

Children's sense of safety



Children's experiences of childhood in contemporary Australia

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May 2008

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Professor Chris Goddard is Director of Child Abuse Research Australia in the Faculty of Medicine Nursing and Health Sciences at Monash University. He has published widely in academic journals and writes regularly for the broader media. His latest book, *The Truth is Longer than a Lie: Children's experiences of abuse and professional intervention* (with Dr Neerosh Mudaly) was published by Jessica Kingsley in the UK and US, and was favourably reviewed around the world. Further research at Child Abuse Research Australia is being undertaken into child homicide, and into listening to children's feedback about therapeutic and support services. He can be contacted by email at Chris.Goddard@med.monash.edu.au.

Australian Childhood Foundation

The **Australian Childhood Foundation** is an independent children's charity working in a number of ways to prevent child abuse and reduce the harm it causes to children, families and the community.

- **Specialist Trauma Counselling.** We provide a range of specialist counselling services for children and young people affected by abuse and for their families.
- **Therapeutic care programs.** We provide a range of therapeutic care programs within residential and foster care settings.
- **Advocacy for children.** We speak out for effective protective and support services for children and young people. All our programs affirm the importance of children.
- **Education.** We provide community and professional education, consultancy and debriefing programs. These programs aim to improve responses to children and young people who have experienced or are at risk of abuse, family violence and neglect.
- **Child abuse prevention programs.** We run nationally recognised child abuse prevention programs that seek to decrease the incidence of child abuse and raise awareness about how to stop it even before it starts.
- **Inspiring and supporting parents.** We provide ongoing parenting education seminars and easily accessible resources to strengthen the ability of parents to raise happy and confident children.
- **Research.** In partnership with Monash University, we have established Child Abuse Research Australia to research the problem of child abuse and identify constructive solutions.

The Australian Childhood Foundation won the 1998 National and State Violence Prevention Awards for its efforts to prevent child abuse. In 2005, it was awarded the National Child Protection Award by the Australian Government.

The Australian Childhood Foundation relies on the support of the community to enable it to continue its programs and services.



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Report first published in May 2008.
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ISBN: 0-9775355-3-3

Child Abuse Research Australia, Monash University

The aim of Child Abuse Research Australia is to achieve a permanent and effective reduction in the incidence of child abuse and the harm it causes to children and the community. We believe that the majority of cases of child abuse, neglect and murder are preventable. We further believe that the rights of the child are as important as the rights of the parent.

Our goal is to provide evidence-based advice to governments and child health and welfare organisations. This will guide the development of policies and practices aimed at dramatically reducing the rate of child abuse, neglect and murder.

Child Abuse Research Australia is a unique collaboration between a world-class university and a national child welfare organisation. It is a priority research area for the medical faculty at Monash University, and it undertakes research that guides the counselling and therapies provided by the Australian Childhood Foundation. Recent publications include:

Frederick, J. Goddard, C. Tucci, J. Liddell, M. (2008) Submission to the Special Commission into Child Protection Services in New South Wales. 2008.

Mudaly, N. & Goddard, C (2006) The Truth is Longer than a Lie: Children's experiences of Abuse and Professional Interventions Jessica Kingsley: London and Philadelphia .

Flaherty, N. & Goddard, C. (2008) 'Child neglect and the Little Children are Sacred report' Children Australia Vol 33 (i): 5-11.

Saunders, B.J. & Goddard, C. (in press) Some Australian Children's Perceptions of Physical Punishment in Childhood Children & Society

Saunders, B.J. & Goddard, C. (2007) 'The Importance of Listening to Children: A Qualitative Study on the Use of Parental Physical Punishment in Childhood in Australia' Social Development Issues, Vol 29 (3): 33-46.

Frederick, J & Goddard, C. (2007) 'Exploring the Relationship between Poverty, Childhood Adversity and Child Abuse from the Perspective of Adulthood' Child Abuse Review, Vol 16 (5): 323-341.

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Acknowledgements

This report is part of the 2008 *Become a Childhood Hero* Program developed and run by the Australian Childhood Foundation. Childhood Hero encourages all Australians to support the work of the Australian Childhood Foundation in its efforts to prevent child abuse and reduce the harm it causes to children, families and the community.

Childhood Heroes are ordinary Australians who want to make a difference in the lives of children who have been traumatised by abuse and violence. They want to act together to help prevent child abuse. They do extraordinary things for children, helping them to celebrate the fun, innocence and importance of childhood.

The centerpiece of the 2008 program is a powerful advertising campaign which has been generously donated by Clemenger BBDO. It delivers an evocative message about how critical all adults are in playing a role to protect children.

We would like to thank our long standing patrons and ambassadors including: Stefan Dennis, (Network Ten Neighbours Star), Kate Ritchie (Seven Network Home and Away Star), Chris Hemsworth (Actor), Kim Giele and Dave Noonan (SEA FM), Robyn Moore (Actor) and David Boon (Former Australian Cricketer). We welcome the support of our new patrons of the Foundation, Eric and Rebecca Bana and new Childhood Hero Ambassador, Nadine Gardiner (Seven Network City Homicide Star).

The 2008 Childhood Hero Program has been supported by the significant contributions of Clemenger BBDO, Sofitel Melbourne, Fujifilm, Mitchell and Partners, Style Counsel, Velvet Monkeys, Rothfield Print Management, LOTE Marketing and many other Australian businesses, schools and individuals.

Horizon Communications Group deserves a special note of acknowledgement for embracing Childhood Hero and for their ongoing support of the Australian Childhood Foundation over many years.



A special note of thanks to *Simon McCall*, *Carolyn Tarry* and the team at Quantum Market Research for their support in conducting the survey and providing a preliminary analysis of the data upon which the report is based.



We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Chris Cussen from the Australian Childhood Foundation for undertaking some of the background research for this project.

Finally, we would like to thank the children who took part in the study for their clarity and willingness to share their experiences and views. We would like to express our appreciation for the models who appear in the photos on this publication.

Preface

Rhyming song sung by children in 1800's in Ireland

Weila Weila Waila

There was an old woman and she lived in the woods Weila weila waila
There was an old woman and she lived in the woods Down by the River S?ile

She had a babee three months old

Weila weila waila

She had a baby three months old

Down by the River S?ile

She had a penknife long and sharp

Weila weila waila

She had a penknife long and sharp

Down by the River S?ile

She stuck the knife in the babee`s head

Weila weila waila

The more she stuck it the more it bled

Down by the River S?ile

Three loud knocks came a-knocking on the door Weila weila waila Two policemen and a man

Down by the River S?ile

"Are you the woman what killed the child?"

Weila weila waila

"I am the woman what killed the child"

Down by the River S?ile

They took her away and they put her in the jail Weila weila waila They took her away and they
put her in the jail Down by the River S?ile

They put a rope around her neck

Weila weila waila

They put a rope around her neck

Down by the River S?ile

They pulled the rope and she got hung

Weila weila waila

They pulled the rope and she got hung

Down by the River S?ile

And that was the end of the woman in the wood Weila weila waila That was the end of the end
of the babee too Down by the River S?ile

The moral of this story is

Weila weila waila

Don't stick knives in babees' heads

Down by the River S?ile

Pronounce Weila weila Waila as 'Wheel-ya wheel-ya why-ya and S?ile as saw-ya. It was collected +/- 1800s in the Rathmines area, (near Dublin through which runs the River Swan). Thanks to Shirley Power & Colin Mockett for sharing the words of the song they performed at the National Celtic Festival in 2007 at Port Arlington.

Executive Summary

Significant numbers of children are the victims of all sorts of harm and exploitation on a daily basis in Australia. Despite the unreliable, inadequate and careless approach to collecting data about child abuse, family violence involving children, crimes against children, bullying and other key indicators, it is clear that children are the most vulnerable group to violence. For example,

- In 2006-07, there were 58,563 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in Australia – up by 45% over the past five years.
- The number of children removed from their family for their own protection has more than doubled in the past ten years from 14,078 in 1997 to 28,441 in 2007.
- There are at least 181 000 children forced to live with family violence in Australia each year.
- Children aged between 0 - 5 years experience one of the highest homicide victimization rates of all age groups at 1.9 per 100,000.
- The majority of child homicides are committed by a family member (92%).
- According to the most recent available data, children and young people aged 19 years and younger, over time, have been significantly more likely to be a victim of sexual assault than adults aged 20 years and over.
- A further 50,100 children and young people accompanied at least one parent seeking support through the homeless service system in 2005-06. Of this number, 36 600 were children under nine years of age.
- The most reliable data suggests that 1 in 6 children experience bullying on a weekly basis.

This research report is the third in a series of studies undertaken by the Australian Childhood Foundation, Child Abuse Research Australia and Quantum that seek the views of children and young people about their experiences of childhood in Australia today. It specifically seeks to further explore children's sense of safety.

A national representative sample of 600 children and young people aged between 10-14 years across Australia completed an online survey in April 2007.

The findings suggested that even though on the surface the vast majority of children surveyed believe that Australia is a good place to grow up in, many of them reflect an undercurrent of worry and concern for their own safety and the protection of other children.

