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Invisible Victims: Recorded Crime and Children in the UK

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INVISIBLE VICTIMS: RECORDED CRIME AND CHILDREN IN THE UK

Introduction

Population based research over the past two decades has contributed to an increasingly robust international evidence base highlighting both the overall high prevalence of child maltreatment and varying risk of abuse depending on victim age, gender and maltreatment type (for example see Stoltenborgh et al., 2011; Finkelhor et al., 1990; Finkelhor, 1994; Cawson et al., 2000; Radford et al., 2011, Berliner, 2011; May-Chahal & Cawson, 2005; Pinheiro, 2006). As this evidence base has developed current thinking has extended beyond traditional conceptualizations of child maltreatment, which is largely concerned with the abuse of children by parents, to embrace the broader concept of juvenile victimisation (Finkelhor, 2007; Radford et al., 2011). As such juvenile victimization includes 'traditional' child maltreatment as well as conventional crimes in which children are victims (e.g. rape, robbery, assault) as well as acts that would clearly be crimes if committed by adults against adults, but by convention, are not generally of concern in the criminal justice system when they occur among or against children (e.g. sibling violence and assaults between preadolescent peers).

In both the US and the UK there is no single source for statistics on child victimisation. In the US, there are a range of data sources including child maltreatment prevalence research, various national surveys and official data sources such as child welfare statistics and crime statistics (Finkelhor & Wells, 2003). Together they point to the enormous quantity and variety of victimisations occurring to children and youth. The US

Developmental Victimization Survey (Finkelhor et al., 2005), confirmed the pervasive exposure of young people to violence, crime and maltreatment. Similarly, the UK Juvenile Victimization and Maltreatment Survey (Radford et al., 2011) confirmed the high prevalence of juvenile victimisation with one quarter of 18-24 year olds reporting severe maltreatment during childhood, either at home, at school or in the community. The British Crime Survey (Chaplin et al., 2011) also estimates that in 2010/11 there were 576,000 violent incidents against children aged 10 to 15 in 2010/11, 77 per cent of which resulted in injury to the victim (e.g. bruising, black eyes). Of these incidents, only a minority were reported to the police, a finding supported by a broad range of international literature which highlights how few incidents of maltreatment and victimisation are reported to the authorities (London et al., 2005).

Low reporting rates notwithstanding, official data such as child protection referrals and recorded crime statistics provide valuable information on the numbers of children experiencing harm which come to the attention of professionals in any given year. Although information on known cases of child maltreatment in the US has traditionally been drawn from child welfare statistics, the utility of crime statistics in providing a more comprehensive overview of broader levels of victimisation has been recognised (Finkelhor and Ormrod, 2001). Similarly, in the UK there has been a strong tendency to focus on child protection statistics even though police data for England and Wales confirms considerably more children are in contact with criminal justice agencies as victims of crime than are in contact with social services in relation to maltreatment; 2,465 children were the subject of a child protection plan under the category of sexual abuse on 31 March 2010 compared with 17,727 sexual offences committed against children under 16 and recorded by police. However, such comparisons are only possible where the age of the victim is

discernible from the offence committed (e.g. sexual assault of a female aged under 13 years). As police statistics in England and Wales are not routinely disaggregated by victim age, crime committed against children remains largely invisible in annual crime reports and associated compendia.

Both internationally and within the UK crime data has been previously used to explore the differences between reported child and adult sexual assault and criminal justice outcomes of cases (Bunting, 2009; Feist et al., 2007; Fitzgerald, 2006). This paper extends this work highlighting the extent and characteristics of both sexual and physically violent crime committed against children and young people using a national sample of crime data recorded by the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI). Data from Northern Ireland (NI) was used as this is routinely disaggregated by victim age, allowing for analysis of crime specifically committed against children. The NI criminal justice system is almost identical to that in other parts of the UK, comprising three key agencies: the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI); the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) which is equivalent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in England and Wales; and the NI Court Service (NICS). Crimes in Northern Ireland, as in England and Wales, are recorded in accordance with strict counting rules issued by the UK Home Office (HO, 2010) and are counted on the basis of crimes rather than offenders (i.e. one victim one crime). Given these similarities, this analysis of NI crime data is used to demonstrate the wealth of valuable information potentially available across the UK. It also highlights areas where data collection can be improved to provide a fuller picture of patterns of child victimisation and enable monitoring of systemic response.

