organisations generally include:

- providing support to paedophiles;
- lobbying for legislative change, such as a reduction in the age of consent;
- educating society about child sexuality, generally in order to encourage the acceptability of paedophile activity.

Law enforcement agencies also believe these organisations are involved in less public activities such as:

- providing a contact point for communication between paedophiles;
- distributing or facilitating the exchange of child pornography;
- facilitating the exchange of methods to access and seduce children;
- providing information to members or allowing members to provide each other with the identity of sexually available children;

- actively promoting the sexual abuse of children and validating the paedophile feelings of members, thus possibly increasing the risk of them offending against children. (NCA 1997, In-confidence)

Paedophile support groups received some prominence in Australia in the 1980s. These were predominantly small groups of males, with an emphasis on man–boy relationships. The Enquiry into Sexual Offences Against Children and Related Matters (Sturgess report) noted the existence of the Sydney-based Australian Paedophile Support Group which was formed in the early 1980s which aimed to promote paedophilia as a viable sexual alternative; to provide support for other paedophiles; to bring pressure for the removal of the age of consent; and to promote children’s rights (Sturgess report 1985, as cited in PJCNCA 1995).

The Australian Paedophile Support Group disbanded as a result of police activities in the mid-80s, and the Australian Federal Police reported in 1992 that the group had reformed as the Boy Lovers and Zucchini Eaters (BLAZE).

Some former members of BLAZE formed a group known as the Children’s Liberation Railway, which claims to be ‘a commune for children’s rights activists, a place for young people escaping from homes, institutions, parents, schools. Stay with us. Join our struggle for children’s rights’. Two of the rights promoted by the group were the ‘right to enjoy our own bodies and to choose who we love and have sex with’; and ‘no laws that punish voluntary relationships’ (Wood 1997).

With more law enforcement focus on child sex offending throughout Australia and with the anonymity now available to offenders via the Internet, child sex offender networks are now much more secretive than they have been in the past. Accordingly, it is much more difficult for law enforcement agencies to identify the existence of these child sex offender support organisations. However, the NCA found in its 1997 report on Operation Bodega that it is unlikely that there are any significant formalised pro-paedophile organisations currently operating in Australia, though it is known that many of the associations made in the past through these organisations have continued (NCA 1997, In-confidence).

Project Axis found no evidence to suggest that BLAZE, or any other formal groups, are still active in Queensland.

The Internet

Child sex offenders in Australia are believed to be following their overseas counterparts by using the Internet⁶⁰ and e-mail to contact other offenders and networks, creating a ‘virtual’ network. The primary purpose for which they use the Internet is to exchange, sell or purchase child pornography. However, as noted in Chapter Five, there is some

⁶⁰ The Internet is a world-wide network of computers capable of communicating with each other in a variety of ways. It comprises two main functions — enabling access to information via the World Wide Web, and providing for communication and exchange of information through such things as Internet Relay Chat (IRC), bulletin boards and newsgroups.

evidence that offenders are also using the Internet to target potential child victims. Some commentators have suggested that Internet networks can also facilitate the exchange of children for sexual purposes.

Taylor (1999) described networking amongst child sex offenders on the Internet as follows:

[T]here is a clear sense of a virtual paedophile community on the Internet, which ... extends across national boundaries, and enables the relatively isolated paedophile to engage with others who share sexual interests in children in a non-threatening and secure way. This virtual community is an important source of support, justification, information, and self-help, as well as facilitating the exchange and distribution of sexually attractive images, and sometimes of course, children.

One of the worst detected cases of Internet paedophile networking was a United States based network known as the Orchid Club. The Orchid Club was discovered by Californian police in 1996. Membership provided access to child pornography, private chat rooms and e-mail addresses of other members. The private chat rooms enabled members to watch sexual acts by a host with a child victim via a live video link on the Internet. Members could participate by communicating acts they wished the host and child to perform. Details of offences committed in this manner revealed the abuse of children as young as five years of age. One Australian was discovered to be a member of this club (ECPAT 1998).

The Smallbone and Wortley study found that while 5 per cent of the offenders in the study had used the Internet to access pornography, only 1 per cent had used it to access child pornography, and only 1 per cent had ever used it to gain contact with clubs, chat groups or individuals concerned with child sexual activity. One explanation for these results is that many of the offenders were serving quite lengthy prison sentences, and opportunities for accessing the Internet may consequently have been limited. Furthermore, the use of the Internet as described above is a relatively recent phenomenon and may not have been as prevalent prior to the offenders entering prison. The ABS report that households with home Internet access increased by 38 per cent between November 1998 (1,272,000) and November 1999 (1,749,000), suggesting that Australians are rapidly increasing their use of the Internet (ABS 2000).

The QPS and QCC report that there is evidence that some child sex offenders resident in Queensland are using the Internet to network with other offenders, but this is mainly for the distribution of, and access to, child pornography. The PJCNCA also found that the most common offences likely to be committed by paedophiles as a group or in a network are the exchange and distribution of child pornography (NCA 1997 In-confidence).

The exchange of child pornography

In the past, hard-core child pornography was readily available in many countries and openly marketed through paedophile contact magazines (Gough 1996). The production of hard-core child pornography in the 1990s is considered to be largely a private 'home based' activity with distribution via the Internet or direct exchange between with

individuals (Taylor 1999). Use of the Internet for distribution makes child pornography available almost instantly to a person on the other side of the world (Grabosky 1998).

'Home-made' child pornography is not necessarily technically inferior (Tate 1990). The Internet and related technologies (such as digital cameras, hand-held video cameras, scanners and others) have given child sex offenders unimaginable scope to produce and disseminate child pornography, particularly with the increased availability and affordability of the technology. Producers of child pornography no longer have to resort to taking Polaroids or developing their own photographs. Nor do they have to rely on third parties to develop their film, thus reducing their vulnerability to detection. Through the use of digital cameras they can easily transfer images directly from their camera on to computer and disseminate them via the Internet to other child sex offenders.

The Internet provides collectors with an anonymous, secure environment in which to purchase or trade pornography. The use of basic security measures, such as passwords and encryption technology, further reduces the risk of another person discovering the collection saved on the computer.

While some commercial web sites have recently been discovered, child pornography on the Internet is considered not to be generally for commercial gain; rather, images are traded (Taylor 1999). In addition to the obvious attraction of acquiring new images, the exchange of material serves the additional purpose, in some cases, of acting as an 'entry' or 'membership' barrier to create a sense of security among consumers of child pornography (Taylor 1999).

The nature of the images available on the Internet varies considerably from relatively innocuous photos to graphic images depicting children participating in sexual acts with adults and with other children. The level of anonymity offered by the various forms of the Internet influences the nature of the images posted and exchanged (Forde & Patterson 1998). Accordingly, World Wide Web pages will generally contain the less offensive images, while the more graphic images will only be available through bulletin boards,⁶¹ newsgroups⁶² and Internet Relay Chat (IRC).⁶³

Maxwell Taylor, a professor from the University College, Cork, Ireland, studied over 50,000 child pornographic images downloaded from Internet sources over a period of two years. According to Taylor, opportunity is a central factor in the production of child pornography. Someone with legitimate access to the child — such as a parent or step-parent — usually produces the pornography in either the child's or the photographer's

⁶¹ Bulletin boards are communication points where users exchange and collect information based on their particular interests or motivations.