More than a quarter of the children in the sample were actively concerned that they might be hurt by an adult (28%) or become a victim of crime (27%). One in five (19%) of those surveyed expressed a degree of anxiety about children not being protected from abuse.

Over half of the children in the sample reported feeling worried about being bullied (57%), teased (54%) and not fitting in with their peers (52%).

The internet, in particular, is perceived as a new source of anxiety and threat for a large number of children and young people. 46% of children reported that they had been exposed to material on the internet which worried them. 27% are worried about the dangers they face over the internet.

They also feel unsafe in their local environment. Overall, 2 in 5 children surveyed felt unsafe in public places, such as shopping centres, cinemas, sporting grounds, walking to school. Just over a quarter of children (27%) were anxious about catching public transport. In each of these findings, a substantial proportion of girls felt more unsafe than boys. In addition, half of the children (51%) surveyed felt that children their age were not made to feel welcome by adults in public places. 1 in 8 children surveyed wanted better spaces for children to be engaged in childhood activities.

Critically, these fears are further amplified because many children feel disconnected from adults whom they perceive not to believe them, listen and take into account their views or respect them. 29% of children hold the view that adults would not believe children if they disclosed abuse to them.

It is only when children feel safe in the relationships with important adults that they are able to experience a broader sense of safety in the world around them.

It is incumbent on all adults to make these whispers of fear more audible. It is a commitment that will enable us to tune into children, understand their vulnerabilities and better ensure their safety.

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Introduction

This research report is the third in a series of studies that seek the views of children and young people about their experiences of childhood in Australia today. It also continues a strong tradition of research that seeks out and documents the voices of children and young people on important issues and experiences (Mudaly and Goddard, 2006; Saunders and Goddard, 2007).

The first study revealed a picture of childhood that is little understood by adults (Tucci, Mitchell and Goddard, 2006). The results appeared to challenge our stereotypical perception of modern childhood. Children and young people described their lives as stressful and held concern for their immediate and long term safety and well-being. Despite modern life offering innovation and opportunities, children were generally uncertain that they will be any better off than previous generations. Children and young people lacked confidence in themselves and felt that they were not doing well enough. They described experiencing emotional turmoil with a concerningly high number of children and young people feeling worried, sad and angry on a regular basis.

The second in the series of reports found, on a range of measures, that children simultaneously hold hopes and significant fears for themselves and their future (Tucci, Mitchell and Goddard, 2007). Findings showed that children were particularly concerned about the environment, climate change and pollution. A substantial proportion were also worried about the escalating tension in the world. The children also described significant levels of insecurity in themselves with concern about their appearance, acceptance by peers and feeling like they are growing up too fast rating highly as issues. The findings also showed that children did not feel generally accepted by adults in the community, often felt unwelcome in shops and cafes and worried about their safety.

This report specifically seeks to further explore children's sense of safety. Safety and security are critical foundations for healthy development. Such experiences are based in the predictability of children's environment, the support they are given by adults to be allowed to explore and learn about their neighborhoods and the contexts in which they live, the confidence in their friends to resource their social life and ultimately a fundamental necessity to trust the adults around them to protect them from harm.

At the heart of any community's commitment to its own survival is the capacity to nurture and foster the growth of its children and young people. In this context, it is critical to regularly measure the extent to which children and young people feel welcomed, safe and supported in their families, their immediate networks of relationships and their local neighborhoods. This is the objective of the current study.

Structure of this report

This report is divided into two sections. The first section attempts to set the context for children by summarizing and profiling key statistical indicators relating to the safety of children in Australia. The second section will detail and analyse the perceptions of children in this study with regard to their own sense of safety and security in contemporary Australia. In the final section, the implications of the key themes from this research are analysed as they relate to parents, all adults, policy makers and those responsible for developing services for children.

Section 1: The safety of children in contemporary Australia

In this first section, the ‘measured reality’ of safety and risk for children and young people in contemporary Australia is described using a series of key indicators and studies covering child abuse and neglect, family violence, crimes perpetrated against children, child and youth homelessness, internet exploitation, bullying and community safety.

It is an indictment on Commonwealth and State Governments that the data underpinning the measures of children’s safety is so unreliable and flawed.

A number of measures are plagued by definitional inconsistencies across state and territory jurisdictions. For example, every year, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare releases its report on child protection with a warning to “interpret relevant statistical information with caution” (AIHW 2008). The AIHW stresses that “it is not possible to calculate the exact proportion of children who were the subject of more than one notification or substantiation”.

Indeed, the reporting and collection of national data for assaults against children was suspended altogether in 2003 – now five years ago, because of a basic lack of uniformity across jurisdictions.

There is not even a national system of recording and reviewing the deaths of children whose deaths have been associated with abuse and neglect.

This failure to collate even the most basic measures would not be tolerated in cancer or road trauma research.

As a consequence, it is difficult to confidently ascertain how dangerous Australia is in relation to the exploitation and violation of children. It is also almost impossible to determine whether there are any real changes in risks to children over time.

It is more than likely that the picture that this data portrays is an underestimate of the level of harm and exploitation that children and young people experience on a daily basis in Australia.

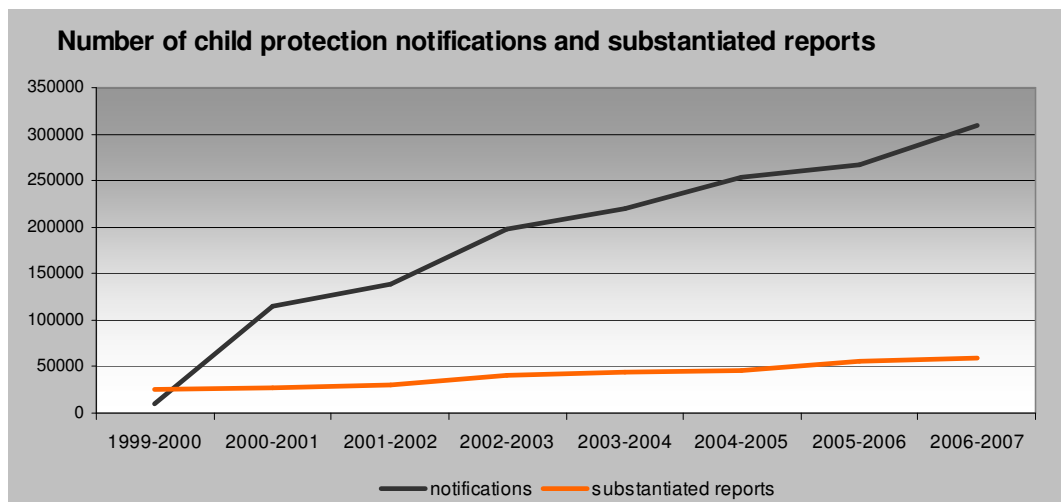
Child Abuse and Neglect

In 2006-07, there were 58,563 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in Australia – up by 45% over the past five years.

The number of children removed from their family for their own protection has more than doubled in the past ten years from 14,078 in 1997 to 28,441 in 2007.

There is no accurate information about the prevalence and incidence of child abuse in Australia. Definitions of what constitutes abuse vary across states thus making it difficult to compare data between states. Whilst inherently limited, the best available, and most often relied upon data relating to the problem of child abuse in Australia comes from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and highlights the mounting crisis of abuse and neglect in Australia.

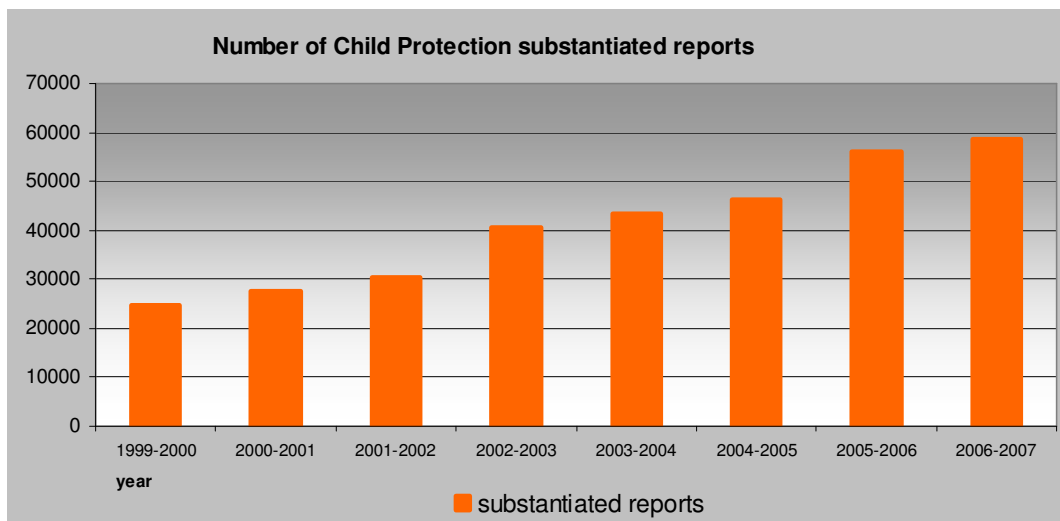
Child abuse notifications have increased more than 50% over the last five years from 198,355 in 2002-03 to 309,517 in 2006-07 (AIHW, 2008).



