

SEXUAL ABUSE STUDY

AN EXAMINATION OF THE HISTORIES OF SEXUAL ABUSE AMONG GIRLS  
CURRENTLY IN THE CARE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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The views expressed in this report remain those of the author and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Department of Social Welfare.

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## ABSTRACT

The study aimed to ascertain the extent and nature of histories of sexual abuse among girls in the care of the Department of Social Welfare. One hundred and thirty-six 15 and 16-year-old girls resident in the five main urban centres were interviewed in 1985. Of those who were interviewed, over two-thirds had experienced sexual abuse and nearly half these girls reported more than one unrelated experience of abuse. Only about a third of the abuse reported in the interviews was previously known to the department although most of the girls had told someone, most often a mother-figure about the abuse. The girls most often received a supportive response from those they told of the abuse. Around half the abuse was perpetrated by family-members or relatives, just over a third by others known to the girls, particularly male peers, and just under a tenth of the abusers were strangers. Nearly all (96%) the abusers were male. The average age of the girls when they were first abused was ten and the average age of the abusers was 28, with a quarter aged 17 or younger. The abuse was equally likely to occur before or after the girls came into care. There were no ethnic differences in the incidence of abuse, but Maori girls were more likely to show anger in response to the abuse and Pakeha girls were more likely to report fear or confusion. Sexual abuse was more common for girls whose main father-figure was a stepfather or who lived in violent households. Girls who had been abused were more likely to have been involved in misbehaviour and offending and to be voluntarily sexually active with peers.

<u>CONTENTS</u>	<u>Page</u>
<u>CHAPTER 1. Background to the study, aims and objectives</u>	1
1.1 Background and rationale for the present study	1
1.2 Objectives of the research	2
1.3 Limitations of the research	3
1.4 Intended uses for the research	3
 <u>CHAPTER 2. Review of previous research</u>	 5
2.1 The prevalence of sexual abuse	5
American non-clinical studies	5
European studies	6
Australian and Canadian Studies	7
Changes in the prevalence over time	7
Prevalence of sexual abuse among those involved with drugs and prostitution	8
Prevalence of sexual abuse among residents in juvenile institutions	8
 2.2 The nature of sexual abuse	 9
Sex of the child	9
Ethnic group	9
Socio-economic status	9
Rural and urban differences	10
Family characteristics	10
Age of the child	10
Sex of the abuser	10
Age of the abuser	10
Relationship of the abuser to the abused	11
The duration of the abuse	12
Types of abuse	12
 2.3 Response to the abuse	 13
 2.4 Initial after-effects resulting from sexual abuse	 13
 2.5 Long-term effects of sexual abuse	 14
 2.6 Implications for social work services	 17



	<u>Page</u>
<u>CHAPTER 3. Methodology</u>	18
3.1 The sample	18
3.2 Comment on the sample	19
Why the study was restricted to girls	19
Why the study was restricted to girls in the care at the Department of Social Welfare	20
Why girls aged 15 were chosen as the study population	20
Why the study was limited to the main urban centres	21
Why a sample size of about 200 was chosen	21
3.3 Sources of the data	22
Recording information from personal files	22
Questionnaire survey of social workers	22
Personal interviews with the girls	22
3.4 The interview procedures	22
The interviewers	22
Voluntary participation	23
Confidentiality	23
Whether parents should be informed	24
Interview venue	24
Why interviews were chosen rather than anonymous questionnaires	25
Approach to the subject	25
The interview schedule	26
Willingness to talk about sexual abuse	27
Distress for the girls	28
What the study provided the girls with in return for participation	29
3.5 The pilot study	30
3.6 Summary	31
<u>CHAPTER 4. Characteristics of the girls involved in the study</u>	33
4.1 Districts	33
4.2 Rural/Urban	33
4.3 Ethnic group	33

	<u>Page</u>
<u>CHAPTER 4. (Continued)</u>	
4.4 Age	33
4.5 Socio-economic status	34
4.6 Size of family	34
4.7 Birth order	34
4.8 Mother and father-figures	34
4.9 Ethnicity of mother and father-figures	35
4.10 Current living situation	35
4.11 Guardianship	37
4.12 Total number of living situations	37
4.13 Total number of families	37
4.14 Total number of institutional placements	39
Department of Social Welfare national institutions	39
Department of Social Welfare girls' homes	39
4.15 Breakdowns of living situations or placements	39
4.16 Education and employment status	39
4.17 Rate of pregnancy	40
4.18 Interviewed sample	40
4.19 Summary	41
<u>CHAPTER 5. The extent and nature of sexual abuse</u>	43
5.1 The kind of experiences considered to be sexual abuse	43
5.2 The incidence of sexual abuse	46
5.3 The characteristics of the abusive situation	47
5.4 The abuser	48
5.5 Sexual acts involved	52

	Pa
<u>CHAPTER 5. (Continued)</u>	
5.6 Involvement of alcohol and other drugs	53
5.7 The girls' feelings about the abuse	54
5.8 Summary	57
<u>CHAPTER 6. How the abuse came to other people's attention</u>	59
6.1 Who was told about the abuse	59
6.2 Family members	59
Reactions of family members	61
How the girls felt about the reactions	62
Reasons for not telling family members	63
6.3 Social workers	63
Reactions of social workers	65
Reasons for not telling social workers	66
6.4 Other people	67
6.5 Abuse that was reported to other people and that which was not	68
6.6 Summary	69
<u>CHAPTER 7. A comparison of the experiences of sexual abuse described in the interview and those recorded on file and on the social worker questionnaire</u>	71
7.1 Summary	74
<u>CHAPTER 8. Factors associated with sexual abuse</u>	75
8.1 Characteristics of the girls	75
8.2 Characteristics of the girls' families	75
8.3 Behaviour shown by girls who have been abused	77
8.4 Summary	80

	<u>Page</u>
<u>CHAPTER 9. Comparison of the experience of Maori and Pakeha girls</u>	84
9.1 Incidence of abuse	84
9.2 Characteristics of the abuse and other sexual experiences	85
Age of the girl	85
Characteristics of the abuse	86
Other sexual experiences	86
9.3 The girl's response to the sexual abuse	86
9.4 Other people's reactions to the abuse	87
The family's reaction	87
The social worker's reaction	88
9.5 Long-term effects	89
9.6 Summary	89
<u>CHAPTER 10. Assistance provided to the girl, assistance thought suitable by the girl and the outcome for the abuser</u>	91
10.1 Outcome for the girl	91
10.2 Outcome for the abuser	94
10.3 The girls' views on need for support services	96
10.4 Need for counselling or follow-up after the interview	101
10.5 Summary	102
<u>CHAPTER 11. Particular types of abuse</u>	104
11.1 Abuse by father-figures	104
Characteristics of the abuse	104
Who the girl told	107
Long-term effects	109
Family circumstances	111
Summary of abuse by father-figures	113
11.2 Abuse by brothers	113
Who the girl told	115
Summary of abuse by brothers	117
11.3 Abuse by groups	117
Summary of abuse by groups	119

	<u>Page</u>
<u>CHAPTER 11. (Continued)</u>	
11.4 Abuse by peers	119
Who the girl told	121
Long-term effects	123
Summary of abuse by peers	123
11.5 Abuse by members of foster families	124
Who the girl told	124
Summary of abuse by members of foster families	125
11.6 Summary	125
 <u>CHAPTER 12. Other sexual experiences</u>	 128
12.1 Sexual harassment	128
Who the girl told	130
Long-term effects	131
12.2 Voluntary sexual experiences with relatives	132
12.3 Voluntary sexual experiences when the girls were 12 or younger	133
12.4 Voluntary sexual experiences with partners more than five years older than the girl	134
12.5 Experiences later regretted	136
12.6 Prostitution and related activities	136
12.7 Voluntary sexual experiences with peers	137
12.8 Other sexual activities	137
12.9 Summary	138
 <u>CHAPTER 13. Conclusion and recommendations</u>	 142
<u>Conclusions</u>	142
13.1 The incidence of sexual abuse	142
13.2 The extent to which the abuse was already known to the department	142
13.3 The nature of the sexual abuse	143
13.4 Social work reponses to the abuse	145

	<u>Page</u>
<u>CHAPTER 13.</u> (Continued)	
13.5 The response of the girl's family to the abuse	146
13.6 Effects of the abuse	146
13.7 Factors associated with sexual abuse	147
<u>Implications and recommendations</u>	148
13.8 Implications and guidelines concerning the girl and her whanau/family	148
13.9 Implications and recommendations for practice	148
13.10 Implications and recommendations for residential services	152
13.11 Implications for staff training	153
13.12 Implications for foster care	154
13.13 Implications for community resources	155
13.14 Cultural issues	155
13.15 Education and prevention	156
13.16 Policy implications for the Department of Social Welfare and other departments	157
13.17 Implications for future research	157
 <u>References</u>	 159
 <u>Appendices</u>	 163
Appendix 1. - Copy of the questionnaires	163
- The file form	163
- The social worker questionnaire	168
- The interview schedule	175
Appendix 2. - Time-table for the sexual abuse research	193

<u>TABLES</u>		Page
2.1	Relationship between the abuser and the abused	11
3.1	Department of Social Welfare districts included in the study in 1985	18
5.1	Types of sexual experiences reported in the interviews	45
5.2	Abuser's relationship to the girl	50
5.3	Sexual acts involved	53
5.4	Alcohol and drug involvement in the abuse	54
5.5	Specific feelings expressed about the abuse	55
5.6	Long-term effects of the abuse	56
6.1	Who in the family was told of the abuse	59
6.2	Reasons for not telling anyone in the family	64
6.3	Reasons for not telling a social worker	64
7.1	Abuser's relationship to the girl by source of data	72
9.1	Age at the first instance of sexual abuse for Maori & Pakeha girls	85
10.1	Source of counselling for abuse recorded on the files	91
10.2	Source of counselling for abuse recorded in the social worker questionnaires	92
10.3	Action taken against the abuser for abuse recorded on file	94
10.4	Action taken against the abuser for abuse recorded in the social worker questionnaire	94
10.5	Desired services mentioned by girls who had experienced sexual abuse	97

	<u>Page</u>
11.1 Long-term effects of sexual abuse by father-figures as reported by the girls	110
11.2 Abusers no more than five years older than the girls	120
11.3 Long-term effects of abuse by peers	123



**FIGURES**

	Pa	
4.1	Type of parent-figure	36
4.2	Ethnicity of parent-figure	36
4.3	Age of girls at guardianship	38
4.4	Total number of living situations	38
4.5	Education and employment status	40
5.1	Duration of abusive experience	49
5.2	Age of girl at first experience of abuse	49
5.3	The abuser's relationship to the girl	51
5.4	Age of the abuser	51
6.1	Who the girl told about the abuse	60
6.2	Reactions of the family and the social workers	60
7.1	The abuser's relationship to the girl in experiences reported on the file, on the social worker questionnaire and in the interview	71
8.1	Incidence of abuse among girls interviewed with different father-figures	76
8.2	Incidence of abuse among girls interviewed who were reported by social workers to show behavioural difficulties	79
8.3	Incidence of abuse among girls interviewed who reported involvement in offending and misbehaviour	79
9.1	Age at the first instance of abuse for Maori and Paheka girls	85
10.1	Source of counselling for abuse recorded on the files	93
10.2	Action taken against the abuser for abuse recorded on the files	93

		page
11.1	Age of girl at time of abuse by father-figures compared to abuse by others	105
11.2	Duration of abuse by father-figure compared to abuse by others	105
11.3	Family's reaction to the girl: abuse by father-figures compared to abuse by others	108
11.4	Family's reaction to the abuser: abuse by father-figures compared to abuse by others	108
11.5	Abuse reported on file: abuse by father-figures compared to abuse by others	114
11.6	Abuse reported on file: abuse by brothers compared to abuse by others	114
11.7	Abuse reported on file: abuse by peers compared to abuse by others	122

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

#### 1.1 Background and rationale for the present study

In recent years, particularly since 1978, there has been an increasing interest in the problem of sexual abuse of children. A large number of articles have appeared in newspapers and popular magazines concerning sexual abuse, and documentaries and dramas on the subject have been shown on television. In New Zealand there has been a growth in community-based services providing help for those who have experienced sexual abuse, such as Rape Crisis centres, the HELP foundation, Te Kākano o te Whanau; and the statutory agencies have become more aware of the need for their staff to respond appropriately when presented with cases of sexual abuse.

The Department of Social Welfare is the statutory body in New Zealand with the greatest responsibility for the well-being of children. The Children and Young Persons Act which the department administers requires action to be taken to protect children from abuse and to respond when child abuse is brought to the attention of the department. In 1986 the Department of Social Welfare, in conjunction with the National Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Child Abuse, produced guidelines for the investigation and management of child sexual abuse.

For some time the Department of Social Welfare has been concerned that a large number of the children under guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare, and hence in the care of the department, might have experienced sexual abuse. A number of social welfare staff have suggested that sexual abuse could have been a major contributor to the later problems that many of these young people were showing. In January 1984 the principal of Allendale Girls Home<sup>21</sup> in Auckland reported that four out of five girls\* in Allendale had a history of sexual abuse. Although the staff of other girls homes<sup>31</sup> did not substantiate these figures, there has been increasing concern among departmental staff about sexual abuse. Unfortunately little was known about how common sexual abuse is among children in social welfare care or even among the New Zealand population as a whole.

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*\*The word 'girl' has been used throughout this report to describe the young women aged 15 who were interviewed. After much thought and discussion it was agreed that although we thought of the 15-year-olds as young women we were often referring to events that occurred at an earlier time in their lives. 'Young woman' was not an appropriate term to use when describing events that occurred to the girls when they were aged four or five years old, and confusion was created when 'young women' and 'girls' were used interchangeably. It was also apparent that a number of the young women thought of themselves as girls. Consequently the word 'girl' will be used throughout the report to denote young women or girls.*

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Nearly all the research undertaken to date has originated overseas, and although the New Zealand study by Miriam Saphira<sup>38</sup> (which involved a mainly white middle class sample of women who had experienced abuse) produced similar findings, there is a lack of New Zealand research, particularly of studies including children from non-European cultures who have experienced sexual abuse. A significant minority of children in the care of the Department of Social Welfare come into care with sexual abuse among the reasons for the care order (11% of the girls studied in the Intensive Foster Care Scheme research), and it is likely there are many more children in care exhibiting problems arising out of earlier sexual abuse which is not known to social workers.

It is important that social workers be better able to identify children who have been sexually abused if they are to assist such children to overcome the problems resulting from the abuse. Thus social workers need to be better informed about the incidence and nature of sexual abuse histories among girls in the care of the department.

These concerns resulted in two members of the department's staff, a social worker and a psychologist suggesting that a study should be done to ascertain the incidence and nature of sexual abuse among girls in the department's care. Another social worker had previously made a similar suggestion and it was clear to the department that staff were concerned about their lack of knowledge about the issue when they were asked to respond to sexual abuse. With this in mind the Department of Social Welfare decided to undertake the present research to answer the questions posed by staff.

### 1.2 Objectives of the research

- 1 For children in the care of the Department of Social Welfare:
  - (a) To estimate the incidence of histories of sexual abuse;
  - (b) To ascertain the proportion of cases where the abuse was known to the child's social worker;
  - (c) To ascertain the proportion of cases where the abuse was documented on file;
  - (d) To ascertain the proportion of cases where the abuse was neither recorded on file nor known to the social worker.
- 2 For a sample of cases of sexually abused girls in the care of the department:
  - (a) To document the nature and extent of the abuse;

- (b) To gain an understanding of how sexual abuse comes to official attention, and the nature of cases which do not come to attention;
  - (c) To describe the response of social work services when cases of sexual abuse become known, including the nature of the support and/or treatment (if any) provided to the girl who has been abused, and the nature of the response to the abuser and other members of the family;
  - (d) To describe the response of the girl's family when the abuse becomes known;
  - (e) To gain an understanding of the perceptions of the girls who have been abused about the effects of the abuse and, where the abuse became known, their feelings about the help and support received from the social work services of the department and other agencies involved.
- 3 To examine the factors associated with sexual abuse among girls taken into Department of Social Welfare care, with a view to identifying possible indicators of abuse.

### 1.3 Limitations of the research

- 1 This study attempts only to answer questions concerning the incidence and nature of sexual abuse among girls in the care of the Department of Social Welfare. It does not provide any information about sexual abuse among other groups of children or among New Zealand children generally.
- 2 The findings are limited by what those interviewed are prepared to disclose to the interviewer. Thus it is likely that the number of cases of identified abuse underestimates the actual number of cases that have occurred among the sample.

### 1.4 Intended uses for the research

The results from the study will be used:

- 1 To provide Department of Social Welfare social work staff with information on the incidence and nature of sexual abuse among children in the care of the department, which will better enable them to identify such children and develop improved intervention procedures;
- 2 To alert management to the size and nature of this problem, so that it is better able to plan appropriate remedial procedures;

- 3 To provide information on sexual abuse (in a New Zealand context) to workers in other social services which provide assistance to children who have been abused (e.g. psychiatric services, Rape Crisis, HELP, Women's Refuge, Te Kakano o te Whanau, Pacific Island Women's Project, Justice Department etc.);
- 4 To make specific recommendations to the Department of Social Welfare to facilitate the development of an appropriate social work response to the sexual abuse of children, including effective methods of prevention and ways of assisting those who have been abused to overcome the effects of their experiences.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

#### 2.1 The prevalence of sexual abuse

Although a large amount of research has been undertaken in the last ten years on sexual abuse, the majority of studies have involved clinical populations and have usually been based on a sample of those presenting themselves at a treatment facility because of problems associated with a history of sexual abuse<sup>11,26</sup>. Many of the studies have been limited by small sample sizes and have only represented particular subgroups of the population. Little work has been done based on general population samples, from which reliable inferences can be made about the incidence of sexual abuse in the community.

The only substantial local study was that undertaken by Miriam Saphira<sup>22,38</sup> in 1979. The study provided useful information on the nature of sexual abuse but it was not possible to estimate in a reliable way the incidence of abuse among the general population from her study because her sample was not a representative one but a self-selected group who responded to a survey in a popular women's magazine.

#### American non-clinical studies

The first study to attempt to document the incidence of sexual abuse among the population as a whole was that by Kinsey<sup>28</sup> who, in 1953, published the finding that 24% of his sample of 4,441 adult American women had experienced an unwanted sexual experience with a male before they were 13. In 1956 another American study was published by Landis<sup>29</sup> involving 1,800 college students. He found that 30% of the men and 35% of the women reported having experienced some unacceptable sexual approaches. Most of the women had had these experiences when they were aged 15 or younger with men who were adults. Both these studies included experiences involving no physical contact such as where someone exposed themselves to the child, as well as abuse involving physical contact. On the other hand, experiences involving abuse by other children and adolescents were excluded. Encounters with exhibitionists accounted for about half the experiences in both studies.

The first large scale study in response to the recent upsurge in interest in childhood sexual abuse, and one of the most widely quoted, is the Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> study of 796 students in New England colleges in 1979. This study defined 'sexual victimisation' as a sexual experience between a child aged 12 or younger and a partner at least five years older, or between a child aged between 13 and 16 and a partner at least ten years older. Using this definition, which included experiences involving exhibitionists (which made up 20% of the girls' experiences with adults in this study), he found 19% of the women and 9% of the men had experienced sexual victimisation.



Finkelhor<sup>15</sup> conducted another survey in 1982 on a sample of 521 adults who were parents of children aged between six and 14. In this case he asked about experiences they had had prior to age 16 with adults five years older which they considered to have been abusive, and found that 15% of the women and 5% of the men reported such experiences. Another study by Kercher (quoted by Finkelhor<sup>15</sup>) in 1980 asked 1,054 people, randomly selected from those who held Texas drivers licences, if they had ever been the victim of sexual abuse as a child, and found 3% of males and 12% of females answered that they had. Another American study published by Ageton<sup>1</sup> in 1983 asked 1,500 adolescents aged between 11 and 17 about sexual assault and found between 5% and 7% of the females had experienced sexual assault in the three years of the study, 1978, 1979 and 1980.

Probably the most extensive attempt to find out the incidence and prevalence of childhood sexual abuse was another American study undertaken in 1978 by Diana Russell<sup>35,36,37</sup> in San Francisco. Adult women from households sampled at random were interviewed by specially trained market research interviewers.

They were asked a number of questions to elicit information on whether they had experienced sexual abuse as a child. Russell found that, of the 933 women questioned 38% had had an abusive sexual contact before they were 18 years old, and if non-contact experiences such as exhibitionism were included, 54% of the women reported such experiences before they were 18. She also noted<sup>36</sup> that one in six women who were brought up with a stepfather as their principal father-figure were sexually abused by him compared to only one in fifty of those raised by a natural father. The incidence of childhood sexual abuse found in the Russell study is higher than that in the other American studies. Finkelhor<sup>15</sup>, in a discussion of a number of studies, suggested this was because Russell asked 13 separate questions designed to trigger memories of sexual abuse. Most other studies asked a smaller number of questions.

#### European studies

Two British studies on the incidence of sexual abuse were published in 1985. One of these, by Nash and West<sup>32</sup>, involved 223 adult women selected at random from a general practitioner's patient list, and 92 female graduate students and medical students. Of the total of 315, 46% were described as 'abused', using a definition that included verbal suggestions, obscene phone calls, and exhibitionism. This definition only included sexual contact between adults and children and hence excluded abuse by peers. The other British study, published by Baker and Duncan<sup>3</sup>, asked one question on sexual abuse in a larger attitude survey, conducted by a market research company on a nationally representative sample of 2,019 adults. They found 12% of the women and 8% of the men reported sexual abuse before they were 16 years old.

According to their definition a child was considered to be sexually abused 'if someone who is sexually mature involves the child in any activity which the other person expects to lead to sexual arousal'. This included touching, exposure of sexual organs, showing pornographic material or talking about sexual things in an erotic way.

A Finnish study has just been completed by Peltoniemi and Korpilahti<sup>33</sup> which found quite a low incidence of child sexual abuse: 4% of the Finnish population. However, this was measured by asking a sample of adults if they knew of any incidents of sexual abuse of children among their friends or in their neighbourhood. As sexual abuse tends not to be disclosed even to those close to the person, this figure is likely to underestimate the true rate greatly.

#### Australian and Canadian studies

Very recently a replication of the Finkelhor college student study has been undertaken in Victoria, Australia by Goldman and Goldman<sup>18</sup>. Nine hundred and ninety one students in the social sciences, general studies, business studies and apprenticeship courses at tertiary educational facilities were surveyed. They found 28% of the females and 9% of the males reported having been sexually 'exploited' by a person more than five years older. Another recent study by Bagley and Ramsey<sup>2</sup> in Canada found that 22% of a random sample of 377 adult women interviewed for a community mental health survey reported serious sexual abuse before they were 16. This solely concerned genital contact with someone at least three years older than the child or where force was used.

In as much as one can generalise from these disparate results it would seem that in the studies of non-clinical samples in a number of countries similar to New Zealand, around a quarter of women and one man in eleven have experienced some form of sexual abuse as children. All these estimates are based on adult populations and consequently refer to abuse which in some cases happened many decades earlier.

#### Changes in the prevalence over time

The Russell<sup>37</sup> study is the only incidence study that has attempted to look at whether the incidence of childhood sexual abuse has changed over time.

She divided her sample into age cohorts and concluded that incestuous abuse increased over the years 1916 to 1961, while extra-familial child sexual abuse fluctuated without significantly increasing or decreasing during this period.

Another study, by Gordon and O'Keefe<sup>19</sup>, looked at the historical perspective, but their sample was restricted to case file data on families seen by three non-sectarian private

Boston social work agencies, between 1880 and 1960. All the families chosen had a documented history of family violence. They identified the presence of incest, which they defined as sexual contact between a child and someone occupying a father role, in 10% of all the cases they looked at. No change was found in the rate of incest over the 80 year time period.

Prevalence of sexual abuse among those involved with drugs and prostitution

Studies of people in contact with specialist rehabilitation and treatment services often show a much higher incidence of sexual abuse. Benward and Densen-Gerber<sup>5</sup> found that of the 118 women drug addicts who had been seen at a treatment facility, 44% had experienced incest, which they defined as sexual experiences with relatives or those in quasi-family roles. Abusive experiences with peers and strangers were not included in this study. A New Zealand report by Fergusson<sup>13</sup> based on 150 women who had passed through a similar Auckland drug treatment facility found 54% had been sexually abused as children.

Another study undertaken by James and Meyerding<sup>23</sup> based on interviews with 228 prostitutes in Seattle between 1970 and 1975, reported that 65% of adolescent prostitutes had been victims of coerced sexual activities. They found that prostitutes were more likely than other women to have experienced sexual advances from elders when they were children, and to be more victimised by incest. Silbert and Pines<sup>40</sup>, in a later study where 200 prostitutes aged from 10 to 46 were interviewed, found that 60% had experienced sexual abuse as a child and had been sexually exploited by an average of two people each. Two-thirds of these women were sexually abused by father-figures.

Prevalence of sexual abuse among residents in juvenile institutions

Bartollas and Sieverdes<sup>4</sup> considered 561 children aged between seven and 17 resident in six juvenile correctional training schools in the south-east United States and identified 10% of both the boys and girls as sexual victims. Another American study by Brooks<sup>6</sup> looked at 29 girls aged between 13 and 18 in a residential placement for disturbed boys and girls. She found that 62% of these girls reported sexual abuse, which was defined as a contact sexual experience involving family members, or non-family sexual contact experiences where the child was under 13 and the other person was at least 5 years older, or where the child was aged between 13 and 18 and the other person was ten years older. All rape experiences were also included regardless of age. The only comparable figures available in New Zealand are the report<sup>21</sup> that 80% of the girls in Allendale Girls Home had been sexually abused, but this was based on a subjective estimate by the principal and not based on a survey of any kind.

In a sample of 331 children aged between seven and 14 in the care of the Department of Social Welfare (from unpublished data collected for research on the Intensive Foster Care Scheme), there were 19 cases among the girls (11%) where there was documentation on the file indicating that sexual abuse was one of the reasons why the girl had come into the department's care. There were no documented cases of sexual abuse among the boys.

## 2.2 The nature of sexual abuse

There is now a large amount of information available about the nature of sexual abuse. This is contained both in the incidence studies discussed in the preceding section and in studies of people who were identified as having experienced sexual abuse, either because they were seen by a treatment facility or because they responded to a phone-in or magazine survey. The detail from the incidence surveys is probably more useful, as it includes all experiences of abuse and not just those already reported to someone else. The information from the other studies is, however, useful to supplement this, particularly when large samples are involved.

Because very few studies have involved samples which are in any way representative of the population as a whole, it is hard to say much about whether children from any particular types of families are more at risk than others.

### Sex of child

All studies which looked at the abuse of both girls and boys<sup>3,14,18,19,33</sup>, except Bartollas and Sieverdes<sup>4</sup> where adults assessed whether the children had experienced sexual abuse, found girls were more likely to be sexually abused than boys.

### Ethnic group

Very few of the studies reported showed any differences between ethnic groups in the rate of sexual abuse, although very few reported any findings on ethnicity at all.

Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> found Irish-American boys were more at risk and Benward and Densen-Gerber<sup>5</sup> found higher rates of incest among Hispanics than other groups.

### Socio-economic status

Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> and Benward and Densen-Gerber<sup>5</sup> reported finding that sexual abuse was more common among children from low income families. However, Baker and Duncan<sup>3</sup> and Goldman and Goldman<sup>18</sup> found no social class differences in the incidence of sexual abuse in their studies.

### Rural urban differences

Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> found rural girls to be more at risk than those in towns or cities, but neither Benward and Densen-Gerber<sup>5</sup> nor Baker and Duncan<sup>3</sup> found this.

### Family characteristics

Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> also found sexual abuse more common where the mother was absent, where a stepfather was present and for children whose parents were experiencing marital conflict and family disruption. Russell<sup>36</sup> also found the presence of stepfathers to be an indicator of greater risk of sexual abuse. These factors seemed also to increase the risk of sexual abuse by people other than family members. Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> found no relationship with overcrowding, although De Francis<sup>10</sup> found incestuous families to be larger than non-incestuous families.

### Age of the child

The studies reviewed have suggested that sexual abuse can happen at any age from less than a year old onwards, with most studies finding the average age at the onset of abuse to be ten or 11 for girls. The studies that included boys found them to be on average about a year older when they were first abused. However, Peltoniemi and Korpilahti's<sup>33</sup> Finnish study found the average age at the onset of abuse to be eight, and Walby<sup>44</sup> (in an Australian phone-in survey involving 340 instances of sexual abuse), also found the average age of the abused girls to be eight years old. Saphira<sup>38</sup> found 71% of those in her survey were under 11 when the abuse began and 12% were under six.

### Sex of the abuser

All studies have found that almost all sexual abusers are male. Saphira<sup>38</sup> and Brooks<sup>6</sup> found all the abusers in their studies were male; Nash and West<sup>32</sup> found 99% of the abusers were male; Walby<sup>44</sup>, Peltoniemi and Korpilahti<sup>33</sup> and Gordon and O'Keefe<sup>19</sup> found 98% of the abusers were male; and Russell<sup>35</sup> found 96% of the abusers in her study were male. Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> found that 94% of those who abused girls were male and 84% of those who abused boys were male.

### Age of the abuser

In nearly all the studies examined the mean age for the abusers of girls was in the thirties, ranging from 29 for Peltoniemi and Korpilahti<sup>33</sup> to 35 for Gordon and O'Keefe<sup>19</sup> and Nash and West<sup>32</sup>. However, Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> noted that although the average age of abusers in his study was 32, 34% of the abusers were under 19. The abusers of boys were on average younger than the abusers of girls. Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> found their

average age to be 27 and Goldman and Goldman<sup>18</sup> found the average age of those who abused boys was 22.

Relationship of the abuser to the abused

There are quite marked differences between the various studies as to the relationship of the abuser to the child. Table 2.1 gives details of who the abusers were in the different studies.

Table 2.1 Relationship between the abuser and the abused

Study	Family members and relatives	Known to the child but not related	Strangers
Saphira <sup>38</sup> (girls)	45%	44%	12%
Finkelhor <sup>14</sup> (girls)	43%	33%	24%
(boys)	17%	53%	30%
Goldman and Goldman <sup>18</sup> (girls)	35%	39%	26%
(boys)	18%	56%	26%
Russell <sup>37</sup> (girls)	29%	60%	11%
Baker and Duncan <sup>3</sup> (girls)	16%	30%	56%
(boys)	13%	44%	43%
Nash and West <sup>32</sup> (girls)	15%	23%	46%

In addition, Saphira<sup>38</sup> found half the abusing family members in her study were father-figures and Nash and West<sup>32</sup> found 17% of the abusers in their study were boyfriends of the girl.

The wide variation in these figures can in part be explained by differences in what was considered to be abuse in the different studies. The two British studies<sup>3,32</sup> included obscene phone calls, exhibitionism and sexual suggestions, which are more commonly exhibited by strangers, hence the higher incidence of abuse by strangers in these studies. On the other hand the Russell<sup>35</sup> study included abuse by peers and hence showed a higher incidence of abusers known to the girl but not related.

#### The duration of the abuse

The studies also varied in their findings as to the proportion of instances of abuse that happened once only and the proportion that continued over a period of time. The studies based on phone-in surveys or therapeutic samples showed the greatest proportion of abuse which continued over a period of time. Walby<sup>44</sup> found 11% of the experiences described in her phone-in survey happened once only, and Gordon and O'Keefe<sup>19</sup> found 10% of the instances documented on file happened once only. On the other hand, Brooks<sup>6</sup> found 66% of the abuse described to her occurred once only, Goldman and Goldman<sup>18</sup> found 64% were single incidents, Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> found 60% were single incidents and Baker and Duncan<sup>3</sup> found 66% of the instances involving girls and 59% of those involving boys were single incidents. It seems reasonable to suggest that a substantial amount of the abuse documented in the general surveys occurred on a single occasion, although in most studies over a third of the instances of abuse recurred over a period of time.

#### Types of abuse

Abuse described in the general population surveys rarely involved sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse was involved in 2% of the abuse in the Nash and West<sup>32</sup> survey, 4% of the abuse involving girls in the Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> survey and 5% of that reported by Baker and Duncan<sup>3</sup>. A much higher rate of sexual intercourse was reported in the write-in or phone-in surveys. Walby<sup>44</sup> found sexual intercourse occurred in 22% of the abusive experiences reported to her and Saphira<sup>38</sup> found it occurred in 26% of all instances reported to her and in 14% of those involving children younger than six. A third of the girls in the Brooks<sup>6</sup> study described their abuse as rape. Although intercourse was only reported in a small number of cases, force seems to have played a more major part in much of the abuse, including that where intercourse did not occur. Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> found force was involved in 55% of the instances of abuse of both girls and boys. Goldman and Goldman<sup>18</sup> found force involved in 58% of the instances concerning girls and 14% of those involving boys. Russell<sup>35</sup> found force involved in 41% of the instances of extra-familial abuse, and Walby<sup>44</sup> found 39% of the experiences reported to her involved force or threats.

### 2.3 Response to the abuse

The most common reaction to the sexual abuse by the children in the studies described above was fear<sup>3,32,33,38,44</sup>. Other negative reactions such as disgust, shock, anger and confusion were also reported, but were not as common.

In most of the studies reviewed, less than half the abuse was disclosed to anyone. Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> found only a third of the students who had experienced sexual abuse had told anybody about it.

Phair-Thompson<sup>34</sup> in a New Zealand study of the long-term effects of incest found that only 20% of the sexually abused women in her sample had told anybody that they had been abused. Nash and West<sup>32</sup> found that 52% of the adult women in their study had told no-one of the abuse, while 32% of the students in their study had told nobody. However, 17% of all the instances of abuse in the Nash and West study were reported to the police. Walby<sup>44</sup> found that only 38% of those in their study had disclosed the abuse by the time they were 15, but that 62% had disclosed the abuse to someone by the time they were 20. Saphira<sup>38</sup> found 13% of the instances of abuse in her study had been reported to the police and 29% had been reported to someone else. In the Brooks<sup>6</sup> study, only one of the 29 girls had told an adult that she had been sexually abused prior to the study. However, it isn't known how many had told peers. Nash and West<sup>32</sup> and Walby<sup>44</sup> gave some indication of who was told in their studies and it seems that mothers were the main choice of confidante. In the majority of cases, where mothers were told of the abuse, they were supportive of the child. Most people told were supportive of the child and responded negatively toward the abuser, although Nash and West<sup>32</sup> found mothers tended to be supportive of their daughters, while fathers (where they were not the abuser) tended to want to seek retribution from the abuser.

### 2.4 Initial after-effects resulting from sexual abuse

Chandler<sup>8</sup>, in her review of the literature, noted that after sexual assault children often showed mood changes, nightmares, phobias, school problems, physical stress, changes in interpersonal relationships and changes in behaviour ranging from withdrawal to hyperactivity. Sgroi<sup>39</sup>, in her handbook for clinicians on sexual abuse, listed the following behaviours as likely to occur among children who have recently experienced sexual abuse:

- 1 Overly compliant behaviour;
- 2 Acting-out, aggressive behaviour;
- 3 Pseudo-mature behaviour;
- 4 Hints about sexual activity;



- 5 Persistent and inappropriate sexual play with peers or toys or with themselves, or sexually aggressive behaviour with others;
- 6 Detailed and age-inappropriate understanding of sexual behaviour (especially by young children);
- 7 Arriving early at school and leaving late with few, if any absences;
- 8 Poor peer relationships or inability to make friends;
- 9 Lack of trust, particularly with significant others;
- 10 Non-participation in school and social activities;
- 11 Inability to concentrate in school;
- 12 Sudden drop in school performance;
- 13 Extraordinary fear of males;
- 14 Seductive behaviour with males;
- 15 Running away from home;
- 16 Sleep disturbances;
- 17 Regressive behaviour;
- 18 Withdrawal;
- 19 Clinical depression;
- 20 Suicidal feelings.

The only studies reviewed here where the short-term effects of sexual abuse were examined were the Saphira<sup>38</sup> and Phair-Thompson<sup>34</sup> New Zealand studies of adult women. Both reported fear, mistrust, or hatred of the abuser, and those in the Phair-Thomson study also reported feeling uncared for and unprotected.

Browne and Finkelhor<sup>7</sup> in a very detailed recent review of the effects of sexual abuse described fear, anxiety, depression, anger, hostility and inappropriate sexual behaviour as the most commonly reported initial effects. They noted, however, that because many of the studies lacked standardised outcome measures and adequate comparison groups, it was not clear whether these findings reflected the experience of all children who had been sexually abused or were even representative of those seen in clinical settings. The empirical literature on the initial effects of child sexual abuse would have to be considered sketchy in their opinion.

## 2.5 Long-term effects of sexual abuse

Considerably more has been written about the long-term consequences of sexual abuse. The effects have been documented from incidence surveys (such as Finkelhor<sup>14</sup>), from phone-in and write-in surveys (such as Saphira<sup>38</sup> and Walby<sup>44</sup>), from studies of those presenting themselves for treatment with particular problems (such as Katz and Mazur<sup>27</sup>) and from studies of 'deviant groups' (such as James and Meyerding<sup>23</sup>).

A lot of the problems mentioned above as short-term effects have been shown to persist often over many years. The most commonly reported long-term effects have been:

- 1 Sexual problems<sup>14,17,24,32,33,38,43</sup>;
- 2 Low self-esteem<sup>2,12,14,17,24,38</sup>;
- 3 Depression<sup>2,6,12,14,17,24</sup>;
- 4 Fear of men<sup>14,24,32,38,43</sup>;
- 5 Nightmares<sup>12,14,24,30,38</sup>;
- 6 Suicidal feelings<sup>2,24,27,38</sup>;
- 7 Guilt<sup>14,17,24,27</sup>;
- 8 Anxiety<sup>12,14,17,24</sup>;
- 9 Relationship problems<sup>24,34,38,43</sup>;
- 10 Drug and alcohol problems<sup>5,13,17,24</sup>;
- 11 Prostitution<sup>17,23,40,42</sup>;
- 12 Lack of trust<sup>12,14,38</sup>;
- 13 Obsessions<sup>12,24,43</sup>;
- 14 Delusions and hallucinations<sup>6,12,30</sup>;
- 15 Hostility and aggression<sup>6,12,32</sup>;
- 16 Phobias<sup>12,14</sup>;
- 17 Difficulties mothering children<sup>12,43</sup>;
- 18 School problems and learning difficulties<sup>17,20</sup>;
- 19 Running away<sup>17</sup>.

A number of authors have looked at the degree of trauma from these long-term effects and found it to be related to aspects of the abusive experience and how the trauma was handled subsequently. Chandler<sup>8</sup>, in her review, noted that sexual assault by family members or where there was a greater violation of trust led to more trauma. She also noted that the prior mental health of the person abused was important in relation to the degree of trauma experienced. Those with no opportunity to develop coping skills and those experiencing too many other stresses were the most traumatised. Baker and Duncan<sup>3</sup> found the abuse caused more damage if it was ongoing, if the child was younger and if the abuser was a member of the family. Nash and West<sup>32</sup> found greater trauma with greater age disparity between the child and the abuser, and if there was genital contact. They found less trauma if the abuser was a stranger. They also found particular long-term effects related to particular types of abusers. They found that those who had been abused by family friends and neighbours tended to be wary of men in general. Those who had been abused by uncles and stepfathers showed bitterness, hatred and resentment, and those who had been abused by fathers and brothers had emotional and sexual problems. Goldman and Goldman<sup>18</sup> found the degree of trauma to be significantly greater for girls than for boys and greater with closer relationships and larger age discrepancies between the child and the abuser. Phair-Thomson<sup>34</sup> found childhood sexual experiences tended to have adverse effects on the child and in adult life, if the perpetrator was more than two years older than the child. Saphira<sup>38</sup> found that nightmares, feelings of worthlessness and suicidal tendencies usually followed experiences where sexual intercourse was involved, and that the fear of men was a long-term effect which was more likely if the

incident was reported to the police. She concluded that court appearances, while not being solely responsible, contributed to the long-term effects of sexual abuse.

Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> looked at the issue of long-term effects of abuse in some detail in his 1979 study, and found increased trauma occurred with larger age differences and where the abuse involved force. He also found sibling incest did not seem to have the same long-term consequences, except where there was a large age disparity.

Browne and Finkelhor<sup>7</sup> in their review of a number of studies noted that, although there was no contributory factor that all studies agreed on as being consistently associated with a more traumatic outcome, there were some trends. Abuse by fathers and stepfathers had a more negative impact than abuse by other perpetrators. Experiences involving genital contact seemed to be more serious, as were those involving force. If the perpetrators were men rather than women and adults rather than adolescents, the effects were more disturbing. The outcome was also found to be more traumatic if the child's family was unsupportive of the child or if the child was removed from the home.