⁶² Newsgroups are 'one-to-many' messaging databases that allow individual users to post messages, files and programs to a particular site.

⁶³ Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is a 'live' network of discussion channels where conversations between users are conducted on private channels in real time. A user from anywhere in the world can connect to the Internet and engage in dialogue with other users using their keyboard. Users can also send and swap files, text, pictures and programs. Users of IRCs are identified by their nickname, which they nominate when they set up the program or reflect content.

home. One of the disturbing qualities of the more recent pictures accessed by Taylor is the domestic nature of the images: 'Typically, the sexual assaults photographed took place in bedrooms, living rooms and kitchens — the normal living places in our homes' (Taylor 1999).

The technology available today means that large volumes of child pornography can be disseminated around the world very quickly. A study conducted by O'Connell and Taylor (1998) in January and again in April 1998 reported that 6,033 child erotica and child pornography images were posted in the first two weeks of January on 24 child-sex related newsgroups, and 7,303 were posted in the middle two weeks of April 1998.

As with networking generally, the 'preferential' offender is thought to be more likely to collect child pornography than other offender types. 'Situational' offenders might also collect pornography but not with the high degree of predictability of the preferential offender (Lanning 1987).

The majority of child sex offenders deny ever having seen any pornography or erotica depicting children. Smallbone and Wortley found that only 10 per cent of offenders reported ever having seen child pornography, and only 1 per cent said they used child pornography regularly. Mixed-type offenders have the highest level of use and ownership of child pornography.

It is sometimes claimed that possession of child pornography may cause some men to sexually abuse children. For example, Marshall (1988) found that one-third of child sex offenders claimed to have used pornography immediately prior to offending and to have been incited to offend by viewing that pornography. Bagley reviewed previous research findings and concluded that there is no systematic evidence that pornography plays a causal role:

[D]oes pornography depicting adult-child sexual relations actually cause men to sexually abuse children? No researcher has produced a clear answer to this crucial question, and research on pornography's effects is extremely difficult to undertake ... Some writers have claimed that collections of pornography found in the possession of convicted child molesters prove the point: but these men might have collected pornography because they were paedophiles. And ... many men may use pornography as an alternative to sexual offending ... (Bagley 1997, pp. 140-141).

However, even if it does not result in actual physical offend harm, it is associated with offending behaviour.⁶⁴ Child pornography is a permanent record of the actual abuse of children, and its distribution represents the ongoing victimisation and exploitation of children. It is also of concern because it is used as part of the 'grooming' process to desensitise children to offending behaviour, and by the child sex offender to validate his offending behaviour by finding a community sharing similar interests.

⁶⁴ As noted earlier, production, possession and distribution of child pornography are offences — see Appendix 1 for further discussion.

Case Studies

Operation Cathedral

One of the largest and most sophisticated Internet networks of child sex offenders that has come to the attention of authorities was known during its period of operation as 'Wonderland' after Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. On 2 September 1998 simultaneous search warrants were executed on the houses of persons believed to be members of the network in 32 United States cities and 15 countries world-wide, including Australia. The operation resulted in the detention of more than 100 people, bringing the network to an end.

The Wonderland network is believed to have been in operation for at least two years on the IRC before coming to the attention of authorities. Each of the members had at least 10,000 pornographic images of children on their computers, this being a prerequisite for club admission. Members of the network exchanged pornography depicting children as young as 18 months (*Weekend Australian* 1998).

The operation resulted in the seizure of one million still images, 67 gigabytes of child pornography material, 624 CD Roms, 38 computers and 3,227 floppy disks (Fournier de Saint Maur 1999). As a result of raids in Western Australia and New South Wales, two offenders have been convicted of possession of child pornography images. One of the Australian offenders had more than 162,000 such images on his computer (NCIS 1999).

The 'Blue Room'

An investigation conducted by the QPS in June 1995 found a Queensland-based computer bulletin board service, the 'Blue Room', promoting, among other material, child abuse stories and images. The images located were of child abuse, bestiality, incest and bondage, and the text files detailed fantasies of abduction, murder and torture of adults and children for sexual gratification. An ensuing investigation established the owner/operator of the bulletin board, and identified 17 targets selected from a list of subscribers.

Operation Dovetail

Information provided to Project Axis led to a coordinated QCC-QPS investigation that identified the first suspected commercial, Internet-based child pornography web site compiled in Australia. Search warrants were executed resulting in the seizure of computer hardware and software containing in excess of 100,000 images. These images have been the subject of forensic computer examination and have been referred to the State Censor. Cooperation with United States law enforcement agencies — United States Customs and the Federal Bureau of Investigation — led to action against the United States Internet service provider hosting the web site.

Key findings

- The available evidence in Australia and elsewhere suggests that most child sex offenders offend in isolation and there is little, if any, identifiable organised offending.
- There is general acceptance that networks of child sex offenders, primarily social and informal in nature, do exist in Australia and in Queensland, but most networking does not generally lead to the commission of joint sexual offences against children.
- To the extent that two or more child sex offenders group together to commit offences, the numbers involved have almost invariably been very small and the groupings very much ad hoc and on a peer-to-peer basis (PJCNCA 1995). Project Axis and Project Cassius concur with this conclusion.
- Prisons provide an environment in which some child sex offenders establish contact with other offenders and these friendships are often maintained after release from prison. Intra-familial offenders, however, generally do not mix with other offenders in prison and are less likely to establish such friendships with other offenders.
- Child sex promotion groups which were a popular means of maintaining contact among offenders in the 1980s, no longer appear to operate in a formalised manner.
- The Internet, which offers greater anonymity, is increasingly used by child sex offenders to facilitate networking. This networking is mainly for the purpose of the distribution and exchange of child pornography. Project Coffee is continuing to investigate use of the Internet by child sex offenders.

Chapter eight

Conclusion

This report has shown that child sex offending in Queensland is not, for the most part, currently being perpetrated by organised groups of paedophiles offending together. While the QCC and QPS have found evidence that some offenders 'network', child sexual abuse is generally committed by a lone male offender. Moreover, most offending occurs inside or close to the victim's home, and the offender is usually known both to the child and to the child's parents. This may help to explain why much child sexual abuse is not reported.

It is clear from the preceding chapters that the extent of child sex offending in Queensland is substantially higher than the level reported to authorities. There is evidence to suggest that levels of reporting may have increased over the past few years. However, there is still a substantial amount of abuse that remains unreported for long periods of time, and sometimes forever.

