

Sexual and Physical Violence against Children in Northern Ireland

A Statistical Overview of Recorded Crime 2008–10

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SUMMARY OF STATISTICS

General

- In total, 11927 violent offences were recorded against children by the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) between 2008–2010. 18% involved sexual offences¹ (n=2194) and 82% physically violent offences (known as ‘offences against the person’, n=9733)².
- Sexual offences against children accounted for 56% of all sexual crime reported in 2008/10 and 16% of all physically violent offences were committed against children.

Sexual Offences against Children

Victims and Offence Types

- 1 in 5 sexual offences against children were reported when the victim was an adult.
- Of the 1654 sexual offences cases involving victims under the age of 18 when the offence was reported, more than 70% involved the specific offences of sexual activity with or sexual assault of a child. Almost 1 in 5 sexual offences involved rape or attempted rape.
- Although teenagers were the predominant victim group more than 1 in 5 sexual offences involved 0–9 year olds.
- The majority of victims of sexual crimes were girls (85% V 15%) and the highest proportion of rapes/ attempted rapes involved this group.
- Reported victimisation followed a relatively similar pattern for both girls and boys aged 0–11 years, though there was a slightly higher incidence level for girls. Girls aged 12–15 years were much more likely to be victims of sexual offences than boys, although levels of victimisation dropped again between 16–17.

1 Sexual offences presented in this paper include: rape/attempted rape; sexual assault of a child/sexual activity with a child; indecent exposure; other sexual offences

2 Offences against the person presented in this paper include: murder/attempted murder/manslaughter/ threat or conspiracy to commit murder; wounding/GBH/wounding with intent/GBH with intent/AOABH; common assault; cruelty/neglect; child abduction and other violent offences.

Detection and Offender Characteristics

- Overall only 19.2% (n=318) of sexual offences recorded by PSNI 2008–2010 had been detected³ by police by September 2010.
- A majority (88%) were detected by way of a charge or summons.
- In detected cases, one third of offenders were aged 10–19 years and 30% were aged 20–35.
- Almost all offenders were male although 12 female offenders (out of 320 offenders) were also recorded.
- The largest proportion of offenders were those known but not related to the victims (44%), followed by strangers (29%). One in five involved a family member.

Characteristics of Detected Cases

- Cases involving 0–4 year olds had significantly lower levels of detection (9%) than other age groups.
- Levels of detection varied significantly across the police district the offence was reported in, varying from 10% to 26%.
- In cases of detected sexual crime against children, the relationship between victim and offender changed depending on the age of the victim. A familial or caretaking relationship was more common with younger victims. As the age of the victim rose, the proportion of offenders who were known but unrelated to the child, who were a stranger to them, or who were or had been in an intimate relationship with them, rose also.

Physically Violent Offences against Children

Victims and Offence Types

- Of the 9693 physically violent offences reported when the victim was aged 0–17 years, the most common involved GBH⁴/AOABH⁵/with intent/wounding, followed by common assault.
- A small proportion, 4%, involved murder/attempted murder/manslaughter or threat or conspiracy to commit murder. Less than 2% involved cruelty/neglect.

³ Detections (or clearances as they may alternatively be known) are, broadly speaking, those crimes that have been 'cleared up' by the police. Crimes are counted as 'detected or cleared' in accordance with strict counting rules issued by the Home Office. There are a number of methods of detection available. Formal sanction detections such as:

- Charging or issuing a summons to an offender;
- Issuing a caution to the offender;
- Having the offence accepted for consideration in court;
- The offender is a juvenile who is dealt with by means of an informed warning, restorative caution or prosecutorial diversion.

In addition, for the most serious offence types a non sanction detection can be claimed if:

- The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) directs no prosecution; or
- The case cannot proceed because the offender has died.

⁴ Grievous Bodily Harm

⁵ Action Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm

- Physically violent offences were recorded more often against boys than girls (60% V 40%).
- A greater proportion of girls were the victim of more serious offences such as GBH/AOABH/wounding than boys (60% V 46%).
- Teenagers were the largest group of victims. When a teenager was the victim of an offence, it was more likely that this offence would be of a serious nature (GBH, AOABH/wounding) than a lesser offence (common assault).
- The most serious offences such as murder/attempted murder involved only a small proportion of children. However, a greater proportion of 0–4 year olds were the victims of these offences than any other age group.
- The offence of child cruelty/neglect involved a small proportion of victims with 0–9 year olds being the most common victims.

Detection and Offender Characteristics

- Levels of detection were higher for physically violent offences than sexual (25% V 19%).
- The proportion of those charged with physically violent offences against children was less than half that for sexual offences (22% V 51%).
- Twelve percent of cases involved multiple offenders.
- One third of these offenders were aged 10–19 years and 39% were aged 20–35.
- The majority of offenders were male (73%).
- The largest proportion of offenders were those known but related to the victims, followed by strangers. One in five offences involved a family member.

Characteristics of Detected Cases

- Cases involving 0–4 year olds had significantly higher levels of detection (28%) than other age group. Cases involving 5–9 year olds had significantly lower levels of detection (15%).
- There were higher levels of detection for cases involving girls than there were for cases involving boys.
- More serious crimes such as murder/attempted murder (33%) and wounding/GBH/AOABH (29%) had higher levels of detection than less serious offences such as common assault (19%).
- Levels of detection varied significantly across the police district the offence was reported in, varying from 19% to 31%.
- A familial or caretaking relationship between the victim and offender was more common in younger age groups. Such a relationship was present in 73% of detected physical violence offences involving under 0–4 year olds and in 44% of detected offences against 5–9 year olds.

- The proportion of offenders who were known but unrelated to the victim rose with victim age, as did physically violent crime committed by strangers and current or ex spouses/boyfriends.

