

----- EIGHT -----
LIFE SINCE COURT

This chapter will report the life experiences of the children since the verdict. One of the purposes of the follow-up study was to examine the long-term impact of the sexual abuse, the disclosure and the resultant court involvement on the child witnesses and their families. In the follow-up interview, questions were asked about changes in family structure and interrelationships that were triggered by the abuse, disclosure or prosecution. As well, we asked about abuse-related changes in residence and school performance, and about therapy, criminal behaviour, post-court contact with the accused, and subsequent victimization.

FAMILY CHANGES

At the time of the follow-up interview, approximately four years after the charges had been laid, one quarter of the children continued to be part of an intact nuclear-family system (see Table 20). The families of one third included a stepparent. The largest category continued to be lone-parent families with a female head, now constituting almost 40 percent of the total. Compared with the distribution of family types at the time of abuse disclosure, this represented a decline in nuclear families and a corresponding increase in single-parent families. Victims of intrafamilial abuse were less likely to be living within an intact-nuclear family at follow-up than were victims of extrafamilial abuse, and were more likely to be living in a stepfamily ($P^2=12.9$, $df=4$, $p=.01$).

One of the reasons for the change in distribution of family types can be seen in Table 21, where it is shown that the disclosure of abuse by a father figure had triggered a permanent marital separation in the families of seven children, all of whom had no more contact with the fathers. For two girls, the father-figure abuser had been temporarily removed from the home but had subsequently returned, one after an acquittal and one after parole. Another direct consequence that was observed for intrafamilial abuse victims was that the children had become alienated from a parent, most typically the defendant fathers but sometimes defendant-supportive mothers as well. The mothers of three children felt that the strain of the entire experience had been the catalyst that ended their marriages. Two children had to leave their families entirely and four other, younger than the latter two, were taken into the care of the Children's Aid Society, temporarily or permanently. In the majority of cases, however, the abuse and disclosure had not led to a change in the family structure. This was more commonly the case among the extrafamilial victims, who were less likely to have experienced a change in family structure because of the abuse, the disclosure or the prosecution ($P^2=24.7$, $df=1$, $p<.00001$).

Table 20
Family Structure at Follow-up (Whether Child in the Home or Not)

	Number	Percent
Intact Nuclear Family	19	24.7
Single Parent Mother	29	37.7
Mother and Stepfather	22	28.6
Father and Stepmother	4	5.2

No Family/Long-term Wards	3	3.9
TOTAL	77	100.0

Table 21

Most Significant Change in Family Structure Attributed to Abuse/Disclosure/Court

	Intrafamilial	Extrafamilial
No Change or Change for Other Reason	11 (29.7)	33 (89.2)
Divorce of Parents, No contact with Father	7 (18.9)	--
Child Taken into Care of CAS	3 (8.1)	1 (2.7)
Child Has No More Contact with Mother	1 (2.7)	--
Child Has No More Contact with Father	9 (24.3)	--
Child Went to Live with Other Parent	1 (2.7)	1 (2.7)
Father Temporarily out of Home	2 (5.4)	--
Child Left Family	1 (2.7)	1 (2.7)
Tension Contributed to Parental Separation	2 (5.4)	1 (2.7)
TOTAL	37 (100%)	37 (100%)

Ten children had no father figure in their life. Of the remainder, one third lived with their fathers (biological, adoptive or step) at the time of follow-up. A further 18 percent had some form of regular contact, such as access visits, 24 percent had sporadic or infrequent contact, and the remainder had no contact with their fathers, some of whom were in prison. Predictably, the children were more likely to have contact with their mothers, 63 percent living with them and 21 percent having regular contact. Four children had no maternal figure in their lives, being long-term wards.

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND CHANGES

Combining the information available at the time of intake and the information gained at the follow-up interview, we were able to put together a picture of the families of origin of these children. As presented in Figure 1 of Chapter One, family-system variables are important in understanding current psychological adjustment and global functioning. This was a heterogeneous group in that we observed stable and nurturing family units with healthy and confident children, on the one hand, and highly chaotic, disorganized and transient families with troubled and vulnerable children, on the other. With notable exceptions, however, and in the aggregate, these children and their families were apparently struggling with many social problems above and beyond the sexual abuse and resultant court involvement. Fourteen children had been in the care of the Children's Aid Society, either before or after disclosure, or both. Nine of these involved protection issues and the remainder involved parenting problems.

Family Violence: We have previously noted the high rate of exposure to family violence among this group of children (61 percent). Victims of intrafamilial sexual abuse were more likely to have been exposed to violence

within their home, this being true for 78 percent of them ($P^2=8.2$, $df=1$, $p=.002$). In addition, half of the intrafamilial sexual abuse victims had been either suspected or confirmed victims of physical abuse prior to their referral to the Child Witness Project, a proportion twice as high as that for the extrafamilial abuse victims. For 15 children, the perpetrator of the physical abuse was also the perpetrator of the sexual abuse.

At the time of follow-up, less than ten percent of the children were living in homes marked by violence or were having access visits with a violent parent, so the majority of them had been exposed to violence by former parental figures. For some, the reduction in exposure to violence could be attributed to the disclosure and prosecution, because it had been the sexual abuser who had been violent in the home. Marital separation and early home leaving were other reasons.