Method

A full dataset relating to sexual offences and physically violent offences (offences against the person) recorded between 1st April 2008 and 31st March 2010 was provided by PSNI.

In total, 11,927 violent offences were recorded against children over the two year time period. Eighteen percent of these involved sexual offences (n=2194) and 82% physically violent offences (n=9733). Together they accounted for 19% of the total violent 63,325 crimes recorded in over this time period; 56% of sexual offences and 16% of physically violent offences

This data was analysed to identify:

1. Patterns of abuse and victimisation apparent in recorded police statistics relating to violent crime (i.e. who are the key groups offended against, by whom and how)
2. Cases outcomes and the factors associated with different outcomes

Recorded Crime Variables and Definitions

Where an offence is recorded by PSNI a variety of victim and characteristics are available including: victim gender; victim age when the offence (1st) occurred (years); victim age when the offence was reported (years); delay between reporting and occurrence (days); offence type and subcategory; and the Police District where the offence was reported (8 in total). It also includes information on whether the crime was 'detected' or not. Where an offence is recorded as 'detected' by the PSNI additional case characteristics such as offender gender, offender age (age groups), offender relationship to the victim and method of detection are also recorded.

Key definitions and additional variable details are outlined below:

Child: aged 0-17 years inclusive

Sexual Offence type: based on five classifications; rape/attempted rape; sexual assault of a child/sexual activity with a child; indecent exposure; and other sexual offences.

Physically Violent Offences: based on 6 classifications; murder/attempted murder/manslaughter/ threat or conspiracy to commit murder; wounding/GBH/with intent/AOABH; common assault; cruelty/neglect; child abduction; and other violent offences. Child cruelty/neglect is a specific offence category under the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and covers various forms of cruelty which result in unnecessary suffering or injury to health, such as: assault; ill treatment; neglect; abandonment; exposure to harm.

Reporting Delay – based on the categorisation of delay between (1st) offence occurrence and reporting into three groups:

- Immediate reporters – those who reported the offence the same or next day after occurrence;
- Children who did not report immediately but reported within the year in which the offence occurred; and
- Children who reported a year or more after the offence took place.

Detected - Detected crimes are those cases which are deemed by the police and, in the majority of offences, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), to have sufficient evidence to have a reasonable chance of securing a conviction in court.

Detection Method: There a number of methods of detection available. Formal sanction detections such as:

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

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

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

Statistical analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS Version 19.0. Univariate analysis was conducted across all the available variables to produce frequency tables detailing the numbers and percentages of victims in each group. Chi-squared tests were used to compare victim gender, age and offence type to identify trends in victimisation. Chi-squared tests were also used to compare case characteristics and levels of case detection for both sexual and physically violent offences.

Of the 11927 offences, 4% (464) were reported to the PSNI when the victim was no longer a child (18+ years). This accounted for 19.4% (425) of sexual offences, 0.4% (28) of physically violent offences. Additionally, information relating to the age of the victim when the offence was reported was not available for 115 sexual offences (5.3%). All univariate and bivariate analyses exclude these historic and missing cases.

Ethical considerations

Formal ethical approval was not required. However, a formal information sharing agreement was drawn up between the NSPCC and PSNI which specified the NSPCC's responsibilities in relation to the storage, analysis and dissemination of the data. This required formal agreement to act in accordance with legal data protection principles and, accordingly, the data was stored on a password protected secure IT system. It also required compliance with the PSNI disclosure policy of not publishing any text or tables relating to cells of 3 or less.

