

**Childhood Abused:**

**The Pandemic Nature and**

**Effects of Abuse and Domestic**

**Violence on Children in**

**Australia**

**David F. Brown**

**and**

**Zoran Endekov**

# Foreword

This paper represents a much needed overview of the linked problems of child abuse and domestic violence in Australia. As the authors point out, these have reached tragic levels in this country.

The authors make what I believe to be the very significant point that the core of all forms of child abuse is a lack of basic respect for children. This is the problem that must be addressed if we as a community are to make any headway in dealing with a problem that is referred to in the paper as a *pandemic*.

They also make the important point that as well as the more obvious forms of abuse such as sexual abuse and physical abuse of children, many children suffer from emotional or psychological abuse or neglect, the effects of which can be as bad if not on occasions worse, than the more obvious forms of abuse. Many of these affected children are subjected to all or some of these forms of abuse.

All too often in our community children are treated as some sort of property of their parents, as I have seen so often in Family Court proceedings. What we need is a new recognition of their importance as individuals. Anyone who has had or worked with young children has seen and knows how each so uniquely develops as an individual at a very early age and yet all too often these individual needs are forgotten and the child is treated as a mere possession of the parents or carers. We as a community must be prepared to take on a much more active role to protect and nurture them.

Even our Governments treat children as parental property, the most graphic example being the incarceration of children of asylum seekers for long periods.

The figures collected in this paper are truly frightening and demonstrate the enormity of the problem. For example they point to the fact that in 2003-4 there were 219,384 reports of suspected child abuse and neglect made to State authorities. This amounts to one child being reported as abused or neglected in Australia every two minutes. On any view, as the report points out, this understates the extent of the problem. I know from my own experience that many family court cases involve serious allegations of child abuse in circumstances where the State authorities have never been involved.

A chilling aspect of the problem is that while children of all ages experience abuse, babies and young children are particularly vulnerable. These are the most defenceless people in our society and one can only wonder about the mores of a society that permits children to be treated in this way at the most vulnerable time of their life.

A serious matter is that even when notifications are made most, if not all child protection authorities in Australia are seriously under staffed, have insufficient trained staff and a high staff turnover, which means that reports may not be dealt with or be dealt with in an unsatisfactory manner. For example most State and Territory Child Welfare Departments do not investigate reports of child abuse by non custodial parents when family court proceedings are on foot, despite the fact that family courts

have no investigative capacity, because they cannot spare the staff to do so. This immediately calls into question the figure for cases that are regarded as ‘substantiated’ by Departments as being grossly understated. Children’s Courts which have the protective responsibility for most children are also grossly under funded to the point where it is impossible to obtain reliable statistics from them because their funding is insufficient to enable them to collect them.

I commend this report as a valuable contribution to highlighting the nature of the problem and it behoves all of us to use our best endeavours to do something about this problem now. It is to be hoped that the material contained in this report will play a significant part in improving the situation.

**The Honourable Alastair Nicholson AO, RFD, QC**  
**Former Chief Justice, Family Court of Australia**  
**Honorary Professorial Fellow**  
**Department of Criminology**  
**University of Melbourne**

# Contents

| <b>SECTION</b>  | <b>PAGE</b> |
|---|-------------|
| <b>FOREWORD</b>   | 3           |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>   | 6           |
| <b>Executive Summary</b>  | 7           |
| <b>1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT</b>   | 10          |
| <b>2.0 DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE</b>   | 11          |
| <b>2.1 Physical Abuse</b>   | 11          |
| <b>2.2 Sexual Abuse</b>   | 12          |
| <b>2.3 Emotional Abuse</b>  | 12          |
| <b>2.4 Neglect</b>  | 13          |
| <b>2.5 Exposure to Family Violence (Domestic Violence)</b>  | 13          |
| <b>3.0 SOME ANTECEDENTS OF CHILD ABUSE</b>  | 14          |
| <b>4.0 PREVALENCE AND INCIDENCE FIGURES OF CHILD ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA</b>                           | 15          |
| <b>5.0 VICTORIAN CHILD ABUSE STATISTICS</b>   | 20          |
| <b>6.0 TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA 2002-2003</b>  | 22          |
| <b>7.0 EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE AND RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD ABUSE</b>                            | 24          |
| <b>7.1 Types of Domestic Violence</b>   | 26          |
| <b>7.2 Prevalence of Children Living With and Witnessing Domestic Violence</b>                    | 28          |
| <b>7.3 Victorian Statistics Related to Exposure to Domestic Violence and Effects on the Child</b> | 30          |
| <b>8.0 SHORT AND LONG TERM EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE</b>   | 31          |
| <b>8.1 Short and Long Term Effects on Children Exposed to Domestic Violence</b>                   | 34          |
| <b>9.0 CONCLUSIONS</b>  | 37          |
| <b>10.0 REFERENCES</b>  | 40          |
| <b>11.0 APPENDIX: CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN IN AUSTRALIA</b>  | 43          |

