



# Victims of Abduction: Patterns and Case Studies

Jacqueline Fitzgerald and Julie People

*In 2005, NSW Police recorded 393 abduction/kidnapping incidents. Due to the intense public attention given to the most notorious abductions, the public could be forgiven for assuming that most abductions are of the most serious type. This study reviews the cases of 238 abduction victims recorded between January and June 2004 in order to characterise the nature of these offences. Only 57 per cent of these victims were actually abducted; 32 per cent of victims experienced an attempted abduction, the experience of four per cent of victims did not concur with the legal definition of abduction and for seven per cent of victims, either no abduction took place or a false report was given to police. The diverse circumstances behind the actual abductions are described and attention given to victim age and gender, victim-offender relationship, physical and sexual violence and the motive for the abductions. While strangers were the most likely perpetrators, they made up less than half (43%) of all offenders. The three dominant motives for actual abductions were sexual desire (35%), robbery (29%) and retribution (24%).*

## INTRODUCTION

In July 1960, eight-year-old Graham Thorne, whose parents had just won the Opera House lottery, was abducted, held for ransom and then murdered by a man known as Stephen Bradley. The case attracted saturation media coverage, in part because, up until that time, cases of abduction and kidnapping were virtually unheard of in Australia. Since 1960, a number of other tragic cases of abduction have also generated widespread public interest and concern. They include the abduction and murder of Anita Cobby, Janine Balding, Samantha Knight and Ebony Simpson.

In 2005, police recorded 393 abductions in New South Wales (NSW). Taken at face value, police figures suggest that NSW has the highest recorded rate of abduction in the country (ABS 2005). Police abduction statistics and media

reports of abduction, however, are in some ways quite misleading. Much of the media focus is on incidents of abduction where the victim is raped and/or murdered. Abduction, however, is not always committed for reasons of sexual gratification or to obtain a ransom. Some abductions are committed as part of a robbery, others occur in the context of domestic violence. Some incidents that are recorded as abductions turn out, on further analysis, not to be abductions at all. The purpose of this bulletin is to provide a picture of the circumstances that give rise to reports of *abduction* and *kidnapping* in NSW. The bulletin describes the nature of the offences recorded by police, the motivation of offenders, the age and gender of victims, the victim-offender relationship and the victim's experience of physical and sexual violence.

## BACKGROUND

NSW has two relevant offences in the *Crimes Act 1900*. *Kidnapping* (s. 86) is the taking or detaining of a person without their consent with the intention of either holding the person to ransom or obtaining any other advantage. *Child abduction* (s. 87) involves taking or detaining a child under 12 years old with the intention of removing or keeping the child from a person having parental responsibility for them. A parent can perpetrate child abduction but not kidnapping unless the act is in contravention of a court order. When NSW Police record such incidents on the Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) they make no distinction between the two offences and simply record the offence under the general heading *kidnapping/abduction*.

Although the NSW legislation applies the term *abduction* to children and the term *kidnapping* to people of all ages, common usage of the term *abduction* generally applies to incidents against both adults and children. It is not always clear whether common usage of the term *kidnapping* relates to all victims or just children. For simplicity in this bulletin, the term *abduction* is used to refer to all incidents of abduction or kidnapping.

It should be noted that the offence of abduction relates to situations where a person's liberty is removed. This occurs both when a victim is forcibly taken somewhere against their wishes and when a person is forced to remain in a particular location.

Existing abduction literature has focused on the abduction of children. Research in the United States has found that family members are responsible for a large proportion of juvenile kidnappings known to police (Finkelhor & Ormrod 2000; Shutt et al. 2004); many of these are related to custodial disputes (Boudreaux, Lord & Etter 2000). In contrast, research in the United Kingdom has shown that most people *convicted* of child abduction are not related to the child (Erikson & Friendship 2002), suggesting that criminal proceedings are infrequently commenced against parents. Apart from the relationship between the offender and the victim, another way to characterise abduction incidents is by the offender's motivation. Boudreaux et al. (2000) identify five motivations for non-familial child abductions: (1) a maternal desire to possess a child, (2) sexual gratification, (3) profit (including ransom and robbery), (4) retribution (including abductions committed as a reprisal for an unpaid debt) and (5) a desire to kill. Among familial abductions involving children, a key motivation is child custody.

This bulletin uses data recorded by NSW Police to investigate the nature of *abductions* in NSW with a view to answering some key questions about the offence:

- What types of incidents are recorded as abductions?

- How many people are *actually* abducted?
- What is the motive for abduction?
- Who are the common victims of abduction?
- Who are the likely offenders of abduction?
- How are people abducted?
- Are victims of abduction injured or is a weapon used against them?
- What is the prevalence and nature of child abduction?
- What is a typical abduction incident?
- How serious are recorded abduction incidents?

These issues are informed by considering the victims' age and gender, the nature of the victim-offender relationship, the harm (if any) suffered by the victim, whether the victim was robbed, physically or sexually assaulted, or threatened or attacked with a weapon. In considering police reports of abduction, it is important to note that abduction does not necessarily involve taking someone to a different location by force. Abduction also occurs when someone is unlawfully forced to remain at a particular location. Moreover, as we shall see shortly, incidents of abduction reported to police include some *attempted* offences. Thus, some reported abductions turn out on subsequent investigation not to be abductions at all. It is possible, then, for police figures to overstate the true incidence of this offence.

## METHOD

When recording the details of a criminal incident, police prepare a narrative description of the offence, which is recorded in the NSW Police COPS database. This study involved a detailed review of the narratives of all the *abduction* incidents recorded by NSW Police between 1 January 2004 and 30 June 2004. Resource constraints limited the review to six months worth of incidents, but there is no reason to suspect that there are any systematic differences between incidents occurring in the second half of the year compared

with the first. Incidents were classified according to a number of different categories. The only information available on each incident was that which was contained in the police report.

Firstly, each incident was classified according to the type of incident recorded by police. This measure indicated whether or not an actual abduction had occurred. The following categories were used:

1. An actual abduction: the victim was physically taken or detained against his or her will
2. An attempted abduction: an offender(s) *tried* to take or detain the victim, but no actual abduction took place
3. Not an abduction: the description of the incident was inconsistent with the legal definition of abduction or kidnapping
4. A false report to police: a matter reported to police as an abduction but later found to be inaccurate, either because the victim admitted that no abduction occurred or evidence revealed that the victim incorrectly claimed to have been abducted.

Secondly, for each victim of an actual or attempted abduction incident, the following information was extracted from the police narrative:

- The motive for the incident
- The method of abduction or how the abduction was carried out or attempted
- The relationship between the victim and the offender
- The age and gender of the victim
- Whether a weapon was used
- Whether the victim was injured

The motive for the incident and the method of abduction were further broken down into several categories.

## Classification of motive

This study classified each incident of abduction according to the motives developed by Boudreaux et al. (2000); these are listed in Table 1.

Note that none of the victims in our sample were abducted for either maternal desire or with the specific intention of killing the person abducted (both possible abduction motives identified by Boudreaux et al. 2000).

### Classification of abduction method

Each incident of attempted or actual abduction was classified according to the method the offender used to take or detain the victim. The criteria used to classify incidents into each category are described in Table 2.