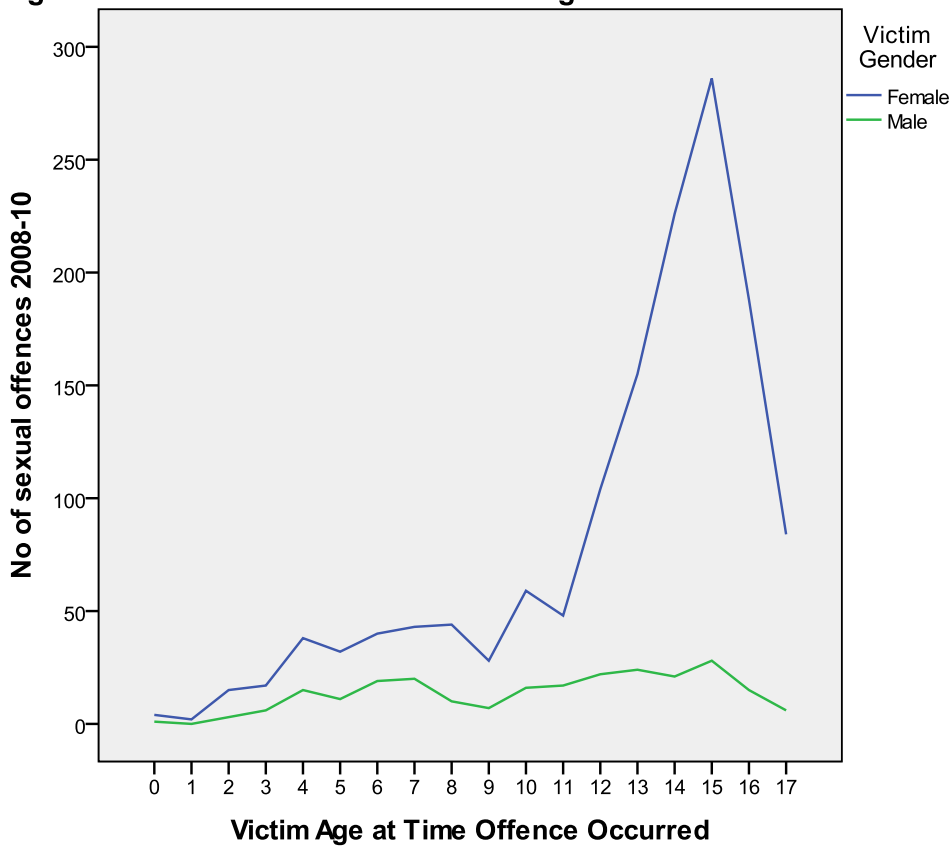
VICTIM & OFFENCE CHARACTERISTICS

Sexual Offences

Almost 1 in 5 of the recorded sexual offences involved rape or attempted rape See Table 1). Girls were the main victims of sexual crime (85% V 15%). There were significant variations according to victim age and offence type with the highest proportion of rapes/attempted rapes occurring in the 14-17 year old age group.

Further exploration of the data using the continuous 'age at time offence occurred' variable showed differences in victimisation patterns by age and gender (See Figure 1). The mean age of offence occurrence for females was 12.6 (SD=3.7) with a median average of 14 and a mode of 15. For males the mean age was 10.4 (SD=4.1) with median of 11 and a mode of 15.

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



Just over half of the sexual offences were reported by child victims with 48 hours of offence (1st) occurrence, 31.4% within the year and 16% more than a year after.

Physically violent offences

The most common physically violent offences involved GBH/AOABH/with intent/wounding, followed by common assault (See Table 1).

Physically violent offences were more commonly recorded against male victims. Victim age and gender were also significantly associated with offence type with a greater proportion of females being the victim of more serious offences such as GBH/AOABH/wounding. Teenagers were the largest group of victims and a greater proportion of 14-17 year olds were the victims of the more serious offences of GBH/AOABH/wounding rather than the lesser offence of common assault (60 V 30%). While the most serious offences, murder/attempted murder etc. involved only a small proportion of children, a greater proportion of 0-4 year olds were the victims of this offence than any other age group. Likewise child cruelty/neglect involved a small proportion of victims, with 0-9 year olds being the most common victims.

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

Offence Type	Total		Victim Gender		Victim Age			
	N	%	Male	Female	0-4	5-9	10-13	14-17
			%	%	%	%	%	%