In 1985, Finkelhor and Browne<sup>16</sup> proposed a conceptualisation of the ways different features of sexual abuse could relate to different consequences. They proposed four 'traumagenic dynamics'. The first, traumatic sexualisation, occurred where the abuse evoked sexual arousal in some form in the abused. They suggested this could lead to inappropriate sexual behaviour, excessive masturbation and sexual aggression toward other children, and in later years to promiscuity, prostitution, sexual problems and body problems among adults. The second dynamic was betrayal, when children discovered that someone on whom they were vitally dependent could do them harm. This could relate to abuse by trusted adults such as fathers and foster parents, and also to the response from others in the family who may not have believed the child or may have blamed her for the abuse. The consequences of this might be grief, depression and extreme dependency as children, and lack of trust, aggression, hostility and impaired judgement of others as adults. The third dynamic they described as powerlessness, the degree of powerlessness experienced by the child being related to whether force or threats were involved, and whether the child found, even after attempts to stop the abuse, that it continued. The consequences of this could be fear, anxiety, nightmares, phobias, suicidal behaviour, learning problems, running away, employment problems and a high risk of further victimisation. The final dynamic described was stigmatisation, which occurred when badness, guilt or shame about the abuse were communicated to the child, for example if the victim was blamed for the

abuse or was put under pressure to keep it secret. The consequences of this could be poor self-esteem, depression, self-destructive behaviour, alcohol and drug abuse, and prostitution.

These dynamics are yet to be tested but they do provide an interesting framework for considering different kinds of sexual abuse.

## 2.6 Implications for social work services

Because the extent and nature of childhood sexual abuse has only recently been documented, most authors consider that there are not adequate services yet available for children who have had such experiences. Some authors have suggested that the response by official agencies in fact exacerbates the problems caused by sexual abuse.

Conte<sup>9</sup> reported in 1982 that little social worker attention had been given to the possibility of traumatisation by insensitive handling of sexual abuse cases by child protection agencies or by social work interventions themselves. In 1983 a social worker<sup>25</sup> working for the Department of Social Welfare asked a number of social work staff about their handling of incest among children in the care of the department, and found that all were unsure about the most positive methods of intervention.

Only one of the studies discussed in this chapter asked those who had experienced sexual abuse about the services they thought appropriate. Walby<sup>44</sup> asked the women in her phone-in survey what they thought would have helped them at the time of the abuse. Thirty per cent said public awareness and discussion, ready availability of information about incest and the knowledge that it had happened to other people would have helped. Walby also asked what the women would like to see happen as a result of the survey. In response, 58% of the women said education programmes should be provided and 32% suggested specialist services should be available for sexually abused girls, including refuges. Smaller numbers suggested support networks for women and children would be helpful to those who had experienced abuse.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 The sample

The sample comprised all girls under the guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare aged between 15 years and years 8 months at the time of the study, and resident in the five main urban centres, Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. These criteria yielded a total sample of 239 girls. The data collection took place during 1985. A full list of the social welfare offices and institutions involved in each urban area is given in Table 3.

Table 3.1 Department of Social Welfare districts included in the study 1985

Auckland

Auckland District Office  
Takapuna District Office  
Henderson District Office  
New Lynn District Office  
Otahuhu District Office  
Mangere Area Welfare Office  
Manukau District Office  
Otara Area Welfare Office  
Papakura District Office  
Pukekohe Area Welfare Office  
Weymouth Residential Centre

Hamilton

Hamilton District Office  
Tokoroa Area Welfare Office

Wellington

Wellington District Office  
Porirua District Office  
Lower Hutt District Office

Christchurch

Christchurch District Office  
Rangiora Area Welfare Office  
Papanui Area Welfare Office  
Hornby Area Welfare Office  
Kingslea

Dunedin

Dunedin District Office

### 3.2 Comment on the sample

#### Why the study was restricted to girls

It was decided to restrict the study to girls for a number of reasons:

- 1 All previous studies which have included boys and girls<sup>3,13,17,18,32</sup> suggest sexual abuse is more common among girls. It was also the case that the main concerns at the time the study was first suggested were about the abuse of girls. Thus, the main priority right from the start was to study the abuse of girls.
- 2 Although sexual abuse is also recognised as a serious problem for boys, it became apparent that to study the abuse of boys it would be necessary to set up a separate project. As it would be expected that the abuse of boys would occur in different ways from that of girls, the same methodology would not be able to be used in both cases. Different questions would need to be asked, and different issues would need to be explored in each case.
- 3 This would also mean that the data on boys and girls could not simply be aggregated. Any study covering both girls and boys, would thus require twice as large a sample as one covering girls alone, as the data would need to be analysed separately.
- 4 Further difficulties were envisaged over who would do the interviews. Would it be more appropriate to use male or female interviewers? On the one hand, adolescent boys might be uncomfortable talking about such matters with a female, but on the other, if a boy had been abused it would almost certainly have been by a male.
- 5 A further consideration was that some of the boys may have been abusers themselves, which would add a further complicating effect.
- 6 In summary, it appeared that to attempt to cover both boys and girls in one study would have amounted to running two projects in parallel at one time. It was decided therefore to stick with the main priority and carry out a study of abuse of girls, leaving aside the separate but related issue of abuse of boys. The possibility of carrying out future work on abuse of boys was left open.

Why the study was restricted to girls in the care of the Department of Social Welfare

When the study was first discussed there was some debate as to whether the investigation should be restricted to children in the care of the department, or whether it should be a project covering the general population. The fundamental issue was whether information was required which would tell us about sexual abuse in the general community or whether we should be concerned primarily with children for whom the department has statutory responsibility.

The major concerns expressed by those who first suggested setting up the study were about the number of children turning up in the care of the department who had prior histories of sexual abuse. It was felt both that there was insufficient information on the problem of sexual abuse generally, and that social workers had been provided with insufficient training and preparation to allow them to deal with confidence with abuse cases that ended up on their caseloads. It was considered that the main priority was to focus on the problem as it affected children for whom the department has a statutory responsibility.

A second reason for focusing on children in the care of the department centred around the issue of access to the study population. Difficulties were envisaged with obtaining access to a general population sample of 15-year-old girls not in social welfare care. Parental consent would need to be obtained before girls of this age could participate in such research and abusing parents would be highly unlikely to agree to let their daughters take part. Therefore any study of the general population would not have been possible with adolescent subjects and it would have been necessary to use a sample of adults. (This is the approach that has generally been used in overseas studies<sup>14,18,35</sup>.) Surveying adults would mean that much of the data would involve abuse that happened a long time ago when social attitudes were different. Such information would be less useful than information on abuse that happened to contemporary young people.

Why girls aged 15 were chosen as the study population

The age chosen represents a compromise between maximising information on abuse and minimising loss from the sample. If information was collected about younger girls (for example those aged 13), this would not provide any information on abuse of girls aged 14 and 15. It was also thought that at age 15 the girls would better understand the voluntary and confidential nature of the interviews, would have a better understanding of the questions and would also be less likely to find the interview traumatic. Older girls posed a different set of problems for the interviews as a significant number are discharged from social welfare care at age 16 and because of

their greater independence are much harder to trace. This is true even of those who remain in the care of the department. However some of the girls who were aged 15 when they were selected for the sample had in fact turned 16 by the time they were able to be interviewed.

Why the sample was limited to the main urban centres

The sample was restricted to the main urban centres, which means that the study will yield little systematic information on abuse in rural areas (apart from abuse which happened to these girls when they had previously lived in rural districts). If rural districts were to be adequately represented, this would have added substantially to the costs of the study, as it would have required considerable travelling in country areas to conduct a small number of interviews. The number of girls aged 15 in rural areas was small anyway, so that with refusals, these may have been insufficient to analyse as a separate sub-group. Furthermore, it was considered necessary to restrict the study to locations where there were adequate support services available for sexually abused girls. Such facilities were usually only available in urban areas.

Why a sample size of about 200 was chosen

The size of the sample was determined using two considerations:

- 1 it was desirable that the study should yield a sufficient number of identified cases of abuse which would provide data on the nature of the abuse and what the experience was like for the girls;
- 2 it was also desirable that estimates of the incidence of abuse should be fairly precise with a reasonably small confidence interval.

It was considered that a total sample of 200 girls should yield a sufficient number of identified cases of abuse for the purposes of the study. If the true incidence of sexual abuse is in the order of 20-25% (as overseas studies would suggest<sup>14,18,35</sup>), there would be expected to be 40-50 examples of sexual abuse in the sample. A sample of 200 would also give a reasonably tight confidence interval around the estimate. That is, if the incidence was found to be 20%, the 95% confidence interval would be from 15% to 25%. A smaller sample of, for example, 100 would yield a smaller number of abused girls, perhaps insufficient to allow investigation of the nature of the abuse, while the 95% confidence interval would be from 12% to 28% (assuming the true incidence to be around 20%). When all the girls in the districts who came within the age range of the study were included, the final achieved sample size was 239.



### 3.3 Sources of the data

It was decided to analyse information from three sources, using the following data collection procedures:

#### Recording information from personal files

The personal file of each of the 239 girls was read completely and basic demographic information was recorded on a standard questionnaire. If any mention of sexual abuse or sexual activity was found on the file, additional information was recorded about the nature and circumstances of the abuse or other activity.

#### Questionnaire survey of social workers

The current social worker of each girl selected in the sample was asked to complete a questionnaire about whether the girl had experienced any sexual abuse. Questions were also asked about whether the girls had ever been involved in criminal offending or other misbehaviour, as other studies<sup>6,7</sup> have suggested that sexually abused girls may be more likely to have these problems. The age, sex and ethnic group of the social worker was also asked for. These questionnaires were completed for 213 girls or 89% of those in the sample.

#### Personal interviews with the girls

Fifty-seven per cent (136) of the girls were interviewed, 25% refused, 12% either couldn't be found after being selected for the sample or did not appear for the interview after agreeing to participate and making an appointment for the interview, and 5% were not interviewed because of other reasons such as low IQ or deafness.

### 3.4 The interview procedures

#### The interviewers

A team of interviewers was assembled to carry out the interviews, all female and including Pakeha, Maori and Pacific Island women. It was decided the girls would be able to choose who they would like to interview them. Jane von Dadelszen, a Pakeha member of the research staff, interviewed 59 of the girls (43%). The Maori women, Katarina Pouaka, Sharon Hawke, Tris Roberts and Sandra Searancke and the Samoan woman Betty Sio, who were recruited from the community for the study, shared the interviewing of the other 77 girls.

In most cases, Maori girls were interviewed by Maori interviewers and Pakeha girls were interviewed by the Pakeha interviewer. It was important that the interviewers were all women, because sexual abuse is a subject that a large number of women will not discuss with men and a number of the girls

spontaneously reiterated this point. The abusers in nearly all cases were men and the most common long-term effect mentioned by the abused girls was a fear, distrust or dislike of men. Although some would have found men all right to talk to, none said they would prefer a male interviewer. The Maori girls who were interviewed were extremely positive about the opportunity to discuss their experiences with a Maori woman.

None of the interviewers were departmental social workers and this was very important in relation to what the girls were prepared to tell us. Many had had bad experiences as a result of giving information to social workers, and most saw confidentiality as critical. Social workers would be unable to guarantee confidentiality in the way we could (as researchers) because of their statutory responsibilities. We were able to assure the girls interviewed that the information was only to be used for research purposes and that the information that they provided would not be made available in a way that identified them to anyone outside the interviewing group.

#### Voluntary participation

A crucial component of the study was that participation in the interviews was voluntary. The girls knew they could avoid answering any question they wished and that they could also terminate the interview entirely at any point. They could also choose whether or not the interview was taped.

#### Confidentiality

It was regarded as essential in a study of sexual abuse for the information obtained to be treated with total confidentiality. This meant that nothing which might identify the girl would be conveyed to anyone outside the interviewing team. A number of the girls stressed that the reason they were willing to talk with us was because of the total confidentiality of any disclosures they might make and the fact that no decisions affecting their lives would be made on the basis of this information unless they chose to have it passed on.

There was concern when the study was planned about how any abuse that was reported to the interviewers would be managed. The research team in consultation with social work staff developed a protocol for dealing with these situations. It was decided that when any girl disclosed any unreported abuse the interviewer would ask her if she could pass the information on to the social worker involved and ask the social worker to arrange counselling if this was desired by the girl. If the girl did not want the social worker to be informed, the interviewer, would either refer her directly to a counselling service or provide her with information about counselling services that were available. (A list of counselling services

in each location that were regarded as suitable was negotiated with the social work staff in each district office before the interviewing began. Where referrals were made, they were to services that were on this agreed list.) Among those girls who were eventually interviewed there were no abusive situations described that were still occurring, and most girls had in fact told someone about their experiences before. A number had also been offered some form of counselling or support for sexual abuse prior to this study.

#### Whether parents should be informed

After much debate and consultation with a large number of people, including the Minister of Social Welfare, it was agreed that parents or other caregivers would neither be approached for their consent for the girl to take part in the study, nor notified that the study was being carried out, unless the girl wished.

Our main concern was that parents or foster parents who might be abusing a girl would be likely to exert pressure on the girl not to participate if they were informed that the girl was to be interviewed, leading to bias in results. If the girl was happy for her family to know or wanted to discuss it with them then they were informed, but otherwise they were not. We also wanted to avoid undue stress for girls whose families did not want any abuse that might have occurred to be revealed.

#### Interview venue

The location of the interviews was also important. Total privacy was essential, which usually made the girl's home or foster home unsuitable. The girls were able to choose the place for the interview, and many chose the local DSW office (50 interviews, 37%) or where the girl lived (35 interviews, 26%). This was usually an institution or DSW family home which afforded more privacy. There were some interviews in the girl's own flat, natural family's home or foster home, when privacy could be assured. Fourteen interviews (10%) took place in community facilities, 11 (8%) at schools, nine (7%) at other DSW facilities, seven (5%) at other people's homes, and ten at other places such as parks or cars at the beach. The majority (71%) of the venues were rated by the interviewer as suitable. However there were interruptions to 18 interviews (13%), lack of privacy or soundproofing in the case of seven (5%) and distractions inside or outside the room in the case of 14 (10%).

Provision was also made for a third person to be present if the girl wanted that, and six girls asked for a friend, parent or counsellor to be present. All of these people were female.

Why interviews were chosen rather than anonymous questionnaires

We chose the interview format rather than an anonymous questionnaire, partly because we knew from social workers of the very low reading and comprehension ability of some of the girls in the sample. In addition, the interview enabled us to be able to probe for more detail, clarify questions, and decide when to continue or stop questioning. We also thought it was essential that there was someone available to provide support if the questions triggered distressing memories. This would not be possible with an anonymous questionnaire.

We found that this approach enhanced the quality of the information we received. The interviews provided a lot of qualitative information in addition to the answers to the structured questions. The interviews also provided more information on sexual abuse than the social workers' questionnaires or the files. Of the abuse described in the interviews only 34% was described on file and only 32% was known to the current social worker.

Interviews are less strenuous for the girls than having to complete a lengthy questionnaire and this clearly enhanced our response rate although there were still some who declined to participate because they "couldn't be bothered".

Approach to the subject

The initial approach to the girl was made by her current social worker, who usually already had an established relationship with the girl. The research team met with the social workers in each district before they approached the girls, to clarify the issues and answer queries about the study. This meant the social workers were able to answer questions the girls had about the study.

The project was presented to the girls as a survey about the lives of girls in DSW care, which would cover such things as offending and sexual experiences. The girls were provided with a written information sheet telling them the kind of questions that would be asked, including those about negative sexual experiences they might have had.

The project was not presented to the girls explicitly as a study of sexual abuse. There were a number of reasons for this:

- 1 we thought this might make it seem only applicable to girls who had been abused;
- 2 they might think they had to reveal to their social worker the fact that they had been abused in order to take part;

- 3 they might think that sexual abuse was the only thing we were interested in; or
- 4 they might imagine the interview would be more frightening than in fact it would be.

The study focused on the abuse from the point of view of the girl. We were primarily interested in her perception of what happened rather than that of the family, the abuser, the law or the social services.

#### The interview schedule

How to ask about sexual abuse posed some problems initially. Although we knew in advance (from their files and from social workers) that some girls had experienced sexual abuse, for a large number it was not known whether or not the girl had experienced abuse. Most previous studies (such as those of clinical populations) concerned people who were already known to have been abused and only the details were required. We adopted some questions from one of the studies that did seek to find out the incidence of sexual abuse among general populations, the Russell,<sup>35</sup> San Francisco study. However, the Finkelhor<sup>14</sup> study was found to be less useful as it used a questionnaire with a reading age that was much too high for our sample.

Because no other studies provided a model for asking these questions it was necessary to develop our own procedures. We decided to ask about sexual abuse in the context of sexual experiences the girls might have had.

The interview schedule contained a lengthy introduction to the questions on sexual experiences explaining the kinds of sexual experiences some girls might have had and asking them to describe their earliest sexual experience. We found it was helpful to have a structured list of sexual acts to read out rather than expecting the girl to describe in detail what the experience involved. For some of them it was necessary to explain what certain acts were and others were happier to be presented with a card where they could give numbers, for example, "he did one and three". The girls then described how they had felt about the experience and we excluded from analysis positive experiences with peers. They were then asked to describe other experiences they had had until all experiences were described.

Following this section more specific questions on more common types of abuse were asked in case certain experiences had been missed out. These were the same questions as were asked in the San Francisco<sup>35</sup> study.

The sexual abuse questions came at the end of the interview after questions about living situations, family circumstances and dynamics, self esteem, nightmares, suicidal feelings and criminal activity. These questions were asked as they concerned other factors commonly associated with sexual abuse. The structure of the schedule meant that occasionally sexual abuse would be described in response to an earlier question: for example, the girl might begin talking about an abusive experience when asked why she didn't like living in a particular situation. If this happened, the girl was given the option of answering the detailed questions then, or waiting until later. This flexibility helped to keep the interview relaxed for the girl.

Placing the questions on sexual abuse after those on criminal activity gave the girl a chance to see that the interviewers did not react in a judgemental way when she talked about criminal activity. This may have helped prepare her to talk about experiences that she may have been reluctant to speak of to someone with a more judgemental or authoritarian attitude.

A copy of the interview schedule is included in Appendix 1.

#### Willingness to talk about sexual abuse

When the study was first suggested, there was some debate about whether 15-year-old girls would be willing to tell a stranger about such experiences, particularly those that they had not revealed to anyone else before.

In the event, the girls found the interview questions easy to answer overall and were very willing to talk about their experiences with the interviewers. For a large number of the girls talking about their experiences was 'no big deal' and we started to conclude that it was the adults who were oversensitive about the issue. A number of the girls who had not experienced sexual abuse knew other girls who had and were very interested in discussing the issues with us.

At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewer recorded how open or guarded they had found the girl. Seventy per cent (95) were described as open, 24% (33) were described as sometimes open and 5% (seven) were described as guarded. The information was not provided for one interview.

Forty-four girls (32%) found some questions difficult to answer and 60 (44%) found some of the topics difficult to talk about. The great majority of these were the sexual questions, although some girls experienced difficulty with the questions on their family and others simply had difficulty recalling dates or ages at which events occurred. Only seven of the 136 girls interviewed thought the survey should have been done in a different way. Of the four who gave more explicit information,

one thought it should have been a questionnaire survey, one thought the questions should have been put differently, one thought we should have asked more about institutions and one thought younger girls should have been interviewed.

A number of the girls commented that they thought the survey had been done very well or gave comments such as:

*"It was good the way it was one to one",*

*"Pretty good, straight to the point, good to know someone will listen"*

*"It was quite easy, I thought you'd ask harder questions than these",*

*"Not very demanding or embarrassing",*

*"The only problem was trying to explain without sounding too crude".*

Most of the girls thought girls other than themselves would also be able to answer these questions, although 26 (19%) thought there would be some who would find it difficult. They made comments such as:

*"Street kids would find it hard",*

*"Some girls wouldn't tell anyone. Because of their experiences they've lost their trust".*

Another interesting thing we noted was that the girls were more willing to talk about negative abusive experiences than positive sexual experiences. The positive ones were seen as none of our business, private, or embarrassing. They were willing to talk about the negative ones as they saw that the research would lead to better understanding of the issues by social workers and hence better treatment for other girls who came into contact with the Department of Social Welfare.

#### Distress for the girls

A related concern was that talking about abusive experiences would cause distress to the girls. This concern and fears that the interview could exacerbate other problems were often voiced by the girls' social workers.

In undertaking the study we were determined to minimise the stress on the girls who were interviewed, while gaining the most accurate picture possible of the abuse. These ethical concerns determined most of the approaches taken in the study.

Our experience was that fears about distressing the girls were unfounded. Most of the girls found the experience of talking about the abuse to someone who understood and believed them was very positive, even when they had told nobody before.

The interviewers continued to talk to the girls for a while after the interview so that they did not leave having remembered distressing events with no follow-through. Some interviewers spent as long as five hours with the girls. Very few were interested in any follow-up counselling but the eight girls who were, found it useful that we were able to refer them to an appropriate source of help. It became clear that our asking the questions and letting them know that other girls had experienced these things too made it very much easier for the girls to talk, and minimised their distress. Only one of the 136 girls interviewed was rated by the interviewer as distressed all the time during the interview and she did not report any abuse; 52 (38%) were described as distressed at some time during the interview and the majority (57%, 78 girls) were described as never distressed. For five interviews the question was not answered.

One girl commented:

*"It depends on the person if they can talk about it, not if they feel dirty and it's their fault. I would have (found some questions difficult) last year, not now I'm more aware".*

It was often the anticipation of the interview that the girls found stressful and they relaxed when they found out what the interview was really like. This is summarised by one of the girls.

*"At first I didn't know what to expect. After a while it got easier. I realised I was helping myself and other girls in that situation. It helps to get it out of your system".*

Another said:

*"It was quite easy. I thought you'd ask harder questions than these. When I got the pamphlet I thought 'shit I'm not going to do this'".*

#### What the study provided the girls with in return for participation

A concern throughout was that since the girls interviewed were providing us with the information for our study, it was necessary to provide something in return. In this respect we were giving the girls a chance to talk about their experiences, be believed and have the information which they disclosed treated as entirely confidential. This was something they found very positive. It became clear in the interviews that a large number of the girls simply wanted to be listened to and believed by those they told of their abuse. In this respect the interviews provided a healing experience for the girls who wanted this kind of support.



We also provided information on the services available for people who had been abused, and contact with or referrals to the services. We passed information on to the girls' social workers if this was desired.

Although the interview was structured, the process was much more of an interaction than a typical structured research interview. This was very important to the girls, as was the way the interviews were tailored to their needs and the fact that they had the power to control what was said in the interview and what was recorded.

The feeding back of research findings to the girls interview is regarded as an important aspect of the research and it is intended that a short summary of the results will be sent to every girl who participated in the interviews and to all the social workers involved.

### 3.5 The pilot study

It was decided that a pilot study would be undertaken in the Hawkes Bay area to test the file forms, social worker questionnaires and interview schedules and to ascertain the practicality of our approach to the subject of sexual abuse. It also seemed desirable to find out, before embarking on the main study, how social workers and the girls in care would react about our asking about sexual experiences.

We chose the Napier and Hastings districts for the pilot because there was a sufficient number (17) of 15-year-old girls under the care of the Director-General resident in those districts, and the proportion of Maori and Pakeha girls resembled that of the main sample.

Sixteen of the 17 girls agreed to be interviewed, of whom nine were Maori and seven were Pakeha. The interviews took place in 1985. The interviewers received very positive feedback about the interviews, particularly the confidential nature of the survey. It was found that placing the sexual experience questions towards the end of the survey made them considerably easier to answer.

Although the girls seemed reasonably relaxed about acknowledging their sexual experiences, they found it extremely difficult to give exact details of what sexual activity was involved. A card was developed with the options printed on it to alleviate this problem.

A very high incidence of sexual abuse was described in the interviews. Only five (three Maori and two Pakeha girls) had no negative experiences to report and many girls reported more than one unrelated instance of abuse. Of those who reported negative experiences, five (three Maori and two Pakeha girls) had experienced abuse by fathers or stepfathers and six had experienced rapes and other forced sexual activity with peers, acquaintances and strangers. A large amount (90%) of the abuse described was not recorded on file or known to the present social worker. There were no ethnic differences in the incidence of abuse.

None of those interviewed wanted counselling at the time of the interview. One wanted her social worker informed and several commented that they would have appreciated counselling at the time of the abuse or at puberty. Often they reported that they had support from peers or relatives and felt this to be sufficient.

The success of the pilot enabled the study to proceed as planned with some relatively minor modifications. The time-scale of the whole project is given in Appendix 2.

### 3.6 Summary

- 1 The sample comprised all young women\* under guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare aged between 15 years and 16 years 8 months in 1985 and resident in the five main urban centres.
- 2 Information about the girls was collected from their personal files, using questionnaires completed by their current social worker and from interviews with the girls.
- 3 File information was collected for all of the 239 girls in the sample, social worker questionnaires were completed for 213 girls (89%) and 136 girls were interviewed.
- 4 All the interviewers were women and none were members of the department's social work staff. One was a Pakeha member of the research section staff and the others comprised four Maori women and one Samoan woman recruited from the community.
- 5 Participation in the interviews was voluntary.
- 6 All information obtained from the interviews was kept confidential to the research team and was not made available to social work staff.
- 7 Parents and other care-givers were not informed of the study unless the girl wished it.

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\*Young women are referred to as girls throughout the report as discussed in the footnote on page 1.

- 8 The interviews took place in a location of each girl's choice.
- 9 The subject of sexual abuse was approached in the context of total sexual experience and asked about as part of a larger interview about aspects of the girl's life history.
- 10 Care was taken to minimise stress during the interview and to make it as easy as possible for the girls to talk about any abuse they had experienced.
- 11 The study provided the girls with a chance to talk about their experiences and be believed and to find out about services available for people who had experienced sexual abuse.
- 12 A pilot study was undertaken in the Hawkes Bay area before the main study began. The success of the pilot enabled the main study to proceed with minor modifications.

## CHAPTER 4

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GIRLS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY

#### 4.1 District

The sample was restricted to the five main urban areas, as described in Chapter 3. One hundred and seven of the girls (45%) came from Auckland, 34 (14%) were from Hamilton, 31 (13%) from Wellington, 53 (22%) from Christchurch and 14 (6%) from Dunedin.

#### 4.2 Rural/urban

The majority of the girls (176 or 74%) had spent more of their lives in an urban area (i.e. one of the main centres or provincial cities) than anywhere else. Of the remaining 63 (26%), 23 had spent longer in towns than anywhere else and 20 had spent longer in rural areas. For the remaining 20, there was insufficient data available on where they had lived.

Time spent living in rural areas was separated out for special analysis. One hundred and thirty-eight (58%) of the girls had never lived in a rural area, and 31 (13%) had lived in such an area for less than one year. Twenty-eight (12%) had spent between one and eight years in a rural area and 19 (8%) had spent more than eight years in a rural area (i.e. more than half their lives). In 23 cases (10%), there were insufficient data available on the amount of time spent living in rural areas.

#### 4.3 Ethnic group

Of the 239 girls in the sample, 88 were Pakeha and 122 were Maori, which represented 37% and 51% of the sample respectively. Of the remaining 29 (12%), there were 11 of Cook Island origin, seven of Samoan origin, one of Niuean origin, one of Fijian origin and five of mixed Maori and Pacific Island origin. Four of the girls were not included in any of the above groups. If a girl was interviewed she was able to nominate the ethnic group she identified with. Information on ethnicity for all other girls was obtained from personal files.

#### 4.4 Age

At the time the data collection took place the girls ranged in age from 15 years to 16 years 8 months. The mean age was 15 years 10 months.

#### 4.5 Socio-economic status

A socio-economic status (SES) score was generated for each girl, using the Elley-Irving Index (1981) applied to the occupation of the parent (in the family she had lived with the longest period of time) whose occupation was of the highest status. The Elley-Irving scale is a six-point index with a score of one representing the highest socio-economic status and a score of six representing the lowest socio-economic status.

The distribution showed that families of highest socio-economic status were under-represented in the sample (3%) compared with the proportion of the total urban New Zealand population at that level (estimated 8%), while families at the lowest level (Level six), were over-represented (14%) compared with the total urban population (estimated at 9%).

The pattern of over-representation of lower socio-economic status families among children in care is a familiar one from previous studies. However the proportions of girls from families in Levels two to five closely approximated the proportion of the estimated total urban population at those levels. Occupations of the parent figures in these girls' households ranged from primary school teachers (Level two) to cafeteria assistants (Level five).

#### 4.6 Size of family

The girls in the sample usually had a large number of brothers and sisters. The total size of the family of origin, including half and step siblings, ranged from one to sixteen children, the average number of children was six. However some of the girls interviewed were unaware of the existence of some of their siblings.

When the count is restricted to the siblings with whom the girl spent the majority of her childhood, the size of the family ranged from one to twelve children with an average of four children.

#### 4.7 Birth order

The place of the girls in their family of origin ranged from first child to 15th. Thirty-six of the girls (15%) were the oldest child and 85 (36%) were the oldest girl in the family.

#### 4.8 Mother and father-figures

For the purposes of the study, one mother and one father-figure was designated for each girl. These were taken to be the parent figures in the home where the girl lived for the longest period of time. In the majority of cases (152, 64%), the natural mother was identified as the mother-figure. Adopted (ten), step (nine) and foster (44) mothers made up a further

26% of the sample. Sixteen girls had other relatives identified as mother-figures, seven of these being grandmothers. The remaining eight mother-figures were staff members of institutions.

While natural fathers were less likely to be the main father-figure they were the most common father-figures (113, 47%). Forty-two were foster fathers, 38 were stepfathers and ten were adoptive fathers, accounting for a further 38% of the sample. Fourteen girls had other relatives as father-figures, five of whom were grandfathers. Institutional staff were identified as father-figures in four cases.

Seventeen (7%) girls in the sample had no identifiable father-figure, and one father figure could not be classed in any of the above groups.

Figure 4.1 shows the types of parent figures of the girls in the sample.

#### 4.9 Ethnicity of mother and father-figures

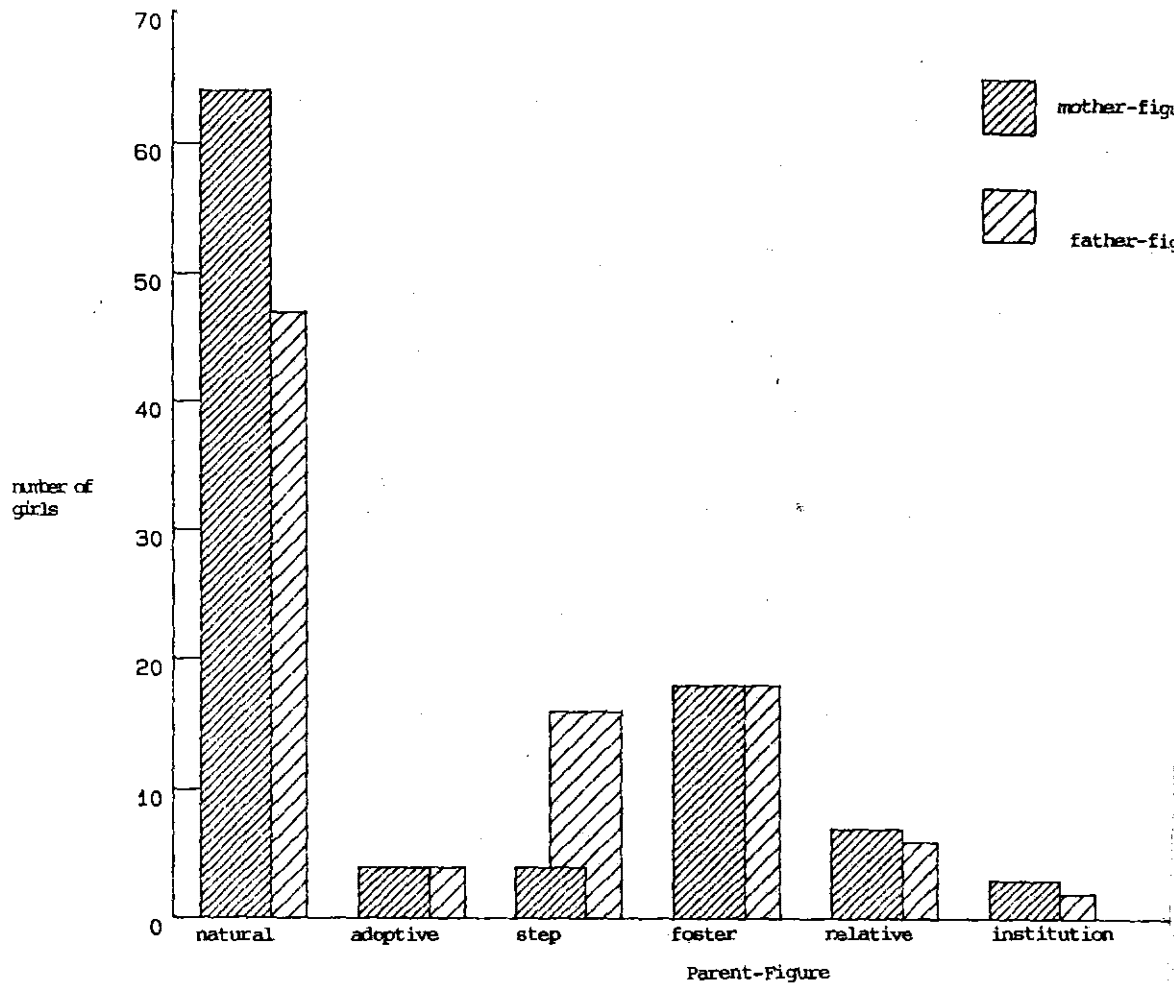
In all ethnic groups, the majority of the girls had mother-figures of the same ethnic background as themselves. For the Maori girls however a large majority of mother-figures were Pakeha (30%), while only two of the Pakeha girls had mother-figures who were Maori.

In all ethnic groups, the majority of girls had father-figures of the same ethnic background as themselves. However, for the Maori girls, 48 (42%) of their father-figures were Pakeha, while only four (2%) of the Pakeha girls had Maori father-figures. Figure 4.2 shows the ethnicity of the parent figures of the girls in the sample.

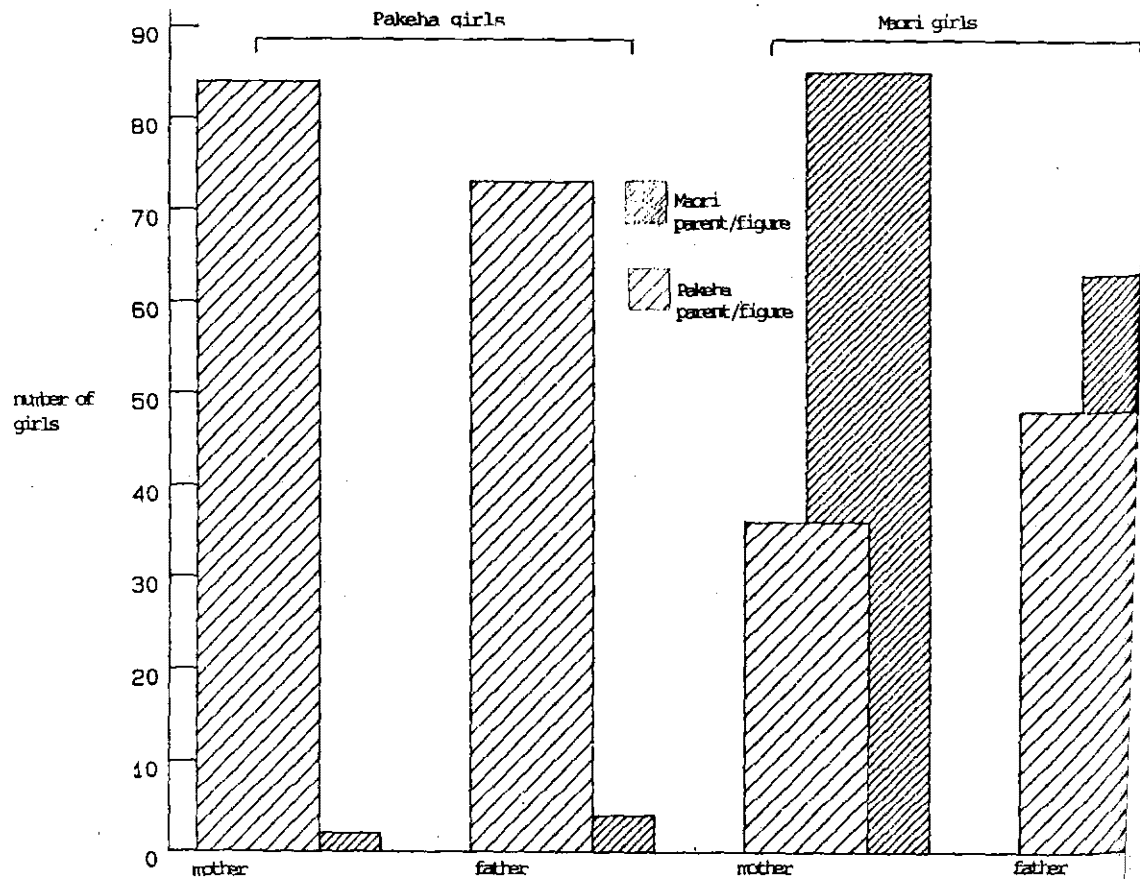
#### 4.10 Current living situation

Two-thirds of the girls (161, 67%) were living with a family in the community at the time of the study. Of these, a substantial number, a quarter of the whole sample (59), were living at home. Eighty-three were placed in private foster homes, 16 with relatives and 67 with others, while 19 were living in DSW family homes. Thirty (13%) of the girls were supporting themselves independently, either by working or drawing the Unemployment Benefit. Forty-seven (20%) were residing in institutions. Of these, 17 lived in a boarding school or hostel, six were in DSW regional institutions, 14 in DSW national institutions, eight in private institutions and two in psychiatric hospitals. One girl was reported as missing.

**Figure 4.1 Type of Parent Figure**



**Figure 4.2 Ethnicity of Parent Figure**



#### 4.11 Guardianship

The average age of the girls when the guardianship order was made was approximately ten years old.

Just over half of the girls in the sample (132), were placed under guardianship after the age of 12 years. Of the 107 (45%) girls who came into care under the age of twelve, over a third (39) were aged three years or less. The girl's age at guardianship is shown in Figure 4.3.

In the majority of cases (59%), the guardianship orders were made primarily because of the home conditions of the girl's family. Ninety-three (39%) girls were placed under guardianship as a direct result of their offending (24) or misbehaviour (69). Four (2%) girls were placed under guardianship after they were put up for adoption by their parents but were not able to be adopted. Very few girls, 19 (8%) came into care with sexual abuse recorded as a reason for the guardianship order being made.

#### 4.12 Total number of living situations

The girl's living situation was considered to have changed if the girl moved to a different setting (e.g. from living with natural parents to living with a grandmother or from home to an institution), if one of the parent figures left home while the child stayed, or if an adult who acted as a parent figure joined the household (such as a new step-parent or defacto step-parent). Temporary changes such as holidays, brief hospitalizations or temporary holding situations were not included in the count of living situations. The number of distinct living situations recorded for each girl ranged from one to 23, with an average of ten.

Only nine (4%) of the girls had experienced less than two changes of living situation throughout their lives while 78 (33%) had experienced more than ten changes. Of the latter group, six had experienced over 20 changes of living situation at the time of this study. Figure 4.4 shows the number of living situations experienced by the girls in the sample.

#### 4.13 Total number of families (including DSW family homes)

On average the girls had lived with five families each. The count of families included natural, extended and foster families as well as DSW family home foster parents. Only seven (3%) of the girls had lived in only one family, while 17 (7%) girls had spent time in more than ten distinct families. The maximum number of distinct families reported for any girl was 16.