The low level of disclosure is one of the biggest hurdles for police and other agencies. Although some proactive policing methods are proving useful in the detection of serial child sex offenders, the police response still relies predominantly on complainants bringing offences and offenders to their attention. Other agencies, such as health and social services, are unable to provide much-needed services to victims if those victims do not come forward. If responses to the problem of child sexual abuse are to be improved, levels of disclosure need to increase.

Improving disclosure

Chapter 6 provides some insight into the reasons victims do not disclose or delay their disclosure. The reasons are many and varied: the reasons an eight year old girl fails to disclose abuse perpetrated by her father are likely to differ substantially from the reasons a fourteen year old boy fails to disclose abuse by an extra-familial adult male. However, common to many victims is the fear of the consequences of disclosure.

In the case of intra-familial child sexual abuse, children may fear that they will not be believed by the non-offending parent, or they may fear the break-up of the family, for which they may feel partly responsible.

In the case of an adolescent boy sexually abused by a male offender, the victim may not disclose for fear of being labelled homosexual. Recent studies suggest that the level of child sexual abuse among boys is even more underreported than among girls. Because boys represent a relatively small proportion of reported victims, there is less research available specifically addressing male victims. There is a need to conduct further research into boys' experiences of sexual abuse in order to identify and better

understand impediments to their disclosure. In the meantime, ensuring appropriate family and community responses and discouraging the labelling of victims may have some effect on disclosure rates.

Even where a victim does disclose, for example to his or her family, the abuse may never be reported to the police or other authorities. A number of factors may contribute to the low rate of reporting by parents, carers and guardians:

- lack of faith in the criminal justice or child protection systems;
- reluctance to subject the child to additional trauma;
- inability or unwillingness to ‘confront the unthinkable’, or to accept the financial loss that might occur if, as a result of disclosure, the family breaks up or the abuser is imprisoned (Wood 1997).

Young victims especially may not disclose sexual abuse because they may be unaware of its social, psychological and moral implications for them. Earlier chapters have shown that abuse often occurs within a trusting relationship between the child and a person known to the child. The abuse is often (at least initially) presented as a normal expression of affection and the child thus has little reason to report the abuse. In this context, education about appropriate physical and/or sexual behaviour can play an important role in encouraging disclosure. Such education can also play an important role in preventing child sexual abuse by alerting a child to inappropriate behaviour before the abuse progresses, or perhaps even before it begins.

Education as prevention

Preventing child sexual abuse before it occurs is the most important response to the problem. Education programs are one way of achieving this. By increasing the level of awareness in the general community, and particularly among children, of the danger posed by child sex offenders and of methods used by them to offend, children can be provided with basic protective strategies. One of the difficulties here is that much offending behaviour can appear to be part of a positive, productive adult-child relationship. The challenge is to provide sufficient information to parents and children to make them aware of the risks without encouraging a level of paranoia within the community. In particular, care needs to be taken to ensure that non-offending men do not withdraw from expressing physical affection toward children.

This report provides useful information about offenders’ characteristics and modus operandi which can inform education programs. For example, Smallbone and Wortley found that assertive strategies may be more effective for children than panicking. Simply telling a would-be offender that the sexual contact is unwanted, for example, appears to be effective in deterring some of these men. This and the other strategies identified by Smallbone and Wortley could be used to educate children about how to avoid becoming a victim.

Many offenders target vulnerable children who have poor family relationships or are low in self esteem. Programs aimed at improving children's social and emotional wellbeing may reduce the risk of children becoming victims. Some examples are:

- positive parenting and other programs designed to improve children's family relationships
- programs aimed at building children's self esteem
- programs aimed at developing children's interpersonal skills and strengthening their peer relationships.

Programs aimed at families and children may also assist in long-term prevention. Studies have shown that some child sex offenders come from disruptive or dysfunctional family backgrounds and targeting these families may reduce the risk of some of these children themselves becoming offenders. The Smallbone and Wortley study suggests that general crime prevention strategies aimed at children at risk of developing delinquent behaviour may be equally useful in preventing child sex offending.

Strategies aimed at offenders

There is no stereotypical child sex offender and therefore a range of different strategies need to be directed at offenders. Strategies designed to prevent offending, including offender treatment programs, need to recognise the differences between sub-groups of offenders. Those serial offenders with a clear sexual preference for children may require different responses to the one-off offender.

Some environments may precipitate offending behaviour. For the more committed offenders, often simply being in the presence of children can lead to offending. For these offenders, legislative regimes designed to limit child sex offenders' access to potential victims may have some preventive effect. However, these strategies will only be effective against those offenders whose offending has already come to light.

Other strategies aimed at discouraging potential offenders may be considered. For some, this may involve avoiding pornography. For others, it will require offenders to avoid situations in which they will be alone with children. Public television may be an effective, and as yet untapped, medium for intervention, especially in light of Smallbone and Wortley's findings that watching television with potential victims is a common feature of grooming.

Community responses

Another important strategy to prevent child sex offending is to create an underlying community environment that is intolerant of activities of this nature and supportive of victims. While the community is no doubt more aware of the problem of child sexual abuse than in the past, information presented in this report suggests that child sexual abuse remains a significant social problem. Reports such as this, including the forthcoming volume, will hopefully assist the community and encourage development of an appropriate social climate.

Future directions

This volume describes the nature of the problem of child sex offending in Queensland and highlights some broad strategies which may address the problem. Volume 2 of the report will examine current government and community responses in more detail to determine what changes, if any, need to be made to improve them.

However, there are some areas already identified which suggest a need for further research:

- While prevalence studies cited in this report have provided a useful source of information about the extent of child sexual abuse in the community, many of these are limited in their methodology and sample selection. Conducting a survey of a large, randomly selected sample of the population about their experiences of abuse would address the limitations of smaller prevalence studies and provide important details about victims, offenders and incidents that have occurred in Queensland. While such a survey would clearly require careful planning and a sensitive approach, the Women's Safety Survey (ABS 1996), provides a useful model for the conduct of such a survey.
- Research described in this report suggests that boys may be less likely than girls to disclose child sexual abuse, and that they are more likely to delay disclosure. Research aimed at exploring the reasons why boys are less likely to disclose would assist in increasing their disclosure role. Improving disclosure among boys may be particularly important in the detection of serial extra-familial offenders who often target post-pubescent boys for offending behaviour.
- Finkelhor has developed a checklist of risk factors for girls, which can be used to target groups of vulnerable children for special prevention interventions. According to prevalence studies, few adult men report having been a victim of child sexual abuse, which perhaps explains why risk factors for boys have not been developed (indeed, Finkelhor reports that there were not enough male respondents to his survey to develop risk factors). Research with male victims may identify risk factors for boys, and this will contribute to appropriate targeting of prevention strategies.

