

# Child victims of sexual violence in the criminal justice system

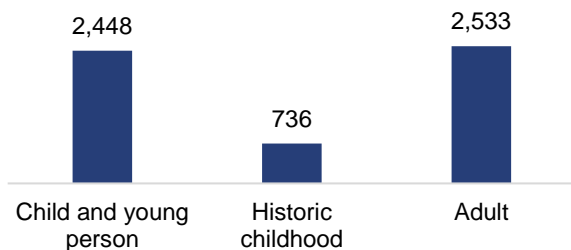
This factsheet is about child victims (children and young people (aged under 18) when they reported sexual assaults to the Police) in 2019, and how those reports have progressed through the criminal justice system since then.

## Almost 2,500 children and young people reported one or more sexual assaults to Police in 2019

In 2019, Police recorded sexual assaults against 5,716 people (Figure 1):<sup>1</sup>

- 43% (2,448) were children and young people aged under 18 when the assaults happened and when they were reported
- 13% (736) were adults aged 18 years or more reporting victimisations that happened when they were a child (historic childhood victimisations)
- 44% (2,533) were adults reporting victimisations that happened when they were an adult.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: More than half of the victims were children when the offending occurred**



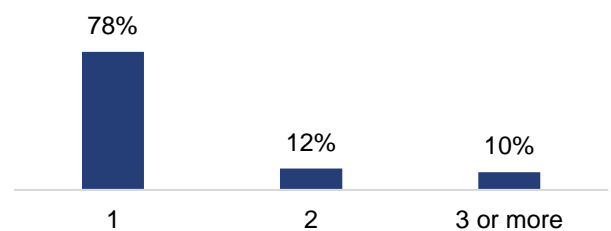
This factsheet describes the 2,448 child victims (children and young people aged under 18 when they reported sexual assaults to Police) in 2019. It does not include the sexual assaults that were experienced by 736 children but not reported to Police until they were an adult.

## Almost a quarter of the child victims reported more than one sexual assault

These child victims had 3,738 victimisations recorded by Police. Most (78%) had one victimisation, while

12% had two victimisations and 10% had three or more victimisations (Figure 2).

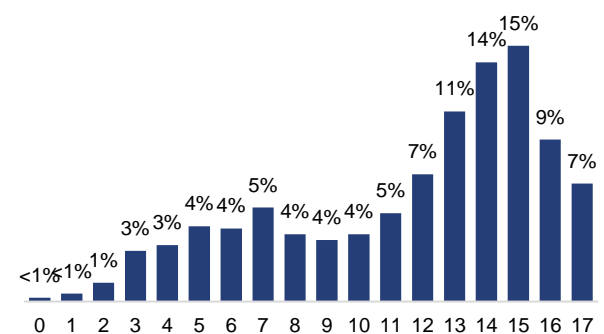
**Figure 2: Most of the child victims reported one victimisation**



## A third of child victims were under 12 years old when they were assaulted

Of the 2,448 child victims, 38% were aged under 12 and 62% were aged 12 to 17 years at the time of the assault. The most frequent age was 14 or 15 years old (Figure 3).

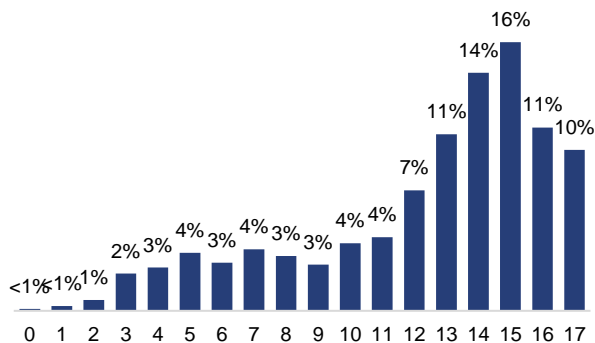
**Figure 3: The most frequent ages of child victims when assaulted were 14 and 15 years old**