Substance Abuse of Parents: In addition, almost half (46 percent) had at least one parent, custodial or non-custodial, who abused alcohol and/or drugs. This was true for 58 percent of intrafamilial abuse victims compared with 33 percent of extrafamilial abuse victims ($P^2=3.8$, $df=1$, $p=.05$). At the time of follow-up, 20 percent of the total were living with such a parent.

Substance abuse is suspected to be a long-term consequence of early sexual victimization. Twelve children (16 percent of those interviewed) admitted that they had previously abused alcohol but felt that the problem was now under control. Five children were honest enough to admit that they felt alcohol was currently a problem for them. Four said that the use of illicit drugs was currently a problem for them and ten said that it had been in the past. However, given the age distribution of this group and the limitations of self-report indicators, the possibility that these children would experience higher than expected levels of substance abuse cannot be explored.

Employment and Financial Support: At the time of disclosure, almost half of the children had been living in dual-income families. This proportion had dropped by the time of follow-up with a concomitant increase in the proportion of one-income, one-parent families and welfare-supported families. As noted in Chapter Six, in the case of 11 children (16 percent of those with families), the family standard of living had dropped as a direct consequence of the abuse disclosure and their reduced circumstances endured to the present for the majority.

For one third of the children at the follow-up, their parents were judged to be financially challenged, being supported by social assistance. A further ten percent lived on unemployment insurance, pensions or student loans. Dual-income families continued to comprise the largest group (43 percent). There were only six children (nine percent) whose families had two parents with one income and, interestingly, all but one of these involved a working mother. Most of the children were still being supported by parents, but 17 percent were themselves receiving social assistance. Seven (nine percent) were supported by the Children's Aid Society. Five were employed.

Family Stressors: For 15 percent of the children, the unemployment of a parent was currently a source of stress, six percent had parents diagnosed with a mental illness, ten percent had parents with a severe medical problem or disability, ten percent were struggling with issues related to the recent separation of their parents (such as access disputes), ten percent lived in homes characterized by severe marital discord, and five percent had unstable residential situations. There was a subgroup, therefore, that was experiencing many family-related stressors and social problems.

DISCLOSURE-RELATED CHANGES IN CONTACT WITH MOTHERS

For the 12 children who had little or no contact with their mothers at the time of follow-up, 11 felt that this represented a decline that was attributable to the abuse and its disclosure. In the case of three children, their mothers had rejected them in favour of the men whom the children had accused of abusing them. In other cases, mothers had verbalized support for both the accused abuser and their children, causing the children to feel so uncomfortable that they chose not to see their mothers very often. Two children no longer saw their mothers

because they had been taken into the care of the CAS specifically because of parental rejection. One child had been seeing her mother on access visits after going to live with her father; but these visits had declined in frequency to the point that they rarely took place, partly because of lingering resentment over the mother's inability to protect the children from abuse by her husband. There was another group who, after a period of having no contact with defendant-supportive mother, initiated a reconciliation where the abuse and court were not directly discussed. It was the birth of a baby that often prompted this mother/daughter rapprochement, as was the case for the following young woman:

Norma's alcoholic father died when she was 11 and her mother remarried the following year. At the age of 15, after three years of sexual abuse by her stepfather, Norma told her mother, who did not believe her. Norma herself called the police and after she gave a statement, her mother called her a liar, assaulted her and insisted that she go pay the stepfather's bail. She was placed in foster care. In the time before court, she was expelled from school, was hospitalized after a suicide attempt, spent some time in juvenile detention, and moved frequently. The trial ended with an acquittal. A pregnant Norma moved in with her physically abusive boyfriend. At the time of follow-up, Norma had recently left this man and was getting counselling at an agency for battered women. She lived near her mother, who was still married to Norma's stepfather and who still did not believe that he had sexually abused Norma. She relied on her mother for babysitting and, therefore, saw her stepfather frequently. Norma said the relationship was alright as long as she did not mention the abuse or court. She did not feel that her child was at risk for abuse by this man because he was a boy. We found Norma to be socially isolated, depressed, and masking a great deal of unresolved anger and hostility.

POST-COURT CONTACT WITH FATHER-FIGURE ACCUSED

When the father had been the person whom a child accused of abuse, only one of the 26 children lived with him at the point of follow-up (see Table 22) and this case involved family reunification after an acquittal. We observed no cases where custody and access disputes arose after abuse disclosures and no one in this group of fathers had directly attempted any type of reconciliation or rapprochement. However, in one case, the father lived with the family and the child, being in foster care, visited the family on alternate weekends. Contact with her stepfather during these visits was to be supervised by an adult, by order of the Children's Aid Society. The fathers of eight of the children had not yet been released from prison at the time that we conducted the interviews but none of these children had plans to broach any type of reconciliation.

Cohabitation of Mothers with Father-Figure Abusers: When the abuser was a father figure, the child's mother was living with him at the time of follow-up in 23 percent of the cases. Of the remainder, the marriage of the parents of seven children ended permanently after the disclosure, and the marriages in the case of 13 children had already ended before the disclosure. In one case, the child's parents reconciled after the court proceedings even though they had been separated at the time of disclosure.