- While the Smallbone and Wortley study has provided a great deal of detail about offenders and their modus operandi, it would be beneficial to build on this material and conduct further research of this kind. For example, knowing the reason offenders stop abusing children would contribute significantly to treatment programs for offenders. Also, offender's insights into the effectiveness of prevention strategies would similarly assist in developing appropriate prevention programs.
- Research with specific groups of offenders, such as intra-familial offenders, may lead to a better understanding of specific issues relating to discrete types of offenders leading, in turn, to improved targeting of prevention and treatment programs.

The QCC will continue to support research of this nature.

Appendix 1

Child sex offences in Queensland

Sexual offences under the Criminal Code

The Criminal Code is the main source of criminal offences in Queensland. The sexual offences in the Code fall into two main categories: those specifically applying to children, and more general offences which may also apply to children.

Sexual offences specifically applying to children

The Code contains a number of offences concerning children under a specified age, being 16 years, 18 years or 'the prescribed age'.

The offence of indecent treatment of a child under 16 (s. 210) is the most frequently charged of the child sex offences. This offence includes indecent dealing with a child; procuring a child to commit an indecent act; permitting oneself to be indecently dealt with by a child; exposing a child to an indecent act by the offender or someone else; exposing a child to indecent material without legitimate reasons; taking indecent photos or videos of a child without legitimate reason.

Carnal knowledge of a girl under 16 (s. 215) is another child-specific offence. Carnal knowledge in this offence involves penetration of the vagina by the penis and does not include sodomy. Consent is irrelevant to the offence, meaning the prosecution does not have to prove lack of consent. In a case where the prosecution can prove that the child did not consent, a charge of rape may be preferred.

Other offences in the Criminal Code relate to children under the age of 18 years. The most notable of these is the offence of sodomy. Until 1991, it was an offence for anyone to engage in sodomy, even consenting adults. Amendments to the Code in 1990 removed the offence in relation to consenting adults. However, it is still an offence to engage in consensual sodomy with a person under the age of 18 years (s. 208). It is an offence for a person to sodomise another person under 18 years or to permit a male under 18 years to sodomise him or her. Nonconsensual sodomy involving persons of any age constitutes rape (see below).

Some offences in the Code rely on the concept of 'prescribed age', such as:

- taking or enticing away a child under the prescribed age for the purpose of committing one of the above offences in relation to the child (s. 219);
- maintaining a sexual relationship with a child, which requires proof of offences of a sexual nature in relation to a child on three or more occasions (s. 229B).

In the context of these offences, the prescribed age will be 16 years or 18 years depending upon whether the offences for which purpose the child is taken away (in s. 219) or the particular act involved in the relationship (in s. 229B) was indecent treatment, unlawful carnal knowledge or sodomy.

Circumstances of aggravation apply to the above offences, increasing the maximum penalty, if the child is under 12 years of age or the child is under the care of the offender.

A defence is available if the child is 12 years of age or older and the accused believed on reasonable grounds that the child was of or above the age of 16 years or, in the case of sodomy, above the age of 18 years.

Less frequently used offences applying in relation to children less than 18 years are:

- Knowingly enticing or recruiting a person under the age of 18 years to engage in carnal knowledge (either in Queensland or elsewhere). In this section, carnal knowledge includes sodomy (s. 217).
- Abducting or detaining a woman under the age of 18 years, from motives of gain and with intent to marry or carnally know the woman (s. 351).

General sexual offences which may also apply to children

Other sexual offences which, although not limited to children, may be committed against children include:

- Incest (s. 222) — this includes carnal knowledge with a person's offspring or other lineal descendant, sibling, parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt, nephew or niece. Consent is immaterial. In respect of offspring or other lineal descendants, siblings and parents, the offence also applies to relationships of an adoptive, half or step nature, including de facto and foster relationships.
- Rape (s. 347) — carnal knowledge of another person without his or her consent, including vaginal or anal penetration.
- Procuring sexual acts by coercion (s. 218).
- Conspiracy to induce a person by fraud or false pretences to permit a person to have carnal knowledge of him or her (s. 221).
- Assault with intent to commit rape (s. 336).
- Indecent assault or procuring another person, without that person's consent to commit an act of gross indecency or to witness an act of gross indecency (s. 337). Where the indecent assault or act of gross indecency consists of penetration of the

vagina, vulva or anus with an object or part of the body other than the penis or oral sex, the penalty is increased.

- Abduction or detention of a woman against her will with intent to marry or to carnally know her (s. 351).

In all of the above offences, except incest, the prosecution has to prove that the victim did not consent or, in some cases, that the consent was obtained by fraud or false pretences.

Offences relating to the production, distribution and possession of child pornography

From a legal perspective, child pornography means any photographs, films, publications or computer generated pictures/images which describe or depict a person who is or appears to be under 16 years, in a way that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult. The child need not necessarily be engaged in sexual activity.⁶⁵

There are a number of aspects of child pornography that constitute offences, with a wide range of penalties applicable. The most serious offences, at least in terms of the penalty provided, are set out in the Criminal Code and include:

- taking an indecent photograph or recording any indecent visual image of a child under 16 years (s. 210);
- exposing a child under 16 to any indecent film, videotape, picture, photograph or printed or written matter (s. 210).

The penalties for the above offences are 10 years if the child is over 12 but under 16 years and 14 years if the child is under 12 years.

Other offences in the Code include:

- selling obscene publications (s. 228);
- exposing to view in a public place an obscene picture, photo, drawing, model or other object tending to corrupt morals (s. 228);

The penalties for these offences are 5 years if the child is over 12 but under 16 years and 10 years if the child is under 12 years.

The Classification of Publications Act 1991, Classification of Films Act 1991, and Classification of Computer Games and Images Act 1995 also include a range of offences directed towards child pornography although the penalties are much less severe than those in the

⁶⁵ See *Classification of Publications Act 1991, Classification of Films Act 1991, Classification of Computer Games and Images Act 1995*.

Criminal Code. The offences relate to the production, sale and possession of child pornography.

Production offences

Procuring a child to be used in the production of child pornography carries five years if the child is to be used in a publication or photograph and three years if the child is to be used in a film or computer game. The term 'computer game' is a bit of a misnomer as it is very widely defined and includes, for example, a computer generated image.⁶⁶

Making a child pornography film or computer game attracts a penalty of five years while producing a child pornography publication carries three years. Copying such a film, computer game or publication also carries a three year penalty.

Sale and distribution offences

Selling child pornography in the form of a publication, photograph or film carries two years, while selling the computer game only carries a penalty of six months.

It is also an offence to advertise or distribute a child pornography publication. To 'sell' a computer game includes, by definition, to exchange and distribute the computer game or to offer to do so. The sale of a film also includes exchange or distribution but only if done in connection with a commercial arrangement.

Possession offences

Possession of child pornography in its various forms carries the following penalties:

- Publications and photos — two years if possession is for the purpose of publishing it and otherwise — one year
- Films — one year
- Computer games — two years.

