

# Child sexual abuse in Queensland: Offender characteristics and modus operandi

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

There is no question that public awareness and concern about child sexual abuse have increased in Australia in recent years. In Queensland, official statistics indicate that the rate of sexual offences reported to police doubled between 1994 and 1998 from about 92 per 100,000 to more than 190 per 100,000. The majority of these offences were committed against children younger than 16 years of age (Criminal Justice Commission 1999).

There is no clear evidence, however, that the incidence of child sexual abuse itself is increasing; rather, increased reporting rates appear partly to reflect a greater willingness by victims and others to report allegations of child sexual abuse. Indeed, many alleged child sexual offences are not reported until long after they have occurred. Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that child sexual abuse is a major social problem.

International efforts to understand the perpetration of child sexual abuse have been constrained by a number of important conceptual and methodological problems. First, there is a broad consensus among researchers that child sexual offending and child sexual offenders are heterogeneous. That is, there is considerable variation both in the ways sexual offences against children are perpetrated (e.g. tactics employed to select and 'groom' children; sexual and other behaviours involved in the commission of offences; methods of avoiding detection), and in the characteristics of the perpetrators themselves (e.g. age; ethnicity; education; psychosocial and psychosexual background; level of sexual interest in children; relationship with victims; general criminality). Causal explanations are similarly varied, and although there are several established theoretical formulations (e.g. psychoanalytic; biological; behavioural), none enjoys the support of a strong empirical base. Perhaps in lieu of a clearer conceptual consensus, most researchers agree that sexual offending against children is a multi-dimensional and multi-determined phenomenon.

Although research efforts are expanding rapidly, sexual offending against children has remained for a variety of reasons a difficult phenomenon to study, not the least because of the secrecy which typically surrounds the commission of these offences. The majority of research data on child sexual offending have been derived from clinical studies of convicted (usually incarcerated) offenders undergoing treatment. Although such studies have produced a large and rich empirical literature, it is unclear the extent to which these findings can be generalised, even to the larger population of convicted offenders. The reliability and validity of these data are typically compromised by the absence of confidentiality, since such offenders would normally be aware that information provided by them may affect decisions concerning their progress in treatment and their release from prison. Further, many studies do not provide sufficient descriptive data to allow comparison of findings from different samples and from different jurisdictions. Finally, comparisons between different subtypes of sexual offenders is often made difficult by the use of small samples and/or by differences in the typological frameworks employed by researchers.

One US study that overcame many of the above methodological problems was conducted by Abel and his colleagues in the late 1980s. This was an unusual study insofar as it was based on confidential self-report data from a large number of known sexual offenders. Although the findings have not been fully replicated, the reports from this study (Abel et al. 1988; Abel et al. 1987; Abel & Osborn 1992) have continued to have a major impact on the field at large, and more specifically on the subsequent development of treatment programs for sexual offenders. The main findings were that a) sexual offenders usually begin offending in adolescence (early onset), b) they are likely to have committed many more offences than ever become officially known, and c) they are likely to experience a broad range of sexually deviant interests and urges (multiple paraphilias). The emphasis on sexual deviance as the central feature of interest added weight firstly to the popular conception that sexual offending, unlike nonsexual offending, is a specialised form of criminal activity, and secondly to the clinical programs of the time which tended to concentrate on changing the 'deviant sexual preferences' of known sexual offenders.

More recently, a number of large-scale correctional studies (e.g. Broadhurst & Maller 1991; Bureau of Justice Statistics 1997; Hanson & Bussiere 1996) have shown that incarcerated sexual offenders are more likely to have previous convictions for nonsexual offences than for sexual offences, and that after release they are more likely to commit new nonsexual offences than they are to commit new sexual offences. Such findings clearly suggest that sexual offenders, including sexual offenders against children, are more versatile in their criminal 'career' than is generally accepted. Nevertheless, treatment programs for sexual offenders remain highly specialised, and sexual abuse prevention initiatives continue largely to ignore the growing body of knowledge available from the broader crime prevention literature.

The present study aimed to gather both official demographic and offence history data, and confidential self-report data, from a large sample of men currently serving sentences in Queensland for sexual offences against children. In particular, the study aimed to investigate a number of features that were considered to be of theoretical and practical significance, and which might inform preventative, investigative and corrective efforts, namely:

Offenders' psychosocial and psychosexual histories

Differences between official and unofficial rates of child sexual offending

The extent of offenders' non-sexual criminal activity

The extent to which offenders have engaged in multiple 'paraphilias' (e.g. exhibitionism, voyeurism, fetishism)

The offenders' modus operandi (e.g. victim recruitment strategies; abusive behaviours; methods of avoiding detection)

The extent of formal and informal networking among offenders, including a) their knowledge and/or membership of paedophile organisations, b) their use of the internet for communication and access to child pornography, and c) the role of the prison environment in facilitating collaboration with other offenders.

## Method

Three hundred and twenty three (323) adult males currently serving sentences in Queensland for sexual offences against children were approached individually and invited to participate in the study. Prospective participants were provided with an information sheet, which among other things stressed that all information could be provided anonymously. Alternatively, offenders could provide their name if they wished to make themselves available for follow-up contact. They were informed that, in any case, all information would be treated confidentially, and that no identifying information would be revealed outside the research team, which was independent of the Department of Corrective Services.

Official demographic and offence history data were gathered on all 323 prospective participants. Of these 182 (56.3%) agreed to complete a 386 item self-report questionnaire. On the basis of their self-reports concerning the (unofficial) circumstances of their sexual offending 'careers', all 182 responders were categorised into one of four mutually exclusive groups: intra-familial offenders (those who had offended only within family settings); extra-familial offenders (those who had offended only outside family settings); mixed-type offenders (those who had offended both within and outside family settings); and deniers (those who denied ever having committed a child sexual offence). The sample consisted of 79 intra-familial offenders, 60 extra-familial offenders, 30 mixed-type offenders, and 13 deniers.

Of the 182 responders, 96 (55.8%) agreed to make themselves available for follow-up contact. Sixteen of these were selected for follow-up contact, which involved a) re-administration of the questionnaire, for the purposes of computing the test-retest reliability of selected self-report measures, and b) a semi-structured interview, which served as a means of gathering and analysing qualitative data on offending patterns and networking, and which was used to assess the validity of the questionnaire data.

## Main Findings

### Test-retest reliability of the self-report data

In the context of the present study, test-retest reliability is a measure of the extent to which questionnaire responses given at one time are the same as the responses given to the same questions at a second time. In the present case, a subset of 16 offenders responded twice to the questionnaire. The average period of time between the first and second response sets was approximately 2 months. In general we found moderate to high levels of agreement over time. With respect to the questions concerning offender modus operandi, for example, the average agreement rate for pre-offence behaviours

was 89 per cent, for offence behaviours 92 per cent, and for post-offence behaviours 98 per cent.

## Demography and offence histories

Offenders were, on average, 41.5 years of age (range = 17 to 76 years) at the time they were sentenced in relation to their current convictions. There were no significant age differences between responders and non-responders, between admitters and deniers, or between the three offender subtypes (intra-familial; extra-familial; and mixed-type offenders).

A substantial majority of offenders (73.9%) had not completed secondary education. Less educated offenders were less likely to agree to participate in the study. There were no differences in level of education between admitters and deniers, nor between the three offender subtypes.

Twenty three (8.2%) of the offenders approached had been identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI), and 219 (77.7%) were Australian-born non-ATSI. Forty offenders (14.2%) were either born outside Australia, or had no ethnic origin recorded in the official records ('others'). ATSI offenders (43.5%) and non-ATSI Australian born offenders (53%) were less likely to agree to participate than were the 'other' group (75%).

The 323 offenders were almost twice as likely to have previous convictions for property or nonsexual violent offences (40.6%) than they were to have previous convictions for sexual offences (22.2%). More than a third (37.1%) of all the offenders had no previous convictions. Of those who did have previous convictions, 82.2 per cent had first been convicted of a non-sexual offence; the most common offence for which first convictions were recorded was theft. There were no differences in previous convictions between responders and non-responders. Among the responders (including deniers), intra-familial offenders (10.8%) were the least likely to have previous convictions for sexual offences, but were somewhat more likely to have previous convictions for nonsexual offences (48.6%).

ATSI offenders were more likely than other ethnic groups to have previous convictions for both property and violent offences.

According to the offenders' self-reports, they were on average 31.5 years of age (range = 14 to 61 years) at the time they first had sexual contact with a child, and 38.4 years (range = 17 to 73 years) at the time they last had sexual contact with a child. There were significant differences between offender subtypes, with intra-familial offenders offending over a shorter average period (4.4 years) than extra-familial offenders (7.8 years) and mixed-type offenders (11.0 years).

## Psychosocial and psychosexual history

There was considerable variation in offenders' reports of their family-of-origin experiences. In general, offenders' relationships with their fathers were reported in more negative terms than were their relationships with their mothers. For example, only 18.9 per cent of offenders indicated their father to have been affectionate, and 18.8 per cent indicated their father to have been sympathetic toward them. On the other hand, more than one third (33.8%) remembered their father as rejecting, 36.9 per cent as violent, and 38.1 per cent as abusive toward them.

In terms of their recollections of the relationship between their parents, 49.4 per cent recalled their parents' relationship as argumentative, 37.7 per cent as troubled, and 29.6 per cent as violent.

More than half (55.2%) of the offenders reported having themselves been sexually abused as children. Deniers were the least likely (7.7%), and mixed-type offenders the most likely (73.3%), to report having been sexually abused. The most common abuse behaviours involved mutual sexual touching. Extra-familial offenders were more likely than other offender subtypes to report having engaged in mutual oral intercourse with their abuser. There was a strong statistical relationship between the extent to which offenders recalled negative childhood relationships with their parents, and the frequency with which childhood sexual abuse was reported.

Sexually abused offenders were on average 9.4 years old when they were first abused, and 12.5 years old when they were last abused. Sexually abused offenders who eventually disclosed the abuse did so on average about 13 years after the time of their last abuse experience (about 16 years after they were first abused). More than one quarter (27.1%) of the sexually abused offenders said they had received some counselling after having disclosed the abuse.

Almost half (45.6%) of the offenders reported having previously received counselling or treatment for problems other than their sexual abuse experiences or their sexual offending behaviour. The kinds of problems for which this help had been received included depression (23.6%), alcohol or drug abuse (18.1%), family problems (14.3%), and anger problems (13.2%).

Intra-familial offenders were somewhat less likely (9.2%) to have committed their first sexual offence before they were twenty years of age than were the extra-familial offenders (19.4%) and the mixed-type offenders (24.0%).

## Pornography use

Most offenders (86.4%) reported having used general (i.e. adult) pornography, with 11.2 per cent reporting regular pornography use. About 10 per cent reported having used child pornography, with only 2 offenders (both extra-familial offenders) reporting regular use of child pornography. Nearly 15 per cent of the mixed-type offenders and 5.4 per cent of the extra-familial offenders reported having collected non-pornographic

pictures of children (e.g. from children's clothing catalogues) for sexual purposes. Three (10%) of the mixed-type offenders said they had been involved in the production of child pornography, and one (1.7%) of the extra-familial offenders said they had been involved in the distribution of child pornography.

Only 23 offenders (13.9%) said they had ever used the Internet. Of these, 7 (30.4%) said they were aware of Internet sites that distribute child pornography. No offenders said they had ever used the Internet to distribute child pornography.

## Multiple paraphilias

The number of offenders with diagnosable paraphilias other than paedophilia was quite low, although there were some significant differences between offender subtypes. Mixed-type offenders (13.3%) were more likely than either extra-familial (3.4%) or intra-familial offenders (3.8%) to have engaged in exhibitionism (exposing genitals to a stranger). Mixed-type offenders (16.7%) were also more likely than extra-familial (8.6%) or intra-familial offenders (6.4%) to have engaged in frotteurism (rubbing sexually against strangers).

Apart from exhibitionism (5.4%), frotteurism (9.0%), and voyeurism (5.4%), fewer than 5 per cent of offenders could have been diagnosed with a paraphilia other than paedophilia, including public masturbation (4.2%), fetishism (1.8%), sexual masochism (1.2%), transvestic fetishism (1.2%), making obscene telephone calls (1.2%), sexual sadism (0.6%), bestiality (0.6%), and necrophilia (0.0%).

## Networking among offenders

Almost one third of the offenders (29.6%) had knowledge of other child sexual offenders prior to themselves first being charged with a child sexual offence. Mixed-type offenders (53.6%) were significantly more likely to have known of other child sexual offenders than were either the extra-familial (24.1%) or intra-familial offenders (25.0%).

Only 8.6 per cent said they had talked to other child sexual offenders prior to themselves first being charged. Again, mixed-type offenders (25.0%) were more likely than the extra-familial (8.5%) and intra-familial offenders (2.6%) to do so.

Only 3.7 per cent of offenders became involved with another individual or a group who organised sexual contact with children. Once again, the mixed-type offenders (13.8%) were more likely than the extra-familial offenders (3.4%) and the intra-familial offenders (0.0%) to do so.

Exchanging of information in prison was reported generally to be low. However, the mixed-type offenders were more likely than other offenders to report prison-based networking activities. For example 17.9 per cent of the mixed-type group reported having been provided with information about access to children for sexual contact, compared to 3.7 per cent of the extra-familial offenders. None of the intra-familial offenders reported such contact.

Only one offender (a mixed-type offender) reported having used the Internet to gain contact with clubs, chat-groups or individuals concerned with child sexual activity.

## Modus operandi

Four aspects of offender modus operandi were examined: 1) victim characteristics, 2) behaviours employed by the offender prior to having sexual contact with a child (pre-offence behaviours), 3) the offending behaviours themselves (offence behaviours), and 4) behaviours employed by the offender after sexual contact with a child (post-offence behaviours). In addition, offenders' perceptions of victim behaviour were examined, and the results of this are included in this section.

### Victim characteristics

The 169 offenders who admitted having committed at least one sexual offence against a child disclosed offences concerning a total 1010 children (748 boys and 262 girls), of which 393 (38.9%) were reported to have been associated with official convictions. Whereas boys accounted for about half (52%) of the officially recognised victims (i.e. those associated with official convictions), about 74 per cent of self-reported victims were boys. This suggests that the sexual victimisation of boys may be even more underestimated, perhaps both in victimisation surveys and official statistics, than that of girls.

The level of victimisation was not evenly distributed. Intra-familial offenders disclosed on average 1.5 victims, extra-familial offenders 6.1 victims, and mixed-type offenders 20.0 victims. Almost half (47.3%) of the combined offenders reported having offended against just one child, and a further 16.4 per cent reported having offended against two children. Fewer than 10 per cent of offenders reported more than 10 victims, and only 2 offenders reported 100 or more victims.

A large majority (92.4%) of intra-familial offenders offended initially against a girl victim. Victim gender was more evenly distributed with the other two offender subtypes, with 46.7 per cent of extra-familial offenders and 43.3 per cent of mixed-type offenders first offending against a boy.

Victim ages were fairly evenly distributed across middle childhood and early adolescence. In examining details of offenders' first victims, 75.6 per cent were between 9 and 16 years of age, and 22.8 per cent were between 5 and 8 years. Fewer than 2 per cent of victims were reported to have been younger than 4 years of age.

Whereas intra-familial offenders, by definition, were related to or lived with their victims 13.3 per cent of extra-familial offenders and 10.3 per cent of mixed-type offenders reported having had sexual contact with children they regarded as "strangers". Conversely, 86.7 per cent of the extra-familial offenders and 89.6 per cent of the mixed-type offenders reported sexual contact with children they already knew.

### Pre-offence behaviours

Intra-familial offenders, by definition, offended against children with whom a prior familial relationship existed. For extra-familial offenders, the most common locations for finding children with whom sexual contact later occurred were at a friend's home (36.5%), and through organised activities (e.g. sporting associations; scouts) (18.9%). For mixed-type offenders, the most common locations were at a friend's home (47.8%), in the nearby neighbourhood (30.4%), and while babysitting (30.4%).

For intra-familial offenders, the most common means for organising time alone with a victim were being at home alone with the knowledge of his wife/girlfriend (57.7%), and watching television with the child (36.6%). For extra-familial offenders, the most common means were watching television with the child (32.2%), letting the child sleep in the same bed (30.5%), and going for car rides with the child (30.5%). For mixed-type offenders, the most common means were watching television with the child (73.3%), sneaking into the child's bedroom at night (63.3%), and letting the child sleep in his bed (60.0%).

For extra-familial offenders, the most commonly used strategies directed toward victims' parents were making friends with the child's parents or caretaker (44.4%) and spending time with the child while his/her parent was present (44.4%). For mixed-type offenders, the most common means were spending time with the child while his/her parent was present (50%), making friends with the child's parent/caretaker (45.8%), and helping the child's parent(s) around the house (45.8%).

For intra-familial offenders, the most common means of developing a victim's trust prior to sexual contact were spending a lot of time with them (70.9%), touching the child non-sexually (67.1%), and giving them a lot of attention (64.6%). For extra-familial offenders, the most common means were touching them non-sexually (64.4%), giving them a lot of attention (59.3%), spending a lot of time with them (55.9%), and doing things the child wanted to do (55.9%). For mixed-type offenders, the most common means were playing with them (83.3%), spending a lot of time with them (82.8%), and giving them a lot of attention (79.3%).

Offenders used a variety of strategies for getting the child to go with them to the place where sexual contact occurred. For intra-familial offenders, the most common strategies were promising rewards or privileges (17.7%), telling the child he (the offender) could be trusted (17.7%), and defending the child against bullies (16.5%). Extra-familial offenders tended to tell the child they were going to do something that would be fun (28.8%), give the child money (20.3%), and promise rewards or privileges (18.6%). For mixed-type offenders, the most commonly used strategies involved giving the child money (46.7%), giving them toys or sweets (43.3%), and promising rewards or privileges (43.3%).

A broad variety of strategies were also employed by offenders to get the child to take part in sexual activity. For intra-familial offenders, these tended to involve touching them non-sexually (55.7%), giving the child non-sexual attention (50.6%), and saying nice things about them (45.6%). Extra-familial offenders tended to give the child non-sexual attention (55.9%), touch the child non-sexually (54.2%), and progressively touch



the child more and more sexually (49.2%). Mixed-type offenders gave the child non-sexual attention (86.7%), said nice things about them (80.0%), touched the child non-sexually (73.3%), and said loving, caring things to them (73.3%).

## Offence behaviours

Offenders usually knew the child, often for significant periods of time, before sexual contact occurred. For example, 76.3 per cent of the intra-familial offenders, 27.8 per cent of the extra-familial offenders and 39.1 per cent of the mixed-type offenders had known the child for more than one year before having sexual contact with them.

Offences usually occurred in the offender's home (83.3 per cent for intra-familial offenders; 45.8 per cent for extra-familial offenders, and 76.7 per cent for mixed-type offenders). Other common locations where offences occurred were going for a car ride (21.5 per cent for intra-familial; 25.4 per cent for extra-familial; and 46.7 per cent for mixed-type offenders), and in isolated places (16.5 per cent for intra-familial; 23.7 per cent for extra-familial; and 53.3 per cent for mixed-type offenders).