# Acknowledgements

The opinions and data presented in this report have been sourced from a diversity of resources. These resources are cited in the appropriate form in the text. However, the authors would like to particularly acknowledge the use of information from the following published articles, manuscripts, reports etc. and materials from various agency websites that have informed the opinions and statistics presented in this report:

- Access Economics Pty. Ltd. (2004). *The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy: Part 1 & 2*. Prepared for the Australian Government's Office of the Status of Women.
- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005). *Child Protection Australia 2003-04*, Cat No. CWS 24, Child Welfare Series 36, Canberra.
- Keatsdale Pty. Ltd., *The Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in Australia*. Prepared for the Kids First Foundation.
- Laing, L. (2003). *Domestic Violence in the Context of Child Abuse and Neglect*, Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse.
- Tomison, A.M., (2000). *Exploring family violence: links between child maltreatment and domestic violence*, National Child Protection Clearinghouse.
- Indermaur, D. (2001). *Young Australians and Domestic Violence: trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, Australian Institute of Criminology.
- [www.aifs.gov.au](http://www.aifs.gov.au)
- [www.dhs.vic.gov.au](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au)
- [www.napcan.org.au](http://www.napcan.org.au)
- [www.stopchildabuse.com.au](http://www.stopchildabuse.com.au)
- [www.wesleymission.org.au](http://www.wesleymission.org.au)

# Executive Summary

This report is the result of a joint partnership between staff of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation and academics at La Trobe University, Melbourne. The title of the report *Childhood Abused: The Pandemic Nature and Effects of Abuse and Domestic Violence on Children in Australia* is intended to draw attention to the widespread and pervasive nature of child abuse. As many authors cited in the report point out, child abuse cuts across all social levels and consequently preventative action is a responsibility to be address not only within families but within the broader community. While the report cites an array of data tables the reader should not be distracted from the tragedy that lies behind the statistics.

The aim of this report is to present current data and opinions related to child abuse in Australia. However, it is clear that although there may not be a universally agreed upon definition of child abuse both the data and informed opinion agree that child abuse in Australia is a very significant and alarming social problem. Much of the data and opinion cited in the report relates to behaviours at the level of individual adult caregivers and the effects of these behaviours on the child. However, it is commonly accepted that the ultimate responsibility to provide remediation and preventative responses to the challenges presented by child abuse lies at the level of the broader community and society.

The data indicate tragic levels of child abuse in the Australian community. In summary the child abuse and neglect data indicate that:

- **there were 198,355 child abuse notifications in Australia in 2002-2003**
- **child abuse notifications increased to 219,384 in 2003-2004**

- **in 2002-2003 it was estimated that one child was reported to be abused or neglected in Australia every 2 minutes**
- **in 2002-2003 it was estimated that there was one report of child abuse for every 25 children in Australia**
- **for every child reported to be abused or neglected, countless others may remain unsafe, unprotected and unnoticed.**

While not all notifications of child abuse are later substantiated, there were:

- **40,416 substantiated child abuse reports in 2002-2003**  
(where notifications have been investigated and it has been determined that there is reasonable cause to believe that the child has been abused or neglected)

and

- **in 2002-2003 one child every 13 minutes was confirmed by child protection services as being harmed.**

The effects on the child of exposure to domestic violence have attracted much interested in the research literature. Children are exposed to domestic violence by witnessing violence and abuse and by being in a household filled with violence and the threat of terrorising behaviours. It appears that children are far more aware of the violence occurring than has been previously thought. The report cites estimates of between 30% and 60% of children exposed to domestic violence also suffer some form of abuse. It is estimated that over 5% of the Australian population less than 18 years old live with and witness domestic violence. Australian Institute of Criminology has estimated that 25% of children have witnessed violent behaviour toward their mother or stepmother. It has been suggested that environments where both domestic violence and child abuse occur represent the greatest risk to children's safety.

Child abuse results in lives being damaged and disrupted with the child often being unable to attain their potential. These children often experience a diminished quality of life. Consequently, adults who were abused as children are at greater risk of encountering problems in later life. These problems include:

- **suicide attempts**
- **anxiety and depression**
- **dissociative disorders**
- **post traumatic stress disorder**
- **drug and alcohol abuse**
- **homelessness**
- **Juvenile delinquency.**

The major classifications of child abuse indicate that in Australia the most prevalent in 2002-2003 were:

- **emotional abuse (34%)**
- **physical abuse (28%)**
- **neglect (28%)**
- **sexual abuse (10%).**

In conclusion, the data and informed opinion cited in this report have identified the multi-factorial nature of child abuse and the need for a diversity of remedial and preventative services. Factors such as styles of parenting which may lead to an abusive family environment need to be addressed from both an individual and social perspective. Taken together, these factors suggest a need for greater education, information dissemination and community and supporting services to assist families at risk. At the degree of child abuse and neglect being reported in Australia it is critical that the community invests its resources across the entire continuum of protection, remediation, prevention and support.