Table 22

Contact at Follow-up Between Child and Father-Figure Accused

	Number	Percent
No Contact Between Them	13	50.0
Father Still in Jail, No Contact	8	30.8
Child Lives With Father	1	3.8
Father Lives with Family, Child Excluded	3	11.5
On-Going Harassment by Father	1	3.8
TOTAL	26	100.0

Post-Release Contact with Incarcerated Fathers: When a father or stepfather had been the defendant, the case ended with his incarceration in 54 percent of the cases. In other words, 14 of these children saw their fathers go to jail for sexually abusing them. Some had received letters from their incarcerated fathers but none had resumed contact with him after release, with the one exception noted above. In that case, the resumption of contact with her stepfather was not her choice, as illustrated in the following case vignette:

Elinor's stepfather pleaded guilty to sexually abusing her and served nine months of a 14 month sentence. Elinor's mother never doubted that her daughter had been sexually abused by her husband but had felt that Elinor was exaggerating the impact based on what the mother considered to be her own far more serious history of childhood victimization. Her position throughout was that her partner had a problem that required treatment. She brought Elinor along for monthly visits with her incarcerated husband. Following his release, neither parent respected the boundaries that had been officially established to provide Elinor with on-going protection, and he eventually moved back in with the family. As a result, Elinor contacted the CAS and requested removal from the home. At the time of the follow-up interview, Elinor (age 12) was living in a foster home and visiting her parents' home at weekends. Her explanation for this separation was that her mother was not ready to have her home. Her mother's explanation was that her husband had undertaken treatment and so Elinor's refusal to live with him was a problem that Elinor herself had to overcome. Elinor took pride in the fact that she had taken charge to ensure her own protection and she revealed omnipotence in this position. Clearly, Elinor was angered by her circumstances and by her mother's continued ambivalence. She missed her mother and resented the enforced separation from her little half-brother.

CONSEQUENCES FOR NON-ABUSED SIBLINGS

Eighteen children had gone through the court process together with a sibling who had been sexually abused by the same man. The siblings of four others had also been sexually abused by the same perpetrator but no charges had been laid, typically because the sibling was younger. Even when a sibling had not been abused, many had experienced negative consequences as a result of the prosecution. In about half of the cases where the child had a sibling, there had been no reported impact. In the other half, however, we learned that there had been significant conflict among siblings over the veracity of the allegations, that some siblings had to cope with the extreme disruptive and acting out behaviours of the child victim, or that siblings were suffering from the

experience of having witnessed the abuse of their sister or brother. Ten percent of the children had siblings who had themselves been sexually abused before and so the abuse reactivated unpleasant memories and unresolved issues for them. When families had to move from their neighbourhood because of the abuse, siblings lost contact with friends and had to change schools. The siblings of two child victims had significant decreases in the amount of access they had to their fathers because of restraining orders and the risk to them of abuse. One boy was charged with assault for attacking his sister because he did not believe the abuse disclosure:

Laura's disclosure of sexual abuse by her father heralded many losses for her. In addition to her father's rejection of her, she had to face a total abandonment by her paternal grandparents who aligned themselves unequivocally with their son. Laura's brother also gave unconditional support to their father, and was so enraged by her disclosure and the resulting involvement of the criminal justice system that he used this as a rationale for physically assaulting his sister. Their father had a long history of extreme physical violence within their home.

CONTACT WITH GRANDPARENTS

Among the children who had contact with their family of origin, we found that 25 percent had lost contact with grandparents as a direct consequence of the prosecution. All of these situations involved intrafamilial abuse by a father or uncle. In fact, half of the intrafamilial abuse victims reported alienation from grandparents that began with the disclosure. The grandparents had believed and supported the defendant, who in these cases was their son. Often, the accused had gone to live with his parents before court and often returned to live there upon parole. This effectively, physically blocked the children's access to the grandparents. More difficult, however, was the emotional loss of that relationship. This was an on-going stress as each family function and holiday get-together emphasized the ostracization. The repercussions often fanned out into the extended family, that divided into opposing camps. The children had been particularly hurt by, and unprepared for, these developments.

RESIDENTIAL SITUATION AND CHANGES

Almost all the children (94 percent) had been living at home when they had been abused. The remainder had been living in a residential placement such as a group home or children's mental health facility. At the time of follow-up, two thirds of the children lived in the family home, although only a little more than half had lived there continuously since the disclosure. Some had cycled in and out of the family home on one or more occasion to live independently or to enter residential placements. Since the disclosure, we found that 17 children had entered residential placements or foster care, nine had left home to live independently, five had gone to live with relatives, and three had moved back with parents. At the time of follow-up, ten percent were in residential placements such as group or foster homes or mental health centres. Two children (three percent) lived in a penal facility at the time of follow-up and four children lived with relatives.

In this age group, home leaving is to be expected, as children reach the end of high school and become emancipated from their parents. We found, however, that these children tended to leave home at a young age and typically because of conflict rather than an amicable moving on. Among those not currently living at home, the abuse and disclosure specifically resulted in the child leaving in almost one third of the cases (Table 23).