The duration of single sexual contacts with children ranged from less than 5 minutes, to in some rare cases more than 1 hour. More than half of the combined offenders (59.7%) reported the duration of their sexual contacts with a child to have been 15 minutes or less.

The number of sexual contacts with a single child ranged from one to more than 50 times, and varied considerably within each of the three offender subtypes. Eighty five percent (85.0%) of the combined offenders reported between 1 and 20 sexual contacts per child victim.

The duration of sexual contact with a single child ranged from less than one day to more than one year. Almost two thirds (62.1%) of the mixed-type offenders, and 43.6 per cent of the intra-familial offenders, offended against a single child over a period exceeding one year, whereas the extra-familial offenders (15.5%) were much less likely to do so. At the other end of the spectrum, 41.4 per cent of the extra-familial offenders offended against a single child over a period of less than one day.

The most common behaviours employed by offenders during sexual contact with victims were touching the child's buttocks, breasts or genitals (82.1%), and putting his mouth on the child's genitals (42.9%). Patterns of offence behaviours were similar for the three offender subtypes, although extra-familial offenders (40.0%) were somewhat more likely to perform oral sex on their victims than were the intra-familial (26.6%) and mixed-type offenders (20.3%).

The most common behaviour the offenders had children do to them was having the child touch his penis (66.7 per cent of the combined offenders). Other common behaviours were having the child perform oral sex on him (43.5%), and having the child masturbate him to ejaculation (39.3%). Mixed-type offenders were somewhat more likely to have the child masturbate him to ejaculation (60.0%), and to have the child perform anal sex on him (the offender) (23.3%).

Offenders reported that, while sexual offences were taking place, the child's parents usually knew he (the offender) was spending time alone with their child (71.1%). A third (33.3%) of the combined offenders considered that the child's parents liked them (the offender). Alarming, 21.4 per cent of the offenders believed the child's parent(s) knew about the sexual contact but did not report it.

## Post-offence behaviours

It tended to take less than an hour for offenders to take a child to the place where sexual contact occurred and then to return the child (64 per cent of the combined offenders). However, nearly half (44.4%) of the extra-familial offenders and 31.7 per cent of the mixed-type offenders took more than one hour to return the child.

The most commonly used means of keeping a child from disclosing the abuse were saying he (the offender) would go to jail or get into trouble if the child told anyone (60.5 per cent of the combined offenders), hoping the child wouldn't want to lose the offender because he provided affection (35.7%), and giving the child special rewards or privileges if they didn't tell anyone (20.8%).

## Offenders' perceptions of their victim's behaviour

According to the offenders, the most common means employed by victims to stop the sexual contact were telling the offender they didn't want to do it (40.2%), saying no (31.2%), demanding to be left alone (25.9%), and crying (19.2%). These also tended to be the strategies that were the most successful in deterring offenders from continuing to abuse a child.

# Implications of Main Findings

Results of the study challenge a number of commonly held assumptions about sexual offending against children. First, the findings reinforce what researchers have known for some time - but what is frequently ignored in public debates - that child sexual abuse overwhelmingly involves perpetrators who are related to or known to the victim. Even where the victim was not related to or living with the offender, in most cases the parents knew that their child was spending time with the perpetrator. According to the offenders, it was not uncommon for the parents of the child victim to know about the abuse but not to report it.

Second, the strategies employed by offenders to gain the compliance of children more often involve giving gifts, lavishing attention and attempting to form emotional bonds than making threats or engaging in physical coercion. Many sexual encounters with children were preceded by some form of non-sexual physical contact. According to the offenders, there were few cases where other forms of violence were part of the sexual abuse.

Third, serial child sexual offending is relatively uncommon. Almost half of the current sample reported that they had been involved with just one victim, and fewer than 10 per cent were involved with more than 10 children. Further, there is little evidence in these findings of organised paedophile networks. In particular, the use of the Internet for paedophilic activities appears to be rare. Prison clearly provides opportunities for informal networking, but it appears that relatively few offenders become actively involved in prison-based networking.

Fourth, perpetrators of child sexual abuse are three times more likely to abuse female than male children (that is, most perpetrators are heterosexual). In the case of intra-familial abuse, girls are over ten times more likely to be victims. However, more generally, males are nearly three times more likely than females to be abused. This is because the relatively few chronic offenders in the sample were more likely to target male victims.

Finally, child sexual offenders do not necessarily form a distinct offender category. Two thirds of the offenders in the present study had previous convictions, and these were twice as likely to be for non-sexual offences as for sexual offences. Remarkably, a large majority of offenders (82.2%) with previous convictions were first convicted of a non-sexual offence.

Highlighting these findings is not meant to diminish the seriousness of child sexual abuse, nor to deny the existence of the stereotypic paedophile. However, these findings do provide a guide for more focussed prevention, investigation and treatment efforts.

In terms of prevention, the findings suggest, for example, that developmental and early intervention programs that are known to reduce rates of general crime may be equally effective in the reduction of sexual crime, since childhood problems including harsh parental discipline, parental rejection, marital conflict and sexual abuse appear to be quite common in the backgrounds of child sexual offenders.

The findings also suggest that public education campaigns focussing on 'stranger danger' need to be balanced with programs that recognise the danger that exists for many children in the home and among friends. The data on the modus operandi of perpetrators will need to be given very careful consideration, because the kinds of behaviours typically employed prior to the commission of these offences are the kinds of behaviours that would normally indicate *positive* parenting. In this sense, it may be very difficult to identify important warning signs for carers. Nevertheless, parents should be aware of the common tactic of intra-familial offenders to seek (perhaps unusual) opportunities to have time alone with their victim, and for extra-familial offenders to ingratiate themselves with their victim's parents. With due caution, children can also be made aware of the grooming behaviours of perpetrators and be taught self-protective strategies. Post-offence behaviours may be somewhat more easily observed, since these typically involve subtle but very manipulative efforts by the offender to avoid detection. It would be unsurprising, for example, to find discrete changes in victims' behaviour following sexual contact with an offender.

Investigating child sexual offending is likely to be fraught with difficulty, since offender strategies for avoiding detection appear subtly directed toward their child victim, and often involve strategies that are likely to result in children themselves feeling responsible for not disclosing the abuse. The targeting of active child sexual offenders may need to consider whether extra-familial offenders or intra-familial offenders should be given priority. On one hand, extra-familial offenders are responsible for many more victims. On the other hand, intra-familial offenders may cause much more overall harm, since they tend to offend repeatedly against one or two children who, because of context of the abuse, may be limited in their ability to secure much needed familial support.

With respect to treatment, the findings challenge the tendency in many programs to emphasise the deviant sexual preferences of child sexual offenders, that is, to treat 'paedophilia' as a specialised and distinct crime problem. The current findings reveal that a substantial majority of child sexual offenders are involved more generally in criminal activity. In other words, many offenders may not require any special motivation to sexually abuse children; rather, their sexual offending may be just another example of their inability or unwillingness to exercise appropriate controls over their behaviour or to observe socially accepted codes of behaviour. Processes involved in the onset of child sexual offending may be very different to the processes involved in maintaining a pattern of offending over time. The therapeutic issue to be addressed may be not so much what makes offenders sexually abuse children, but what fails to stop them.

# Introduction

## Recent responses to child sexual abuse in Queensland

There is no question that public awareness and concern about child sexual abuse have increased throughout the developed world during the last two decades. As public condemnation has increasingly focused on the perpetrators of child sexual abuse, so too have government responses concentrated on the detection, investigation, prosecution, incapacitation and rehabilitation of child sexual offenders. Thus, public resources have, in the main, been directed to criminal justice and other tertiary prevention strategies (i.e. intervention after child sexual abuse has already occurred). Relatively little attention has been given to other forms of prevention, such as developmental or situational prevention. This may be partly due to a reluctance to consider alternatives to the widely accepted 'sexual deviance' model of sexual offending.

In Queensland, as in other Australian States, we have seen a succession of initiatives ostensibly aimed at reducing the incidence of child sexual abuse. These have included a) public campaigns designed to increase awareness and reporting of child sexual abuse, b) changes to policing practices designed to target active child sexual offenders, c) legislative reviews concerning penalties, sentences, offender registration and community notification, d) the establishment of formal Inquiries and Commissions charged with examining past and current child sexual abuse, and e) correctional initiatives directed toward the development and implementation of intervention programs for convicted sexual offenders.

Although significant at the time, the potential impact of an early Inquiry into child sexual offences in Queensland (Sturgess 1986) may to some extent have been overshadowed by broader correctional reforms arising from the Kennedy (1988) report into the administration of Queensland prisons. In any case, with the establishment of the Queensland Corrective Services Commission in 1989 came a new and more focused emphasis on offender rehabilitation, which among other things highlighted the need for the development of programs for the assessment and treatment of convicted sexual offenders. The Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) at Moreton Correctional Centre in Brisbane's west, which has operated continuously since its establishment early in 1990, has now involved more than 350 incarcerated sexual offenders in structured assessment and intervention. This makes it one of the largest and most significant programs of its kind in Australia. Other, less intensive programs for convicted sexual offenders have since been developed in Queensland, and attention has recently been given to the development of comprehensive programs for special-needs groups, including indigenous sexual offenders (Smallbone, Wortley & Lancefield, 2000).

At the 'front-end' of the criminal justice system, public awareness campaigns, such as the *Child Sexual Abuse Hotline* instituted by the Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care (DFYCC) in 1996 and *Operation Paradox* initiated by the Queensland Police Service (QPS) in 1997, appear to have been successful in increasing the reporting of child sexual abuse. These initiatives, together with special targeting of child sexual offenders by the QPS through *Project Horizon* and the *Child Exploitation Unit*, and through the establishment of *Taskforce Argos*, may be in large part responsible for the substantial increases in the numbers of people accused of child sexual offences appearing before the Courts and in the numbers of convicted child sexual offenders entering the correctional system since 1994 (Criminal Justice Commission 1999).

This increased attention to child sexual abuse by the public and by the criminal justice system has given rise to a number of important public Inquiries, including the Forde Inquiry into the abuse of children in Queensland institutions, and to the establishment of statutory authorities such as the Children's Commission of Queensland and the Queensland Crime Commission. Public and political debate has meanwhile led to serious consideration being given to important changes to the legal regulation of convicted child sexual offenders, most notably the development of official sexual offender registration, DNA and other data bases, and community notification laws.

## The need for objective local data on child sexual offenders and offending

Clearly, considerable public resources in Queensland have been devoted, and continue to be devoted, to the important problem of child sexual abuse. Moreover, controversial policies and practices such as DNA testing, offender registration, community notification, targeted policing, offender risk assessment, and so on, are currently being implemented. Not all of these measures, however, can be said to be based on an established body of empirical knowledge. Indeed, there continue to be significant and as yet unsolved problems associated with understanding child sexual abuse and developing demonstrably effective public policy responses.

One problem has been noted to lie in the lack of practical and policy co-ordination between relevant agencies and authorities (Criminal Justice Commission, 2000). Further, there appear to have been serious deficiencies in official data collection systems and in the co-ordination of these systems (Criminal Justice Commission 1999). Without valid and reliable data about the perpetrators of child sexual abuse and, for example, about how and where this abuse occurs, it is doubtful that an efficient and effective public policy response can be organised.

While accurate official statistics on child sexual abuse are of course needed, other data are also required to provide a more complete picture of the problem at hand. Overseas research has provided convergent data from official statistics (e.g. police and court data), victimisation surveys, correctional surveys, and clinical and experimental studies (typically involving convicted offenders undergoing treatment). Nonetheless, sexual crime has proved to be an unusually difficult area of study, not the least due the secrecy that surrounds the occurrence of child sexual abuse. In particular, there have been

problems with obtaining accurate and reliable information from offenders, who are understandably reluctant to disclose information under conditions that typically do not provide anonymity or confidentiality. Few reliable data from any of these sources are available on child sexual abuse in Queensland

## The background, purpose and scope of the present study

In September 1998, Queensland Crime Commissioner Mr Tim Carmody met with staff of the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University to discuss the possibilities for collaborative research focused on child sexual abuse. In accordance with the Queensland Crime Commission's (QCC's) charter to investigate criminal paedophilia, discussion focused on current gaps in empirical knowledge about the perpetrators and perpetration of child sexual abuse. It was clear that, while further intelligence about the activities of child sexual offenders was needed to support efforts in the detection and prosecution of offenders, a broader strategy that included primary and secondary preventative efforts would require more detailed and reliable data than were presently available. In particular, it was agreed that detailed information on the background, characteristics, and modus operandi of child sexual offenders was urgently needed. In addition, and in further accordance with the QCC's charter to investigate organised crime, it was agreed that information on networking and collaboration among convicted child sexual offenders was needed.

In February 1999, an application was made to the Criminology Research Council (CRC) for partial funding of the present study, the balance of the required funding having already been committed by the QCC. The CRC application was successful, and the project proceeded on the basis of joint funding from the QCC and the CRC.

The principal purpose of the study, then, was to gather and analyse various data on a large number of convicted child sexual 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 implications at a national and international level.

The central focus of the study was to examine in detail the modus operandi (pre-offence, offence, and post-offence behaviour) of a large representative sample of men currently serving sentences in Queensland for sexual offences against children. In addition, the study aimed to examine a number of other offender behaviours 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. There were six main objectives. These were to examine:

Offenders' psychosocial and psychosexual histories

Differences between official and unofficial rates of child sexual offending

The extent of offenders' non-sexual criminal activity

The extent to which offenders have engaged in multiple 'paraphilias' (e.g. exhibitionism, voyeurism, fetishism)

The offenders' modus operandi (e.g. victim recruitment strategies; abusive behaviours; methods of avoiding detection)

The extent of formal and informal networking among offenders, including a) their knowledge and/or membership of paedophile organisations, b) their use of the internet for communication and access to child pornography, and c) the role of the prison environment in facilitating collaboration with other offenders.

The original proposal was to approach up to 500 men currently serving a custodial or community sentence in Queensland for child sexual offences, and to elicit anonymous self-report data related to the above objectives. Over the project timeframe, this would have involved virtually all identifiable sentenced child sexual offenders in Queensland. The Queensland Department of Corrective Services, while clearly supportive of the project, expressed concern about the targeted numbers, and asked for either a) the number to be reduced, or b) the timeframe to be extended, in order to reduce the impact on resources in Correctional Centres and Community Corrections Offices. In addition, the Griffith University Ethics Committee did not agree to the original proposal that self-report questionnaires would be administered in small groups, and insisted that individual administration of questionnaires was necessary to ensure proper anonymity. The targeted number was therefore reduced to 300.

## The purpose and structure of the report

The present project has generated a large volume of data on a considerable range of factors associated with child sexual offenders and child sexual offending, and there are many different ways in which the available data might be considered and analysed. Instead of testing and reporting the results of a more or less circumscribed set of hypotheses, the project had the more immediate and fundamental aim of examining and describing a range of features we considered to be of theoretical and practical significance. This report, then, presents an array of descriptive data analyses. It does not seek to provide an exhaustive series of analyses, and nor does it aim to provide the more fine-grained analyses which the data set as a whole is capable of producing. We intend to follow this report with a series of empirical papers which will report on various separate aspects of the study in considerably more detail.

In view of the broad range of factors examined in the study, we have not included a separate literature review in this report. Instead, results are reported as a series of more or less distinct topics, each of which includes a discussion of the findings in terms of existing knowledge (see Section 3). A number of recent general reviews of child sexual offending and child sexual offenders are available (see e.g. Barbaree & Seto 1997; Marshall 1997) and the interested reader is urged to consult these.



Results are, in the main, reported descriptively, usually by presenting average raw scores or percentages. Tables of summary data have been used extensively as an aid for the reader to quickly examine areas of interest. Although inferential statistics (e.g. Analysis of Variance; Chi-square analysis) were used, for example, to examine differences between the different subtypes of sexual offenders, the reporting of technical statistical terms is avoided. We have done this to increase the accessibility of the report to readers who may not be familiar with statistical terms and procedures. References made in the report to 'significant differences' indicate that the magnitude of difference between groups would have less than a 5 per cent probability of occurring by chance. However, we have not controlled for multiple testing of statistical significance, and so it is possible that some 'significant' findings have occurred by chance (so-called 'family-wise error'). Results of group comparisons should therefore be considered to be indicative rather than definitive.

## Method

### Pilot study

Data collection procedures were trialed on 8 child sexual offenders then 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 sexual 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 minor practical problems were identified and resolved on the basis of the pilot study, including the efficient use of correctional files, methods of arranging access to offenders, methods of engaging the offenders, and methods of checking for complete responses. On the whole, however, 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 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 Department of Corrective Services (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
- rape
- unlawful carnal knowledge
- indecent treatment of a child
- sodomy (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

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.

A total of 633 sexual offenders were identified as being in secure custody (prisons) or community custody (half-way houses and the like), of which 290 had been convicted of rape but whose record did not specifically indicate sexual offences against a child. Although there are likely to have been a number of these offenders whose rape charge related to a child victim, all were discarded from the study.

Of the remaining 343 offenders, 66 had convictions for rape as well as other specific child sexual offences and 277 had child sexual offence convictions but no conviction for rape. Of these 343, 332 (96.8%) were accommodated at one of five Correctional Centres, namely Moreton B, Wolston, Townsville, Rockhampton, and Palen Creek Correctional Centres. These 332 were identified 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 were identified as currently serving community corrections orders (probation, parole etc.). Since the

geographical locations of offenders serving Community Corrections orders were widely distributed, only those Community Corrections Offices supervising more than 10 child sexual offenders were considered. Using this criterion, we identified 98 offenders (52.4%) who were reporting to one of seven Community Corrections Offices (4 in South-East Queensland, and 3 in North Queensland). These 98 were originally identified as prospective participants.

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), we had been unable to locate 87 offenders. 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 7 had agreed to participate. Due to these low response rates (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 sexual offenders. Six of these offenders had already been approached either in prison or community settings, leaving an additional 12 prospective participants, of which 8 agreed to participate.

## Procedure

The lists supplied by the Department of Corrective Services contained identification numbers, but no names. These identification numbers were used to locate offenders' corrections files. These files were examined on all prospective participants, and demographic and offence history data were recorded on a data sheet (Appendix 2). No names were recorded on the data sheets. Lists of names were instead recorded from the prisoner files, 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 consent form (Appendix 1) were provided. It was explained that participation would be entirely voluntary, and that no record would be made of who had declined to participate.

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

Those who agreed to participate were taken to a private room, given a questionnaire (Appendix 3), and left to answer the questionnaire. In cases where offenders indicated the need for assistance with reading or writing, the field researcher provided this assistance. 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 subtypes in proportion to the larger sample. Eight intra-familial offenders, 6 extra-familial offenders, and 3 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.