## RESULTS

Between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2004, NSW Police recorded 409 incidents of abduction. Of these, 211 were reported between 1 January 2004 and 30 June 2004. These 211 abduction incidents involved 246 victims. Of these, the narrative records of eight incidents were either duplicates or incomprehensible. These records were removed and the records of the remaining 238 victims were analysed. The 238 victims were involved in 203 incidents. Eighty eight per cent of these incidents involved only one victim.

**Table 1: Offender’s motive for abducting the victim**

<i>Motive</i>	<i>Description</i>
Sexual desire	The victim experienced a sexual or indecent assault, or threatening comments of a sexual nature were made towards him or her
Robbery	The victim was robbed, the offender tried to rob the victim or the offender threatened to rob the victim
Ransom	The offender threatened to harm the victim unless a ransom was paid
Child custody	The child victim was taken due to a disagreement about custody
Retribution	The offender acted out of rage or with an intention to enact retribution or revenge against the victim
Other	The victim was abducted for a reason other than those described above
Unknown	There was no obvious reason in the police narrative as to why the victim was abducted

**Table 2: Method by which victims were abducted**

<i>Method</i>	<i>Description</i>
Victim taken from dwelling	The offender entered a residential premise and took the victim to another location by car or on foot
Victim coerced or forced into offender’s vehicle	The victim was either lured into the offender’s vehicle or was forcibly dragged into the vehicle
Offender entered victim’s vehicle	The offender either forced his or her way into the victim’s vehicle or entered the vehicle with the permission of the victim and later would not allow the victim to leave
Victim approached on foot in a public place	The offender followed, approached or dragged the victim away on foot in a public place
Victim detained in a dwelling	The offender forced the victim to remain in a residential premise against his or her will
Victim detained in vehicle and dwelling	The victim was detained against his or her will and was held for some time in a residential premise and for some time in a vehicle
Child not returned from access visit	Child was not returned to his or her parent(s) after a custodial access visit

### Case Study 1: False statement given to police

A heavily intoxicated female victim was walking along the footpath of a main road at about 5:30am. Her statement indicated that a white Commodore crossed to her side of the road and drove very slowly next to her. The victim alleged that a passenger sitting behind the driver opened his door whilst the vehicle was still in motion and said, “Get in”. The victim said, “No” and continued to walk. The passenger then attempted to grab the victim around the waist and pull her into the vehicle. The victim struggled away from him and ran towards a service station. As the vehicle pulled away, the victim alleged that an unknown person in the vehicle threw an arm-rest at her.

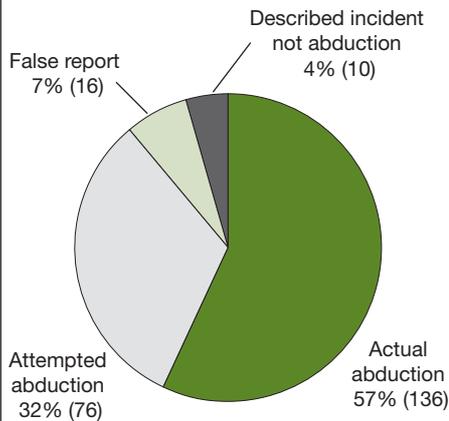
From the service station the victim telephoned her mother requesting to be picked up. Her mother reported that during their conversation the victim said that someone was trying to burn her alive. The victim’s mother later stated that the victim had been reading a novel about someone being burnt alive.

The victim then telephoned the police stating she had been sexually assaulted. About nine witnesses were present with the victim while she was on the phone to police. The witnesses stated she was talking hysterically and crying and then read out to police the number plate of a car directly in front of her, the vehicle of one of the witnesses.

The victim told police that she did not require an ambulance as physically she was fine. When asked how she remembered the registration number of the vehicle she stated she had a good memory for numbers. When asked a short time later for the registration number of the white Commodore, the victim stated she could not remember.

The next day the victim contacted police and said, “I don’t want to go any further with this, physically I’m fine, thanks anyway”.

**Figure 1: Experience of recorded abduction victims, Jan 04 to Jun 04 (n = 238)**



### Case Study 2: False statement given to police

Two female victims, aged 14 and 15 years, reported to police that they had been approached by a male offender while walking along a street at 7pm. They reported that the offender forced them to walk with him to a park and detained them there with him for three days. The victims reported that they were deprived of sleep, food, water and the opportunity to go to the toilet.

The victims claimed to have escaped early one morning when the offender fell asleep. The victims attended school that morning and reported the incident; the police then came to interview the victims. During the interview, the police noted that the victims did not appear to be deprived of three days sleep. Victim 1 giggled whilst describing the incident. The victims described the area of the park in which they were allegedly detained. When the police attended the park with the victims, however, the physical environment was inconsistent with the description given by the victims. Simple features were not described, such as a toilet block approximately three metres from where they were allegedly detained.

Police believed that the victims may have run away from home and invented a story to avoid getting into trouble with their parents. Several weeks later, Victim 1 admitted that the incident was fabricated.

### Nature of the offence

Figure 1 categorises the abduction of the 238 victims according to the type of incident that occurred. The figure shows that, while most (57%) victims were actually abducted, for a large proportion (43%) of victims no abduction actually took place. In 32 per cent of cases this was because the attempted abduction was unsuccessful.

For seven per cent of victims, police either found evidence that no abduction had occurred or the victim admitted giving a false statement to the police. These incidents included children seeking adult attention; misunderstandings due to victim intoxication; mental illness or intellectual disability; insurance fraud (false robbery and abduction); false ransom demands or children inventing stories to avoid getting into trouble with their parents. The narratives for these incidents indicated that police believed the abduction or kidnapping was doubtful. Case Studies 1 and 2 describe incidents of false statements given to police.

For four per cent of victims, the offence described in the narrative was neither abduction nor kidnapping. Half of these incidents involved misunderstandings between the victim and offender, or arguments between people that were reported to the police. For example, one victim was inadvertently locked in a house. The resident of the house was asleep and could not be woken up. The victim called the police, who came to the house, released the victim and woke the resident. After questioning both parties, police found insufficient reason to initiate criminal proceedings. In the other five incidents of this type, the description of the offence suggested that the matter was not abduction but another type of offence, such as an assault, robbery or sexual assault. The narratives in some of these incidents indicate that the police considered the claim of abduction or kidnapping to be doubtful. Case Study 3 describes an incident where the victim was assaulted rather than abducted.

The following sections describe attempted and actual abductions in more detail.

### Attempted abduction

Attempted abductions involve incidents reported to police where the attempt to abduct someone was unsuccessful. An offender may have verbally tried to lure the victim to go with him or her or the victim may have managed to escape from a physical approach by the offender. Examples of two attempted abductions are described in Case Studies 4 and 5.

#### *What is the motive for attempted abduction?*

For most (50 out of 76) attempted abductions, the police narrative did not describe the offender's motivation. This was generally because the victim's interaction with the offender was brief and the offender did not indicate his or her intentions during this time. The narrative gave some clue to the motivation of 26 (34%) attempted abductions. In 22 of these cases, the narrative included reference to sexual comments or actions by offenders. In three cases, the motive for the attempted abduction appeared to be retribution. In one case, the motive appeared to be robbery.