Table 23

Reason Child Not Living at Home at Follow-up

	Number	Percent
In Care of CAS	4	17.4
Conflict over Disclosure	7	30.4
Conflict, Other Reason	8	34.8
Child in Institution	2	8.7
Good Parting	2	8.7
TOTAL	24	100.0

Three quarters of the children had experienced at least one residential move since the disclosure and 30 percent had moved four or more times. Ten percent could be described as transient, moving on 12 occasions or more. In 11 cases, a family residential move was attributed to the abuse: to leave a neighbourhood because of bad memories and the notoriety of the case, to keep their address unknown from the accused, or to permit a marital separation from the abuser. All but one of these cases involved intrafamilial abuse.

SCHOOLING

A large proportion of these children faced academic challenges. Seventeen percent had been diagnosed as having a learning disability and 16 percent as having behaviour problems or attention deficits and hyperactivity. Forty percent had been, at some point in their school careers, in a special class because of a learning disability, a behaviour problem or an intellectual deficit. Nine percent were developmentally delayed, having been assessed to be functioning in the low/borderline range of intellectual capability.

At the time of initial referral to the Project, all the children had been in school, although some left school in the time before court. At follow-up, 44 percent were in a regular school program and 29 percent were in a special program because of an academic challenge. Therefore, three quarters of them were in school. Four children had graduated, one of them continuing on to post-secondary education. Twenty-five percent had dropped out, most permanently and some temporarily. For example, two of the graduands had dropped out but returned to complete their studies.

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Those who had dropped out were asked if their decision to leave school had been related to the abuse or the prosecution. About half said that it had, to some extent. Most of them cited as the reason an inability to concentrate because of preoccupation with the abuse and court. This led to a decline in their grades that terminated with their leaving. Two had felt so embarrassed by the public knowledge of the abuse that they left school. As we noted in Chapter Six, 12 percent said that they had been openly taunted at school. One girl had to leave school because of on-going stalking and harassment by her stepfather after he was released from jail. She changed residences frequently and continued her schooling by correspondence.

CHANGES IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

One quarter reported that the disclosure had been followed by a change in the extent to which they interacted with their peers and class mates. Among these 17 children, three reported a temporary change and

eight said they became and continued to be more socially withdrawn. Seven indicated that the disclosure had been followed by an increase in social contact with peers, usually because the abuser had been removed from the home and the children felt as if their lives had normalized.

CHANGES IN SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

When asked how their grades fared, almost two thirds indicated that the abuse disclosure had been followed by some type of change in their academic performance. Twenty-one percent reported a decline in their school performance that was rectified once the court process was over. Seventeen percent said that their grades deteriorated after the disclosure and never returned to normal. Five children (seven percent) said that their school performance improved after the disclosure, again because a significant source of stress had been removed when the abuser was arrested. For 28 percent, their grades had always been good and continued to be good. For 11 percent, their grades had always been poor and continued to be poor.

STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS

As noted above, a proportion of the children were experiencing or had experienced stressful life circumstances: family violence, parental alcoholism, financial hardship, chronic parental illness, recent parental divorce, etc. We also noted that school drop-out and residential moves were observed. In addition, we found that this group had experienced many stressful events since court. On the Stress Index described in Chapter Two, the mean score was 3.6. Twenty percent had experienced five or more of the stressors. Some specific examples:

- ! nearly one third were grieving the recent death of a close family member;
- ! nearly one third had experienced either an accident or serious medical problem since court;
- ! four had experienced the death of same-age friends and one of these had witnessed his friend hit and killed by a car;
- ! ten girls had become mothers or were imminently to give birth and three girls told us about miscarriages and/or abortions since court.

Victims of intrafamilial abuse had experienced significantly more of the stressors, on average 4.4, than victims of extrafamilial abuse ($t=2.64$, $df=69$, $p=.01$) and girls had experienced more stressors than boys ($t=-2.51$, $df=54.3$, $p=.015$).

We also learned that 13 children (18 percent) had made anywhere from one to six suicide attempts since the disclosure. Observations of these factors combined led us to conclude that these children, with notable exceptions, had experienced stressful and somewhat chaotic lives since we last saw them. At the same time, 31 of them were judged to be affected by parental rejection, inadequate parenting or the absence of any parental figure in their lives. They were, in effect, negotiating their own way in the world without the benefit of guidance by an effective parent.

INVOLVEMENT WITH YOUTH COURTS

Fifteen (20 percent) had appeared before the youth court, almost all for property-related offences. However, two teenaged boys were convicted of sexually assaulting young girls. Ironically, one of these girls was referred to the Child Witness Project for court preparation, leaving us in the uncomfortable role of having to

prepare a child to testify against another child who had previously been one of our clients.

CHILD BEARING BY CHILD WITNESSES

Ten girls had become mothers, or were imminently to become mothers, in the time since court. Two girls were expecting their second babies. Child bearing was not associated with whether the abuse had been intra- or extrafamilial. However, the six intrafamilial victims shared many characteristics. Five of the girls had experienced sexual abuse from stepfathers and one from a biological father. All six father figures had been violent within the home and most had abused alcohol. Moreover, the post-disclosure maternal reaction was either to be hostile or superficially supportive of the girls. Even when they were rejected by their mothers after the disclosure of abuse by a stepfather, their non-custodial biological fathers were not available or chose not to be involved. The other similarity came in the court outcome for these girls. For seven of the ten, the cases ended in either a dismissal or a withdrawal of all charges.