Figure 4.3 Age of girls at guardianship

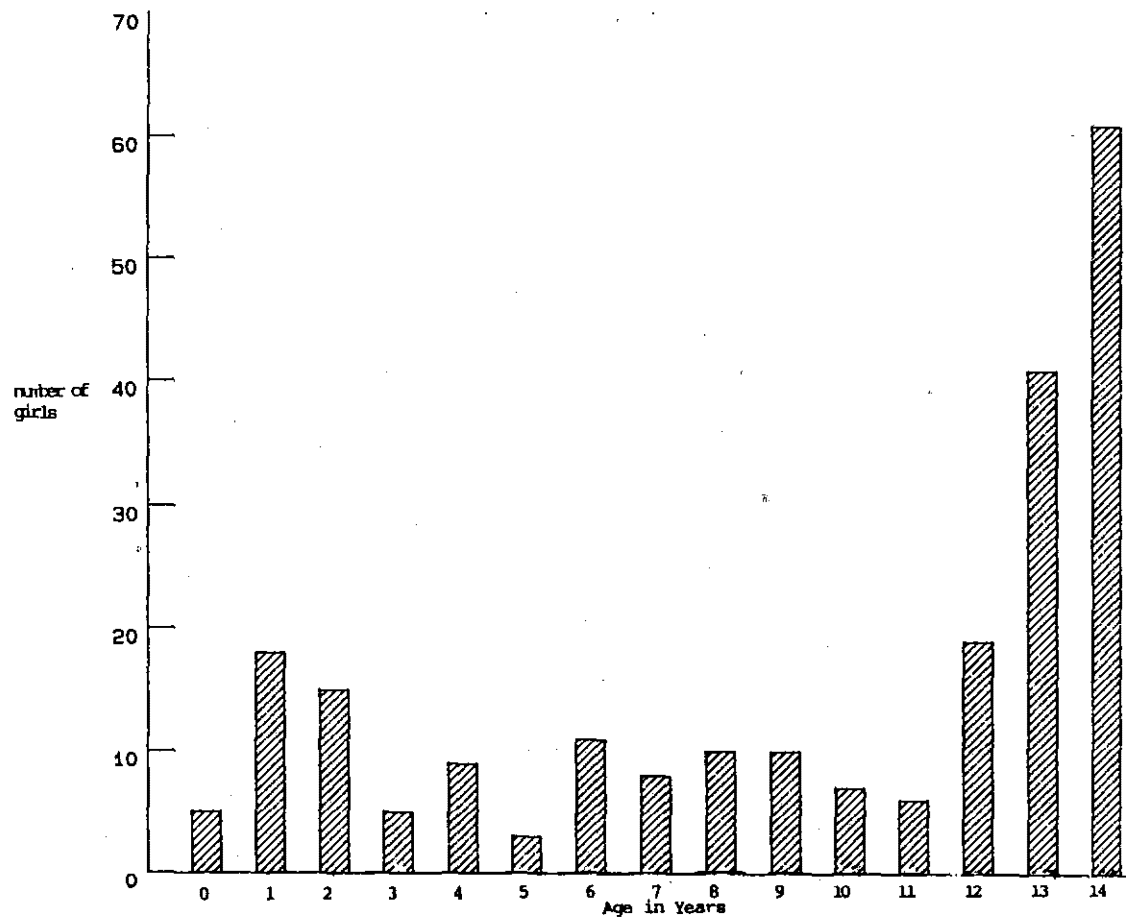
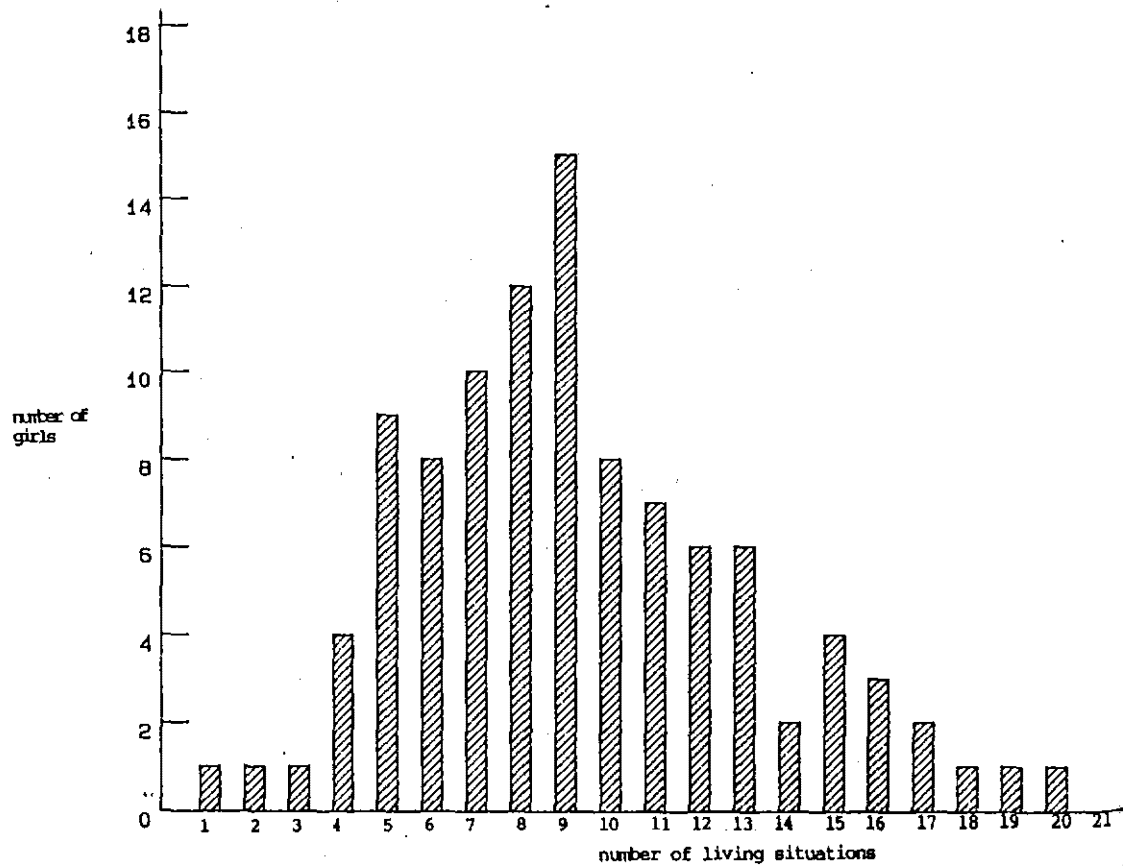


Figure 4.4 Total number of living situations



#### 4.14 Total number of institution placements

Most of the girls (190, 79%) had lived in an institution at some time in their lives. The count of institutions here included Department of Social Welfare national institutions, girls homes, boarding schools, hostels and other private institutions. The number of stays each girl had had in an institution ranged from none to seven. Forty-nine (21%) girls had never been admitted to an institution, 71 (30%) had had only one stay and 67 (28%) had lived in an institution on two occasions. The remaining 52 (22%) had had between three and seven stays in institutions.

##### Department of Social Welfare national institutions

Over two-thirds of the total sample (168 girls, 70%) had never been admitted to either Kingslea or Weymouth. Fifty eight girls (24%) had been admitted to one of these national institutions on one occasion, 12 (5%) twice and one girl had been in Kingslea three times.

##### Department of Social Welfare girls' homes

A substantial number of the girls (104, 44%) had never lived in a DSW girls' home, while 54 (23%) had had one stay, 57 (24%) two stays and the remaining 24 (10%) had had between three and five stays in DSW girls' homes.

#### 4.15 Breakdowns of living situations or placements

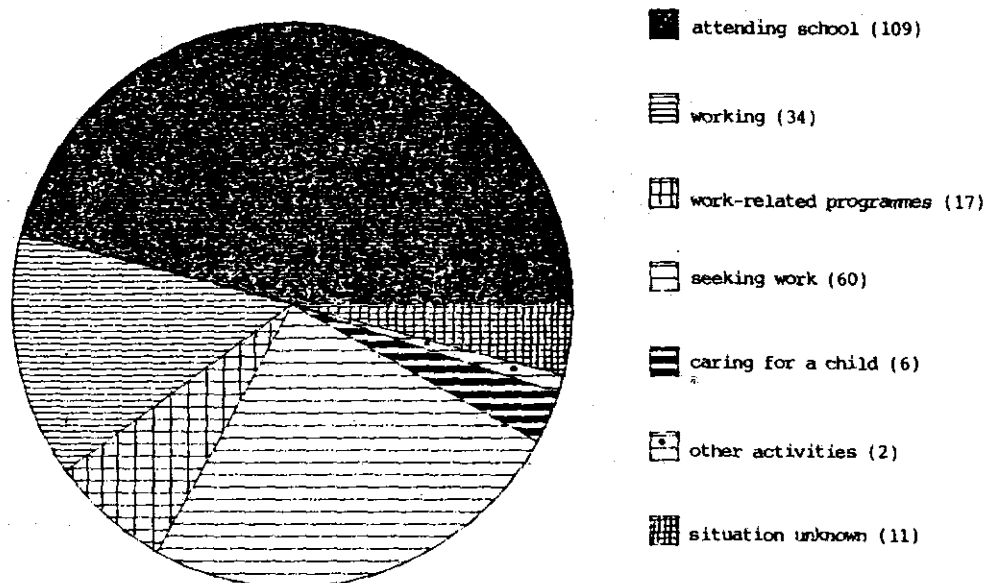
A breakdown was defined as an unplanned ending to a living situation or a placement. On average the girls had experienced four such breakdowns each. Very few (five, 2%) of the girls had not experienced any breakdown and only 6% (14 girls) had experienced more than ten breakdowns. The maximum number of breakdowns experienced by any girl was 16.

If the count is restricted to breakdowns that occurred within family settings (i.e. foster, natural or extended families and DSW family homes), on average the girls had four family breakdowns each. Very few of the girls had never experienced the breakdown of a family placement (five, 2%), while 5% (11) had experienced ten or more family breakdowns. The maximum number of family breakdowns that any one girl had experienced was 13.

#### 4.16 Education and employment status

Of the 239 girls in the sample, 109 (46%) were still attending school at the time of the study, 34 (14%) were working and 17 (7%) were placed on work-related programmes. Out of the remaining 79 (33%), 60 were seeking work, six were caring for a child, and two were involved in other activities. For 11 girls, their situation with regard to schooling or employment was not known. Figure 4.5 shows the education and employment status of the girls in the sample.

Figure 4.5 Education and employment status



#### 4.17 Rate of pregnancy

The number of girls in the sample who had ever been pregnant was recorded. Of the 18 (8%) girls who fell into this category, seven were currently pregnant. (One of these girls had also had a previous pregnancy which had miscarried.) Six of the girls had one child and one had two children. Of the remaining three girls who had experienced a pregnancy, one had a termination and two had had miscarriages.

#### 4.18 Interviewed sample

One hundred and thirty six (57%) of the 239 girls in the total sample were interviewed. This interviewed sample generally reflected the total sample with respect to the characteristics of the girl and her family. There were, however, three factors on which those who were interviewed differed from the total sample: experience of breakdowns, father-figure and ethnic group.

In the total sample five girls had not experienced the breakdown of a family placement or living situation. None of these girls were interviewed, four being unsuitable (for reasons such as a very low IQ) and one refused to do the interview. In other respects, the number of breakdowns in non-interviewed and interviewed samples were similar.

The 17 girls who had no identifiable father-figure were under-represented in the interviewed sample. Only 18% (three) of these girls were interviewed compared to the 60% of those with father-figures who were interviewed.

Finally, girls from the Pacific Island ethnic groups were under-represented in the interviewed sample. Only 32% (eight) of girls from Pacific Island ethnic groups were interviewed compared with 65% (57) of the Pakeha group and 57% (70) of the Maori group. However, the Pacific Island ethnic groups comprised a relatively small percentage of the total sample (11%, 25 girls).

In all other respects, the interviewed and non-interviewed groups did not show statistically significant differences.\*

#### 4.19 Summary

- 1 The majority of the young women\*\* involved in the study had lived most of their lives in urban areas.
- 2 Thirty-seven per cent were Pakeha, 51% were Maori and 12% were of other ethnic origin.
- 3 In terms of socio-economic status, the sample approximated the New Zealand population as a whole except that the highest status group was under-represented and the lowest status group was over-represented.
- 4 The girls came from large families of origin in the majority of cases, having an average of six siblings each (including half, step and adoptive siblings). The families in which they had spent the greatest amount of time had an average of four children.
- 5 Two-thirds spent the majority of their childhood with their natural mothers and nearly half spent the majority of their childhood with their natural fathers. Foster parents were the next most common care-givers followed by step-parents and adoptive parents. For eight girls (3%) their main parent figures were institution staff members and 17 (7%) had no identifiable father-figure.

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\* Throughout the report the term "not statistically significant" will refer to differences which are not sufficient to allow rejection of the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level when the Chi-square test is performed.

\*\* Young women are referred to as girls throughout the report as discussed in the footnote on page 1.

- 6 Most of the girls had parent figures of the same ethnic groups as themselves, although 30% of the Maori girls had Pakeha mother-figures and 42% had Pakeha father-figures.
- 7 A quarter of the girls (24%) were living at home at the time of the interview, 7% were fostered with relatives, 28% were in foster homes with non-relatives, 8% were in DSW family homes, 13% were living independently, 7% were living in hostels or boarding schools, 6% were resident in a national institution, 3% were resident in regional institutions, 3% were resident in private institutions and 1% were living in other placements.
- 8 The average age at guardianship was ten. Fifty-five per cent came into the department's care as teenagers. A majority of the guardianship orders were made primarily as a result of the home conditions of the family, rather than offending or misbehaviour of the girl herself.
- 9 Many of the girls had experienced a large number of changes of parent figures and living situations, with one girl having moved through 23 different living situations. On average, the girls had experienced ten changes of care-givers each.
- 10 Over half the girls (58%) had stayed in a DSW regional or national institution at some time. Of these 56% had been in a girls' home and 30% had been in one of the national institutions (such as Weymouth or Kingslea). Most girls (79%) had lived in an institution of some sort at some time in their lives, including private institutions and boarding hostels.
- 11 Nearly all of the girls had experienced unplanned endings to some of their living situations. The average number of such unplanned endings (or breakdowns) was four.
- 12 Less than half (46%) of the girls were still attending school at the time of the interview and of those who were not at school, sixty (25% of the whole sample) were unemployed and seeking work.
- 13 Eighteen (8%) had been pregnant at some time and eight of them had produced children.
- 14 The girls who were interviewed were, in most respects, similar to the whole sample except that proportionately fewer Pacific Island girls, proportionately fewer of those with no identifiable father-figure and proportionately fewer of those who had not experienced the breakdown of a placement were interviewed.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF SEXUAL ABUSE

#### 5.1 The kind of experiences considered to be sexual abuse

It is apparent that authors in the area of sexual abuse do not all agree as to what constitutes sexual abuse (see Chapter 2). A number of factors are usually considered when operating definitions are arrived at. The main factors are: the age of the child, the age of the abuser, the relationship between the abuser and the child, the sexual acts involved, whether force was involved, whether the act was voluntary and how the child felt about it. It is clear that most of these factors interact with each other. For example, two very young children touching each other's genitals would not normally be considered abuse whereas a 19-year-old fondling the genitals of a much younger child would be considered abusive by most authors. There is little disagreement in the literature that abuse has occurred when, for example, a very young child is raped by an adult. However, not all abusive behaviour combines such extremes of these factors, and often they interact in different ways. The importance attributed to different mixes of these factors has led to different definitions of abuse and from there to different estimates of incidence. These have been discussed in Chapter 2.

When the present study was begun it was considered that there was no widely held definition of sexual abuse available in New Zealand and that the study would be more useful if it looked at the whole range of sexual experience, from voluntary activity with peers through to serious sexual abuse and rape. The survey thus sought information from girls about all sexual experiences they had had. A wide range of experiences was described in the interviews and it was found that overall the girls themselves divided their experiences into those they mainly felt good about and those they found unpleasant. In nearly all cases the experiences that they reported feeling good about were also voluntary, although there was a small number of experiences that were entered into voluntarily but regretted afterwards.

It was decided to allow the girls' descriptions of the experiences to define abuse for the purposes of this study. In this respect the approach was different from most of the studies reviewed in Chapter 2 which considered experiences to be abusive because of the age discrepancy between the child and the abuser or because of the relationship between the child and the abuser.

In the present study, experiences were considered abusive if they were involuntary and the girl expressed negative feelings about them, such as feeling afraid, hurt or angry.

These criteria included abuse by similar-aged peers but excluded the small number of voluntary experiences with much older partners, those where the girl herself was very young, those that were later regretted although entered into voluntarily, and experiences the girls felt good about with relatives (such as cousins or foster brothers).

There were no experiences with immediate family, father-figures or natural brothers which the girls rated positively.

The experiences described in this study ranged from rape to suggestions of sexual activity and from full sexual intercourse to people exposing their genitals to the girl. Many of the other studies reviewed have defined all experiences within a range as abusive, while others have distinguished between 'contact' and 'non-contact' experiences when defining abuse (eg. Russell<sup>35</sup>).

Such a substantial number of abusive experiences reported in the present study involved some form of genital contact that it was decided to adopt a 'contact' criterion as the third element of our own definition of abuse. Experiences reported by girls were defined as contact experiences if they involved genital contact, that is sexual intercourse, attempted intercourse, oral-genital contact and the touching of genitals. Other experiences such as touching of breasts or legs, suggestion of exhibitionism were considered to be sexual harassment rather than abuse and have been discussed separately.

In summary, an experience was considered to be sexual abuse if:

- 1 the sexual activity was involuntary;
- 2 the girl expressed negative feelings about it such as anger, fear, or hurt;
- 3 It involved sexual intercourse, attempted intercourse, oral-genital contact or the touching of genitals.

This rather narrow definition would include very few experiences excluded by other studies but would exclude many experiences that other authors would consider to be abusive. There were such a large number of abusive experiences reported even using this narrow definition, that the impact of the findings could be reduced if the definition was broadened. Because some people would not consider the other types of experience to be as serious, it might not be realised how common the more serious types of abuse were. Table 5.1 shows the number of experiences reported that fit the criteria described above and those which do not fit these criteria.

Table 5.1 Types of sexual experiences reported in the interviews

	Number of experiences	Number of girls	% of those interviewed
Involuntary, negative and genital contact (abuse)	169	96	71%
Involuntary, negative but not genital contact (harassment)	20	15	11%
Voluntary sexual contact with relatives	8	7	5%
Voluntary sexual experiences when girls were 12 or younger	14	12	9%
Voluntary sexual experiences with partners more than five years older	16	16	12%
Voluntary sexual experiences later regretted	7	7	5%
Prostitution and related activity	1	1	1%
Voluntary sexual experiences with peers	Not collected in terms of separate experiences	67	49%
Other sexual experiences	3	3	2%

*Note:* Girls may have reported more than one kind of experience so that the percentages add to more than 100%. The table is based on data for the 136 girls who were interviewed.



This chapter will focus on the experiences within the definition of abuse and the other experiences will be discussed in Chapter 12.

## 5.2 Incidence of sexual abuse

Using the above criteria, 96 girls or 71% of the 136 girls were interviewed, had had experiences which were considered to be abusive. Information was also collected on experiences which the 103 girls who were not interviewed had had which fitted the criteria. This information came from reading the personal files of the girls and from the social worker questionnaires. For these girls an experience was only included in the data collection if it was clear that the abuse was reported by the girl herself or if it had been proven in court. Thirty-three of those not interviewed had been abused according to the information on file. In addition one girl reported by her social worker to have been abused although it was not recorded on her file making a total of 34 girls or 25% of those not interviewed who were known to have experienced sexual abuse.

When figures for both these groups are combined there is evidence that 130 girls or 54% of the total sample of 239 had experienced sexual abuse. How this percentage might compare to the true incidence of histories of sexual abuse among girls in social welfare care is not straightforward, however. Firstly, the figure of 54% is based on a relatively small sample, and it may be that if the same information could be collected in the same way for all girls in care then the percentage obtained could fall some way either side of this estimate. If a 95% confidence interval for the 54% estimate is constructed, then it appears from this sample data that the proportion would fall somewhere between 48% and 60%.

Secondly, such an estimate assumes that incidence for girls who were interviewed and for girls in the sample who were not interviewed was the same. As the percentages reported for each group at the beginning of this section show, this is not a valid assumption. The data indicate two sources for this disparity in incidence between girls who were interviewed and those who were not:

- 1 many of the instances of abuse reported by girls who were interviewed were not recorded on departmental files and/or not known to their social workers. Only 64% of girls who reported abuse at interview had abuse recorded on file or were known by their social workers to have been abused;
- 2 it appears that fewer of the girls who were not interviewed had experienced sexual abuse. Only 39% (39 girls) not interviewed had abuse documented on file known to their social worker compared to 47% of those who were interviewed. This difference however, was not statistically significant.

It would seem, therefore, that girls who had been sexually abused were more likely to be available to be interviewed than those who had not, so the 'true' incidence of sexual abuse over all girls in care may not be as high as the 71% reported in the interviews. It does appear though that the true incidence is higher than the figure of 54% based on the information obtained from files and social workers for those not interviewed and from the interview for those who were interviewed, as such a large number of the instances of abuse were not reported on file or known to the social worker. It is likely then, that a number of the girls who were not interviewed had experienced sexual abuse which was not reported on file or known to the social workers. If the under-reporting rate for the girls not interviewed was the same as that for the girls who were interviewed (something we cannot be sure of), we can estimate that approximately 60 of the girls not interviewed had been abused. This suggests that it is more likely that the true incidence of sexual abuse among girls under guardianship of the Director-General is in the order of 65%.

To summarise, the findings of this study indicate that over half the girls under guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare are likely to have been sexually abused at some time in their past and indications are that as many as 70% may have experienced abuse.

### 5.3 Characteristics of the abusive situation

This discussion of the characteristics of abuse will be in terms of instances of abuse rather than in terms of the individual girl because a large number of the girls reported more than one abusive experience.

The term instance of abuse refers to an episode of abuse which could have occurred either on a single occasion or on a series of occasions when the perpetrator was the same person. In total 169 separate instances of abuse were described by the 96 girls who reported sexual abuse.

Forty-six girls (48% of the 96 interviewed who had been abused) reported more than one abusive experience. Of those, 24 girls reported two, 17 reported three, four reported four and one girl reported five unrelated instances of abuse.

Seventy-one (42%) of the 169 instances of abuse described began prior to coming under the guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare, 67 (40%) began after guardianship, 16 (10%) began in the same year as guardianship and for 15 experiences it is not known when the abuse began.

Forty-eight per cent of the abusive experiences (82 instances) occurred once only, 5% (nine) occurred over a period of less than one month, 10% (17) happened over a period of between a

month and a year, 13% (22) continued for more than a year less than five years and 5% (eight) of the experiences were for five years or longer.

The duration was not known for 18% (31) of the experiences. Figure 5.1 shows the duration of these experiences.

The ages of the girls at the time the abuse began ranged from two to 15, the average age being ten. In eight instances the girl was under five. She was aged between five and ten years old for 80 instances of abuse (47%) and was 13 or older for 66 (39%). The age of the girl was not known for 15 experiences (9%). Figure 5.2 shows the girl's age at the time the abuse began.

#### 5.4 The abuser

A detailed description of who the abusers were is given in Table 5.2 on page 50. Ninety-six per cent of the abusers were male, 3% (five people) were female and 1% (two instances) involved mixed sex groups.

Looking at some of the logical groupings in Table 5.2, about a fifth of abusers (18%) were father-figures, about one in ten (13%) were brothers, stepbrothers or foster brothers and 1% were foster or stepsisters. Half of the abuse (51%) involved members of the girl's immediate or extended family, about a third (36%) concerned other people known to the girl or her family and 15 instances (9%) involved abuse by strangers (see Figure 5.3 on page 51). The identity of the abuser was not known for eight experiences (5%). Members of foster families were involved in 19 instances of abuse (11%) and a male staff member in an institution was involved in one incident.

Groups of two or more people had abused the girl in 14 of the experiences described (8%). Figure 5.3 on page 51 gives the abuser's relationship to the girl.

The abusers were more likely to be members of the girl's family, particularly fathers and uncles, in the first experiences of abuse and more likely to be other people, particularly friends of the girl, in subsequent abuse.

This would suggest that girls who are abused within the family initially may be more likely to be later abused by people outside the family.

Figure 5.1 Duration of abusive experience

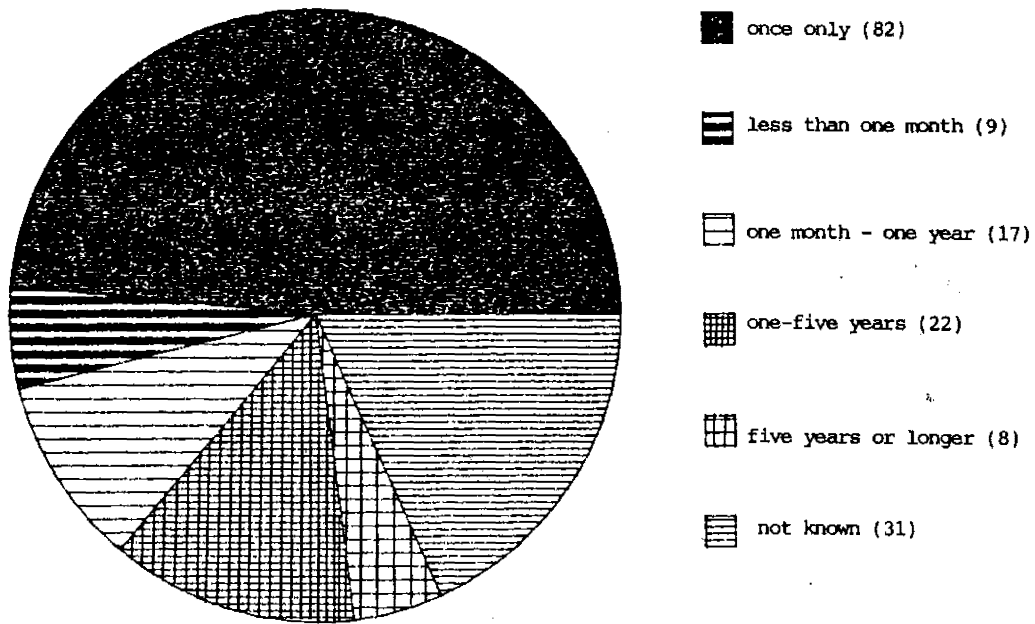


Figure 5.2 Age of girl at first experience of abuse

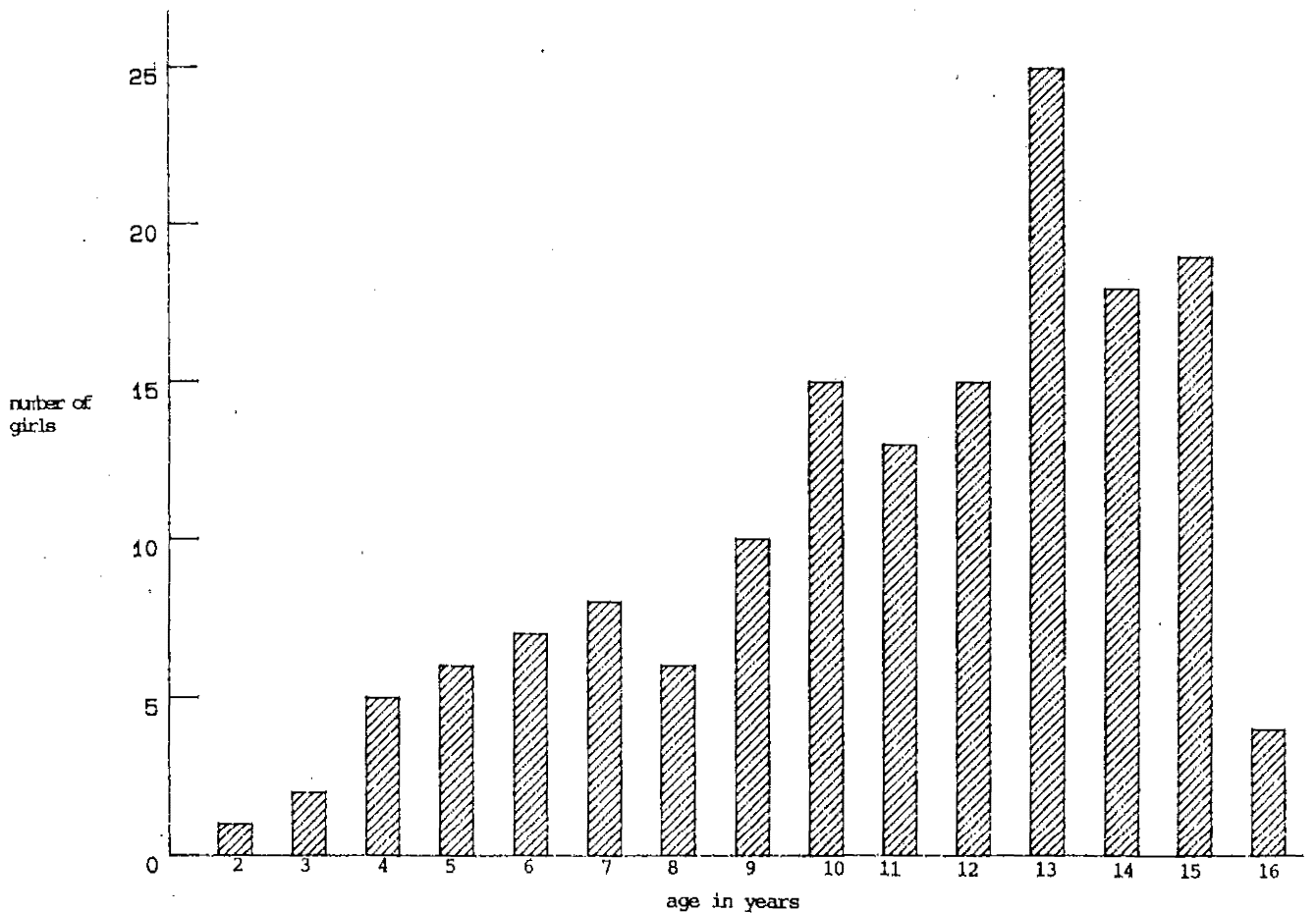


Table 5.2 Abuser's relationship to the girl

	Instances abuse
Natural father	11
Adoptive father	2
Stepfather	8
Foster father	9
Brother or half brother	10
Stepbrother	2
Foster brother	8
Grandfather	3
Foster grandfather	1
Uncle	17
Male cousin	9
Sister's husband or boyfriend	4
Stepsister	1
Foster sister	<u>1</u>
<b>TOTAL RELATIVES</b>	<b>86</b>
Boyfriend, male friend or acquaintance of girl	31
Male family friend	10
Mother's boyfriend (not live-in)	5
Boarder	2
Male babysitter	1
Male institution staff member	1
Other female known to girl	3
More than one male known to girl or family	5
Mixed sex group	<u>2</u>
<b>TOTAL KNOWN TO GIRL</b>	<b>60</b>
Male stranger	8
More than one male stranger	<u>7</u>
<b>TOTAL STRANGERS</b>	<b>15</b>
Identity of abuser not known	<u>8</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b><u>169</u></b>

Figure 5.3 The abusers' relationship to the girl

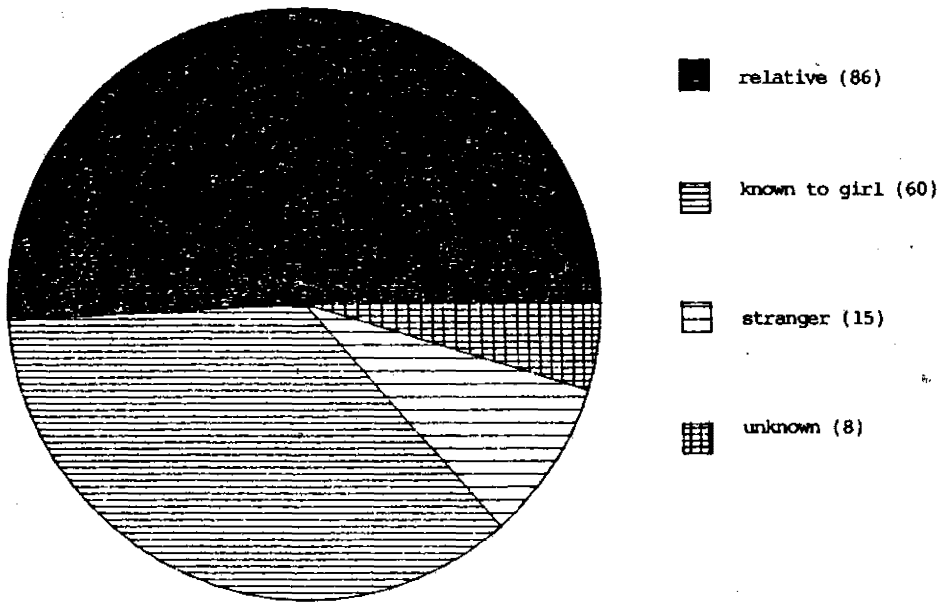
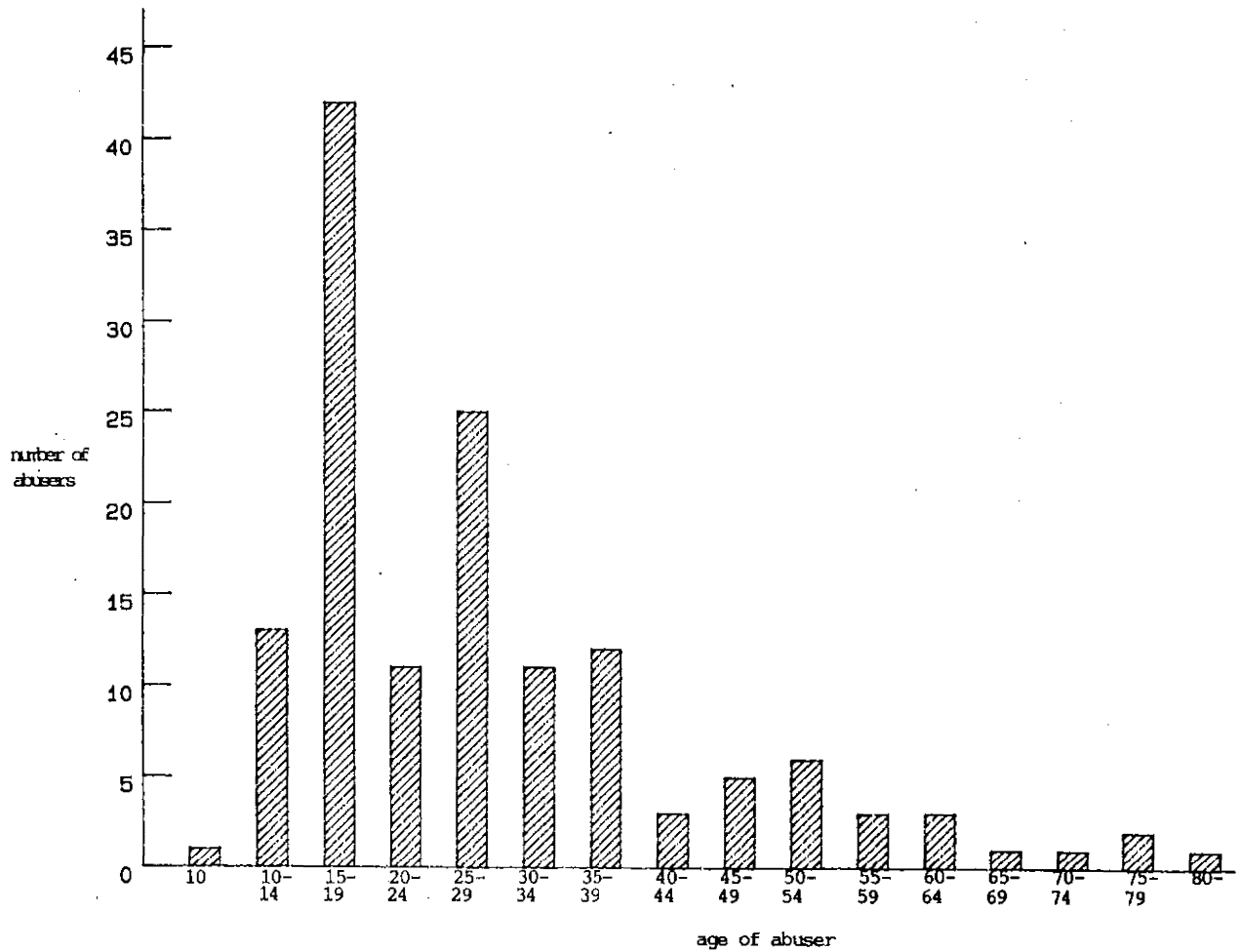


Figure 5.4 Age of the abuser



The abusers ranged in age from three to 80 with a mean 28. Twenty-six percent (44) of the abusers were aged younger. The age was not known for 27 (16%) abusers. 5.4 gives the distribution of the ages of the abusers.

Sixty-seven abusers (40%) were Pakeha, 62 (36%) were M 16 (9%) were from other ethnic groups. The ethnic group not known for 24 (14%) of the abusers.

### 5.5 Sexual acts involved

Sexual intercourse was involved in 44% of the instances of abuse. Other types of abusive activity involved attempted intercourse, oral sexual contact and/or the touching of genitals. The sexual acts described by girls in the instances are given in Table 5.3. This table should not be seen as a comprehensive list, however, as where sexual intercourse was described information was not usually collected on the other activities that may have accompanied it. The reason for this was that the girls often found it hard to describe the activity in detail and if intercourse was involved it was thought necessary to know about any other activities. Where intercourse was not involved, the sexual acts the girls described were recorded and those presented here cover those where genital contact occurred. The range of sexual acts that was described when genital contact did not occur is discussed in the section on harassment in Chapter 12.

The abuser used force or threats to make the girl participate in 88 instances of abuse (53%) and bribed her or got her to ensure her participation in another four (2%). For the remaining 16 instances (9%) threats were also used to prevent her talking about the abuse (66 instances, 39%) and bribes were used in six instances to keep her quiet.

Examples of the way force, threats and bribes were used are given below.

*"He would tell me he'd get me into trouble with Auntie. That was threatening enough." "He had a baton and he pulled my hair and stuck a rag in my mouth and he locked me in the room with him and started hitting me." "He slapped me around, told me I was a slut and had sex with me. He was brutal about it too." "He would get me because I wouldn't let him near me. Would threaten me with a gun in Miramar Girls Home." "He used to lay on top of me and would get me off." "He used blackmail, bribes, doing the dishes ..." "I was frightened of him and just let him do it. He told me not to tell anyone or he would give me a hiding." "She was the top girl in the school and she said I'd made her do it." "Stuck a knife to my throat and said tell anybody I'll kill you. I was scared." "He gave me more than I was scared of him I wouldn't tell anybody." "He threatened to burn Mum's house down (if I told)". "(He said) 'Don't tell anyone about the other one (an earlier incident of abuse by another person)." "Buy me things to keep me quiet." "He used bribes and threats of psychology because I didn't know any better".*

**Table 5.3 Sexual acts involved**

	<i>Instances of abuse where the act occurred</i>	
<i>Sexual intercourse</i>	74	44%
<i>Attempted sexual intercourse</i>	58	34%
<i>Performing oral sex on other person</i>	12	7%
<i>Oral sex performed on her</i>	13	8%
<i>Touching other person's genital</i>	33	20%
<i>Other person touching her genitals</i>	51	30%
<i>Other person touching her breasts</i>	45	29%
<i>Exposure of genitals</i>	16	10%
<i>Other touching interpreted as sexual</i>	4	2%
<i>Simulated intercourse and masturbating in front of her</i>	1	1%
<i>Suggestions, innuendos, abduction, abused others in front of her</i>	4	2%
<i>Photography, arranged for others to see her undress</i>	1	1%
<i>Unspecified sexual contact with women</i>	2	1%
<i>Other unspecified</i>	2	1%

Note: A number of instances involved more than one sexual act. For this reason the percentages in the columns add to more than 100%. The acts that fall outside the criteria for abuse are only included because they occurred together with genital contact.

**5.6 Involvement of alcohol and other drugs**

Alcohol was involved in a substantial minority of the abusive experiences. Table 5.4 gives details of the abuse where alcohol or other drugs were involved. Only alcohol was asked about systematically. Where information on other drugs is reported, this was spontaneously given by the girls.



The abuser had used alcohol in 55 instances (33%) and the girl had used alcohol in 18 (11%). Other drugs were only mentioned in a small number of instances. The abuser used other drugs in ten instances (6%) and the girl used other drugs in seven (4%). The most commonly reported other drug was marijuana (involved in eight instances).