#### *Who are the victims of attempted abduction?*

Figure 2 shows the age and gender of victims in cases of attempted abduction. The majority (66 or 87%) of victims of attempted abduction were female and most (57 or 75%) victims were children or teenagers. The average age of attempted abduction victims was 17 years. Only 11 per cent of victims were younger than 10 years.<sup>1</sup> The characteristics of the attempted child abductions in the sample are described in detail in Text Box 1 (see page 12).

#### *Who are the offenders of attempted abduction?*

All but two of the attempted abductions involved a stranger. In one case, the alleged offender was the victim's ex-partner. In the other, the alleged offender was a 'friend'.

**Case Study 3: Described incident not abduction**

A male and a female travelling together alighted from a train at a railway station. They began to argue and the male offender grabbed the female victim by the head and thrust the victim's head into a nearby railing. The offender then grabbed the victim by the hair and swung her around the platform. A staff member approached the victim and offender but was told by the offender to "get lost". The victim sustained swelling and bruising to several parts of her face and head. The following day, the victim attended a police station and reported the incident.

This incident was recorded as abduction, but the description is more consistent with an assault.

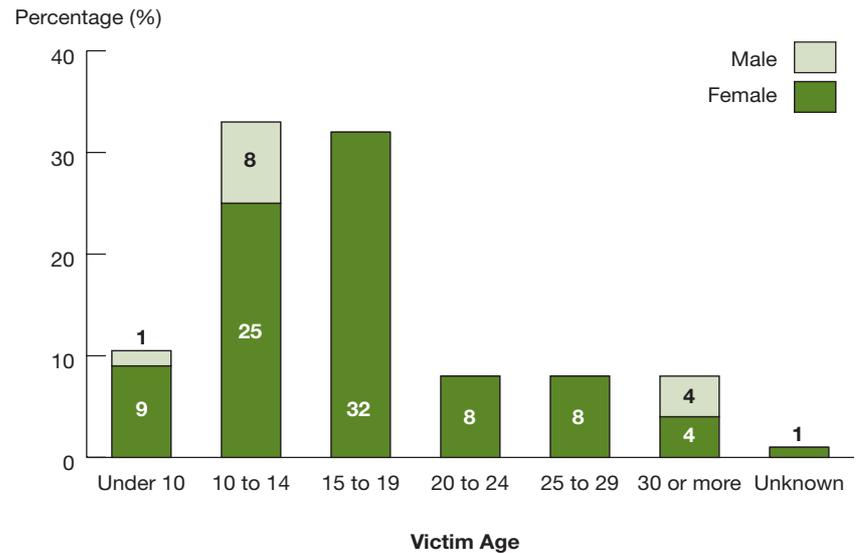
**Case Study 4: Attempted abduction**

A 10-year-old boy was riding his bicycle along a suburban street. A vehicle approached the victim and the male driver stopped and said, "Get in the car". The victim refused and the male driver got out of the vehicle. The victim rode off towards his home. The offender followed the victim in his car until the victim entered his front yard. The victim told a friend what had happened and this friend phoned the police. Police attended the scene and searched the area but were unable to locate the offender's vehicle.

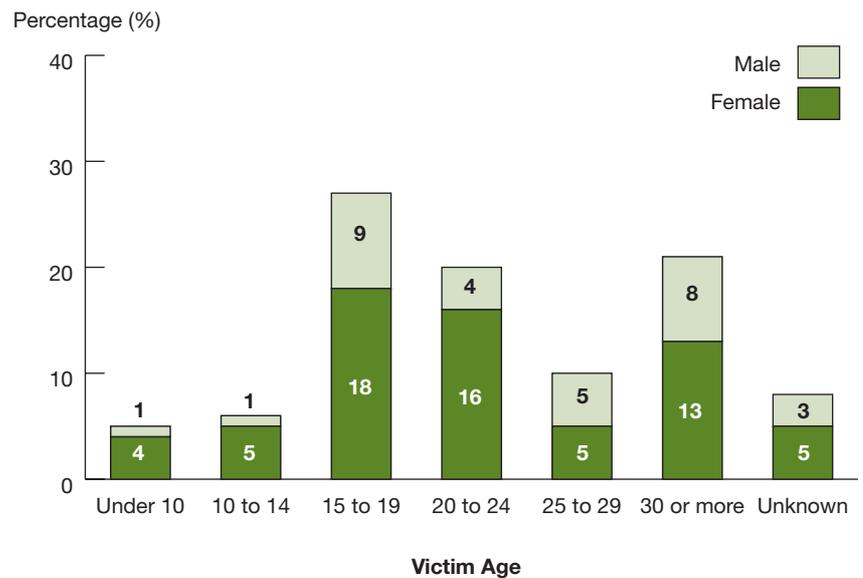
**Case Study 5: Attempted abduction**

A 22-year-old female victim was walking home when she noticed a car following her. The car stopped and a male offender stepped out and approached the victim from behind. The victim began to run away, but the offender caught up with her and grabbed her by the arm. The offender tried to drag the victim into his car. Three other men were inside. A short struggle followed and the victim managed to break free. She ran to a nearby service station and reported the matter to police.

**Figure 2: Age and gender of victims of attempted abduction, Jan 04 to Jun 04 (n = 76)**



**Figure 3: Age and gender of victims of actual abduction, Jan 04 to Jun 04 (n = 134)**



Note: Figure 3 excludes two victims whose gender was not recorded in the police narrative.

**What methods are used in attempted abductions?**

In most (75%) cases of attempted abduction, the offender approached the victim in a vehicle and tried to force or coerce the victim inside.<sup>2</sup> In many cases, the offender stopped his or her vehicle close to the victim and directed them to "Get in!". In some cases, the offender attempted to pull the victim into his or her vehicle. In the remaining cases, victims were either followed in a public place or the offender attempted to drag the victim away on foot.<sup>3</sup>

**Are victims of attempted abduction injured or is a weapon used against them?**

In most (91%) cases of attempted abduction, the victim was not injured, although a few victims reported having been physically assaulted. In one attempted abduction the victim was threatened with a weapon (namely, a syringe). There was no record of any weapon being used against the other victims.

## Actual abduction

As mentioned above, between 1 January 2004 and 30 June 2004, NSW police recorded 136 victims of actual abduction.

### *Who are the victims of actual abduction?*

Figure 3 shows the age and gender of victims. Sixty-six per cent of all actual abduction victims were female. The average age of actual abduction victims was 24 years.

Two things are evident from a comparison of Figures 2 and 3. Firstly, victims of actual abduction tend to be older than victims of attempted abduction. Only 38 per cent of victims of actual abductions were aged less than 20 years, compared with 75 per cent of attempted abduction victims.

The actual abduction of children aged less than 10 years was quite infrequent, with only seven victims in this age range (i.e. 5% of the total). Secondly, the proportion of female victims in cases of actual abduction was smaller than in cases of attempted abduction. About two thirds of all actual abduction victims were female, compared with 87 per cent of attempted abduction victims. Appendix 1 provides detailed information regarding the age and gender of victims of actual abduction.

The characteristics of the actual child abductions in the sample are described in detail in Text Box 1 (page 12).