## Measures

### 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 sexual offence convictions; and current and previous non-sexual offence convictions. For all sexual offence convictions, complete details and dates of convictions (e.g. 3 x *indecent dealing with a child under 16*; 9/95) were recorded. Non-sexual offence convictions were summarised using the Australian National Classification of Offences (ANCO) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997). The number of each non-sexual conviction type, and the date of the first conviction for any offence, were recorded (see data recording sheet, Appendix 2). Field researchers were trained in the use of the ANCO schedule prior to the data collection phase of the study.

### Psychosocial and psychosexual history

Offenders' relationships with their parents were measured using two separate self-report instruments: a childhood attachment questionnaire and an attachment history checklist. The childhood attachment questionnaire (Hazan and 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 1 (not at all like my mother /father) to 7 (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 relationship with 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 child/parent relationships to be identified than does the more global childhood attachment questionnaire. Participants were initially asked to reflect upon 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 sexual offenders (Smallbone & Dadds 1998).

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

The Modus Operandi Questionnaire (MOQ; Kaufman 1989) was used to measure offenders' recollections of their own childhood sexual abuse (see 2.4.5. below). For the first and last episode of childhood sexual abuse, details included the age of the participant and of the abuser at the time of the abuse, the gender of the abuser, the relationship between the participant and his abuser, behaviours employed by the abuser, the number of sexual contacts, and the duration of the abuse.

## Paraphilias

Although the concept of 'multiple paraphilias' has continued to influence conceptions of sexual offenders and sexual offending, there is no consensus about how best to measure the extent of this phenomenon. For example, Abel et al. (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 (DSM-IV; 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 nonliving 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 bestiality (sexual activity with animals).

## Pornography use and offender networking

We developed a series of questions specifically for the purposes 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 modelling 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, 6 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 (MOQ) was developed by Kaufman (1991) as a measure of specific behaviours related to child sexual offending. The self-report measure consists of 231-items and is divided into two primary sections. The initial section gathers demographic information and contains items related to the participant's victimisation history (see 2.4.2., above). The second, larger section is concerned with offenders' modus operandi. Kaufman used the MOQ to assess offending behaviour according to six dimensions: 1) targeting and selection of child; 2) methods of obtaining the victim's trust; 3) details of the sexual abuse itself; 4) use of bribes and enticements; 5) use of threats and coercion; and 6) methods of keeping the victim from disclosing the abuse. Participants rate each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 0 ('never') to 6 ('always') according to 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 MOQ has been demonstrated generally to provide a greater amount of unique information than a parallel interview, with both incarcerated and community-based sexual offenders (Kaufman et al. 1996).

For the purposes of the present study, aspects of offender modus operandi were examined in chronological sequence, as follows: 1) victim characteristics, 2) pre-offence behaviours, 3) offence behaviours, 4) post-offence behaviours, and 5) offenders' perceptions of their victims' 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 behaviours, rather than on their frequency.

## Interviews

Qualitative information was gathered by interviewing a subset of 16 participants. The semi-structured interview schedule was specifically designed to gather information about:

Selection and recruitment of the victims

Strategies employed to introduce sexual contact

Behaviour during the offence

Behaviour after the offence

Knowledge of formal and informal offender networks

## Results

### Test-retest reliability

Test-retest reliability data are presented in Table 1. 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 1, agreement of offender self-reports over time were on the whole quite strong. With the exception of insecure paternal attachment, average correlations ranged from 0.76 to 1.0. With respect to the categorical data, average rates of agreement over time were uniformly strong, ranging from 86.7 per cent to 100 per cent. 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 1: Test-retest reliability of offender self-reports**

Test-retest item	Agreement (%)	Correlations
<u>Childhood experiences</u>		
Maternal attachment		
Secure		.91
Anxious		.90
Avoidant		.84
Paternal attachment		
Secure		.85
Anxious		.21



Test-retest item	Agreement (%)	Correlations
Avoidant		.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		.98
Age at last sexual contact with a child		.99
Number of victims		.76
Relationship to victims		.97
Modus operandi		
Pre-offence behaviours	89.6	
Offence behaviours	92.0	
Post-offence behaviours	98.0	

## Sample characteristics

Of the 323 offenders who were approached and invited to participate in the study, 287 (88.5%) were imprisoned and 36 (11.5%) were serving community corrections orders. Of the 323 approached 182 (56.3%) agreed to participate. Response rates for prisoners (58.2%) were better than for those on community orders (41.7%).

Of those who participated 13 (7.1%) either overtly denied having ever committed a sexual offence or provided no information about sexual 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 (46.7%) 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 (35.5%) 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 (17.8%) 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.

These basic categories — intra-familial, extra-familial, mixed-type, and deniers — are used in the various analyses and tables throughout this report. However, note that there were small variations in the numbers for each group caused by the occasional skipping of items by participants. In view of the large number of items, it was considered impractical to indicate exactly where the variations in category numbers occur. In all cases the variations are small (one or two participants missing) and the percentages reported have been adjusted to account for the reduced number.

## 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 subtypes.

## Current sexual offences

The most common sexual offence type was *indecent dealing with a child under 16 years* (39.0%). This was followed by *indecent dealings (age unspecified)* (33.6%), *carnal knowledge* (22.2%), *attempted or completed rape* (20.6%), *indecent dealing with a child under 12* (18.1%), *sodomy* (14.9%), *incest* (11.7%), *indecent assault* (11.5%), and *exposing a child to indecent act, literature, videos etc.* (8.6%). The number of single current sexual offence charges ranged from 1 to 44.

## Concurrent non-sexual offences

In addition to their current sexual offence convictions, 27.8 per cent of offenders had a current conviction for a non-sexual offence. Using the ANCO crime classifications, the most common current non-sexual offences were traffic and motor vehicle regulatory offences (6.0%), acts intended to cause injury (5.7%), abduction and related offences (5.4%), offences against justice procedures (4.8%), unlawful entry offences such as burglary and break and enter (4.1%), and illicit drug offences (2.9%).

These data should be interpreted cautiously, since many of these non-sexual offences may have been committed as part of the commission of sexual offences.

## Demography and offence histories

### Age when sentenced for current child sexual offence(s)

Intra-familial offenders were, on average, almost 42 years old at the time they were sentenced for their current sexual offence(s). This ranged from 19 to 66 years of age. Extra-familial offenders averaged about 40 years of age (range = 18 to 76), and mixed-type offenders were about 37 years of age (range = 21 to 67). Deniers averaged about 35 years of age (range = 21 to 53). There were no significant differences between the

four groups. In addition, there were no differences between responders and non-responders.

## Age when first sentenced for any offence

As a whole, the offenders were more likely to have first been convicted of a nonsexual than a sexual offence (see *previous convictions*, below). Intra-familial offenders were first convicted on average more than 10 years before their current conviction. Similarly, extra-familial offenders were first convicted on average about 10 years before their current conviction. Mixed-type offenders had been convicted on average more than 12 years before their current conviction. Deniers had been convicted on average 11 years before their current conviction. There were no significant differences between the four groups, nor between responders and non-responders.

**Table 2: Means for age when sentenced for current sexual offence, age when first sentenced for any offence, and age at first and last sexual contact with a child**

Event	Offender sub-types			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Age sentenced for current sexual offence	41.7	40.0	42.6	35.6
Age first sentenced for any offence	31.0	30.0	28.4	26.4
Age of first sexual contact with a child	33.1	29.4	31.1	
Age of last sexual contact with a child	37.8	37.1	42.1	

## Age at first and last sexual contact with a child

According to their self-reports, intra-familial offenders were on average 33.1 years of age (range = 14 to 61 years) at the time they first had sexual contact with a child, and 37.8 years of age (range = 17 to 67 years) when they last had sexual contact with a child. Extra-familial offenders were on average 29.4 years old (range = 14 to 61 years) when they first had sexual contact with a child, and 37.3 years (range = 19 to 73 years) at the time of their last sexual contact with a child. Mixed-type offenders were on average 31.1 years (range = 15 to 61 years) at first sexual contact, and 42.1 years (range = 20 to 63 years) at last sexual contact with a child.

Thus, intra-familial offenders reported having first had sexual contact with a child on average about 33 years, extra-familial offenders about 29 years, and mixed-type offenders about 31 years, before their current conviction. There were no significant differences between the three offender groups. The average period of time between the first and last reported sexual contact with a child was about 10 years for intra-familial offenders, 7 years for extra-familial offenders, and more than 11 years for mixed-type offenders. Mixed-type offenders reported having offended over a significantly longer period than did the intra-familial offenders.

## Education

Data on the formal education of offenders are presented in Table 3. Responders (those who agreed to provide self-report information) were significantly better educated than non-responders. Among the responders, there were no differences in level of education between intra-familial offenders, extra-familial offenders, mixed-type offenders, or deniers.

More than two thirds of admitters had completed 10 or fewer years of formal education. There was a nonsignificant trend for deniers to have achieved higher levels of education.

**Table 3: Highest level of education achieved by offenders (%)**

Highest Education level	Offender sub-types				
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Deniers	Non-responders
Grades 1 to 7	15.5	14.3	14.8	0.0	21.5
Grades 8 to 10	53.5	53.6	55.6	33.3	62.8
Grades 11 to 12	19.7	19.6	18.5	16.7	12.4
Technical/Trade	7.0	1.8	3.7	16.7	1.7
Some Tertiary	1.4	7.1	3.7	25.0	0.8
University Grad.	2.8	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.8
Post Graduate	0.0	1.8	3.7	8.3	0.0

## Ethnicity

Twenty three ATSI (8.2%), 219 non-ATSI Australian born (77.7%), and 40 non-ATSI non-Australian born (14.2%) were approached.

Offenders born outside Australia were more likely to participate (75%) than were ATSI (43.5%) and non-ATSI (53.0%) Australians.

Of those whose ethnicity could be determined 10 ATSI 116 Australian born non ATSI, and 30 'other' offenders participated.

There were no differences between ethnic groups in the frequency of denial.

## Marital status

According to their self-reports, the majority (72.2%) of the combined offenders had at some time been married or had lived in a de facto relationship, including 28.9 per cent who were currently married or in a de facto relationship (see Table 4). More than one third (39.4%) were currently separated or divorced. Extra-familial offenders (51.7%) were significantly more likely than the other offender subtypes to have never been married.

**Table 4: Marital status of offenders (%)**

Marital status	Offender sub-types			Deniers	Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type		
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	0.0	3.9
Never married	7.7	51.7	37.9	15.4	27.8

## Sexual orientation

Although victim gender is often used to infer the sexual orientation of offenders (e.g. an offender whose victims have been male children may be termed a homosexual child molester, and so on), even repeated sexual contact with male and/or female children may not accurately reflect the offender's sexual interests in adult men and/or women. Some researchers have noted, for example, that many 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). Among other things, this has important clinical implications, especially with respect to efforts toward the re-orientation of an offender's sexual interests.

In the present study, offenders were asked to nominate their sexual orientation with respect to adults. As Table 5 shows, more than three quarters (76.1%) of the combined offenders identified as exclusively heterosexual, with intra-familial offenders (94.9%) and deniers (91.7%) more likely than extra-familial (59.3%) and mixed-type offenders (53.3%) to see themselves as heterosexual. Mixed-type offenders (13.3%) were more likely than other offender subtypes to declare an asexual orientation with respect to adults (i.e. attracted neither to women nor men).

## Previous convictions

We examined previous convictions in two ways. First, we examined the frequency with which offenders' criminal history records indicated the presence of any previous conviction. For this analysis, the Australian National Classification of Offences (ANCO: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997) was used to initially classify offence types, and these were then collapsed into the broader categories of sexual offences, violent offences (e.g. homicide; robbery), property offences (e.g. theft; property damage), and any other offences (see Table 6). Second, for those with at least one previous conviction, we examined the type of offence for which the first conviction was recorded. For this analysis, we examined each of the ANCO's 16 crime categories (see Table 7).

**Table 5: Sexual orientation of offenders (%)**

Orientation	Offender sub-types			Deniers	Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type		
Attracted to women only	94.9	59.3	53.3	91.7	76.1
Attracted to men only	2.5	15.3	13.3	0.0	8.3
Attracted to both women and men	2.5	23.7	20.0	8.3	12.8
Attracted to neither women nor men	0.0	1.7	13.3	0.0	2.8

Altogether, 61.6 per cent of offenders had at least one prior conviction for some kind of offence. More than a third (39%) of all offenders had prior convictions for property offences, 22.8 per cent for violent offences, and 21.3 per cent for sexual offences. There were no differences in the presence of prior sexual or non-sexual offences between responders non-responders, nor were there any differences between admitters and deniers.

ATSI offenders were more likely to have a prior conviction for a property offence. ATSI offender were also more likely to have a previous conviction for a violent offence. There were no differences in ethnicity with respect to previous convictions for sexual offences.

More than a third (36.5%) of the intra-familial offenders, 30.5 per cent of the extra-familial offenders, 44.8 per cent of the mixed-type offenders, and 41.7 per cent of the deniers had at least one prior conviction for a property offence. These differences are not statistically significant.

About one in six (16.4%) of the intra-familial offenders 18.6 per cent of the extra-familial offenders, 27.6 per cent of the mixed-type offenders, and 41.7 per cent of the deniers had at least one prior conviction for a violent offence. Again, these differences are not

statistically significant, probably due to the relatively small number of deniers (12) for whom these data were available.

**Table 6: Offenders with previous property, violent, sexual, and any offence (%)**

Previous convictions	Offender sub-types			Deniers	Non-responders
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type		
Property	36.5	30.5	44.8	41.7	40.4
Violent	16.4	18.6	27.6	41.7	22.0
Sexual	10.8	30.5	41.1	25.0	20.6
Any offences	61.6	61.0	69.0	58.3	60.3

There were significant differences between offence subtypes in the proportion of offenders with prior convictions for sexual offences. About 11 per cent of the intra-familial offenders, 30.5 per cent of the extra-familial offenders, 41.4 per cent of the mixed-type offenders, and 25 per cent of the deniers had at least one prior conviction for a sexual offence.

For those offenders with at least one previous conviction, we recorded the year in which the first conviction for any offence appeared in the criminal records. In particular, we were interested to examine whether child sexual offenders begin their official 'criminal career' with sexual or non-sexual offending, and whether there are differences between offender subtypes in this regard. Of the 197 offenders with at least one prior conviction 162 (82.2%) were first convicted for a non-sexual offence. The most common non-sexual offence type for which these offenders were first convicted was theft (21.8%), followed by traffic and motor vehicle offences (15.7%), public order offences (8.6%), and break and enter (8.1%) (see Table 7). In comparison 17.8 per cent of those offenders with prior convictions were first convicted of a sexual offence.

**Table 7: Types of offences for which offenders were first convicted (not including current convictions) (%)**

Conviction type	Offender sub-types			Deniers	Non-responders
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type		
Theft	13.6	22.2	33.3	–	25.0
Sexual offences	9.1	25.0	28.6	25.0	15.9
Traffic/Motor vehicle	37.5	16.7	–	37.5	14.8
Break and enter	11.4	5.6	–	–	10.2
Public order offences	9.1	11.1	4.8	–	9.1

Conviction type	Offender sub-types			Deniers	Non-responders
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type		
Drug offences	6.8	8.3	4.8	–	3.4
Justice offences	4.5	11.1	–	–	4.5
Personal injury	2.3	–	14.3	12.5	4.5
Property damage	4.5	–	4.8	12.5	4.5
Deception	6.8	–	4.8	–	2.3
Dangerous acts	4.5	–	4.8	12.5	2.3
Weapons offences	4.5	–	–	–	1.1
Robbery	2.3	–	–	–	1.1
Homicide	–	–	–	–	1.1

Taken together, our analyses of previous convictions suggest that child sexual offenders are not specialist offenders. Indeed, there appears to be considerable versatility in the kinds of offences these offenders have committed. The results suggest that mixed-type offenders are more likely than other offender subtypes to be convicted on more than one occasion for a sexual offence, but even these offenders cannot be considered specialist offenders, with a third of this group having first been convicted of theft. Further analysis is required before firm conclusions can be drawn, however, since differences in reporting rates and clear-up rates between the different offence types are important confounding factors. For example, higher reporting rates for theft than for sexual offences may mask the true extent of sexual offending relative to theft.

## Summary of comparisons between responders and non-responders

There were many more similarities than there were differences between those who agreed to provide self-report information (responders) and those who declined to do so (non-responders). The only two variables found to differentiate these groups were level of education, and ethnicity.

Less educated offenders were significantly less likely to agree to provide self-report information. It may be that the role of psychological research generally may be less understood by less educated offenders, and this group may thus have been more suspicious of the purposes of this particular research study. Less educated offenders may also have not readily understood what their participation would require of them. Although the field researchers offered special assistance in cases where offenders had literacy and/or comprehension problems, some poorly educated offenders may not have wanted their literacy or comprehension problems to become known.



Offenders who were either born outside Australia or for whom ethnic origin could not be determined were more likely to participate than were either ATSI offenders or non-ATSI Australian born offenders. This finding is difficult to interpret. It is not possible to examine ethnicity in further detail, since we did not collect data on country of birth.

No differences between responders and non-responders were found on a range of important variables. For example, there were no differences in age at current conviction, age at first conviction, nor in current or previous offences.

## Offenders' childhood experiences

### Relationships with parents

A substantial body of literature exists which emphasises the effects of early and middle childhood family experiences on subsequent antisocial or criminal behaviour. Among the most important family factors associated with antisocial behaviour is excessive and non-contingent punishment, and a concomitant lack of encouragement and support shown to children's prosocial behaviours (Loeber 1990; Patterson 1986). Lax supervision and monitoring by parents (McCord 1979; Robins 1979) and lack of paternal involvement in a boy's leisure activities (Farrington 1973) are other firmly established predictors of antisocial behaviour. With respect to parental rejection of the child as a predictor of criminal behaviour, a range of parent behaviours and attitudes toward their children have been found to be significant. These include lack of warmth (Bandura & Walters 1959; Blakely, Stephenson & Nichol 1974), lack of affection (Lewis 1954; Slocum & Stone 1963), hostility (Glueck & Glueck 1950), and overt rejection (Eron, Walder & Lefkowitz 1971; Imperio & Chabot 1980; McCord, McCord & Howard 1963). While maternal rejection has received the greatest attention, several studies have specifically found paternal rejection to be associated with the son's criminality (e.g. McCord 1984). A similar pattern has emerged in retrospective studies of sexual offenders (Aljazeera 1993; Ford & Linney 1995; Pithers, Beal, Armstrong & Petty 1989; Rada 1978).

In the present study, we used childhood maternal and paternal attachment as the main conceptual framework from which to examine offenders' relationships with their parents. Childhood attachment refers to the quality of the bond between children and their parents. Secure attachment is associated with parental attitudes and behaviours 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.

There are two main recognised types of insecure attachment. First, anxious (or ambivalent) 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.

The second type of insecure attachment - avoidant attachment - is associated with parental attitudes and behaviours 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 (Campos, Barrett, Lamb, Goldsmith & Stenberg 1983).

