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UNH Researchers Find Adults Commit Majority of Reported Crimes against Children

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UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- Adults are the offenders in more than half of all reported cases involving crimes against children, according to a new report by University of New Hampshire researchers. The number of adult offenders is particularly large in sex crimes and kidnaping, as well as in crimes against children under age 6.

These findings, released by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, are reported in "[Characteristics of Crimes against Juveniles.](#)" by David Finkelhor and Richard Ormrod, of the UNH Crimes Against Children Research Center.

The study used police information generated by a new national crime reporting system that, for the first time, makes information available according to the age of the victim. Data from 12 states was used in the research; however, the authors caution that conclusions drawn from the study may not necessarily reflect national trends.

"When people think about crime against children, often they focus just on juvenile offenders, but adult offenders play a major part," says Finkelhor. "There is a great deal of adult perpetrated juvenile victimization coming into the justice system."

In crimes against children that are reported to police, adults constitute 88 percent of kidnapers and 64 percent of sex offenders. They also make up 43 to 45 percent of offenders in assaults and robberies with juvenile victims. The report also finds that adults make up a particularly large portion (70 percent) of the perpetrators of crimes known to police for victims age 12 and older.

One implication of the study, according to the authors, is that juvenile victims need better assistance coping with the court system. "This system was not designed with juvenile victims in mind," says Finkelhor. "The investigation, the delays, the adversarial process, the confrontation with the alleged offender in court, and the

cross examination -- these are all aspects of the criminal justice process that can be hard on young victims."

Finkelhor points to innovations like Court Schools and Children's Advocacy Centers as examples of programs designed to ease the burden of criminal cases on children. Court Schools give child victims a chance to visit criminal courts and learn about the justice system before having to testify. Child Advocacy Centers try to provide well-coordinated, child-friendly investigations and interviews to reduce the likelihood of trauma.

Other findings of the report include the following:

- Juveniles make up 12 percent of all crime victims known to police, including 71 percent of all sex crime victims and 38 percent of kidnaping victims.
- Simple assault is the most commonly reported crime against juveniles, constituting 41 percent of all juvenile victimizations reported to police. Sexual assaults make up 12 percent, aggravated assaults 11 percent, and kidnapings 1 percent.
- Victims of sex offenses and kidnaping are primarily girls, but boys make up the majority of victims of all other crimes.
- Children under the age of 12 make up approximately one-quarter of all juvenile victims known to police and at least one-half of the juvenile victims of kidnaping and forcible sex offenses.
- Family members and relatives make up 20 percent of the offenders against children, but they make up a majority of offenders against children under age 4 and are disproportionately represented among kidnapers and sex offenders.

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