Reporting Delay in Sexual Offences

Extent of Delayed Reporting and Case Characteristics

- Of the 2194 child sexual offences reported to the PSNI in 2008–2010, just over 2 in 5 children reported the offence within 48 hours of it occurring (immediate reporters). A quarter reported the offence within the year (365 days from offence occurrence) and 13% reported more than a year after the offence occurred. A further 1 in 5 reported the offence when they were adults, where the average reporting delay was 24 years.
- Almost twice as many of those who reported a childhood sexual offence when they were adults were men, compared to those who were immediate reporters.
- A majority of the offences reported by adults (61%) and children more than a year after they occurred (54%) related to sexual offences which occurred when the victims were aged 0–9 years. This was significantly higher than for immediate reporters (17%) or children reporting within a year of offence occurrence (13%).
- The most serious, penetrative sexual offences such as rape/attempted rape had the greatest reporting delay.

Detection and Reporting Delay

- Length of reporting delay had a significant impact on case outcomes with the lowest levels of detection (14%) occurring in cases of child sexual abuse which are reported when the victim is an adult.
- Levels of detection for children reporting within the year and those reporting more than a year after the offence occurred were not noticeably different. This suggests reporting within 48 hours of offence makes detection more likely.
- Living in a largely rural area was also found to have an impact on reporting delay with higher levels of delayed reporting apparent amongst children and adults in these areas.
- Within detected cases, a majority of sexual offences reported by children to police more than one year after occurrence or by adult survivors involved a familial relationship with the alleged offender.
- Cases in which adults reported childhood sexual abuse were less likely to involve offenders who were juveniles, young adults, females or multiple offenders, although numbers were very small.

INTRODUCTION

Background

It is well evidenced that child sexual abuse is a global problem of considerable extent affecting the lives of millions of children each year (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). Equally well evidenced is the fact that, despite the frequency of child maltreatment across a range of populations, only a minority of abuse cases come to the attention of the authorities (Terry & Tallon, 2006; London et al's, 2005). London et al's (2005) review of disclosures of child sexual abuse concluded that 60%–70% of adults had not disclosed their sexual abuse as children, and only a small minority, 10%–18% recalled that their cases were reported to the authorities. The review also details what is known about patterns of disclosure among children treated or evaluated for sexual abuse, further highlighting that when children do disclose, it often takes them a long time to do so.

Nonetheless, official data such as child protection referrals and recorded crime statistics provides valuable information on the numbers of children experiencing harm which come to the attention of professionals in any given year. In the United Kingdom (UK) the information on known cases of child maltreatment has traditionally been drawn from child welfare statistics. However, the utility of crime statistics in providing a more comprehensive overview of broader levels of victimisation is often overlooked. Both internationally and within Northern Ireland (NI), crime data has been successfully used to explore the differences between reported child and adult sexual assault and the outcomes of cases in the criminal justice system (Bunting, 2008; Feist et al., 2007; Fitzgerald, 2006).

This paper extends this work by presenting data on the patterns of violent crime committed against children in NI and reported to and recorded⁶ by police. It demonstrates the wealth of valuable information available, information which is essential for policy development and service planning not just in terms of identifying levels of need but in identifying changing patterns in the occurrence and reporting of victimisation and monitoring systemic response. Key themes emerging from the data are identified and an overview of key statistics provided.

Method

This analysis focused on sexual offences and physically violent offences recorded by the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) between April 2008 and March 2010. For all offences this included the victim's age and gender, time of reporting, offence type and District Command Unit (DCU) in which the crime was reported (the NI police force includes 29 DCUs which cover the entire jurisdiction). For offences 'detected' by the PSNI this included the method of detection, the relationship between the victim and the offender and the age and gender of the offender. Detections (or clearances as they may alternatively be known) are, broadly speaking, those crimes that have been 'cleared up' by the police. Crimes are counted as 'detected or cleared' in accordance with strict counting rules issued by the Home Office⁷. There are a number of methods of detection available. Formal sanction detections such as:

⁶ Recorded crime figures (sometimes referred to as notifiable offences) detail those crimes and offences (including attempts) recorded by the police which are deemed to be indictable or triable-either-way. Certain closely associated summary offences are also counted in the recorded crime figures.

⁷ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/crime/counting-rules/>

- Charging or issuing a summons to an offender;
- Issuing a caution to the offender;
- Having the offence accepted for consideration in court;
- The offender is a juvenile who is dealt with by means of an informed warning, restorative caution or prosecutorial diversion⁸.

In addition, for the most serious offence types a non sanction detection can be claimed if:

- The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) directs no prosecution; or
- The case cannot proceed because the offender has died.

Prior to April 2006 a variety of non sanction detections could be claimed where police took no further action, the main one being where the victim declined to prosecute. At that time these detection types accounted for around 50% of the PSNI's total detection rate. However, since then some major changes have been introduced which have substantially limited the detection options open to the PSNI.

Ethical considerations

Formal ethical approval was not required. However, a formal information sharing agreement was drawn up between NSPCC and PSNI and all anonymised database information provided by PSNI was placed on a secure, password protected server.

Statistical analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS Version 19.0. Comparisons were made using inferential statistics, primarily chi-squared tests, and those with a p value < 0.05 are reported as significant.

Sample Characteristics

This analysis focused on sexual offences and physically violent offences recorded by the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) between 1st April 2008 and 31st March 2010. In total, 11,927 violent offences were recorded against children. Eighteen percent of these involved sexual offences (n=2194) and 82% physically violent offences (n=9733). Together they accounted for 19% of the total violent 63,325 crimes recorded between 1st April 2008 and 31st March 2010; 56% of sexual offences and 16% of physically violent offences.

Of the 11927 offences, 4% (464) were reported to the PSNI when the victim was no longer a child (18+ years). This accounted for 19.4% (425) of sexual offences, 0.4% (28) of physically violent offences. Additionally information relating to the age of the victim when the offence was reported was not available for 115 sexual offences (5.3%). Further analysis excludes these historic and missing cases and is based only on those cases involving victims under the age of 18 when the offence was reported.