⁶⁶ The *Classification of Computer Games and Images Act 1995* defines 'computer game' to mean –

- (a) a computer program and associated data, capable of generating a display on a computer monitor, television screen, liquid crystal display or similar medium; or
 - (b) a computer generated image; or
 - (c) an interactive film;
- but does not include —
- (d) a bulletin board; or
 - (e) a business, accounting, professional, scientific or educational computer program or computer generated image, other than a program or image containing a computer game that would, if classified, be classified as an MA(15+) or RC computer game; or
 - (f) a film that is not an interactive film.

Prostitution offences

The Criminal Code includes offences relating to children's involvement in prostitution (see sections 229C – 229L). It includes a specific offence of permitting a young person (under 18 years) to be at a place used for prostitution by two or more prostitutes. This offence carries a maximum of 14 years imprisonment.

In addition, the following offences carry a substantially increased penalty (14 years imprisonment) if a child is involved in the offence:

- procuring a person to engage in prostitution
- being found in, or leaving, a place suspected of being used for prostitution by two or more prostitutes
- participating in the provision of prostitution
- having an interest in premises used for the purposes of prostitution.

The *Prostitution Act 1999* is due to take effect from 1 July 2000. The Act provides for licensed brothels to operate legally in Queensland. However, the Act maintains the strict penalties in place for any involvement of young people under 18 years in prostitution.

Appendix 2

Project Axis — Research activities

Survey of survivors of child sexual abuse

Aim of the project

The survey of survivors was designed to enable victims of child sexual abuse to participate in Project Axis. Survivors of child sexual abuse can contribute important information about the nature of sexual abuse, the methods used by offenders, and the consequences to victims. During the course of the project, consultation took place with a number of survivor advocacy groups and sexual assault support services. The Project Axis survey of survivors was conducted by the Queensland Crime Commission (QCC) with the assistance of these organisations.

Methodology

The survey consisted of an anonymous, confidential self-administered questionnaire distributed by survivor advocacy groups and sexual assault support services to their clients.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on the survey instrument used by Finkelhor (1979), and was a combination of fixed-answer and open-ended questions. Dr Juliette Goldman provided ongoing assistance with the design of the survey instrument. It contained 48 questions and was divided into the following five sections:

- the personal details of participants
- their age at the time the first incident of abuse took place
- the nature of the abuse
- the frequency of the abuse
- their relationship with the offender
- disclosure of the abuse.

The questionnaire concluded by asking respondents to give their permission for their experiences to be featured as a 'case study'. Forty-eight respondents (46% of the final sample) nominated themselves as 'case studies'. The results of the questionnaire were analysed by the Office of Economic and Statistical Research.⁶⁷

Procedure

In November 1998, the QCC contacted a number of sexual assault support services and advocacy groups within the community. Following discussions with these organisations, it was considered appropriate that they assist the Commission with the administration and distribution of the survey on its behalf. This was to ensure the confidentiality of responses received, to save time, and to ensure that all participants were survivors of child sexual abuse.

Consultation also indicated that it would be beneficial for the Commission to hold a workshop for survivors wishing to complete the survey in a supportive environment. The workshop would also provide survivors with the opportunity to discuss any specific issues of concern and to contribute additional information to the project if desired. The workshop was held on 31 January 1999 and was attended by 60 survivors, counsellors and families.

Surveys were also forwarded to 24 support groups, sexual assault services and associated networks throughout the State who distributed them to their clients. This approach was adopted to ensure that participants had immediate access to support and counselling if necessary. A covering letter was attached to all surveys explaining the aims and objectives of Project Axis and the purpose of the survey. All participants were required to provide their informed consent before completing the survey. It was made clear that participants could withdraw their consent at any time.

Participants were required to be over 18 years of age at the time of completing the survey and information was sought only in relation to child sexual abuse that occurred within Queensland. Responses that related to incidents of abuse occurring outside the State were excluded from analysis.

Survey sample

The Commission received 129 completed surveys from survivor advocacy groups and sexual assault support services, 45 of which surveys were completed at the survivors' workshop held in January 1999. Twenty-five of the completed surveys involved abuse that had taken place outside the State and were therefore excluded from analysis. The final survey sample was 104. As the QCC is unsure how many questionnaires were distributed, a response rate to the survey cannot be calculated.

Limitations of the methodology

⁶⁷ Formerly known as the Government Statistician's Office.

The survey sample is not representative of the experiences of all survivors, but reflects the experiences of victims of child sexual abuse who seek the services of a support agency or advocacy group. In addition, we cannot judge whether those respondents who completed the survey were somehow 'different' from those who did not respond. This means we cannot rule out the possibility that the survey sample was biased in some way. However, when used in combination with other sources of data, the results of the survey provide important additional information about child sexual abuse.

Sample description

Age and sex

Of the final sample of 104 participants, 17 per cent (n = 18) were male and 83 per cent (n = 86) were female. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 59 years (see Table 28).

Table 28: Age of respondents to the Project Axis survey of survivors

Age group	Number	Per cent
<20	1	1.0
20-24	6	5.8
25-29	18	17.3
30-34	19	18.3
35-39	11	10.6
40-44	21	20.2
45-49	11	10.6
>50	16	15.4
Missing	1	1.0
TOTAL	104	100.2

Source: Project Axis survey of survivors

Cultural background

Of the participants, 92 per cent (n = 96) indicated that their cultural background was Anglo-Australian. Only three per cent (n = 3) were from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) background and the remaining three per cent (n = 3) were from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The vast majority of participants (97%; n = 101) were born in Australia.

Educational background

Nearly a third of the sample were tertiary-qualified, and a further 15 per cent had completed year 12. About a third of the sample (36%) had completed 10 or fewer years of education.

Occupation

While a third of the sample were unemployed, 15 respondents were in professional or managerial occupations, 12 were in clerical or sales occupations, 10 respondents were in skilled occupations and 8 were unskilled.

Project Axis offender interviews

Aim of the project

Interviews with child sex offenders were arranged to seek information about how offenders go about committing offences. For example:

- how offenders choose their victims
- how they maintain a relationship with their victims
- what inducements or threats are made to guarantee silence
- to what extent parents and carers trust offenders with their children
- how offenders escape detection for long periods
- the extent of offenders' criminal careers
- the extent of unreported incidents of abuse.

While there is a significant body of literature on the psychology of offenders and offences, the conduct itself has been less fully explored. It was thought that interviews with incarcerated offenders may provide valuable information about offences that remain undetected by law enforcement agencies.

Methodology

Sample selection

The QCC approached the Queensland Corrective Services Commission (QCSC)⁶⁸ to investigate the possibility of conducting interviews with incarcerated child sex offenders. Due to time and resource constraints, the sample was drawn from three Queensland correctional facilities — Palen Creek, Moreton B and Woodford correctional centres — to participate in the interviews. It was intended that six child sex offenders would be selected from each facility.

⁶⁸ Now known as the Department of Corrective Services (DCS).

In the selection process it was stipulated to the QCSC that offenders must freely volunteer to be interviewed for the project and that those selected must not be in denial about their offending. It was further requested that the child sex offenders selected include extra-familial offenders, so that data on offenders' modus operandi would not be biased towards mere opportunity.