All Sexual Offences	1654	100	14.6	85.4	6.1	15.4	26.9	51.6
Rape/attempted rape	312	18.9	8.7 ¹	20.6 ¹	9.9 ²	18.5 ²	14.8 ²	22.1 ²
Sexual assault/sexual activity	1188	71.8	80.9 ¹	70.3 ¹	87.1 ²	73.6 ²	70.3 ²	70.3 ²
Indecent exposure	126	7.6	8.3 ¹	7.5 ¹	3.0 ²	7.5 ²	12.1 ²	5.9 ²
Other sexual offences	28	1.7 ¹	1.6 ¹	2.1 ¹	0 ²	.4 ²	2.7 ²	1.8 ²
All Physically Violent Offences	9693	100	60.4	39.6	3.8	7.8	24.8	63.6
murder/attempted murder/manslaughter/threat or conspiracy to commit murder	383	4	4.7 ³	3.4 ³	7.1 ⁴	2.3 ⁴	2.4 ⁴	4.6 ⁴
wounding/GBH/with intent/AOABH	5264	54.3	46.0 ³	59.7 ³	29.7 ⁴	35.2 ⁴	48.5 ⁴	60.4 ⁴
common assault	3455	35.6	39.8 ³	32.9 ³	42.2 ⁴	51.2 ⁴	43.5 ⁴	30.3 ⁴
cruelty/neglect	156	1.6	2.0 ³	1.4 ³	17.7 ⁴	6.8 ⁴	1.1 ⁴	.2 ⁴
child abduction	72	.7	1.2 ³	.4 ³	2.7 ⁴	2.7 ⁴	.9 ⁴	.3 ⁴
other violent offences	363	3.7	6.3 ³	2.0 ³	.5 ⁴	1.9 ⁴	3.5 ⁴	4.2 ⁴

¹ χ^2 (df3, N=1654) = 19.064^a, $p < 0.000$

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

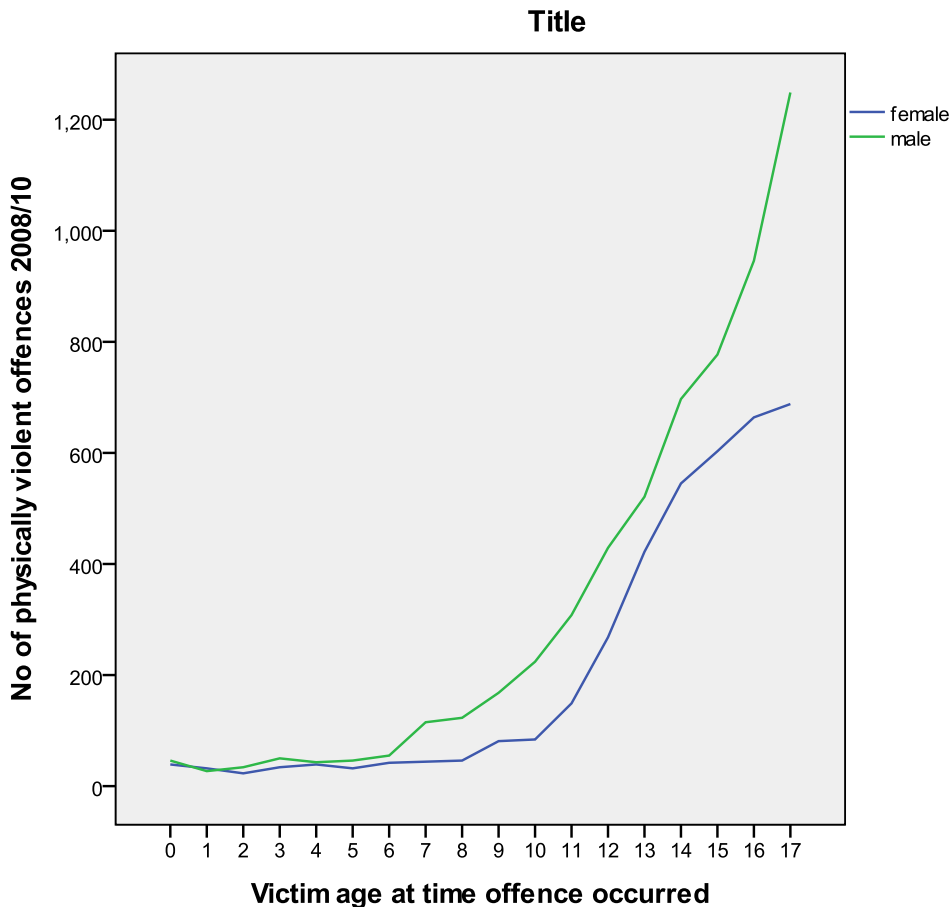
³ χ^2 (df5, N=9693) = 257.389, $p < 0.000$

⁴ χ^2 (df15, N=9693) = 1217.566, $p < 0.000$

Further exploration of the data using a continuous 'age at time offence occurred' variable showed difference in victimization patterns by age and gender (see Figure 2). The mean age of offence occurrence against females was 13.7 (SD=3.5) with a median average of 15 and a mode of 17. For males the mean age was 13.6 (SD=3.5) with median of 15 and a mode of 17.