⁸ Where the offender is diverted from traditional prosecution and dealt with via a diversionary scheme such as the Community-based Restorative Justice Service or statutory youth conferencing. For further details see: http://www.nio.gov.uk/alternatives_to_prosecution_-_a_discussion_paper.pdf

VICTIM AND OFFENCE CHARACTERISTICS

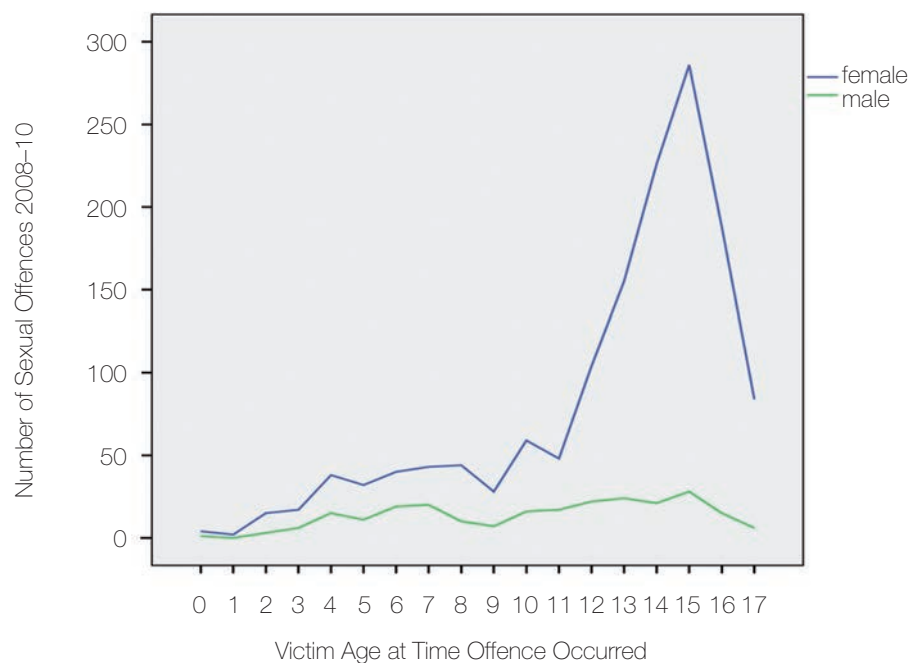
Sexual Offences

Of the 1654 sexual offences cases involving victims under the age of 18 when the offence was reported, a majority, more than 70% involved sexual activity with a child or sexual assault⁹ (see Table 1). Almost 1 in 5 sexual offences involved rape or attempted rape. Girls were the main victims of sexual crime (85% V 15%) and there were gender differences across offence types with rape/attempted rape involving a significantly greater proportion of girls (21% V 9%) and sexual assault/activity offences involving a greater proportion of boys (81% V 70%).

There were significant variations according to victim age and offence type. The highest proportion of rapes/attempted rapes occurred in the 14–17 year old age group, sexual assault/activity in the 0–4 year old age group and indecent exposure in the 10–13 year old age group.

Further exploration of the data using a continuous ‘age at time offence occurred’ variable showed differences in victimisation patterns by age and gender (see Figure1). Reported victimisation followed a relatively similar pattern for both girls and boys aged 0–12 years, albeit there was an elevated incidence level for females with female victimisation dramatically increasing from age 12–15 and dropping again between 16–17 years. The mean age of offence occurrence for females was 12.6 (SD=3.7) with a median average of 14 and a mode of 15. For males the mean age was 10.4 (SD=4.1) with median of 11 and a mode of 15.

Figure 1: Gender Difference in Victim Age at Time the Sexual Offence Occurred



⁹ The Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 was implemented on 1st Feb 2009 and crime recording practices changed to reflect this legislative change. As such the dataset includes a wide range of sexual offences recorded under both the old and new legislative systems (see appendix 1 for overview).

Physically Violent Offences

Of the 9693 physically violent offences reported when the victim was aged 0–17 years, the most common involved GBH/AOABH/with intent/wounding, followed by common assault. (see Table 1). A small proportion (4%) involved murder/attempted murder/manslaughter or threat or conspiracy to commit murder and less than 2% involved cruelty/neglect.

Physically violent offences were more commonly recorded against male victims, although the gender gap was much less pronounced (60% V 40%) than with sexual offences. Victim age and gender were also significantly associated with offence type with a greater proportion of females being the victim of more serious offences such as GBH/AOABH/wounding (60% V 46%) and a lesser proportion being the victim of common assault (33% V 40%). Teenagers were the largest group of victims and a greater proportion of 14–17 year olds were the victims of the more serious offences of GBH/AOABH/wounding rather than the lesser offence of common assault (60 V 30%). Although GBH/AOABH/wounding was less common in younger age groups it still accounted for 30% of offences against 0–4 year olds and 35% of offences against 5–9 year olds. The most serious offences, murder/attempted murder etc involved only a small proportion of children but a greater proportion of 0–4 year olds were the victims of this offence than any other age group. Likewise child cruelty/neglect involved a small proportion of victims with 0–9 year olds being the most common victims.

Table 1: Relationship between Victim Gender and Age and Offence Type for Sexual and Physically Violent Offences

Offence Type	Total		Victim Gender		Victim Age			
	N	%	Male %	Female %	0–4 %	5–9 %	10–13 %	14–17 %
All Sexual Offences	1654	100	14.6	85.4	6.1	15.4	26.9	51.6
Rape/attempted rape	312	18.9	8.7*	20.6*	9.9**	18.5**	14.8**	22.1**
Sexual assault/sexual activity	1188	71.8	80.9*	70.3*	87.1**	73.6**	70.3**	70.3**
Indecent exposure	126	7.6	8.3*	7.5*	3.0**	7.5**	12.1**	5.9**
Other sexual offences	28	1.7*	1.6*	2.1*	0**	0.4**	2.7**	1.8**
All Physically Violent Offences	9693	100	60.4	39.6	3.8	7.8	24.8	63.6
murder/attempted murder/manslaughter/threat or conspiracy to commit murder	383	4	4.7†	3.4†	7.1††	2.3††	2.4††	4.6††
wounding/GBH/with intent/AOABH	5264	54.3	46.0†	59.7†	29.7††	35.2††	48.5††	60.4††
common assault	3455	35.6	39.8†	32.9†	42.2††	51.2††	43.5††	30.3††
cruelty/neglect	156	1.6	2.0†	1.4†	17.7††	6.8††	1.1††	0.2††
child abduction	72	0.7	1.2†	0.4†	2.7††	2.7††	0.9††	0.3††
other violent offences	363	3.7	6.3†	2.0†	0.5††	1.9††	3.5††	4.2††