The selection process in two of the correctional facilities simply involved correctional staff calling for expressions of interest by suitable volunteers meeting the stipulated criteria. The remaining correctional facility requested that Project Axis staff themselves select volunteers from within the centre, and accordingly provided a forum for QCC officers to put their proposal to the inmates directly.

The final sample consisted of 18 child sex offenders.

Interview questions

The interview questions were based on questions used in research conducted by Elliott, Browne and Kilcoyne (1995).⁶⁹ This British study asked offenders about the process of abuse which they had used.

Some additional questions, more relevant to law enforcement, were included, such as which and how many victims were offended against and in what context the offences took place. Specific issues, such as child sex tourism, child prostitution and use of the Internet were also canvassed in the interviews. Almost all the questions were to some extent open-ended to allow offenders to expand on questions put to them, or to offer an answer that did not form part of the set responses. The interview consisted of 88 questions.

The interviews were conducted at each correctional centre by two QCC teams each consisting of one male and one female. Interviews generally lasted from 30 minutes to an hour.

Limitations of the methodology

As only 18 child sex offenders participated in the survey, it is obviously not possible to apply the findings to the whole population of child sex offenders, or even to those child sex offenders incarcerated in Queensland correctional centres. The intention of the interviews was merely to identify patterns in a particular offender's methodology and to use the interviews as the basis for illustrative case studies. Research such as that conducted by Smallbone and Wortley (described below), using a considerably larger sample, is much better suited to identifying relevant trends and generating findings applicable to the broader population of convicted child sex offenders.

⁶⁹ The project thanks Michelle Elliott (Director, Kidscape Charity for Children's Safety), Kevin Browne (Faculty of Medicine, University of Birmingham) and Jennifer Kilcoyne (Faculty of Medicine, University of Birmingham) for permission to base the interview questions on their original questionnaire.

Another factor influencing the results of the interviews is the truthfulness, or otherwise, of the offenders interviewed. The difficulty in obtaining reliable self-reports from offenders has been documented. For instance, Kaplan (1985) found that offenders were significantly more likely to disclose offences to staff in a treatment program than to a parole officer, despite the fact that the parole officer assured them their responses would be completely anonymous.

Ensuring the confidentiality of responses, and gaining the trust of offenders are therefore essential when conducting such research. Offenders were assured that neither their names, nor admissions attributable to them, would be divulged to others. Precautions to ensure the confidentiality of the information obtained included the assigning of code numbers to offenders. Tape recordings of the interviews and written records generated were assigned the code number of the offender interviewed. The survey questions did not aim to identify any particular incident or victim.

The QCC is a law enforcement organisation and participants were made aware of this fact from the outset. It is certainly more than possible that despite all the precautions taken, some offenders may have feared the consequences of full and frank disclosure of their offending behaviour. Furthermore, it is possible that some offenders may have misrepresented their behaviour in an attempt to 'impress' the interviewers.

Sample description

Age and sex

All 18 of the offenders interviewed were men. The age of the offenders interviewed ranged from 27 to 58 years, with a mean age of 45 years. Only five of the eighteen were aged under 40.

Employment history

Nine of the offenders listed their background as unskilled, six as semi-skilled and two as skilled. Only one offender interviewed came from a professional background.

Marital status

Eleven of the offenders had previously been married and three engaged, while four had never been married or engaged.

The Smallbone and Wortley study of convicted offenders

Aim of the project

The principal purpose of the study was to gather and analyse various data on a large number of convicted child sex offenders, and to consider the findings in terms of their implications for the prevention, detection, and investigation of child sexual abuse in Queensland. It was recognised that the findings would also have important national and international implications.

The main focus of the study was to examine in detail the behaviour of offenders currently serving sentences in Queensland for sexual offences against children. In addition, the study aimed to examine a number of other offender behaviour and characteristics considered to be of theoretical and practical significance. As a whole, the study aimed to inform preventive, investigative and corrective efforts with respect to the perpetration of child sexual abuse.

Methodology

Pilot study

Data collection procedures were trialed using eight child sex offenders incarcerated at Moreton Correctional Centre in Brisbane's west. The main aims of this pilot study were to evaluate:

- whether the required official data (demographic and offence history data) could be collected in the intended form
- whether the questionnaire was presented in terms that would be easily understood by convicted child sex offenders
- whether the questionnaire provided sufficient information in terms of the aims and objectives of the study
- the fluency of the data collection procedure as a whole.

A number of practical problems were identified and resolved on the basis of the pilot study. On the whole, the pilot study indicated that the procedure and materials were appropriate in terms of the purposes of the study, and in terms of minimising potential problems that might arise from lack of cooperation within the correctional system and from lack of participation by offenders.

A few small changes were made to the questionnaire itself. The most notable of these was the addition of a series of questions that asked about the number, gender and age of victims in relation to whom no conviction had ever been recorded. Other changes concerned some of the written directions within the questionnaire, and some minor changes to the use of terms which had not been universally understood.

Participant identification and selection

The Queensland DCS supplied, on request, two lists (one for secure custody and community custody, and one for community corrections) of all currently sentenced offenders who had been convicted of at least one of the following offence types:

- indecent dealing with a child
- rape⁷⁰
- unlawful carnal knowledge
- indecent treatment of a child
- sodomy of a child
- maintaining a sexual relationship with a child
- exposing a child to indecent acts
- exposing a child to pornography
- any other references to sexual offences against a child.

Of the 343 offenders identified using these criteria, 332 (97%) were accommodated at one of five Correctional Centres, namely Moreton B, Wolston, Townsville, Rockhampton, and Palen Creek Correctional Centres. These 332 incarcerated offenders were selected as prospective participants in the study.

Using a similar method (i.e. discarding offenders whose convictions did not clearly indicate sexual offences against a child), a total of 187 offenders currently serving community corrections orders (probation, parole etc.) were identified. Since the geographical locations of offenders serving community corrections orders were widely distributed, only those Community Corrections Offices supervising more than 10 child sex offenders were considered. Using this criterion, 98 offenders (52%) reporting to one

⁷⁰ Since it is possible in Queensland to be convicted of rape when the victim is under 16 years of age, the offence of rape was included in the original list. However, since it would be impossible to determine the age of the victim from the DCS lists, we only identified those rape offenders who had an additional offence recorded that indicated sexual offences against a child.

of seven Community Corrections Offices were selected (4 in south - east Queensland, and 3 in north Queensland).

Data collection began in October 1999. By February 2000, an attempt had been made to locate and approach all originally identified incarcerated offenders. Due to considerable movement through the correctional system (discharges, release to community supervision, and prisoner transfers), 87 offenders were unable to be located. In February 2000 an updated list of incarcerated offenders was requested and supplied, and a further 88 prospective participants were identified. In effect, then, the final number of incarcerated offenders identified as prospective participants remained relatively unchanged at 333.