2000-2001 substantiated cases- no data available therefore data averaged across the surrounding years
2003-2004 substantiated cases no data found therefore data averaged across the surrounding years

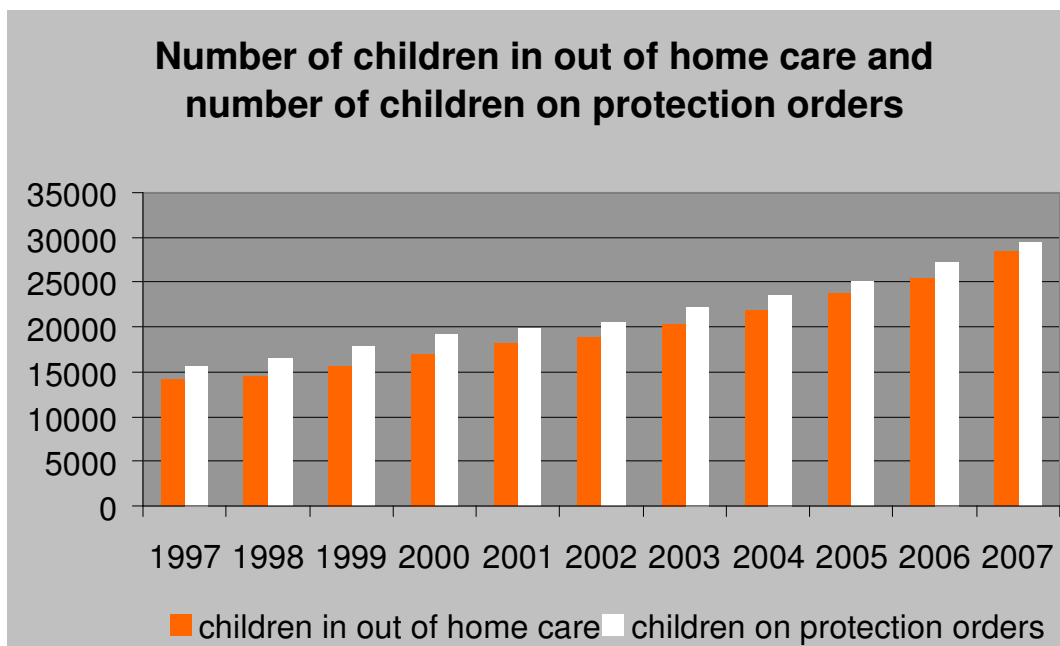
According to the AIHW (2008), girls are three times more likely than boys to be the subject of a substantiated report of sexual abuse. However, boys are more likely to be involved in a substantiated report of physical abuse.

Similarly, as can be seen in the table below, the number of substantiated cases of child abuse have increased by 45% over the past five years from 40,416 in 2002-03 to 58,563 in 2006-07. Rates of substantiated abuse decrease as the age of the child increases (AIHW, 2008).



2000-2001 substantiated cases- no data available therefore data averaged across the surrounding years
 2003-2004 substantiated cases no data found therefore data averaged across the surrounding years

The number of children placed on care and protection orders has increased 87% in the past ten years from 15,718 in 1997 to 29,406 in 2007. Finally, the number of children removed from home due to abuse and neglect has increased 102% in the past ten years from 14,078 in 1997 to 28,441 in 2007. The number of children placed away from home increased 12% in the past year alone (AIHW, 2008).



2004 entry for children on protection orders estimated from averaged surrounding data as no data available

Indigenous children remain over represented in child protection statistics. They are five times more likely to than non-Indigenous children be the subject of a substantiated report of child abuse. They are seven time more likely to be placed on a child protection than non-Indigenous children and eight times more likely to be removed from the care of their parents and placed in alternate accommodation (AIHW, 2008).

Family Violence

There are at least 181 000 children forced to live with family violence in Australia each year.

As described by Laing (2000), methodological problems in measuring the prevalence of domestic violence in general, similarly constrain our ability to estimate the number of children and young people affected. Most studies rely on reports by caregivers. Studies in which both mothers and children are interviewed invariably indicate that children and young people have a higher level of awareness of the violence than their mothers report.

Notwithstanding methodological problems in establishing the size of the problem, a range of studies agree that hundreds of thousands of children are exposed to domestic violence in Australia each year. A study by UNICEF examining the issue of children and domestic violence in twenty countries estimated that the number of Australian children exposed to domestic violence is between 75,000 and 640,000 per year (UNICEF, 2006).

In New South Wales alone, the Department of Community Services received 286,033 reports relating to 123,690 children in 2006-07 for reasons of domestic violence. In 2006-07, domestic violence was an issue in 45% of all reports of child abuse and neglect (DOCS, 2008).

In research involving 5000 young people between the ages of 12 and 20 years, Indermaur (2001) suggested that one quarter of all Australian children have witnessed physically violent behaviour towards their mother or step-mother. Physically violent behaviour was defined as behaviour including throwing objects, hitting or attempted hitting, use of or threatened with a knife or gun.

In 2004, Access Economics reported that 353,600 women experienced domestic violence in 2002-03. Within this context it was estimated that 263,000 children were living with victims of domestic violence in the same year with 181,200 children having witnessed the violence. The economic cost of domestic violence to children specifically was conservatively calculated at \$769 million for this period (Access Economics, 2004).

Criminal Victimisation of Children

There were 101 children aged under 15 years of age who were known to be victims of homicide in Australia in the past three years.

Children aged between 0 - 5 years experience one of the highest homicide victimization rates of all age groups at 1.9 per 100,000.

The majority of child homicides are committed by a family member (92%) with all children killed by someone they knew.

Official police records show that there were 12 395 children under 15 years of age who were victims of an assault in 2003 – the last year that national data was kept.

Official police records show that there were 7502 children under 15 years of age who were victims of a sexual assault in 2003 – the last year that national data was kept.

According to the most recent available data, children aged 0-19 years, over time, have been significantly more likely to be a victim of sexual assault than adults aged 20 years and over, with female children at all ages, at the highest risk.

Young people aged 15-19 years are significantly more likely to be a victim of robbery than the general population. In relation to robbery, boys are much more likely to be victimized than girls.

In their report, *The State of Victoria's Children Report, 2006*, the Department of Human Services notes that young people are more likely than adults to be victims of crime.

Murder/Child Homicide/Fatal Child Abuse

The terminology used to describe children who have died as a result of the acts of another is variously described as murder (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007), child homicide (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2006), filicide, that is murder of a child by a custodial or non-custodial parent (Mouzos and Rushforth, 2003), fatal child abuse (Irenyi, Kovacs and Richardson, 2008) and fatal assault of children (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2008). Slippage between these various terms contributes additional confusion to the ability to establish the precise numbers of children killed each year as a result of the behaviour of another. With each term comes definitional and data collection variations and limitations.

The Australian Institute of Criminology National Homicide Monitoring Program reported that of the total 283 homicides recorded in 2005-06, 35 involved children under 15 years of age (20 female and 15 male) (Mouzos and Houliaras, 2007). Eleven infants aged under one year were killed during this period. Children aged between 0-5 years experience one of the highest homicide victimization rates at 1.9 per 100,000. Only adults aged between 20-39 years have a higher victimisation rate.

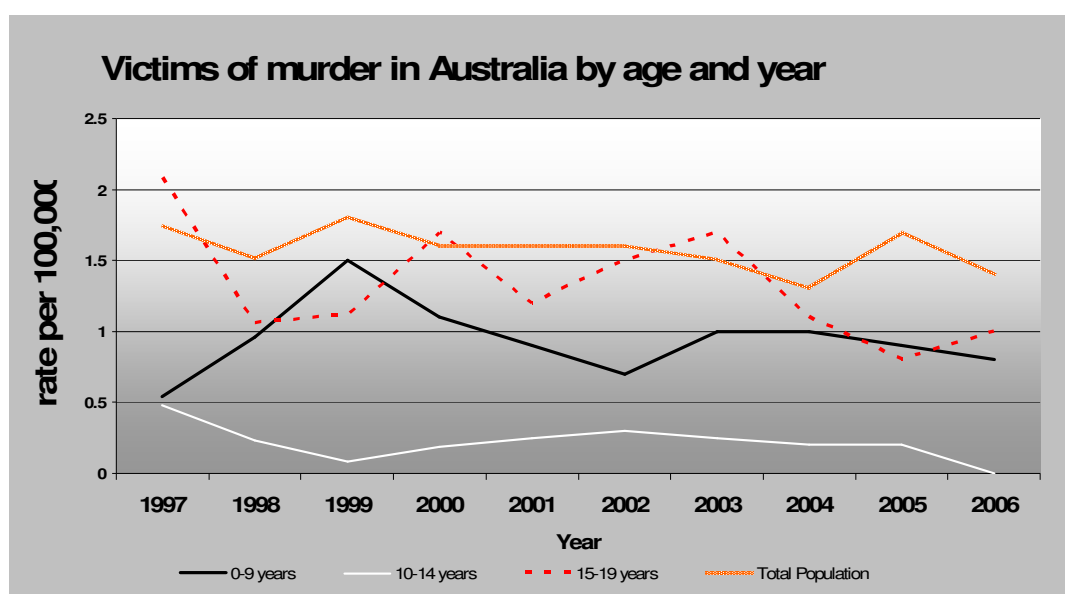
The majority of child homicides are committed by a family member (92%) with all children killed by someone they knew (Mouzos and Houliaras, 2007). This contrasts starkly with the public fear that children are at risk of abduction and murder by a stranger. The majority of children (80%) are killed at home, with nearly one third beaten to death by a parent using their hands and feet.