* χ^2 (df3, $N = 1654$) = 19.064^a, $p < 0.000$

** χ^2 (df9, $N = 1654$) = 42.009, $p < 0.000$

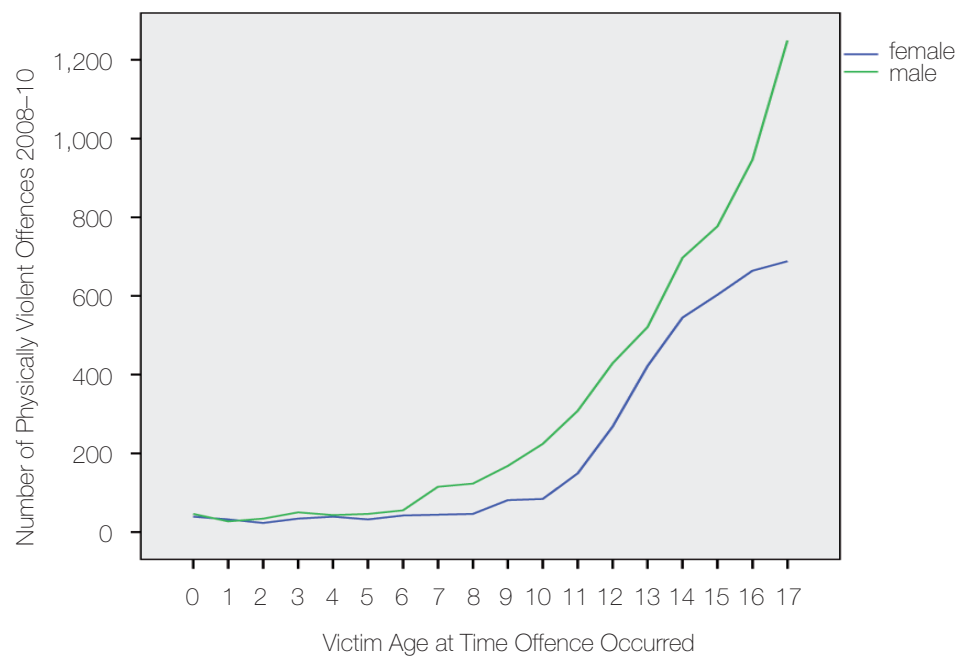
† χ^2 (df5, $N = 9693$) = 257.389, $p < 0.000$

†† χ^2 (df15, $N = 9693$) = 1217.566, $p < 0.000$

Further exploration of the data using a continuous 'age at time offence occurred' variable showed difference in victimisation patterns by age and gender (see Figure 2). Physically violent offences had almost identical gender patterns and rates up unto the age of 6 years. The incidence of victimisation steadily increased for both males and female from age 7 on with males being the predominant victim group but the gender gap becoming more extreme between 15–17 years.

The mean age of offence occurrence against females was 13.7 (SD=3.5) with a median average of 15 and a mode of 17. For males the mean age was 13.6 (SD=3.5) with median of 15 and a mode of 17.

Figure 2: Gender Difference in Victim Age at Time Physically Violent Offence Occurred



DETECTION AND OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS

Sexual Offences

At September 2010 19.2% of sexual offences reported in the financial years 2008/09 and 2009/10 had been detected. Of these detected offences a majority were detected by way of a charge or summons. Information relating to the alleged offender's age, gender and relationship with the victim is only available in recorded crime data where there is a detection. PSNI may hold this information in non-detected cases but it is not appropriate for this to be included in this statistical dataset in these circumstances. Ten cases involved multiple offenders and there were a total of 331 offenders in relation to the 318 offences. One third of these offenders were aged 10–19 years and 30% were aged 20–35. Almost all offenders were male and of the 12 female offenders recorded, 10 committed the offence alone and 2 with a male co-offender. The largest proportion of offenders were those known but related to the victims, followed by strangers. Six percent involved a parent, 4 % a sibling and 10% a grandparent or other relative.

Physically Violent Offences

Detection was higher for physically violent offences compared to sexual offences with 25% of such offences reported in the financial years 2008/09 and 2009/10 having been detected at September 2010. Of these detected offences close to one third were detected by way of a juvenile informed warning or restorative caution and close to half resulted in a summons to court being issued. The proportion of those charged was less than half that for sexual offences (22% V 51%).

Information relating to the alleged offender's age, gender and relationship with the victim is only available in recorded crime data where there is a detection. Twelve percent of cases involved multiple offenders and there were a total of 2778 offenders identified in relation to the 2410 offences. One third of these offenders were aged 10–19 years and 39% were aged 20–35. The majority of offenders were male, although, again, the gender gap was less pronounced with physically violent offences compared to sexual offences. Female victims were much more likely to be offended against by another female, either individually or in or a group containing at least one female offender in comparison with male victims (49% V 10%) (see Table 3). The largest proportion of offenders were those known but not related to the victims, followed by strangers. Thirteen percent involved a parent, 5% a sibling and 2% another relative.