Table 5.4 Alcohol and drug involvement in the abuse

<u>Alcohol</u>	<u>Instances</u>	
Both used alcohol	15	9%
Abuser only used alcohol	40	24%
Girl only used alcohol	3	2%
<u>Marijuana</u>		
Both used marijuana	2	1%
Abuser only used marijuana	5	3%
Girl only used marijuana	1	1%
<u>Glue and other solvents</u>		
Both used solvents	2	1%
Abuser only used solvents	0	0%
Girl only used solvents	1	1%
<u>Other drugs</u>		
Both used other drugs	1	1%

### 5.7 The girl's feelings about the abuse

The girls were asked how they felt about the abuse. For a large number of the instances of abuse (50, 30%), the girls were not specific about their negative feelings. The responses given by those who were more specific are documented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Specific feelings expressed about the abuse

	Number of instances	
Fear	27	16%
Anger and hatred	25	15%
Shame, guilt or uncleanness	17	10%
General bad feelings	17	10%
Confusion	8	5%
Sadness, hurt, felt upset	6	4%
Mixture of negative feelings	5	3%
Other feelings	4	2%

Examples of the way the feelings were expressed are:

*"I screamed, it was horrible" "I didn't know what was happening. I didn't even know the facts of life. I was scared and I cried." "I knew it was wrong. I couldn't say no. Dad liked him and would have got angry." "I could have killed him." "I smashed his window and 'TV then told Dad." "At the time I didn't think much of it. Now I feel angry inside." "(I felt) pretty sick, even at that age I knew what it was but I couldn't stop it." "I felt like a slut." "When I was little, I thought it was part of life having to put up with it. Then I started to feel squirmish, to avoid him." "I didn't like it then but it's all in the past now." "I was hurt, we were like brother and sister".*

The girls thought there were long-term effects resulting from the majority of the experiences of abuse (93 instances, 55%) and a range of effects was mentioned. Table 5.6 gives a list of the effects mentioned by the girls. The most commonly reported long-term effect was a fear, distrust or dislike of men and boys generally, which was mentioned in response to 36 instances of abuse (21%). Examples were:

*"I had doubts about guys for a long time." "When I get to know guys I shy away." "I don't trust older men anymore." "It made me think about boys and be more careful." "I don't want to get close to boys now".*

Other effects mentioned by a number of the girls were being wary of sex, having a fear, distrust or dislike for a particular man, being unable to forget the experience and being wary of situations where abuse might occur. For example:

*"I don't like sex very much because I always think of him and I freak out." "I hate him for the raping of me and my sister." "I don't like him much as a person. I have this growing anger inside. I want to kill him if I could." "I feel funny, mad, terribly, terribly upset every time I think about it." "I'm a bit wary of going out at night especially in Wellington".*

Table 5.6 Long-term effects of the abuse (as reported by the girls)

<u>Effect</u>	No. of mentions	No. of girls who were abused	%
Fear, distrust or dislike of men and boys generally	36	27	2
Wary of sex	15	11	1
Fear, distrust or dislike of a particular man	10	10	1
Memories of incident won't go away	10	9	
Wary of situations where abuse might occur	9	8	
Fear, distrust or dislike for particular kinds of men	8	8	
Unable to speak of abuse or things associated with it	7	6	
Heightened interest in sex or confusion about sex	7	6	
Unspecified bad effects	5	3	
Fear, distrust or dislike of a particular group of people (mixed sex)	4	4	
Misbehaviour and offending	4	3	
Fear, distrust or dislike of people generally	4	2	
Learnt to handle these kinds of situations, grew up fast	3	3	
Cause of all her problems	3	1	
Low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts or other psychological problems	2	2	
Fear, distrust or dislike of women generally	2	2	
Placement breakdown and movements, links with family destroyed	2	2	
Drug and alcohol problems	2	2	
Other problems	2	2	
Physical problems, VD or other infections	2	2	
Nightmares	1	1	
Pressure from others for sex	1	1	
School work suffered, couldn't think	1	1	

## 5.8 Summary

- 1 Seventy-one per cent of the young women\* interviewed were found to have experienced sexual abuse and 33% of those not interviewed were known to have been sexually abused. When the two groups are combined 54% of the whole sample were found to have experienced sexual abuse. An experience was considered to be abuse if it was involuntary, viewed negatively by the girl and involved genital contact.
- 2 Of those interviewed who had been abused, 48% (46 girls) reported more than one unrelated instance of abuse.
- 3 Forty-two per cent of the 169 experiences of sexual abuse described in the interviews began prior to the girls' coming under guardianship of the Director General of Social Welfare, 10% began in the same year as guardianship and 40% happened after guardianship.
- 4 The average age of the girl at the time of the the first abusive experience was ten. Eight instances of abuse happened before the girl was five.
- 5 The rate of abuse was the same among Maori and Pakeha girls.
- 6 Ninety-six per cent of the abusers were male, 3% were female and 1% were mixed sex groups.
- 7 Fifty-one per cent of the experiences involved the girl's immediate or extended family. Father-figures accounted for 18% of the abusers and brothers for 13%.
- 8 Thirty-seven of the experiences involved other people known to the girl or her family, the most numerous group being male friends or acquaintances of the girl, who accounted for 18% of the abusers.
- 9 Nine per cent of the experiences involved abuse by strangers.
- 10 The mean age of the abusers was 28.
- 11 Forty per cent of the abusers were Pakeha and 36% were Maori.
- 12 Sexual intercourse was involved in 44% of the experiences. The others involved the touching of genitals (either the girl's or the abuser's) in some way.

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\* *Young women are referred to as girls throughout the report as discussed in the footnote on page 1.*

- 13 Force or threats were used by the abuser to ensure the girl's participation in 53% of the instances of abuse and to prevent the girl talking about the abuse in 39% of instances.
- 14 Alcohol was involved in 33% of the instances of abuse and in nearly all of these cases it was used by the abuser.
- 15 The girls were unhappy about all the experiences described in this section and the most common feelings expressed were fear, shame or anger.
- 16 The majority of the abuse (55%) was seen by the girls and have had long-term effects. The most commonly reported long-term effect was fear, distrust or dislike of men and boys.

## CHAPTER 6

### HOW THE ABUSE CAME TO OTHER PEOPLE'S ATTENTION

#### 6.1 Who was told about the abuse

When a girl indicated in the interview that she had experienced sexual abuse a number of questions were asked about whether she had told any of her family, any social workers or any other people about the abuse. For a number of the girls the process of the interview was tiring and asking for very detailed accounts of who was told, particularly for subsequent experiences, was seen as inappropriate. This accounts for a certain amount of missing information in response to these questions, particularly those concerning whether additional people were told of the abuse. This section only concerns those who were interviewed.

In most cases where a girl had experienced sexual abuse, she had told at least one other person about the abuse. Only 19 experiences (11%) were not reported to anybody else and only ten girls who had been abused did not tell anyone about any of the abuse they had experienced (10%).

Figure 6.1 shows who was told about the sexual abuse reported in the interviews.

#### 6.2 Family members

Family members were told about 43% (72 instances) of the abuse and knew about another 9% (15 instances) through other means such as being present or being told by someone else. Of the 87 girls who answered these questions about some instances of abuse, just over half, (46, 33%) told someone in their family about all experiences of abuse. Sixteen (18%) told family members about some experiences and 27 (31%) did not tell family members of any.

Table 6.1 Who in the family was told of the abuse

	<i>Instances</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Mother-figure</i>	51	59%
<i>Father-figure</i>	5	6%
<i>Both parents</i>	6	7%
<i>Sister/foster sister</i>	12	14%
<i>Brother/foster brother</i>	2	2%
<i>Other female relatives</i>	4	5%
<i>Other male relatives</i>	1	1%
<i>Other mixed sex relatives</i>	4	5%
<i>Not known</i>	2	2%

Figure 6.1 Who the girl told about the abuse

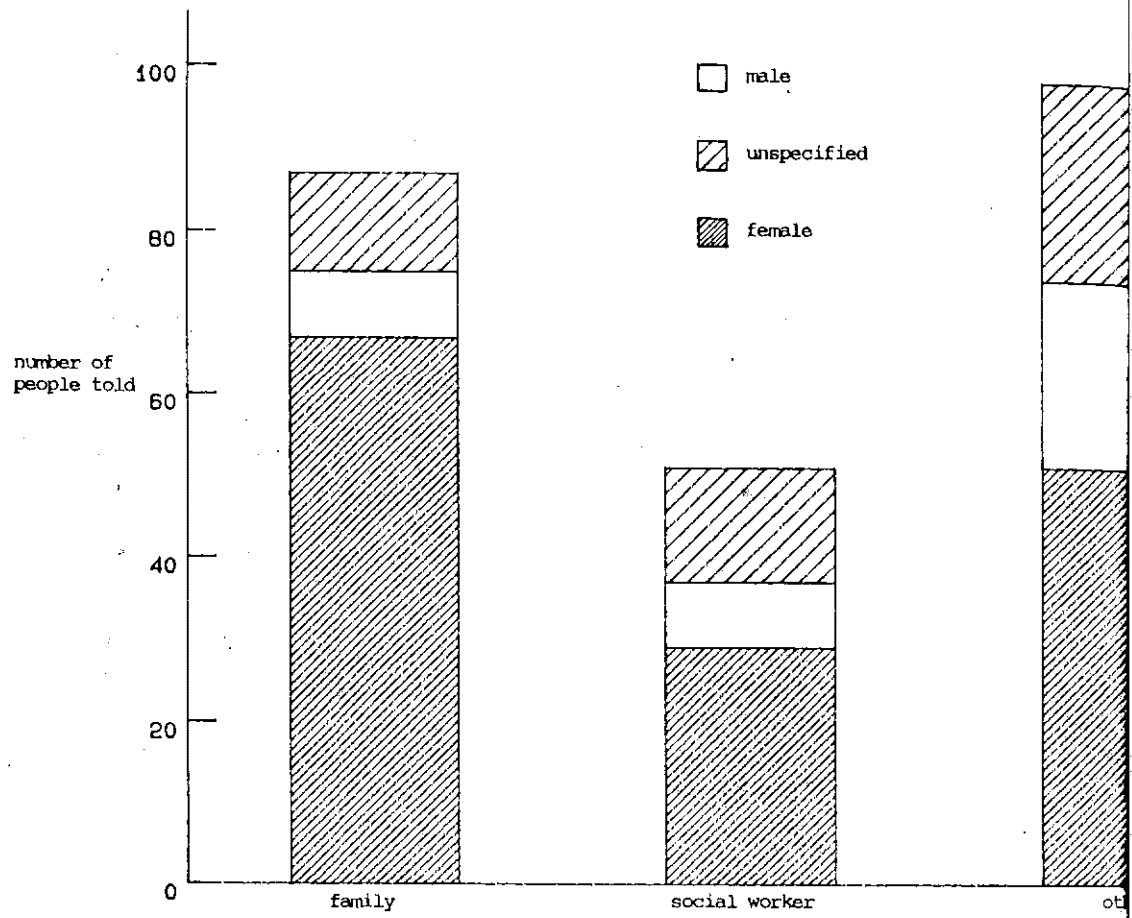
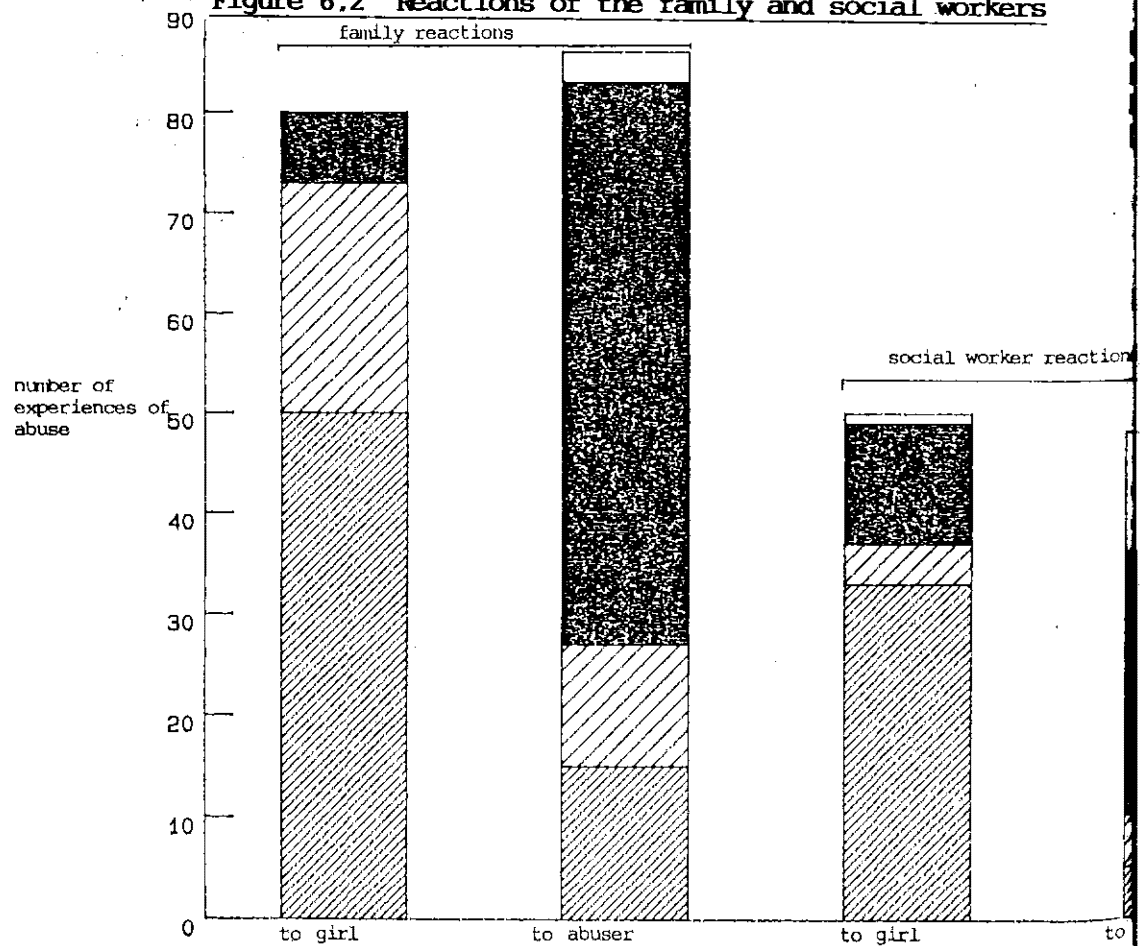


Figure 6.2 Reactions of the family and social workers



The family members who were told were usually female as Table 6.1 shows. Female relatives were told about 77 instances of abuse which make up 89% of all instances where a family member was told. Usually it was the mother-figure who was told. This was the case in 57 of these experiences.

Family members were also usually told shortly after the event occurred. Well over half the experiences (57%, 50 instances) were reported within a month of the abuse beginning, a further 9% (eight) were reported within a year. A quarter were not disclosed until at least a year after the abuse had begun: 17% (15 instances) were reported between one and five years afterwards and 8% (seven) more than five years afterwards. For 8% (seven) there was no information on when family members were told.

#### Reactions of family members

Family members were more likely to react positively toward the girl than negatively, although a small number were ambivalent or indifferent to the girl. Examples of the ways girls reported the reactions of their family are:

*"She tried to get evidence so they'd believe her." "Cross and supportive." "Really upset, apologised about not believing me earlier".*

It was also more usual for family members to react negatively to the abuser. For example:

*"Told Dad to get the bastard. Dad went to the police. He got taken to court but he got off." "(mother) Kicked him (boarder) out."  
"(mother) Didn't love him (father) - had to be there for our sakes."  
"(foster mother) Had a few words with him and I haven't seen him since".*

Looking at the reaction of particular family members, it is clear that siblings were more supportive to the girl than parents, and mother-figures were more supportive than fathers. When all family members are considered, male family members were no less supportive than female family members. However, since such a small number of male family members were told at all compared with female family members it is possible that males were told only if the girl had reason to believe they would be likely to respond positively to her. Family members were most positive in their response to the girl if the abuser was a stranger and least positive if the abuser was a non-relative known to the girl or family (particularly towards friends or acquaintances of the girl).

Siblings tended to react more positively to the abuser than parents and female relatives tended to react less negatively than male relatives to the abuser. Family members showed particularly negative responses to abusers who were strangers, members of foster families, babysitters or institution staff.



Abusers who were family members or relatives were more likely to be viewed positively than other abusers by other family members. This was particularly the case with natural fathers, adoptive fathers or stepfathers, but also to a lesser degree with brothers and uncles. Figure 6.2 on page 60 shows the reactions of family members to the girl and the abuser.

#### How the girls felt about the reactions

Several of the girls felt dissatisfaction with their family response when they were told about the abuse, even where the reaction was described as positive. In the case of seven instances the girl felt bad about the family's reaction although it was positive to her and in the case of a further six instances the girl had mixed feelings about her family reaction although it was positive. In the case of two instances of abuse the girl felt positive about her family reaction to her even though it was negative. Examples of girls' feelings about their families' reactions are:

*"I was pissed off because even though (the abuser's daughter) believed me, I'd have liked her to have rung Social Welfare straight away or the police." "I felt bad he had to leave his job." (the girl was) pleased that it came out but not so pleased with Mum because she didn't do nothing." "I felt sorry for her (mother who was to support me) because she was quite cold." "I felt sort of angry because he showed more support to her (the abuser) than me".*

The girls tended to feel more positive about their family reaction to their disclosure if the abuser was not related to them. They tended to feel most negative when the abuser was a close family member such as a father-figure or a brother.

Those who were not totally happy with their family's reaction were asked how they would have liked them to react. Only 12 girls (67%) answered this question. Of these, 20 (57%) wanted people to listen and believe them or be supportive and understanding. Ten wanted the abuser punished or something done to stop the abuse continuing, and two wanted both the above responses. Two of the remainder commented that their response they had received could have been worse and they would have liked accepting of the response they received, and the other six wanted to be told right from wrong. Examples of the responses girls would have liked from their families were:

*"... Liked her to believe me and get it out of the way." "I would have liked her to be more supportive because I was attacked". "Understand me, talk to me about it. I still do, I still want to talk to her about it." "Like her to believe me at the start." "It would have split the family if she'd said something. She couldn't do anything."*

*"More caring. Could've tried to help me more." "Just gone down and told him not to do it." "To speak to Dad from the first time it happened." "Kick him out." "Not react at all, I'd rather she'd not found out." "(react) More quietly".*

Of those who told their families, about two-thirds said they wanted help from them and just over half of these thought they had received help.

#### Reasons for not telling family members

Those who did not tell anyone in their family about the abuse gave a variety of reasons for this. The most commonly mentioned reason (20 instances, 38%) was that they were afraid or would get a hiding. Other reasons indicating a lack of a satisfactory relationship such as not knowing how to tell, never being asked or judging it to be not relevant to the family, accounted for a substantial number of the remainder (12 instances, 23%). Table 6.2 on page 64 classifies the reasons given by the girls. Examples of particular responses are:

*"I didn't want him (the abuser) to beat me up." "Might get a hiding from them (the family)." "I was scared of him (the abuser)." "I didn't want anyone to find out." "... 'Cause they'd yell and carry on." "I had no one to turn to." "I couldn't reach them from Whangarei".*

Most of those who did not tell their families expected a negative reaction to themselves and a negative reaction to the abuser - for example "they'd kill me" or "they'd kill him".

Most of the girls who did not disclose the abuse said they did not want help from their families, but those who did usually wanted help from their parent figures, especially their mothers. In most cases nobody in the family had asked any questions about the abuse, although for six instances of abuse (11% of those where nobody in the family was told) someone did ask about the abuse but was not told. The people who did ask were mothers (two), sisters (two), both brothers and sisters (one), and a grandmother (one).

#### 6.3 Social workers

Girls who had been abused less commonly talked to social workers than to their families about the abuse (See Figures 6.1 and 6.2 on page 60). Social workers were told about 39 instances of abuse (23%) and knew about a further 12 (7%) through other means.

**Table 6.2 Reasons for not telling anyone in the family**

	No. of res- ponses	%	No. of girls	% of all girls inter- viewed
Not wanting people to know, none of their business etc.	8	15%	7	7%
Lack of satisfactory relationship, never asked, didn't know how to tell	12	23%	9	9%
Wouldn't be believed	3	6%	3	3%
Afraid	20	38%	16	17%
Ashamed, guilty or embarrassed	7	13%	7	7%
Protect the abuser or protect others	3	6%	2	2%
Reason not known	2	4%	2	2%

**Table 6.3 Reasons for not telling a social worker**

	No. of res- ponses	%	No. of girls	% of all girls inter- viewed
Not wanting people to know, none of their business etc.	34	41%	29	30%
Lack of satisfactory relationship, never asked, didn't know how to tell	26	31%	20	21%
Wouldn't be believed	1	1%	1	1%
Afraid	4	5%	4	4%
Ashamed, guilty or embarrassed	6	7%	5	5%
Protect the abuser or others	3	4%	3	3%
Reason not known	8	10%	7	7%
Didn't think it was abuse then.	1	1%	1	1%

Note: Multiple responses are possible because a number of reasons could have been given for each experience and each girl could have experienced more than one instance of abuse and have given different reasons for not revealing the abuse to family or social workers.

If the 96 girls who reported sexual abuse are considered, 27 (28%) reported all the abuse they experienced to social workers, 16 (17%) reported some abuse to social workers and 43 (45%) reported no abuse to social workers. The remaining ten girls did not indicate if any instances of abuse had been reported to social workers.

Female social workers were more likely to be told about the abuse than males. Fifty-nine per cent of those told were female, 16% were male and 24% were groups of social workers of both sexes or where the sex was not reported. Current DSW social workers accounted for 51% of those told. Two experiences were reported to a private agency social worker and for one the girl gave no details as to the identity of the social worker.

Social workers were not generally told about the abuse until a longer time had elapsed than was the case with family members. Only 33% of social workers were told within a month compared to 57% of family members, and 20% were told more than five years later compared with only 8% of family members.

#### Reactions of social workers

Social workers were more likely than family members to react positively to the girl and negatively to the abuser, although for 12 instances of abuse (24%) the girl did not know how the social worker had reacted to the abuser. Some examples of the responses of the social workers were:

*"She listened and we talked about it. She abused him." "Support, understanding, took me to Help." "(she did) Nothing, a little concerned. She knew she couldn't do anything about it." "She took me up to the hospital which was good, she didn't say anything about it. I think it'll put her off gang members though." "She was very upset as she (the social worker) was the person who placed me in that family home. They wanted to take strong actions against (the foster father) and they helped me and went to the (police) station with me." "She was blooming mad. Why didn't I tell anyone? She said I should've had him up for sexual abuse." "In between, not supportive or hostile - neutral." "(reaction to the girl) Fussy, (to the abuser) very polite".*

Social workers were slightly less supportive of the girl if the abuser was a father-figure and, although girls were less willing to tell social workers of abuse involving siblings, in all these cases where the social worker was told, the social worker was supportive of the girl. In the only situation where a social worker was told of a female abuser the social worker's response to the girl interviewed was negative and to the other girl (the abuser) was positive. The only other abusers to whom

the social worker's response was positive were, a natural father, a stepfather and two uncles. Female social workers tended to respond more positively to the girls than male workers when told about the abuse but they were less likely than male social workers to respond negatively to the abuse.

In just over 50% of the cases (29 instances of abuse), the girl was happy with the social worker's response. The response desired by those who were not happy with the response they received covered a wide range although the girls were generally more likely to want something done to punish the abuser of the abuse when they told social workers than when they told other people. Seven of the twelve who described how they have liked social workers to respond gave this response compared with 13 of the 50 answers relating to persons other than social workers. Examples of the responses were:

*"Chop his balls off, give him a hiding." "I would have liked them to have done something about it." "More should have been done. Keep him in there longer." "Stick up for me".*

Unfortunately, for 53% (14) of the instances of abuse when the girl was not entirely happy about the response she had received from her social worker, she did not indicate how she would have liked the social worker to respond.

In 51% of the instances (26) the girls said she wanted help when she told her social worker, and in 21 instances received help.

#### Reasons for not telling social workers

The reasons given for not telling social workers about the abuse differed slightly from the reasons for not telling family members as Table 6.3 on page 64 shows. The girls were much more likely not to want the social worker to know about the abuse or to consider it none of the social worker's business. They were also slightly more likely to give reasons relating to the quality of the relationship with the social worker. Few girls were much less likely to give fear as a reason. Examples of the reasons they did not tell their social worker were:

*"I never felt close to any social worker to talk about it." "I don't want to be the run then, none of their business." "What the fuck for? So everyone can read about it." "I didn't know any." "Didn't think it needed to know." "Don't trust any social workers and don't like them." "Has never asked me. If he asked me if I'd been raped I'd say yes." "Don't know what they'd have done to me." "Don't want to remember my childhood - when I was younger." "I'm not scared to tell her but I don't get a chance to." "None of their business - too late now." "Don't want anyone to know about it." "Never thought about it."*

Those who had not told any social workers about the abuse tended to expect a negative reaction if they had done so, a result which parallels that for families. For 23 experiences (28%) they thought the reaction would be positive and for 28 (33%) they expected a negative reaction to themselves. For the remaining 33 (40%) the expected reactions were mixed or indifferent, or the girl did not answer the question or did not know how she expected the social workers to react.

The majority expected the social worker would react negatively to the abuser although again for a sizeable number of instances of abuse (eight, 10%), they did not know how the social worker would react.

Only 8% (seven girls) who did not tell a social worker nevertheless would have liked some help from a social worker. Three of these would have liked help from their present female Department of Social Welfare social worker, one would have liked help from her present female social worker with a private agency and three would have liked help from previous social workers. Social workers had asked about ten abusive experiences (12% of those where social workers were not told). Female social workers were more likely to have asked whether the girl had been abused than male social workers.

#### 6.4 Other people

Seventy-four instances of abuse (44%) were revealed to people other than family members and social workers. This is the majority of the 134 instances for which we have information on this question. There was no information given on whether people other than family or social workers were told about 35 instances (21%). The remainder of this section will concern the 134 experiences where information was given.

Some abuse was revealed to a number of other people and information was collected about each person or group told. Of the 98 other people told (about the 74 instances where someone else was told) 52% were female, 23% were male, 8% were mixed sex groups and for 16% the sex of the person told was not known. Peers accounted for 47% (46 people) of the other people told and siblings or similar aged relatives for 10% (ten people). Adult care-givers accounted for 16% (16 people), adult relatives for 8% (eight people) and police for 9% (nine people). Three of the other people were counsellors, two were "street parents", one was a teacher, one was a neighbour and the other was a newspaper reporter.

Only 32% (32 experiences) of the other people were told within a month of the abuse and 20% (20 experiences) were told five or more years after, a pattern similar to that for social workers. Again the majority of those told reacted positively to the girl (78%, 76 instances) and negatively to the abuser

(74%, 68 instances). Of these people, police officers reacted most negatively to the girl and least negatively to the abuser. Adult relatives were most positive to the girl and most negative to the abuser. Some typical answers are:

*"Understanding. It had happened to her (adult care-giver)." "D care, understood, no pressure (adult care-giver)." "Couldn't do anything - no evidence. Told him 'Don't touch her' (police)." "understood. It happens sometimes (adult care-giver)." "Made me a statement. Never even spoke to him (police)".*

Again the girls usually (76%, 74 instances) felt good about reactions they received from other people and again those who were not happy with these reactions usually wanted more support and understanding. Most said they had wanted help when they were told people and the majority considered they had received it.

The reasons given for not telling people other than family members or social workers about the abuse were more similar to those given for not telling social workers than those for not telling family members. Not wanting to talk about the incident, considering it none of other people's business or wanting to forget it featured predominantly in response to this question. Examples of particular responses are:

*"Wanted to sort it out for myself." "People talk, it would have spread around." "I don't feel like telling people, they tend to take it the wrong way or they pity you." "Don't want anyone else to interfere." "Didn't want to." "Don't trust anyone round to tell." "Can't let it out with other people".*

Not knowing how to tell, lack of trust or never being asked were also common responses. Four instances of abuse were reported because the girl was ashamed or embarrassed, and one because she thought she would not be believed.

Those who did not tell anyone else about the abuse were more likely to expect a negative reaction to themselves and to the abuser.

#### 6.5 Abuse that was reported to other people and that which was not

Certain types of abuse were more likely to be reported to family members while others were less likely to be reported. That involving immediate family (fathers or brothers) was more likely to be revealed to others both inside and outside the family. Abuse involving strangers was more likely to be reported to social workers than to family members while abuse involving brothers was more likely to be revealed to peers than to social workers.

There were 19 instances of abuse where nobody was told about them and only seven of these (37%) involved relatives and four of these involved members of foster families. None involved natural fathers or brothers. Of the remaining 12 instances, six concerned friends of the girl, and four involved strangers. The other two involved family friends. It would seem that where the girl told nobody about the abuse, she had typically been abused by a peer, a stranger or by a member of a foster family.

#### 6.6 Summary

- 1 Most experiences of sexual abuse were reported to somebody. Only 11% were reported to nobody else and only 10% of the young women\* interviewed who had been abused had told nobody about any experience.
- 2 The girls were more likely to tell another female about the abuse than a male. Females were generally more supportive of the girl than males, but not necessarily more negative to the abuser.
- 3 More abuse was revealed to family members than to social workers or to other people.
- 4 The sexual abuse was most likely to be revealed to family members at the time it occurred and more likely to be revealed to social workers and others some time afterwards.
- 5 The girls mainly received supportive reactions from the people they told and were usually happy with the reaction they received.
- 6 Siblings were more positive to the girl than parents but also more positive towards the abuser. Mothers were more positive towards the girl and in their response to the abuser than fathers. Social workers were more positive to the girl and more negative to the abuser than family members. Female social workers were more positive to the girl than male social workers. Of the other people told, adult relatives were most positive to the girl and most negative to the abuser and police were least positive to the girl and least negative to the abuser. Father-figures who had abused were viewed more positively by other family members than other types of abusers.
- 7 The girls who were not happy with the reactions of the people they told generally wanted a more supportive and understanding response. They also wanted someone to stop the abuse and punish the abuser. The latter was the response more often sought from social workers and less often sought from family members or other people.

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\* *Young women are referred to as girls throughout the report as discussed in the footnote on page 1.*



- 8 Of those who did not tell anyone in their family a substantial number did not tell because they were a. Those who did not tell social workers or other people most likely to say it was none of their business or the relationship with the other person was not strong enough to facilitate telling.
- 9 Those who did not tell often expected a negative reaction if they did so.
- 10 Family members were most likely to know about abuse involving fathers and brothers and least likely to know about that involving abuse by peers. Social workers were most likely to know about abuse involving fathers or strangers and least likely to know about that involving family friends or siblings.

CHAPTER 7

A COMPARISON OF THE EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL ABUSE DESCRIBED IN THE INTERVIEW AND THOSE RECORDED ON FILE AND ON THE SOCIAL WORKER QUESTIONNAIRE

The information about whether the girls in the sample had experienced sexual abuse was collected from three sources. In addition to the personal interviews which were conducted with the 136 girls in the sample who agreed to participate, information was collected about each of the 239 girls in the whole sample from their personal files. Also the social worker working with each girl was asked to complete a form giving information about any sexual abuse they knew the girl had been subject to. Completed forms were returned by the social workers of 89% of the girls.

Table 7.1 and Figure 7.1 give details of the abuse obtained from the three data sources described above. It can be seen that certain kinds of abuse, such as abuse by father figures were more likely than other kinds, such as abuse by peers, to be recorded on file or known about by the current social worker.

Figure 7.1 The abuser's relationship to the girl in experiences reported on the file, on the social worker questionnaire and in the interview

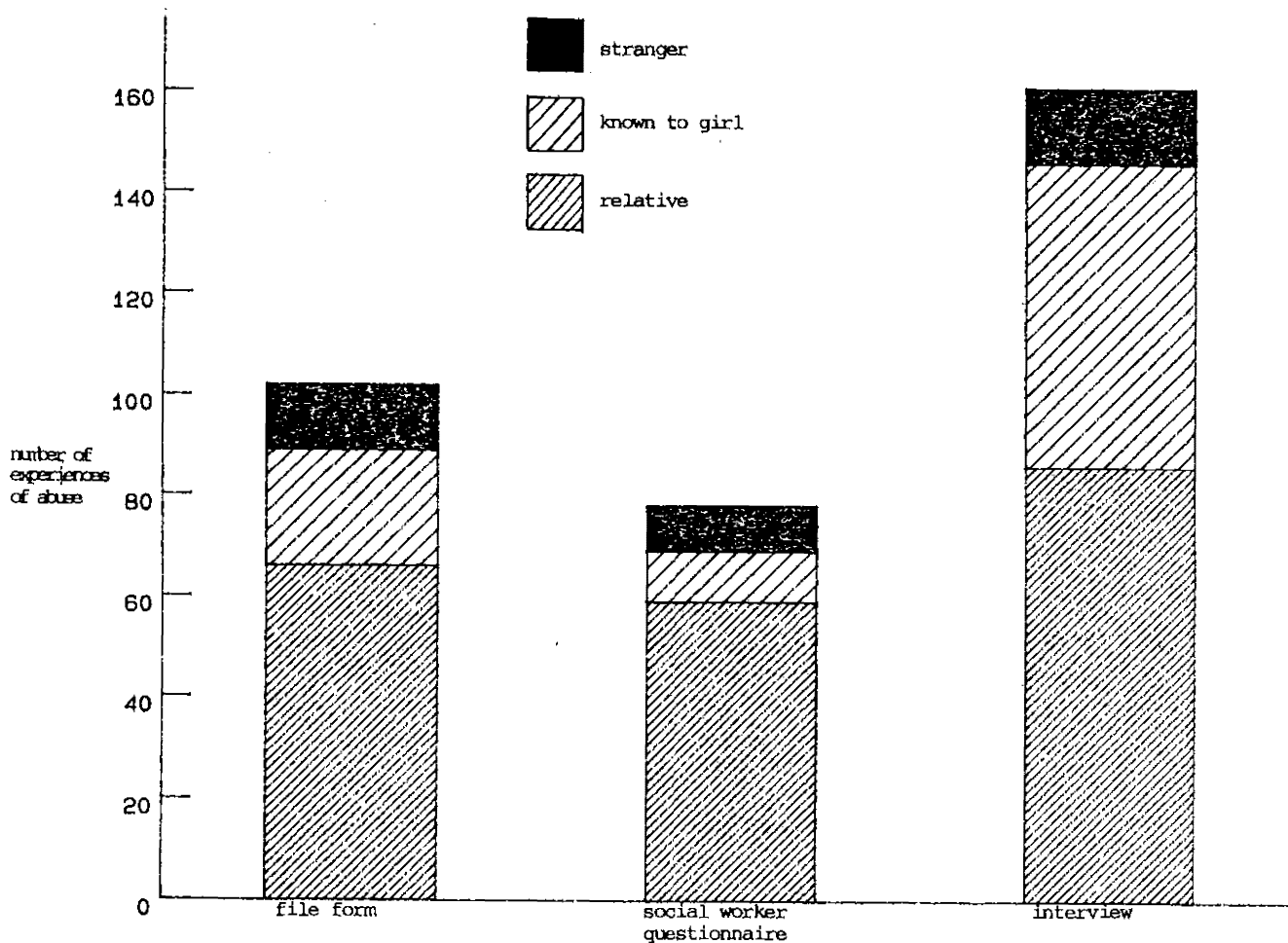


Table 7.1 Abuser's relationship to the girl by source of data

	File form		Social worker question-naire		Interview	
Natural father	21	19%	14	15%	11	7%
Adoptive father	1	1%	3	3%	2	1%
Stepfather	10	9%	9	10%	8	5%
Foster father	7	6%	6	6%	9	5%
Brother or half-brother	5	5%	3	3%	10	6%
Stepbrother	1	1%	1	1%	2	1%
Foster brother	3	3%	3	3%	8	5%
Grandfather	2	2%	2	2%	3	2%
Foster grandfather	0	-	0	-	1	1%
Uncle	9	8%	12	13%	17	10%
Male cousin	4	4%	3	3%	9	5%
Sister's husband or boyfriend	2	2%	3	3%	4	2%
Foster mother	1	1%	0	-	0	-
Stepsister	0	-	0	-	1	1%
Foster sister	<u>0</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1%</u>
<b>TOTAL RELATIVES</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>51%</b>
Boyfriend, male friend or acquaintance of the girl	9	8%	13	14%	31	18%
Male family friend	4	4%	2	2%	10	6%
Mother's boyfriend (not live in)	1	1%	3	3%	5	3%
Boarder	2	2%	0	-	2	1%
Male babysitter	1	1%	1	1%	1	1%
Male institution staff member	1	1%	0	-	1	1%
Other female known to girl	0	0	1	1%	3	2%
More than one male known to girl or family	4	4%	2	2%	5	3%
Mixed sex group	<u>1</u>	<u>1%</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1%</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1%</u>
<b>TOTAL KNOWN TO GIRL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>37%</b>
Male stranger	5	5%	2	2%	8	5%
More than one male stranger	<u>8</u>	<u>7%</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>7%</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>4%</u>
<b>TOTAL STRANGERS</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9%</b>
Identity of abuser not known	<u>8</u>	<u>7%</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3%</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5%</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b><u>110</u></b>	<b><u>100%</u></b>	<b><u>94</u></b>	<b><u>100%</u></b>	<b><u>169</u></b>	<b><u>100%</u></b>

Abuse that occurred over a period, especially where this continued for a long time, was more likely to be recorded on file, while incidents that happened only once were under represented on social work files. Abuse involving sexual intercourse, abuse where the girl reported feelings of fear and abuse involving physical force or threats was more likely to be recorded on file. Forty-two per cent of the abuse described in the interview involving force or threats to get the girl to participate was recorded on file, while only 29% of that not involving force or threats to ensure participation was recorded on file.

Because of the high degree of agreement between what was recorded on file and what was reported in the social worker questionnaires, it is not necessary to examine the instances of abuse known to the social workers in any more detail. It is worth noting that no significant differences were found in terms of age, sex or ethnic group between the social workers who knew of the abuse and those who did not.

Only 58 (34%) of the abusive experiences described in the interviews were documented on file and only 54 (32%) were described in the social worker questionnaires. Those described by the social workers were very similar to those recorded on file and were in fact mostly the same experiences, although eight (5%) were recorded on file but not known to the current social worker, and 12 instances of abuse (7%) were known to the social worker but not recorded on file.

As indicated above, some types of abuse described in the interviews were more likely than others to have been known to the department and hence recorded on the file or reported by the social worker in the questionnaire. Experiences involving family members or relatives were more likely to be recorded than those involving friends or other people known to the girl or her family. Abuse involving father-figures (i.e. natural, step, adoptive or foster fathers) was much more likely\* to be recorded on file, while abuse involving friends or acquaintances of the girl was least likely\*\* to be recorded on file. Thus of the instances of abuse described by girls in the interview, 77% of those involving father-figures were already known to the department and recorded on file; as were 40% of those involving strangers (six out of the 15 instances), 21% of those involving brothers or cousins (six out of 29 instances), 16% of the instances involving friends of the girl and none of the five incidents involving females.

The above figures do not tally with those given in Table 7.1 as they only concern abuse that was described in the interview and some of the abuse described on the files and in the social worker questionnaires concerned girls who were not interviewed.

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\*Chi-square value 4.81, one degree of freedom significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Chi-square value 10.29 one degree of freedom significant at the 0.01 level.

The abuse recorded on the files on average involved older abusers. The mean age of the abusers in the instances on file was 32, while the mean age of the abusers in the instances not recorded on file was 25. There was no difference between abuse involving Maori girls and that involving other girls as to whether it was recorded on file or known to the social worker.

#### 7.1 Summary

- 1 Only 34% (58 instances) of the abuse reported in the interviews was recorded on the young woman's\* personal file and only 32% (54 instances) was known to her social worker.
- 2 Abuse by relatives (particularly father-figures) was likely to be already known to the department, and abuse by male friends or acquaintances of the girl was less likely to be known to the department.

## CHAPTER 8

### FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SEXUAL ABUSE

#### 8.1 Characteristics of the girls

One of the aims of the present study was to identify factors which were associated with histories of sexual abuse in order to identify possible indicators of abuse.

This chapter compares the characteristics of girls with a history of sexual abuse with those who had no such history, in order to identify possible indicators of sexual abuse. Such indicators would be useful in assisting Department of Social Welfare staff to identify girls who have been sexually abused, or who may be at greater risk of sexual abuse, and hence to take appropriate action.

In order to identify such characteristics, the girls interviewed who reported experiences of sexual abuse as described in Chapter 5 were considered in relation to those interviewed who did not report a history of sexual abuse. Those who were not interviewed were excluded from consideration as it was possible that a large number of those thought not to have experienced abuse had in fact been abused. This seemed likely considering the large number of experiences of abuse reported in the interviews which were not recorded on file or known to the current social worker.

It has been suggested in previous studies<sup>5,14</sup> that the risk of sexual abuse might be associated with characteristics of the girl or her living situation. For example, researchers have proposed that there is a relationship between sexual abuse and standard of living, ethnicity or rural living.

However, there was no evidence from the present study to suggest that either rural living, ethnicity or socio-economic status are indicators of sexual abuse among children in the department's care. There was also no evidence from the findings of this study to suggest that eldest children or eldest girls are at any greater risk of sexual abuse than others in the family.