Others have suggested it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics about fatal child abuse due to the lack of comprehensive data collection across all states. Whilst not all states collect the data,

in those states that do, there is a general consensus that the figures under-represent the size of the problem because some deaths labeled as 'accidental deaths' might actually be attributable to child abuse and neglect (Irenyi, Kovacs and Richardson, 2008).

The following tables and statistics are drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Recorded Crime data 1996-2006 (ABS, 2007). Recorded crime statistics are those recorded by police that are either reported by the victim or a witness or detected by police. These statistics do not form a complete picture of all crime because not all crime comes to police attention, nor are all incidents reported to the police recorded as a crime.

The following tables show the rates of victimisation of children and young people in relation to a range of serious crimes compared to the rate of victimisation for the population between 1996 and 2007. Whilst the tables detail victimisation rates according to age, it is also the case that gender plays a significant role, at times, in the likelihood of victimisation.



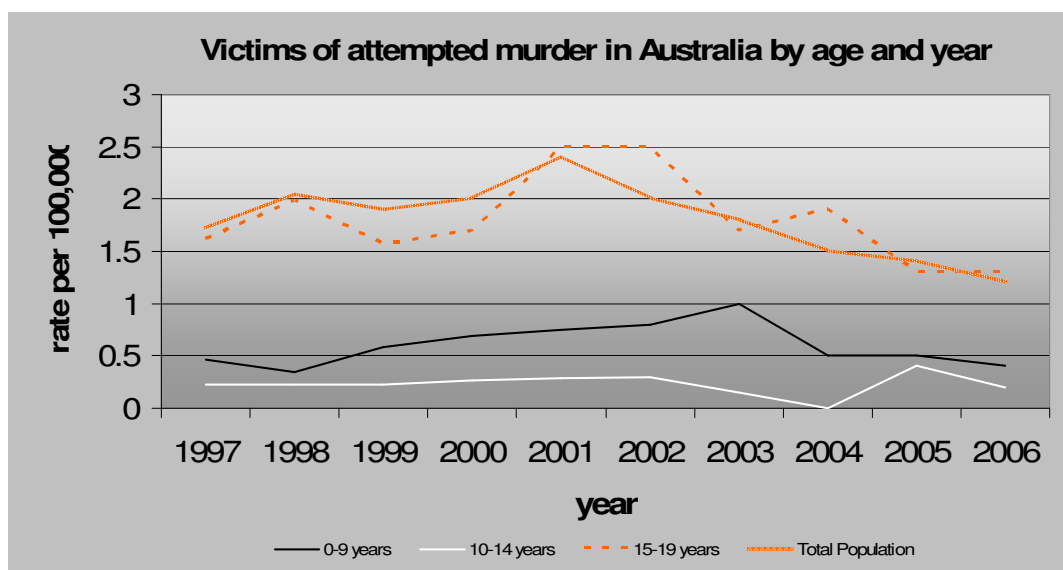
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Recorded Crime data 1996-2006 (ABS, 2007).
 2000-2001- no data available therefore data averaged between 1999-2002
 2003 for 10-14year old no abs data so averaged across the 04-02

Victimisation rates in 2006 (ABS, 2007) showed that boys aged 0-9 years were nearly twice as likely to be a victim of murder (1.1 per 100,000) or attempted murder (0.5 per 100,000) than girls of the same age (0.6 per 100,000 and 0.3 per 100,000 respectively). In 2004, boys aged 0-9 years were almost as likely (1.2 per 100,000) as the general population (1.3 per 100,000) to be murdered.

Girls aged between 15-19 years (1.3 per 100,000) were significantly more likely than younger girls (0.6 per 100,000 for 0 – 9 year olds) and almost as likely as the general population to be a victim of murder in 2006 (compared to 1.4 per 100,000).

Attempted Murder

The table below clearly shows that young people aged between 15 and 19 years are, on average, as likely as the general population to be a victim of attempted murder. However, when gender is taken into account the risks for boys in this age group become more apparent. In 2006, for example, a boy aged between 15 -19 years was significantly more likely (2.1 per 100,000) than the general population (1.2 per 100,000) to be a victim of attempted murder and five times as likely as a peer aged girl (0.4 per 100,000).



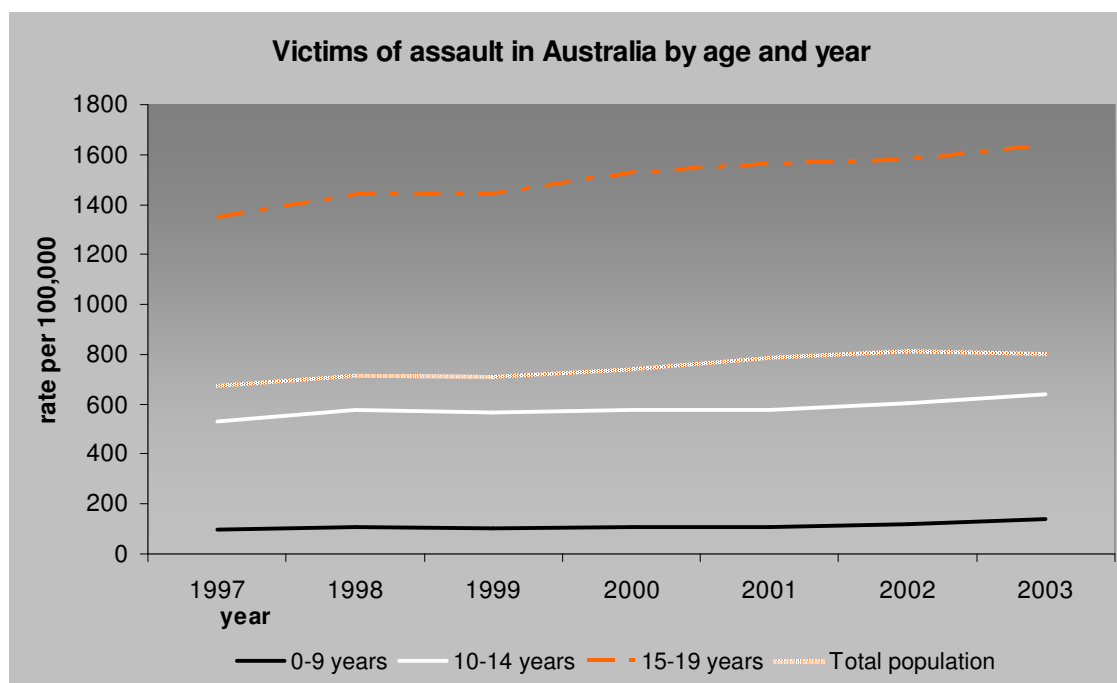
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Recorded Crime data 1996-2006 (ABS, 2007).

2000-2001- no data available therefore data averaged 1999-2002

2003 for 10-14 year old no abs data so averaged across the 2002-2004

Assault

Recorded Crime data collection for assaults was ceased in 2004 due to definitional variation between states as to what constituted an assault (ABS 2008a). It is the understanding of the authors that data collection in regard to these crimes will recommence in when there is greater definitional alignment of assault across the states. Notwithstanding the lack of recent data the following figures portray young people to be at an alarmingly high risk of assault. In 2003, boys aged between 10-14 years were almost as likely (760.1 per 100,000) to be a victim of assault as the general population (798.0 per 100,000), whilst boys aged between 15-19 years were more than twice as likely (1825.6 per 100,000) as the general population to be assaulted. Girls aged between 15-19 years were more likely than 20-34 year old women to be a victim of assault and nearly twice the level of victimization as the general population.