Table 2: Detection Method and Offender Characteristics for Sexual Offences (Detected cases only)

	Sexual Violence	
	no	%
Detection Method		
Adult caution/informed warning	12	3.8
Charge	162	50.9
Juvenile caution/informed warning/youth conference	21	6.6
No prosecution directed	5	1.6
Summons issued	118	37.1
Total	318	100
Offender/Victim Relationship		
Current spouse, partner, girlfriend, boyfriend etc	10	5.5
Ex spouse, partner, girlfriend, boyfriend etc	< 5	1.1
Grandparent/grandchild	< 5	2.2
Other family relationship	15	8.3
Parent/child	10	5.5
Sibling	8	4.4
Stranger	52	28.7
Suspect known to victim	80	44.2
Total	181	99.9
Number of offenders		
1	307	96.5
2 or more	10	3.5
Total	317	100
Age of all offenders		
10–14	32	9.7
15–19	77	23.3
20–24	35	10.6
25–29	43	13.0
30–34	21	6.4
35–39	29	8.8
40–44	21	6.4
45–49	17	5.2
50–54	12	3.6
55–59	12	3.6
60–64	15	4.5
65+	16	4.8
Total	330	100
Offender Gender		
Female	12	3.6
Male	318	96.4
Total	320	100

Table 3: Detection Method and Offender Characteristics for Physically Violent Offences (Detected cases only)

	Physically violent offences	
	no	%
Detection Method		
Adult caution/informed warning	184	7.6
Charge	517	21.5
Juvenile informed warning	242	10.0
Juvenile restorative caution	236	9.8
No prosecution directed	< 5	–
Summons issued	1140	47.3
Youth conference	90	3.7
Total	2410	100
Offender/Victim Relationship		
Current spouse, partner, girlfriend, boyfriend etc	39	2.6
Ex spouse, partner, girlfriend, boyfriend etc	31	2.1
Grandparent/grandchild	< 5	0.0
Other family relationship	22	1.5
Parent/child	196	13.0
Sibling	73	4.9
Stranger	352	23.4
Suspect known to victim	786	52.3
Total	1502	100
No offenders		
1	2124	88.1
2 or more	284	11.9
Total	2408	100
Age of all offenders		
10–14	699	25.2
15–19	1044	37.6
20–24	292	10.5
25–29	139	5.0
30–34	115	4.1
35–39	168	6.0
40–44	152	5.5
45–49	82	3.0
50–54	36	1.3
55–59	26	.9
60–64	12	.4
65+	13	.5
Total	2778	100
Offender Gender		
Female	760	27.4
Male	2017	72.6
Total	2777	100

Table 4: Relationship between victim and offender gender in detected physically violent offences 2008–10

Physically violent offences	Male only offender(s) %	One or more female offender %	N	χ^2	df	Sig
Female Victim	50.9	49.1	2410	467.561	1	.000
Male Victim	90.3	9.7				

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DETECTION AND CASE CHARACTERISTICS

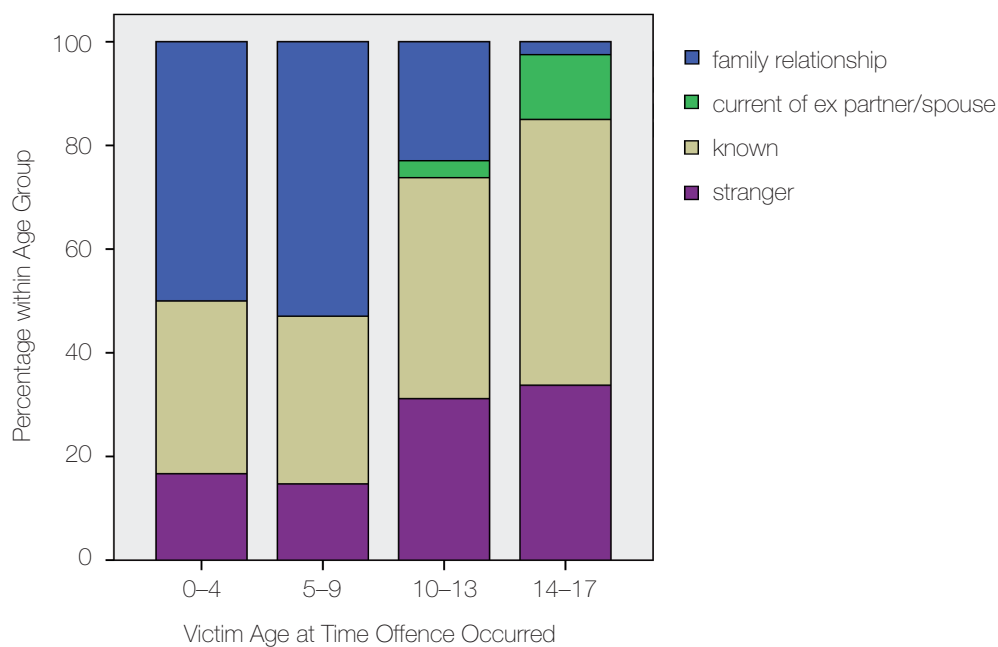
Sexual Offences

There was an association between case detection and victim age, reporting delay and police district the offence was reported in but no association with victim gender, domestic motivation and offence type. Cases involving 0–4 year olds had significantly lower levels of detection (9%) than 5–9 year olds (21%) and 10–13 year olds (24%), as did 14–17 year olds (17%), although the difference was much smaller.

There was significant difference between levels of detection depending on which police district the offence was reported in, varying from 10% to 26%.

Although significance testing was not possible given the numbers available, Figure 3 demonstrates the relationship between the victim and offender in detected sexual crime changed by age group. A familial or caretaking relationship was more common in younger age groups, accounting for 50% of detected sexual crime involving under 0–4s, 53% of 5–9s, 23% 10–13s and 3% 14–17s. The proportion of known but unrelated offenders rose with victim age as did sexual crime by strangers and current or ex spouses/boyfriends.

Figure 3: Victim Age at Time Sexual Offence Occurred by Relationship with Offender (detected cases only)



Physically Violent Offences

There was an association between levels of detection and victim age, gender, offences type, domestic motivation, reporting delay and police district the offence was reported.