Recent studies of attachment in sexual offenders suggest that insecure childhood attachment, especially insecure paternal attachment, may be associated with general criminality, and also more specifically with later difficulties in sexual and parenting behaviour. Smallbone and Dadds (1998; in press) have argued that insecure childhood attachment may in some cases help to explain the development of processes involved in the grooming of children by sexual offenders, primarily involving a break-down in the usual boundaries between parenting and sexual behaviour.

In the present study, childhood attachment to both parents were measured in two ways. First, offenders responded to descriptions corresponding to the three main attachment styles — secure, anxious, and avoidant — in relation first to their mother, and then with their father. These data are presented in Table 8. Second, offenders selected from a variety of descriptors those that best described their father's and mother's attitudes, feelings and behaviour toward them when they were growing up. These data are presented in Tables 9 and 10.

Offenders were, on the whole, more likely to report secure attachments with their mother than with their father (see Table 8). Consistent with previous research that has investigated associations between childhood attachment and sexual offending behaviour (Smallbone & Dadds 1998), many offenders tended to reported avoidant (rejecting) attachment with their fathers.

**Table 8: Offenders primarily categorised as secure, anxious or avoidant in their childhood maternal and childhood paternal attachment relationships (%)**

Attachment Styles	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
<u>Maternal</u>				
Secure	55.3	78.0	57.1	69.2
Anxious	22.4	16.9	32.1	23.1
Avoidant	22.4	5.1	10.7	7.7
<u>Paternal</u>				
Secure	28.4	36.8	29.6	53.8
Anxious	24.3	35.1	33.3	23.1
Avoidant	47.3	28.1	37.4	23.1

Examination of more detailed aspects of offenders' relationships with their parents revealed similar patterns (see Tables 9 and 10). Consistent with previous criminological findings associating low levels of paternal supervision with general criminal behaviour, few offenders in the present study recalled their fathers as attentive (and even fewer as overprotective). Of particular interest was the relatively high frequency with which offenders recalled their fathers as abusive and violent (Table 10). These findings are consistent with previously established findings that sexual offenders, like other offenders, have often experienced harsh parental disciplinary regimes.

**Table 9: Offenders endorsing maternal attachment history descriptors (%)**

Descriptor	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Loving	64.1	84.7	70.0	76.9
Affectionate	44.9	59.3	60.0	69.2
Respectful	35.9	59.3	40.0	61.5
Attentive	23.1	33.9	30.0	46.2
Understanding	55.1	72.9	53.3	69.2
Caring	60.3	86.4	80.0	76.9
Sympathetic	39.7	62.7	46.7	46.2
Accepting	51.3	64.4	53.3	76.9
Critical	20.5	16.9	20.0	7.7
Strict	41.0	37.3	53.3	61.5
Intrusive	14.1	15.3	10.0	15.4
Overprotective	12.8	28.8	23.3	30.8
Inconsistent	28.2	13.6	26.7	23.1
Unresponsive	19.2	8.5	13.3	7.7
Disinterested	19.2	6.8	10.0	7.7
Rejecting	14.1	6.8	16.7	15.4
Abusive	14.1	5.1	10.0	0.0
Violent	14.1	3.4	6.7	0.0

**Table 10: Offenders endorsing paternal attachment history descriptors (%)**

Descriptor	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Loving	51.4	32.8	39.3	38.5
Affectionate	11.0	29.3	17.9	46.2
Respectful	31.1	48.3	35.7	61.5
Attentive	16.2	24.1	14.3	38.5
Understanding	28.4	48.3	32.1	46.2
Caring	37.8	50.0	50.0	61.5
Sympathetic	10.8	31.0	14.3	30.8
Accepting	28.4	48.3	17.9	69.2
Critical	37.8	41.4	39.3	15.4
Strict	64.9	44.8	67.9	76.9
Intrusive	14.9	12.1	17.9	7.7
Overprotective	9.5	10.3	0.0	15.4
Inconsistent	32.4	34.5	28.6	23.1
Unresponsive	32.4	29.3	32.1	15.4
Disinterested	40.5	24.1	25.0	23.1
Rejecting	35.1	27.6	42.9	15.4
Abusive	41.9	37.9	28.6	23.1
Violent	40.5	34.5	32.1	30.8

## Relationships between parents

Parental conflict is one of several factors identified as being associated with very early disruptive behavioural problems in children (Dadds 1997). These early behavioural problems, such as irritability, noncompliance, inattentiveness, and impulsivity are themselves linked to later conduct disorder which, in its more severe forms, has been shown to lead in turn to antisocial behaviour in adolescence and early adulthood. Parental conflict has also featured among the range of family factors associated with criminal behaviour. Together with parental aggression, parental conflict was shown by McCord (1979) to predict adult offending, especially violent offending. Parental conflict, again in concert with other family factors, has also been shown to predict juvenile convictions (West & Farrington 1973).

**Table 11: Offenders endorsing parental relationship history descriptors (%)**

Descriptor	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Affectionate	33.3	43.1	37.9	61.5
Happy	40.0	56.9	44.8	53.8
Comfortable	37.3	48.3	44.8	53.8
Supportive	38.7	55.2	55.2	76.9
Caring	38.7	58.6	51.7	61.5
Good-humoured	34.7	46.6	35.7	61.5
Argumentative	54.7	41.4	51.7	30.8
Distant	30.7	25.9	31.0	30.8
Troubled	45.3	34.5	24.1	15.4
Unhappy	44.0	31.0	24.1	23.1
Strained	42.7	36.2	44.8	30.8
Violent	33.5	27.6	24.1	15.4

With respect specifically to sexual offending, Worling (1995) found differences in parental conflict among a group of adolescent sexual offenders between those who had offended against children outside their home and those who offended against siblings inside their home. Specifically, sibling offenders were significantly more likely to report the presence of marital discord. On the other hand, Bischof, Stith, and Whitney (1995) reported that while family cohesion, expressiveness, and independence differentiated adolescent sexual offenders from adolescent non-offenders, the presence of parental conflict did not. With regard to adult sexual offenders, Pithers, Beal, Armstrong & Petty (1989) reported that 52 per cent of a mixed sample of 64 rapists and 136 child molesters had experienced marital discord during their childhood. While this proportion seems high, no comparative data were reported.

Data on offenders' parental relationship histories are presented in Table 11. Like their own relationships with their parents, it is clear that child sexual offenders do not see the relationship between their parents in uniformly negative terms. It may be of interest, however, to note the relatively high frequencies of argumentative and strained parental relations. Also, between a quarter and a third of offenders recalled their parents as having a characteristically violent relationship. The full significance of these findings cannot be assessed, however, without reference to normative data.

## Childhood sexual abuse

Previous correctional surveys and clinical studies have generally supported the popular notion that sexual offenders tend disproportionately to have experienced childhood sexual and physical abuse. In the United States 19 per cent of incarcerated rapists and 34 per cent of other incarcerated sexual offenders reported having been sexually and/or physically abused as a child - a substantially higher rate than the average 12 per cent reported by all inmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1997). With regard specifically to childhood sexual abuse, while some 22 per cent of incarcerated offenders against children reported at least one such incident, only 6 per cent of incarcerated (sexual and/or violent) offenders against adults reported such an incident. Almost 80 per cent of the offenders against children who reported having been either physically or sexually abused identified their abuser as having been either a parent or guardian or another relative (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1996).

These data are broadly supported by clinical research, which has typically found that child molesters are about twice as likely as rapists to have experienced childhood sexual abuse (Bard et al. 1987). Dawhan and Marshall (1996) obtained both questionnaire and interview data from incarcerated child molesters and incarcerated non-sexual offenders. Half the child molesters and 20 per cent of the non-sexual offenders reported physical contact sexual abuse at some time in their childhood.

The results of the present study (see Table 12) are consistent with previous clinical findings. Specifically, more than half (55.2%) of the offenders in the present study reported at least one episode of childhood sexual abuse. Interestingly, those who denied having committed any sexual offences were significantly less likely to report having experienced sexual abuse in their own childhood. One interpretation of this might be that those who have not been sexually abused have more difficulty with admitting to having committed sexual offences, perhaps because they are less able to 'excuse' their behaviour or to fit their offending into a previously constructed framework of adult/child sexual contact. Alternatively, those who deny offending may also tend to deny having been sexually abused.

**Table 12: Summary of details reported by offenders about their own childhood sexual abuse**

Details of abuse	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Proportion of offenders who were sexually abused (%)	57.7	53.3	73.3	7.7
Mean age (years) when first sexually abused	8.5	10.0	9.9	—
Mean age (years) when last sexually abused	12.6	13.6	10.3	—
Mean age (years) of the abuser when first abuse occurred	30.9	31.7	31.6	—

Details of abuse	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Mean age (years) of offender when sexual abuse first disclosed	27.5	23.8	24.0	–
Proportion of offenders who disclosed sexual abuse before they began offending (%)	33.3	46.2	61.5	–

Of considerable theoretical interest, we found a strong statistical association between insecure attachment and childhood sexual abuse. In a previous study that examined this association, Smallbone and McCabe (under review) suggested that rejecting or unavailable fathers may fail to provide adequate supervision and protection from potential abusers. Such fathers may leave their sons more prone to obtaining attention and affection from other males, thus increasing opportunities for sexual abuse to occur.

**Table 13: Abused offenders who reported kinds of sexual behaviours employed by their first abuser (%)**

Behaviour	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Touched the boy's buttocks or genitals	75.0	80.0	72.7	76.0
Had the boy touch the abuser's penis or vagina	52.3	66.7	63.6	59.4
Put his/her finger in the boy's anus	20.5	43.3	22.7	28.1
Had the boy put his finger in the abuser's anus	2.3	10.0	13.6	7.3
Put his/her mouth on the boy's genitals	31.8	63.3	40.9	43.8
Had the boy put his mouth on the abuser's penis or vagina	29.5	60.0	36.4	40.6
Had the boy put his penis in the abuser's anus	13.6	6.7	22.7	13.5
Put an object in the boy's anus	9.1	20.0	13.6	13.5
Tried to put his penis into the boy's anus	38.6	60.0	31.8	43.8

There were no significant differences between the offender subtypes with respect to the age at which sexual abuse first or last occurred, nor with respect to the estimated age of the abuser at these times. Although almost two thirds of the mixed-type offenders, and only one third of the intra-familial offenders, said they had told someone about their

own abuse before themselves committing a sexual offence, this difference is not statistically significant.

The kinds of sexual behaviours employed by the abuser (see Table 13) appear generally to have been quite similar to those later employed by the offenders themselves (see 3.11.4), although there is no basis for suggesting a causal link between the two. Interestingly, extra-familial offenders were more likely than the other two offender subtypes to have been engaged in 'mutual' oral intercourse with their abuser, as they were to have employed these behaviours in their offending (see Table 43).

## Involvement in counselling and treatment

The most common problems for which offenders had received counselling or treatment were sexual abuse (27.1%) and depression (23.6%). Other relatively common problems for which help had been received were alcohol or drug problems (18.1%), family problems (14.3%) and anger problems (13.2%) (see Table 14). Unfortunately, we did not ask offenders to provide details about the circumstances surrounding the original problem, nor about the context in which the counselling or treatment was provided, and it is therefore difficult to comment upon the significance of these findings. It is not clear, for example, to what extent these problems preceded or were otherwise related to offending. Neither is it clear to what extent counselling or treatment for these problems was provided in a correctional context (i.e. after being convicted of sexual offending). There does, however, appear to be considerable variation in the types of problems experienced by offenders.

**Table 14: Offenders who have received counselling or treatment for problems other than sexual offending (%)**

Problem	Offender sub-types			Deniers	Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type		
Sexual abuse	23.8	38.5	15.4	–	27.1
Depression	20.3	31.7	23.3	7.7	23.6
Alcohol or drug problems	13.9	18.3	23.3	30.8	18.1
Family problems	13.9	10.0	23.3	15.4	14.3
Anger problems	13.9	10.0	10.0	30.8	13.2
Learning problems	7.6	10.0	13.3	7.7	9.3
Hyperactivity	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.5



# Pornography use

The use of both adult and child pornography by sexual offenders has received considerable attention by clinical researchers. There is some evidence that child molesters are more likely than rapists to have used general (adult) pornography, and that this difference extends both to general use and as an immediate precursor to offending (Carter et al. 1987; Cook, Fosen & Pacht 1971). However, studies examining associations between sexual aggression and general pornography use have on the whole produced weak or inconsistent findings, and thus have failed to demonstrate a systematic link between general pornography use and sexual offending (Bauserman 1996). Furthermore, little is known about the extent and the manner of use of pornography by non-sexual offenders and by non-offenders (other than that it appears to be very widely used).

Even less is known about the use of child pornography by sexual offenders. While some commentary is available, very little empirical evidence currently exists. Hames (1993) has suggested that child pornography may serve any of a number of rather different purposes for child sexual offenders, including as a means of keeping a record of a particular child or children, as part of a seduction or desensitisation process directed toward victims, as confirmation or validation of offenders' belief systems with respect to children's sexuality, and of course for commercial purposes.

We did not aim to examine the purposes to which either adult or child pornography was put by offenders; rather, we aimed to examine the frequency with which different kinds of pornography were used by offenders. Our findings are summarised in Table 15.

A substantial majority of the combined offenders (86.4%) reported having used general (adult) pornography, with mixed-type offenders (27.6%) significantly more likely to engage in regular general pornography use than either the extra-familial (8.6%) or intra-familial offenders (6.8%).

The mixed-type offenders (27.6%) were also significantly more likely than extra-familial (8.8%) or intra-familial offenders (3.9%) to have used child pornography. Interestingly, although 24.1 per cent of the mixed-type offenders reported having owned child pornography, none of this group admitted to regular use of the material. In fact, overall, very few offenders (1.2%) reported regular use of child pornography. Similarly, very few offenders reported having been involved in the production (1.8%) or distribution (0.6%) of child pornography, although the production of child pornography was mainly accounted for by mixed-type offenders (10.0%).

With respect to the use of otherwise innocuous images of children for sexual purposes, it was interesting to find that some offenders (5.4 per cent of the extra-familial offenders and 14.8 per cent of the mixed-type offenders) reported having collected non-pornographic pictures of children, such as might be obtained from children's clothing catalogues, for sexual purposes.

**Table 15: Offenders who reported pornography use (%)**

Pattern of use	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Ever used pornography	82.4	72.4	62.1	75.2
Regularly used pornography	6.8	8.6	27.6	11.2
Ever used child pornography	3.9	8.8	27.6	9.9
Ever kept a record of sexual contacts with victims (e.g. photos, diary etc.)	2.5	8.5	20.0	7.7
Ever owned child pornography	0.0	3.4	24.1	5.5
Ever collected pictures of children (e.g. catalogues)	0.0	5.4	14.8	4.4
Ever involved in the production of child pornography	0.0	0.0	10.0	1.8
Regularly used child pornography	0.0	3.5	0.0	1.2
Ever involved in the distribution of child pornography	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.6

## Networking

Although clinical experience suggests that child sexual offenders almost always offend alone, there has been continuing speculation and considerable social concern about the possible existence of organised child sexual activity involving groups of offenders. Lack of evidence for active networks of child sexual offenders is often explained in terms of the difficulty in uncovering such networks. A considerable literature has nevertheless emerged, particularly through the 1980s, that provides anecdotal evidence for networking among child sexual offenders, generally obtained from interviewing child victims (see e.g. Belanger et al. 1984; Burgess, Groth & McCausland 1981; Burgess et al. 1984; Hunt & Baird 1990; Wild & Wynne 1986).

In the present study, we examined three different aspects of offender networking. First, we asked offenders about their knowledge and experience of other child sexual offenders prior to themselves being charged with a sexual offence. These data are summarised in Table 16. Second, we were interested to examine the extent to which prison may facilitate the establishing of networks among child sexual offenders (see Table 17). Finally, following from recommendations arising from a recent examination of paedophile Internet activity in Australia (Forde & Patterson 1998), we examined patterns of Internet use among offenders (see Table 18).

## Contact with other child sexual offenders prior to current conviction

A considerable proportion of offenders (29.6%) reported having had some knowledge of other child sexual offenders prior to themselves being charged with a sexual offence, with mixed-type offenders (53.6%) significantly more likely than the other two subtypes to have had this knowledge. Once again, however, the significance of this is difficult to interpret, since we did not ask for further details about the context of this knowledge. It could be, for example, that some offenders who had been sexually abused merely recalled their own abuser in answer to this question. Alternatively, some offenders may have come into contact with child sexual offenders while they themselves were serving an earlier prison sentence for a non-sexual offence. Finally, some offenders may have known of other child sexual offenders through their family or social networks.

Mixed-type offenders (25.0%) were significantly more likely than the other offender subtypes to have had discussions with other child sexual offenders prior to themselves being charged with a sexual offence, however this is also difficult to interpret for the same reasons considered above.

Certainly, active collaboration with other child sexual offenders was reported generally to be quite rare, although yet again the mixed-type offenders (13.8%) were more likely than the other offender subtypes to have been involved at this level with other offenders. Further research examining the context in which pre-offence networking occurs is clearly warranted.

**Table 16: Offenders who reported contact with other child sexual offenders before themselves being charged with a child sexual offence (%)**

Type of contact	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Had knowledge of other child sexual offenders	25.0	24.1	53.6	29.6
Talked to other child sexual offenders	2.6	8.5	25.0	8.6
Became involved with an individual or group who organised sexual contact with children	0.0	3.4	13.8	3.7

## Contact with other child sexual offenders while in prison

More than a third (37.3%) of the combined offenders said they had spoken about child sexual offending with other prisoners other than through their involvement in prison-based treatment programs. Once again, the mixed-type offenders (57.1%) were more likely than the other offender subtypes to do so. While this is perhaps unsurprising given that child sexual offenders are typically accommodated together in prisons, this may be of particular concern, especially if such conversations involve gratuitous conversations or 'swapping notes'.

The level of contact with other prisoners more specifically involving offence-related activities was much lower, although there was some evidence that problematic prison-based networking activity exists. For example 17.9 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 offender subtypes to engage in prison-based networking.

**Table 17: Offenders who reported networking activities while in prison (%)**

Type of networking	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Spoken to other prisoners about child sexual offending	30.3	37.0	57.1	37.3
Had other inmates ask about accessing child pornography	3.9	5.6	10.7	5.7
Provided with information about obtaining child pornography	2.6	5.6	10.7	5.1
Provided with information about access to children for sexual contact	0.0	3.7	17.9	4.4
Provided with information about clubs or organisations that distribute child pornography	0.0	11.1	7.1	5.1
Provided with information about Internet sites concerned with child pornography	1.3	0.0	10.7	2.5

## Use of the Internet

As Table 18 shows, the computer literacy of offenders appears to be low, with relatively few offenders (13.6%) using the Internet for any purpose. The extent of Internet activity specifically related to child pornography and sexual abuse is very small but marginally highest amongst mixed-type offenders.