### *How are people abducted?*

Victims were most commonly coerced or forced into an offender's vehicle (32%) or detained in a dwelling (25%). The abduction generally lasted a few hours before victims were released. Very few (10) cases involved victims being held for longer than a few hours. Five victims were held for approximately 24 hours and two victims were held for two or three days. One victim was held for nine days and another was held for one month. The police narrative for one victim did not specify exactly how long the victim

### **Case Study 6: Actual abduction involving sexual assault with a history of domestic violence**

The male offender and the 31-year-old female victim had previously been in a relationship from which they had three children aged under 10 years. The relationship was a violent one and the victim and offender had separated approximately two months before the described incident.

On the evening of the incident the victim and her children were at home with another seven-year-old child, who the victim was minding. The offender entered the victim's house by an unknown means and hid in one of the children's bedrooms. When the victim entered the bedroom to check on the children the offender grabbed the victim around the throat and arms. The offender forced the victim into the lounge room where he physically and sexually assaulted her.

The offender then forced the victim into her car and made her drive away from the house telling her that she had to go back to live with him. The children were left alone in the house. The victim and offender then returned to her house and the four children were forcibly placed

into the car. The offender threatened the victim with violence if she did not follow his instructions. The victim attempted to get away by starting the car before the offender had time to get in, but failed. The offender grabbed the victim by the throat and warned her not to try and leave again or he would punish her. The victim was then forced to drive to the offender's address where she and the children were forced to stay the night.

The following morning, the mother of the seven-year-old friend arrived at the victim's house to pick up her child. When nobody answered the door, she became worried and called the victim on her mobile phone. The offender answered the victim's phone and told the child's mother to collect her child from his house. The victim's friend was aware of the violent history between the victim and the offender and called the police. The police attended the offender's house where they were told by him that nothing was wrong. The offender allowed the victim and the four children to leave. The police escorted the victim home, where she reported the incident.

### **Case Study 7: Actual abduction by a stranger where the motivation was sexual desire**

A 14-year-old female victim was walking along a road at about 4:30pm. As she walked, a car stopped twice and the 40 to 50-year-old male occupant asked if she wanted a lift. On both occasions the victim said, "No". The victim crossed the road and headed towards a bus shelter. The offender drove down the

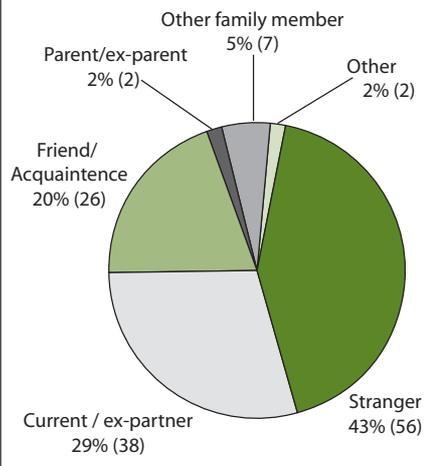
road, turned around and stopped at the bus shelter. The offender offered the victim cash to get into the car. He then dragged her inside. The victim was driven to some bushland and sexually and physically assaulted. After the sexual assault, the offender drove the victim to another location and released her. The police noted that the victim had injuries consistent with her description of the assault.

was detained, but it was between three weeks and four months. For one other victim, abducted by a parent, the narrative record did not indicate that the victim had been returned at the time the record was accessed.

### *Are victims of abduction injured or is a weapon used against them?*

Sixty-three per cent of victims had no weapon used against them. Where a weapon was involved, knives were the most common weapon used to

**Figure 4: Victims of actual abduction by relationship to offender, Jan 04 to Jun 04 (n = 131)**



Note: Figure 4 excludes five cases where the victim-offender relationship was not specified on the police narrative.

threaten victims (18%), followed by guns (11%) then ‘other weapons’ such as screwdrivers and scissors (7%).

Almost half (47%) of the victims who were actually abducted had no recorded injuries.<sup>4</sup> Sixteen per cent were sexually assaulted and six per cent were indecently assaulted (note, seven of the 29 sexual violence victims were also physically assaulted). Thirty one per cent of victims experienced a physical assault (without sexual violence).

**Who are the offenders in actual abductions?**

Figure 4 shows the relationship between victims and offenders in actual abduction incidents. It can be seen that the perpetrators of abduction incidents are diverse. While strangers are the most likely perpetrators, they make up less than half (43%) of all offenders. A significant proportion of abductions are perpetrated by past and present intimate partners (29%) and friends or acquaintances (20%).

**Why are people abducted?**

The wide range of relationship types involved in abductions suggests that there may be a wide range of motivations behind the offence. Figure 5 shows the motivation behind actual abductions

**Case Study 8: Actual abduction where the motivation was sexual desire**

An 18-year-old female victim hailed a taxi at about midnight and asked the driver to take her to a nearby address. The driver told the victim he was hungry and asked if he could drive to a take-away shop. He drove to the shop and bought two meals. He pulled the vehicle over, ate his meal and gave the other one to the victim, who refused to take it. The driver then drove to another shop a few suburbs away to buy cigarettes. The victim continually asked the driver to take her

home. He eventually agreed, but did not take the most direct route. Once outside the victim’s home, the driver asked the victim for her phone number. She refused to give it. The driver then took the victim’s mobile phone out of her hand and rang his phone from hers in order to get her number. The victim was then allowed to leave the taxi. A few hours later, a person who the victim suspected to be the driver, called the victim. The call was from a private number so the driver could not be identified.

where it was known. There are three

dominant motives for abductions recorded by police: sexual desire (35%), robbery (29%) and retribution (24%). These motives accounted for 88 per cent of actual abductions in which the motive was known.

Examples and general characteristics of abductions for each motive are described below, followed by a comparison of gender, age and victim-offender relationship for the three most common motives. (Detailed information on actual abductions by motive is given in Appendix 2.)

**Sexual desire**

Forty victims were classified as being abducted for reasons of sexual desire; each having been either sexually or indecently assaulted, or having received threats of a sexual nature. Some incidents classified as ‘sexual desire’ also involved a degree of retribution, such as the incident described in Case Study 6. This incident was perpetrated by a former partner and would have been classified as retribution were it not for the occurrence of sexual violence during the protracted incident. Case Studies 7 and 8 describe another two sexually motivated abductions.

**Case Study 9: Actual abduction where the motivation was robbery**

The 21-year-old male victim was driving at about 3am when a vehicle collided with the rear of his car. The victim got out of his car and was set upon by four offenders from the other car. The victim was restrained and a handgun pointed at his head. The victim was instructed to get into the back seat of his car with Offender 1. Offender 2 drove the victim’s car in an unknown direction followed by the other two offenders in the other car.

After a short time both cars stopped in bushland. Offender 1 and the victim got out while the other offenders drove the victim’s vehicle around the location a number of times. Offender 1 instructed the victim to get back into his car and both vehicles drove in an unknown

direction for about 10 minutes. Again, both vehicles stopped in a different unknown location and the victim was told to get out of the car. Offenders 3 and 4 asked the victim if he had any money or if the victim’s parents had any money at their house. The victim replied, “No”. The victim was told to get back into the car and again both vehicles drove for about 10 minutes in an unknown direction.

The victim’s vehicle slowed down slightly and the victim was told to get out of the car. The victim ran from the vehicle until he arrived at a location where he contacted police. Offender 1’s handgun was pointed at the victim throughout the offence. The victim feared for his life and complied with all directions.