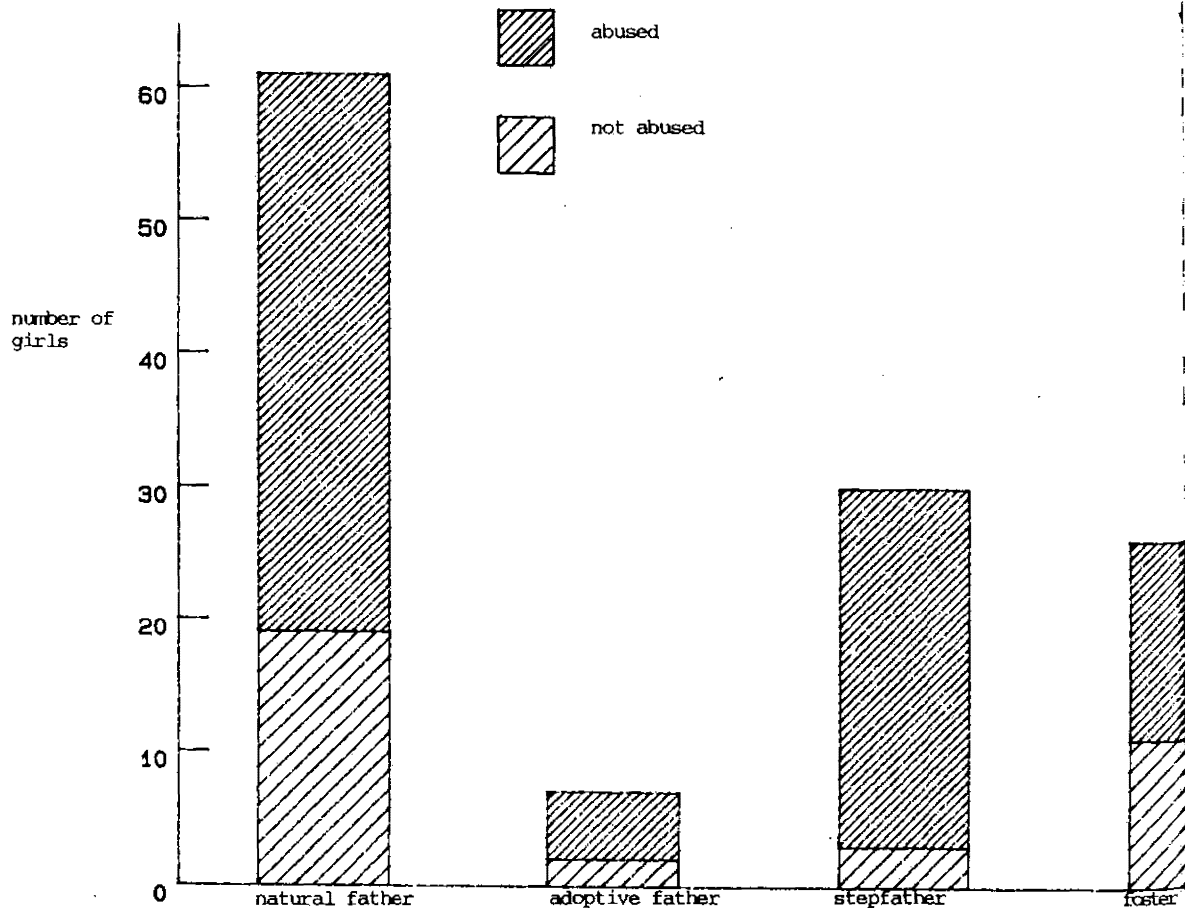
#### 8.2 Characteristics of the girls' families

The relationship between characteristics of the girls' families and the incidence of sexual abuse was also examined. Other writers<sup>14,37</sup> have suggested that sexual abuse occurs more often in families characterised by marital conflict or the presence or absence of a parent figure.

All of the girls who were interviewed were asked about of their home lives. No association was found between abuse and the girl's perception of crowding at home. No was any association found with the numbers of visitors (compared to a few), or her parents' drinking. The inci abuse among girls who shared a bedroom with a male was than among those who had never shared with a male but t difference was not statistically significant.

The type of father-figure identified for the girls was be related to the incidence of abuse. The incidence of was significantly\* higher for girls whose main father-fi was their stepfather (90% abused). It should be noted all these abusers were stepfathers. Girls with stepfath a higher incidence of abuse perpetrated by both family and people outside the family. Figure 8.1 shows the dif rates of abuse among girls raised by different types of father-figures. There were no significant differences i incidence of abuse between girls with different mother-f

Figure 8.1 Incidence of abuse among girls interviewed with di father-figures



\* Chi-square value 6.11, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

Abuse was also strongly associated with the girls' ratings of the way their parents got on with one another\*. Girls who had a history of abuse were more likely (87%) to report their parents behaved in a strongly negative way towards each other than those who did not report abuse (13%). There was also considerably more physical violence between parents of girls who had been abused (79%) than those who had not (21%). For example, several girls commented that their parents "argued heaps" and one girl added that her parents "argued every day" and that for:

*"as long as Mum can remember they couldn't stand one another".*

Physical abuse was found to be strongly associated with sexual abuse. The incidence of sexual abuse was significantly higher among those girls who reported that they themselves were hit or beaten frequently (77%)\*\*. They were often hit:

*"every night", "as often as he could", "sometimes twice a day".*

Reasons given for being beaten included a girl whose father:

*"would hit us when he was drunk"*

and a girl who was very likely to be hit:

*"if Mum was in a bad mood".*

One girl admitted that she was often:

*"too scared to go home from school".*

The abused girls may have been beaten or hit more because, as it will be reported later in this chapter, they were more likely to engage in problem behaviour. While problem behaviour was more common among girls who had been abused it is difficult to sort out what might be the cause and what might be the effect. There is no doubt a complex interaction between (physical and sexual) abuse and behaviour, with abuse of both types likely to lead to behavioural problems which in turn can lead to further physical abuse. However it is clear that the incidence of physical violence between parents and physical punishment of the girl are indicators of an increased risk of sexual abuse.

### 8.3 Behaviour shown by girls who have been abused

Studies 2,12,14,24,38,43 have indicated a number of problems that may develop after sexual abuse, both short-term and long-term such as nightmares, school problems, guilt, running

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\* Chi-square value 4.18, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\* Chi-square value 8.92, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level.



away and adolescent promiscuity. To investigate these factors, information about such factors as school problems, low self-esteem, nightmares, suicidal feelings and sexual activity was sought from both social workers and the girls themselves.

Several factors were identified as more common among girls who had a history of abuse than those who had no such history. Girls who had been abused were more likely to run away\*, truant\*, display uncontrollable behaviour outside the home\* and have problems in school\* (Figure 8.2).

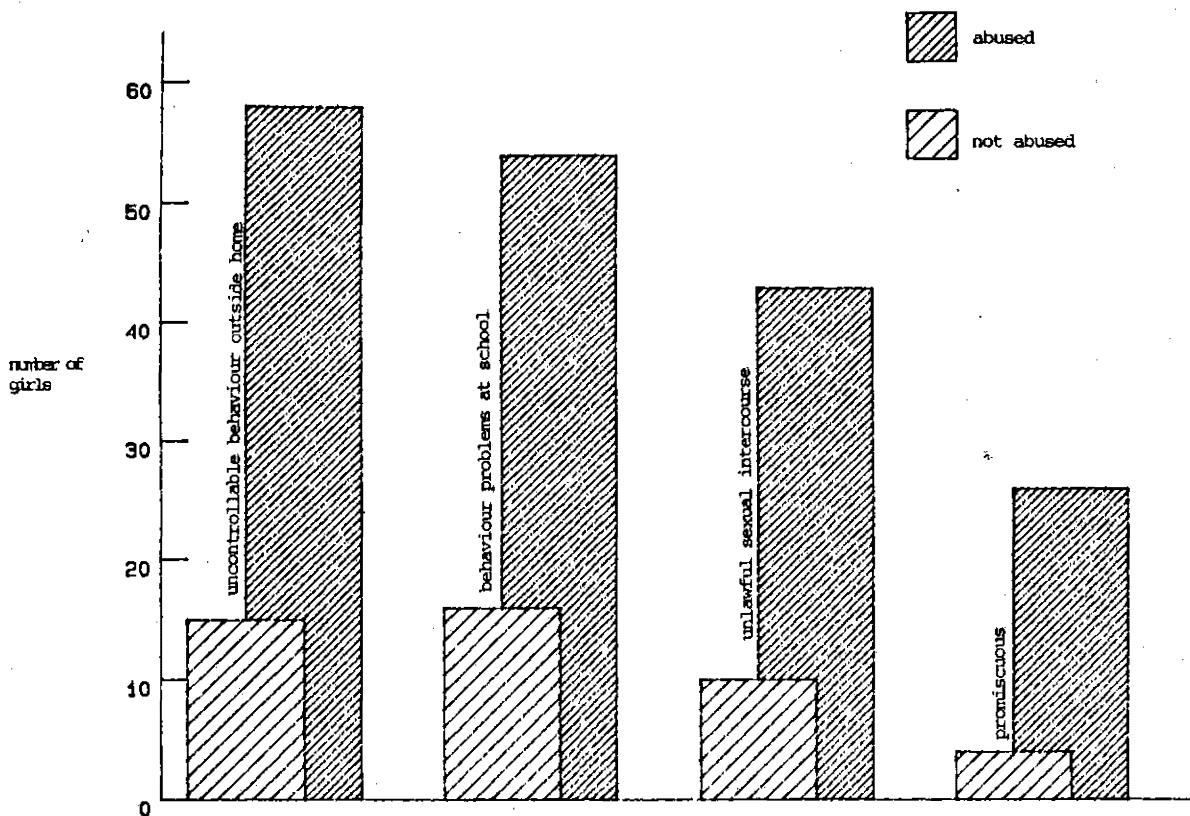
The incidence of abuse was statistically significantly higher where girls stated they had assaulted others\*, or participated in car conversion\*, vandalism\* and repeated shoplifting\*. Figure 8.3 gives details. In addition more abused girls drank alcohol underage\*, sniffed solvents\*, smoked cannabis\* or taken other drugs\*. Social workers were also asked for information on what they knew of the girls' involvement in these sorts of activities. However, as the incidence of such behaviour was much lower than that reported by the girls themselves, the differences between those abused and those who did not report abuse were not as marked. Social workers however report a higher incidence of shoplifting for girls who had been abused.

Figure 8.2 also shows that girls who had experienced abuse were more likely to be reported by social workers to have more commonly engaged in sexual activity under 16 years of age\* and in behaviour described as promiscuous\*. Voluntary sexual activity with

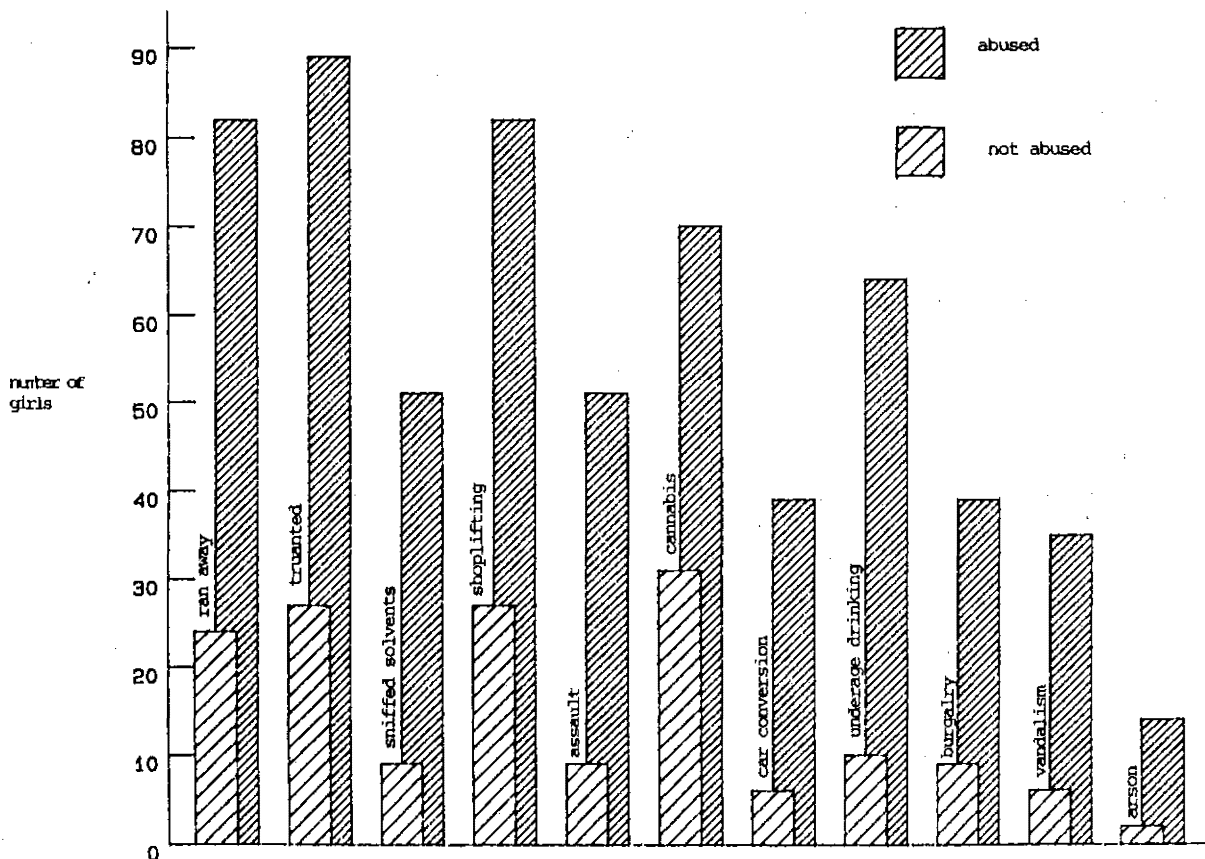
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\* (running away) Chi-square value 8.08, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level.  
(truant) Chi-square value 12.19, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.001 level  
(uncontrollable outside home) Chi-square value 8.57, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level.  
(problems at school) Chi-square value 3.95, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level  
(assault) Chi-square value 9.27, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level  
(car conversion) Chi-square value 7.06, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level  
(vandalism) Chi-square value 5.19, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level  
(shoplifting) Chi-square value 10.18, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level  
(underage drinking) Chi-square value 17.82, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.001 level.  
(sniffing solvents) Chi-square value 9.27, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level  
(Cannabis) Chi-square value 19.67, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.001 level  
(other drugs) Chi-square value 9.30, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level  
(sexual activity under 16) Chi-square value 12.16, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.001 level  
(promiscuous) Chi-square value 5.51, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

**Figure 8.2 Incidence of abuse among girls interviewed who were reported by social workers to show behavioural difficulties**



**Figure 8.3 Incidence of abuse among girls interviewed who reported involvement in offending and misbehaviour**



peers was found to be more common among those who had experienced sexual abuse than those who had not. Of the interviewed who had been abused 57% (55 girls) said they sexually active with peers, while of those who had not abused only 30% (12 girls) reported sexual activity with

Voluntary sexual activity with a relative was also strongly linked to sexual abuse. Seven girls were known to have engaged in such activity and of these six (86%) reported they had been sexually abused before this activity with relative had begun, four of these being subsequently sexually abused as well.

Of the 24 girls who reported in the interview they were sexually active at age 12 or younger, or who were sexually active with partners more than five years older, all but had also been sexually abused. The majority (67%, 16 girls) were abused prior to the voluntary activity. For five of the abuse occurred after they had begun voluntary sexual activity. Half (eight girls) of those who were abused before the voluntary activity were also abused subsequently. One girl entered prostitution at 14 after being abused at 13 before becoming sexually active at 11. It seems that girls who have been abused are likely to become sexually active younger and active with older partners, although there were also several cases where girls who were sexually active were subsequently sexually abused. The rate of pregnancy among abused girls was no higher than that for non-abused girls.

While girls who had been abused reported more nightmares than girls who had not been abused, and reported remembering the nature of these nightmares, the differences were not statistically significant. Girls who had been abused also reported a marginally higher incidence of wishing themselves dead than those who had no history of abuse. However, this difference was not statistically significant.

Girls who had been sexually abused were less likely to be attending school. Forty-two per cent (40) of those who experienced abuse were still at school compared to a higher proportion (70%, 28) of girls who had not been abused. This difference was statistically significant\*\*. However, girls who had been abused were no more likely to be unemployed and seeking work than those who were not abused.

The current living situation of the girls did not differ between those who had been sexually abused from those who had not. However, the incidence of abuse was higher for those girls who had at some time been placed in a Department of Social

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\*Chi-square value 21.39, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level.

\*\* Chi-square value 7.97, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

national institution (82%, 33 girls) or in a DSW girls home (81%, 60 girls)\* compared with the incidence of abuse in the total sample (71%). Of the 136 who were interviewed the incidence of sexual abuse among those who had ever been in a Department of Social Welfare institution was found to be 80%.

During the interview all the girls were asked to indicate which of the places they had lived in had been generally happy or unhappy for them. The places the girls who had been abused were happy in differed significantly from those described by girls who had not been abused\*\*. All of the 14 girls who described living independently as the situation they had been happiest in had been sexually abused. The majority of those who named a Department of Social Welfare family home (19, 79%) or a Department of Social Welfare institution (eight, 73%) as the places they had been happiest had also been abused. However, as was pointed out earlier, girls who have been abused are more likely to have been placed in a Department of Social Welfare institution or family home. A significantly lower proportion of girls who had histories of abuse described natural or extended families (29, 67%) or foster families (24, 57%) as situations where they had been happiest.

There were also differences in the places the girls had been unhappy. Of the 48 instances where Department of Social Welfare institutions were described as places where the girls had been unhappiest, 39 (81%) were attributable to girls who had been abused.

*"They always used to keep us locked up and that's why I ran away"*

explained one girl. A second stated that the institutional staff:

*"Didn't have much time for us - treated us like little criminals".*

Eighty-five per cent (39) of the girls who said they had been unhappiest in foster homes had been abused. One girl described her unhappiness as stemming from a situation where:

*"my foster father tried to touch me when he was drunk"*

and another commented she:

*"was only used for sexual reasons by some foster fathers and their sons".*

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\*Chi-square value 6.75, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level.

\*\*Chi-square value 10.58, four degrees of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

Girls who had been abused were much less likely to report there was nowhere they were unhappy living. Only 41% of those who were not unhappy anywhere had experienced abuse. This contrasts with the 78% of those who were unhappy somewhere who experienced abuse. This difference was significant statistically.\*

From these findings it is possible to identify two major factors that were found to be associated with higher rates of sexual abuse among girls under Department of Social Welfare care.

First, if the parent figures in the home have a strongly negative relationship, particularly where violence is involved, and if the girl is frequently subject to physical punishment, the risk of sexual abuse is much greater.

Secondly, the girl's offending and misbehaviour may be an indication that she has experienced or is experiencing sexual abuse. Strongly associated factors are running away, truancy, school, sexual activity under 16 and behaviour described by some social workers as promiscuous, sniffing, underage drinking, taking drugs particularly cannabis and criminal offending. Girls in the sample involved in these types of behaviours are significantly more likely to have been abused than girls under Department of Social Welfare care not participating in these activities.

#### 8.4 Summary

- 1 There were no differences found in the incidence of sexual abuse between different ethnic groups, different socio-economic groups or between those who lived in rural or urban areas.
- 2 Sexual abuse was not related to perceived crowding at home, perceived frequency of visitors or to parents' alcohol consumption.
- 3 Young women\*\* with stepfathers had a much higher incidence of abuse (both by family members and those outside the family) than those whose main father-figure was not a stepfather.

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\*Chi-square value 19.83, five degrees of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level.

\*\*Young women are referred to as girls throughout the report as discussed in the footnote on page 1.

- 4 Sexual abuse was more common for girls whose parents got on badly or were violent with each other, or for girls who were hit or beaten at home.
- 5 Sexual abuse was more common among girls who ran away from home, showed uncontrollable behaviour outside the home, had problems at school, were regularly truant and had problems with alcohol, solvents and other drugs.
- 6 A history of sexual abuse was also found more often among those who had been involved in repeated shoplifting, assault, car conversion and vandalism.
- 7 Girls who had been abused were more likely to be sexually active, to enter voluntary sexual relationships at a younger age, to be involved with older partners and to be voluntarily sexually involved with relatives. They were also more likely to be seen as promiscuous by others.
- 8 Those who had been abused were more likely to have contemplated suicide.
- 9 Abused girls were less likely than those who had not experienced abuse to have been happy living with their natural or extended family or in a foster home.

## CHAPTER 9

### COMPARISON OF THE EXPERIENCE OF MAORI AND PAKEHA GIRLS

When the study was initiated there was considerable interest in whether the experiences of Maori and Pakeha girls differ with respect to sexual abuse. No systematic information had previously been collected on the sexual abuse of Maori girls and this study made some attempt to ascertain whether there were any differences between the Maori and Pakeha girls' experiences. However it should be remembered this study considers the experiences of girls in the care of the Department of Social Welfare and may not be applicable to other sections of the community.

Each girl who was interviewed was asked to identify the group to which she belonged. Information on ethnicity for other girls was obtained from personal files. The group identified was then used as the basis for the discussion of differences in the experiences of Maori and Pakeha girls.

Of the 239 girls in the sample, 37% (88 girls) were Pakeha (122 girls) were Maori and 12% (29 girls) were from other ethnic groups.

The discussion in this chapter will cover only Maori and Pakeha girls. Girls\* from other ethnic groups will not be included because: as the numbers of girls in this study from Pacific Island backgrounds are so small, any separate discussion of these groups would make it possible that individual girls who had taken part in the study could be identified; and it was not considered appropriate to group together girls from the different Pacific Island ethnic groups as a single sub-group.

#### 9.1 Incidence of abuse

Fifty-five per cent (48) of the Pakeha girls had been sexually abused, as had 58% (71) of the Maori girls and 38% (11) of those from other ethnic backgrounds. These differences were not statistically significant. The low incidence of sexual abuse found among those girls from ethnic groups other than Maori or Pakeha may not reflect the true incidence of abuse in this group as only a small number of those from these groups in the sample (nine out of 29) agreed to be interviewed and less information is available for these girls. Other studies<sup>15</sup> have suggested that sexual abuse occurs throughout society and that no ethnic group is more or less likely to be involved.

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\*Unless stated elsewhere the results reported here are based on the sample of girls involved in the study and not only those interviewed

The findings would support these expectations although it is not possible to generalise to the New Zealand population as a whole and the findings must be limited to girls in the care of the Department of Social Welfare.

**9.2 Characteristics of the abuse and other sexual experiences**

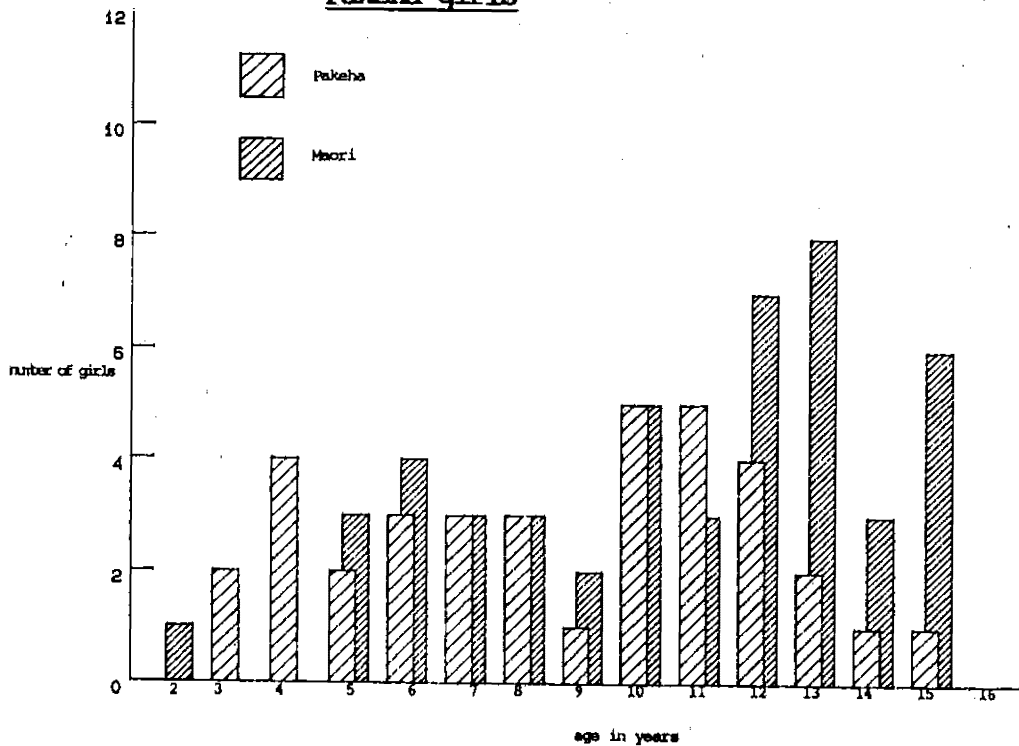
**Age of the girl**

There were significant differences\* in the age at which the girls were first abused. Table 9.1 shows that most (78%, 28) of the Pakeha girls were first sexually abused when they were less than 12 years old. The first instance of abuse for Maori girls, however, was equally likely to occur before or after the age of 12. The mean age at which Pakeha girls were first abused was between ten and 11 years old compared with 11 and 12 for Maori girls.

**Table 9.1** **Age at the first instance of sexual abuse for Maori and Pakeha girls**

Girl's age	Ethnic group			
	Pakeha		Maori	
Less than 12 years	28	78%	24	50%
12 years or more	8	22%	24	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Figure 9.1** **Age at first instance of abuse for Maori and Pakeha girls**



\* Chi-square value 5.6, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.



In both groups the earliest age at which a girl was found to have been sexually abused was very young: three years old in the Pakeha group and two years old in the Maori group. Figure 9.1 shows the girl's age at the first instance of abuse for Maori and Pakeha girls.

#### Characteristics of the abuser

The average age of the abuser was not significantly different for either ethnic group.

There was no evidence to suggest any differences in the incidence of abuse between Pakeha or Maori girls within the family and extended or foster families, or by father-figures, mothers, siblings or groups. However father-figures who abused were more likely to be Pakeha than Maori. This difference is statistically significant\*.

#### Other sexual experiences

Other sexual experiences which fall outside the definition of sexual abuse used in this study were reported by the girls and are described in Chapter 12. Ethnic differences for both girls and the other person involved in these activities were apparent in some cases. Of the 16 people for whom the ethnicity was known who perpetrated sexual harassment, more than abuse, 14 (88%) were Pakeha and one (6%) was Maori (see Table 12.1 to Chapter 12). Voluntary sexual contact with a relative was more likely to be reported by Maori girls (six, 86%) and with a friend or relative was more likely to be Maori (six, 75%). Voluntary sexual experiences when the girls were aged 12 or younger were also more likely to be reported by Maori girls (11, 92%) than those girls known to have had voluntary experiences with partners more than five years older than themselves, equal numbers were Maori (ten, 45%) and Pakeha (ten, 45%). Similarly, there were no differences between Pakeha (three) and Maori (four) girls who had engaged in prostitution or related activities.

#### 9.3 The girl's response to the sexual abuse

When the girl's response to the abuse was considered there were marked differences between the Maori and Pakeha girls\*\*. Maori girls most commonly expressed feelings of anger and hatred towards the abuser. In fact of the 22 girls who expressed such emotions 91% (20 girls) were Maori.

*"All I could do was hate him"*

reported one Maori girl, while another reported she

*"could have killed him".*

\*Chi-square value 5.62, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Chi-square value 18.7, four degrees of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

Feelings of fear of the abuser were more commonly expressed by Pakeha girls. Of the 27 girls who reported being afraid 15 (56%) were Pakeha. Of the Pakeha girls who said they were scared, two said they were scared because they:

*"didn't know what it was all about" or "didn't know what he was doing".*

A third admitted she was scared because he was her foster parent's son. One Pakeha girl's fear meant she:

*"couldn't go near him - couldn't be alone with him".*

Equal proportions of Maori girls and Pakeha girls (24%) reported feeling ashamed, guilty or unclean. Of the eight (8%) girls who stated they felt confused, seven (88%) were Pakeha.

#### 9.4 Other people's reactions to the abuse

Subsequent reactions of the girls' families, peers and social workers were examined with respect to ethnic differences. This examination covered details of who the girl told about the abuse, how others reacted to the girl and to the abuser, their anticipated reaction and what help the girl was given.

##### The family's reaction

Family members of the Pakeha and Maori girls did not appear to respond differently in any significant way when told about the abuse. However, the Maori and Pakeha girls themselves felt quite differently about how they would have liked the family member to react to them\*. Fifteen (88%) of the Pakeha girls who recalled how they wanted the family member to react said they wanted to be listened to, believed, understood and supported, while the majority of the Maori girls (eight, 73%) primarily wanted the family member to stop, punish or prosecute the abuser. Pakeha girls emphasised they would have liked their families to have been:

*"(a) bit easier, more supportive", to "at least listen to me and talk about it" or "to understand and talk to me about it".*

One Pakeha girl admitted she would have liked the family to have been:

*"more supportive 'cause I was attacked";*

and another said she would have liked her mother:

*"to believe her. To get it out of the way".*

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\*Chi-square value 8.30, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level.

The Maori girls were more inclined to want action taken their families towards the abuser. One Maori girl wanted mother:

*"to speak to Dad from the first time it happened. To keep Dad from me".*

Others wanted the family to:

*"kick him out", "beat him up and take him to court" or "ring Social Welfare straight away and the police".*

These different desired reactions reflect the girls' reactions to the abuse itself, Maori girls expressing more anger and hatred and Pakeha girls, fear and confusion.

More Maori girls (26, 74%) mentioned they wanted assistance from their families when they told them than Pakeha girls (12, 63%). A significantly higher proportion\* of Maori girls (26, 74%) said they had received help from their families compared to Pakeha girls (ten, 42%). Members of the Maori girls' families were no more likely to ask about the abuse than members of the Pakeha girls' families. Most Pakeha (12, 63%) and Maori (23, 82%) girls who had not told family member nobody in the family had asked if she had been abused.

#### The social worker's reaction

Maori girls reported a markedly more positive reaction when they told their social worker about the abuse than the Pakeha girls. Twenty (95%) of the Maori girls who recalled the social worker's reaction stated it was positive compared to 57% of the Pakeha girls\*\*. One Maori girl was:

*"really pleased because they wanted to take strong actions against the man and they helped me and went to the (police) station with me"*

Another was grateful because the social worker:

*"listened - put me into another home and took me for help".*

In contrast, more Pakeha girls reported their social worker:

*"didn't give a stuff", "didn't believe a word"*

and one Pakeha girl was upset because her social worker:

*"told the judge I enticed him and he got off",*

whereas she hoped the social worker would:

*"stick up for me".*

\*Chi-square value 4.25, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Chi-square value 6.43, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

The pattern of these results cannot be explained by any difference in the likelihood of Maori and Pakeha girls telling a social worker about the abuse. Twenty-three per cent of the Pakeha girls and 25% of Maori girls spoke to social workers about the abuse.

### 9.5 Long-term effects

The girls were asked whether they had experienced any long-term effects from the abuse. In most respects, the effects that the Pakeha and Maori girls mentioned did not differ in any substantial way. However, of the 36 girls who reported fear, distrust or dislike of men and boys, 23 (64%) were Pakeha and 13 (36%) were Maori. In addition, Maori girls were the only girls who mentioned a fear, distrust or dislike of particular mixed sex groups or fear, distrust or dislike of people generally.

### 9.6 Summary

- 1 There were no significant differences in terms of the incidence of sexual abuse between the different ethnic groups of young women\* involved in the study.
- 2 On average the Maori girls who had been abused were older (average age 11) when they were first abused than the Pakeha girls (average age ten).
- 3 Father-figures who abused were more likely to be Pakeha than Maori. Groups of abusers were equally likely to be Maori or Pakeha.
- 4 Sexual harassment (involuntary, negative sexual experiences not involving genital contact and not coming within the criteria used here for abuse) was much more likely to have been perpetrated by Pakehas.
- 5 Maori girls were much more likely to have been involved in voluntary sexual contact with relatives and voluntary sexual contact when aged 12 or younger. Maori and Pakeha girls were equally likely to have been involved in voluntary sexual relationships with partners five or more years older than them.
- 6 Pakeha girls were significantly more likely to react to the abuse with fear or confusion, while Maori girls were more likely to react with anger and hatred.
- 7 Of the girls who were not happy with the reactions they received on telling family members, Pakeha girls were more likely to want support and understanding and Maori girls were more likely to want something to be done to stop the abuse or punish the abuser.

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\*Young women are referred to as girls throughout the report as discussed in the footnote on page 1.

- 8 Significantly more Maori girls thought they received support from their families than Pakeha girls.
- 9 Maori girls were more likely to report a positive attitude when they told social workers about the abuse. They were as likely to tell social workers as Pakeha girls.
- 10 Pakeha girls were more likely to report a general dislike or fear of men or boys after they had been abused. Maori girls were the only ones to report the long-term effect of a specific dislike of particular kinds of people (e.g. foster parents) or of people generally.

CHAPTER 10

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO THE GIRL, ASSISTANCE THOUGHT SUITABLE BY THE GIRL AND OUTCOME FOR THE ABUSER

Only a limited amount of information was collected in the interviews with the girls on the outcome of the abuse. These results were covered in Chapter 6. However, more information was collected from files and from social workers on the outcome of abuse and results from these sources will be reported in this chapter. First, the outcome from the point of view of the girls will be covered, focusing on whether counselling was provided. Secondly, the outcome from the point of view of the abuser will be examined, focusing on official action such as whether charges or complaints were laid and if so what the outcome was.

Unfortunately, only 34% of the abuse described in the interviews was recorded on social work files and only 32% was reported by the current social worker. Thus this information covers only a sub-sample of the abuse known to have occurred to the girls in the study. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 7, particular kinds of abuse, for example that involving father-figures, was more likely to be recorded on file and known to the social worker. Other abuse, such as that involving peers, was very much less likely to be known to the department. This means that the following information will apply mainly to abuse involving family members or strangers and may not be typical of the outcomes for other types of abuse.

10.1 Outcome for the girl

A total of 110 instances of abuse were documented on the departmental files of the girls in the sample. The files record that counselling was offered to the girls in 64 of these known instances of abuse (58%). The counselling was provided by a range of agencies, most commonly statutory agencies other than the Department of Social Welfare (such as hospital board services and Education Department psychologists). Table 10.1 gives details of the sources of counselling and this is represented graphically in Figure 10.1 on page 93.

Table 10.1 Source of counselling for abuse recorded on the files

Sexual abuse service	14	22%
DSW social workers	5	8%
DSW institution staff	9	14%
Other statutory services	24	38%
Community and voluntary agencies	3	5%
Counselling on matters other than sexual abuse	6	9%
Counselling offered to the girl but refused	2	3%
Abuser only was counselled	1	2%

More information was collected about abuse known to social workers, by means of the questionnaires they were asked to in on the girls in the sample. It was not possible to compare the discussion on the results from the social workers with those from the files as although a number of instances of abuse were reported in both places it was often not clear whether the abuse referred to by the social workers was the same as that referred to on file. Social workers reported 94 known instances of abuse in these questionnaires and noted that counselling was offered to the girl in respect of 66 of the instances (70%). In only 12 instances (19%), counselling was offered at the time of the abuse, while in 29 instances (44%) it was offered within a year, and in 22 instances (35%) more than a year later. Again the sex of the counsellor was usually female (41 out of 53 instances where the sex of the counsellor was known).

The information reported by social workers also showed that counselling was provided by a range of agencies but here it was most commonly provided through the Department of Social Welfare. Table 10.2 gives details of the source of counselling.

Table 10.2 Source of counselling for abuse recorded in the social worker questionnaires

Sexual abuse service	14	21%
DSW social workers	19	29%
DSW institution staff	13	20%
Other statutory services	12	18%
Community and voluntary agencies	3	5%
Foster mother	1	2%
Counselling on matters other than sexual abuse	1	2%
Counselling offered to the girl but refused	3	5%

The marked difference between Table 10.1 and Table 10.2 in relation to the counselling by departmental social workers probably be explained by the source of the data. Social workers may well have known that the girl was offered counselling by themselves or their colleagues although that counselling was offered was not recorded on the file.

Some comments by social workers indicated counselling was to be very valuable by the girls and their families. For example one social worker wrote:

"A Rape Crisis worker was (also) involved and (the girl's mother) states that this support was extremely useful and without it she believes (she) and (the girl) would not have had the strength to through the court case that followed".

Figure 10.1 Source of counselling for abuse recorded on the files

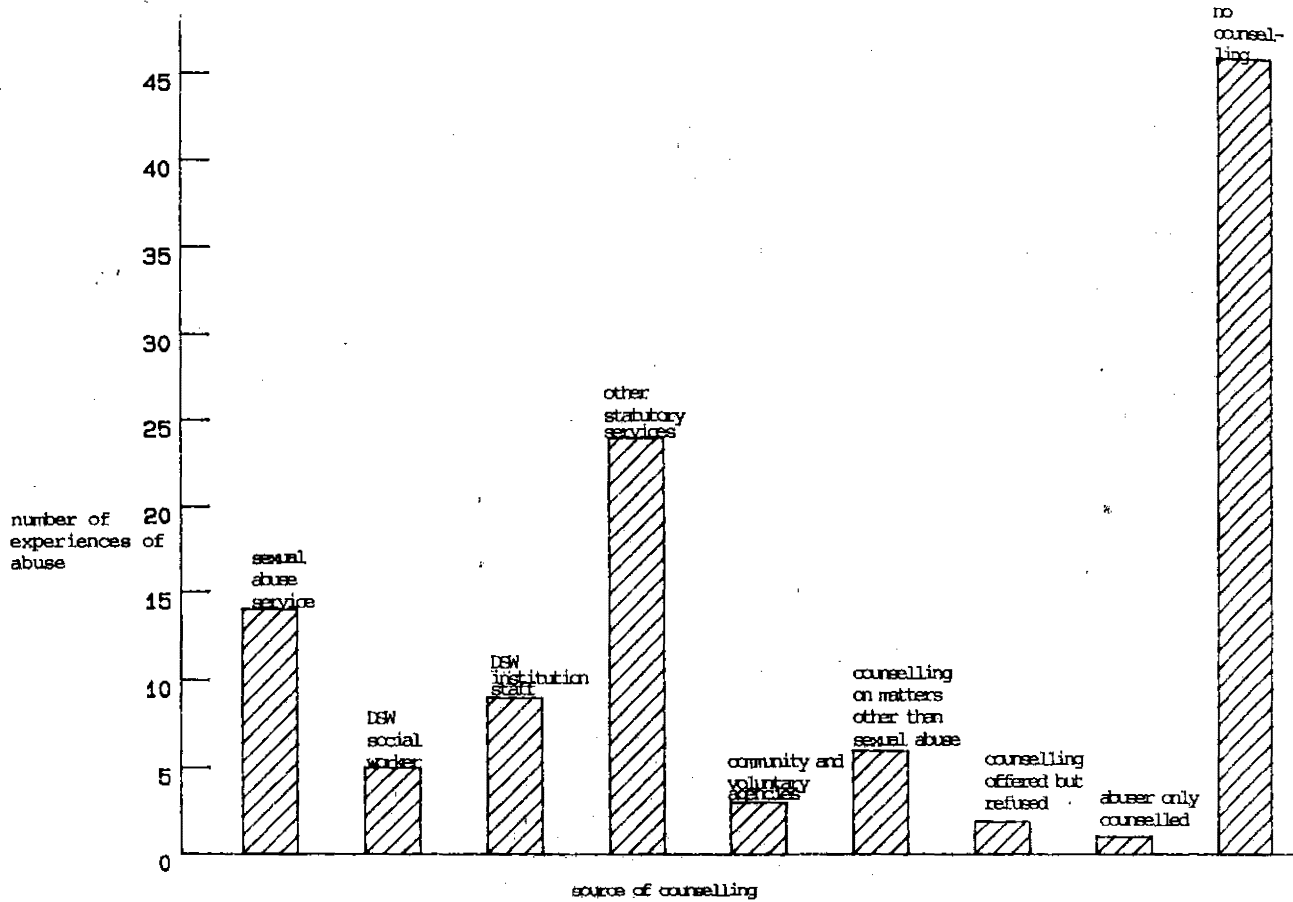
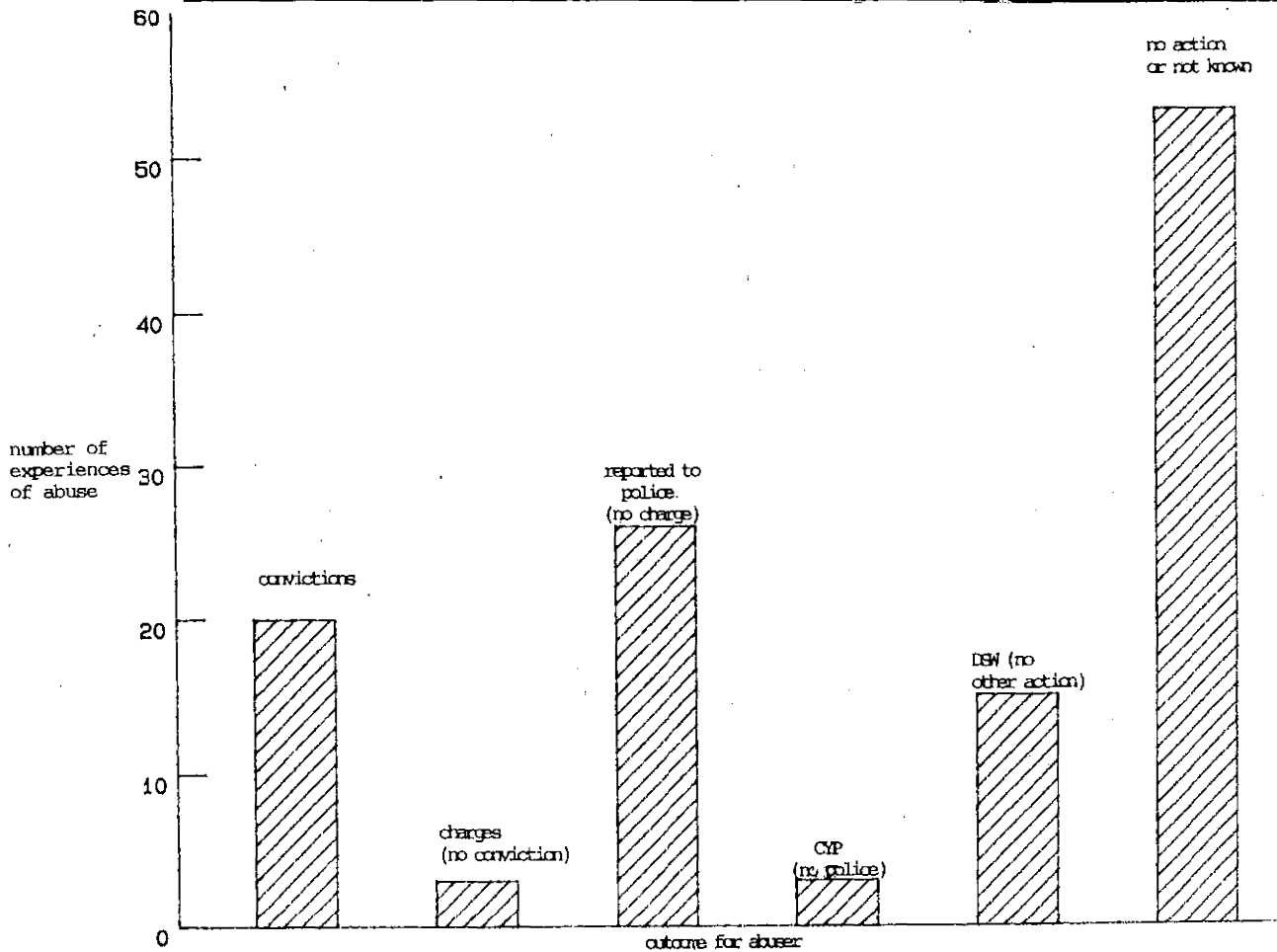


Figure 10.2 Action taken against the abuser for abuse recorded on the files





Of the 110 instances of abuse recorded on file, 19 (17%) contributed to a guardianship order being made for the one other led to the girl involved being made a ward of court. Eleven (12%) of the instances reported by the workers led to guardianship orders being made for the

### 10.2 Outcome for the abuser

Sixty-seven of the instances of abuse recorded on file resulted in some official action (that is the abuse was reported to the Department of Social Welfare or to the police). Table 10.3 and Figure 10.2 show the kinds of that was taken in response to the abuse recorded on the file.