Nine in ten (90.2%) offences were reported within 48 hours of offence (1st) occurrence, 8.7% within one year and 1% more than one year after occurrence.

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



DETECTION AND OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS

Sexual Offences

At September 2010, 19.2% of sexual offences reported in the financial years 2008/09 and 2009/10 had been detected, primarily by way of a charge or summons. Information relating to the alleged offender’s age, gender and relationship to the victim is only available in

recorded crime data where there is a detection (see Table 2). Almost all offenders were male and one third was aged 10-19 years. The largest proportion of offenders was those known but related to the victims, followed by strangers. One in five offences involved an offender with a familial relationship to the victim.

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

Detection Method	Sexual Violence		Physically violent offences	
	No Detected	% Detected	No Detected	% Detected
Adult caution/informed warning	12	3.8	184	7.6
Charge	162	50.9	517	21.5
Juvenile caution/informed warning/youth conference	21	6.6	568	23.6
No prosecution directed	5	-	< 5	-
Summons issued	118	37.1	1140	47.3
Total	318	100	2410	100
Offender/Victim Relationship				
Current spouse, partner, girlfriend, boyfriend etc	10	5.5	39	2.6

Ex spouse, partner, girlfriend, boyfriend etc	< 5	1.1	31	2.1
Grandparent/grandchild	< 5	2.2	< 5	0.0
Other family relationship	15	8.3	22	1.5
Parent/child	10	5.5	196	13.0
Sibling	8	4.4	73	4.9
Stranger	52	28.7	352	23.4
Suspect known to victim	80	44.2	786	52.3
Total	181	99.9	1502	100
Age of all offenders				
10-19	109	33	1743	62.8
20-29	78	23.6	431	15.5
30-39	50	15.2	283	10.1
40-49	38	11.6	234	8.5
50+	55	16.5	87	3.1
Total	330	100	2778	100
Offender Gender				
Female	12	3.6	760	27.4
Male	318	96.4	2017	72.6
Total	320	100	2777	100

Physically Violent Offences

Detection was higher for physically violent offences compared to sexual offences at 25%. The proportion of those charged was less than half that for sexual offences (22% V 51%) [See Table 2].

Sixty three percent of offenders were aged 10-19 years and 25% were aged 20-39. The majority of offenders were male, although, again, the gender gap was less pronounced with physically violent offences compared to sexual offences. The largest proportion of offenders was those known but related to the victims, followed by strangers and one in five involved an offender with a familial relationship to the victim.

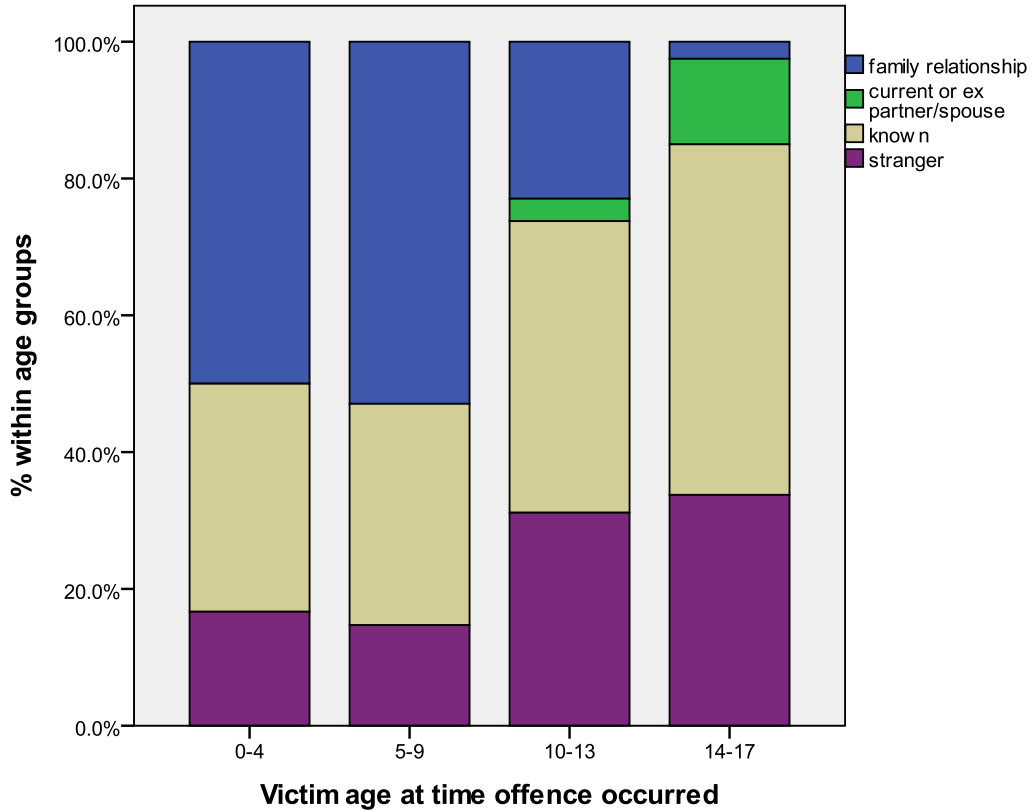
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DETECTION AND CASE CHARACTERISTICS