**Case Study 10: Actual abduction where the motivation was robbery**

Three male offenders with covered faces entered a hotel at 10am. Offender 1, armed with a firearm, jumped over the main bar asking, "Where's the money?". Meanwhile, Offender 2 closed the front doors of the hotel.

Offenders 1 and 2 entered the gaming room shouting, "Get down, get down!", while Offender 3 guarded the door. A female staff member came out of the gaming room office and was told to put her hands up. Offender 1 held her at gunpoint and directed her to knock on the door of a downstairs office where the hotel's safe was located. When there was no response, Offender 1 tapped on the door with the firearm and shouted, "Open the door or I will shoot her!". He held the gun to the victim's head and directed her

to tell the occupants of the office that a gun was being held to her head. There was no response.

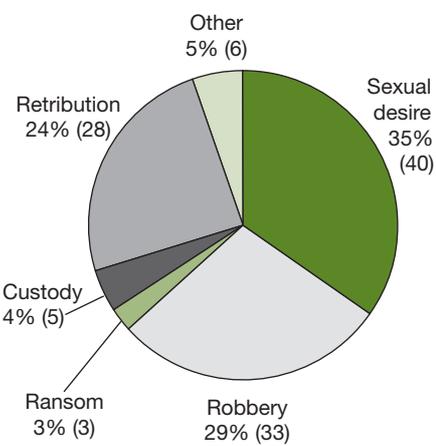
Offender 1 grabbed the victim by her jumper and took her back upstairs. He led her to the cash registers at the main bar. The victim placed the cash from the registers into the offender's backpack. The victim was taken back to the gaming room and ordered to open a time-delay safe. While waiting for the safe to open, Offender 1 took money from a nearby cash register and a cashbox. He led the victim back downstairs to the main office and attempted to open the door by kicking it. He pointed the gun at the lock, but did not shoot. The victim was led back to the time delay safe in the gaming room. It had not yet opened.

The victim was ordered to empty money from a nearby poker machine, which she

did. The victim was then led back to the time delay safe. At this moment, police entered the hotel and the three offenders retreated to the gaming room. Offender 1 called out, "Hostage, hostage!". He alternated between pointing his gun at the victim and the police. All three offenders used the victim to shield themselves against the police. They dragged the victim to a nearby exit and shouted, "Don't shoot, don't shoot!". The offenders released the victim and ran off getting into a stolen car. A high-speed chase followed. The chase ended when the stolen car collided with another vehicle. The offenders were arrested.

The abduction element of this offence was the detention of the female staff member while the offenders were on the hotel premises.

**Figure 5: Victims of actual abduction by motive, Jan 04 to Jun 04 (n = 115)**



Note: Figure 5 excludes 21 victims abducted for an unknown reason.

**Robbery**

Thirty-three victims were abducted for the purpose of robbery. Seventy-nine per cent of these victims were actually robbed. The commonly stolen items included money, wallets and mobile phones. Some victims were forced to reveal the PIN of their ATM cards and money was stolen from their bank

accounts. Four cases involved the abduction of a delivery driver and the theft of the goods being transported. The victims who were not robbed generally either had nothing to steal or managed to escape before any robbery occurred. Case Studies 9 and 10 describe examples of abductions motivated by robbery.

**Retribution**

Twenty-eight victims were abducted for retribution. This category included many complex personal situations generally characterised by the offender's extreme anger towards the victim. The reasons behind these incidents included broken relationships, ongoing arguments, bad business and drug deals. Case Study 11 describes an example of a victim detained against her will because the offender was angry about a broken relationship. As mentioned above, Case Study 6 was classified as sexually motivated because it included a sexual assault, even though the incident had many elements of abduction motivated by retribution.

Seventy-five per cent of all retribution incidents involved past or present

intimate partners and, in many cases, the police narrative mentioned a history of domestic violence in the relationship.

About two thirds of retribution victims were physically assaulted. In most cases the assaults were minor, but a few victims were seriously wounded.

**Ransom**

A ransom was involved in the abduction of three victims. One of these cases was not clearly described by the victim and the police recorded it as 'doubtful'. The ransoms for the other two victims were \$22,000 and \$13,200. In both of these cases, the offenders believed the victims owed them this money, and threatened to harm the victims and/or their families if the money was not paid by a certain date. Both victims were held against their will for a few hours and released. In one case, the outstanding debt was repaid. In the other case, the money changed hands under a police operation and the offenders were arrested.

**Custody**

Five children were abducted as a result of custody disputes. Four of these

victims were siblings and were taken for several hours by their aunt, uncle and grandmother in the one incident. The children were not injured in any way. In the fifth case, the child’s father failed to return her from a custody access visit. The father was on bail for an unrelated matter and absconded, taking the child with him. At the time the police narrative was accessed, nine months after the incident, there was no mention that the child had been recovered.

**Other**

Six victims were abducted for reasons other than those outlined above. There was no pattern to these incidents. For instance, one victim was forced into a car and beaten by strangers because the offenders suspected he was homosexual. Another offender abducted a woman he knew seemingly because he was lonely and wanted her to be his wife.

**Unknown**

For 21 abduction victims, no motive for the offence could be discerned from the police narrative. In some cases, the victim or the offender had an intellectual disability or was affected by drugs or alcohol. In other cases, the victim escaped or was released before any motive could be determined. In some instances, the police narrative was not sufficiently detailed to indicate the motive for the abduction. None of these victims experienced sexual violence or robbery.

**COMPARING ABDUCTIONS MOTIVATED BY SEXUAL DESIRE, ROBBERY AND RETRIBUTION**

Abductions motivated by sexual desire, robbery and retribution accounted for 88 per cent of actual abductions in which the motive was known. These abductions involved 101 victims. This section compares the significant characteristics of these abductions.

**Comparison of victims of abduction**

Figure 6 shows the gender of victims abducted for the three dominant

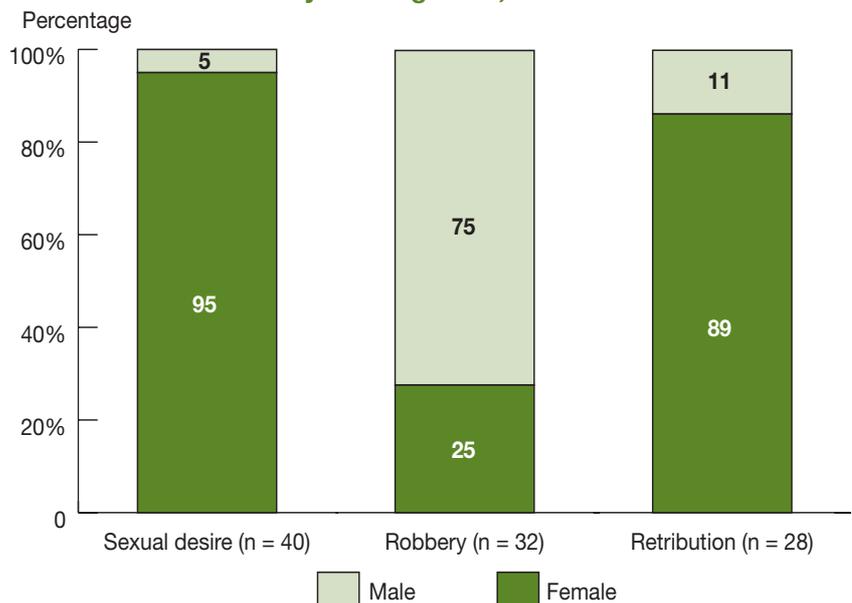
**Case Study 11: Actual abduction where the motivation was retribution**