After 24 offenders on community corrections orders had been approached, only seven had agreed to participate. Due to this low response rate (29%) among offenders serving community corrections orders, we decided to abandon our original procedure, and instead targeted those offenders who were attending community-based sex offender programs. During the period of data collection, there were three programs operating, involving 18 child sex offenders. Six of these offenders had already been approached either in prison or community settings, leaving an additional 12 prospective participants, of which eight agreed to participate.

Procedure

The lists supplied by the DCS contained identification numbers, but no names. These identification numbers were used to locate offender's corrections files, which were examined for demographic and offence history. Lists of names were recorded from the prisoner files separately, and written on temporary lists that would allow individual offenders to be located within a particular Centre or Community Corrections Office.

All prospective participants were approached individually and invited to participate in the study. An information sheet and a consent form were provided. It was explained that participation would be entirely voluntary, and that no record would be made of who had declined to participate. Those who agreed to participate were asked to sign a consent form. They were told that they could participate anonymously, or alternatively that they could indicate with their signature that they agreed to make themselves available for an interview at a later date.

If offenders denied having committed sexual offences against children, they were nevertheless asked to participate.

Those who agreed to participate were taken to a private room, and left to complete the questionnaire. In cases where offenders indicated the need for help with reading or writing, the field researcher assisted. After the offender had completed the questionnaire, the field researcher checked that all questions had been answered, and thanked the offender for his participation.

Sixteen of the 96 offenders who had agreed to make themselves available for further contact were selected to take part in a) re-administration of the questionnaire, and b) a semi-structured interview. These 16 were non-randomly selected according to identified offence sub-types in proportion to the larger sample. Eight intra-familial offenders, six extra-familial offenders, and three mixed-type offenders were approached. Re-administration of the questionnaire followed the same procedure as that described above. Following the second completion of the questionnaire, these offenders were interviewed privately for between 60 and 90 minutes.

Demography and offence history

Demographic and offence history data were recorded directly from offenders' correctional files, which were accessed within the relevant Correctional Centre or Community Corrections office. The information obtained from these files included: date of birth; highest level of education achieved; ethnicity; date and length of current sentence; current and previous sex offence convictions; and current and previous non-sex offence convictions. For all sex offence convictions, complete details and dates of convictions were recorded. Non-sex offence convictions were summarised using the Australian Bureau of Statistics schedule of criminal offences (ABS 1997a). The number of each non-sex conviction type, and the date of the first conviction for any offence, were recorded. Field researchers were trained in the use of the ABS schedule prior to the data collection phase of the study.

Psychosocial and psychosexual history

Childhood attachment was measured using two separate self-report instruments: a childhood attachment questionnaire and an attachment history checklist. The childhood attachment questionnaire (Hazan & Shaver 1986, in Collins & Read 1990) consists of three short paragraphs describing the three major attachment patterns (secure, anxious, and avoidant). Respondents were asked to read the descriptions of each pattern and to choose the attachment category that best described their mother and father when they were growing up. The participants then rated the extent to which each description corresponded to their recollections of the ways in which their mother and father typically behaved toward them during their childhood, on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from one (not at all like my mother /father) to seven (very much like mother/father).

Responses to this measure can be used in two ways. First, the ratings can be utilised as continuous measures of the various adult attachment patterns. Second, because participants select a description that 'best' fits their parents, they can be classified into discrete attachment styles.

The attachment history checklist (Hazan & Shaver 1987) was used as an additional retrospective measure of the quality of family relationships during childhood. The checklist allows for more specific patterns of childhood attachment relationships to be identified than does the more global childhood attachment questionnaire. Participants were initially asked to reflect on their relationship with their mother and father, and then to select from a

list of nineteen adjectives (e.g. responsive; rejecting; inconsistent) the terms that best described their parent's attitudes, feelings and behaviour toward them. The participants completed this task separately for each parent. The attachment-history descriptors can be conceptually grouped into 'involved/secure' qualities (e.g. loving; affectionate; accepting), 'over-involved' qualities (e.g. critical; demanding; strict), 'uninvolved/insecure' qualities (e.g. inconsistent; unresponsive), and 'harsh/rejecting' qualities (e.g. rejecting, abusive; violent). Both the childhood attachment questionnaire and the attachment history checklist have previously been shown to have moderate to high test-retest reliability for a sample of incarcerated sex offenders (Smallbone & Dadds 1998).

Participants were also asked to reflect upon their parents' relationship with each other, and similar to the previous task, select from a list of twelve adjectives the terms which best described their parents' relationship.

Paraphilias

Although the concept of 'multiple paraphilias' has continued to influence conceptions of sex offenders and sex offending, there is no consensus about how best to measure the extent of this phenomenon. For example, Abel, Becker, Mittelman, Cunningham-Rathner, Rouleau and Murphy (1987) used an interview method, but did not make clear the criteria upon which decisions were made about the presence or absence of paraphilias. For the purposes of the present study, we decided to use formal diagnostic criteria, as described in the latest edition the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (APA 1994). These criteria require the presence, over a period of at least six months, of 'recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, urges or behaviour' associated with unusual objects, activities or situations.

A series of 12 questions was developed to determine the prevalence of the following paraphilias: exhibitionism (exposure of genitals); fetishism (sexual use of non-living objects); public masturbation; frotteurism (touching and rubbing sexually against a non-consenting person); sexual masochism (receiving sexual humiliation or suffering); sexual sadism (inflicting sexual humiliation or suffering), transvestic fetishism (cross-dressing); voyeurism (observing others engaged in undressing or sexual activity); telephone scatologia (making obscene phone calls); necrophilia (sexual activity with deceased persons); and zoophilia (sexual activity with animals).

Pornography use and offender networking

A series of questions were developed specifically for the purpose of the present study, to assess four broad areas related to offender networking and pornography use. These were:

- Internet use — Nine questions were designed to elicit the extent of knowledge and use of the internet to access sites, organisations and chat rooms for child-sex purposes. For example, 'Have you ever used the internet to gain contact with clubs, chat groups or individuals that distribute pictures or films of children involved in sexual activity?'

- Pornography use — Six questions were designed to assess the usage and collection of general adult pornography, child pornography and other types of sexually arousing material, such as children’s clothing catalogues, for example, ‘Have you ever collected pictures of children from clothing catalogues or other advertisements because you found them sexually interesting? (e.g., children modeling swimwear or underwear)’. These questions also attempted to determine whether the participant had been involved in the production and distribution of child pornography, for example, ‘Have you ever been involved in the production of sexually explicit material or movies of children?’
- Community-based networking — Three questions were designed to assess offenders’ knowledge of and involvement with adult/child sexual activity prior to themselves being charged with a sexual offence. For example, ‘Before you were charged with a child sexual offence, did you ever become involved with an individual or a group of people who organised sexual contact with children?’
- Prison-based networking — Finally, six questions assessed the role of the prison environment in facilitating collaboration between offenders in the development of informal networks for the purposes of child sexual activity. For example, ‘While you have been in prison how often have other inmates approached you about wanting to gain access to sexually explicit pictures and movies of children?’ and ‘While in prison, how often have you been provided with information about how to gain access to children for sexual contact?’