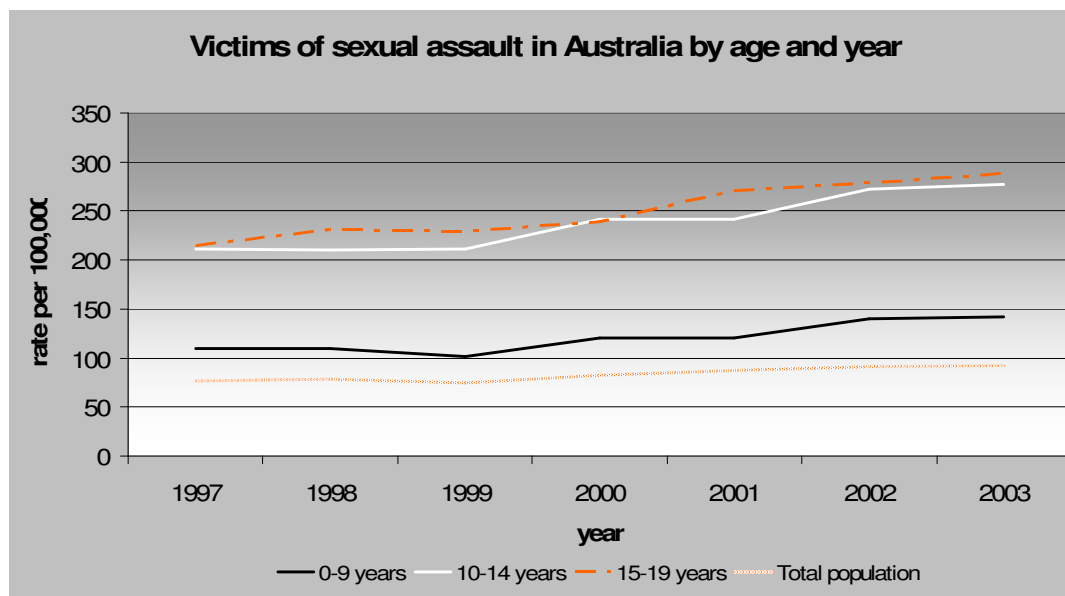


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Recorded Crime data 1996-2006 (ABS, 2007).

2000-2001- no data available therefore data averaged between 1999-2002

Sexual Assault

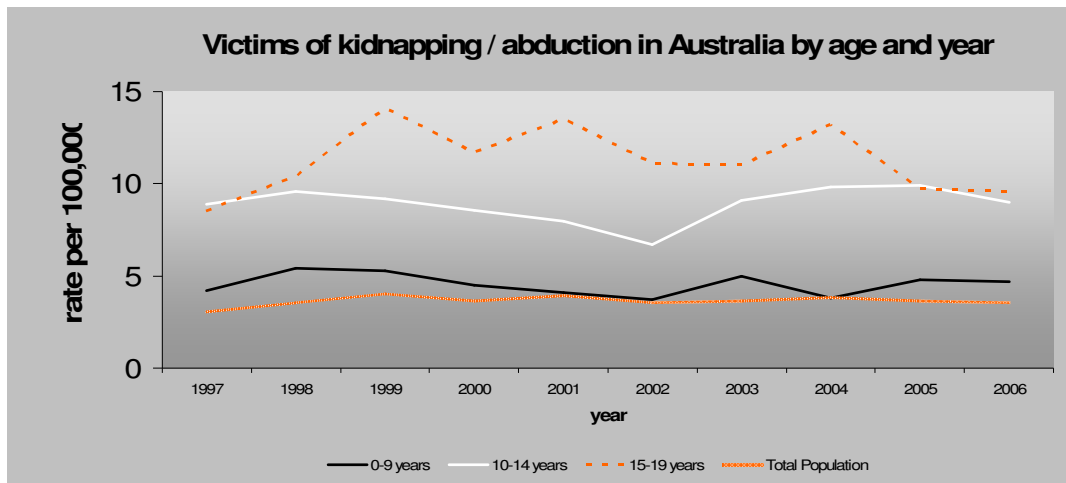
Data collection in relation to sexual assault ceased after 2003 for the reasons outlined above in relation to data for assault. However, according to the most recent available data, children aged 0-19 years, over time, have been significantly more likely to be a victim of sexual assault than adults aged 20 years and over, with female children at all ages, at the highest risk. In 2003, girls aged 0-9 years were more than twice as likely to be a victim of sexual assault (195.8 per 100,000), whilst girls aged 10-14 years were more than four times more likely (474.7 per 100,000) and girls aged 15-19 years were more than five times more likely (519.6 per 100,000) to be victims of sexual assault than the general population (91.7 per 100,000).



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Recorded Crime 1996-2006 (ABS, 2007).
2000-2001- no data available therefore data averaged between 1999-2002

Kidnapping/Abduction

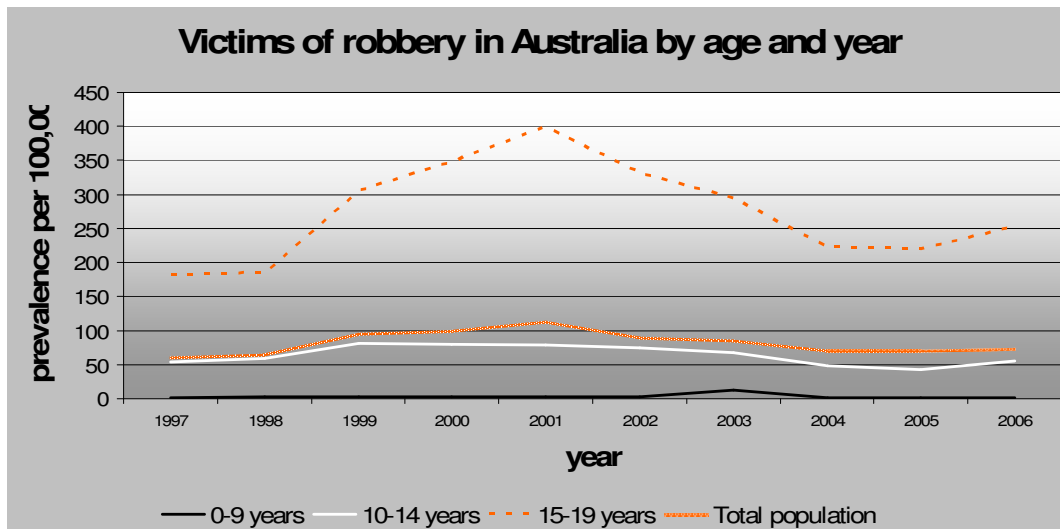
The table below clearly shows that children aged 0-19 years are at greater risk of abduction or kidnapping than the general population. Interestingly, the risk to children increases with age and gender. Whilst in 2006, there was little gender variation between victimisation rates for boys (4.2 per 100,000) and girls (5.0 per 100,000) aged 0-9 years gender plays an increasingly significant role for children in the older age groups. Girls aged 10-14 years were four times as likely to be abducted compared to their male peers who were twice as likely, whilst girls aged 15-19 years were more than five times as likely to be abducted compared to their male peers.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Recorded Crime data 1996-2006 (ABS, 2007).
 2000-2001- no data available therefore data averaged between 1999-2002

Robbery

Whilst children under the age of nine years are unlikely to be a victim of robbery, the chart below shows that children aged 10-14 years are at least as likely to be a victim of robbery as the general population whilst children aged 15-19 years are significantly more likely to be a victim. In relation to robbery, boys are much more likely to be victimized than girls. In 2006, boys aged 10-14 years were more than five times as likely (92.9 per 100,000) than peer aged girls (16.3 per 100,000) to be a victim of robbery. This rate increases significantly with age. Boys aged 15-19 years are more than four times as likely (408.0 per 100,000) to be a victim of robbery compared to the general population (71.4 per 100,000).



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Recorded Crime data 1996-2006 (ABS, 2007).
 2000-2001- no data available therefore data averaged between 1999-2002. Figures for 1997-1999 un-armed robbery

Children and Young People in Public Places

Reviewing the findings of the Crime Victimization in Australia Survey, Johnson (2005) notes that

“concerns about crime are generally more widespread than recent direct experiences of victimisation. While awareness and concern about crime can be positive and lead to behaviours that reduce the risk of victimisation, for some more vulnerable members of society, such as women and the elderly, fear of crime can result in serious curtailment of everyday activities, lost opportunity, and a reduction in the quality of life (Johnson 1996). If fear becomes extreme and residents retreat from public spaces, the result may be a gradual decline in the character of communities.....(Skogan, 1990).”

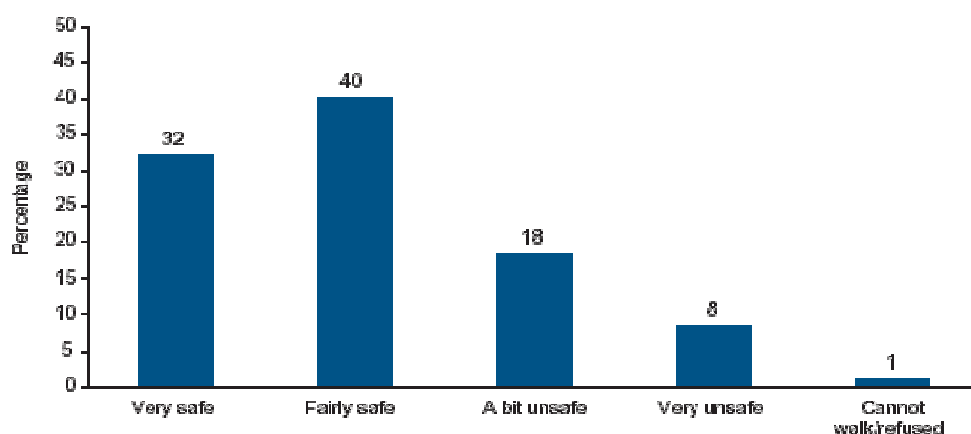
Research undertaken in Britain found that 71% adults played outside in the street or area close to home as children compared with 21% of children these days (Beunderman, Hannon and Bradwell, 2007). This echoes previous research by the authors that suggests that both adults and children perceive public spaces to be potentially unsafe and unwelcoming (Tucci, Mitchell and Goddard, 2005; 2006; 2007). Some have argued that ‘parental paranoia’ over the safety of their children is undermining the confidence and emotional development of their children (Owen, 2007).