One explanation for these findings may be that the offenders in the present study were on the whole poorly educated, and may thus not have the personal resources required to own and operate the required computer technology. Further, since many of the offenders were serving quite lengthy prison sentences, opportunities for accessing the Internet may have been restricted for the group as a whole, since the widespread use of the Internet in the general community has only emerged in recent years. The use by child sexual offenders of the Internet may therefore be a problem that is yet to emerge in Australia. Certainly, our findings are inconsistent with Forde and Patterson's (1998) observations that Internet use by paedophiles is both extensive and highly organised, and that many paedophiles display sophisticated levels of technological competence.

**Table 18: Offenders who have used the Internet for child pornography and sexual abuse (%)**

Type of Internet use	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Ever used the Internet	12.7	11.7	20.0	13.6
Ever used the Internet to access pornography	2.5	5.0	13.3	5.3
Ever used the Internet to access child pornography	0	1.7	3.3	1.2
Aware of Internet sites that distribute child pornography	2.5	3.3	10.0	4.1
Ever used the Internet to gain contact with clubs, chat-groups or individuals concerned with child sexual activity	0	0	3.3	0.6
Ever used the Internet to distribute pictures of children	0	0	0	0
Ever used the Internet to gain the trust of a child	0	0	0	0

## Paraphilias

The specialisation of theoretical, empirical, and clinical endeavours with respect to sexual offending has its roots in the earliest scientific attempts to describe, classify, and explain variations in human sexual behaviour (cf. Krafft-Ebing 1886/1965; Ellis 1899/1942; Freud 1905/1953). An important legacy has been that sexual offending behaviours, especially those involving children, have continued to be understood as more closely linked with legally tolerated sexual deviations (e.g. tranvestism and fetishism) than with non-sexual criminal behaviours (e.g. theft and assault). This position is exemplified in a recent prominent publication which uses the DSM-IV (APA 1994) paraphilias as an organising framework for recognised international experts to present current knowledge on the etiology and treatment of sexual offending (Laws & O'Donohue 1997).

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) nonhuman objects, 2) the suffering or humiliation of oneself or one's partner, or 3) children or other nonconsenting 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 nonliving 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).

In a landmark study, Abel and his colleagues (Abel et al. 1988; Abel & Osborn 1992) reported that, under conditions of strict confidentiality, the majority of sexual offenders reveal involvement in numerous paraphilias during their lives. For example, Abel et al. (1988) reported that only 10.4 per cent of 561 known sexual offenders had a single paraphilia. By contrast 19.9 per cent were diagnosed with two, 20.6 per cent with three, and 37.6 per cent with between 5 and 10 separate paraphilias.

Although Abel and his colleagues were reported to have used formal diagnostic criteria, the study has been criticised for its apparently very liberal application of these criteria, and for artificially inflating the reported incidence of multiple paraphilias (Marshall & Eccles 1991). Further, some attempts to replicate Abel's findings have found a far lower incidence of multiple paraphilias among sexual offenders, including child sexual offenders (e.g. Marshall, Barbaree & Eccles 1992). Nevertheless, Abel et al.'s findings have continued to exert a very important influence on the conceptualisation and treatment of sexual offending, and we therefore considered it important to benchmark the incidence of paraphilias among child sexual offenders in Australia. A summary of our findings in relation to diagnosable paraphilias is presented in Table 19.

We found the number of offenders with diagnosable paraphilias other than paedophilia to be quite low, although there were some significant differences between offender subtypes. Mixed-type offenders (13.3%) were more likely than either extra-familial (3.4%) or intra-familial offenders (3.8%) to have engaged in exhibitionism (exposing genitals to a stranger). Mixed-type offenders (16.7%) were also more likely than extra-familial (8.6%) or intra-familial offenders (6.4%) to have engaged in frotteurism (rubbing sexually against strangers).

Apart from exhibitionism (5.4%), frotteurism (9.0%), and voyeurism (5.4%), fewer than 5 per cent of offenders could have been diagnosed with a paraphilia other than paedophilia, including public masturbation (4.2%), fetishism (1.8%), sexual masochism (1.2%), transvestic fetishism (1.2%), making obscene telephone calls (1.2%), sexual sadism (0.6%), bestiality (0.6%), and necrophilia (0.0%).

**Table 19: Offenders with diagnosable paraphilias other than paedophilia (%)**

Paraphilias	Offender sub-type			Deniers
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
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
Public masturbation	2.6	3.4	10.0	4.2
Fetishism	1.3	0.0	6.7	1.8
Obscene phone calls	0.0	0.0	6.7	1.2
Sexual masochism	0.0	0.0	6.7	1.2
Transvestic Fetishism	1.3	0.0	3.3	1.2
Sexual sadism	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.6
Bestiality	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.6
Necrophilia	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

## Modus operandi

Previous studies have shown that both intra-familial and extra-familial child sexual offenders often employ quite subtle behavioural strategies to initiate and maintain sexual contact with children, although more overtly aggressive strategies are also sometimes employed (Berliner & Conte 1990; Elliot, Browne & Kilcoyne 1995; Kaufman et al. 1998). This section presents a detailed analysis of the offence behaviour of the study participants. Five issues are examined - the characteristics of victims, the details of the first sexual contact, the behaviour of offenders prior to offending, their behaviour during the offence, and their behaviour after the offence.

### Victim characteristics

Participants were asked to report the number, ages and gender of children a) related to or living with them and b) not related to nor living with them with whom they had had sexual contact, whether or not they were caught or charged for these behaviours. These data are shown in Tables 20 and 21. Table 22 shows the breakdown for all children (Tables 20 and 21 combined). Participants were also asked to report the number, ages and gender of children for whom they had been formally convicted of offending against and this is shown in Table 23.

**Table 20: Number, gender and age of children living with or related to the offenders with whom they reported having sexual contact (%)**

Number	Younger than 12		Between 12–16		Combined
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
0	87.3	70.3	91.5	72.1	36.4
1	9.1	18.8	4.8	20.6	37.0
2–5	3.0	10.3	3.6	7.3	24.3
6–10	0.6	0.6			1.2
11–20					1.2

**Table 21: Number, gender and age of children not living with nor related to the offenders with whom they reported having sexual contact (%)**

Number	Younger than 12		Between 12–16		Combined
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
0	83.0	82.4	80.6	81.2	47.9
1	7.3	10.3	2.4	15.2	21.8
2–5	5.4	5.4	9.0	3.6	16.4
6–10	3.0	1.2	4.8		6.4
11–20	1.2	0.6	1.2		4.8
21–100			1.2		1.8
>100			0.6		0.6



**Table 22: Number, gender and age of all children with whom offenders reported having sexual contact (%)**

<b>Number</b>	<b>All Boys</b>	<b>All Girls</b>	<b>All &lt;12 yrs</b>	<b>All 12–16 yrs</b>	<b>Combined</b>
0	67.9	26.7	44.8	37.6	
1	9.7	44.2	24.2	33.9	48.8
2–5	9.6	24.8	22.4	17.5	34.4
6–10	3.8	2.4	3.6	7.2	6.3
11–20	6.0	1.8	4.8	1.8	7.5
21–100	1.8			1.2	2.4
>100	0.6			0.6	0.6

**Table 23: Number, gender and age of children against whom offenders had been convicted of offending (%)**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Younger than 12</b>		<b>Between 12–16</b>		<b>Combined</b>
	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	
0	78.7	61.0	80.5	59.1	
1	10.4	25.0	4.3	32.3	55.3
2–5	9.7	13.4	12.2	7.9	34.7
6–10	1.2	0.6	1.8	0.6	6.7
11–20		0.6	1.2	0.6	3.0

Looking at the self reported sexual contact (Tables 20 to 22), it can be seen that relatively few offenders admit to serial offences. When all categories are combined, almost half of the participants (48.8%) reported sexual contact with just one child, just over 10 per cent reported sexual contact with more than 10 children, and only 1 participant (0.6%) reported contact with more than 100 children.

In terms of victim gender trends, the majority of perpetrators target female victims. As Table 22 shows, overall 32.1 per cent of offenders reported sexual contact with boys while 73.3 per cent reported sexual contact with girls. This differential is largely accounted for by the gross over-representation of girls as victims in intra-familial abuse (Table 20), with overall victim-gender differences largely disappearing for extra-familial abuse (Table 23). However, the most serious serial offending (more than 5 victims) is more likely to involve boys than girls (Table 21). Generally, then, intra-familial abusers

tend to be heterosexual in orientation while for extra-familial abuse there is a roughly equal proportion of heterosexual and homosexual perpetrators. Because there are more intra-familial abusers than extra-familial abusers, overall the majority of abusers are heterosexual. However, because the few chronic offenders tend to be homosexual, there are more male victims of sexual assault than female victims.

There is little overall difference in the rates of victimisation of children under 12 years old and those between 12 and 16 years, except that, as already noted, serious serial offending is more likely to involve boy victims between 12 and 16.

Convictions (Table 23) show similar patterns to the self-report data. Just over half (55.3%) of participants have been convicted for only one offence and only 5 participants (3%) have convictions for more than 10 offences. Offenders are more likely to be convicted for abusing girls than boys both in the under 12 and 12 to 16 categories. For the under 12 category, 21.3 per cent of offenders were convicted of offences with boys and 39 per cent for offences with girls; for the 12 to 16 category the respective figures are 19.5 per cent and 40.9 per cent. Overall, convictions are evenly distributed across the two victim age categories.

## Details of first sexual contact with a child

In order to examine factors relating to the onset of the abusive behaviour, participants were asked to provide details about their first sexual encounter with a child.

Table 24 reinforces the victim-gender trends discussed earlier. Intra-familial offenders were 12 times more likely (92.4 per cent girl victims versus 7.6 per cent male victims) to abuse females as their first victim. For extra-familial and mixed-type offenders, the gender ratio approaches 50/50, although female victims are still marginally in the majority. Overall girls were roughly 3 times more likely than boys to be offenders' first victims (72.2 per cent girl victims versus 27.8 per cent male victims).

**Table 24: Gender of first victim (%)**

Gender of child	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Male	7.6	46.7	43.3	27.8
Female	92.4	53.3	56.7	72.2

Table 25 shows the age breakdown of the first victim. The mean age of victims was 11.1 years, with no significant difference across offender-types. In general, victimisation increases linearly with victim age, especially for extra-familial offenders. Mixed-type offenders, however, are more likely to abuse children between 9 and 12 than any other age group.

**Table 25: Age of first victim (%)**

Age of child	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
< 4	0.0	3.3	3.4	1.8
5–8	23.1	20.0	27.4	22.8
9–12	38.4	33.3	37.8	36.6
13–16	38.5	43.3	30.9	39.0
Mean age	11.2	11.3	10.2	11.1

Table 26 reports the relationship between the offender and his first victim. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of intra-familial offenders (93.7%) lived with their victims. For the remaining cases of intra-familial abuse (6.3%) the offenders were presumably estranged fathers or other relatives. For the extra-familial abuse, only 13.3 per cent involved victims who were otherwise unknown to the offender. (Note that 6.7 per cent of extra-familial offenders claimed to be living with their first victim. This would seem to indicate there was some inconsistency by participants in answering this question since such a response would indicate intra-familial abuse.) Overall the incidence of 'stranger' abuse was only 6.5 per cent.

It is important to consider whether mixed-type offenders offend initially within or outside a family context, since this may bear on the broader debate about the relative influence of dispositional and situational factors involved in the onset of offending for this especially problematic group. Our results indicate that the majority (58.5%) of mixed-type offenders begin offending within families. Conversely, these results suggest that mixed-type offenders do not necessarily target families after they have already established their sexual interests in children.

**Table 26: Offenders' relationship with first victim (%)**

Relationship	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Lived with child	93.7	6.7	58.6	56.5
Knew child outside home	6.3	80.0	31.0	36.9
Stranger	0.0	13.3	10.3	6.5

As shown in Table 27, over one quarter of offenders had only one sexual contact with their first victim. Intra-familial and mixed-type offenders tended to have more sexual contacts with their first victim. This is likely to reflect the fact that these offenders were often living with their victims and so probably had the opportunity for contact over a longer period of time than is the case in extra-familial abuse. Similarly, as shown in Table 28, intra-familial and mixed type offenders had relationships with their first

victims that extended over a longer period of time than was the case with extra-familial offenders. For example, 43.4 per cent of intra-familial offenders and 62.1 per cent of mixed-type offenders had a relationship with their first victim extending over one year. In comparison, only 15.5 per cent of extra-familial offenders had a relationship of this length. Overall, just over a quarter (29.5%) of relationships between offenders and victims lasted less than one day.

**Table 27: Number of sexual contacts with first victim (%)**

Number of contacts	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
1 time	20.5	40.0	23.3	28.0
2–3 times	14.1	20.0	10.0	15.5
4–5 times	12.8	13.3	10.0	12.5
6–10 times	16.7	15.0	16.7	16.1
11–20 times	16.7	8.3	10.0	12.5
21–50 times	11.5	3.3	23.3	10.7
> 50 times	7.7	0.0	6.7	4.8

**Table 28: Duration of sexual contact with first victim (%)**

Length of contact	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
0–1 day	21.8	41.4	24.1	29.5
1–7 days	6.4	6.9	6.8	6.6
1–4 weeks	1.3	8.6	3.4	4.2
1–2 months	2.6	6.9	0.0	3.6
2–6 months	12.8	13.8	0.0	10.8
6–12 months	11.5	6.9	3.4	8.4
> 12 months	43.6	15.5	62.1	36.7

The average age of the offender at the time of their first sexual contact with a child is shown in Table 29. The mean age for all offenders was 32.4 years. There were no significant age differences between offender subtypes. Intra-familial offenders in the present study reported on average having begun offending somewhat later (33.1 years) than did Abel and Osborn's (1992) samples of homosexual (23.5 years) and heterosexual

incest offenders (27.1 years). Extra-familial offenders in the present study began offending substantially later (29.4 years) than did Abel and Osborn's (1992) samples of homosexual (18.2 years) and heterosexual non-incest offenders (21.6 years). Our results are thus generally inconsistent with popular conceptions of early onset for sexual offending, although some offenders clearly do begin offending during adolescence or early adulthood. It is important to note, however, that our reporting of average ages masks the considerable variation within the groups (e.g. the range of ages at first sexual contact for extra-familial offenders was 14 to 61 years).

**Table 29: Age of offender at time of first sexual contact with a child (%)**

Age of offender	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
<16 years	5.3	5.3	3.4	4.9
17–20 years	3.9	14.1	20.6	10.6
21–30 years	22.6	35.3	23.8	27.4
31–40 years	49.4	29.9	20.5	37.2
41–50 years	13.2	8.9	20.7	13.0
51–60 years	2.6	5.4	6.9	3.6
61–70 years	2.7	1.8	3.4	2.5
Mean age	34.2	29.8	32.6	32.4

## Pre-offence behaviour

This section looks at strategies employed by offenders to locate and 'groom' children for sexual abuse. Participants were asked to nominate on a six-point scale the frequency with which they adopted various strategies ('never' to 'always'). In order to simplify the presentation of data, it was decided to dichotomise responses as either 'not nominated' or 'nominated' (that is, by collapsing all responses other than 'never' into a single category). The tables presented in this and following sections, then, show the percentage of offenders who acknowledged that a particular questionnaire item applied to them at least some of the time.

Table 30 summarises the places that victims were first contacted by those offenders who had offended outside family settings (extra-familial and mixed-type offenders). Overall, the most common locations were at a friend's home (40.0%), in a neighbourhood close to where the offender lived (21.1%), while baby-sitting (21.1%), and through an organised activity, such as scouts, sporting clubs and so forth (19.7%). Utilising locations where children unknown to the offender might be found - public toilets (13.2%), parks (10.5%), swimming pools (10.5%), hitchhiking (5.3%), video arcades (3.9%) and so forth - was

relatively uncommon. By and large, then, 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 locations for finding children were selected, they were more likely to be nominated by mixed-type offenders than extra-familial offenders. For example, 21.7 per cent of mixed-type offenders said that they sought children in public toilets, compared with 9.4 per cent for extra-familial offenders. Similarly, 26.1 per cent of mixed-type offenders said they located children in parks against 3.8 per cent for extra-familial offenders. At first glance these findings are somewhat counterintuitive. Since mixed-type offenders are involved in both intra-familial and extra-familial abuse, it might be expected that they would be less likely than exclusively extra-familial offenders to seek children in public locations. The results tend to suggest that mixed-type offenders are more determined in their pursuit of sexual encounters. This is perhaps consistent with findings reported earlier that mixed-type offenders are also more likely to report higher incidences of psychosocial and psychosexual disturbances than either intra-familial or extra-familial offenders.

**Table 30: Locations for finding children for sexual contact  
(extra familial and mixed-type only) (%)**

Location	Offender sub-type		Combined
	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
At a friend's home	36.5	47.8	40.0
A close neighbourhood	17.0	30.4	21.1
Baby-sitting	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

Location	Offender sub-type		
	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Combined
Hitchhiking	5.7	4.3	5.3
The child babysat for other children at the offender's home	0.0	17.4	5.3
A video arcade	0.0	13.0	3.9
A movie theatre	0.0	8.7	2.6

The strategies employed for organising time alone with a victim are presented in Table 31. 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 strategies have a sexual component that may arouse suspicions - for example, letting the child sleep in the offender's bed (36.3%) and taking a shower or bath with the child (22.6%) (although these are behaviours that most parents probably engage in from time to time as a normal part of parenting). However, other activities are on the surface quite innocuous or would even be considered indicative of a positive child-adult relationship - for example, watching TV with the child (41.7%) or taking the child on an excursion (25.6%). 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 purposes 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 strategies 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 the bed with them (60 per cent versus 31.6 per cent and 30.5%), to sneak into their room at night (63.3 per cent versus 38.0 per cent and 15.3%), take them swimming (50 % versus 16.5 % and 22.0%), and take them to isolated spots (43.3 % versus 15.2 % and 18.6%).

**Table 31: Strategies for getting time alone with child (%)**

Strategy	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Being at home – it was OK for 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

Strategy	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
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	8.6	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
Seeing them on weekends (if divorced or separated)	6.3	6.8	20.0	8.9
Having sole custody	13.9	0.0	10.0	8.3
Taking them to school	7.6	1.7	20.0	7.7
Taking them to the video arcade	2.5	6.8	20.0	7.1
Taking them to a park	5.1	8.5	10.0	7.1
Taking them to the movies	1.3	8.5	16.7	6.5
Taking them out of school	5.1	1.7	16.7	6.0
Having the child baby-sit for your children	2.5	5.1	6.7	4.2
Going to a playground	0.0	5.1	10.0	3.6



Table 32 summarises the extent to which offenders position themselves within organisations and within families in order to gain access to children. The most common strategy, especially by mixed-type offenders, was to establish a relationship with the parents of a child. Relatively few offenders said that they joined youth organisations in order to access children.

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 30 showing that 19.7 per cent of offenders in fact found victims in such locations. It is worth being reminded 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 sections of this report looking at situational strategies of prevention.