Table 10.3 Action taken against the abuser for abuse recorded on

<i>Police charges laid</i>	23	21%
<i>Report to police but no charges laid</i>	26	24%
<i>Children and Young Persons Court action but no police action</i>	3	3%
<i>Report to DSW but no other action</i>	15	14%

In most cases (59 or 88% of those where there was some action), the action was taken against the abuser, but there were another six cases where the action was taken against the abuser and the girls' care-givers and two other cases where action was taken against the care-givers but not the abuser. It was also interesting to note that in four of the 59 instances, the action taken against the abuser was in response to the abuse of another child and not the girl in the study.

In the 23 cases where charges were laid, 20 resulted in conviction of the abuser and of these, half (ten) resulted in a custodial sentence. Nine resulted in a non-custodial sentence and for one instance of abuse the sentence was not known. Further instances resulted in the abuser receiving a warning but not being convicted of an offence.

The abuse described by the social workers had similar outcomes. Official action was taken for 31 (33%) of the instances of abuse and the type of action taken is shown in Table 10.4.

Table 10.4 Action taken against the abuser for abuse recorded in the social worker questionnaire

<i>Police charges laid</i>	18	19%
<i>Report to police but no charges laid</i>	5	5%
<i>Children and Young Persons Court action but no police action</i>	7	7%
<i>Report to DSW but no other action</i>	1	1%

Again in most cases of abuse reported by social workers, most of the action (81%, 25 instances) was taken against the abuser. A further four instances of abuse lead to action against the abuser and other care-givers, and two led to action against the child's care-givers but not the abuser. For three of the 25 instances the action against the abuser was in relation to another child.

In the 18 situations where charges were laid, 14 (45% of those where action was taken) led to convictions. Seven of these resulted in non-custodial sentences, six resulted in custodial sentences and for one conviction the nature of the sentence was not known. One instance of abuse resulted in the boy who was the abuser being admitted to a boys' home but not charged with an offence.

Some of the comments made by social workers indicated that even after the girl reported the abuse, the response was often not supportive of the girl.

*"The detective who questioned her (the girl) was a friend of the foster father and called her a liar. The man (the abuser) was fined \$500 with comments (published) about what a shame a hitherto upstanding member of the community had erred."*

*"(The aunt) reported it to the police who said the girls (the girl in the study and her sister) didn't mind so there was no need for DSW involvement."*

*"(The girl) testified in the District Court. The court was very hard on (the girl). The sentence was a suspended sentence. Leniency was shown because of the influence of alcohol."*

*"The grandmother said it would be difficult to bring court action as she had no proof and she didn't want to go to the police."*

*"The police questioned the man but (the girl) withdrew her statement due to family pressures."*

*"The police were involved. The police felt that after the DSIR examination they didn't have enough evidence to proceed with a prosecution of rape."*

*"The police were told. They took a statement. (The father) denied the charge so there was no further action. It was his word against hers, so the police did not proceed although they believed (the girl). Social Welfare withdrew their complaint against the father as the mother admitted physical abuse and this led to guardianship."*

*"The police were involved but as it was the word of two intellectually handicapped children against the taxi driver there was no chance of conviction. The police talked to the taxi driver and his boss."*

*"She went to the police and was examined by a doctor. The police w  
not prosecute as they claim (the girl) is known to be a liar."*

*"(The girl) was put in Bollard (girls home). (The foster parents)  
called the police who failed to establish the rape occurred so there  
was no further action."*

### 10.3 The girls' views on the need for support services

The girls were asked in the interviews what services they thought should be available for girls who had experienced abuse, both at the time of the abuse and in later years. For 40 of the 169 instances of abuse no answer was given to this question. This was because, where girls had experienced a number of instances of abuse, it was considered too onerous to collect full details on each abusive experience. This meant some girls answered a smaller number of questions on subsequent abusive experiences and the questions on the services, which occurred towards the end of the section, were often excluded.

Of the 85 girls who answered this question, 79 (93%) thought there should be some services provided to assist girls who had been sexually abused, although two girls thought services should only be available at the time and were not necessary in later years. Table 10.5 gives details of the types of services that were suggested by the girls interviewed.

It should be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive, and many of these were mentioned in combination by the girls. The categories represent an attempt to extract the main dimensions out of the wide range of responses given by girls, and the results give some indication of the importance to these girls of different features of services that might be provided. The most commonly made suggestion was that there was a need simply for someone to listen to the girl and believe her.

Other commonly reported suggestions were for general counselling services, places similar to refuges where children could go and be safe from the abuser, help from people who had experienced abuse themselves and punishment for the abuser.

Some of the suggestions were more likely to be favoured at the time of the abuse while others were seen as more appropriate in later years. For example, someone to make contact with young children to ascertain if there had been abuse was seen as appropriate at the time of the abuse but less so in later years, while forming support groups of girls of a similar age was seen as more appropriate in the years after the abuse.

Some of the girls made quite detailed suggestions on the need for someone to listen to them, as illustrated by the following selection of answers.

**TABLE 10.5 Desired services mentioned by girls who had experienced sexual abuse**

Type of Service	Wanted at the time of abuse		Wanted in later years	
	Number of mentions	% of incidents	Number of mentions	% of incidents
Someone to listen and believe	27	16%	28	17%
People who've had the same experience	15	9%	17	10%
Counselling service not specific to sexual abuse	12	7%	16	9%
Refuge, place to go	12	7%	8	5%
Punishment for abuser	10	6%	8	5%
Existing sexual abuse service	9	5%	7	4%
Someone who would go to the girl	8	5%	2	1%
Somewhere informal, not an institution	6	4%	5	3%
No men	6	4%	5	3%
Girls the same age	5	3%	11	7%
Phone line	4	2%	2	1%
Totally voluntary, not forced	4	2%	1	1%
Something for younger children	4	2%	0	-
Not DSW	3	2%	5	3%
Support for the family	3	2%	2	1%
A family who can help	3	2%	1	1%
Total confidentiality, no questions asked, not going to police	2	1%	3	2%
Help getting interested in boys again, help with relationships, sex education, help with pregnancies	2	1%	2	1%
Alarms	2	1%	2	1%
Remove girl from situation	2	1%	0	-
Maori people	1	1%	2	1%
Not psychiatrists	1	1%	1	1%
Help raise self esteem	1	1%	1	1%
24 hour service	1	1%	1	1%
Self defence for the girl	1	1%	1	1%
Adults	1	1%	0	-
Question not answered	18	11%	24	14%

(At the time of the abuse) "Someone you can tell your troubles to who does something about it. Not only listen but act too." (And later). "Someone who will listen and seek direction from the one telling the story."

"Being able to talk about it and not being forced to be counselled someone you don't know. Support groups of Maori women and someone is there that I can relate to and know that I won't be shifted from foster parent to foster parent."

"I don't know. I feel better after talking to you about it."

"Someone that person could talk to 'cause when it happens a lot of people block that person out."

"Don't know but something, just someone to believe. Must be female."

"Understanding people, caring people, community people."

"Somewhere you can turn to if you don't want to turn to parents. People who've been through it."

"Someone to talk to like Help. Check you out every few months."

"Being able to talk to someone and not have to answer questions. Friend or person you trust and know she will understand."

"Place to go and talk."

"People you can talk to. Not all of us have best friends. A group of friends that you trust and share your problems with."

"Nothing like social workers. I think the public should pitch in because they just stood there at the time. Just someone with ears to listen, like you."

"Not DSW. People you can see and trust totally. People who've had experience."

"Talk. People who've experienced it and are a lot older."

"Counselling. Ladies like you. Survivors best. If Maori girls want Maori people they should be able to have them. Doesn't matter to

Some made comments about refuges or places for children to go for safety, assistance and support following an abusive experience.

"Somewhere you can take off and come back to where you were."

"(A) centre. Somewhere you can have time out. No time limit."

"Somewhere to go and stay but a place where young people are, and Maori people."

"Someone to talk to, to believe them and trust ... A place they can go, find security and stay if they need to."

"A place where they can just go - where they can reconstruct themselves. No questions asked. Not where you have to go, like an institution. Where you don't have to stay. If this works, then there's only a slight possibility that they will need help in later years. If this doesn't work, girls her age could get together and talk about it - no men. It would be better than Lifeline."

(At the time) "A place where they could go or a place where they know they are going to be safe." (Later) "A place they can meet other women, young women who've been through abuse and can share how they overcame it."

"Where they can build your confidence again."

"Somebody who can come and take you away for a wee while. Like social workers - to listen more and help more."

"Groups of other girls with the same experiences run by social workers. Some community people wouldn't understand."

Other girls gave specific examples of how people could approach children to find out if abuse was occurring and help them.

(At the time) "Someone to ask kids if it's happening, a nurse or phys.ed teacher." (Later) "A community youth centre with people always there, so you can choose who to talk to by yourself with privacy. Don't want to go through Social Welfare. They are too nosy, not polite. They never saw my point of view. You never knew what they were thinking or what they were going to do to me. They always wrote it in the file. You need social workers similar to the girls."

"Guidance counsellors at Primary and Intermediate (schools). Social workers so long as they don't blab."

"Something at school."

"Someone to ask kids."

"Adults going to colleges and schools. Adults should go to kids, talking to them would help."

"People that would come around. People that want to. Kind of social workers."

Some mentioned phone lines and others suggested existing services.

"Like Youthline - where girls can ring up and ask for help 24 hours a day."

"Phone line or something. Alarm instead of getting to the phone."

"Telephone service, someone you don't have to see."

(At the time) "Should be able to dial a number in an emergency."  
(Later) "There should be people around the place, just people willing to help not necessarily survivors."

"I think the existing one (Rape Crisis) is good but kids probably wouldn't go."

"There is (a service available now). There should be more of the same."

"I didn't want anything then. Rape Crisis was good."

"Rape Crisis would have been good at the time."

"Not a shrink, someone who has been through it, same age as the girl."

Other suggestions included help from families and punishment for the abuser.

"People who can sympathise and say 'we understand'. Family preferably."

"Need a family, like a foster home, where people can help you. There is too much competition in a (DSW) family home. Rape Crisis is good for people who've been raped and don't know what to do, good for young people. Me being young ... needed love and attention."

"Child should go to parents. Should support parents or relatives."

"The offender should be put away even if he just tried. Mad, loose sex maniacs should be locked up."

"I probably would have wanted him to go to jail. Sometimes people don't understand what you are going through and I'd like to talk to people that do."

It is interesting to note that the findings in the earlier sections showed that counselling offered to the girls was mostly given by Department of Social Welfare social workers and other professionals employed by statutory bodies. Here it is clear that although some girls favoured this type of service, a substantial number wanted other options. Clearly there is a need for a range of services to be available for girls who have been sexually abused. It should be noted however, that the questions on the services were very general and open-ended and the girls were not asked to consider a series of options and say whether or not they would be appropriate. This means that it is possible that girls who did not suggest various options may have favoured them if they had been suggested.

#### 10.4 Need for counselling or follow-up after the interview

At the end of the interview, the girls were offered referral to, or information on, counselling services that were available in their region. These included services arranged through Department of Social Welfare staff as well as those provided by community agencies such as Rape Crisis Centres or Maori women's groups. The reason this was offered to the girls was that in the early stages of developing the study concern was expressed that discussing the abuse in the interviews might result in distress for the girls and it was thought that they might want to undertake further counselling after the interview (see Chapter 3 for details).

For 69 of the 96 girls who had experienced abuse, no action was taken after the interview and no information was provided on available services. This was generally because the girls did not want any help (40 girls). Eleven girls were already receiving counselling, two more thought their family and friends were sufficient, eight would not talk about the abuse and seven did not see the experience as abusive. The reason was not given for one girl.

In total, 24 girls (23 who reported abuse and one who reported harassment) were provided with information on a service that was available to them if they wished to make contact. Twelve girls were given information on a Maori health service, nine were given information on a service that specialised in support for people who had been sexually abused and three were given information on both sexual abuse services and a Maori health service.

In addition there were four girls who were referred directly to a support service and in all cases this was a Maori health service offering sexual abuse counselling. Two of these girls were also given information on a service. Only four girls (two of whom were also given information on services) wanted social workers to be informed about the abuse. In three of these cases the social worker was the girl's current social worker



and female. In the fourth case, the girl thought her sister might be abused and she wanted a social worker in another office told about this.

From the above it is clear that although the girls had a wide range of ideas about appropriate assistance for girls who had been sexually abused, most were not interested themselves in participating in any counselling following the interview.

#### 10.5 Summary

- 1 Relatively little information is available on the outcome of the abuse described in the interviews. There is, however, information on the outcome of the abuse described on file or in the social worker questionnaires.
- 2 The majority of the abuse recorded on file or known to the social worker led to some counselling being offered to the girl. In most cases the counsellors were women. The counselling was provided by a sexual abuse service for over one fifth of the instances of abuse. In most other cases the counselling was provided by DSW staff (field social workers or institution staff) or other government agencies such as health, or education services. In a small number of cases counselling was provided on matters other than sexual abuse or offered but refused by the young women\*.
- 3 Counselling usually occurred within a year of the abuse being disclosed, although it was not usually provided at the time of disclosure.
- 4 Eight per cent of the girls in the study (19 girls) came under guardianship of the Department of Social Welfare because of sexual abuse.
- 5 Sixty-eight per cent of the abuse recorded on file and 61% of the abuse reported by the social workers was reported to the Department of Social Welfare or to the police. In 21% of these cases, the abuse was reported to the police but only 21% of the instances recorded on file and 19% of those mentioned in the social worker questionnaire resulted in charges being laid.
- 6 The action was usually taken against the abuser although in some cases the action was taken against the girl's (other) care-givers either instead of the abuser or in addition to the abuser.

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\* Young women are referred to as girls throughout the report as discussed in the footnote on page 1.

- 7 Convictions resulted from the majority of the cases where the abuser was charged (86% of those recorded on file where the abuser was charged and 77% of those reported in the social worker questionnaire). However, charges were laid in respect of only 21% of the instances of abuse recorded on file and 19% of those mentioned in the social worker questionnaire. About half of those convictions (approximately 10% of the instances described) resulted in custodial sentences.
- 8 During the interviews the girls described services they thought would be appropriate for girls who had experienced sexual abuse. The most commonly made suggestion was for someone to listen and believe the girl. Other commonly made suggestions were for general counselling services, places for girls to go where they could be safe from the abuser, such as a refuge, help from people who had experienced abuse themselves and punishment for the abuser.
- 9 Although the girls had a number of suggestions for appropriate services for girls who had been sexually abused, very few were interested in receiving any counselling themselves following the interview. Three girls wanted social workers to be told of their abuse and four girls were referred directly to a Maori women's health service. Twenty-four girls were given information about services currently available for girls who have been sexually abused.
- 10 Forty of the girls simply did not want any counselling or help following the interview, 11 had already received counselling, two thought family and friends were sufficient, eight would not talk about the abuse and seven did not see the experience as abusive.

## CHAPTER 11

### PARTICULAR TYPES OF ABUSE

This section discusses particular types of abuse, focussing in turn on abuse by father-figures, abuse by brothers, abuse by groups, abuse by peers and abuse by members of foster families. The characteristics of each type of abuse will be examined, followed by considerations of who the girl told about the abuse (if anyone), what response she got, and what effects she reported it had had on her. Because the sample numbers are quite small in some of the groups discussed in this section, many of the effects reported are not statistically significant. It is not possible to know whether any differences that occur are simply caused by sampling variance or whether there are real differences here which cannot be confirmed through lack of numbers. Results of this type then can only be regarded as suggestive, and it would require further research (with larger sample numbers) on these particular types of abuse to confirm whether these differences relate to real effects associated with the type of abuse.

All the sexual abuse discussed in this chapter was described by the girls in the interviews.

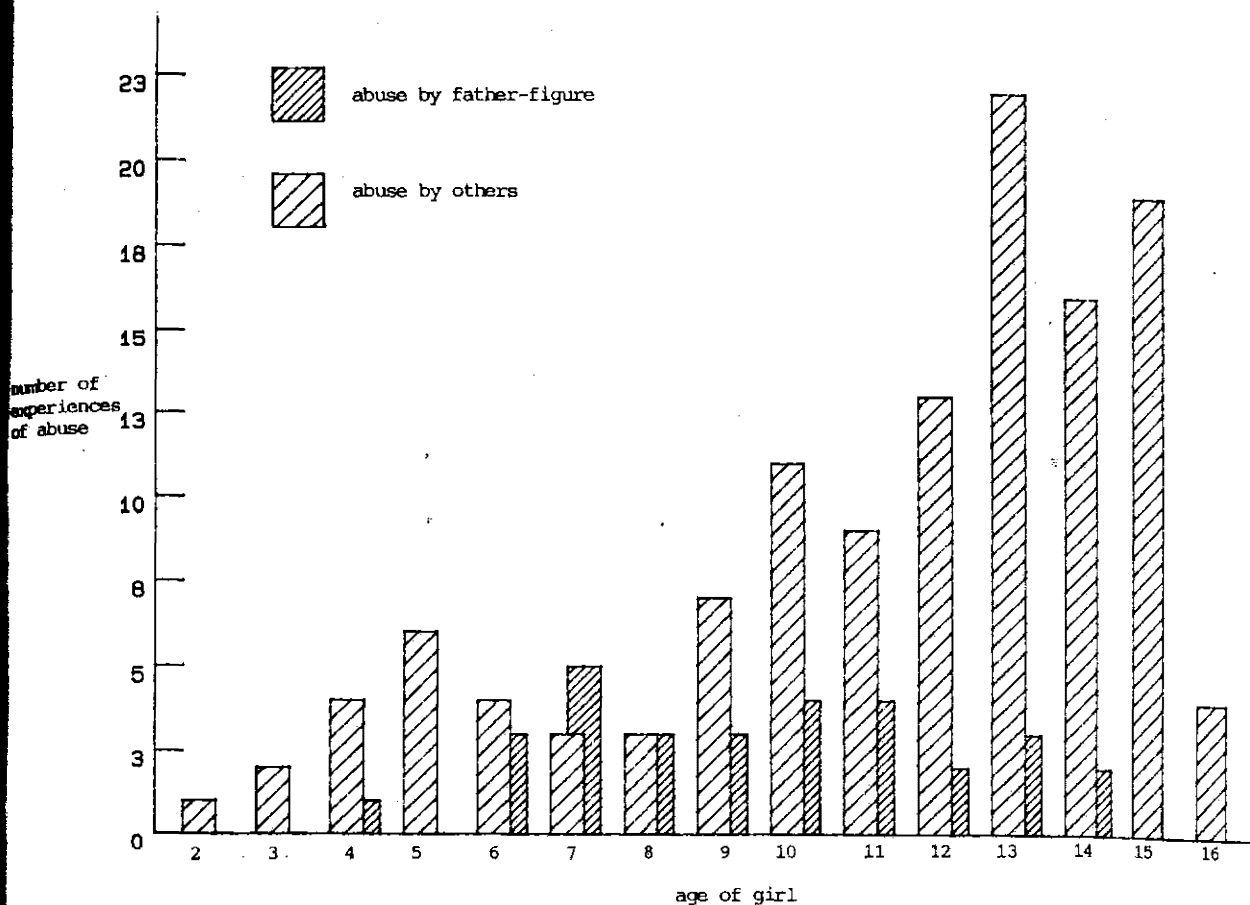
#### 11.1 Abuse by father-figures

The most commonly discussed type of sexual abuse in other studies is father-daughter incest. Thirty instances of abuse involving father-figures (18% of the total) were reported by girls interviewed in the study. Eleven of these involved natural fathers, eight involved stepfathers, two involved adoptive fathers and nine involved foster fathers. Two girls were involved in two abusive experiences with father-figures. One was abused by an adoptive father and a foster father and the other by two foster fathers. Adjusting for the two girls who were abused twice, this means that 28 of the 136 girls in the sample who were interviewed had been abused by a father-figure (21%).

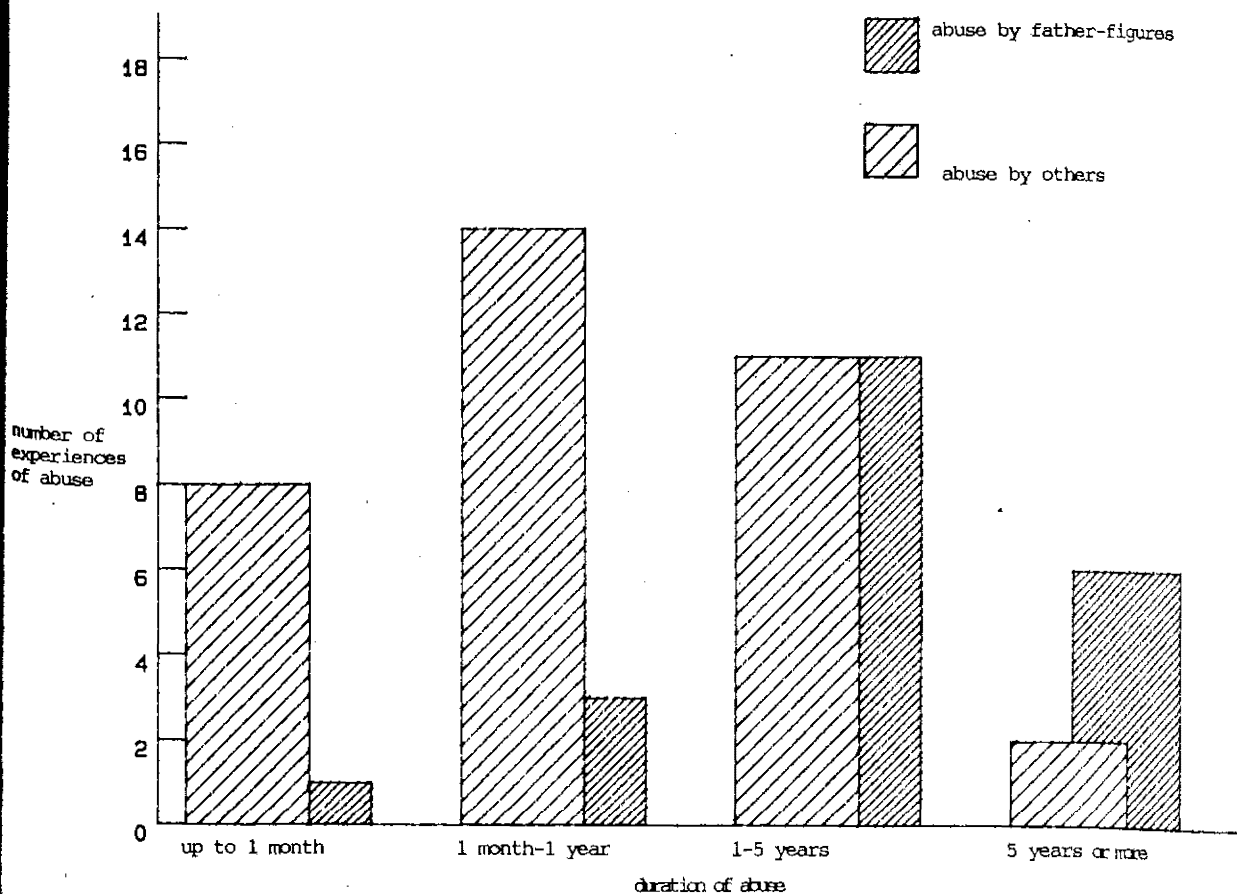
#### Characteristics of the abuse

The girls' ages at the time the abuse began ranged from four to 14 with a mean age of nine, slightly younger than for other kinds of abuse. Figure 11.1 shows the girls' ages when they were abused by father-figures compared with the girls' ages when other abuse occurred. The abusers ranged in age from 25 to 57 with a mean age of 41, which is older than the average age of the other types of abusers. This pattern simply reflects the fact that inter-generational abuse is likely to involve large age differences.

**Figure 11.1 Age of girl at time of abuse by father-figures compared to abuse by others**



**Figure 11.2 Duration of abuse by father-figures compared to abuse by others**



Father-figures who abused their daughters were more likely to be Pakeha and less likely to be Maori. Sixty-seven per cent (20 men) were Pakeha and 23% (seven men) were Maori, which contrasts with the ethnic distribution amongst all other types of abuser (53% Pakeha and 40% Maori). This difference was statistically significant\*. In 15 situations (half of all instances of abuse by father-figures) the girls who were abused were Maori, while three were from other ethnic groups and twelve were Pakeha.

On average, abuse by father-figures continued over a longer period than other types of abuse. Twenty per cent (six) of the instances of abuse described in this study involving fathers occurred once only compared to 55% of other types of abuse, and 20% (six instances) went on for more than five years compared to only 3% of other types of abuse. The duration of abuse by father-figures compared to other types of abuse is shown in Figure 11.2. The majority of the remainder (11 instances) continued for between one and five years, and four instances lasted for less than a year. Eleven instances (37%) involved sexual intercourse and a further ten involved attempted intercourse. This is a slightly lower percentage than for other types of abuse but the difference is not statistically significant.

The feelings expressed by the girls about abuse by father-figures were similar to those expressed about the other types of abuse with feelings of fear, anger or shame being the most common. Examples of the way girls expressed their feelings were:

*"I started hating my father when he started playing with me. I know he's my own flesh and blood and he shouldn't be doing things like that to me. I know he's my father, but I'd like to think he's not".*

*"I was scared. I shut it off as if it wasn't happening. I tried not to think about it".*

*"Disgusted, upset, angry, numb. I walked around like a zombie".*

*"I tried to avoid it always. I didn't feel anything. I was just blank. I didn't know wrong or right. I thought it happened to everyone".*

Force and threats to make the girl participate were no more likely for this kind of abuse than any other, but force and threats to prevent her telling were more likely. Examples of the way the girls described these threats are:

*"(He said) I'll hit you if you tell Mum. I only did once. She called my sister, we were all pretty scared".*

*"He told me my mother would stick me back in a foster home if I told her."*

*"I wanted to leave. I wanted to tell my grandparents. Dad would have beat us if we told our grandparents anything".*

\* Chi-square value 5.62, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

Bribes were involved in three instances of abuse by father-figures to prevent the girl telling anyone about the abuse. One girl said that:

*(The abuser) "used bribes. It was psychological. He let me smoke and bought me jeans".*

#### Who the girl told

Abuse by father-figures was more likely to be revealed to other family members and to social workers than other types of abuse, as was discussed in Chapter 6. Only two experiences of abuse by father-figures were revealed to nobody and in both these cases the abuser was a foster father.

Twenty-one of the 30 abusive experiences involving father-figures were reported to family members (either members of the girl's natural family or foster family). All the family members told were female, 18 were mothers and three were sisters. No girl who had been abused by a father-figure told another male family member about it.

Mothers were more likely to be told of abuse by fathers than abuse by other people. Where a girl had been abused by a person other than her father-figure, mothers only accounted for half of the family members who the girl told about the abuse. (This difference is statistically significant\*).

Although the majority of these instances of abuse were revealed to the girls' mothers or sisters at some time, it was often a considerable time after the onset of the abuse. In four situations (19%) the abuse was not revealed until more than five years after it began and in a further five instances it was revealed between one and five years afterwards. Only three instances of abuse by father-figures (14%) were revealed to family members at the time the abuse began compared with 38% of other types of abuse.

The mothers and sisters who were told about abuse involving father-figures were fairly evenly split on how they responded to the girl, with 11 described as responding positively and ten responding negatively. In their reaction to the abuser, nine responded negatively and five positively, three responded with a mix of both positive and negative feelings and three made no response to the abuser when told of the abuse. In one instance, the girl did not know how the person she told had reacted to the abuser. Figures 11.3 and 11.4 show the reactions of family members to abusers who were father-figures and the girls they abused.

More girls were disappointed than satisfied with their families' response when they disclosed that they had been abused by a father-figure. Although a similar proportion to

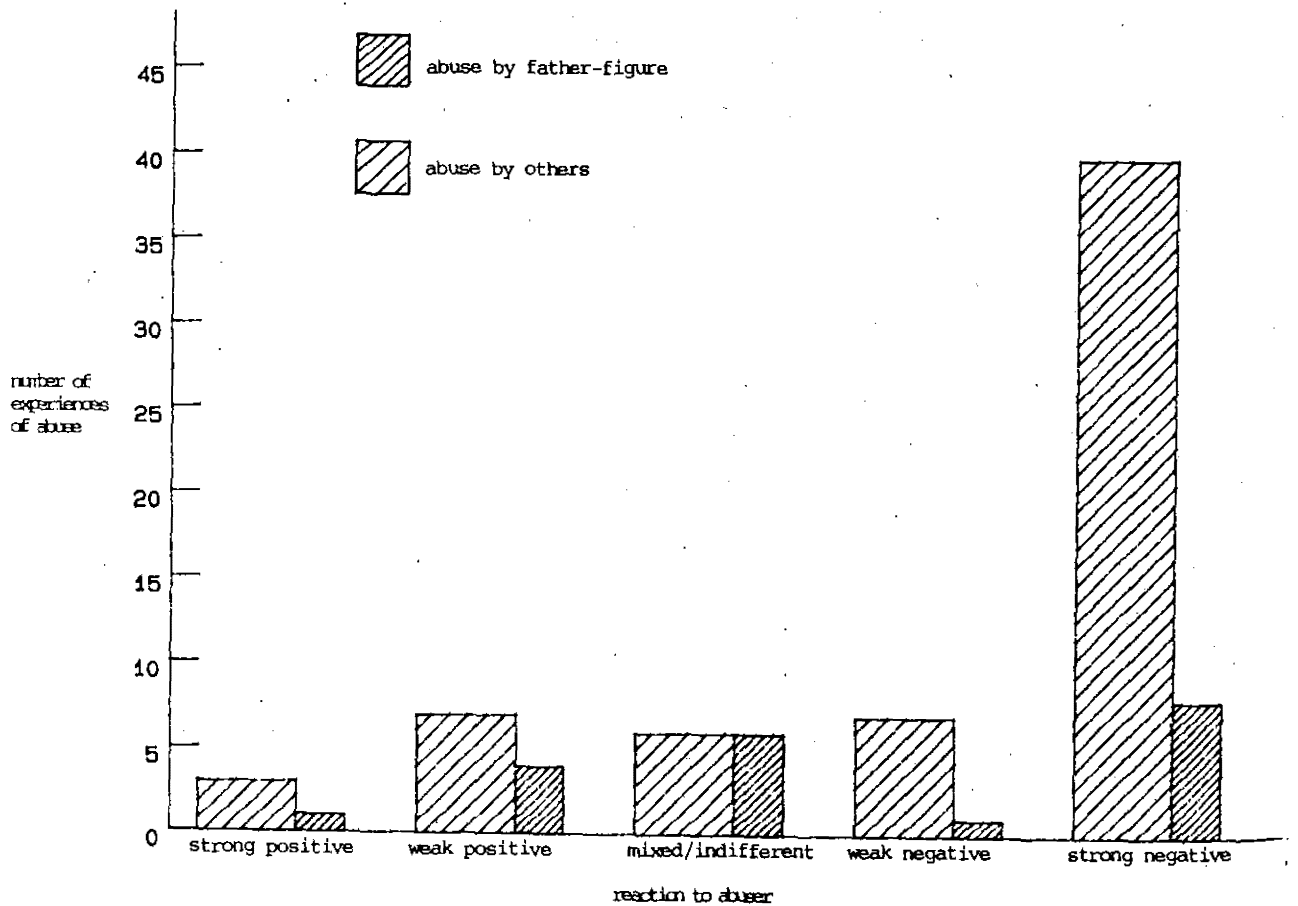
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\* Chi-square value 6.32, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

**Figure 11.3 Family's reaction to the girl: abuse by father-figures compared to abuse by others**



**Figure 11.4 Family's reaction to the abuser: abuse by father figures compared to abuse by others**



se experiencing other sorts of abuse wanted help, a much larger percentage of those abused by father-figures thought they had not received help (eight girls, 57% of those who had needed help).

se girls who had been abused by a father-figure did not tell anyone in their families about this. The reasons they gave for not telling were varied; two did not want anyone to know, one wanted a sufficiently satisfactory relationship with her family to be able to tell, one did not know how to tell, two thought they would not be believed, one was afraid and two wanted to protect the family as a whole.

se of these girls who had not told their family that their father-figures had abused them, thought their family would react favourably to them if they had been told. Three of the girls said they would have liked help from their families, one from her mother, one from her brother and one from her natural father. (In this instance, the girl had been abused by her step father).

se seven of the experiences of abuse by father-figures were reported to a social worker and the reasons given here were very ranging. One thought it was none of the social worker's business and one said she did not know any social workers, although she was under Department of Social Welfare care and had been abused by her foster father. One girl did not know how to tell, one was afraid, one wanted to protect her mother, one said that it was only later that she recognised she had been abused and one did not know why she had not told a social worker. None of those who had not told a social worker said they would have wanted help from their social workers and only one girl reported that her social worker (who she had not told) had asked her whether she had been abused.

### Long-term effects

The way in which girls who had been abused by a father-figure described the long-term effects of this abuse were broadly similar to those relating to other types of abuse, although the girls were slightly less likely to report being wary of men generally. Table 11.1 shows the range of responses given to this question and the numbers of girls who gave each type of response. Examples of the way the girls described long-term effects of having been abused by father-figures are:

*"I don't like being alone with a man until I know them. I couldn't stand being alone in a house at night if a man was there."*

*"I don't trust Social Welfare foster parents. I want to find my own and I have now, but I'm scared Social Welfare will move me again if they find out."*

*"My attitude to men, I've got a funny feeling about men. I don't trust"*



TABLE 11.1 Long-term effects of sexual abuse by father-figures as reported by the girls

Effect	Number of mentions	Number of girls	% of girls abused by father-figures
Fear, dislike or distrust of men and boys generally	9	8	29%
Fear, dislike or distrust of a particular man	4	4	14%
Fear, dislike or distrust of particular kinds of people (mixed sex)	3	3	11%
Fear, dislike or distrust of particular kinds of men	2	2	7%
Wary of sex	2	2	7%
Heightened interest in sex or confusion over sex	2	2	7%
Memories of abuse won't go away	2	2	7%
Drug and alcohol problems	2	2	7%
Misbehaviour and offending	2	2	7%
Fear, dislike or distrust of people generally	1	1	4%
Nightmares	1	1	4%
Family breakdown	1	1	4%
Wary of situations where abuse could occur	1	1	4%
Unable to speak of abuse	1	1	4%
Unable to form close emotional bonds	1	1	4%

### Family circumstances

Information on family background is of particular interest for girls who were abused by father-figures since other studies<sup>14</sup> have suggested that sexual abuse is more likely in certain kinds of families, for example in families characterised by marital conflict or family disruption. However, information on the family background is not available for all the girls abused by father-figures, since it was only collected for the family in which the girl spent the longest period of her life and this may or may not have been the family in which she was abused.

In most instances of abuse by father-figures, the father was a long-standing parent figure: in 21 out of 30 instances he was the father-figure the girl had spent the longest period living with. This group comprised ten of the natural fathers who abused, seven of the stepfathers who abused, both the adoptive fathers and two of the foster fathers who abused. The remaining father-figures who abused, one natural father, one stepfather and seven of the foster fathers were the girls' father-figures for a shorter time. The foster fathers were father-figures for periods ranging from three months to three and a half years and the natural father and the stepfather abused daughters who were not living with them at the time.

When the family backgrounds of the group of 21 girls where the abuser was the father-figure in the family in which she spent the greatest part of her life are compared with the family backgrounds of other girls who had not been abused by fathers there were not a large number of differences between the groups. In addition, because there were only 21 girls with abusing fathers the numbers are insufficient to draw any firm conclusions.

There were no differences in terms of who was the primary income earner in the family although the girls with abusing fathers reported slightly more occasions when there was not enough money.

Hitting of the children was reported more often in households where sexual abuse occurred (only two of the 21 girls reported that they were not hit). In particular these girls were more likely to report being hit by fathers and more likely to report that they were hit when they had done nothing wrong. None of these differences were found to be statistically significant. However, significant differences were found between the abusing families and the other families in terms of the frequency of beating\* and whether the beating was noticed at school.\*\* The

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\*Chi-square value 3.8, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Chi-square value 6.46, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

girls with abusing fathers were much more likely to report being beaten a lot. Only one out of the eleven who gave a specific frequency for the beatings reported being hit less often than once a week.

Of the 19 girls with abusing fathers who reported being hit, 11 (57%) reported that someone at school had noticed that they had been beaten compared with 24% of the girls who had not been abused by father-figures. Those who noticed the beating were usually other children but in three cases teachers noticed. The girls usually denied they had been hit or resisted attempts to help them although in one case the person who noticed did nothing and in another both the girl's parents and the Department of Social Welfare were informed. Examples of the way girls described what happened when other people noticed they had been beaten were:

*"They tried to help. I told them to stay out of my family life.",  
"They asked but there was no proof", "My mates told their parents",  
"They did nothing, they were angry at Dad and supported me", "They were just nosy, I used to say I walked into doors", "I just told them I'd been in fights", "My friend noticed. I told her not to tell the teacher".*

However, there were also differences between the groups (although these were not statistically significant) suggesting that the girls with abusing fathers were beaten for more serious misbehaviour. Examples of the sort of behaviours that led to the beatings were:

*"Pinching from them (her parents) and trying to hit them", "beating up the other kids", "running away" and "not coming home".*

While these behaviours were more common among the girls abused by father-figures and may account for some of the increased likelihood of their being beaten, it is difficult to sort out what might be the cause and what might be the effect. There is no doubt a complex interaction between (physical and sexual) abuse and behaviour, with abuse of both types likely to lead to behavioural problems which in turn can lead to further physical abuse.

Girls who had been abused by fathers in all cases reported that their parents drank alcohol, and a greater percentage reported that at least one person in the household drank too much alcohol (67% compared to 56% of the other families). The person who was reported to drink too much was also more likely to be the father in the abusing families. Examples of comments girls made about the effects of their fathers' drinking on the family are:

*"He was never home to cook our meals. I had to make the tea" and "He hit us a lot, beat up Mum and abused my sisters".*

However none of these differences were statistically significant.

There were no major differences between the girls whose fathers had abused them and the others in terms of the way they described their parents' relationship. However, those who were abused were a little less positive about the relationship, with comments such as:

*"They didn't (get on)", "(they) never seemed very close, always arguing", "crazy but they put up with each other", "If they stay together too long they start fighting".*

Only one (5%) of the girls abused by her father thought her parents got on very well, while 30 of the others (27%) thought their parents' relationship was very good. The abusing fathers were also more likely to be reported to argue with and to hit their female partners but again these differences were not statistically significant.