Sexual Offences

There was an association between case detection and victim age, reporting delay and police district where the offence was reported (see Table 3).. Cases involving 0-4 year olds had significantly lower levels of detection than any other age groups, followed by 14-17 year olds, as did cases reported more than 48 hours after (1st) occurrence. Levels of detection, varying from 10% to 26% across police districts.

Although significance testing was not possible given the numbers available, Figure 3 demonstrates the changing relationship between the victim and offender in detected sexual crime across different age groups. A familial or caretaking relationship was more common in younger age groups while the proportion of known but unrelated offenders rose with victim age as did sexual crime by strangers and current or ex spouses/boyfriends.

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



Physically Violent Offences

There was an association between levels of detection and victim age, gender, offence type, domestic motivation, reporting delay and police district the offence was reported (see Table 4). More serious crimes such as murder/attempted murder and wounding/GBH/AOABH had higher levels of detection than less serious offences such as common assault, as did offences involving female victims, those reported within 48 hours and those involving a 0-4 years olds. Those which had a domestic motivation were less likely to be detected than those that did not and levels of detection varied from 19% to 31% across police districts.

As Figure 4 below demonstrates, the relationship between the victim and offender in detected physically violent offences changed by age group. A familial or caretaking relationship was more common in younger age groups while the proportion of known but unrelated offenders rose with victim age as did violent crime by strangers and current or ex spouses/boyfriends.

Table 3: The Relationship between Sexual Offences and Physically Violent Offences and Levels of Detection) (Detected case only, n = 318)

Sexual Offences			Physically Violent Offences		
	Detected			Detected	
	No	%		No	%
Age Group of victim [χ^2 (3, n=1654) = 16.626, $p \leq 0.001$].			Age Group of victim [χ^2 (3, n=9693) = 49.451, $p \leq 0.001$].		
0-4	9	8.9	0-4	104	28.3
5-9	53	20.9	5-9	109	14.5
10-13	108	24.3	10-13	597	24.8
14-17	148	17.3	14-17	1600	25.9
Gender of victim [χ^2 (1, n=1654) = 0.251, $p \leq 0.552$].			Gender of victim [χ^2 (1, n=9693) = 15.150, $p \leq 0.001$].		
Male	43	17.8	Male	1375	23.5
Female	275	19.5	Female	1035	27

Offence Type [χ^2 (3, n=1654) = 0.928, p=0.819].			Offence Type [χ^2 (5, n=9693) = 0.150.705, p≤0.001].		
rape/attempted rape	63	20.2	murder/attempted murder/manslaughter/threat or conspiracy to commit murder	126	32.9
sexual assault/sexual activity with a child	225	18.9	wounding/GBH/with intent/AOABH	1528	29.0
indecent exposure	23	18.3	common assault	650	18.8
other sexual offences	7	25.0	cruelty/neglect	39	25.0
-	-	-	child abduction	12	16.7
-	-	-	Other	55	15.2
-	-	-			
Domestic Motivation [χ^2 (1, n=1654) = 0.000, p≤0.988].			Domestic Motivation [χ^2 (1, n=9693) = 26.136, p≤0.001].		
Yes	30	18.9	Yes	478	19.8
No	288	19.3	No	1932	23.9
Police District [χ^2 (7, n=1654) = 18.922, p≤0.008].			Police District [χ^2 (7, n=1654) = 18.922, p≤0.008].		