**Table 32: Strategies for getting access to children for sexual contact (%)**

Strategy	Offender sub-type			
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Combined
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	0.0	5.3	10.0	3.7
Volunteered for child or teen organisation for the purpose of obtaining sexual contact	1.3	0.0	3.3	1.2

The strategies directed toward victims' parents by extra-familial and mixed-type offenders to get time alone with the child are summarised in Table 33. Almost half of the offenders reported spending time with the child's parents while the child was present (46.2%) or making friends with the parents (44.9%). Note that more offenders report making friends with the child's parents in this table than report establishing friendships with the child's parents in order to gain access to the child in Table 32. This again highlights the probable role of opportunity factors in sexual offending discussed in the previous paragraph. It is likely that many offenders abuse the children of friends, as opposed to befriend the parents of children they intend to abuse.

**Table 33: Strategies with child's parents or caretaker to get time with the child (extra-familial and mixed-type only) (%)**

Strategy	Offender sub-type		
	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Combined
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 baby-sit 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

The strategies for developing a victim's trust prior to sexual contact are presented in Table 34. The most common tactics involve attempts to befriend the child and establish some form of emotional relationship with him/her. This can involve spending a lot of time with the child (67.7%), touching the child non-sexually (66.6%), giving the child a lot of attention (65.3%) and other similar strategies. These attempts to draw in the child emotionally are much more popular than buying the child's trust with gifts — for example, money (34.4%), privileges (34.1%), lollies (31.1%) and toys (16.2%) — or by giving them alcohol (22.2%) or drugs (6.6%). The pattern continues in these data of mixed-type offenders generally acknowledging greater use of strategies than the other two sub-types.

**Table 34: Strategies for developing child's trust before starting sexual contact (%)**

Strategy	Offender sub-type			
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Combined
Spending a lot of time with them	70.9	55.9	82.8	67.7
Touching them non-sexually (eg tickling)	67.1	64.4	70.0	66.6
Giving them a lot of attention	64.6	59.3	79.3	65.3
Playing with them	58.2	42.4	83.3	57.1
Doing what they like to do	48.1	55.9	70.0	54.8
Treating them like adults	54.4	47.5	65.5	53.9
Letting them decide what you will do together	38.0	44.1	76.7	47.0

Strategy	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Telling them how special they are	45.6	40.7	48.3	44.3
Saying loving caring things to them	40.5	33.9	53.3	40.5
Protecting them from people who might hurt them	39.2	32.2	60.0	40.5
Telling them personal things	36.9	35.6	69.0	40.1
Sticking up for them in arguments with a parent	40.5	15.3	60.0	35.1
Giving them money	25.3	30.5	65.5	34.1
Giving them special privileges or rewards	32.9	18.6	51.7	31.1
Giving them lollies or their favourite food	17.7	30.5	62.1	29.9
Sticking up for them in arguments with their friends	24.1	25.4	44.8	28.1
Taking them places	17.7	30.5	41.4	26.3
Talking like you were their age	22.8	25.6	36.7	26.2
Giving them alcohol	6.3	11.9	27.6	22.0
Saying you could help them do something	11.4	15.3	36.7	17.3
Saying that you are the only one who really loves them	12.7	10.2	20.7	17.2
Giving them toys	11.4	18.6	24.1	16.2
Giving them other kinds of gifts	12.7	13.6	30.1	16.2
Letting them see you with another child they know	6.3	16.9	40.0	16.1
Letting them smoke cigarettes	5.1	18.6	26.7	13.7
Showing them pornography	8.9	10.2	30.0	13.1
Giving money to others in the child's family	7.6	13.6	20.7	12.0
Having their friend say its OK to trust you	2.5	15.3	30.0	11.9
Saying that you know they're not to talk to strangers but you're OK	6.3	6.8	23.3	9.5
Giving them cigarettes	2.5	10.2	24.1	9.0

Strategy	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Pretending to be someone they like or trusted	5.1	10.2	16.7	8.9
Saying you know one of their parents	0.0	13.6	20.0	8.3
Saying you know one of their friends	1.3	10.2	23.3	8.3
Asking them for help	5.1	10.2	13.3	8.3
Talking with them about an abuser they know	1.3	5.1	30.0	7.7
Having another child talk to them about how much fun it is with you	3.8	8.5	16.7	7.7
Giving them drugs	2.5	6.8	17.2	6.6
Saying you know some other relative of theirs	1.3	5.1	13.3	4.8

Table 35 outlines the offenders' perceptions of the relationship between themselves and their victims. Over half (53.9%) of offenders said that they tried to form an emotional relationship with their victim and 43.1 per cent said that they tried to be like a parent for the child. Mixed-type offenders are more likely than other offenders to attempt to develop a relationship with their victim.

**Table 35: Behaviour associated with developing a relationship with the child (%)**

Behaviour	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Tried to form real friendship with the child before the sexual contact	43.6	52.5	83.3	53.9
Started sexual contact for the first time without saying anything	39.0	46.6	70.0	47.3
Imagined having sexual contact with the child before any sexual contact began	35.1	45.6	66.6	44.5
Tried to be like a parent to the child before sexual contact	42.3	33.9	63.3	43.1
Talked about sex before sexual contact	28.2	39.0	53.3	36.5
Pretended to be friends with the child before sexual contact	23.1	32.8	50.0	31.3

Behaviour	Offender sub-type			
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Combined
Tested the child to see if they would tell anyone about the sexual contact	20.8	16.9	40.0	22.9
Tried to make the child think that the two of you had a romantic relationship	14.3	11.9	40.0	18.1

The strategies employed by offenders for getting the child to go with them to the place where sexual contact occurred are presented in Table 36. A broad distinction can be made between strategies involving bribes and enticements, and those involving threats and coercion. The most popular strategies involved bribery — promising rewards (22.6%), giving the child money (22.6%), promising to do something fun (22.6%) and so forth. Only 3.6 per cent of offenders reported that they used physical force to make the child come with them, 2.4 per cent said that they let the child see a weapon, and 1.8 per cent said that they threatened to hurt the child. Mixed-type offenders again are up to twice as likely as the other sub-types to nominate that they had employed the strategies shown. Note, too, several of the more coercive strategies presented to participants received no endorsement and are not included in the table. For example, no participant reported threatening to hurt the victim's pet as a way of gaining victim compliance. In the interests of succinctness, items receiving no endorsement are also omitted from subsequent tables.

**Table 36: Strategies for getting child to go with the offender to the place where sexual contact occurred (%)**

Strategy	Offender sub-type			
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Combined
Promising rewards or privileges	17.7	18.6	43.3	22.6
Giving them money	15.2	20.3	46.7	22.6
Telling them you were going to do something fun	15.2	28.8	30.0	22.6
Defending the child against bullies	16.5	16.9	40.0	20.8
Telling them you could be trusted	17.7	15.3	40.0	20.8
Giving them toys or sweets	8.9	10.2	43.3	15.5
Saying you would stop giving them special privileges	15.2	6.8	10.0	11.3
Pretend to be someone they liked or trusted (e.g. a priest etc.)	3.8	11.9	16.7	8.9

Strategy	Offender sub-type			
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Combined
Letting child see you with other children	3.8	3.4	26.7	7.7
Giving them alcohol	3.8	5.1	23.7	7.7
Giving them cigarettes	2.5	8.5	20.0	7.7
Saying that since you were older they should do what you say	7.6	0.0	23.3	7.7
Saying you wouldn't spend time with them unless they came	8.9	1.7	6.7	6.0
Giving them drugs	0.0	5.1	13.3	4.2
Letting the child see you angry or violent with another person	6.3	0.0	3.3	3.6
Using physical force to make them come along	2.6	5.1	3.3	3.6
Having a pet to show the child	0.0	1.7	10.0	2.4
Telling the child their parents wanted them to go with you	1.3	0.0	10.0	2.4
Saying that the child would get into trouble if they didn't come	3.8	0.0	3.3	2.4
Letting the child see that you had a weapon even though you didn't say you'd use it	0.0	5.1	3.3	2.4
Saying you would hurt them if they didn't come along	1.3	3.4	0.0	1.8
Letting the child know that you had hurt others or had a bad temper	1.3	3.4	0.0	1.8
Hoping the child thought that you would hurt them even if you didn't say you would	1.3	1.7	0.0	1.2

A broad variety of strategies were also employed by offenders to get the child to take part in sexual activity. These are summarised in Table 37. The most common strategies involve gradually building up to sexual contact by giving non-sexual attention (58.9%), touching the child non-sexually (58.3%) and saying nice things to them (51.2%). More overtly, offenders also begin touching the child sexually (48.8%), starting sexual contact as if it were no big deal (47.6%), and getting the child sexually excited (41.1%) and curious about sex (36.5%). In more extreme cases, offenders reported having the child watch or take part in pornographic acts. For example 18.5 per cent of offenders said they showed the children pictures of naked adults, 7.1 per cent took nude photographs of the

child, 6.5 per cent had the child do sexual acts with other children, and 5.4 per cent had the child watch them do sexual acts with other children.

Other common strategies involve the offering of inducements such as gifts (34.5%) and money (33.3%). On the other hand, threats and coercion are relatively uncommon. For example, 6.0 per cent of offenders reported resorting to physical force, 3.0 per cent threatening to hit the child, and 1.2 per cent tying the child up. Also relatively uncommon is the use of alcohol (8.3%) and drugs (4.8%) to make the child more compliant. Where these strategies are employed, they are more likely to be nominated by mixed-type offenders.

**Table 37: Strategies to get child to take part in sexual activity (%)**

Strategy	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Giving them non-sexual attention	50.6	55.9	86.7	58.9
Touching them non-sexually	55.7	54.2	73.3	58.3
Saying nice things about them	45.6	44.1	80.0	51.2
Touching them sexually more and more	41.8	49.2	66.7	48.8
Starting sexual contact as if it were no big deal	41.8	44.1	70.0	47.6
Saying loving caring things to them	41.8	35.6	73.3	45.2
Getting the victim sexually excited	31.6	40.7	66.7	41.1
Getting the victim very curious about sex	26.6	29.3	76.7	36.5
Talking more and more about sex	29.5	30.5	56.7	34.7
Giving them gifts from time to time	25.3	32.2	63.3	34.5
Giving them money from time to time	22.8	28.8	70.0	33.3
Saying that you are going to teach them something	19.0	18.6	56.7	25.6
Giving them special privileges or rewards just before or just after the sexual contact	24.1	15.3	46.7	25.0
Giving them money just before or just after the sexual contact	16.5	16.9	53.3	23.2
Saying that you will take them places	17.7	18.6	46.7	23.2
Saying how special they are to be doing this with you	17.7	16.9	43.3	22.0

Strategy	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Wearing less clothing and telling them to do the same	20.3	10.2	46.7	21.4
Starting sexual contact when the victim was upset or needing attention	17.7	11.9	43.3	20.2
Saying that you will spend more time with them	13.9	15.3	43.3	19.6
Showing them magazines, pictures, Internet sites or videotapes with naked adults in them	6.3	23.7	40.0	18.5
Giving them sweets or their favourite food just before or just after the sexual contact	12.7	13.6	40.0	17.9
Showing them magazines, pictures, Internet sites or videotapes with adults doing sexual things with each other	10.1	18.6	36.7	17.9
Buying them other clothes	11.4	10.2	36.7	15.5
Saying that you will love them more if they do this with you	11.4	10.2	30.0	14.3
Giving them other gifts just before or just after the sexual contact	5.1	10.3	33.3	12.0
Saying you would hire them for a job	6.3	13.6	23.3	11.9
Telling them that all of their friends have had sex by now	6.3	6.8	30.0	10.7
Buying them bathing suits	5.1	1.7	40.0	10.1
Giving them toys just before or just after the sexual contact	6.3	11.9	13.3	9.5
Buying them underwear or sleepwear	7.6	0.0	30.0	8.9
Giving them beer or alcohol just before or just after the sexual contact	5.1	6.8	20.0	8.3
Giving them cigarettes just before or just after the sexual contact	2.5	10.2	20.0	8.3
Talking to them about another offender with whom they have been sexually involved	2.5	8.5	23.3	8.3
Taking photographs or videos of the child with their clothes on	1.3	10.2	20.0	7.7



Strategy	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Having one of their friends with whom you have been sexually involved say that it is OK	0.0	5.1	30.0	7.1
Taking photographs or videos of the child with their clothes off	1.3	8.5	20.0	7.1
Making them feel like there is nothing they can do to stop it	3.8	8.5	13.3	7.1
Having them do sexual things with other children	0.0	10.2	16.7	6.5
Using physical force to make them do sexual things	5.1	6.8	6.7	6.0
Having them watch you do sexual things with other children	0.0	3.4	23.3	5.4
Having them watch other children do sexual things with each other	0.0	6.8	16.7	5.4
Getting them drunk with beer or alcohol	1.3	5.1	16.7	5.4
Saying you tell on them about having sex with you	2.5	10.2	3.3	5.1
Giving them drugs just before or just after the sexual contact	0.0	5.1	16.7	4.8
Saying that they don't really love you if they don't do what you ask	3.8	1.7	13.3	4.8
Hoping the child thought you would get them into trouble even though you didn't say that you would	6.3	1.7	6.7	4.8
Hoping the child thought you would hurt them even though you didn't say you would	3.8	3.4	6.7	4.2
Getting them high with marijuana or other drugs	0.0	3.4	13.3	3.6
Having them watch you do sexual things with other adults	2.5	1.7	6.6	3.0
Showing them magazines, pictures, Internet sites or videotapes with naked children in them	0.0	1.7	10.0	3.0
Saying you will hit them if they don't do it	1.3	1.7	10.0	3.0

Strategy	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Showing them magazines, pictures, Internet sites or videotapes with children doing sexual things with each other	0.0	1.7	10.0	2.4
Saying you will hurt them with a knife	0.0	3.4	6.7	2.4
Showing them magazines, pictures, Internet sites or videotapes with adults doing sexual things with children	0.0	1.7	6.6	1.8
Putting a weapon where they could see it so they would be scared	0.0	3.4	3.3	1.8
Saying you will tie them up	0.0	1.7	6.7	1.8
Having the child take photographs or videos of you doing sexual things with another adult	0.0	3.4	0.0	1.2
Saying you will kill them	0.0	3.4	0.0	1.2
Getting them high with prescription drugs	0.0	0.0	6.6	1.2
Tying them up	0.0	1.7	3.3	1.2
Hoping the child thought you would hurt one of their family members even though you didn't say you would	1.3	1.7	0.0	1.2
Having the child take photographs or videos of you doing sexual things with another child	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.6
Showing them magazines, pictures, Internet sites or videotapes with animals doing sexual things with other animals	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.6
Showing them magazines, pictures, Internet sites or videotapes with people doing sexual things with animals	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.6
Saying you will hurt them with a gun	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.6
Saying you will hurt their bothers or sisters	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.6
Hurting a family member in front of them	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.6

## Offence Behaviour

Table 38 shows the length of time between the offender first meeting the child and the initiation of sexual contact. Overall, more than half (50.7%) of offenders knew the child for over 12 months prior to sexual contact. Not surprisingly, intra-familial offenders generally knew their victims for longer periods of time than extra-familial and mixed-type offenders. For example 73.6 per cent of intra-familial offenders knew their victims for over a year, compared with 27.8 per cent for extra-familial and 39.1 per cent for mixed-type. Nevertheless, these figures show that even extra-familial and mixed-type offenders tended to have contact with children that they already knew. Only 22.2 per cent of extra-familial and 12.9 per cent of mixed-type offenders had sexual contact with children they had known less than a day. Somewhat incongruously 11.9 per cent of intra-familial offenders also reported having sexual contact with children that they had known less than a day. It is possible that there are situations that might account for this (for example, the sexual assault may have occurred at the very beginning of a defacto relationship). It is more likely, however, that some participants have misunderstood this question or have answered inconsistently.

**Table 38: Time between meeting child and sexual contact (%)**

Time	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
0–5 minutes	5.1	7.4	4.3	5.8
5 minutes–1 hour	3.4	11.1	4.3	6.6
1 hour–1 day	3.4	3.7	4.3	3.7
1 day–1 month	0.0	14.8	30.4	11.0
1–6 months	6.8	20.4	4.3	11.8
6–12 months	5.1	14.8	13.0	10.3
> 12 months	76.3	27.8	39.1	50.7

The locations that offenders took the child for sexual contact are shown in Table 39. By far the most common location for all subtypes is the offender's own home (68.9%). Mixed-type offenders were the most likely of the three subtypes to take the child to isolated places such as vacant lots (53.3%), the bush (33.3%), a park (20.7%), or a public toilet (20.0%). Table 38 examines locations in terms of actual distances. The majority of offenders (72.2%) move their victims less than 60 metres.

**Table 39: Locations for taking children for sexual contact (%)**

Location	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Your own home	83.3	45.8	76.7	68.9
Going for a car ride	21.5	25.4	46.7	27.4
Isolated or out of the way places (e.g. vacant lot)	16.5	23.7	53.3	25.6
An out of the way place in the child's home	19.0	11.9	30.0	19.5
A friend or relative's home	3.8	16.9	30.0	17.1
The bush	7.6	16.9	33.3	15.5
Other	6.3	8.6	20.7	9.6
A park	5.1	11.9	16.7	9.5
Public toilet	1.3	8.5	20.0	7.1
Swimming pool	1.3	5.1	16.7	5.4
Taking the child for walks	3.8	3.3	13.3	5.4
Playground	0.0	1.7	13.3	3.0
Movie theatre	0.0	1.7	10.0	2.4

**Table 40: Distance child taken (%)**

Distance	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
0–3 metres	11.9	0.0	4.5	6.3
3–6 metres	54.2	32.6	22.7	41.3
6–15 metres	15.3	16.3	27.3	17.5
15–60 metres	5.1	4.7	13.6	7.1
60 metres–2 kilometres	1.7	14.0	4.5	6.3
2–10 kilometres	3.4	16.3	9.1	8.7
> 10 kilometres	8.5	16.3	18.2	12.7

The average time taken for sexual contact with each child is shown in Table 41. Almost a quarter of sexual contacts took less than 5 minutes. Virtually all contacts (98.2%) were completed within an hour. There were few differences between offender subtypes in the times taken.

**Table 41: Average length of sexual contact per child (%)**

Length of contact	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
0–5 minutes	26.6	24.1	20.7	24.7
5–15 minutes	44.0	34.5	24.1	37.0
15–30 minutes	22.7	22.4	24.1	22.8
30–45 minutes	2.7	13.8	20.7	9.9
45–60 minutes	1.3	5.2	6.9	3.7
1–2 hours	2.7	0.0	0.0	1.2
>2 hours	0.0	0.0	3.4	0.6

The time elapsing between taking the child for sexual contact and returning the child is shown in Table 42. Around two-thirds (70.3%) of children are returned within an hour and 5.5 per cent are taken for more than a day.

The types of sexual behaviours of offenders towards their victims are shown in Table 43. By far the most common behaviour is to touch the penis or vagina of their victim (89.0%). There is a tendency for mixed-type offenders to report higher levels of behavioural involvement than the other two sub-types. In particular, mixed-type offenders are more likely to report anal-related sex acts. For example, 36.7 per cent of mixed-type offenders report putting their penis in the child's anus, compared with 9.0 per cent of intra-familial and 20.7 per cent of extra-familial offenders. Overall, few offenders (4.2%) reported that the child was hurt during the sexual contact or that hurting the child was part of the sexual act (3.0%).