Cases involving 0–4 year olds had significantly higher detection levels of detection (28%) than other age groups and 5–9 year olds significantly lower (15%) levels. There were higher levels of detection for female victims and offences with a domestic motivation were less likely to be detected than those without (24% v 20%).

More serious crimes such as murder/attempted murder and wounding/GBH/AOABH had higher levels of detection than less serious offences such as common assault (33% & 29% V 19%). Child cruelty/neglect also had higher levels of detection than common assault (25% V 19%).

There was significant difference between levels of detection depending on which police district the offence was reported in, varying from 19% to 31%.

As Figure 4 below demonstrates, the relationship between the victim and offender in detected physically violent offences changed by age group. A familial or caretaking relationship was more common in younger age groups, accounting for 73% of detected physically violent offences involving under 0–4s, 44% of 5–9s, 14% of 10–13s and 16% of 14–17s. The proportion of known but unrelated offenders rose with victim age as did violent crime by strangers and current or ex spouses/boyfriends.

Figure 4: Victim Age at Time Offence Against the Person Occurred by Relationship with Offender (detected cases only)

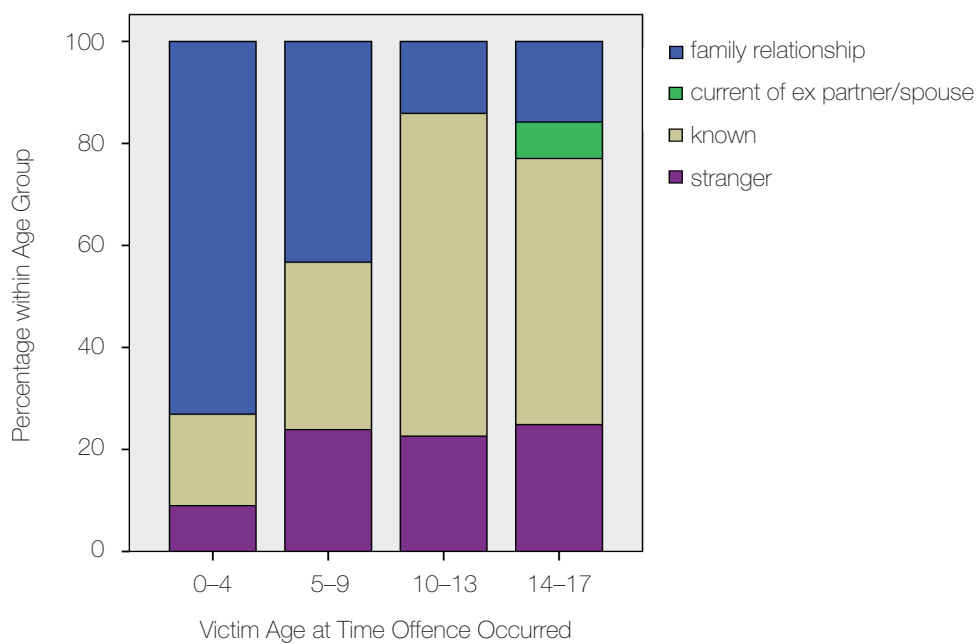


Table 5: The Relationship between Sexual Offences and Levels of Detection (Detected case only, n=318)

	Detected		N	χ^2	df	Sig
	No	%				
Age Group of victim						
0-4	9	8.9	1654	16.626	3	.001
5-9	53	20.9				
10-13	108	24.3				
14-17	148	17.3				
Gender of victim						
Male	43	17.8	1654	0.251	1	0.552
Female	275	19.5				
Offence Type						
rape/attempted rape	63	20.2	1654	0.928	3	.819
sexual assault/sexual activity with a child	225	18.9				
indecent exposure	23	18.3				
other sexual offences	7	25.0				
Domestic Motivation						
Yes	30	18.9	1654	0.000	1	0.988
No	288	19.3				
Police District						
A		19.4	1654	18.922	7	.008
B		20.8				
C		21.6				
D		18.5				
E		10.0				
F		25.5				
G		18.4				
H		22.6				

Table 6: The Relationship between Physically Violent Offences and Levels of Detection (Detected case only, n=2410)

	Detected		N	χ^2	df	Sig
	No	%				
Age Group of Victim						
0-4	104	28.3	9693	49.451	3	.000
5-9	109	14.5				
10-13	597	24.8				
14-17	1600	25.9				
Gender of Victim						
Male	1375	23.5	9693	15.150	1	.000
Female	1035	27				
Offence Type						
murder/attempted murder/ manslaughter/ threat or conspiracy to commit murder	126	32.9	9693	150.705	5	.000
wounding/GBH/with intent/ AOABH	1528	29.0				
common assault	650	18.8				
cruelty/neglect	39	25.0				
child abduction	12	16.7				
Other	55	15.2				
Domestic Motivation						
Yes	478	19.8	9693	26.136	1	.000
No	1932	23.9				
Police District						
A		23.8	9692	40.702	7	.000
B		19.2				
C		25.4				
D		27.4				
E		23.5				
F		30.6				
G		24.9				
H		24.3				

DELAYS IN REPORTING SEXUAL OFFENCES TO THE POLICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Delayed reporting until adulthood was more common within sexual crime than physically violent crime (19.4% V 0.4%). To explore this further reporting delay for the 2194 child sexual offences reported to PSNI in 2008–2010 was calculated. Data was available in 2079 cases and victims were categorized into four groups:

- immediate reporters¹⁰ – those who reported the offence the same or next day after occurrence;
- children who did not report immediately but reported within the year in which the offence occurred;
- children who reported a year or more after the offence took place; and
- adults reporting offences which happened to them during childhood.

Just over 2 in 5 children reported within 48 hours, a quarter within the year and 13% more than a year after the offence occurred with the mean average reporting delay for this group being 3.4 years (see Table 7). A further 1 in 5 reported as adults with an average reporting delay of 24 years, although the standard deviation value of 12 years points to considerable variation amongst this group.