Some seemed to be trying to create their own family systems, perhaps in the hope or expectation that they would receive unconditional love and affection from their newborn babies. None of these girls believed that therapy would be of any assistance to them and few had any meaningful involvement with their mothers. Understanding grandparents who could assist in child care were not present in their lives, with a few exceptions. These young mothers were on their own, parenting infants despite their own histories of non-nurturing families and rejection. Most were judged by the therapists to be marginal parents, carrying emotional baggage from their own abuse experiences. In almost all cases, they were involved in abusive relationships with men who were uninterested in their babies.

REVICTIMIZATION

We have previously presented that 21 percent of these children had been sexually abused by a different perpetrator before their referral to the Project. We have also stated that 28 percent had mothers who acknowledged their own childhood sexual victimization. Five children fell into both categories. We have also noted the distressing levels of exposure to, and experience of, physical violence within the families. Combined with the abusive experiences about which they were testifying, it was of little surprise that, at the time we first saw these children, they were as a group evidencing high levels of fear of retaliation by the abuser and of revictimization generally. This was especially true of the girls. The majority tended to view their world as threatening and unsafe for children. Their generally pessimistic view of their ability to protect themselves against future assaults was particularly distressing to Project therapists. For some of the more fearful, there was a foreboding sense that something bad would happen to them in the near future.

Unfortunately, we were to learn from our follow-up interviews that, in reference to the period since the abuse disclosures:

- ! 14 girls and one boy reported they had experienced at least one sexual assault by another perpetrator;
- ! nine reported they had experienced at least once physical assault;
- ! nine girls had been or were involved with physically-abusive boyfriends or common-law partners; and,
- ! nine children had been taken into care by the Children's Aid Society as being in need of protection, five from sexual abuse, three from physical abuse, and one from neglect.

There appeared to be a theme of repeated victimization for some. Subsequent victimization was not statistically associated with sex or age of the child, nature of the abuse or history of family violence. It was,

however, associated with prior sexual abuse ($P^2=4.7$, $df=1$, $p<.03$). Sixty percent of those children who had a history of sexual abuse prior to their referral to the Project had been sexually abused by another person within the follow-up interval. For those children with whom we spoke at follow-up and were able to ask about subsequent victimization, their lifetime history of sexual victimization is listed in Table 24.

Serial victimization has been observed to occur in many crime categories and explanations can involve subtle or overt victim blaming. One hypothesis applied to sexual assault, for example, is that victims internalize a self-identity as a victim, which predisposes them to subsequent victimization. We would question this hypothesis, especially in application to children. Social circumstances and family-system variables are certainly at least as important. Further prospective study of this and other groups of child victims will assist in identifying which children are most vulnerable to sexual victimization.

POST-COURT CONTACT WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

At the time of follow-up, 20 children were actively associated with the Children's Aid Society. Half of these cases involved voluntary contact, although six children were Crown wards, two were temporary wards, and two were the subjects of supervision orders. Since court, CAS contact had been terminated with 21 children, because the families withdrew from voluntary supervision, the situation had improved, the children was too old for the CAS mandate, or because the children had left the jurisdiction. In most cases, CAS supervision had centred on issues not related to the sexual abuse, usually protection from other abusers, parenting assistance, behaviour management, or parent/child conflict.

Table 24

Known Sexual Victimizations by Different Perpetrators Over Lifetime

	Number	Percent
Once	36	65.5
Twice	12	21.8
Three Times	5	9.1
Four Times	2	3.6
TOTAL	55	100.0

PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTION

In the time since court, some families had approached and/or been assisted by other professional groups because the consequences of the victimization and court proceedings did not necessarily end with the verdict.

ABUSE-RELATED COUNSELLING

In our jurisdiction, one treatment alternative for child victims of sexual abuse is group therapy. The Children's Aid Society as well as several children's mental health centres provide sessions of group counselling specifically geared to child victims of sexual abuse. Thirteen children had finished at least one series of sexual

abuse group counselling sessions through the CAS by the time of the follow-up. Six others had started but not finished and ten had been offered the chance but declined. Eight parents had finished at least one series of group sessions for non-offending parents.

Considering all venues of treatment combined, half of the children had been able to access either group or individual counselling that focused on the sexual abuse. Six were still in therapy at the time of the follow-up. In this group, the boys were more likely to have received counselling (60 percent) than the girls (47 percent).

The motivation for entering into counselling, according to the children, was most typically that someone had insisted that they do so. Five acknowledged that they had been troubled by the effect of the abuse and had sought counselling for that reason. Two had been in counselling for other reasons and simply carried on, but with the focus shifted to the abuse. Those who had received therapy typically felt that the experience had been beneficial but an almost equal number said it had no discernible benefits. The parents were more likely to identify the therapy as being beneficial for the children but four felt it had been harmful because it required the children to dwell on the abuse.

Those who had not engaged in therapy most commonly cited as the reason the belief that there had been no need. One said that she could not find any resources and one said that she had wanted to but her parents were opposed. In reference to the present, 70 percent of the children asked did not feel that they needed any counselling at this time. Not including those who were currently in therapy, five children said they would like to get some counselling now and five thought it might be a good idea, possibly in the future.