**Table 42: Time between taking and returning child (%)**

Time	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
0–10 minutes	13.1	0.0	0.0	6.3
10–30 minutes	45.9	35.6	36.4	40.6
30–60 minutes	23.0	20.0	31.8	23.4
1–3 hours	3.3	20.0	4.5	9.4
3–6 hours	6.6	6.7	18.2	8.6
6–24 hours	1.6	2.2	4.5	2.3
> 24 hours	1.6	11.1	4.5	5.5

**Table 43: Sexual abuse behaviours (%)**

Behaviour	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Touch their vagina or penis	89.5	86.2	93.3	89.0
Touch their buttocks	57.9	60.3	80.0	62.8
Touch their breasts	73.7	43.1	60.0	60.4
Put your mouth or tongue on their vagina or penis	51.3	63.8	73.3	59.8
Rub your penis against their bodies	61.8	44.8	76.7	58.5
Masturbate them to ejaculation or orgasm	36.0	50.9	66.7	46.9
Put your finger in their vagina	48.7	36.8	43.3	43.6
Rub your hands or body against them sexually without them knowing it	29.5	32.8	60.0	36.1
Put your penis into their vagina	33.3	27.6	20.0	28.9
Try to put penis in their vagina	36.4	13.8	33.3	27.9
Put your finger in their anus	5.3	20.7	33.3	26.0
Try to put your penis into their anus	9.0	29.3	46.7	22.9

Behaviour	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Put your penis into their anus	9.0	20.7	36.7	18.1
Put an object into their vagina	10.3	3.4	16.7	9.0
Put an object into their anus	3.8	10.5	17.2	8.5
Hurt them (unintentionally) during the sexual contact (cuts etc.)	3.8	3.4	6.9	4.2
Hurt them as part of sexual acts	2.6	5.2	0.0	3.0
Urinate on them	0.0	1.7	6.7	1.8

**Table 44: Sexual activities offender had child perform (%)**

Behaviour	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Touch your penis	64.5	59.3	86.7	66.7
Put their mouth or tongue on your penis	36.7	42.3	63.3	43.5
Masturbate you to ejaculation	34.2	35.6	60.0	39.3
Put their finger or another object in your anus	2.6	13.6	16.7	9.0
Put their penis in your anus	2.6	10.2	23.3	9.0
Urinate on you	0.0	0.0	6.7	1.2
Hurt you as part of sexual acts	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table 44 details the acts that the offender had their victims perform. Two-thirds (66.7%) of offenders had the child touch their penis and 43.5 per cent required the child to perform oral sex. Again there is a tendency for mixed-type offenders to acknowledge greater incidences of the behaviours in question.

Tables 45 and 46 show, respectively, the average number of sexual contacts per child and the average length of time the relationship with the child continued. These findings are similar to those reported with respect to the offenders' first victim (Tables 27 and 28). This is not surprising since almost half of offenders reported contact with just one child. However, it may be that even for the more chronic offenders the patterns of sexual contact with children remain fairly stable throughout their offending 'career'.

**Table 45: Average number of sexual contacts per child (%)**

Number of times	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
1 time	20.8	27.6	18.5	22.8
2–3 times	11.7	19.0	22.2	16.0
4–5 times	18.2	17.2	7.4	16.0
6–10 times	10.4	19.0	14.8	14.2
11–20 times	18.2	13.8	14.8	16.0
21–50 times	13.0	3.4	14.8	9.9
>50 times	7.8		7.4	4.9

**Table 46: Average duration of sexual contact with child (%)**

Length of contact	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
0–1 days	21.1	38.9	18.5	27.0
1–7 days	9.9	3.7	11.1	7.9
1–4 weeks	2.8	11.1	3.7	5.9
1–2 months	4.2	5.6	3.7	4.6
2–6 months	11.3	16.7	7.4	12.5
6–12 months	5.6	18.5	3.7	9.9
>12 months	45.1	5.6	51.9	32.2

Table 47 shows the behaviours that offenders reported children used to prevent sexual contact. Table 48 shows how successful these strategies were *for those children who employed them* (that is, percentages shown are in terms of the sub-sample of children using this strategy, not the whole sample). Thus, 45.2 per cent of offenders said that the child told them that they did not want to have sexual contact. Of this group, 85.9 per cent said that this strategy had been successful at least on some occasions in deterring them from continuing with the sexual abuse. The most widely used and apparently successful strategies involve the child showing the offender that the sexual contact is unwanted and distressing. Perhaps surprisingly, resisting or calling for help is not as common and when it is used is also not very effective.



**Table 47: Ways that children attempted to prevent sexual contact (%)**

**Table 48: Success of strategies in deterring offenders when used (%)**

## Post-offence behaviour

The methods employed by offenders to prevent or dissuade the child from reporting the sexual abuse are shown in Table 49. The two most common tactics — saying the offender would go to jail (60.5%) and hoping the child would not want to lose the relationship (35.7%) — appear to attempt to exploit the emotional relationship the offender has established with the child. Relatively few offenders report that they resort to threats and physical violence to keep the child's silence.

**Table 49: Strategies to keep the child from telling about sexual contact (%)**



Strategies	Offender sub-type			Combined
	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	
Hoping the child thought you would hurt one of their family members even though you didn't say you would	1.3	0.0	3.3	1.2

Strategies	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Combined
Hoping the child thought you would hurt one of their family members even though you didn't say you would	1.3	0.0	3.3	1.2

Finally, Table 50 reinforces the earlier findings that child sexual abuse typically involves offenders who have some form of relationship with the family of the victim. Most parents (71.1%) knew that their child was spending time alone with the offenders and in a third of cases (33.3%) had apparently allowed their child to be babysat by the offender. Even for extra-familial abuse, these figures were 62.7 per cent and 31.6 per cent respectively. Three quarters of extra-familial offenders (76.7%) further reported that the child's parents liked them. Most alarming of all, one-fifth (21.4%) of all offenders (including 18.6 per cent of extra-familial offenders) reported that the parents knew about the abuse and did not report it.

**Table 50: Victims' parents' behaviour with respect to the sexual contact (%)**  
Offender sub-type

Parents' knowledge	Intra-familial	Extra-familial	Mixed-type	Combined
Parents knew you were spending time alone with their child	72.7	62.7	83.3	71.1
The parents of the child liked you	64.5	74.6	76.7	70.3
You were babysitting the child	32.9	31.6	37.9	33.3
The parents knew about the sexual contact and did report you.	24.7	35.6	48.3	33.3
The parents of the child knew about the sexual contact but did not report it	20.3	18.6	30.0	21.4
The child had to lie to their parents when they spent time with you	11.5	11.9	36.7	16.2
The parents complained that you were spending too much time alone with their child	11.4	8.5	23.3	12.5
You helped them make up lies for their parents	7.7	8.6	26.7	11.4
The parents said they thought you were having sex with their child and told you to stop	5.1	6.8	23.3	9.0



# General discussion

## Conceptual Implications

At the beginning of this report we drew attention to the influence of a series of landmark publications by Abel and his colleagues in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Abel et al. 1988; Abel et al. 1987; Abel & Osborn 1992). These reports indicated that sexual offenders generally, and child sexual offenders in particular, were likely a) to begin offending in adolescence or early adulthood (early onset), b) to commit many more sexual offences than become officially known, and c) to be involved in a broad range of sexually deviant behaviour (multiple paraphilias). These reports were especially influential because of the unusual methodology employed, the most notable aspect of which was the eliciting of confidential self-reports of a large number of known offenders. It was thought that under these circumstances offenders would reveal more reliable information than could be obtained when self-reported information presents a real risk of severe negative consequences, as it may when the same information is revealed during police interviews or in a prison treatment setting.

Our findings show that some child sexual offenders begin their sexual offending in adolescence or early adulthood, but that the majority do not. Our findings also show that sexual deviance beyond offending (multiple paraphilias) is not characteristic of the majority of child sexual offenders. Further, although the offenders in the present sample admitted to about three times as many offences as were officially known, the differences between official and unofficial sexual offending were largely accounted for by a relatively small group of chronic, serial offenders. Since the early onset and diversity of sexual deviance are linked to conceptual frameworks that associate sexual offending primarily with disturbances in sexuality, our results strongly suggest that alternative conceptual formulations need to be considered. Moreover, our findings that child sexual offenders are more generally criminal than is usually accepted point to the possibility that it is not disturbed sexuality *per se*, but perhaps the broader problem of criminality, that best characterises child sexual offenders. Thus, established models of criminal behaviour may be more applicable to child sexual offending than are models that concentrate on sexual deviance.

Consistent with most previous findings, our results show considerable variation both in the ways in which offences occur, and in the characteristics of offenders themselves. Nevertheless, a number of consistent patterns have emerged in this study. Perhaps the most important of these is that child sexual offenders appear overwhelming to abuse children who they already know. Indeed, most child sexual abuse appears to occur in either the children's or the offenders' homes which, of course, are in many cases one and the same place.

Although most offenders commit their offences more or less consistently either within a family setting or outside a family setting, an important minority are less discriminating. This latter group (referred to in the report as mixed-type offenders) emerged as having a) a higher incidence of childhood sexual abuse, b) a longer sexual offending 'career', c)

more victims, and d) a higher incidence of sexual disturbances other than paedophilia. In addition, mixed-type offenders were more likely to e) use general and child pornography, and f) collaborate with other offenders. These findings suggest that offenders who commit offences both within and outside of family settings may be more committed to offending and possibly more difficult to deter.

Notwithstanding other differences found between the three offender subtypes identified in the present study, offence-related behaviours themselves were found to be remarkably similar. This suggests that, despite individual differences in the degree to which offenders may be disposed to offend, immediate environmental conditions within which child sexual abuse occurs are quite similar. Thus, we propose that opportunities for preventing child sexual abuse exist both in terms of individual dispositions and in terms of situational factors. We will deal with these more practically shortly, but will first consider this proposition with respect to its conceptual implications.

Traditional schemes for categorising child sexual offenders have distinguished broadly between two main types. Although the nomenclature varies, the essential distinction has been concerned with extra-familial offenders (who tend to target boys, have more victims, and are seen to have a more or less exclusive sexual interest in children), and intra-familial offenders (who tend to target girls, have fewer victims, and are seen to prefer adult sexual relations). The main characteristics of these two types have by and large been replicated in the results of the present study. One conceptually important set of terms that has traditionally been applied to this distinction has been *preferential* versus *situational* offenders. This implies that the former group is especially disposed to sexual contact with children, and that the offending of the latter group is more subject to the influences of situational factors.

In reality, of course, there will be some combination of dispositional and situational factors at work: a motivated offender cannot offend without the opportunity to do so, and nor is an otherwise well-functioning individual likely to perpetrate sexually abuse simply because he is alone with a child. Thus, whether a 'sexual deviance' model or a 'criminality' model of sexual offending is favoured, continuing emphasis on the detection, investigation, incapacitation, and rehabilitation of individual offenders risks ignoring the opportunity structures and other situational factors that may not only help to explain sexual offending, but may lead to important opportunities to prevent it, even when we are dealing with those individuals who do seem especially predisposed and committed to engaging children for the purposes of sexual contact.

## Policy implications

We now turn to the implications of our findings for the development of more efficient and effective public policy concerning child sexual offending. We begin by considering the prospects for developmental prevention, which is concerned essentially with limiting the development in individuals of the disposition to commit these offences. We then turn to situational prevention, which by contrast to developmental approaches seeks to reduce offending by intervening in the physical, social and interpersonal environments where offending may otherwise occur. Finally, we will consider the prospects for criminal justice interventions, including policing and offender

rehabilitation. Our concluding remarks consider the main strengths and limitations of the study.

## Implications for developmental prevention

Although current demands for effective treatment of sexual offenders have tended to concentrate research efforts on the more immediate precursors of sexual offences, developmental antecedents have continued to be a focus for researchers and clinicians concerned with understanding and treating sexual offenders. Descriptive and empirical research, together with clinical observations, provide convergent, albeit largely nonspecific evidence that adverse family-of-origin experiences appear to exist commonly in the childhood backgrounds of sexual offenders. These largely retrospective findings parallel those from more sophisticated prospective longitudinal and clinical experimental studies linking adverse childhood experiences more generally to delinquency and crime (Loeber & Farrington 1998).

Developmental crime prevention involves the application of interventions to individuals and/or their families who present with certain characteristics that are predictive of the individual's later involvement in delinquency and crime. Ideally, these interventions are applied *before* the individual becomes involved in serious delinquency or crime, however some prominent researchers argue that it is "never too early (and) never too late" to apply effective interventions (Loeber & Farrington 1998).

Established predictors of later involvement in serious crimes include family factors such as a) living with a criminal parent or parents, b) harsh discipline, c) abuse and neglect, d) poor family management practices, e) low levels of parental involvement with the child, f) high levels of family conflict, and g) parental attitudes favourable to violence (Loeber & Farrington 1998).

Our results suggest that a number of these family risk factors are present in the backgrounds of many child sexual offenders. Specifically, we found:

a relatively high incidence of insecure paternal attachment. The three offender subtypes all were somewhat more likely to report insecure than secure relationships with their fathers. Of particular note, more than half the intra-familial offenders recalled their fathers as characteristically cold, distant and rejecting. Avoidant attachment is thought to be associated with deficits in the autonomous regulation of negative emotions, such as anger and sadness. Among other things, insecure paternal attachment may be associated with poor modelling of adult male behaviour, especially as it relates to the roles of husband and father.

a relatively high incidence of harsh parental disciplinary practices. More than a third of the offenders in the present study recalled their father as having been characteristically abusive and violent toward them. Such experiences are likely to lead to poor moral development and to provide further negative modelling influences.



a relatively high incidence of childhood sexual abuse. More than half of the offenders in the present study reported at least one episode of childhood sexual abuse, and this was statistically related to negative recollections of their relationships with their parents. Interestingly, the most problematic group (the mixed-type offenders) were the more likely (73.3%) to have experienced childhood sexual abuse. Although the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual offending is certainly not a direct one, for some boys such experiences may provide a model for paedophilic behaviour, and may serve to associate sexual arousal with adult/child interactions.

a relative lack of parental attention and sympathy. Fewer than a third of the offenders in the present study indicated that either their mother or their father was attentive to them, and most offenders saw their fathers as having been unsympathetic. Low levels of paternal involvement may leave a boy vulnerable to seeking attention and affection from other adult males, some of whom may exploit the situation for their own, sometimes sexual, purposes.

a relatively high incidence of marital discord. Almost half the offenders recalled their parents' relationship as having been characteristically argumentative and strained, and about one quarter saw their parents' relationship as having been characteristically violent. Such features are likely to provide negative models of intimacy and parenting.

These findings add to a growing body of evidence that many child sexual offenders experience family-of-origin problems that are quite similar to those known to be predictive of general delinquency and crime. Thus, we would argue that developmental interventions that are known to reduce the incidence of general crime are likely to be equally effective in reducing the incidence of sexual crime. Such interventions may include, at a school and community level:

- Home visitation of pregnant women and teenage parents

- Behavioural consultation for schools

- Pre-school intellectual enrichment programs

- School-wide monitoring and reinforcement of prosocial behaviour

At a family level, effective interventions may include:

- Parent training in child behavioural management

- Provision of financial and social resources to marginalised and disadvantaged families

At an individual level, effective interventions may include:

Support and treatment following the identification of childhood abuse, especially the sexual abuse of boys

Interpersonal skills training

Cognitive-behavioural interventions

## Implications for situational prevention

Situational prevention is a relatively recent criminological paradigm that shifts the attention from the supposed criminal disposition of offenders to the features of the potential crime scene that might encourage or permit criminal behaviour. Situational techniques involve the systematic manipulation of aspects of the immediate environments of potential offenders in an attempt to block or inhibit criminal responses. Situational prevention is based on a dynamic view of human action, one that stresses the fundamental variability of behaviour according to immediate circumstances. For example, a person who may be described by others as aggressive does not behave uniformly in an aggressive manner. Rather, aggression is displayed occasionally and only when certain favourable conditions are met.

The importance of situational factors in the commission of sexual offences has been recognised in a number of important conceptual models, most notably the relapse prevention treatment model (Pithers et al. 1983) and Marshall and Barbaree's (1990) and Finkelhor's (1984) explanatory models. In practice, however, many researchers and clinicians working in the sexual offending area have continued to focus attention on the personal, intrapsychic dimensions of the behaviour (e.g. stable deviant sexual interests) and to overlook the contributions of immediate circumstances.

While offenders were not asked directly in the current study about the role of situational influences on their offending behaviour, a number of findings strongly suggest there was a substantial situational component in many cases. These findings include:

the late onset of the behaviour. We found that the mean age of offenders at the time of their first sexual contact with a child was 32.4 years and the modal age bracket (accounting for 37.2 per cent of the sample) was 31 to 40 years. That many offenders were able to resist sexually abusing children for so long suggests the absence of strong sexually deviant motivations and perhaps the occurrence of some triggering incident.

the high incidence of previous crimes of a non-sexual nature. For many offenders sexual offending might be seen as part of a more general involvement in criminal activity. For these offenders, the problem seems less to be the existence of some special motivation to sexually abuse children but rather a more fundamental problem involving the failure to inhibit urges and impulses, especially within the interpersonal domain. That is, many offenders in the sample may be better portrayed as 'opportunity-takers' than sexual deviants.

the low incidence of chronic offending. Around half of the sample had committed only one offence. Again this suggests the absence in many offenders of strong deviant motivations.

the low incidence of 'stranger' abuse. The vast majority of offenders (93.5%) abused their own child or a child that they already knew. Locating and grooming a previously unknown child for the purpose of sexual contact requires a high level of commitment and effort. In contrast, most offenders had sexual contact with children with whom they had immediate or convenient access.

the low incidence of offender networking and collaboration. There was little evidence of the use of the Internet for sexual purposes or involvement in organised paedophile activities. Most offenders did not display the deep interest in paedophilia that one might expect from a dedicated offender.

the relatively low incidence of long term planning for sexual offending. While 44.9 per cent of offenders said that they were friends with the parents of the children they abused, only 28.8 per cent said that they formed a friendship with the child's parents in order to gain access to the child. Similarly 19.7 per cent said that they abused children in organisations to which they belonged but only 1.2 per cent said that they joined those organisations for the purpose of obtaining sexual contact with children. In other words, rather than creating opportunities many offenders appear to be capitalising on the opportunities with which they are presented.

Conceptually, situational influences can be divided into two basic categories (see Wortley 1997 1998). With respect to the present problem, some situational factors serve to sexually stimulate offenders and thus to precipitate sexual behaviour. Viewing pornography is an example of this. Other situational factors provide the necessary opportunities for sexual offending behaviour to occur. Being left alone with a child is an example of this. Situational prevention, then, can involve both reducing precipitating influences on offenders that might encourage them to offend, and blocking their opportunities to carry out those offences.