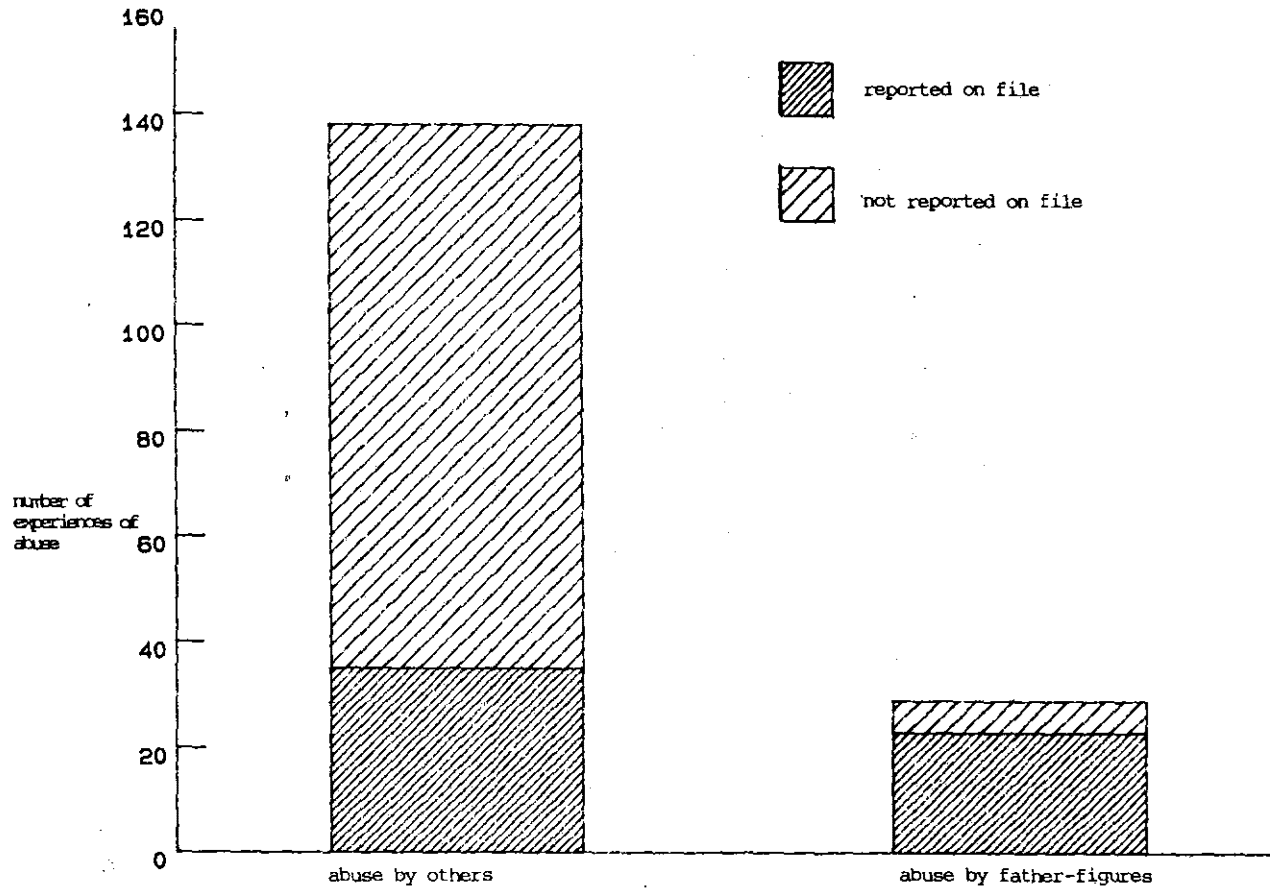
#### Summary of abuse by father-figures

In summary, abuse by father-figures was reported by 21% of the girls interviewed. This type of abuse tended to involve younger girls and older abusers, was likely to continue over a longer period and was more likely to involve force or threats to ensure silence about the abuse than other types of abuse. The father-figures who abused their daughters were more likely to be Pakeha than was the case for other types of abuse although they were no more likely than other abusers to involve Pakeha girls. Abuse by father-figures was also more likely to occur in families characterised by physical abuse. Finally abuse by father-figures was more likely than other types of abuse to be disclosed to others and more likely to be known about by the Department of Social Welfare, as Figure 11.5 shows.

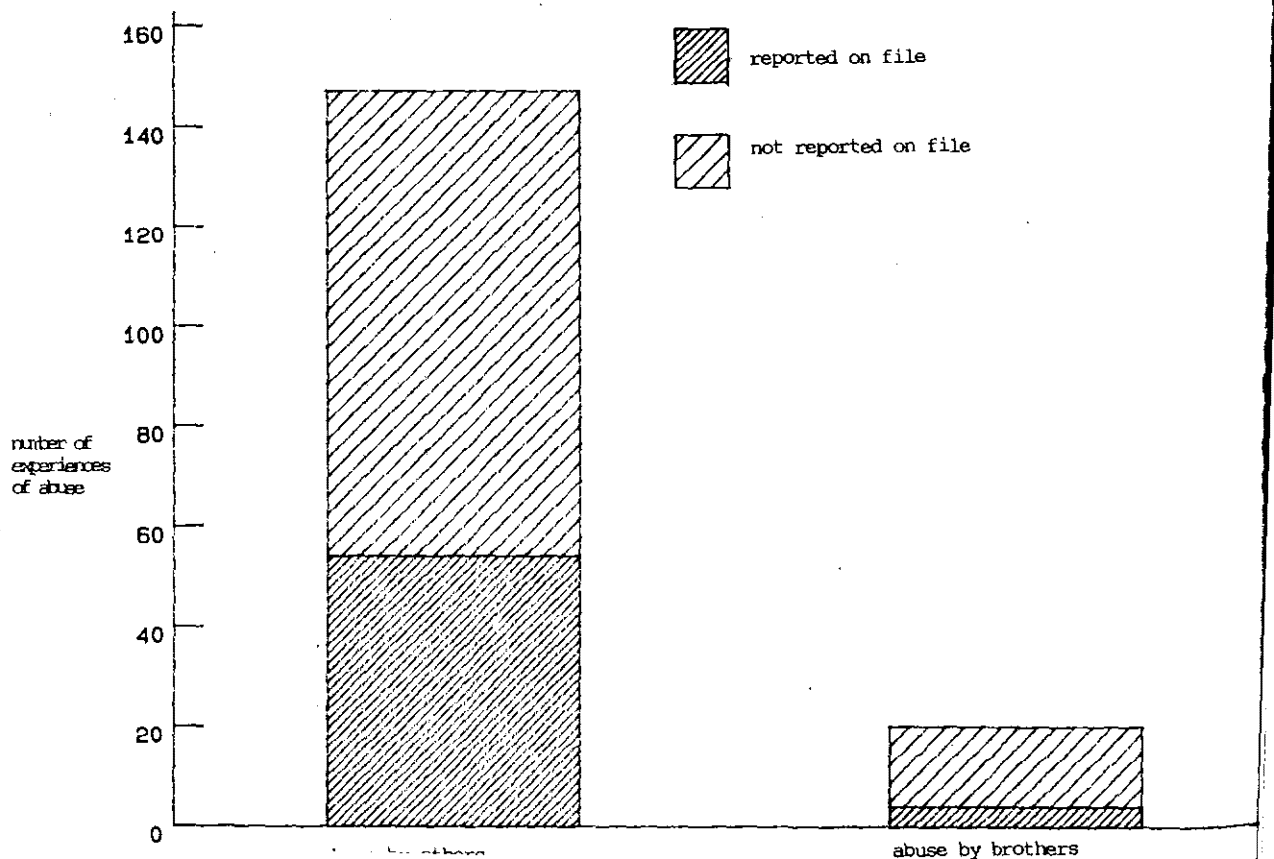
#### 11.2 Abuse by brothers

Twenty instances of abuse by brothers were reported by the girls in the course of the interviews, (12% of all instances of abuse). Half of these involved full or half-brothers, two involved stepbrothers and eight involved foster brothers. Seventeen girls reported being abused by brothers, 13% of those interviewed. One girl reported three experiences of abuse by brothers (two foster brothers and a stepbrother), one girl reported two (both full brothers) and the remaining 15 reported one instance of abuse by brothers.

**Figure 11.5 Abuse reported on file: abuse by father-figures compared to abuse by others**



**Figure 11.6 Abuse reported on file: abuse by brothers compared to abuse by others**



age of the girls at the start of the abuse ranged from five to 15 with a mean of nine years. The age of the abusers ranged from three to 25 with a mean of 16. In the incident involving a three-year-old the girl's uncle made her three-year-old brother have sexual contact with her (she was five years old). This incident is excluded, the age of the abusers ranged from ten to 25 with the mean remaining at 16.

The age of the girls when they were first abused by their brothers is younger on average than the age at which other types of abuse began (and similar to the age at onset of abuse by fathers). Clearly, close family contact allows fathers and brothers greater access to younger girls and hence greater opportunity for abuse. The age of the abusing brothers was younger on average than the other types of abusers, which again is not surprising as brothers are of the same generation as the girls and hence more likely to be of similar age. Nevertheless, brothers who sexually abused their sisters were on average seven years older than the girls.

The majority of the instances of abuse by brothers (12 out of 15) happened only once, although in two instances the abuse lasted longer than a year, and in five instances abuse occurred several times in the course of a year.

The abuse by brothers was similar to other types of abuse in most respects although it was less likely to involve alcohol. In 12 of 15 instances had the girl been drinking, and only three of the brothers had consumed alcohol when the abuse occurred.

In response to these experiences the girls reported fear, helplessness, general bad feelings, confusion and shame.

*"I was scared because he was (her foster parents') son."*

*"I didn't like it. I didn't want to feel out of place so I did it."*

Love and hatred were not among the feelings the girls said they had for their brothers at the time the abuse occurred.

#### Who the girl told

Abuse by brothers was no more or less likely to be reported to family members than other types of abuse. However abuse by a brother was the only type of abuse that girls reported to their brothers. Most instances of abuse by brothers that were reported to family members (six out of 11) were reported at the time although one instance was not reported by the girl to her family until six years after it began.

Fear featured strongly among the reasons given for not telling their families about the abuse by their brothers:

*"I was too scared. I'd have got a hiding". (The girl was five and her stepbrother was 17.) "Mum would have been shitty. (My stepfather would have smashed him in the face." "I didn't want him (her brother) to beat me up".*

All of the five girls who did not tell their families expected that the family would have reacted negatively to both themselves and to the (abusing) brothers.

Girls who were abused by their brothers were very unlikely to tell social workers of this abuse. Only two of the 20 instances of abuse by brothers were reported to social workers, and one further instance was known to social workers through other means. The main reasons girls gave for not telling their social workers were that it was none of their business or that they simply did not want to talk about it:

*"I never wanted it to be brought up", "I didn't think they needed to know", "I didn't want anyone to know about it",*

although one girl anticipated a negative reaction:

*"I don't think they'd be (supportive) the second time".*

Half the instances involving abuse by brothers (ten) were seen by the girls as having no long-term effects. As one girl said

*"No I've put it all in the past and we get on well now".*

This is significantly\* more than for other types of abuse where only 37 instances (25%) were reported by the girls to have had no long-term effects.

However, in spite of a relatively high proportion of instances of abuse by brothers being seen as having no effects, some of the other experiences involving brothers were seen as having serious effects for the girl concerned. Three girls reported distrust of or dislike for the brother involved:

*"I hate my brother now. He's no longer a brother. He's also not in the family any longer", "I hate my brother." "I don't hate my brother but I'll never forgive him".*

Two girls reported being wary of sex:

*"I think it has (affected me). I don't like sex very much. I always think of him and I freak out". "I get uncomfortable with my boyfriend if things get serious sexually".*

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\*Chi-square value 4.32, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

Another mentioned offending and misbehaviour:

*(It's affected me in) lots of ways, all the things I've done wrong, stealing ...."*

Others mentioned a generalised distrust of men and boys, difficulty speaking of the abuse and a heightened interest in sex.

Finally, abuse of this type was less likely than other types to be known to the current social worker or recorded on file. Only four of the 20 instances were recorded on file and only four were reported by the girl's current social worker on the social worker questionnaire. This is shown in Figure 11.6 on page 114.

#### Summary of abuse by brothers

In summary, fifteen girls who were interviewed (13%) reported being abused by brothers. This type of abuse usually concerned younger girls and younger abusers than other types of abuse. However the brothers who abused their sisters were on average seven years older than the girls. Girls were more likely to see abuse by brothers as having no long-term effects when compared to other types of abuse although some of the experiences were considered by the girls to be as serious in long-term effects as other types of abuse. Finally abuse by brothers is unlikely to be reported to social workers or known about by the Department of Social Welfare.

#### 11.3 Abuse by groups

Fourteen instances of abuse (8% of the total reported) involved sexual abuse of the girl by a group of people. Twelve of the girls experienced this kind of abuse (9% of those interviewed) and two of them experienced two unrelated incidents involving groups. Although for four of the incidents the girl did not say precisely how many people were involved, for the others the groups ranged from two to 26 people with an average size of three. The four groups of unknown size were probably large as they were described as "a group of streetkids", "a gang" and "lots" by the girls concerned.

All of these instances involved girls in the North Island and nine of the 14 occurred in Auckland. All but two involved girls who had been sexually abused by someone else previously. In just over half (eight instances) the group was unknown to the girl. In the other six, at least some of the group members were known to the girl. Women were among the abusers in two instances. The other twelve groups were entirely male.

These instances of abuse happened to girls who were on average older than those who experienced other types of abuse, ranging from 11 to 16 with a mean age of 14.



Ten of the 14 instances happened only once, but two occurred over a longer time period. One of these involved forced prostitution over one and a half years and in the other case the girl was abused every night for a week while she was held captive. For two instances it was not known whether the abuse happened on more than one occasion.

Ten of the 14 instances of abuse by groups involved sexual intercourse, and this type of abuse was much more likely to have involved threats or force to ensure the girl's participation than other types of abuse. Eleven of the 14 instances were known to involve force or threats and in only one instance was it known that there was no force or threats involved. In the other two cases it was not known if force or threats were involved.

Examples of the way force or threats were used were described by girls as follows:

*"He hit me over the head with a bar and hit me in the stomach so I wouldn't run." "They had a knife but they didn't use it".*

However abuse by groups was no more likely than other types of abuse to involve threats or force to ensure that girls did not tell anyone about it. They were also no more likely to involve alcohol than other types of abuse.

The girls were asked to give estimates of the age and ethnic group of the group members who had abused them. No estimate of age was given for three instances but the others ranged from 15 to 35 with a mean of 23.

Of the 12 girls who were abused by groups, six were Pakeha and eight were Maori. The abusers in this group were more likely to be described as being of ethnic groups other than Maori or Pakeha. The abusers in three instances were described as Pakeha, in two were described as Maori and in five were described as being of Pacific Island origin. In one instance the abusers were described as being from other ethnic groups and in three instances the ethnic group of the abusers was not known.

Feelings of shame and uncleanness were more commonly reported in relation to this kind of abuse than for other types. For six instances there were no details given on the kinds of negative feelings the girls had about the abuse. Of the remaining eight, three expressed feelings of uncleanness or shame:

*"I felt like a slut", "I felt dirty";*

were afraid, two felt generally bad:

*"I couldn't cope with living."*

one felt anger at the abuse.

Of the instances of abuse were described as having no long-term effects, and the question was not answered for a further three instances. In the eight instances where the girls describe some long-term effects; four mentioned being wary of sex, three a generalised fear of men and boys, and two mentioned a wariness of particular kinds of men. Other girls they were haunted by the memories of the abuse or were reluctant to go out at night. One girl regarded it as the cause of all her problems and another wished she was still a virgin.

There is not a great deal of information available on whether these experiences were reported to other people, which makes interpreting the answers difficult. Only five instances were reported to the girls' families and all of those were within a year of the abuse. Seven were reported to social workers which is slightly more than for other types of abuse.

Abuse by groups, however, was less likely than other types of abuse to be recorded on file or known to the current social worker although these differences are not significant.

#### Summary of abuse by groups

In summary, 12 girls (9% of those interviewed) reported being sexually abused by groups. In just over half the cases the perpetrator was unknown to the girl. These experiences all happened on the North Island and most occurred in Auckland and were more likely than other types of abuse to involve force. The girls sexually abused by groups were generally older than the girls who experienced other types of abuse and the experiences were more likely to be known to the department.

#### Abuse by peers

There were 42 instances of abuse (25% of the total) where the perpetrator was a peer of a similar age to the girl. Twenty-four girls (17% of those interviewed) indicated that they had been sexually abused by a peer. Peers were defined as people no more than five years older than the girl. Table 11.2 shows the composition of people this represents. The largest group of similar abusers were boyfriends, male friends, or acquaintances of the girl, together accounting for 48% of instances involving peers. Male relatives were involved in 12 instances (29%), strangers were involved in three instances (7%) and females were involved in four instances (10%). Only one

instance of abuse by a female involved someone more than five years older than the girl. The age of the girl when this abuse occurred ranged from five to 16 years old with an average of which is slightly older than for other types of abuse. The mean age of these abusers was 15.

The majority of these instances (29, 59%) occurred once only. None continued for more than five years and only three went on for more than a year.

Bribes were not used by abusers in any of these situations and force or threats were less likely to be used by peers than by other types of abusers. Force or threats to ensure the girl's participation were used by the abuser in only 20 of these instances (48%) compared with 54% (68 instances) for other types of abuse. Force or threats to prevent the girl from telling anyone what had happened were used in only 14 instances (33%) compared with 41% (52 instances) for all other types of abuse. These differences were not found to be statistically significant.

TABLE 11.2 Abusers no more than five years older than the girls

	No. of abusers	%
<i>Brother or half-brother</i>	4	10%
<i>Stepbrother</i>	1	2%
<i>Foster brother</i>	4	10%
<i>Male cousin</i>	2	5%
<i>Boyfriend or acquaintance of the girl</i>	20	48%
<i>Male family friend</i>	1	2%
<i>Male stranger</i>	2	5%
<i>More than one male known to the girl</i>	3	7%
<i>More than one male stranger</i>	1	2%
<i>Foster sister</i>	1	2%
<i>Other female known to the girl</i>	3	7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Who the girls told

Family members were less likely to be told about abuse by peers than they were about abuse by other people. Only 17 of the 42 instances of abuse by peers were revealed to family members. Where family members were told, this was usually shortly after the abuse occurred. In 12 of the 17 instances where family members were told they were told within a month of the abuse beginning. The girls were, on average, not very happy with the reactions they received from their families. Only seven felt good about the reaction, one was indifferent, three had mixed feelings and six felt bad about the reaction they received. Five would have liked some support or simply wanted to be listened to and believed. Only one girl said she wanted the abuser punished or made to stop abusing her.

The most commonly given reason for not telling anyone in the family when they had been abused by peers was fear, and this was mentioned by 11 of the 21 girls who did not tell their families. Typical comments made by the girls were:

*"Hell no. They'd kill me.", "I was too scared. They'd have thought it was my fault".*

Of the remainder: two thought it was none of the family's business, three lacked a sufficiently satisfactory relationship with their families, five felt ashamed or embarrassed, one wanted to protect the abuser and one thought she would not be believed.

Abuse of this type was less likely than other types of abuse to be revealed to social workers and even fewer instances of this type were revealed to social workers than to family members. Only 12 of the 42 instances were reported to have been revealed to social workers. Twenty-four were not revealed to social workers and for six the question was not answered.

The reasons for not telling social workers about abuse by peers generally related to the quality of the girl's relationship with the social worker. For ten of the 24 instances not revealed to social workers, the reason given was that it was none of their business or she did not want them to know, for example:

*"What for? Why should I tell them?" and "I don't want anyone to know about it".*

Nine of the instances of abuse by peers were not reported to the social worker either because the girl was never asked or because she lacked a satisfactory relationship with her social worker, as the following comments illustrate:

"Because it would go on file and they'd ask questions", "They'd blab", "I don't trust any social workers and I don't like them".

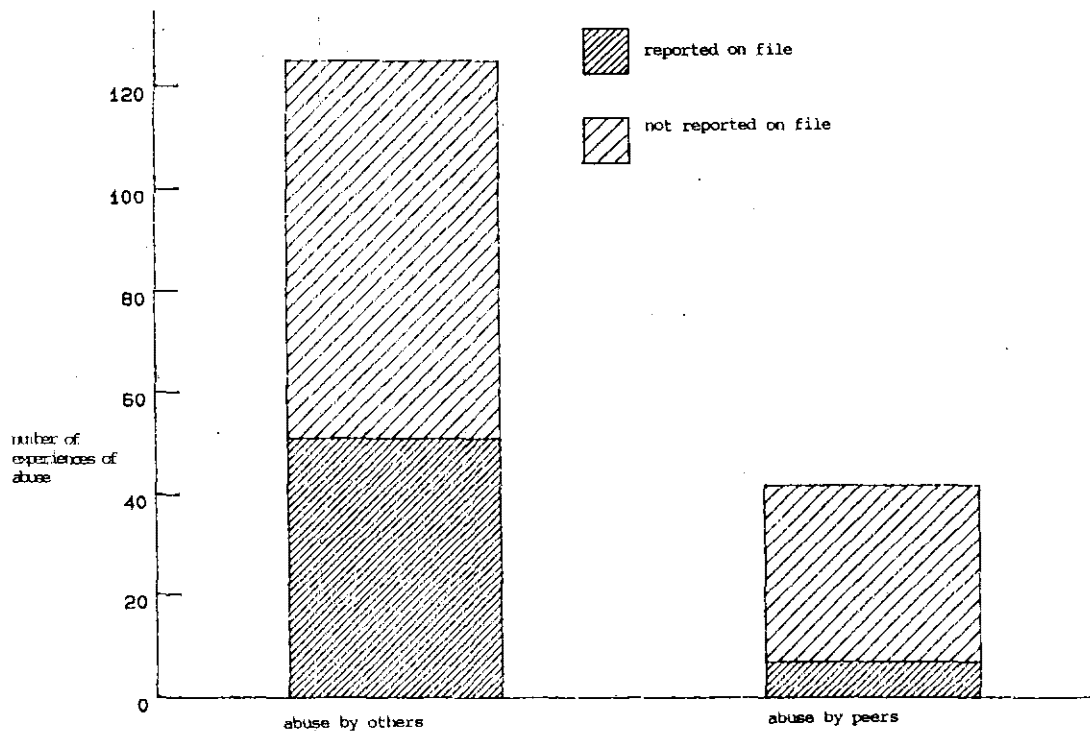
One girl was afraid, one was ashamed and one wanted to protect the abuser. Two girls did not give a reason for not telling their social workers.

Only one girl said that she had been asked about this type of abuse by her social worker and only two girls who had not told social workers had wanted help from social workers over abuse by peers.

In the case of nine instances involving peers (21%), the girl told nobody which is a greater percentage than for other types of abuse where only 8% was not revealed to anyone. This difference is statistically significant\*.

This type of abuse was significantly\*\* less likely than other types to be documented on file or known to the social workers who completed the questionnaires. Only five of the 42 instances were known to the social worker and only seven were recorded on file. Figure 11.7 shows the amount of this abuse that was known to the department.

Figure 11.7 Abuse reported on file: abuse by peers compared to abuse by others



\*Chi-square value 4.53, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Chi-square value 10.29, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.01 level.

Long-term effects

The girls reported that just under half the instances of abuse by peers (48%, 20) had some long-term effects. The most commonly reported effect (six instances) was a generalised fear, distrust or dislike of men and boys. Details of other reported effects are shown in Table 11.3.

TABLE 11.3 Long-term effects of abuse by peers

	<i>Number of mentions</i>	<i>Number of girls</i>	<i>% of girls abused by peers</i>
<i>Fear, dislike or distrust of men or boys generally</i>	6	6	25%
<i>Fear, dislike or distrust of a particular man</i>	4	4	17%
<i>Learnt to handle this sort of situation</i>	3	3	13%
<i>General bad effects unspecified</i>	3	3	13%
<i>Wary of sex</i>	2	2	8%
<i>Wary of situations where abuse could occur</i>	2	2	8%
<i>Memories that won't go away</i>	2	2	8%
<i>Fear, distrust or dislike of women generally</i>	2	2	8%
<i>Upset when she remembers situation</i>	1	1	4%
<i>Fear, dislike or distrust of particular kinds of men</i>	1	1	4%
<i>Heightened interest in sex</i>	1	1	4%

Summary of abuse by peers

In summary, abuse by peers was a relatively common type of sexual abuse, reported by 24 girls (17% of those interviewed) and accounting for a quarter of all the instances of abuse described in the study. This type of abuse is very unlikely to be known to the department and less likely than other types of abuse to be revealed to anybody.

### 11.5 Abuse by members of foster families

A total of 15 girls were abused within foster families (11% of the girls who were interviewed). Two were abused by two different foster family members and one was abused by three different members of foster families. There were 19 instances of abuse (11% of all abusive instances) where the girl was abused by a member of her foster family. Nine of these involved abuse by a foster father, eight involved abuse by a foster brother, one involved abuse by a foster sister and one involved abuse by a foster grandfather.

The girls' ages ranged from six to 13 with a mean age of ten which is the same as the overall mean. The abusers ranged in age from ten to 60 with a mean age of 31. This is a little older than the overall mean age of abusers (28).

Eight of the 19 instances of abuse within foster families occurred once only. Of the remaining 11, four continued for between a month and a year, and five continued for more than a year. None were reported to have gone on for more than five years. The duration of two instances was not known.

This kind of abuse was not different from other kinds of abuse in terms of whether force was involved, whether alcohol was involved and whether the sexual acts included sexual intercourse.

Seven of the 19 instances were not considered by the girls to have had any long-term effects. Five of these instances involved foster brothers and two involved foster fathers. It is not known whether or not there were any long-term effects for two experiences. The girls thought there were long-term effects for ten instances of abuse within foster families and in over half these cases (six) the effects were described as resulting in a generalised fear, distrust or dislike of men and boys.

A generalised dislike or distrust of foster parents as a group was reported by two girls. Two instances of abuse led to the girls being wary of situations where abuse might occur and two produced memories the girls could not forget. The other long-term effects mentioned in response to abuse by members of foster families were: being wary of sex, being unable to speak of the experience, having problems with drugs and alcohol or offending and misbehaviour and feeling that all her problems were a result of the abuse.

#### Who the girls told

Only ten of the 19 instances of abuse were reported to family members (either natural or foster family) and in no cases did family members get to hear of them through other means. The reporting rate was similar to that for other types of abuse.

Half of these (five) were reported to other members of the foster family at the time of the abuse. One was reported to the foster mother a few months after and two were reported to the girl's natural mother three years later.

Eight instances were not reported to any family members. For three of them it was because the girl did not want anyone to know, two because of an unsatisfactory relationship with other family members, one because the girl did not know how to tell and one thought her natural family had other problems. It was notable that none of the girls gave fear as a reason for not telling, whereas this was a very important reason for not disclosing abuse by other parent figures.

Abuse by members of foster families was slightly more likely to be reported to social workers than other types of abuse although the difference was not statistically significant. Four instances of abuse involving members of foster families had not been reported by the girl to anyone prior to the study. Two of these involved foster fathers, one involved a foster brother and the other involved a foster grandfather.

#### Summary of abuse by members of foster families

In summary 11% of the girls interviewed (15 girls) had been abused by a member of a foster family with just under half the experiences involving foster fathers and just under half involving foster brothers. These instances of abuse were in most respects very similar to the others reported in the study. Because of this the findings discussed earlier concerning sexual abuse in general are likely to apply to abuse occurring in fostering situations.

#### 11.6 Summary

##### Abuse by father-figures

1. Thirty instances of sexual abuse by natural, step, adoptive and foster fathers were reported in the interviews.
2. They involved young women\* who were younger (mean age nine) and abusers who were older (mean age 41) than for other types of abuse.
3. Abuse by father-figures was no more likely than other types of abuse to involve Pakeha girls but much more likely to involve Pakeha abusers.

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\*Young women are referred to as girls throughout the report as discussed in the footnote on page 1.



- 4 These experiences tended to continue for longer periods than others described in the study.
- 5 Threats and force were more likely to be involved in keeping the girl quiet but no more likely to be involved in making her participate.
- 6 Abuse by father-figures was much more likely to be revealed to family, social workers and other people and to be recorded on file than other types of abuse.
- 7 Girls who were sexually abused by their father-figures were also much more likely to be hit at home often and to be beaten sufficiently for people at school to notice.

#### Abuse by brothers

- 8 Twenty instances of abuse involving full, half, step or foster brothers were described.
- 9 This abuse involved younger girls than other abuse (mean age nine) and also younger abusers (mean age 16). The brothers were, on average, seven years older than the girls.
- 10 Abuse by brothers was much less likely than other types of abuse to be reported to social workers and less likely to be recorded on the girl's file or to be known to her current social worker.
- 11 These experiences were less likely than others to be seen by the girls as having had long-term effects.

#### Abuse by groups

- 12 Fourteen instances of abuse by groups were reported. All these instances involved girls from the North Island and nine occurred in Auckland.
- 13 In just over half the instances (eight) the group was unknown to the girls.
- 14 The girls who experienced this type of abuse were on average older (mean age 14) than those who experienced other types of abuse.
- 15 Threats and force to ensure participation were more common for this type of abuse.
- 16 Abuse by groups was less likely than other abuse to be recorded on file or known to the current social worker.

Abuse by peers

Forty-two instances of abuse by abusers no more than five years older than the girls were reported.

The average age of the girls who experienced this type of abuse was 11, slightly older than the average for other types of abuse and the average age of the abuser was 15.

Abuse by peers was less likely than other abuse to be revealed to family members or social workers and a higher percentage (21%) of these instances than others were revealed to nobody. It was also the abuse least likely to be recorded on file or on the social workers questionnaires.

Abuse by foster family members

Nineteen instances involving foster family members were described in the interview. Nine involved foster fathers, eight involved foster brothers, one involved a foster sister and one involved a foster grandfather.

The abusers were slightly older on average (31 years old) than for other types of abuse but the girls were of a similar age (mean age ten) as for other types of abuse.

Abuse by foster family members was in most respects similar to other types of abuse.

## CHAPTER 12

### OTHER SEXUAL EXPERIENCES

The findings presented so far in this report have been concerned with experiences which were classified as abuse, according to the definition provided in Chapter 5. This definition covered experiences which:

- were involuntary on the part of the girl;
- the girl expressed negative feelings about (for example fear or anger);
- involved sexual intercourse, oral sex, or the touching of genitals.

There was however, a range of other experiences reported by the girls in the course of the interview (or known about by the social worker or documented on file) which were not covered by this definition, but which are nevertheless worthy of some attention in the context of this study. Some of these experiences were in the nature of what could be described as sexual harassment, while others involved consensual sexual relationships with more distant members of the family, with considerably older partners or which in some other way might be considered inappropriate for girls of this age. This section examines in turn a number of those other types of sexual experiences which fall outside the working definition of abuse used in this study.

#### 12.1 Sexual harassment

An experience was considered to be harassment if:

- 1 the sexual acts involved were not as serious as those included in the definition of abuse, but did include any of the following: touching the girl's breasts or legs, exposure of genitals, other touching interpreted as sexual (such as kissing), suggestions, innuendos or threats, making her undress, photographing or arranging for others to see her undress; and
- 2 the girl was an unwilling participant and expressed negative views about the experience.

For 29 (12%) of the total sample of 239 girls, such an experience of sexual harassment was either documented on file, recorded by the social worker on the questionnaire they were asked to fill in or revealed by the girl herself in the interviews. Fifteen (11%) of the girls interviewed described experiences of this type. The majority (12) reported only one such experience but two girls experienced two and one girl reported four. In total 20 instances of harassment were reported in the interviews. Ten (67%) of the girls who reported harassment also reported being sexually abused.

The remainder of this section on harassment will be concerned with the experiences described in the interviews. The 20 instances of harassment involved girls aged between five and 15 with an average age of 12, which is older than the average of those who were abused. The age of the harasser ranged from 14 to 60 with a mean age of 28, which is the same as the average age of those who abused the girls. The ethnic group was known for 16 of the 20 perpetrators and all but two of these were Pakeha. One was Maori and the other one was described as Polynesian. Five of the girls were Maori and the other ten were Pakeha.

A large number of the instances of harassment (eight, 40%) involved male friends or acquaintances of the girl. A further four involved strangers. The remaining eight instances, involved a natural father, a stepfather, a foster father, an uncle, a brother-in-law, a male family friend, a boarder and a member of staff in an institution.

Eight of the instances of harassment happened once only and the five others, where the duration was known, lasted for less than a year. It is apparent that harassment is less likely than abuse to continue for an extended period, although it is possible that harassment may develop into sexual abuse if it continues. Many of the abusive experiences started as harassment.

Seven instances involved touching of the girl's breasts or legs or other touching that the girl interpreted as sexual, nine involved threats or suggestions of sexual activity and three involved exposure of genitals. In the other instance, the girl was made to undress. Examples of the ways girls described instances of harassment are:

*"Me and my cousin were attacked going down town. My cousin was raped. I ran away and got help." "A fellow at work has been making grabs at me ever since I started working there", "He put his arm around me. I knew he wanted sex with me".*

Of the 13 girls who elaborated on the negative feelings they had about this harassment six reported being afraid. For example:

*"He put his hand on my thigh. I was frightened. I felt trapped, crowded in by six men. I couldn't say anything to the boys." "It really scared me a lot because I thought he had raped her (her friend)".*

Only three of the instances of harassment involved force to ensure the girl's participation and two involved force or threats to prevent her telling anyone about the incident. For example:

*"We were attacked as we were walking towards the city." "If I tell anybody he'll get me. I see him a lot riding around in his car".*

However a number of other girls indicated that although persuasion or force may have been involved they were able to prevent the harassment from becoming more serious. For example:

*"I pushed him away". "He tried to talk me into it".*

Alcohol was rarely involved in harassment. There were only two instances where the use of alcohol was reported.

#### Who the girl told

Information is available on who the girl told about the harassment for only 15 of the experiences reported in the interviews. Family members were told about 12 instances, social workers were told of three instances, others were told about six and one instance was not reported to anyone.

Harassment was most likely to be reported to family members and mainly to mothers: nine instances were reported to mothers or to both parents, one was reported to a father only, one to a sister and one to a brother.

In most cases (seven instances, 58% of those where a family member was told), the girl reported a supportive response when she told her family and in more (nine instances, 75%) the family had responded negatively to the perpetrator. The girls were usually happy with the reaction they received (eight instances, 67%). Of those who were not happy with the response from their family, two wanted more support and one wanted something done about the harassment. One girl said:

*"They could have listened and believed me. They scared me".*

As a rule harassment was not revealed to social work staff. Only two instances were directly reported to social workers and one other was known to the social worker from another source although the social worker never discussed it with the girl herself. Four girls did not consider the harassment to be the social worker's business, three saw it as unimportant or not sufficiently relevant to report to social workers, one did not want to talk about it at all and two did not know why they had not told any social workers.

Only six of these instances of harassment were reported to other people besides family and social workers. Three of these people were female, two were male and the sex of the other was not recorded. The people told included peers, siblings, foster parents, a friend's parents, institution staff and the police.

Harassment was very unlikely to be previously known to the department. Only three instances were recorded on the girl's personal file and only one was recorded by her current social worker in the questionnaire.

long-term effects

in (55%) of the instances of harassment were seen by the girls as having some long-term effects, which is the same as the proportion of abusive experiences that were seen to have long-term effects.

The effects described by the girls were similar to those mentioned in relation to abuse. Four instances had resulted in generalised distrust or dislike of men and boys, for example:

*"I don't trust guys. It takes me a long time before I trust them."*

*"Every time I get to know guys I shy away. It still affects the way I feel about boys".*

These experiences resulted in unshakeable memories:

*"I always think about it".*

One girl described how she felt anxious about anyone riding a bicycle close behind her; another girl said she now had a heightened awareness of sex; another described how the harassment had led to the family coming into social welfare care and being split up; and another girl said the experiences had caused her to wonder how to cope with this sort of situation. In another instance the girl said she now had a dislike of the particular boy, and another girl wondered why nobody believed her.

Most of the girls thought there should be services available for girls who had these kind of experiences. The services which they suggested were very similar to those suggested by girls who had been sexually abused although one girl said they were only needed for experiences worse than hers. The need for someone to talk to or someone who would listen was mentioned by most of the girls and three suggested people who had had similar experiences. In addition one girl suggested something *"too formal"*, one suggested it would be useful to talk to people of the same age, another suggested people who were older would be more appropriate and one suggested something like Rape Crisis for younger children.

When these experiences are added to those of sexual abuse it is evident that 101 of the 136 girls interviewed (74%) reported having been sexually abused or harassed.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on other experiences which would be considered by some authors to be sexual abuse because of the age of the girl or the other party or because of the relationship between the girl and the other person. The following experiences differ from those described previously in that the girls did not consider them to be involuntary or distressing negative feelings such as fear or anger in response to these experiences.

## 12.2 Voluntary sexual experiences with relatives

In Chapter 5 when the definition of sexual abuse was discussed it was noted that one of the criteria considered important by other authors was how closely related to the abuser the girl was. The present study differed from a number of the other studies reviewed in that the girls' descriptions of the experiences and in particular of how they felt about them, were used to define an experience as abuse. Because of this there were a number of sexual experiences involving relatives which were not included in the working definition of abuse, as they were described by the girls in a positive way.

In the whole sample ten girls (4%) were involved in experiences with relatives which they described in a positive way. Seven of those interviewed described such experiences. One girl reported two such experiences and the other six reported only one. It is important to note that none of the relatives involved were immediate family, father-figures or full or half-brothers. Two were uncles, three were cousins, two were foster brothers and one was a stepbrother. Two of the girls mentioned that they had not known the other person was a relative (a cousin and a stepbrother) until afterwards.

All the experiences involved girls aged 12 and over with a mean age of 14. None of these experiences in fact crossed generations as the relatives in all cases were no more than five years older than the girls, their ages ranging from 16 to 21 with a mean age of 18.

All but one of these seven girls involved were Maori and the other was Pakeha. Six of the eight relatives involved were also Maori and two were Pakeha.

Six of the seven girls who reported these experiences in the interviews also reported that they had been sexually abused. All of the six had been abused prior to the voluntary contact with a relative and four were also subsequently abused. In three of these cases, the girl was abused by another relative (two uncles and a cousin).

Two of the sexual experiences with relatives happened only once, one went on for less than a month and one continued over a period of several months. The majority (seven out of eight instances) involved sexual intercourse. In two cases the relative had used force to make the girl participate but the girls nevertheless had a positive view of the experience. In no case did the relative use force or threats to prevent her from telling anyone.

There was no alcohol involved in four of these cases, while both the girl and the other person had been drinking in three other instances. It was not known whether alcohol was involved in the other experience.

Although the girls said they felt positive about all of these experiences, one reported feelings of confusion afterwards:

*"It was alright until I found out he was my cousin".*

The majority did not think there were any long-term effects resulting from these experiences. One found she was pregnant afterwards and one said she was not scared of having sex anymore.

Half (four) the sexual experiences with relatives were not reported by the girl to anyone. This is higher than the non-reporting rate for abusive experiences. This would seem to be because the girls viewed the situations positively and hence they did not want support from others and in addition, they expected disapproval because their sexual partners were related to them.

None of these experiences were described by social workers on the questionnaire they were asked to fill in and only three were recorded on file. Two of these involved foster brothers and the other concerned a relationship with a cousin that had the girl's family in an uproar. Three girls revealed their relationships to family members and one girl told a social worker about her experience. In all four situations this was within a month of the events occurring. The reasons given for not telling family members were fear (*"Hell no, they'd kill me"*), embarrassment and to protect the other person (*"My mother would kill him"*). On the other hand the girls generally did not tell social workers or other people, because they considered it not to be their concern. For example:

*"I don't trust them. The department would have a fit", "Because it's a personal thing". "I don't know. I didn't think it really mattered".*

### 12.3 Voluntary sexual experiences when the girls were 12 or younger

Twelve of the girls who were interviewed (9%) reported voluntary sexual experiences involving sexual intercourse when they were 12 or younger and two others who were not interviewed were known to have had similar experiences, although few details are available. All of the girls who reported such activity in the interviews also reported that they had been sexually abused and for all but two of them this was prior to the voluntary activity. Half of them (six girls) also reported that they had been abused after they had taken part in this voluntary sexual activity, and one entered prostitution at the age of 14 after being abused at seven and becoming sexually active at 11. At the time of these experiences, the girls' ages ranged from five to 12 with an average age of 11. The ages of their partners ranged from nine to 18 with an average age of 14.

Eleven of the 12 girls who reported such experiences were Maori and the other was Pakeha. Four of the girls provided more detail in the interviews on the voluntary activity that they



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In the whole sample ten girls (4%) were involved in experiences with relatives which they described in a positive way. Seven of those interviewed described such experiences. One girl reported two such experiences and the other six reported only one. It is important to note that none of the relatives involved were immediate family, father-figures or full or half-brothers. Two were uncles, three were cousins, two were foster brothers and one was a stepbrother. Two of the girls mentioned that they had not known the other person was a relative (a cousin and a stepbrother) until afterwards.

All the experiences involved girls aged 12 and over with a mean age of 14. None of these experiences in fact crossed generations as the relatives in all cases were no more than five years older than the girls, their ages ranging from 16 to 21 with a mean age of 18.

All but one of these seven girls involved were Maori and the other was Pakeha. Six of the eight relatives involved were also Maori and two were Pakeha.