The parents were more likely to feel that the children should be in counselling, 22 percent expressing that view about their children. They saw repercussions of the abuse which had not subsided but typically cited resistance on the part of the children to entertain the idea of therapy. Another 15 percent of the parents felt that there may well be a need for counselling in the future, foreseeing the possibility that the onset of adolescence may trigger unresolved issues about the sexual abuse. Overall, resistance on the part of the children to entertain the possibility of counselling was common.

During the follow-up interview, Rick reported that he would like to get on with his life and that he would like to forget that the abuse ever happened. He was also concerned that someone may discover his "secret." At the time of court, he had resisted attempts to engage him in therapy and he continued to be reluctant, although he recognized the advantages it could provide him.

The Child Witness Project therapists, through their involvement with the children at the follow-up interviews, felt strongly that almost half could benefit from therapy. Their needs, however, were seen to be varied, with some children requiring therapy specifically focused on the abuse and others needing a more generalized therapy to assist with many life issues and emotional problems. Yet for others, on-going depression was the only symptom manifested. As a result of Project therapists' concerns, suggestions for suitable resources were made for 25 percent of the cases that presented for the follow-up. The current emotional adjustment of this follow-up group is discussed more fully in Chapter Ten.

CRIMINAL INJURIES COMPENSATION

The Ontario system for criminal injuries compensation, unlike those of several provinces, provides an avenue for victims of sexual assault to claim financial compensation for the pain and suffering they endured as a consequence of their victimization. Twenty-one percent had applied and been successful in receiving an award while six percent had applied and their cases were still being considered. Therefore, only about one quarter of these victims of child sexual abuse had been able to benefit from compensation. No child victim who applied

had been turned down although two mothers had applied on their own behalf because they felt deserving of compensation as the parents of victims. One had been told that she did not qualify for compensation and the other told us that the Board had agreed to consider her application. Children were particularly pleased to learn that they are not necessarily required to testify again in front of the Board. Perhaps the most satisfying use of criminal injuries compensation was when children whose abusers have been acquitted were successful in convincing the Board of the validity of their claim.

In about 30 percent of cases, the families had decided not to pursue an application, for any of a variety of reasons. For example, some parents said they would view the money as tainted, some felt that there had been no injury, and some expressed a self-reliance ethic and shunned government payments. In the cases of 44 percent of the children, the family said they had never heard of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. It is likely that they had been told about it at the time but that they had been too distraught to fully comprehend the information. In addition, the pamphlet material provided by the Board tends to be written in a legalistic style, beyond the capabilities of many young victims and their families.

The families that had received awards were generally happy with their experiences with the Board. The money had been put to a variety of uses, one of the most creative being that a mother was able to redecorate her daughter's bedroom so that she was less likely to be reminded of the sexual abuse that had taken place there. Typically, the money has been used to pay for private counselling because most families were not in a financial position to acquire this expensive service. The only complaint of note was the length of time that it took to have the applications assessed and a judgment made.

PAROLING AUTHORITIES

When the accused person had been incarcerated, true in about two thirds of these cases, we found that the family of the victim likely knew very little of what happened after the offender's admission to penal custody. Yet, victims can continue to play a role. First, they can provide information to correctional and paroling authorities about the continuing impact of the crime and, especially for intrafamilial cases, about the background of the offender. Second, where there is the possibility of on-going contact with the offender, victims should be informed about when he is being released, his destination, and any parole conditions that restrict his contact them.

As would be typical among people in the general population, few families had even the vaguest understanding of corrections or the parole process. They presumed that there would be information sharing between the police and courts, on the one hand, and the corrections and parole end of the system, on the other. In other words, they felt that they had nothing further to contribute. They rarely knew about, or even considered, contacting the paroling authority, although most did understand that an inmate would not serve the entire sentence prescribed by the judge. People relied on family and community rumour to know where the offender had served his sentence and when he had been released. This information was often incorrect. Moreover, the uncertainty about dates of release elevated their anxiety and offset many of the benefits that the children gained from knowing that their abusers were safely behind bars. Few were aware of their rights, whom to contact for information, or how to complain if the offender violated parole. This subject is a crucial one within the context of the next subject: child victims of sexual abuse will often have some degree of unwanted contact with their abusers after the verdict.

POST-COURT CONTACT WITH DEFENDANTS

Although many professionals view the verdict as an end to the sexual abuse and the stress it creates for the children, the reality is that the end of the court proceedings do not, for the majority of cases, signify closure. At the time of follow-up, more than half of the children knew either specifically (26 percent) or generally (33 percent) where the abuser currently lived. This is some evidence of the on-going connection between them, a

connection that was not severed by the verdict. They could continue to share a neighbourhood, a community, friends, and relatives. Where there had been a pre-existing relationship between the child and the abuser, this relationship was almost always ended with the prosecution, even in 87 percent of the intrafamilial abuse cases. However, one third of the children interviewed were judged to be experiencing stress created by on-going, usually indirect, contact with the accused person post-court. In almost all of these cases, the accused had been a family member. Where an acquittal was handed down in court for an intrafamilial defendant, the stress on the child would typically increase after the verdict.