This review was unable to obtain any published Australian research undertaken with children and young people with regard to their sense of safety and comfort in their local communities. As such the following studies involving adults are described as a means of establishing a general sense of public safety in the community.

The Department of Human Services, Victorian Population Health Survey, 2005, collected information from parents of children with the question, “Do you feel safe walking alone down your street after dark?” Whilst 60.4% of parents indicated they did feel safe a significant number indicated that they only felt safe sometimes (14.5%), didn’t often feel safe (5.7%) or never felt safe (16.6%) (DHS, 2006).

Similarly, the Crime Victimization Survey (Johnson, 2005) showed that the majority of Australians, aged 16 years and over, feel relatively safe in their local environment. However on the dimensions of ‘walking alone at night in your local neighborhood’ and ‘using public transport’, it is clear that there is a significant proportion of respondents who do not share this sense of safety. More than 1 in 4 respondents (26%) report feeling unsafe walking alone at night in their local area, with almost 1 in 10 respondents (8%) feeling very unsafe.

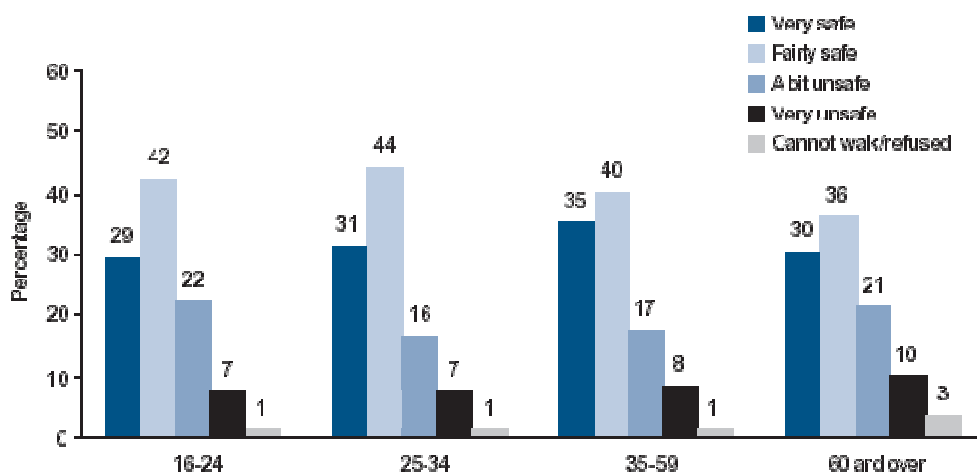
Feelings of safety walking alone in the neighbourhood after dark



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, International Crime Victimization Survey, 2004

There are some important differences in perceptions of safety amongst various groups in the population. For example, women were more than twice as likely as men to say they feel a bit unsafe and four times as likely to say they feel very unsafe walking alone in the local area after dark (Johnson, 2005). The chart below also shows that people aged between 16-24 years are more likely to feel unsafe than people aged between 25 – 60 years, with 29% of young people indicating they feel unsafe at night in their local neighborhoods. Interestingly, this level of fear correlate most closely with those aged over 60 years. Fear expressed by younger people reflects their higher risk of personal victimisation (Johnson, 2005).

Feelings of safety walking alone in the local area after dark by age group

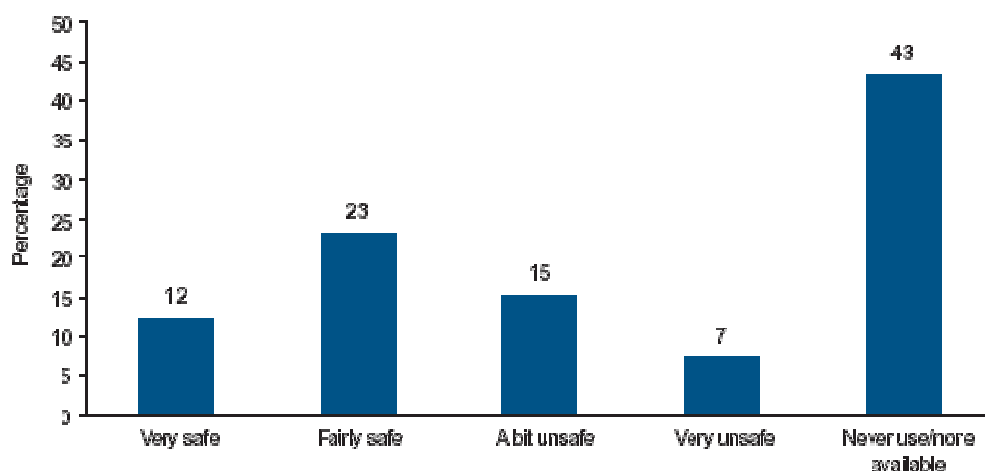


Differences are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, International Crime Victimization Survey, 2004

Whilst the chart below shows that of the people who do use public transport more than 1 in 5 people (22%) feel unsafe using public transport after dark.

Feelings of safety using public transportation after dark



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, International Crime Victimization Survey, 2004

Women are about four times as likely as men to say they feel very unsafe while waiting for or using public transportation. According to Johnson (2005) perceptions of personal safety are linked to personal vulnerability associated with:

- being female, young and living in a disadvantaged neighborhood;
- belonging to a minority group; and
- previous experiences of crime victimisation.

In their United Kingdom study of children and young people, Beunderman et al (2007) contend that

“The freedom of children and young people to roam around, to play independently and to discover the world is crucial to their development and happiness.....because of the importance of this process.....the way that children experience the public realm and how they are treated in it is an integral part of their wellbeing.” p 25

Further they state perceive that

“....children are repeatedly let down by the places they live in. For different reasons, and in different ways, children and young people experience the negative impacts of a public realm that is neglected, unwelcoming, unsafe or downright hostile.....In the short term their self-esteem is undermined by unwelcoming and uncared for places, creating feelings of powerlessness and disrespect.” p 39

As a community, it appears that we are both concerned for the safety of children and young people whilst at the same time feeling increasingly fearful of them. Young people are often blamed for a range of social ills resulting in their negative stereotyping. These attitudes serve to disadvantage and separate young people from the very communities that should be prioritising their care and protection. As a result, a number of key researchers have argued for the need to challenge these beliefs. Rather than treating young people as social problems, they need to be seen as individuals with their own rights and needs (Kitzinger, 1994; NSW Child Protection Council, 1998; Patton, 1999).

It has been argued that young people are acutely sensitive to the societal forces surrounding them and that as a result they serve as a barometer for society (Frederico et al, 1999). Certainly, the focus of the media on negative issues and images of young people has continued to fuel this attitude. In 2000 the Queensland Children's Commissioner commented that a major task facing our society is overcoming the inter-generational and systemic mistrust and prejudice that defines young people today (Sullivan and Landers, 2000).

Homelessness

A total of 13,200 children and young people under the age of 17 accessed homeless support services in their own right in 2005-06.

A further 50,100 children and young people accompanied at least one parent seeking support through the homeless service system in 2005-06. Of this number, 36 600 were children under nine years of age.

Homelessness is commonly defined as a problem that largely effects adults. However, according to a report recently released by the National Youth Commission (2008), youth homelessness is worse in 2008 than it was twenty years ago, having doubled since the Burdekin Inquiry in 1989. The report revealed that in 2001, 36,173 young people aged between 12 – 24 years were homeless, comprising one third of all homeless people. Young people experiencing homelessness come from a range of family backgrounds and most often become homeless due to family relationship difficulties. In addition, 9,941 children aged under the age of 12 years accompanied their parents into homeless services.

According to the AIHW report (2007), a total of 13,200 children and young people under the age of 17 accessed homeless support services in their own right in 2005-06. A further 50,100 children and young people accompanied at least one parent seeking support through the homeless service system in 2005-06. Of this number, 36 600 were children under nine years of age.

The National Youth Commission (2008) report highlighted that young people admitted to state care due to abuse, neglect and family breakdown are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless and are over-represented in the homeless population. Further, the report identified a clear link between youth homelessness and a series of health issues including drug and alcohol, mental health, trauma grief and disturbed emotional states. Finally, homeless young people are often the victims of crime rather than the perpetrators of it as is often reported in the media.

Young people experiencing homelessness need “....a stable home; friends; healthy nutrition; to have adequate education support; help when they need help; and reliable adults in their lives (National Youth Commission, 2008; p 7-8).”