Modus operandi

The Modus Operandi Questionnaire was developed by Kaufmann (1989) as a measure of specific behaviours related to child sex offending. The self-report measure assesses behaviour along a time continuum that includes six basic phases of the offence. These are:

- targeting and selection of child
- methods of obtaining the victim’s trust
- details of the sexual abuse itself
- use of bribes and enticements
- use of threats and coercion
- methods of keeping the victim from disclosing the abuse.

Participants rate each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale from zero (‘never’) to six (‘always’) to describe the frequency with which they engaged in the specific behaviour. Test-retest reliability for these scales have been reported as acceptable, while the internal consistency of four of the scales has been reported as good. Importantly, the

questionnaire has been demonstrated generally to provide a greater amount of unique information than a parallel interview, with both incarcerated and community-based sex offenders (Kaufman et al. 1996).

For the purposes of the present study, aspects of offender modus operandi were examined in more or less chronological terms, as follows:

- victim characteristics
- pre-offence behaviour
- offence behaviour
- post-offence behaviour
- offenders' perceptions of their victim's behaviour.

Since in the present sample there was a considerable range of offending characteristics (e.g. some offenders reported having offended only once, while others reported having offended many times), analyses were based on the presence or absence of behaviour, rather than on their frequency.

Interviews

Qualitative information was gathered by interviewing a subset of 17 participants. The semi-structured interview schedule was specifically designed to gather information about the following areas:

- basic information about the participant's background: family relationships; schooling performance; mental health issues; substance usage; previous sexual abuse; adult intimate relationships; sexual development and issues; first offence and time when attracted to child;
- information about the offences, including age, gender, number of and relationship with victims;
- selection and recruitment of the victims;
- profile of victims;
- strategies employed to introduce sexual contact;
- behaviour during the offence (e.g. how the first contact started, what was said by the offender);

- what occurred after the offence (e.g. how the participant ensured that the child did not disclose the abuse);
- knowledge of networks (whether the offender was aware of the existence of formal and informal networking among child sex offenders);
- psychological and social aspects that the offender considered important in the development and maintenance of sex offending behaviour;
- preventative measures (the offender's view of what might have made it more difficult for him to offend).

Limitations of the methodology

The key limitations of the study are as follows:

- The study purposely targeted a non-treatment population, and the extent to which the findings can be generalised beyond convicted offenders is unclear. Selection processes arising from biases in reporting, investigation, prosecution and sentencing are likely to have been present and these may serve to limit the extent to which the data are representative of child sex offending in general.
- Despite attempts to gather data from offenders serving community orders, almost all the offenders who agreed to provide self-report information were either currently in prison or were serving a term of parole after having been released from prison. This means that findings may not be representative of non-incarcerated child sex offenders.
- Despite offering anonymity and confidentiality, there are some inherent limitations associated with relying on offender self-reports. Although the test-retest reliability check suggests that offenders were not purposely providing false information, the reader is cautioned against assuming the offender self-reports to be wholly accurate.

Results

Test-retest reliability

Test-retest reliability data are presented in Table 29. These are expressed in one of two forms. For categorical data, average agreement rates are expressed in terms of percentages (the higher the percentage, the higher the reliability of the item). For continuous data, reliability is expressed in terms of correlation values which can range from -1.0 (a perfect negative correlation) to +1.0 (a perfect positive correlation). Correlation values of +0.7 or higher would normally be considered to indicate acceptable reliability.

As indicated in Table 29, agreement of offender self-reports over time were on the whole quite strong. With the exception of insecure paternal attachment, average correlations ranged from 0.84 to 1.0. With respect to the categorical data, average rates of agreement over time were uniformly strong, ranging from 87% to 100%. These findings add considerably to the confidence with which the data provided by the offenders might be interpreted. In light of the scepticism which often surrounds offender self-reports, these reliability data suggest that the confidentiality provided to offenders in this study may have facilitated a greater than usual level of honesty. It is important to note that this does not necessarily suggest that the offender self-reports represent an accurate account of their background, offending history and offence-related behaviour. However, it does suggest that the level of dissimulation (knowingly providing false information) in the present study is low.

Table 29: Test-retest reliability of offender self-reports

Test-retest item	Agreement (%)	Correlations
Childhood experiences		
Maternal attachment	Secure	0.91
	Anxious	0.90
	Avoidant	0.84
Paternal attachment	Secure	0.85
	Anxious	0.21
	Avoidant	0.68
Relationship with mother	89.7	
Relationship with father	86.7	
Parental relationship	88.0	
Childhood sexual abuse	100.0	
Paraphilias	90.0	
Networking and Pornography use	90.4	
Offending		
Age at first sexual contact with a child		0.98
Age at last sexual contact with a child		0.99
Number of victims		0.76
Relationship to victims		0.97
Modus operandi	Pre-offence	89.6
	Offence	92.0
	Post-offence	98.0

Sample characteristics

A total of 323 offenders — 287 incarcerated and 36 serving community corrections orders — were approached and invited to participate in the study. Of these, just over

half of the 323 (182) agreed to participate. Response rates for prisoners (58%) were better than for those on community orders (42%).

Of those who participated, 13 (7%) either overtly denied having ever committed a sex offence or provided no information about sex offending. This group is treated in this report as 'deniers'.

Of the 169 who admitted to having committed at least one sexual offence (admitters), 79 (47%) reported having offended exclusively against children either with whom they were residing at the time of offending, or who were related to them. This group is referred to in this report as 'intra-familial' offenders. Sixty admitters (36%) reported having offended exclusively against children with whom they had not been residing, and who were not related to them ('extra-familial' offenders). A third group of 30 admitters (18%) reported having offended both against children with whom they lived or who they were related to, and against children with whom they did not live and who they were not related to. This third group is referred to in this report as 'mixed-type' offenders.

Description of the sample

Age and sex

All offenders were male and had an average age of 41.5 years (range = 17 to 76 years) at the time they were sentenced in relation to their current convictions. There were no significant differences between responders and non-responders, between admitters and deniers, or between the three offence sub-types (intra-familial, extra-familial and mixed-type offenders).

Current offences

The average length of custodial sentences for offenders' current convictions was 6.8 years. There were no significant differences between responders and non-responders, between admitters and deniers, nor between the three offender sub-types. The most common sexual offence type was indecent dealing with a child under 16 years (39%). This was followed by indecent dealings (age unspecified) (34%), carnal knowledge (22%), attempted or completed rape (21%), indecent dealing with a child under 12 (18%), sodomy (15%), incest (12%), indecent assault (12%), and exposing a child to indecent act, literature, videos etc. (9%). The number of single current sex offence charges ranged from 1 to 44.

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⁷² See also Ffrench, M.

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