The male offender and the 17-year-old female victim had previously been in a relationship. The victim had spent the weekend with the offender at his house. On Sunday afternoon, the victim informed the offender that she wished to go home. The offender hid her belongings. When the victim began to leave the house the offender stated, “If you leave I will smash you with an iron pole”. The victim started to walk down the street and the offender ran after her and said, “I’m going to smash you. If you are going to leave then I’m going to make it so you are so ugly no one else will want you”. The victim returned to the house, found her belongings and tried to sneak away by the front verandah. The offender blocked her way and threatened to stab her with a cricket stump he was holding. The victim continued to walk forward and the offender hit her across the thighs with the cricket stump. He then punched the victim with a closed fist to the face a number of times. The victim managed to grab the cricket stump and hit the offender in self-defence. The offender said, “You are gonna get it now” and wrestled with the victim to get the cricket stump from her. The offender grabbed the victim’s hair, kneed her to the head a number of times and pushed her head into the concrete.

The offender was able to get the cricket stump from the victim. The victim sat on the verandah crying. The offender hid the victim’s belongings again and the victim returned inside.

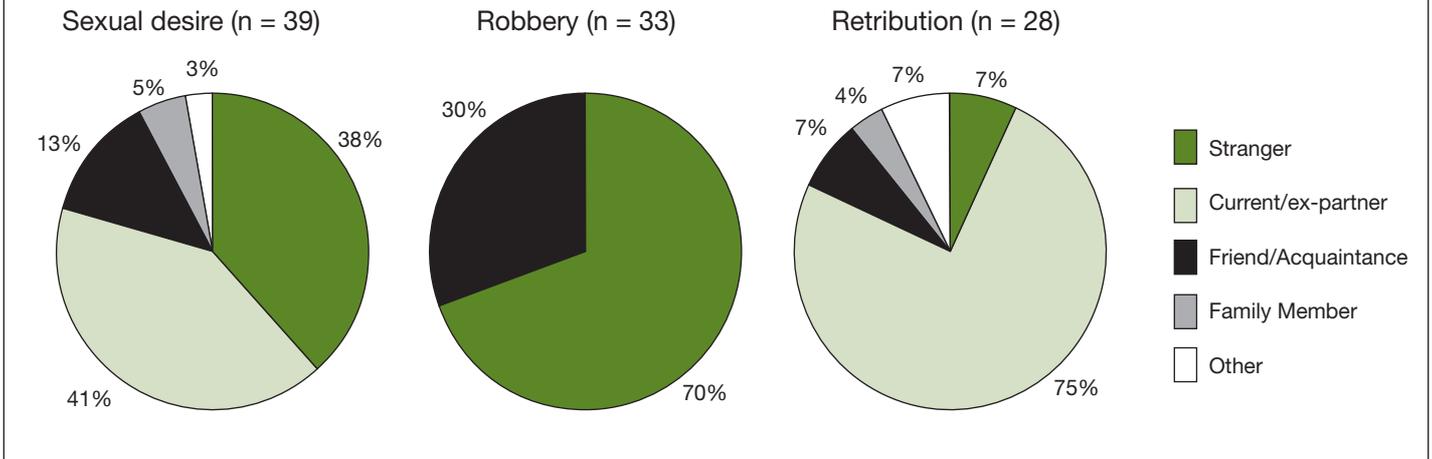
That evening the offender said, “I’m sorry I did not want to hit you, you should not have tried to leave”. The victim went to sleep. On Monday, the victim again informed the offender that she was leaving and began to go. After a brief conversation the offender started getting angry and stated, “You’re gonna get it”. The offender ran after the victim and punched her on the back of her head. The victim kept walking and the offender grabbed the victim and would not let her go. The offender said, “I’m gonna smash you. I will do it on the highway ‘coz I don’t care”. The offender began to punch the victim with a closed fist to the head and then grabbed her by the hair and threw her onto the road. The victim got up and continued to walk away. The offender continued to punch the victim to the head with a closed fist. The offender then pushed the victim to the ground and started to knee her to the head. An off-duty police officer and a neighbour came to the assistance of the victim. Police attended and noted that the victim was unsteady on her feet and that she was bleeding from her head, had bruising on her face, legs and arms and blood around her nose and mouth.

**Figure 6: Victims of abduction motivated by sexual desire, robbery or retribution by victim gender, Jan 04 to Jun 04**



Note: Figure 6 excludes one victim abducted for robbery whose gender was unknown.

**Figure 7: Victims of abduction where the motivation was sexual desire, robbery or retribution by victim-offender relationship, Jan 04 to Jun 04**



Note: Figure 7 excludes one victim who was abducted for sexual desire whose relationship to the offender was not known.

motives. It can be seen that victim gender differs considerably across these abduction types. Victims abducted for sexual desire and retribution were overwhelmingly female (95% and 89% respectively). In abductions motivated by robbery, however, the majority of victims were male (75%).

The average age of victims differed according to whether they were abducted for sexual desire (23 years), robbery (26 years) or retribution (30 years).<sup>5</sup> The difference between the victim ages for the three abduction motives arises in part because children aged younger than 15 years were only abducted for sexual desire (five victims), not robbery or retribution. (Note that, as mentioned above, five children were also abducted for custody reasons and six for an unknown reason.)

**Comparison of offenders of abduction**

Figure 7 shows the victim-offender relationship for abduction incidents motivated by sexual desire, robbery and retribution. As with victim age and gender, the victim-offender relationship differs considerably across the three primary abduction motives. In three out of five (62%) of the sexually motivated abductions, the offender was known to the victim; in most (41%) cases because

he or she was a current or former partner. Strangers accounted for 38 per cent of sexually motivated abductions. In contrast, strangers perpetrated 70 per cent of the 33 abductions motivated by robbery. Family members were not involved in any of these offences. Seventy five per cent of the abductions motivated by retribution involved a current or former partner. The offender was a stranger in only two cases (7%) of abduction for the purposes of retribution.

**Comparison of injury and weapon use**

Figures 8 and 9 show victim injuries and weapon use respectively in abductions motivated by sexual desire, robbery and retribution. Victims abducted for sexual desire were most likely to be physically harmed during the abduction, with 78 per cent experiencing some form of physical or sexual violence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, more than half (53%) the victims abducted for sexual desire were sexually assaulted and another 20 per cent were indecently assaulted. A quarter of victims who experienced some form of sexual violence were also physically assaulted. A small proportion (5%) of victims abducted for sexual desire were physically assaulted only. Victims abducted for the purpose of retribution also experienced high rates (64%) of physical violence.

Despite the high level of injuries among persons abducted for sexual desire, weapons were infrequently used in these offences (only 13% involved a weapon). Abductions for the purpose of retribution had the highest rate of weapon involvement (61%) followed by robbery (52%). In robbery and retribution abductions, knives were the most common weapons, however, there were 12 abductions involving a firearm. The use of weapons other than firearms and knives was common in retribution offences. As mentioned above, many of these incidents were domestic violence related and occurred in residential premises; therefore a greater proportion of these incidents involved household objects such as tools and scissors.