Six of the seven girls who reported these experiences in the interviews also reported that they had been sexually abused. All of the six had been abused prior to the voluntary contact with a relative and four were also subsequently abused. In three of these cases, the girl was abused by another relative (two uncles and a cousin).

Two of the sexual experiences with relatives happened only once, one went on for less than a month and one continued over a period of several months. The majority (seven out of eight instances) involved sexual intercourse. In two cases the relative had used force to make the girl participate but the girls nevertheless had a positive view of the experience. In no case did the relative use force or threats to prevent her from telling anyone.

There was no alcohol involved in four of these cases, while both the girl and the other person had been drinking in three other instances. It was not known whether alcohol was involved in the other experience.

though the girls said they felt positive about all of these experiences, one reported feelings of confusion afterwards:

*"It was alright until I found out he was my cousin".*

The majority did not think there were any long-term effects resulting from these experiences. One found she was pregnant afterwards and one said she was not scared of having sex anymore.

If (four) the sexual experiences with relatives were not reported by the girl to anyone. This is higher than the non-reporting rate for abusive experiences. This would seem to be because the girls viewed the situations positively and hence they did not want support from others and in addition, they expected disapproval because their sexual partners were related to them.

None of these experiences were described by social workers on the questionnaire they were asked to fill in and only three were recorded on file. Two of these involved foster brothers and the other concerned a relationship with a cousin that had caused the girl's family in an uproar. Three girls revealed their relationships to family members and one girl told a social worker about her experience. In all four situations this was within a month of the events occurring. The reasons given for not telling family members were fear ("Hell no, they'd kill me"), embarrassment and to protect the other person ("My mother would kill him"). On the other hand the girls generally did not tell social workers or other people, because they considered it not to be their concern. For example:

*"I don't trust them. The department would have a fit", "Because it's a personal thing". "I don't know. I didn't think it really mattered".*

### .3 Voluntary sexual experiences when the girls were 12 or younger

Eleven of the girls who were interviewed (9%) reported voluntary sexual experiences involving sexual intercourse when they were 12 or younger and two others who were not interviewed were known to have had similar experiences, although few details are available. All of the girls who reported such activity in the interviews also reported that they had been sexually abused and for all but two of them this was prior to the voluntary activity. Half of them (six girls) also reported that they had been abused after they had taken part in this voluntary sexual activity, and one entered prostitution at the age of 14 after being abused at seven and becoming sexually active at 11. At the time of these experiences, the girls' ages ranged from five to 12 with an average age of 11. The ages of their partners ranged from nine to 18 with an average age of 14.

had experienced at a very young age. These girls provided information on a total of six experiences. The ages of the girls at the time of these experiences ranged from five to 12 with an average age of ten. The other people ranged in age from nine to 17 with a average age of 13.

The other people involved were all friends of the girl and three of them were Maori, two were Pakeha and one was of Cook Island origin. Three cases involved a relationship which continued for more than a year, while two involved an experience which happened only once and one involved a relationship which went on for several months. All instances involved sexual intercourse. None involved force, threats or bribes but both parties had been consuming alcohol during two of the experiences. Only one was seen as having any long-term effects. In this case the girl said:

*"I was so young". I think it was better to get the experience then than now".*

In half these instances where details were provided (three) the girl reported the experience to nobody, family members knew about two, and other people knew about two. Social workers were told about none of these experiences and none were recorded on file or known to the current social worker. The reasons given by the girls for not telling other people were usually that it was none of their business or not relevant, although one girl said she was too scared to tell her family. Examples of comments were:

*"'Cause I think she's nosy; She would have asked too many questions", "I didn't want to, they can mind their own business" and "I didn't want anyone to know".*

#### 12.4 Voluntary sexual experiences with partners more than five years older than the girl

Sixteen of the girls interviewed reported that they had had sexual relationships with partners five or more years older than themselves and a further six who were not interviewed were known to have had similar experiences. All of these relationships involved sexual intercourse. All but two of the girls who reported this type of experience in the interview had also experienced sexual abuse. Eleven had been sexually abused before the sexual activity with a much older partner and three of these girls had also experienced subsequent abuse. Two girls only experienced sexual abuse after they had begun having sexual relationships with partners more than five years older. For one girl it was not known when the abuse occurred. Of the six who were not interviewed, two were known to have experienced abuse before they engaged in voluntary activity with older partners.

Ten of the girls were Maori, ten were Pakeha and two were from other ethnic groups. The girls ranged in age from 12 to 16, with an average age of 14 and the men ranged in age from 18 to 40, with an average age of 22.

of those interviewed provided more detail about these experiences. All of the other people were male friends, girls and all the relationships continued for a time, the seven lasting for more than a year and the other lasting a shorter time. None of these experiences involved force, threats or bribes but the consumption of alcohol by both parties was mentioned by four girls.

Although the girls usually felt good about the experiences, two had feelings of confusion. For example:

*When I first had it I felt dumb but I went on having it." "I felt confused"*

She mentioned feeling used afterwards when the young man ended the relationship.

Although the experiences had had some long-term effects, two reported being wary of sex afterwards, two considered it made them grow up fast and one became pregnant. Examples of the way girls described the effects of this type of experience are:

*For a while I didn't want sex with a guy again. They'd use and abuse me. "I didn't want to get pregnant but I'm glad now I've got the baby." "I'm not scared of having sex anymore".*

These experiences were more likely than the others discussed in this chapter to be reported to other people. Only one of these experiences had not been reported to anybody and most (six out of seven) were recorded on file. Social workers described four of these experiences in the questionnaire they filled in.

Family members knew about five of these experiences and in all cases the family members were female. Four were mothers and one was a sister. They were all told within a month of the relationship beginning. The reactions to the girls and their partners were equally likely to be positive or negative and the reactions were split on how they felt about the families' reactions. Those who were not happy wanted their families to treat the relationship as 'ok'.

Of these relationships were reported by the girl to social workers, two to their present male social workers and two to their former female social workers. Again, they received mixed reactions. Two of the three who did not tell social workers did so for their reason as wanting to protect their partner from prosecution (all the girls were under the age of 16).

In all these experiences were reported to female peers. In most cases the girls reported they had received a mixed reaction.

### 12.5 Experiences later regretted

Seven girls (5% of those interviewed) described in the interviews occasions where they had voluntarily entered into sexual situations which they had regretted afterwards. All of these girls also reported being sexually abused. The ages of the girls at the time of these experiences ranged from eight to 15 with an average age of 12. The age of the other person involved ranged from 11 to 18 with an average age of 15. In one instance the other party was a young man aged 17 and the girl was eight, but for all the others the other person was no more than four years older than the girl. All the young men were friends of the girls, except one who was a stranger and one who was a cousin. Three of the girls were Maori and four were Pakeha.

Only one instance was recorded on the girl's file and another was known to her present social worker. Three of the girls thought these experiences had had long-term effects, one said her school work had suffered and she had become distracted, one said:

*"sometimes I feel I look older because of that";*

and the third thought the experience had increased her curiosity about sex. Three of the girls thought there should be some services available for girls who had had these sort of experiences. Two mentioned sex education and one of these also mentioned that help would be best if provided by a person who had had a similar experience. The third said help should be provided with relationships generally. The feelings of the girls about these experiences can be summarised by one of them who said:

*"I don't know how anyone can help you over something you've done that's over, but the memories are still there and you know it's wrong. I didn't have any feelings for him but he just used me and that hurt. It's done and over with. I wish I'd held onto my pride".*

### 12.6 Prostitution and related activities

Two girls reported that they had engaged in prostitution. One reported this in the interview and one who was not interviewed had told her social worker. Another girl who was not interviewed was suspected by her social worker of having engaged in prostitution, another had had sexual intercourse with a man and demanded money and another had traded sex for drugs. One girl was working as a stripper, one had performed a strip-tease for boys at school and another was reported to her social worker as being so promiscuous that boys were lining up for her at school. Six of these girls were also known to have been sexually abused.

Four of these girls were Maori, three were Pakeha and one was from another ethnic group. They were all aged between 13 and 15 at the time of the experience with an average age of 14.

If all the experiences described in this chapter so far are included in a very broad definition of sexual abuse similar to that used in some of the studies reviewed, we can report that in the interviews 101 girls reported abuse or harassment. In addition one girl reported a positive experience with a relative and two others reported positive experiences with partners more than five years older. This makes a total of 104 girls or 76% of those interviewed who reported such experiences. Considering that 71% reported abuse using the very narrow definition discussed in Chapter 5, it is clear that very few additional girls would report abuse if the definition was broadened and, as discussed in Chapter 5, this could well lead to the impact of these findings being lost.

### 12.7 Voluntary sexual experiences with peers

A large number of the girls were known to be voluntarily sexually active with peers. Forty per cent (95 girls) of the total sample of 239 were known to have experienced sexual intercourse with peers. Voluntary sexual activity with peers was found to be more common among those who had experienced sexual abuse than those who had not. Of those who had been abused, 49% (64 girls) were sexually active with peers while of those who had not been abused 21% (30 girls) reported that they were sexually active with peers. This difference was statistically significant\*.

As noted in Chapter 4, 18 (8%) of the girls had experienced pregnancies. Of these, eight had borne children and seven were pregnant at the time of the study. Those who had been abused were no more likely to have experienced pregnancy than those who had not.

### 12.8 Other sexual activities

There were a number of other sexual experiences reported on the girls' files or in the interviews that did not easily fit into any of the preceding categories. These experiences have been included here in order to report on all the sexual experiences on which the study had information. They do not easily fit together under any heading but as each type of experience was only reported once they are discussed here together to complete the chapter.

One girl was reported to have voluntarily had sexual intercourse with all the members of a gang at a local shopping centre. Another felt positive about her sexual relationship with her boyfriend, although he used force to make her have sexual intercourse with him and threatened to beat her up if she told the police.

During the interview one girl referred to a painful experience that had happened to her that year but gave no other

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\*Chi-square value 21.39, one degree of freedom, significant at the 0.0001 level.

information. Another girl claimed in the interview that her stepfather had not sexually abused her, although the abuse had been well documented in the past and she had received counselling for it.

Finally, two girls were reported on file to have initiated sexual acts that were found distressing to others. One girl aged 14 had sexually abused the five-year-old child of her foster parents, and another had a habit of grabbing the genitals of the male staff at the institution where she lived.

Of these six girls, three were also known to have been sexually abused.

## 12.9 Summary

### Sexual harassment

- 1 Twelve per cent of the total sample (29 girls) were known to have experienced sexual harassment. Fifteen young women\* (11%) reported 20 experiences of harassment in the interviews. Ten of these had also experienced sexual abuse.
- 2 The ages of the girls ranged from five to 15 with an average age of 12. The perpetrators ranged in age from 14 to 60 with an average age of 28.
- 3 Ten of the girls were Pakeha and five were Maori. Of the 16 perpetrators whose ethnic group was known, 14 were Pakeha, one was Maori and one was described as Polynesian.
- 4 These experiences were of shorter duration than abusive experiences and fewer involved force, threats or alcohol.
- 5 These experiences tended to be reported to family members, particularly mothers, and were unlikely to be reported to social workers. They were very unlikely to be recorded on file or in the social worker questionnaire.
- 6 Harassment was as likely as abuse to be seen as having long-term effects and the kinds of effects were also similar.
- 7 Five of the girls thought there should be services for girls who have had these kinds of experiences and the most commonly requested service was for someone to listen.

### Voluntary sexual contact with relatives

- 8 Ten girls (4% of the whole sample) were known to have had voluntary sexual contact with relatives. Seven of those interviewed described eight such experiences. Six of these girls had been sexually abused prior to contact with relatives and four of them were also subsequently abused.

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\*Young women are referred to as girls throughout the report as noted in the footnote on page 1.

None of the relatives were immediate family, two were uncles, three were cousins, two were foster brothers and one was a stepbrother.

All the girls were aged 12 or older with an average age of 14 and none of the relatives were more than five years older, ranging in age from 16 to 21 with an average age of 18.

Six of the seven girls were Maori and one was Pakeha and six of the eight relatives were Maori and two were Pakeha.

None of the girls felt negative about the experiences.

Half the experiences with relatives (four) were reported to nobody and none were described by social workers on the social worker questionnaires. Only three were reported on file. One was reported to a social worker, three to family members and none to anyone else. The reasons for not telling family members related mainly to fear and embarrassment and the reasons for not telling other people were that it was not their concern.

#### Voluntary sexual activity when the girls were 12 or younger

Fourteen girls (6%) were known to have had voluntary sexual experiences when they were 12 or younger. Twelve of those interviewed had had these experiences. All the 12 girls interviewed had also experienced sexual abuse and ten had been abused before the voluntary sexual activity. Six girls also reported abuse after the voluntary activity.

The girls ranged in age from five to 12 with an average age of 11. Their partners ranged from nine to 18 with an average age of 14.

Eleven of the girls were Maori and the other was Pakeha. The ethnic group of the other person was only known for six experiences. Three of them were Maori, two were Pakeha and one was of Cook Island origin.

Half these experiences were reported to nobody, family members knew about two and other people knew about two. None were reported to social workers, recorded on file or recorded in the social worker questionnaire.

#### Voluntary sexual activity with partners more than five years older than the girls

Twenty-two girls (9%) were known to have had sexual relationships with partners more than five years older than themselves. Sixteen of those interviewed reported such experiences and further detail was available on seven experiences. Fourteen of the sixteen had also experienced sexual abuse, eleven before the voluntary activity, two after and for one girl it was not clear whether the abuse occurred before or after the voluntary activity.



- 19 The girls ranged in age from 12 to 16 with an average age of 14 and the men ranged from 18 to 40 with an average age of 22.
- 20 Ten of the girls were Maori, ten were Pakeha and two were from other ethnic groups.
- 21 All the experiences were ongoing relationships, all involved sexual intercourse and none involved force, threats or bribes.
- 22 These experiences were usually known about by other people. Six of the seven relationships described in detail were recorded on file and four were recorded in the social worker questionnaire. Four were reported to social workers, five were reported to family members and two were reported to female peers.

#### Experiences later regretted

- 23 Seven girls (5% of those interviewed) reported sexual experiences they had entered into voluntarily but later regretted and all had also been sexually abused.
- 24 The girls ranged in age from eight to 15 with an average age of 12 and the other people ranged from 11 to 18 with an average age of 15. All the young men were friends of the girls except one who was a stranger and one who was a cousin.
- 25 Three of the girls were Maori and four were Pakeha.

#### Prostitution and related activities

- 26 Two girls reported having engaged in prostitution, another was thought to have by her social worker, a fourth had sexual intercourse with a man and then demanded money and a fifth traded sex for drugs. Another girl worked as a stripper, another performed a strip-tease for boys at school and another had boys at school lining up to have sexual intercourse with her. Six of these girls has also been sexually abused.

#### Voluntary sexual experiences with peers

- 27 Ninety-five girls (40%) were known to be sexually active with peers. Voluntary sexual activity with peers was more common among those who had been sexually abused (49%, 64 girls) than those who had not experienced abuse (21%, 30 girls).
- 28 Eighteen girls had experienced pregnancies, of whom seven were pregnant at the time of the study. Eight had borne children.

Other sexual activities

- 29 Six girls were known to have reported other activities. Two initiated sexual behaviour others found distressing, two voluntarily entered into situations involving force or sexual intercourse with a gang, one would not disclose her experience and one denied a well documented report of sexual abuse. Three of these girls also reported sexual abuse.

## CHAPTER 13

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### CONCLUSIONS

##### 13.1 The incidence of sexual abuse

The study considered sexual experiences to be sexual abuse if they were involuntary, they were viewed negatively by the girl, and they involved some form of genital contact. Ninety-six (71%) of the 136 girls who participated in the interviews had experienced some form of sexual abuse. Of the whole group of 239 girls included in the study which includes a further 103 girls who were not interviewed (but for whom data was available from file or social workers), 130 or 54% were found to have been sexually abused. There were no significant ethnic differences in the incidence of sexual abuse. Among girls who had at some stage resided in a Department of Social Welfare institution (a national institution, regional girls' home or group home) 80% of those interviewed had experienced abuse at some time.

In addition a further ten girls (4%) reported experiences (which were considered in the study to be harassment) which did not involve genital contact but were sexual in nature and viewed by the girl as negative.

It can be concluded that a very large number of the girls who come onto the caseloads of Department of Social Welfare field and residential social workers will have experienced some form of sexual abuse. In addition, a smaller number will have had negative sexual experiences not involving genital contact.

These findings on the incidence of sexual abuse are higher than the incidence described in the general population studies reviewed in Chapter 2<sup>2,3,17,32,35</sup> but are very similar to the incidence found in the studies of drug addicts in the USA<sup>5</sup> and in Auckland<sup>13</sup> and in the American study by Brooks<sup>6</sup> of girls in residential training centres. The findings would also support the estimate made by Joan Hough<sup>21</sup> in 1984 that 80% of the girls in Allendale Girls' Home had experienced sexual abuse.

##### 13.2 The extent to which the abuse was already known to the department

Of the 169 experiences of sexual abuse reported by girls in the interviews, only 32% (54) were known to the girl's current social worker and only 34% (58) were reported anywhere on her personal file. Ninety-nine instances of abuse (59%) were not previously documented on file or known to the girl's present social worker. However, most abuse was revealed to at least one other person and only 11% or 19 experiences were not disclosed by the girl to anyone.

involving family members, particularly father-figures was likely to be known to the department as was abuse involving older abusers, abuse that continued for a period of abuse involving sexual intercourse, abuse accompanied by force or force to ensure the girl's participation, abuse where the girl was afraid and abuse where the abuser used force. Abuse by friends or acquaintances of the girl was less likely to be known to the department.

It can be concluded that a substantial number of the girls in the guardianship will have experienced sexual abuse which is not recorded on file and not known to or suspected by their social worker. Although it is likely that the girls have disclosed the abuse to some other person, that person does not necessarily have passed the information on to the department. It is also likely that the abuse which is not reported to the department will involve abusers who are friends or acquaintances of the girl and people other than father-figures.

From the other studies reviewed as background to this study it was examined whether the abuse was known to statutory officers. In addition most of these studies found a much smaller percentage of those abused had told nobody of the abuse. The difference between the findings of this study and those of the other studies could perhaps be explained by the differences in the samples. Most of the other studies reviewed concerned adults for whom the abuse would often have occurred a considerable time in the past, while young people may be more willing to talk about their experiences. It may be because more open attitudes and public debate on the issue make it easier to discuss such experiences and at the same time suggest such experiences are more common than previously thought.

#### The nature of the sexual abuse

Six girls (48% of those interviewed who had experienced sexual abuse) reported more than one unrelated abusive experience. The majority of the other studies reviewed did not report more than one unrelated instance of abuse for each person and where they did the findings were often limited to the findings concerning abuse that continued for a period. This makes it difficult to compare the results of the present study with those from other research. The Silbert and O'Connell study of prostitutes however noted that the women on average had been abused as children by two abusers each.

The findings would support the view<sup>16</sup> that girls who have been sexually abused are often at greater risk of subsequent abuse. They would also suggest that if work is being done with a girl concerning one experience of sexual abuse that it would be worthwhile enquiring about other instances of abuse she may have experienced which may also need to be dealt with.

Just under half the abuse (42%) happened before the girls came under the guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare and just under half (40%) happened after guardianship. The remainder occurred at approximately the same time as the care order. This finding has important implications in that a substantial amount of the sexual abuse occurred while the girls were under the care of the department. It is important to note here that the majority of this abuse was perpetrated by people other than care-givers.

Around half the abusive experiences occurred once only and around a third continued over a period of time. This figure is similar to the findings of the other studies reviewed.

The average age of the girl when the first instance of abuse began was ten, a finding which is again similar to that found in other studies. It is worth noting however that the age when the abuse first began ranged from two to 15 and it is clear that sexual abuse may happen to children of any age.

The findings on the identity of the abusers are interesting. In the present study, 51% of the abusers were family members and relatives which is a higher proportion than that found in any of the other studies reviewed. The proportion of abusers known to the girl but not related was similar to that found in other studies and the proportion who were strangers was lower.

It should be remembered here, however, that the sample in the present study is far from representative of the New Zealand population as a whole. It is possible that the effects of abuse by relatives are more likely than the effects of abuse by strangers to lead to girls coming into the department's care. This would seem to be a possibility as Baker and Duncan<sup>3</sup>, Nash and West<sup>32</sup> and Goldman and Goldman<sup>18</sup> have all suggested greater trauma results from abuse by close relatives and less trauma occurs if the abuser is a stranger.

The average age of the abusers in the present study was 28 which is slightly younger than that for most of the other studies reviewed.

The present study also differed markedly from other studies in the proportion of abuse that involved sexual intercourse and could be described as rape. Forty-four per cent of the abusive experiences in the present study involved sexual intercourse compared with between 2% and 26% in the other studies discussed. This finding can probably be partly explained by the much narrower definition of abuse employed in the present research. Another factor which could explain this difference is again the non-representativeness of the sample. A number of authors<sup>7,32,38</sup> have suggested that abuse involving genital contact, and particularly intercourse, is more likely to have serious long-term effects and it may be that this kind of abuse is more likely to result in girls coming into Department of Social Welfare care.

Although the abuse reported in the present study involved intercourse more often, the incidence of the use of force and threats to ensure participation was similar to that in the other studies.

### 3.4 Social work responses to the abuse

About a third of the abuse described in the interviews had been revealed to Department of Social Welfare social workers.

Abuse by father-figures was most likely to be reported to social workers. Other kinds of abuse, such as that involving peers or similar aged siblings, was unlikely to be known about by the department.

Social workers were generally supportive of the girl and negative in their reaction to the abuser. Maori girls who told social workers about the abuse were more likely than Pakeha girls to find them supportive.

Half of the girls who told social workers about the abuse were happy with the response they received. Girls who were not happy with the response they received from social workers, generally wanted something done to stop the abuse, the abuser punished and some support for themselves.

Where girls did not tell social workers about the abuse their main reasons for not telling were that it was not the social worker's concern or that the girl's relationship with her social worker was not sufficiently satisfactory to facilitate telling.

The interviews with the girls did not provide much detail on the social work response to the abuse. However, more is known about the social work response to the abuse recorded on the social work files or in the questionnaires filled in by the social workers. It should be noted that the abuse recorded on file made up only a sub-group of all the abuse identified in the study and was more likely to be particular kinds of abuse (for example abuse by father-figures). Counselling was provided to the girls in the majority of cases identified from files and social workers. The counselling was usually provided by women and in most cases by Department of Social Welfare staff (either field or residential social workers), or by the staff of other government agencies. In about a fifth of the cases the counselling was provided by community services specialising in providing assistance to those who have experienced sexual abuse.

For 19 girls (8% of the whole sample) the outcome of the abuse was being placed under the guardianship of the Director-General of the Department Social Welfare.

A relatively small number of the abusers were prosecuted as a result of the abuse. Twenty of the 110 instances of abuse documented on file (18%) and 14 of the 94 known to the social

workers (15%) resulted in convictions. Around half the convictions resulted in custodial sentences and about half resulted in sentences such as probation, community service and fines. In addition in a further three instances of abuse reported on file and a further four reported in the social worker questionnaire police charges were laid but there was no conviction. A further 26 instances of abuse recorded on file and a further five recorded by social workers were reported to police with no charges laid.

In a substantial number of the instances of abuse (including some of those where convictions resulted) the response by the police and the judicial system was not supportive of the girl.

### 13.5 The response of the girl's family to the abuse

In the interviews the girls were asked whether they had told any family members about the abuse and if so what response they had received. The study found that family members, particularly mothers and to a lesser extent sisters, were the people most likely to be told about sexually abusive experiences. The family members told were usually supportive of the girl and the girls were usually happy with the response they received.

These findings are similar to those of Walby<sup>44</sup> and Nash and West<sup>32</sup>, the only other studies reviewed which asked about who was told of the abuse and how they responded.

The girls who were not happy with the response they received from their families generally wanted more support and understanding, although a smaller number wanted something done to stop the abuse or punish the abuser.

The main reason for not telling family members about the abuse was fear which contrasted with the main reasons for not telling other people, that it was not considered to be their concern.

Clearly the girls saw their families as the appropriate people to tell about sexual abuse and in most cases received the support and understanding they sought. However, a significant number were too afraid to tell members of their family.

### 13.6 Effects of the abuse

Most of the sexual abuse described in the study was considered by the girls to have had long-term effects. A wide range of effects was described but the most common was a fear, distrust or dislike of men or boys.

The girls interviewed also thought that there should be services available for girls who have been abused. The services they suggested were very wide-ranging, with those favoured by some girls being opposed by others. A substantial number of girls preferred non-professional community services of various types. It is clear from the responses that there is

a need for sexually abused girls to be given a choice of services to provide them with help to deal with the sexual abuse. Girls also made suggestions about how abuse could be detected and responded to for younger children. Considering that the study found that the average age of the girls when they were first abused was ten, it seems essential that there are services that can respond to and provide help for children of primary school age or younger.

### 13.7 Factors associated with sexual abuse

The present study found few characteristics of the girls' families or lifestyles that seemed to predispose them to sexual abuse. Among the girls included in the present study, there were no differences in the incidence of sexual abuse in terms of ethnic group, socio-economic status, the size of families or whether they were rural or urban. The only family characteristics that seemed related to a higher incidence of abuse were whether the main father-figure was a stepfather (a finding similar to that of Russell<sup>35</sup>) and whether the family relationships were characterised by violence. It should be noted that these factors correlate with higher rates of sexual abuse by both family members and people outside the family.

The finding that girls from families in which the parents hit each other and in which the children were frequently beaten were more likely to have experienced sexual abuse would support present trends to view child sexual abuse in the general context of family violence.

Histories of sexual abuse were strongly associated with a number of behavioural difficulties shown by the girls and it would seem reasonable to assume that the experience of abuse is a contributor to these problems. Sexual abuse was found to be associated with girls running away from home, showing uncontrollable behaviour outside the home, having problems at school, truanting and having problems with alcohol and other drugs. Associations were also found with repeated shoplifting, assault, car conversion and vandalism. Girls who were sexually abused were more likely to be voluntarily sexually active, to be sexually active younger and with older partners, and to be described as promiscuous by social workers. Girls who had experienced abuse were also more likely than others in the sample to have contemplated suicide.

These findings are very similar to those found in other studies which looked at the longer-term effects of sexual abuse, and it would seem desirable for staff working with girls who are exhibiting these behaviours to consider the possibility that the girl has been sexually abused.



## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 13.8 Implications and guidelines concerning the girl and her whanau/family

The research demonstrated that the young women interviewed were very clear on what they considered abusive, what the effects of the abuse were and what they would have found helpful in response to the abuse they experienced.

#### Recommendation 1

*That the whole focus of the response to sexual abuse be on empowering the girls who have been abused and on involving them where appropriate in all decisions pertaining to them.*

As the research found that where the girl's family was informed of the abuse they were usually supportive of the girl and as family members, particularly mothers, were seen by the girls as the most appropriate people to tell about sexual abuse, the department has a responsibility to support the families of girls who have been abused.

#### Recommendation 2

*That staff members, while ensuring the girl is safe from further abuse, empower the whanau/family by keeping them fully informed, involving them in subsequent decisions and providing them with access to appropriate support and healing services and resources.*

#### Recommendation 3

*That the department accept the responsibility to provide ongoing support for the whole whanau/family, to assist existing self-help groups and to assist in the formation of further groups for the family members to use.*

### 13.9 Implications and recommendations for practice

Since a very large number of the girls in the care of the Department of Social Welfare have a history of sexual abuse, it is important that staff are aware of the likelihood that girls they are working with have been sexually abused. Also since behaviours such as criminal offending, running away, school problems, and voluntary sexual activity at a young age and with older partners were found to be associated with a history of sexual abuse it is important that social work staff recognise these behaviours as possible indicators of a history of sexual abuse.

Recommendation 4

Department of Social Welfare field and residential social work staff are provided with information on the prevalence of sexual abuse and on the behaviours likely to be associated with sexual abuse, and on the implications of this knowledge for their practice.

Of the abuse described in the study was recorded on caseloads; not known to the girl's current social worker, it is recommended that staff read the personal files of the girls on their caseloads.

Recommendation 5

Department of Social Welfare field and residential social work staff should, on taking girls on their caseloads, read the personal files of the girls and retain if there is any indication of sexual abuse.

Of those who disclosed abuse wanted above all else to be listened to and believed, and a substantial number wanted social workers to do something to stop the abuse and/or punish the abuser.

Recommendation 6

Department of Social Welfare field and residential staff members when told by a girl that she has been sexually abused listen to the girl and ensure she knows that they believe her and are prepared to take any necessary action.

Recommendation 7

Department of Social Welfare field and residential staff members when told by a girl that she is currently being abused, respond immediately to stop the abuse, provide the girl with safety from further abuse and initiate action against the abuser. Staff should also ensure that they inform and consult with the girl on any action and plans made for her future.

Girls interviewed thought that a wide variety of services were appropriate as a response to sexual abuse, both at the time it occurred and in subsequent years.

Recommendation 8

*That field and residential staff members ensure that girls who have been sexually abused are made aware of a range of options where help is available including a place of refuge where the girl can feel safe from the abuse, help from community groups, help from those who have experience of sexual abuse themselves and counselling by professionals. This help should be available at the time of the abuse and in subsequent years.*

The study found that a large number of girls experienced further abuse from different abusers after their first experience of sexual abuse. Because of this, staff members should be cautious when arranging alternative living situations for girls so they are not further placed at risk.

Recommendation 9

*That girls who are removed from an abusive situation be placed in situations where there is little or no risk of further abuse.*

The girls in the study who had experienced sexual abuse were often unhappy living in nuclear family situations or unhappy living closely with men and boys and this has implications for the placements offered to girls who have been abused.

Recommendation 10

*That field and residential staff members, when considering alternative placements for girls who have been abused, provide a range of options about different kinds of placements and determine whether they meet the girls' needs at the time.*

The experiences described in this study as harassment, where there was no genital contact, were often seen by the girls as having had similar effects as the experiences considered to be abuse.

Recommendation 11

*That field and residential staff consider reports of harassment seriously and offer the same support, and where appropriate action, as is recommended for abuse.*

number of abusers of girls in the department's care are to be in contact with the department themselves, particularly those aged under 17 and those who are members of L's family and this has implications for the social work men with these people.

Recommendation 12

male staff members in particular (as nearly all abusers are male) ensure that the abusers receive help to prevent them continuing the abuse or abusing other children.

Recommendation 13

the staff members working with the families of girls who have been abused and the families of abusers (if they are different), work to ensure that the girls are provided with the support and safety they need and that the abusers are given assistance to prevent recurrence of abuse or abusing others.

large number of girls revealed to departmental staff that they had been sexually abused, it is essential that the department employ staff who are willing to respond appropriately. These qualities should be assessed during the interviewing of applicants.

Recommendation 14

not only field and residential staff who demonstrate appropriate attitudes, sensitivity and awareness toward the issues of sexual abuse be recruited and that these qualities be required of all staff.

fear, distrust or dislike of men and boys was the long-term most commonly reported by the girls in the study it is important that girls who have been abused are provided with the opportunity to receive help from women and are not obliged to discuss sexual abuse with male staff.

Recommendation 15

that girls be given the opportunity to discuss sexual abuse with female staff who have skills in the area of responding to sexual abuse, that they not be obliged to discuss the abuse with male staff and that where possible the staff be of the same ethnic group as the girl.

Much of the sexual abuse discussed in the study was not known to the department and is unlikely to be revealed to departmental staff. The implications of this for practice are that it cannot be assumed that a girl has not experienced sexual abuse just because it has not been reported to the department.

Recommendation 16

*That staff ensure that all girls are aware of the services available for those who have been sexually abused, even when no abuse has been disclosed.*

Forty per cent of the abuse reported in the study occurred after the girls came under the guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare. The girls in the study were as likely to be abused by young men under the age of 17 (i.e. the male peer group of the girls) as by family members and strangers. The implications of this are that coming under the care of the Department of Social Welfare does not ensure safety from sexual abuse.

Recommendation 17

*That the department continue to be watchful as to the possibility of abuse even after guardianship and that staff respond to ensure the girl's safety when abuse is reported.*

Recommendation 18

*That the National Director (Families in Special Circumstances) be asked to take action which will lead to the development of information for staff and to ensuring that practice guidelines and manuals reflect Recommendations 1-17.*

13.10 Implications and recommendations for residential services

The study found a higher incidence of sexual abuse among girls who had at some time resided in a Department of Social Welfare institution than among those who had not. Sexual abuse was also more common among girls who showed the kinds of behavioural problems and offending that are often the reason for the girls receiving residential care.

Recommendation 19

*That residential staff be made particularly aware of the likelihood that the girls in their care may have experienced sexual abuse and be appropriately trained to respond to this, with referral to community agencies being among the range of appropriate responses.*

Recommendation 20

That programmes for girls in institutions who have experienced abuse be integrated with programmes which respond to other difficulties, such as offending, school problems, or drug and alcohol problems, as these other difficulties could be linked to sexual abuse.

As a significant number of the abusers were boys aged 17 or younger, it is essential that girls placed in co-educational institutions are given protection from other inmates.

Recommendation 21

That girls placed in co-educational institutions not be placed at risk from boys resident in the institutions and that procedures be developed for responding to reports of sexual abuse by other residents.

Recommendation 22

That programmes be developed for boys in institutions who have been sexually abused and for boys who are abusers.

Recommendation 23

That the National Director (Youth and Employment) be asked to devise ways to implement Recommendations 19-22.

3.11 Implications for staff training

It is clear from the study that although the majority of staff who were told by the girl that she had been sexually abused responded in ways the girls found appropriate, a number did not and it seems that most staff had not been adequately prepared to respond to reports of sexual abuse.

Recommendation 24

That field and residential social work staff be given comprehensive training, including input from community agencies, other statutory bodies and voluntary groups, on the nature of sexual abuse, how to identify it, its implications for the girl and her whanau/family, and appropriate ways of responding.

Recommendation 25

That male staff be given training, including input from community agencies other statutory bodies and voluntary groups, on how to work with abusers to prevent further abuse.

Recommendation 26

That the Regional Executive Officers (Training) consider placing a priority on the training described in Recommendations 24 and 25 and that the Director (Training and Development) be asked to action and resource such training.

13.12 Implications for foster-care

Around 10% of the girls interviewed were abused by members of foster families while in the care of the department. Around half of this abuse was by foster fathers and around half by foster brothers of the girl.

Recommendation 27

That foster parents and their families be carefully selected and given specific appropriate support and training to prepare them for fostering to prevent sexual abuse. It is essential that the whole foster family is involved in this training as training foster mothers only may not help prevent abuse by other family members.

Recommendation 28

That foster parents and their families when fostering children known to have experienced sexual abuse be given training to prevent further abuse and to provide the support needed by children who have had such experiences.

Recommendation 29

That social work staff regularly talk alone with children in foster care to enable them to report such abuse or harassment if it occurs so that action can be taken.

Recommendation 30

That procedures be developed for responding to reports of sexual abuse by members of foster families.

Recommendation 31

That if a girl is known to have been sexually abused, consideration be given to placing her with foster parents who have particular skills in dealing with such abuse. In addition that consideration be given to fostering sexually abused girls, who have developed a fear of men, in families where there are no men or boys.

Recommendation 32

That the National Director (Families in Special Circumstances) be asked to ensure that practice guidelines and manuals reflect Recommendations 27-31.

### 13 Implications for community resources

A large number of the girls interviewed favoured community-based voluntary services when seeking help with sexual abuse, and some are likely to go directly to such services, avoiding departmental staff and other professional services.

In addition, a large number of girls were unwilling to discuss sexual abuse with departmental staff. This has implications in terms of the allocation of resources for providing such services.

#### Recommendation 33

*That community-based services which provide help for girls who have been sexually abused, such as Rape/Sexual Abuse/HELP services, Women's Refuges and Maori and Pacific Island women's groups be provided with adequate funding and training to provide an appropriate service to the girls who want it.*

#### Recommendation 34

*That girls who report to field or residential staff that they have been abused be given the option of receiving help from community-based services even when there are specialist services available within the department or institution.*

#### Recommendation 35

*That the National Director (Families in Special Circumstances) be asked to ensure that community services in the sexual abuse area are adequately resourced and that practice guidelines and manuals reflect Recommendation 34.*

### 14 Cultural issues

It is important that staff recognise that, while there was no difference in the incidence of sexual abuse found between girls of different ethnic groups, there were differences in the girls' responses to the abuse. Most of the existing approaches to helping girls who have been abused have been developed for Pakeha and it is important to recognise that these may not be appropriate for Maori girls or girls of other ethnic groups.

#### Recommendation 36

*That efforts be made to ensure that culturally appropriate support and healing is available for girls who report that they have been sexually abused and that increased resources are made available to ensure that appropriate facilities are developed.*



A significant number of the Maori girls interviewed appreciated the opportunity to talk to women of their own ethnic group who were relaxed with them, could talk to them about their family and give them recognition as young Maori women.

Recommendation 37

*That, where possible, girls who have been sexually abused be given the opportunity to receive help concerning the abuse from women from their own ethnic group.*

Recommendation 38

*That the National Director (Maori and Community Programmes) and the National Director (Families in Special Circumstances) be asked to develop a co-ordinated response to ensure that Recommendations 36 and 37 are implemented.*

13.15 Education and prevention

Because such a high percentage of the girls in the department's care experience sexual abuse at some time and so many of these are also subsequently abused there is a need for the department to be involved in prevention and education on how to avoid sexual abuse. Programmes such as the police programme "Keeping Ourselves Safe" and the Whangarei Rape Crisis Centre programme "Standing Strong" are examples of such programmes. Appropriate programmes for Maori girls should also be developed. Self defence courses would also be useful for girls in care.

Recommendation 39

*That the department teach girls in its care about sexual abuse and how to keep themselves safe and strong.*

A substantial number of the girls had engaged in voluntary sexual intercourse before they were 16 and 7% had become pregnant. It would seem desirable for the department to provide girls in care with sex education and contraceptive advice. In addition the girls who were aged 15 and involved in this study made a clear distinction in the interview between experiences they found abusive and those where they were willing partners.

Recommendation 40

*That departmental staff provide sex education to girls in the department's care and initiate discussions on sexuality and contraception in order to prevent abuse and to enable them to develop positive sexual relationships without unwanted pregnancies.*

Recommendation 41

*That the National Director (Families in Special Circumstances) give consideration to ensuring that children in the department's care receive education on sexual abuse and sexuality.*

16 Policy implications for the Department of Social Welfare and other departments

In the interviews it was clear that the concerns about sexual abuse expressed by the girls were not all within the jurisdiction of the Department of Social Welfare. There were comments made about the police and the criminal justice system, about hospital board services and about prevention and early detection programmes that could be established in schools.

Recommendation 42

*That the department's response to the problem of sexual abuse of children be a co-ordinated response with other government departments, in particular the Police, Justice and Education Departments, and with voluntary agencies and community groups.*

A finding that sexual abuse is more common in homes characterised by violence between spouses and by physical abuse of the children would support the view that sexual abuse of children should be approached as a family violence issue.

Recommendation 43

*That the department's policy on sexual abuse be developed in the context of family violence prevention and that any response be worked out in conjunction with the Family Violence Prevention Co-ordinating Committee and the National Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Child Abuse.*

Recommendation 44

*That the Assistant Director-General (Policy Development) refer the report to the Family Violence Prevention Co-ordinating Committee and the National Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Child Abuse to ensure that the findings are used in a co-ordinated response to child sexual abuse.*

17 Implications for future research

The findings of the present study fit well with those from other similar research and from general population studies previously published. The findings of such studies should be used as guidelines when there is no New Zealand data available.

Recommendation 45

*That, where there are no New Zealand research findings in the sexual abuse field, the findings of overseas studies be used to guide policy in the interim until indigenous research has been done.*

The present study is limited in that it only concerned girls under guardianship of the Director-General of the Department of Social Welfare. There is clearly a need to know more about the incidence and nature of sexual abuse in the New Zealand population as a whole. There is also clearly a need to know more about the sexual abuse of boys. In addition there is a need to know how different types of sexual abuse affect children in the long term, how beneficial various interventions are for sexually abused children and their families and how effective these interventions are in preventing further abuse.

Recommendation 46

*That further research be undertaken including research on the incidence and nature of sexual abuse of children in the community generally, the sexual abuse of boys, the long-term effects of different types of sexual abuse on children, the benefits of various interventions for sexually abused children and their families, and their effectiveness in preventing further abuse.*

As a final statement, it should be recognised that the manner in which this research was carried out benefitted from the active participation of a group of Maori and Pacific Island women drawn from the community.

Recommendation 47

*That any further research on complex social issues involve Maori and Pacific Island people in a skills-sharing, consensus decision making manner throughout the entire period of the project.*

Recommendation 48

*That the Assistant Director Generals (Policy Development) and (Programmes and Services) give consideration to undertaking further research as indicated in Recommendation 46 and to ensuring that Maori and Pacific Island people are involved in future research projects.*

Recommendation 49

*That the Assistant Director-General (Programmes and Services) monitor the implementation of Recommendations 18, 23, 32, 35 and 41 and the National Director (Administration and Personnel) monitor the implementation of Recommendation 26.*