Table 7: Reporting Delay, percentage, mean, standard deviation and range

	No	%	Mean	SD	Range
Child-report within 48hrs	866	41.7	–	–	–
Child-report within one year	519	25.0	85 days	96 days	2–365 days
Child-report more than 1 year	269	12.9	4.8 years	3.4 years	1–16 years
Reported when adult	425	20.4	23.9 years	11.8 years	2–62 years

More than 60% of adult reporters and 55% of children reporting more than a year after the offence were reporting on offences which had occurred when they were under the age of 10, significantly greater proportions than for children reporting either immediately or within the year (see Table 8). Almost twice as many adults reporting childhood sexual offences were males compared with immediate reporters, although the proportion of males reporting within the year was lower than for immediate reporters. While sexual assault/sexual activity offences were fairly evenly spread across the reporting groups, the proportion of rapes/attempted rapes increased as reporting delay increased while indecent exposure and other sexual offences decreased. Levels of offence detection were highest for immediate child reporters and lowest for adult reporters.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the use of the term ‘reporter’ is used only in a general sense and that a number of these offences are likely to have been reported to police by third parties after a child has been a full or partial disclosure or a third party has suspicions that a crime has been committed.

It was hypothesized that reporting delay could be greater in more rural areas because of the tight-knit nature of these communities and the associated stigma of friends and neighbours finding out about the offence. To test this a rural/urban variable was created. The Household Conditions Survey (2006) categorises each of the 27 Local Government Districts (LGDs) by the proportion of the population living in a urban or rural area. The District Command Unit structure used by the PSNI is based on the LGD structure and each sexual offence within the DCUs was assigned the proportion of rural dwellings in the LGD area covered by that DCU. DCUs with a proportion of rural dwellings greater than 50% were categorized as largely rural and those under 50% as largely urban. Although the majority of all offences were reported in DCUs covering largely urban areas, analysis showed significant differences in reporting patterns with a lower proportion of victims reporting within 48hrs in rural areas and higher proportions of delayed reporting, particularly in relation to those children reporting more than a year after the offence.

Within detected cases, a majority of sexual offences reported by children to police more than one year after occurrence or by adult survivors involved a familial relationship with the alleged offender, with stranger and intimate offenders being rare (see Table 9). Adults reports of childhood sexual abuse were less likely to involve juveniles and young adults (10–19 yrs) than other reporting groups and more likely to involve older age groups, in particular offenders aged 30–39 years. Sexual offences involving multiple offenders were more commonly reported within 48hrs of occurrence, although significance testing was not possible due to the small numbers involved. Cases involving a female offender were reported by children either immediately or within the year of occurrence with no female offenders reported by children a year or more after the offence or by adult survivors. Significance testing was again not possible due to the small numbers involved.

Table 8: Sexual Offence Characteristics and Case Detection by Reporting Group

	Reporting Delay				N	χ^2	df	Sig
	Child- Within 48 hrs	Child – within 1 year	Child – 1+ years	Adult				
Age Group of victim								
0–4	4.7	4.0	14.5	14.8	2079	493.094	9	.000
5–9	12.1	8.5	39.0	45.4				
10–13	26.7	25.4	30.5	25.4				
14–17	56.5	62.0	16.0	14.4				
Gender of victims								
Male	15.6	11.8	16.7	28.2	2079	48.368	3	.000
Female	84.4	88.2	83.3	71.8				
Offence Type								
Rape/attempted rape	12.2	22.7	32.7	29.4	2079	178.962	9	.000
Sexual assault/sexual activity with a child	72.9	73.2	65.8	69.4				
Indecent exposure	12.7	2.7	0.7	0.2				
Other sexual offences	2.2	1.3	0.7	0.9				
Detection								
Yes	21.6	16.8	16.4	14.1	2079	12.800	3	.005
No	78.4	83.2	83.6	85.9				
Urban/Rural DCU								
Urban	79.7	69.4	64.3	69.9	2079	35.544	3	.000
Rural	20.3	30.6	35.7	30.1				

Table 9: Offender Characteristics for Detected Sexual Offences by Reporting Group

	Reporting Delay				N	χ^2	df	Sig
	Child – Within 48 hrs	Child – within 1 year	Child – 1+ years	Adult				
Offender/Victim Relationship (collected for detected offences only)								
Family relationship	11.5	13.0	61.3	62.2	226	91.474	9	.000
Current/ex spouse, partner, girlfriend, boyfriend etc	6.3	11.1	0.0	0.0				
Known but not related to victim	37.5	61.1	35.5	35.6				
Stranger	44.8	14.8	3.2	2.2				
Offender Age (yrs)								
10–19	31.0	40.7	29.5	23.3	377	25.020	12	.015
20–29	29.4	16.3	11.4	25.0				
30–39	13.9	16.3	22.7	31.7				
40–49	10.2	10.5	18.2	13.3				
50+	15.5	16.3	18.2	6.7				
No offenders								
1	95.2	98.8	100.0	98.3	377	–	–	–
2 or more	4.8	1.2	0.0	1.7				
Offender Gender								
Female	3.2	4.6	0.0	0.0	318	–	–	–
Male	96.8	95.4	100.0	100				

KEY THEMES

While the analysis provides a broad range of information which can usefully assist in policy development and service planning a number of key themes are apparent:

Violence against Teenagers

Older children and teenagers (10–17 year olds) were the main victims of both sexual offences (78%) and physically violent offences (88%). Clear gender differences were apparent with the majority of sexual offences affecting females (85%) and the bulk of physically violent offences affecting males (60%), although a substantial proportion of victims of physically violent offences were female also.