UNWANTED CONTACT

One third of all the children — 43 percent of intrafamilial abuse victims and 22 percent of extrafamilial abuse victims — continued to have some degree of direct or indirect contact with their abusers, the type of which varied. Sixteen percent of the total reported occasional random contact since their last court date, such as an encounter on the street or at a store. The meetings were seen by the children as accidental and, although upsetting, they were not viewed as purposeful or harassing. Nevertheless, many were conscious of the possibility that they would encounter the abuser in public places and some took evasive action of greater or lesser degree. Examples of such avoidant behaviour included: not going to certain areas of the city, never going anywhere alone, never using city buses, or even being reluctant to leave the house. Because the contact was random, it could happen at any time and this was a source of considerable anxiety for some. Random meetings could also be how the children learned that the offender had been paroled and this abruptly ended any sense of security they had gained because of the incarceration. A few learned in this way that the men they thought were in jail had been almost immediately released on bail pending an appeal.

Three children (four percent) described receiving sporadic calls from an intrafamilial abuser or experiencing occasional encounters with them at family events. Another four percent said that their siblings were seeing the defendant regularly on access visits. This was difficult for them, as they would hear second-hand information about the defendants and/or see them when their siblings were picked up for the visits. It could also be upsetting because they were excluded from these visits. Although they did not miss having contact with the abuser, they could miss having a father in their lives.

Three intrafamilial abuse victims had frequent, direct contact with the abuser, in once case because she lived with him and for two others because the abusers lived with the children's mothers. In all cases, the relationship was strained and uneasy and in two of the three cases, the children would have much preferred not to see these men at all. Three other intrafamilial abuse victims reported on-going harassment by the offender. In one extreme case, a teenaged girl was stalked by her step-father abuser. She chose to live her life as a virtual recluse because of on-going harassment by this dangerous and violent man following his parole. Although this case represented an extreme example, the lack of legal protection or recourse was a frightening reality for this young woman and her mother. Her case poignantly illustrates the ongoing, serious threat posed to some children by their abusers, even after court:

Janice had been a fearful and reluctant witness. At the preliminary hearing when both Janice and her mother testified, the defendant repeatedly called her a slut under his breath, and told Janice's mother that he would "get" her afterwards. He pleaded guilty at the trial and was sentenced to probation for sexually abusing Janice. However, he received a reformatory term for physically assaulting her mother. Upon his release, he appeared to embark upon a relentless vendetta of physical and psychological intimidation against Janice and her mother. This included insidious incidents where they would find roses dipped in black paint or dead cats on their porch. Several visits were made by this man to Janice's school, and on one occasion, he cornered her at knife point in the school washroom. Due to continuing harassment, Janice's mother and her baby (the biological child of the offender) had moved 12 times. Janice lived like a fugitive, and moved among the homes of relatives. She stopped attending school following the knife incident, and enrolled in correspondence courses. She was totally isolated from her friends and community at the time that we interviewed her.

Recent criminal law amendments regarding stalking may make the criminal justice system better able to protect these victims.

CONTACT DURING INCARCERATION

Surprisingly, even when abusers were jailed, 15 percent of the children had had some form of contact, through visits (two children) or by letter (five children). The prison visits occurred in the case of intrafamilial abuse, where families were torn emotionally by the incarceration of the father. In neither case did the child desire to participate in the visits. The letters typically came unsolicited from the inmates, sometimes in attempt to apologize and seek forgiveness. None of the children replied and in one case the mother requested that the prison prohibit the sending of any subsequent letters to her address.

ON-GOING FEARS OF CONTACT BY THE ABUSER

We found, therefore, that resolution in court did not automatically translate into peace of mind for many of the families. Nearly one third of the children felt that their would try and come back into their lives and bother then and another 20 percent felt that he might try to contact them again. Victims of intrafamilial abuse were more likely to say that the abuser could return ($P^2=10.8$, $df=2$, $p=.003$). Fears of reprisal were common, with some children becoming unrealistically fearful of physical retaliation, by defendants who had never been threatening or had never used force. The resulting effect was an unsettling feeling of uneasiness and hypervigilance because of concerns for personal safety. These feelings of insecurity and lack of safety appeared to be more pronounced in cases where there was an acquittal, or where there was no incarceration. Incarceration of defendants provided many child witnesses with breathing space, and they greatly feared releases. Interviewing parents about their perceptions of their children's safety revealed that almost 25 percent of them as well felt the defendant could reappear in their lives.

At the time we saw Mark for the follow-up, his father was still serving a lengthy penitentiary sentence for sexually assaulting Mark and six other children. One would assume that the knowledge that the perpetrator was in prison would lead a child to feel safe. This certainly was not the case with this young boy. He continued to express intense fears. Throughout the interview, Mark kept recalling how his father laughed repeatedly while he was testifying. He described his father as "crazy" and he said that he believed that his father had special powers to know what Mark was doing, that he was able to see through things and had super-human faculties. This appeared to mean that, for Mark, incarceration did not equate with guarantees of protection. As a result, he continued to suffer from intense anxieties and to feel extremely vulnerable. Shortly before our interview with Mark, he had in fact been hospitalized with severe stomach pains which he said were ultimately attributed to "bad nerves." Mark believes that his father will seek revenge on his release from prison. Mark has a very involved and concerned mother and has regular therapy sessions. He is, however, an extremely vulnerable child whose fears are not much alleviated by his father's conviction and imprisonment.