The distribution of ages was slightly older at the time of reporting than when the victimisation occurred (Figure 4), because victimisations are often reported months or years after they happened:

- 31% were aged under 12 at the time of reporting
- 69% were aged 12 to 17 years.<sup>3</sup>

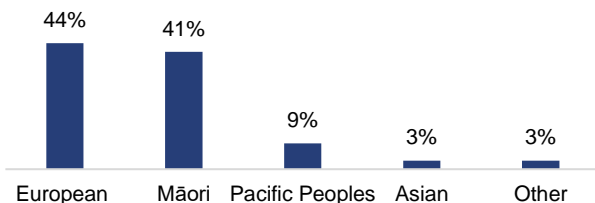
**Figure 4: The majority of the child victims were 12 to 17 years old when they reported to Police**



## Recording of ethnicity for victims is not compulsory

Ethnicity information was not recorded for 33% of the child victims (it is not compulsory as it is not appropriate in some circumstances). Among those with ethnicity information, 44% were European, 41% Māori, 9% Pacific Peoples, 3% Asian, and 3% of another ethnicity (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: For child victims with ethnicity information available, most were European or Māori**



## Most child victims who reported to Police were female

Most of the child victims were girls (84%), 16% were boys, and gender was not recorded for fewer than 1%.

## Less than half of all reports resulted in court action

The progression through the justice system was examined both one year and two years following reporting to Police in 2019.

Most sexual assaults reported to Police take many months to be investigated. After one year, Police had taken court action against a perpetrator for 41% (1,530) of the victimisations against children.

This increased slightly after two years:

- 44% (1,641 victimisations) had court action (with another 6% resulting in non-court action)
- 17% had a conviction (with another 13% still active in court)
- 12% had a prison sentence (with another 1% waiting to be sentenced)
- however, 6% were still under Police investigation.

Points of attrition in the criminal justice system included:

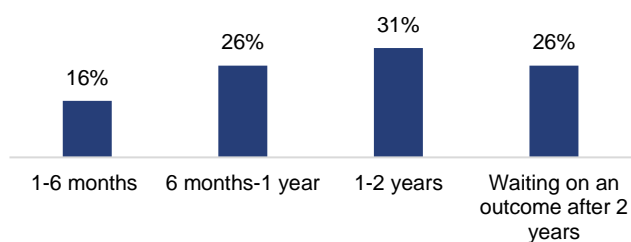
- Police made decision not to progress (35%)
- the victim or witness was not in a position to progress (8%)
- Police determined no crime had taken place (<1%)
- Police taking court action, but the charge was dismissed, discharged, withdrawn (9%)
- Police taking court action, but the charge resulted in a not guilty verdict (2%).

This progression and attrition is similar to overall reported sexual assaults.

## A quarter of child victimisations with court action (within two years) took more than two years to go through court

Of the 1,641 reported child victimisations with court action taken within two years, 16% had been finalised in court within 6 months, 26% took 6 months to a year, and 31% took 1-2 years. Another 26% were still waiting on an outcome after two years (Figure 6). This was fewer than compared to overall people (34%).

**Figure 6: More than half of child victimisations with court action (within two years) spent more than a year in court**



The distribution of ages for when these child victims were assaulted differed slightly to that for all child victims. A higher proportion (44%) of those whose report led to court action were aged under 12 and fewer (55%) were 12 to 17 years old.

However, because of the lag between victimisation, reporting, and Police taking court action, by the time of the first court hearing: 28% were aged under 12, 68% were 12-17, and 3% were 18-19. On average, child victims were 13 years old when they gave evidence in court.