In relation to sexual offences, patterns of victimisation for males remained fairly stable across the age ranges, albeit always at lower levels than females, with female victimisation dramatically increasing from age 12–15 and dropping again between 16–17 years. While information on offender characteristics was only available for detected cases, the analysis indicated that almost all were males and one third were aged 10–19 years old. The proportion of known but unrelated, intimate or stranger offenders rose with victim age. The data indicates that younger teenage girls are a key group at risk of victimisation, suggesting the need for the development of preventative strategies, which encourage reporting and provide support services in the first few years of secondary education. It also suggests that many of those who offend against them are of a similar age and are known to them, again pointing to the potential benefits of targeting teenage males in preventative strategies to reduce sexual victimisation.

In relation to physically violent offences, patterns and rates of reported victimisation were almost identical between males and females up to the age of 6 years. The incidence steadily increased for both males and female from age 7 on, with males being the predominant victim group but the gender gap becoming more extreme between 15–17 years. Nonetheless, teenage girls accounted for a significant proportion of victims and were more commonly the victims of more serious offences such as GBH/AOABH/wounding than males (60% V 46%). As with sexual offences the majority of offenders in detected cases were male (73%) and one third of these offenders were aged 10–19 years with the proportion of known but unrelated, intimate or stranger offenders rising with victim age. This suggests that preventative strategies in terms of physical violence are needed at both primary and post primary level but have particular relevance for older teenage males.

Young Children as Victims

As noted above, older children and teenagers were the predominant victims of sexual and physical violence. Nonetheless, young children aged 0–9 years still accounted for 22% of sexual crime and 12% of physically violent crime. Patterns of reported victimisation for younger age groups were quite different from that of older children with both boys and girls exhibiting a similar incidence of victimisation in younger age groups. While the more serious sexual offences (rape and attempted rape) and physically violent offences (GBH/AOABH/wounding) were more common in older age groups, the most serious

physically violent offences (murder/attempted murder etc) involved a greater proportion of 0–4 year olds than any other age group (although it should be noted that overall numbers are small).

While 1 in 5 perpetrators of both sexual and physical violence had a familial relationship to the victim, familial perpetrators accounted for much higher proportions of offenders for both offence types in the younger age groups. As this information is only available in detected cases it remains unclear if this relationship is due to higher proportions of cases involving family members coming to the attention of police or higher levels of detection where the offender is related to the victim. Nonetheless, greater levels of access to young children and high levels of dependency would suggest that family members or those with a caretaking relationship are likely to be the primary offenders for this group.

Early Reporting

The analysis reveals a range of reporting patterns amongst children who are victims of sexual violence. While 2 in 5 children report immediately, a significant proportion only come to the attention of the police weeks, months and even years after the offence(s) occurred. A further 1 in 5 sexual offences are reported only when the child becomes an adult, which can be many years, often decades after the offence. Almost twice as many adults reporting childhood sexual offences were male compared with immediate reporters, indicating that males may have particular difficulties in coming forward and reporting to professionals what has happened to them.

A majority of the offences reported by adults and children more than a year after they occurred related to sexual abuse which had happened when they very young. It was the most serious, penetrative sexual offences such as rape/attempted rape which had the greatest reporting delay. Living in a largely rural area was also found to have an impact on reporting delay with higher levels of delayed reporting apparent amongst children and adults in these areas. Within detected cases, a majority of sexual offences reported by children to police more than one year after occurrence or by adult survivors involved a familial relationship with the offender.

The analysis confirms that the length of reporting delay has a significant impact on case outcomes with the lowest detection rates (14%) apparent amongst adults reporting child sexual abuse. Detection rates for children reporting within the year and those reporting more than a year after the offence occurred were not noticeably different, suggesting that reporting within 48 hours of occurrence is the most significant factor if a case is to be detected. This has implications for the ability of victims to access justice and suggests a need for proactive strategies to encourage children to come forward as soon as possible, as well as suggesting a need for service provision to meet the needs of adult survivors.

Case Progression

Attrition within the CJS has previously been highlighted as an issue in Northern Ireland and the present analysis confirms this remains the case with low levels of detection apparent for both sexual offences (19%) and physically violent offences (25%). Cases deemed to be detected form the basis of those offences which can proceed within the criminal justice system and ultimately, in a proportion of cases, achieve a conviction. This data indicates that only a minority of sexual offences and physically violent offences can proceed in this manner.

Case characteristics impacted on the detection of both sexual and violent crimes in different ways; cases involving sexual violence against victims aged 0–4 year olds were less likely to be detected; cases involving physically violent offences against 0–4 year olds more likely. There were also higher levels of detection for cases involving female victims in relation to physically violent offences. For both offence types there were significant differences between levels of detection across the police district the offence was reported in.

Gaps in Data

While the data made available by the PSNI is extremely useful in developing a detailed picture of violent crime committed in Northern Ireland, there are a number of serious limitations. Due to changes to the Home Office Counting Rules in 2006, available information on victims of crime has now substantially decreased. Previously recorded crime statistics counted victim withdrawal as a non-sanction form of detection. Since 2006 this is no longer counted and now detected cases are ostensibly those cases in which an offender has been charged or received a summons. As such, valuable data relating to those victims who decide not to proceed with a criminal case is no longer routinely recorded in crime statistics. Cases can remain undetected for a variety of reasons; there is no identifiable offender, the victim denies or retracts allegation, refuses to co-operate with the initial investigation or then withdraws at a later stage. Developing recorded crime categories to take account of the key reasons for non detection would provide valuable information on case progression which is currently not available. Additionally, as recorded crime data only includes offender age, gender and relationship to the victim in detected cases, essential information on the nature and type of crime against children and young people remains unknown in a vast majority of cases (75–80% of cases in NI).

Limitations

The nature of this analysis and the range of the variables included are, by necessity, limited to those recorded by police information systems and it should be recognized that a broader and more complex range of variables are likely to be related to cases outcomes. Small numbers within individual categories, particularly in relation to sexual crime, also mean that some results should be treated with caution. As noted above, one of the key limitations of the data presented in this paper is the lack of information in relation to offender details. Nonetheless recorded crime data provides valuable information on the nature of sexual and physically violent crime committed against children and the extent to which such cases are able to proceed within the criminal justice system.

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