SUMMARY

The disclosure and prosecution were likely to have triggered changes to the family composition where the abuse had been intrafamilial, but not so when the abuser had not been a family member. There were three principal types of changes: permanent marital separation, alienation of a child from a parent, and/or alienation of a child from the entire family. Where the abuser was a father figure, family reunification occurred only once among this group and the children almost always remained alienated from the fathers and, in some cases, defendant-supportive mothers. No custody and access disputes arose after court. Eleven children reported that their relationship with their mother had deteriorated after the abuse disclosure and had not been rehabilitated during the follow-up period.

The characteristics of the families were variable and we saw a wide range of parenting styles. A salient characteristic of this group in the aggregate, however, is the exposure to violence within the home, the detrimental effects of which are now well documented.⁵⁹ Substance abuse and financial pressures were also features of many families. While this group's exposure to violence and parental substance abuse had declined since before the disclosure, financial pressures had increased. An undesirable consequence of the prosecution for some included a decline in standard of living, one of the ways in which children could feel penalized for having disclosed.

Another undesirable, and unanticipated, consequence for the child victims of intrafamilial abuse was that half of them became alienated from grandparents. Consequences for non-abused siblings included conflict among family members over veracity of the allegation, coping with the anxiety of the court experience of their sister or brother, coping with mood and behavioural disturbances of their sister or brother, having to move from their neighbourhoods and school districts, reduced access to fathers, reactivation of unresolved issues from their own prior abuse experiences, and alienation from extended-family members, especially grandparents.

A portion of this group had been highly transient since the disclosure and only half had lived in the family home continuously since the disclosure. The families of eleven children had moved specifically in response to the abuse. Those children who had left home tended to have done so when still relatively young and thirty

⁵⁹ P.G. Jaffe, D.A. Wolfe & S. Kaye Wilson (1990). *Children of Battered Women*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

percent of them attributed their leaving to conflict over the abuse and its disclosure. Some attributed academic difficulties and even early school leaving to the repercussions of the prosecution

As a group, these children had experienced many stressful life circumstances and events since they first disclosed sexual abuse. Coping strategies were typically inappropriate and unsuccessful and a high rate of suicidal behaviour was discovered. Among the most disturbing findings was the observation that a portion of this group had been sexually victimized by three or more perpetrators during their young lives. Conversely, four boys were known to have sexually abused younger children: two had done so prior to their disclosure (as noted in Chapter Five) and two had since been convicted of child sexual assault in the youth courts.

Where the defendant had been a father-figure, family reunification was rare. These men often went to live with their parents, effectively eliminating any contact between the children and their grandparents. The latter was also true when the abuser had been an uncle.

Only one child of the 77 continued to have direct contact with the defendant that was not perceived by them as unwanted contact. If we were to talk with this group again a few years from now, the situation might be different. But, three years after the verdict, any pre-existing relationship between the children and the defendants had been terminated with the prosecution. At this point in time, this situation was welcomed by the children, who continued to harbour fear and negative feelings about the abusers. However, 22 percent of the extrafamilial abuse victims and 43 percent of the intrafamilial abuse victims had had contact with the abuser since the last court hearing. These findings highlight the fact that a verdict may not end the fear and concern for personal safety among child victims. This should be of little surprise because their innocent sense of security had previously been disrupted or eliminated by their victimization.

In summary, the problems that many had hoped would end with the verdict continued and were even added to for a sizable group of these children, usually intrafamilial abuse victims. In examining their life events in the three years since the verdict, we could conclude that girls who disclosed abuse by a father-figure, and any family members who supported them, had paid a heavy price.

HIGHLIGHTS

! the three years after the verdict were for many characterized by stressful life circumstances and stressful life events;

! the abuse/disclosure/prosecution could result in three types of changes to family composition after intrafamilial abuse: permanent marital separation, alienation of a child from a parent, and/or alienation of a child from the entire family;

! since the prosecution, the children were less likely to be living in a home characterized by violence, often because the violence had been perpetrated by the sexual abuser;

! half of the intrafamilial abuse victims became alienated from grandparents as a direct consequence of the abuse/disclosure/prosecution;

! in about half the cases where the child victims had brothers or sisters, there were negative consequences of the abuse/disclosure/prosecution for the siblings reported;

! children and defendant father-figures rarely reconciled and there were no custody and access disputes among this group;

! among those who were no longer living at home, 30 percent attributed this situation to conflict over their

abuse disclosure;

! 20 percent had appeared before the youth courts since the disclosure, principally for property-related offences;

! revictimization among this group was distressingly high and the best predictor of subsequent sexual victimization was pre-referral history of sexual victimization;

! half of the children had been able to take advantage of counselling programs for sexual abuse victims;

! although the prosecution typically ended pre-existing relationships between the children and the abusers, one third of the children continued to be troubled by indirect, random or harassing contact by the abuser; and,

! about half of the children worried to some extent that the abuser would come back into their lives.