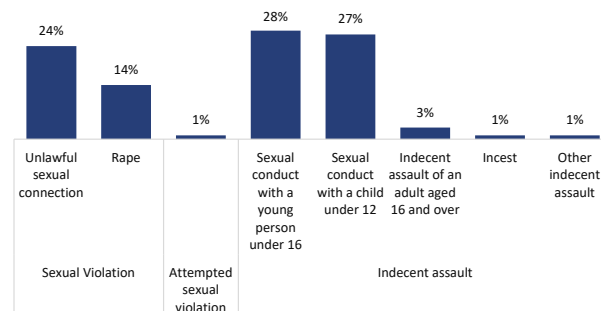
### Girls were more likely than boys to have victimisations result in court action

The proportion of girls and boys whose report led to court action (within two years) was slightly different to the proportion who reported victimisations. Of these, 88% were girls and 12% were boys,<sup>4</sup> indicating that girls were slightly more likely than boys to have court action within two years. It is not immediately clear from the data why this is, and many factors could have influenced this result.

### Indecent assault offences were the most common

The most common offence types against children were indecent assaults (60%) (Figure 7). A further 38% were for sexual violation offences, which are the most serious types of sexual offending and carry maximum penalties of up to 20 years imprisonment.

**Figure 7: Indecent assault offences were the most common**



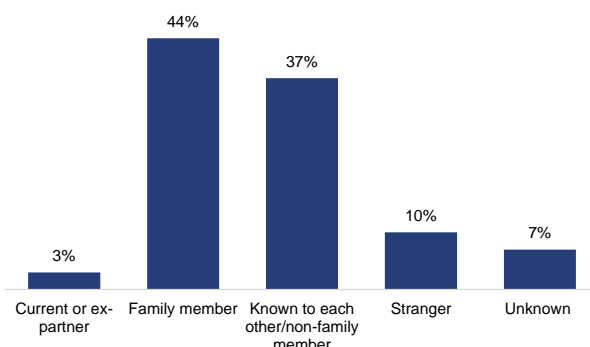
### Younger children were more likely to have been victimised by a family member

The relationship between the victim and the perpetrator is only available for analysis if Police take court or non-court action against a perpetrator.

For most children whose report led to court action (within two years) the perpetrator was a family member (44%) or someone else known to them (37%). The most frequent type of family members are parents, stepparents, and siblings. The average age of children whose perpetrator was identified as a family member was 10 years old.

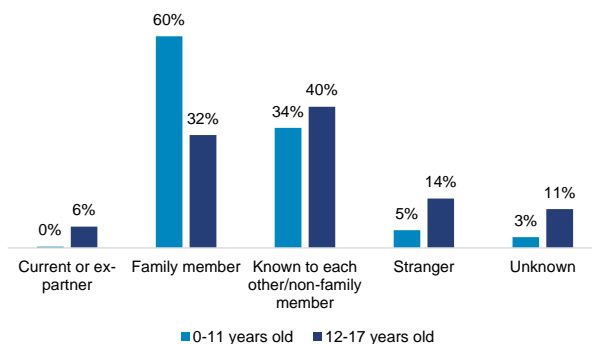
For a further 10% of child victimisations leading to court action, the perpetrator was a stranger, 3% a current or ex-partner, and for 7% the relationship was unknown (Figure 8).<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 8: Most of the perpetrators were known to the victims (where the report resulted in court action within two years)**



Perpetrators were more likely to be family members for younger children compared to older children, while perpetrators were more likely to be strangers, current or ex-partners,<sup>6</sup> or other known non-family members for older children compared to younger children (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: The majority of perpetrators for victimisations against children under 12 were family members**



<sup>1</sup> The actual number of victims Police got to know about may be higher (up to 6,352 people) but information on these people is incomplete.

<sup>2</sup> Victims can be in more than one victim type. The victim type could not be determined for 2% of victims, with otherwise complete information.

<sup>3</sup> Age was unknown for <1% of victims, with otherwise complete information. For victimisations that occurred over a period of time, or where victims had multiple victimisations, victim age is counted at the earliest date of offending.

<sup>4</sup> Gender was unknown for a small proportion (<1%) of children with court action within two years.

<sup>5</sup> Victims can report victimisations by multiple perpetrator relationships.

<sup>6</sup> As children were aged up to 17 years old, they could have intimate partners.