A	32	19.4	A	251	23.8
B	33	20.8	B	198	19.2
C	44	21.6	C	328	25.4
D	44	18.5	D	392	27.4
E	22	10.0	E	331	23.5
F	40	25.5	F	273	30.6
G	54	18.4	G	347	24.9
H	59	22.6	H	289	24.3
Reporting Delay [χ^2 (2, n=1654) = 6.579, p=0.037].			Reporting Delay [χ^2 (2, n=9731) = 32.759, p≤0.001].		
Immediate Reporter	187	21.6	Immediate Reporter		25.7
Within Year	87	16.8	Within Year		17.3
1 year +	44	16.4	1 year +		18.8

Table 4: The Relationship between Sexual Offences and Levels of Detection**(Detected case only, n = 318)**

	Detected		N	χ^2	df	Sig
	No	%				
Age Group of victim						
0-4	9	8.9	1654	16.626	3	.001
5-9	53	20.9				
10-13	108	24.3				
14-17	148	17.3				
Gender of victim						
Male	43	17.8	1654	0.251	1	.0552
Female	275	19.5				
Offence Type						
rape/attempted rape	63	20.2	1654	.928	3	.819
sexual assault/sexual activity with a child	225	18.9				
indecent exposure	23	18.3				
other sexual offences	7	25.0				
Domestic Motivation						
Yes	30	18.9	1654	0.000	1	0.988
No	288	19.3				

Police District						
A	32	19.4	1654	18.922	7	.008
B	33	20.8				
C	44	21.6				
D	44	18.5				
E	22	10.0				
F	40	25.5				
G	54	18.4				
H	59	22.6				
Reporting Delay						
Child-Within 48 hrs		21.6	2079	12.800	3	.005
Child – within 1 year		16.8				
Child – 1+ years		16.4				
Adult		14.1				

INSERT TABLE 4**Discussion**

This paper seeks to identify patterns of abuse and victimisation in recorded police statistics relating to sexual and physically violent crime, together with case outcomes and associated factors. The analysis shows that female teenagers were the main victims of

sexual crime with. patterns of sexual victimisation for males remaining fairly stable across the age ranges, albeit always at lower levels than females, with female victimisation dramatically increasing from age 12-15 and dropping again between 16-17 years. This is in keeping with the findings from both US and UK prevalence studies and analysis of US crime statistics (Finkelhor et al., 2010, Cawson et al, 2000; Radford et al., 2011; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000). These studies also recognised a significant minority of younger children are the victims of sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 2010; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000) and, in keeping with this, the present analysis found that that one in five sexual offences were committed against children under the age of 10. Similarly, while teenagers were the predominant victims of physically violent offences, 12% involved children under 10. The incidence of physically violent offences steadily increased for both males and female from age 7, with males being the most common victim group and the gender gap becoming more extreme between 15-17 years. Nonetheless, teenage girls accounted for a significant proportion of victims and were more commonly the victims of more serious offences. These findings mirror both those of the British Crime Survey (Millard & Flatley, 2011) and the American DVS (Finkelhor et al., 2005) and suggest that preventative education strategies which focus on a range of abuse/offence types are needed at both primary and post primary level.

In keeping with the literature the majority of alleged offenders of both sexual and physically violent crime were male, although it is worth noting that more than one quarter were female. Approximately one third of alleged sexual offenders were aged 10-19 years. This figure rose to 3 in 5 for physically violent offences. While one in five alleged offenders in both offence groups had a familial relationship with the victim, the nature of the family relationship differed with parents being much more likely to be the alleged offenders of

physically violent offences. The analysis also suggested changing patterns of victim-offender relationships across age groups with the proportion of known but unrelated, intimate or stranger offenders rising with victim age. Again, as this information is only available in detected cases it remains unclear if this is due to higher proportions of cases involving family members coming to the attention of police or higher levels of detection where the offender is related to the victim. Nonetheless, greater levels of access to young children and high levels of dependency would suggest that family members or those with a caretaking relationship are likely to be the primary offenders for younger age groups.