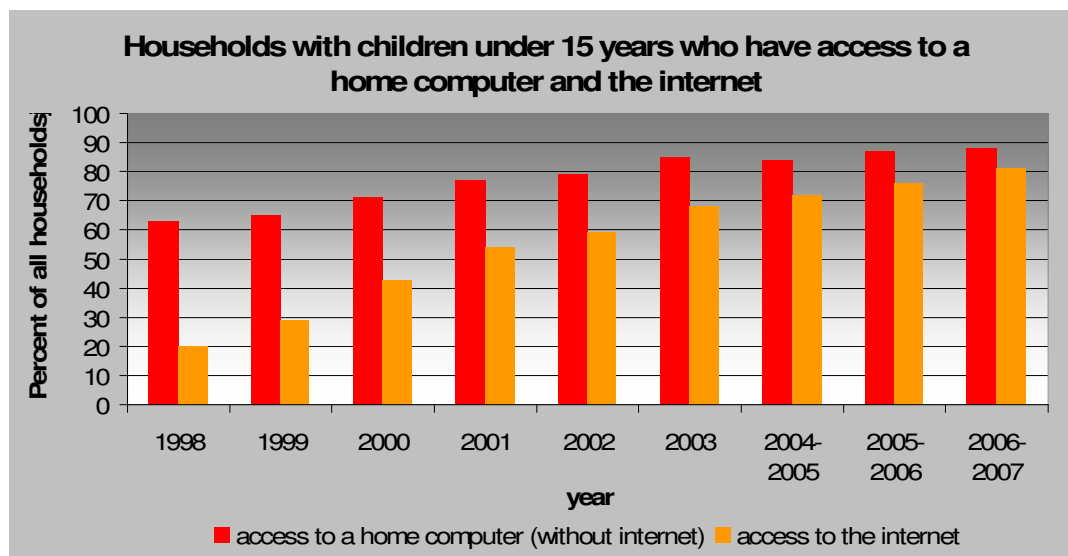
Internet and children

At least 47% of young people in Australia accessing the internet have inadvertently been exposed to pornographic material.

According to latest research, whilst the main purpose of internet use amongst young people is to remain socially connected, assist with homework and for entertainment, many of them are exposed to pornography, violent images and bullying in the process (Fleming et al, 2006).

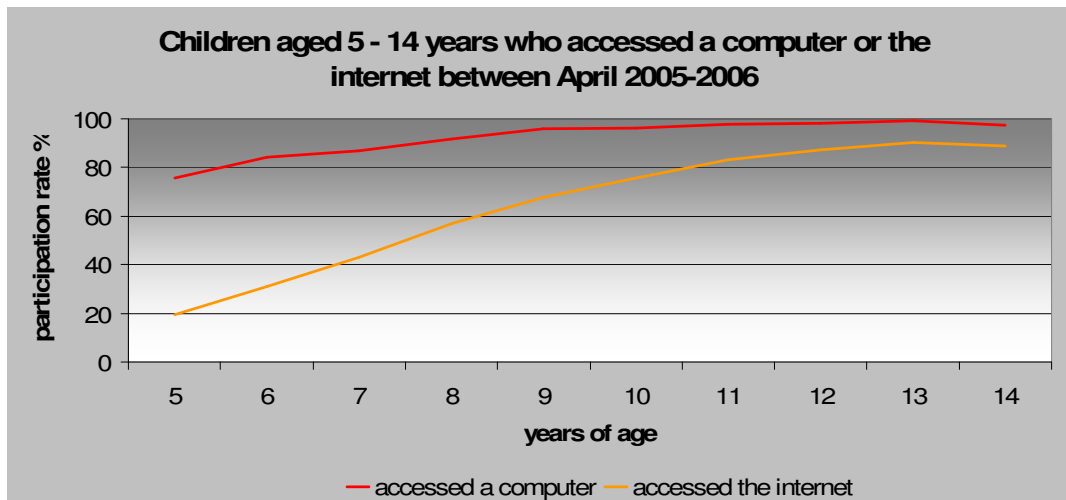
Risks to children and young people over the internet have been the subject of much attention and concern over recent years. This has in the main been driven by the growth in the use of the internet by children and young people and reports of the predatory behaviour of some adults on the internet emerge. A study by the Australian Communication and Media Authority (2007), involving 1000 children aged between 8- 17 years, found that 98% of children in the study had access to a computer with the average child spending 1.25 hours on the internet per day. Internet usage increased with age with average internet usage increasing to 2.5 hours per day for 15 – 17 year olds.

Illustrating the access to and use of computers and the internet, the following table shows the extent to which children aged under 15 years are engaging with this technology.



Source: Household Use of Information Technology, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007

From their survey of Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities in 2006, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that the use of the computer and internet by children as young as 5 years constitutes a significant out of school hours activity for the vast majority of children (92%). This figure is consistent with the findings of earlier surveys that showed that whilst computer usage has remained relatively unchanged (93% in 2003 and 95% in 2000), internet usage has increased significantly by this age group since 2000. In 2000, 47% of children used the internet, increasing significantly in 2003 to 64% of children and again increasing slightly in 2006 to 65% of children (ABS, 2006). As can be seen in the chart below, computer and internet usage varied with age.



Source: Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006

In their survey of 692 young people aged between 13 -16 years in Australia, Fleming et al (2006) found that whilst the main purpose of internet use amongst young people was to remain socially connected, assist with homework and for entertainment, many young people were being exposed to pornography, violent images and bullying.

Flood and Hamilton (2003) in their study of 16-17 year old Australian young people found that 84% of males and 60% of females indicated they had been unintentionally exposed to online sexual material.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority's (2001) survey of 192 young people aged between 11 - 17 years found that almost half (47%) reported having been exposed to offensive content such as violence, pornography and nudity. The overwhelming majority of offensive content cited by these teens was pornography. Only 44% of respondents told their parents about the incident.

A Flinders University study with 114 young people aged between 13 – 17 years explored the use of internet chat rooms and found that the exchanges in chat rooms can be a source of stress and strain to adolescents, and that emotional and psychological abuse, particularly bullying, is a regular occurrence (Mubarak, 2005). The study found that more than half (56%) of the young people surveyed reported 'no parental interest' in their chat room with only 18% of respondents receiving 'parental guidance and support' relating to their use of chat rooms. Some 62% of young people surveyed felt that they needed professional help in dealing with the problems of chat room use, but were reluctant to make use of existing counsellors at school, feeling that adults who did not use chat rooms would be unable to understand or empathise with their problems. Assistance from younger, technologically savvy professionals was preferred, with initial contact online rather than face-to-face, at least initially.

Bullying

The most reliable data suggests that 1 in 6 children experience bullying on a weekly basis (Rigby 2004).

Kids Help Line (2004) identifies bullying as one of the major issues facing children, young people and their parents with 94% of all callers had been bullied at least once. 25% of callers indicated they were bullied frequently, whilst a further 41% suggested the bullying was episodic with 10% suggesting they were bullied constantly.

Bullying has always occurred but seems underestimated in both its extent and severity (Kids Help Line, 2004). Estimates of the prevalence of bullying vary widely, in part due to the lack of a uniform definition. From his research with children, Rigby (1997) estimates that 1 in 6 Australian children are bullied on a weekly basis. In his literature review of bullying in schools in 2006, Rigby found that:

- although there is no consistent evidence that bullying overall is increasing, one growing area of concern is cyber bullying;
- boys are physically bullied more than girls;
- girls are more often involved in indirect forms of aggressions such as excluding others, rumour spreading and unpleasant manipulation of situations to hurt those they do not like;
- differences in the nature and frequency of victimization by children vary according to age. Bullying among younger children is proportionately more physical whilst with older children it is more indirect and subtle (Rigby, 2006).

Kids Help Line (2004) identifies bullying as one of the major issues facing children, young people and their parents. Seventy-five percent of calls about bullying received in 2003 by the help line were made by 10-14 years old children, suggesting most bullying occurs in the late primary and early secondary school years (Kids Help Line, 2004). Their data also indicated that 94% of all callers had been bullied at least once. Twenty-five percent of callers indicated they were bullied frequently, whilst a further 41% suggested the bullying was episodic with 10% suggesting they were bullied constantly.

Rigby (1997) found that whilst a substantial proportion of children indicated they would not tell anyone if they were being bullied, those that would tell indicated they would most likely tell their friends, followed by their mother and father. Teachers were nominated as the least likely to be told. Forty percent of boys and a quarter of girls in the study who were bullied weekly did not tell their friends with a larger proportion not telling their parents. The study showed that informing others about bullying decreases with the increasing age of the child on the basis that it is somehow shameful to be 'dobbing' on someone else.

Half of the children in Rigby's study (1997) indicated that when they had told someone the situation did not substantially improve.

To whom do children turn?

In previous research by the authors, children and young people reported that they

“.....feel held in little regard by the community at large. Significant numbers of children feel they are not respected by adults generally, that adults do not care about what they think. More than half the children feel they are not welcome in public places such as shops and cafes. This study has shown that in the main, children feel valued and supported by those in their immediate environment but beyond the front gate it is a different story.”

(Tucci, Mitchell and Goddard, 2007. P25)

These findings are consistent with similar research undertaken by the NSPCC in Britain. In a 2004 survey of 11-16 year olds, the NSPCC found that young people want adults to listen to them and believe them. More than one third had wanted to talk to someone about a problem in the last 12 months with 3 in 10 of these young people indicating they had no-one to talk to about their worries and concerns (NSPCC, 2004a). Mothers and friends were the people young people preferred to talk to about their problems. Ten percent of young people indicated they would speak to a teacher. One in seven young people indicated they could not talk to parents about their worries with 25% of these suggesting the reasons included believing they would be told off or made to feel stupid if they spoke out. Two in five young people indicated they would not speak to a friend for fear of being laughed at (NSPCC, 2004a).