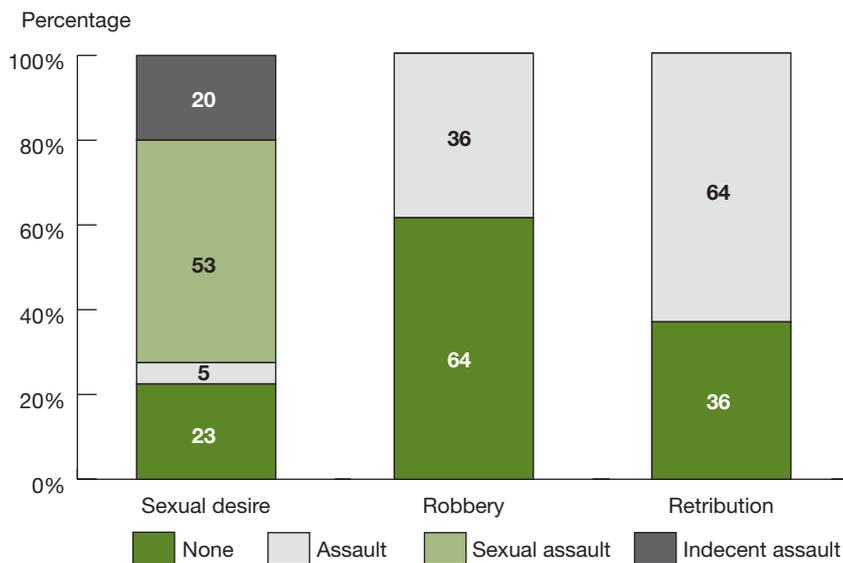
**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Media reports of abduction often focus on the worst cases of abduction. The purpose of this bulletin was to provide a more representative picture of the circumstances that give rise to police reports of abduction and kidnapping.

**How many people are actually abducted?**

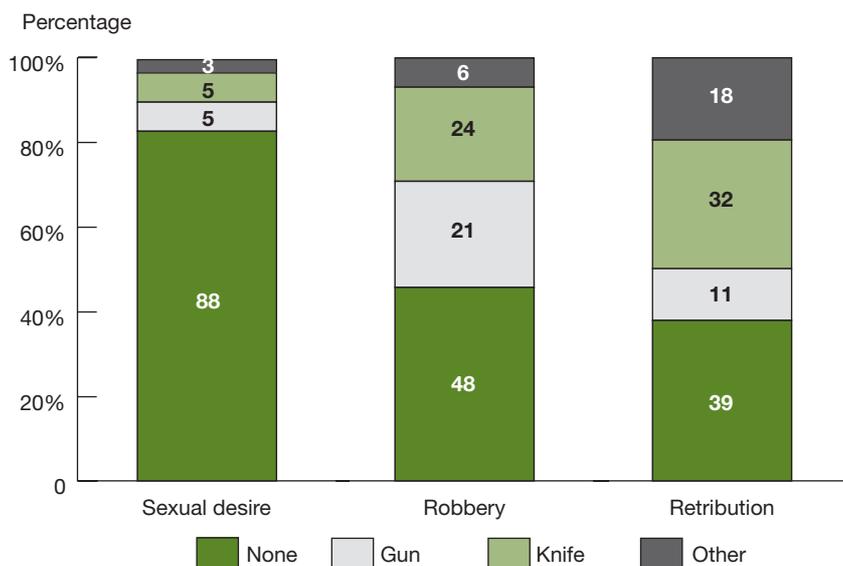
Slightly more than half (57%) of the hundreds of abduction incidents recorded by the NSW Police involve

**Figure 8: Victims of abduction motivated by sexual desire, robbery or retribution by victim injury, Jan 04 to Jun 04**



Note: Figure 8 shows the victims most serious injury. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

**Figure 9: Victims of abduction motivated by sexual desire, robbery or retribution by weapon use, Jan 04 to Jun 04**



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

an actual abduction. This amounts to roughly 250 to 300 victims annually. In a large proportion (32%) of cases, the incident recorded as a case of abduction actually involves an *attempted* abduction, equating to between roughly 125 and 175 victims per year. In the remaining cases, the incident either does not conform to the legal definition of abduction or kidnapping (4%) or there is evidence that the report is false (7%).

**What is the typical attempted abduction?**

Attempted abduction incidents usually involve a female victim (87%), who is very likely to be under the age of 20 years (75%), and an offender who is a stranger (97%). Based on the small proportion of attempted abductions for which a motive was known, attempted abductions appear to be overwhelmingly motivated by sexual desire (85% of

incidents where a motive was known). Typically, the offender in a vehicle approaches a pedestrian victim in the street and attempts to lure or coerce her into the car. The vast majority of attempted abduction victims manage to get away without sustaining physical injuries (91%) and weapon involvement is very uncommon (1%). The incident is generally reported to police by parents or victims, not because the incident had serious effects, but because of the potential for serious harm if the attempt had been successful.

**What is the typical actual abduction?**

The evidence suggests that there is considerable diversity among actual abductions and accordingly the offence has no typical character. Slightly more than half the actual abduction victims (whose age was known) are aged over 20 (58%) and the incidents most commonly involve females (67%). The characteristics of the offence differ considerably depending on the motive; the three dominant motives being sexual desire (35% of actual abductions with a known motive), robbery (29%) and retribution (24%). Less than five per cent of recorded actual abductions are related to the custody of a child. Less than five per cent are committed to obtain a ransom.

Half (53%) the victims of actual abduction sustained some kind of injury; 22 per cent experienced a sexual or indecent assault (in some cases combined with a physical assault) and 31 per cent were physically assaulted only. None of the abductions studied involved the murder of the victim, although as noted earlier, in one case the victim was still missing.

The victims in cases of abduction are usually held for less than a few hours and then released. Ten victims were detained in a dwelling for days, weeks or, in one case several months; for six of these victims the offender was a current or former partner. While actual abduction victims are most commonly taken or detained by a stranger (43%), a large

proportion are abducted by a current or previous partner (29%) or a friend or an acquaintance (20%). The victim-offender relationship differs considerably depending on the motive for the offence. Abductions motivated by robbery commonly involve a stranger against a male victim, whereas current or previous partners are involved in the vast majority of abductions motivated by a desire for retribution.

If we consider the types of abductions likely to be perpetrated by different offenders we see that abductions perpetrated by a current or previous partner are most often motivated by retribution (57%) but many also involve sexual desire (43%). Abductions perpetrated by strangers are more likely to be motivated by robbery (52% of stranger abductions where the motive was known) than sexual desire (34%).

#### *How serious are abduction incidents?*

For many, the notion of abduction evokes ideas of the most serious type of this offence where a child victim is taken by a stranger and sexually assaulted or possibly murdered. This study found that this type of offence is very rare among recorded incidents of abduction. It has been shown above that slightly more than half the recorded abduction victims are actually abducted. There were 238 abduction victims recorded by police in the first half of 2004; this included four children aged under 15 who were abducted and sexually or indecently assaulted. Two of these children were abducted by a stranger and the other two were abducted by a non-family member known to the child. No abduction victims, of any age, were murdered, although one child victim abducted by her father was possibly still missing.