Delayed disclosure and reporting of sexual abuse and victimisation is well evidenced in the maltreatment literature with numerous studies and reviews highlighting how many children do not disclose abuse during childhood and, even in adulthood, some may never tell (Sas & Cunningham, 1995; London et al., 2005). Similarly the present study demonstrated that reporting delay was common in sexual offences with close to half involving a degree of delay, in many cases only coming to the attention of the police years after the offence occurred. The analysis also indicated that delay in reporting has a significant impact on case outcomes for both sexual and physically violent offences with cases reported within 48 hours having the highest levels of detection. This is in keeping with previous NI analysis (Bunting, 2008) but differs from the findings of English research (Feist et al., 2007) focusing specifically on rape which has shown delay to be a significant predictor of getting a case to court for adults but not younger victims. While this may be related to differences in categorisations of delay and the type of offence studied, it may also point to different outcomes between UK jurisdictions which is worthy of further investigation.

The finding that only a minority of sexual offences (19%) and physically violent offences (24%) are detected has serious implications for the ability of child victims to access justice. Cases deemed to be detected form the basis of those offences which can proceed within the criminal justice system and ultimately, in a proportion of cases, achieve a conviction. As with previous UK research in this area (Gallagher & Pease, 2000; Feist et al., 2007; Bunting; 2009), case characteristics impacted on the detection of both sexual and violent crimes. In addition to reporting delay, cases involving sexual violence against victims aged 0-4 year olds were less likely to be detected while cases involving physically violent offences against 0-4 year olds were more likely to be detected. There were also higher levels of detection for cases involving female victims in relation to physically violent offences while for both offence types levels of detection varied significantly depending on where the offence was reported. The findings suggest the need to develop proactive awareness raising strategies to encourage children to come forward as soon possible. They also suggest the need to consider variation in police practice across districts to ensure that children experience equity in the criminal justice response.

Conclusions

As the above discussion demonstrates, the data made available by the PSNI is extremely useful in developing a detailed picture of violent crime committed against children in the UK. This data can be used to highlight age groups and issues where policies and initiatives might usefully be developed, as well as providing evidence as the impact of current policies.. Yet despite the potential for crime statistics to provide an annual overview

of the victimisation of children and act as a source for identifying changing trends and monitoring system response, children continue to remain invisible in annual statistics. This invisibility is also apparent at a policy level. In her 2009 report, 'Redefining Justice', the Victims Champion Sarah Payne highlighted 'a low level of awareness of young people being victims of crime, with the significant exception of young victims of very serious crime, including sexual violence' which appeared 'particularly stark when set against the considerable public and governmental attention given to the issue of youth offending.' This is despite the implementation of a raft of UK wide policy and legislation aimed at improving the system response to victims and witnesses of crime, in particular child victims and vulnerable adults (Plotnikoff and Woolfson, 2007; Hayes et al., 2011). The Coalition Government's Call to End Violence against Women and Girls (HM Government, 2011) and associated actions plan notes that 'more than one third (36%) of all rapes recorded by the police are committed against children under 16 years of age. Yet despite having a specific focus on preventing violence against women and girls, reducing case attrition and improving justice outcomes there is little consideration of the patterns of violent crime committed against children.

While the extension of the British Crime Survey to 10-15 year olds is a welcome addition to the UK knowledge base, as yet there has been no attempt to develop recorded crime as a complementary source of information police. Given that this data is routinely available in NI and collected annually, recorded crime statistics can clearly be a valuable resource. Nonetheless, a number of limits remain, particularly in relation to offender details which are only recorded in a minority of cases. Equally, valuable data relating to those victims who decide not to proceed with a criminal case is now no longer routinely recorded in UK crime

statistics. Cases can remain undetected for a variety of reasons; there is no identifiable offender, the victim denies or retracts allegation, refuses to co-operate with the initial investigation or then withdraws at a later stage. Developing recorded crime categories to take account of the key reasons for non detection would greatly increase the utility of this data and provide information which is essential to monitoring attrition rates and identifying areas for further development. Without a fuller understanding of the extent of crime against children and throughput through the criminal justice system, policy initiatives to improve access to justice and case outcomes are essentially 'flying blind'. Developing recorded crime practice to make child victims of crime more visible, both to the public and policy makers, is needed to appropriately assess the effectiveness current initiatives and policy developments.

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