Prout (2001) argues that children and adults can hold different perspectives about many aspects of life. As such, the differing priorities of children and adults are important to understand when considering children's problems and adults' perceptions of and responses to them.

Further research by the NSPCC found that children encounter a range of obstacles when telling people about the difficulties they are facing including:

- Having no-one to talk to;
- Feeling they won't be listened to, taken seriously or believed;
- A belief in the need to rely on themselves;
- A sense of futility about sharing problems and a belief that nothing will change as a result;
- Embarrassment;
- Not wanting to burden others;
- Fear of getting oneself or someone else into trouble;
- Concern that adults will trivialize or over-react and make matters worse;
- Fear of a lack of control of the information shared and how the information will be acted on by adults/or being made to do something against their will;
- Limited knowledge of formal helping services and what they do; and
- The stigma of involvement with formal agencies (NSPCC, 2004b).

Information about the extent to which children disclose about experiences of abuse and neglect and to whom they disclose is limited. It is, none the less, generally accepted that many children will only ever partially disclose, disclose incrementally, or may never disclose.

Additional barriers to children seeking help in relation to abuse and neglect can include the extent to which the issue of abuse or neglect is taboo in open conversation, the extent to which the abuse renders the child feeling even more isolated and lacking in self-worth and fears about the consequences of telling. Barriers may also be compounded by issues of gender, disability, age, ethnic and cultural differences (NSPCC, 2004b).

Section 2: Current Study Methodology

Aims of research

The key objectives of this research were to

- understand the extent to which children and young people feel safe within their immediate and neighborhood environments;
- explore the views of children and young people in relation to what they need from families and the community to assist them to feel safe;
- explore the primary sources of support relied on by children and young people today; and,
- develop a basis for informing the evolution of public policy which seeks to further include the voices of children and young people.

Survey method

The study is based on an online survey conducted by Quantum Market Research with a nationally representative sample of 600 children and young people aged between 10-14 years across Australia in April 2007.

Survey sample

Total Sample	N=600
Gender	%
Male	52
Female	48
Age	
10 years old	22
11 years old	15
12 years old	15
13 years old	17
14 years old	31
Location	
New South Wales	33
Victoria	25
Queensland	19
Western Australia	10
South Australia	8
Tasmania	2
Australian Capital Territory	2
Northern Territory	1

Critical findings

The following tables summarise the key findings of the survey results. They are presented as a series of interconnecting themes emerging from the data. For the purposes of this report, the term 'children' is used to describe both children and young people.

Children agree Australia is a good place to grow up in.....

Key findings	%
Australia is a good place to grow up	96

...and have a largely carefree outlook

Key findings	%
Friends	22
Have fun/play/enjoy life	19
Don't have to go to work	14
No responsibilities	11
Playing sport	10
Don't have to worry about money	9
Good family/parents look after me	8
School	7
Computer/video games/internet	6
Holidays	6

Children are clear that childhood experiences are different to adult experiences because they have fewer responsibilities, such as going to work and needing to be concerned about money. This leaves them free to enjoy the activities of childhood which centre around playing and having fun. It is also important for children to be part of supportive networks who are able to resource their development and nurture them.

However, there is evidence that children are frightened about being victimised and hurt.

Key findings
28% of children worry about being hurt by an adult
27% of children fear being a victim of crime
Almost 1 in 5 children (19%) worry about children not being protected from abuse

A significant proportion of children in the sample worry about their own safety and the safety of other children. More than a quarter of the children in the sample were actively concerned that they might be hurt by an adult or become a victim of crime. This finding is consistent with an earlier study by the authors that found 31% of children are concerned they will be a victim of crime at some stage in their lives (Tucci et al, 2006). One in five of those surveyed expressed a degree of anxiety about children not being protected from abuse.

Taken together, these results suggest that adults are perceived as a threat for a substantial number of Australian children. For these children, their very sense of safety is undermined by a fear of being victimized and harmed by an adult.

Bullying is also a major concern for children.

Key findings	Overall
	%
Being teased	57
Not fitting in with friends	54
Being bullied	52

Over half of the children in the sample reported feeling worried about being bullied, teased and not fitting in with their peers. Despite efforts to date to prevent or reduce the experiences of bullying at school, it would seem that a substantial proportion of children continue to perceive it as a significantly critical source of tension and concern in their every day lives.

The internet presents dangers and risks to children.

Key findings

46% of children have seen material on the internet that has worried them
27% of children are worried about the dangers they face over the internet
24% of children feel unsafe when they use the internet

Significantly, 1 in 4 children in the sample feel unsafe and are worried about the dangers of the internet. For almost half, this concern is based in the actual reality of their experience with 46% of them reporting that they have been exposed to material which has worried them.

Children feel unsafe and unwanted in the public domain.

Key findings	Overall %	Boys %	Girls %
I feel unsafe in public places	41	31	51
I feel worried about catching public transport	27	22	32
51% of children feel children their age are not welcome in shops and cafes			
More than 1 in 8 (14%) children would make more places for children to play/more activities for children and young people/recreation centres for children and young people			

Overall, 2 in 5 children surveyed felt unsafe in public places, such as shopping centres, cinemas, sporting grounds, walking to school. Just over a quarter of children were anxious about catching public transport. In each of these findings, a substantial proportion of girls felt more unsafe than boys.

In addition, half of the children surveyed felt that children their age were not made to feel welcome by adults in public places. 1 in 8 of children surveyed wanted better spaces for children to be engaged in childhood activities.

Children's experience of their lived environment is a source of concern for them. A substantial number of children worry about their safety in public places and half of them feel that they are treated with suspicion by adults.

It is not surprising that children have these experiences when there is support for products such as the "mosquito" which emits a high-pitched whine at a frequency audible only to the ears of young people and becomes so unbearable that they are driven away from the area (Frith, 2008). In the media report about the "mosquito", it was claimed that a shopping centre in Queensland, a home owner in Canberra and an art gallery in Victoria have already bought and fitted the devices. In addition, the NSW Police Force and several councils were reported to be considering its purchase.

Children do not feel listened to or believed by adults.

Key findings

29% of children hold the view that adults do not believe children when they tell them that they are being abused

36% of children believe that adults (excluding those in their family) do not care about what young people think

41% of children believe that adults (excluding those in their family) do not show respect for young people

It remains a major concern that 3 in 10 children surveyed do not think that adults will believe them if they disclosed abuse to them. In addition, substantial proportions of children believe that adults (other than their family members) do not care or respect the legitimacy of their views.

Respect, trust and care are the critical qualities of relationships which can enable children to experience a communal sense of protection. Yet, for so many children in this survey, their reality is the opposite. Their experiences of adults serve to undermine their confidence that they can find support or safety in the network of relationships around them.

Children will turn to their parents and others for help if they feel that their relationship is safe.

Key finding
84% of children would turn to a parent if they needed help
18% of children would turn to friends if they needed help
12% of children would turn to a teacher if they needed help
8% of children would turn to grandparent(s) if they needed help

It is only when relationships feel reliable and solid that children find the space and permission to engage with others to access support. These findings are critical to understanding how any sense of perceived danger by children can be mitigated and reversed. Children's sense of safety depends on the stability and trust of people in their lives that are important to them. Children obviously do best when they feel that they are part of and belong to a set of networks who care for them, stand up for them and can help them when they need it.

Analysis and Conclusion

Significant numbers of children are the victims of all sorts of harm and exploitation on a daily basis in Australia. Despite the unreliable, inadequate and careless approach to collecting data about child abuse, family violence involving children, crime against children, bullying and other key indicators, it is clear that children are the most vulnerable group to violence.

To many adults in the community, the every day violation of children and young people is a reality that is too confronting to believe and engage with. For example, in previous research, adults list child abuse thirteenth on a list of community concerns, after problems with roads and foot paths. Significant number of adults also underestimate the extent and severity of violence against children, preferring to believe that it happens in another community away from their own (Tucci, Mitchell, and Goddard, 2003, 2004, 2006).

However, many children are very aware of the dangers of living in contemporary Australia. Substantial proportions of children who responded to this survey worry about being hurt by adults and not protected by them. They also feel unsafe in their local environment. They worry about being bullied and teased by their peers.

The internet, in particular, is perceived as a new source of anxiety and threat for a large number of children and young people.

Critically, these fears are further amplified because many children feel disconnected from adults whom they perceive not to believe them, listen and take into account their views or respect them.

It is only when children feel safe in the relationships with important adults that they are able to experience a broader sense of safety in the world around them.

It is clear the even though on the surface the vast majority of children surveyed believe that Australia is a good place to grow up in, many of them reflect an undercurrent of worry and concern for their own safety and the protection of other children.

It is incumbent on all adults to make these whispers of fear more audible. It is a commitment that will enable us to tune into children, understand their vulnerabilities and better ensure their safety.

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Mudaly, N. and Goddard, C. (2006). Published by Jessica Kingsley.

\$50.00

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