Amongst the 136 victims of actual abduction, the proportion abducted by a stranger was only 43%; many offences involved past and present intimate partners (29%) or friends or acquaintances (20%). Another indication of seriousness is the duration of the

#### **Text Box 1: What is the prevalence and nature of child abduction?**

Among the attempted abduction victims were 33 victims aged less than 15 years (44% of all attempted abduction victims). In each of these incidents the perpetrator was a stranger to the child. In most cases the offence did not progress far enough to ascertain the offender's motive but the results from the few actual abductions against children perpetrated by strangers suggest that most were probably motivated by sexual desire.

Sixteen children aged under 15 years were actually abducted, which is fewer than the number who experienced an abduction attempt (33). The motive behind the abduction of ten of these 16 children was available from the police narrative; five were abducted by family members for custody reasons and five were abducted for sexual desire. Of the children abducted for sexual desire, two were abducted by a stranger, one by an acquaintance and one by a former step-parent. Three of the five children actually abducted for sexual desire were taken by an offender in a vehicle. The relationship between one child victim and offender

was not known. Three of the five children were sexually assaulted, one was indecently assaulted and the other was not injured. Each of the six children abducted for an unknown reason was abducted by a stranger. None were physically harmed in the incident as they all managed to escape from, or were let go by, the offender.

Girls were more commonly targeted in both actual and attempted abduction incidents. Twenty-six (79%) of the attempted abduction victims aged less than 15 were female as were each of the five child victims abducted for sexual desire. Four of the five child victims abducted for custody reasons were female as were three of the six children abducted for an unknown reason.

The sample included fewer parental custody abductions than might be expected from overseas research. NSW Police advise their practice is not to record a criminal incident of abduction or kidnapping when a child is not returned from an access visit; rather a missing person report is created (B. Cullen, NSW Police, 2006 personal communication).

offence. The present study found that the vast majority of actual abduction victims were only held for a few hours. Ten victims were detained for a day or more and six of these incidents were domestic violence related.

Even though very few offences met the abduction stereotype, a sizeable proportion of the actual abduction victims were significantly harmed in the offence. In the first half of 2004, 21 victims were sexually assaulted<sup>6</sup> and eight victims were indecently assaulted (including the child victims mentioned above). Forty-one victims were physically assaulted only and the remaining 62 victims were not harmed.<sup>7</sup> Of the 56 victims abducted by strangers, approximately 19 were physically, indecently or sexually

assaulted. Thirty victims of actual abduction were robbed; eight of whom were also physically assaulted and two sexually assaulted.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are very few features common to incidents of abduction and kidnapping recorded by NSW Police other than that they generally reflect the same legal category of offence (i.e. the taking or detaining of a person without consent). Abduction incidents vary greatly in seriousness. While some characteristics are common to most offences, such as the tendency to target female victims, there are very few other commonalities. Offences vary considerably depending

on the motivation for the offence and the relationship between the offender and the victim. There is no *typical* abduction offence and the diversity of such incidents should be considered when interpreting statistics for this offence.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Dr Natalie Taylor of the Australian Institute of Criminology who generously provided some very instructive comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Our thanks also go to Dr Don Weatherburn, Lily Trimboli and Tracy Painting of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research for their comments and advice.

### NOTES

- 1 Detailed information regarding the age and gender of victims of attempted abduction is given in Appendix 1.
- 2 Of the victims of attempted kidnapping who were coerced or forced into an offender’s vehicle, five were less than 10-years-old, 20 were between 10 and 14-years-old, 18 were between 15 and 19-years-old and 13 victims were 20-years-old or more. The age of one victim who was forced or coerced into an offender’s car was not recorded.
- 3 Three victims who were approached on foot in a public place were less than 10-years-old. Five were between 10 and 14-years-old, five were between 15 and 19-years-old and the remaining five victims were 20-years-old or more.
- 4 Data regarding injury were missing for four victims.
- 5 Data excludes seven abduction victims (one sexual desire, four robbery and two retribution) whose ages were not known.
- 6 Two victims of sexual assault were also robbed.
- 7 Data regarding injury were missing for four victims.

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## APPENDICIES

### Appendix 1: Victims of actual and attempted abduction by victim age and gender, Jan 04 to Jun 04

Victim age	Attempted abduction			Actual abduction		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Less than 10	7	1	8	5	2	7
10 to 14	19	6	25	7	2	9
15-19	24	0	24	24	12	36
20-24	6	0	6	22	6	28
25-29	6	0	6	7	7	14
30 or more	3	3	6	18	11	29
Unknown age	1	0	1	7	4	13*
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>136</b>

\*Note: Includes two persons of unknown age whose gender was also not recorded.

**Appendix 2: Victims of actual abduction; offence motivation by various known offence characteristics, Jan 04 to Jun 04**

<i>Victim gender</i>	<i>Sexual desire</i>		<i>Total*</i>	<i>Robbery</i>	<i>Retribution</i>	<i>Ransom</i>	<i>Custody</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>Victim aged less than 15</i>	<i>Victim aged 15 or over</i>								
Male	0	2	2	24	3	2	1	4	8	44
Female	5	32	38	8	25	1	4	2	12	90
Unknown	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Victim Age</b>										
Less than 10	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	3	7
10 to 14	4	0	4	0	0	0	2	0	3	9
15-19	0	9	9	7	9	1	0	4	6	36
20-24	0	13	13	8	6	0	0	0	1	28
25-29	0	3	3	6	3	1	0	1	0	14
30 or more	0	9	9	8	8	1	0	1	2	29
Unknown	0	0	1	4	2	0	0	0	6	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Relationship</b>										
Stranger	2	13	15	23	2	1	0	3	12	56
Current/ex-partner	0	16	16	0	21	0	0	0	1	38
Friend/acquaintance	1	4	5	10	2	2	0	3	4	26
Parent/ex-parent	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Other family member	0	1	1	0	1	0	4	0	0	7
Other	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Unknown	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Method of approach</b>										
Taken from dwelling	1	3	4	2	1	1	4	1	1	14
Victim coerced or forced into car	3	11	14	8	11	1	0	4	6	44
Offender entered victims car	0	1	1	8	2	0	0	0	5	16
Victim approached on foot in a public place	0	2	2	5	2	0	0	0	4	13
Detained in a dwelling	1	13	15	9	9	0	0	1	0	34
Detained in car and dwelling	0	4	4	1	3	0	0	0	4	12
Child not returned from custodial access visit	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Unkown	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Injury</b>										
None	1	8	9	21	10	2	4	3	13	62
Assault	0	2	2	12	18	1	0	3	5	41
Sexual assault	3	12	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Indecent assault	1	5	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Assault and sexual assault	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Assault and indecent assault	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Victim still missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Weapon</b>										
None	4	31	35	16	11	2	5	4	12	85
Gun	0	2	2	7	3	1	0	0	2	15
Knife	0	1	2	8	9	0	0	0	5	24
Other	0	0	0	2	5	0	0	2	0	9
Weapon not described	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Data missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>136</b>

\* Note: Sexual desire total includes one victim of unknown age.

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