The most obvious target for reducing precipitating influences on potential offenders is pornography use. We found that 86.4 per cent of offenders in our sample admitted to having used pornography 11.2 per cent said they used pornography regularly, and 11.1 per cent said that they specifically used child pornography. While these levels of use are perhaps lower than might be expected (and lower than figures reported by Goldstein et al. 1974 and Marshall 1988) pornography use is a potentially important factor for a significant sub-group of child sexual offenders. In particular, we found that mixed-type offenders - a group that we consistently found to be the most sexually deviant in their orientations - recorded much higher levels of child pornography use than other offender subtypes. Of course, the extent to which pornography increases sexual offending is controversial. We note the study by Marshall (1988), however, that found that one-third of child molesters claimed to have used pornography immediately prior to offending and to have been incited to offend by viewing that pornography. Such research provides the rationale for restricting or censoring child pornography, particularly that portraying violence.

But child sexual offenders do not necessarily require explicit pornography in order to become sexually stimulated. We found that 14.8 per cent of mixed-type offenders collected seemingly innocuous pictures of children from magazines, clothing catalogues, and so on. Barbaree and Marshall (1989) similarly found that pictures of clothed children aroused some child sexual offenders. This suggests that for some offenders simply observing or being in the company of children might be problematic and trigger sexual fantasies. Such offenders need to avoid situations that might set in chain an offending cycle. Apart from legal restrictions that might be placed on these offenders to limit their contact with children (discussed below), relapse prevention therapy can help offenders self-manage immediate environments in order to minimise unwanted sexual triggers.

Reducing the opportunities for child sexual abuse involves increasing the effort (making it more difficult to perform), increasing the risks (making it more likely the behaviour will be detected and punished), reducing the rewards (making the outcomes less attractive), and increasing feelings of guilt or shame (making it more psychologically or socially distressing) for offenders (Clarke 1997). There are a number of avenues in which these principles might be applied. As noted in the previous paragraph, one strategy that is already widely used is to enact legislation that prevents known child sexual offenders taking jobs or joining organisations that bring them into contact with children. Certainly we would agree that, particularly in the case of serial and recidivist offenders, restricting contact with children in this way is a sensible precaution. However we would caution against the blanket application of policies that remove all contact between offenders and children. Given that many offenders commit only one offence there is a danger in overemphasising recidivism risks. Moreover, overzealous implementation of such policies may be incompatible with therapeutic efforts to restore low-risk offenders to productive members of the community.

Public education programs can be employed to alert parents and guardians to the need for effective supervision and protection of children in their care. Previous campaigns that have tended to highlight 'stranger danger' need to be expanded to include recognition of the danger that exists for many children at home and among friends. Teaching parents and guardians to identify danger signals is not unproblematic, however. As we have noted, many of the behaviours of child sexual offenders leading up to the abuse may be interpreted as part of a normal and even positive adult-child relationship. But perhaps suspicions might be aroused by an offender's unusual or seemingly overenthusiastic attempts to seek opportunities to be alone with a child. Certainly, one area that the data suggest needs to be specifically addressed in a public education campaign is the reporting of child sexual abuse. We found that one in five parents who were aware that their child had been abused did not report the abuse.

A public education program might also be directed at potential offenders aimed at challenging neutralising beliefs about child sexual abuse (eg. that it provides a sexual education for children) that offenders often hold. We found that a common tactic of offenders (particularly mixed-type offenders) was to spend time watching TV with their victim prior to the abuse. This would seem to provide ideal opportunity to reach potential offenders at the very time that offending was being contemplated.

Finally, education programs can be provided for potential victims. We are aware that there are already such programs operating in many schools to teach children about inappropriate touching, whether that touching comes from a stranger or someone that is known to the child. The results of this study can provide basic information for such programs. In particular, some of the most interesting findings from the point of view of situational prevention are those looking at the ways children attempted to prevent sexual contact. The most successful tactics involved being assertive and saying 'no'. Also relatively successful was showing distress, which seems to jog the conscience of the offender. In contrast, struggling and calling for help were not particularly effective.

Two criticisms are typically levelled against situational crime prevention techniques, and these are likely also to be raised in the specific case of child sexual abuse. First, it is often said that situational interventions will displace but will not prevent criminal behaviour. In other words, it is argued that if an offender is thwarted in one location he will simply move to a new location to offend. This criticism, of course, betrays a person-centred bias to understanding the dynamics of human action. To level such a charge is to argue that behaviour is only trivially affected by immediate circumstances. This view is contrary to most psychological theories and, as we have shown, there is ample evidence that situational influences play a significant role in child sexual abuse. Undoubtedly, the significance of that role varies from case to case. In some cases, it is entirely possible that had situational conditions favourable to child sexual abuse not been in place at the time, the offender may never have engaged in sexually abusive behaviour. In other cases, we do not doubt that the sexual abuse is carried out by determined, predatory offenders who will go to considerable effort and risk to offend. But even in these cases, we would argue, situational interventions may slow down the offending rate and produce a net reduction the incidence of child sexual abuse.

The second criticism of situational techniques is that they can produce socially undesirable consequences by engendering a siege mentality. We agree that there is a danger in this regard and that care needs to be taken to ensure that sensible protective behaviours do not turn to paranoia. It would be a pity — and ultimately counterproductive from the perspective of encouraging healthy adult-child relationships — if fathers felt they were unable to show affection to their children, if people were reluctant to babysit their friends' children, or if teachers felt that they could not comfort a distressed pupil for fear of raising suspicions that they were involved in sexually abusive behaviours.

## Implications for criminal justice intervention

While we would argue that primary (e.g. situational) and secondary (e.g. developmental) prevention of child sexual abuse should be given priority over tertiary prevention initiatives, there is no doubt that improvements are needed in responding to sexual abuse once it has already occurred. We consider the implications of the current findings for two domains of tertiary prevention here — the detection of alleged offenders, and the rehabilitation of convicted offenders.

## Detection

At the outset of this brief section of the report, we would like to acknowledge that we have no special expertise in investigative methods or police intelligence gathering protocols. We will therefore limit ourselves to making a few general observations about the detection of child sexual offending. We would welcome any feedback or inquiries from police in relation to the contents of this report.

First, our findings suggest that the detection of child sexual offending presents special difficulties. In particular, our findings in relation to offenders' modus operandi clearly show that offenders generally involve themselves at an emotional level with the children they sexually abuse. Consequently, we would expect that many abused children may be reluctant to disclose the abuse because of the emotional 'entanglement' with the offender. This is especially underscored by our findings that offenders generally attempt to convey to their child victims a sense that they (the child) will be at least partly responsible for the serious negative consequences that would follow disclosure (e.g. "I'll go to jail if you tell anyone"). Although this apparent shift in the tenor of communication from the offender to the victim may produce discrete and observable changes in the child's behaviour, the child may become progressively less able to disclose over the course of the abuse for fear of being held responsible for the offender's 'misfortune', or even for 'allowing' the abuse to have continued.

It is probably even more difficult to detect early warning signs of abuse. Of special concern are our earlier observations that the kinds of behaviours employed by offenders prior to having sexual contact with children closely resemble *positive* parenting behaviour — in short, offenders appear to employ just the kinds of behaviours that in other circumstances we would be encouraging in close adult/child relationships.

Our findings do show that, by and large, child sexual abuse occurs in homes and other places normally considered safe for children. This is probably obviously true of intra-familial abuse, but it also seems to be true for extra-familial abuse. This challenges the stereotyped view that the main problem lies with offenders trying to find children in schools and playgrounds, although there is some evidence that this does occur. Perhaps one of the main contributions of our study has been to show the *relative* significance of certain places and behaviours.

The offenders in the present study have provided considerable detail about the 'nuts and bolts' of their offending behaviour. For example, the majority of offenders take the child less than 60 metres, take less than 15 minutes to have sexual contact with them, and return the child within an hour. Clearly, single offences mainly occur within a very small window of space and time. Once again, though, there is considerable variation among offenders. Much more research would be needed to develop the technology to construct individual offender modus operandi 'profiles' that could be of practical use in the investigation of cases that might warrant such an approach.

Finally, the question must be raised whether the targeting of intra-familial or extra-familial offenders should receive priority. On one hand, extra-familial offenders are responsible for many more victims. On the other hand, intra-familial offenders may

cause much more overall harm, since they tend to offend repeatedly against one or two children who, because of context of the abuse, may be limited in their ability to secure much needed familial support. Mixed-type offenders seem to represent the worst of both worlds, so to speak, so giving this group the highest priority would not be without justification. There is, however, a problem with identifying mixed-type offenders. Although many mixed-type offenders may begin offending within a family context, it is likely that the majority of intra-familial offenders do not possess the commitment or persistence that is probably needed to establish a chronic course of offending. We cannot therefore assume that intra-familial offenders are 'mixed-type offenders in the making', although some undoubtedly are. We do not yet possess the knowledge and predictive technology to differentiate the one-off intra-familial offender from the less discriminate mixed-type offender.

## Offender rehabilitation

Although claims for the effectiveness of current psychological treatment of sexual offenders remain controversial (see e.g. Quinsey et al. 1993), there appears to be increasing evidence that comprehensive cognitive-behavioural treatment programs, especially those that include relapse prevention training, are producing small but statistically significant and reliable treatment effects (Hall 1995; Marshall & Pithers 1994; Marshall et al. 1991). Moreover, there is a general consensus among clinicians with respect to the kinds of problems that need to be assessed and targeted in these programs (Knopp et al. 1992). Typically, specialised treatment programs for sexual offenders aim to increase a) the offender's acceptance of responsibility for offending, b) his understanding of his offending in terms of its antecedents and consequences, c) his capacity for empathy and perspective-taking, d) his prosocial interpersonal skills, and e) his ability to identify future risk situations and to cope positively with these situations. Treatment will also typically aim to decrease a) his use of justifications and rationalisations, b) his deviant sexual arousal, and c) his opportunities to offend. In recent years, attention has also been given to the contextual features of treatment (Beech & Fordham 1997), most notably the process of engagement used by treatment providers (Marshall 1996).

One immediate difficulty in engaging sexual offenders in treatment is their reluctance to fully disclose the details of their offending behaviour. While this reluctance is perfectly understandable (since disclosure of undetected offences clearly risks further legal consequences), a clear and comprehensive picture of the problem at hand is fundamental to effective intervention. A distorted picture of the problem may therefore reduce or negate the impact of otherwise appropriate assessment and treatment. For example, a functional behavioural assessment is likely to be incomplete or inaccurate when incomplete or inaccurate information is made available by the offender. Although it would not be appropriate to use our findings to infer the characteristics or behaviour of an individual offender, our findings do provide an important benchmark with respect to the background, characteristics and offending behaviour of Australian child sexual offenders. For example, our findings in relation to where and how offenders engage children may be used to inform more effective relapse prevention strategies.

Our findings confirm the widely observed heterogeneity of child sexual offenders and offending. This presents special problems for offender treatment. Although specialised programs usually specify inclusion and exclusion criteria, many programs are prescriptive, and tend to aim for certain program outcomes rather than individually-tailored offender outcomes. Further flexibility may be needed within specialised sexual offender programs since, for example, effective intervention for a 'one-off' intra-familial offender is unlikely to be equally effective for a chronic mixed-type offender.

This brings us to a more complex and controversial question - whether specialised interventions are appropriate for all child sexual offenders. The assertion that sexual offenders are categorically different from non-sexual offenders (i.e. that they offend in different ways and for different reasons, and that different interventions are needed) has underpinned the development of specialised sexual offender treatment programs. Yet, in the main, this assertion is unsupported by our (and other) findings. Given that many child sexual offenders are in fact involved in a broad range of criminal activity, general offender programs may offer important alternatives. Interestingly, the content of general offender programs and specialised sexual offender programs have converged in recent years: both now tend to target personal accountability; offence-related beliefs, attitudes and thinking; consequences of offending and victim empathy; emotional regulation; and relapse prevention. Diverting some child sexual offenders to general offender programs may simultaneously reduce the load on specialised programs, and more effectively target more general offence-related factors such as antisocial beliefs and attitudes, social problem-solving, empathy and so on, which may reduce both their sexual offending behaviour *and* their general criminal behaviour. This may allow the specialised programs to concentrate on the more persistent sexual offenders, whose patterns of sexual offending behaviour are more firmly established and whose sexual interests in children may require special modification.

Clinical experience in the field suggests that professionals involved in the assessment and treatment of child sexual offenders tend to emphasise individual dispositional factors in their clinical formulations and interventions. Our findings suggest that situational factors may be equally important, and especially relevant to understanding how and where child sexual offending is likely to occur. Thus, we would argue that clinical efforts should give more attention to the immediate physical and interpersonal environment within which child sexual abuse is perpetrated. We would further argue that this is not inconsistent with the ideological view that child sexual (and of course other) offenders should be held personally accountable for their actions. Considerable confusion seems to exist between providing explanations for child sexual offending on the one hand, and allocating blame or responsibility on the other. That offences may be more likely to be perpetrated against children who are seeking some physical or emotional connection to the offender, for example, does not imply that the child should shoulder some of the burden of responsibility for the offending behaviour.



## Concluding remarks

In closing, we would like to draw attention to the main strengths and limitations of the present study. The main strengths, as we see them, lie in our attempts to circumvent a number of important methodological problems typically found in this field of inquiry. Most notably, we attempted to a) avoid the use of a treatment-only sample, b) target a large sample, c) provide complete confidentiality for offender self-reports, d) examine comparisons between those who agreed to provide us with information and those who did not, and e) assess the reliability of the self-report data.

The main limitations are also methodological. First, although we purposely targeted a non-treatment population, it is unclear the extent to which the findings can be generalised beyond convicted offenders. 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 our data are representative of child sexual offending in general. Second, despite our attempts to gather data from offenders serving community orders, almost all of 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. We are currently exploring options to continue data collection specifically targeting offenders who have not been to prison. Third, despite offering anonymity and confidentiality, there are some inherent limitations associated with relying on offender self-reports. Although our reliability checks suggested that offenders were not purposely providing false information, the reader is cautioned against assuming the offender self-reports to be wholly accurate. Nevertheless, given that it is of course not possible to directly observe offending, confidential self-report data may be the best available method of obtaining much needed information about this otherwise very secretive phenomenon. Finally, the present document may best be seen as a report of the preliminary findings from the study. We expect to be able to provide further, more detailed analyses arising from this substantial and important database.

The present report, we believe, represents a significant addition to the empirical knowledge base on child sexual offenders and child sexual offending. Child sexual abuse is undeniably an issue of considerable public concern, and we hope to have made a substantive contribution to understanding and responding effectively to this important social problem. In particular, we hope that we have succeeded in drawing attention to the potential for reducing the incidence of child sexual abuse through primary and secondary, as well as tertiary, prevention.

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# Appendix 1

## Information sheet and consent form



GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY



School of Criminology & Criminal Justice

*THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY*

All your answers will remain **CONFIDENTIAL**

In completing the questionnaire please ensure to answer ALL of the questions. It is important to note that questions are on **BOTH SIDES** of each page.

If you are unsure of the meaning of any of the questions or have any queries regarding the questionnaire please ask the researcher (the person who gave you the questionnaire) for assistance.



School of Criminology & Criminal Justice  
Dr. Stephen Smallbone  
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You are being approached to take part in a research study. The study is being conducted by a group of researchers from the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University in Brisbane.

The aim of the research is to obtain information about sexual offending and men who are convicted of having committed sexual offences. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire. This is likely to take about *V/i* hours of your time.

The questionnaire asks about your background, any sexual offences you may have committed, contact with other people who may have committed sexual offences, and the use of certain types of pornography. This is an **INDEPENDENT STUDY**. None of the information you provide will be used by anyone outside the research team - that is, **ALL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE IS COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL and will never be used to identify anyone.**

There is a lot we don't know about sexual offending. By taking part in the study and providing accurate information, you will be making a very important contribution.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary, there will be no penalty if you choose not to (in fact, no-one except the independent research team will know). Even if you decide to participate, you can withdraw at any time, again without penalty.

If you decide to participate, you will be given a questionnaire to fill out. You will have the option of doing this anonymously (this means no record of your name will be made, and no one will be able to tell who filled the questionnaire out), and we expect that most people will choose to do it this way. Alternatively, you may indicate by circling 'YES' and placing your signature at the end of this form that you provide permission for us to contact you at a later date. If you do this, we may contact you again for an interview. If this happens at all, it will happen within 3 months of filling out the questionnaire. After this time we will destroy any record of your name, and you will never be contacted personally by us again.

The questions are obviously very personal, and it is possible that answering some of them could upset you. If this happens, the researcher who gives you the questionnaire will be available for you to talk to.

Because we won't know who filled out any of the questionnaires, we will not be able to give you feedback about the information you provide. However, if you want to find out

about the results of the study, please feel free to contact the Principal Researcher at the number given below.

If you have any queries about this study, please feel free to contact the Principal Researcher, Stephen Smallbone, at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University on 3875 6808 or write to:

Dr. Stephen Smallbone  
School of Criminology and Criminal Justice  
Mt. Gravatt Campus  
Griffith University  
Qld. 4111

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information.**

- 1) I have read the above information and/or had the information read to me.
- 2) I understand the above information.
- 3) I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about this information.
- 4) I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that the information I provide will not be used to identify me.
- 5) I understand that I may decline to participate without penalty, and that even if I agree now to participate, I can withdraw at any time.

Signed ..... / .....  
(Principal Researcher) (date)

..... / .....  
(Participant) (date)

..... / .....  
(Witness) (date)

I hereby give permission for the researchers of this study to re-contact me at a later time for an interview (please circle one response):

**YES** (I give permission to be contacted for an interview)

**NO** (I do not wish to be contacted for an interview)

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / 1999

## Appendix 2

### Demographic and offence history data recording sheet



1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFO.

Code	Date of Birth (month / year)	Level of Education Attained	ATSI	Aust	Other

Correctional status (Tick Box)		Date sentenced (month / year)	Total Sentence			Prison / Office
Community	Prison		Years	Months	Days	

2. PROJECT STATUS

Participation (Y / N)	Subject No.	Agreed to Interview (Y / N)	Interviewed (Y / N)	Data collected by	Interviewed by

3. CURRENT OFFENDING

A) Sexual offence/s for which inmate is **currently** serving a sentence

No. x Offence type/s (eg. 3 x Indecent Dealings)


B) Non-sexual offence/s for which inmate is **currently** serving a sentence (insert number of convictions)

01	02	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

**4. PREVIOUS OFFENDING**

A) History of previous sexual offending (record details for each particular offence)

Date (month/year )	Number (convictions )	Offence type/s

B) Non-sexual offence/s for which inmate has **previously** been convicted (insert total number of convictions in first row; insert year of first conviction in second row)

01	02	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

C) General comments (e.g. participant's reaction to the study; literacy / comprehension problems; other special needs / circumstances)

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# Appendix 3

## Questionnaire