## 1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

The occurrence of child abuse has for many years led to considerable political and media attention in Australia and other countries in the western world. It is not surprising therefore that issues related to child abuse generate discourse in the moral, legal, medical, political, professional, and personal domains. Yet, in common with other complex social phenomena there are no standard definitions for the term child abuse. However, child abuse, although sometimes referred to as child maltreatment, is clearly recognised as encompassing physical harm, sexual abuse, emotional/psychological abuse and neglect. In order to address issues related to child abuse it is necessary to view it from a whole of society perspective. This level of perspective entails that while it may seem appropriate to categorise child abuse as an act committed by individuals the broader society must also accept responsibility for preventative and remedial action. While this position may be generally acceptable there is intense argument about what the nature of the *problem* is and how society should respond (Lyon & de Cruz, 1994; Wilson & James, 2002). To quote an opinion from Keatsdale (2003, p.1).

*the extent of the problem of child abuse and neglect in Australia is not readily apparent due to the absence of standard definitions of child abuse and neglect across jurisdictions, jurisdictional differences in procedures, reporting, recording and substantiations, the lack of integration of data within jurisdictions, and apparent community reluctance to become involved in protection matters.*

Due to these jurisdictional differences it is considered that prevalence data related to child abuse is an underestimation of the current situation (Keatsdale, 2003; Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 2000; Child Abuse Prevention: Resource Sheet, 2004).

## **2.0 DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE**

The aim in this report is to address the implications of current data related to child abuse. Such an interpretation is complicated by difficulties caused by differing definitions of child abuse. Moreover, it may be misleading to collapse statistics across jurisdictions as State and Territory child protection systems operate under different legislation, policies and philosophies. These differences may well influence how Departments record and report child abuse and the way that terms such as *abuse*, *notification* and *substantiation* are interpreted. Although many forms of child abuse occur, the data reported will focus on the more common major categories of physical, sexual, emotional abuse, and neglect. It is therefore important to define the meaning of these terms within the present report. It should be noted that these descriptions are not universally agreed upon definitions of the various types of abuse but are taken from various sources and they address commonalities across Australian States and Territories.

### **2.1 Physical Abuse**

*Physical Abuse* occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from an injury inflicted by a child's parent or caregiver. The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures. Physical abuse can vary from moderate to severe and in some cases it can be fatal. Physical abuse results in physical injuries which leave wounds to heal and scars visible. Such scars can occur from bruises, cuts, bites, marks from beatings with objects, burns and scalds. Invisible/internal injuries such as bone fractures, breaks and other internal injuries can also be present (Hanks & Stratton, 2002).

## 2.2 Sexual Abuse

*Sexual Abuse* occurs when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve the child in sexual activity and the child's parent(s) or caregiver(s) has not protected the child. Physical force may be involved. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity. It includes fondling of the child's genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object. It may also include non-contact activities such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways (Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 2000).

Possible categories of sexual abuse include (adopted from Lyon & de Cruz, 1994):

- incest
- pedophilia
- exhibitionism (indirect exposure)
- molestation
- sexual intercourse
- rape
- sexual sadism
- child pornography
- child prostitution.

## 2.3 Emotional Abuse

*Emotional Abuse* occurs when a child's parent(s) or caregiver(s) repeatedly rejects the child or uses threats to frighten the child. This may involve name calling, put downs or continual coldness from the parent(s) or caregiver(s) to the extent that it significantly damages the child's physical, social, intellectual or emotional development. There is no clear consensus on a definition of emotional abuse. There are different opinions as to whether the emphasis should be on the abuse of the child

or the behaviour of the parent. Styles of parenting may be an issue for any definition of emotional abuse. For example, can authoritarian or extremely permissive parenting styles be considered abusive? Is constant criticism of a child an abuse? If it can be demonstrated that certain styles of parenting can affect the well-being of the child should they be considered in a definition of *emotional abuse*? The obvious difficulty is to collate the necessary data and gain consensus on what are acceptable and unacceptable parenting styles (Corby, 2000; Wilson & James, 2002). However, all abuse can be seen to involve some emotional ill-treatment, that is, some element of emotional abuse.

## **2.4 Neglect**

*Neglect* is the failure to provide the child with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision, to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be significantly harmed.

Neglect may well be due to a child's parent(s) or caregiver(s) failing to do something which is necessary for the child's well-being. Neglect does not necessarily involve individuals behaving in a willful, cruel or vicious manner. Neglect may therefore include failure to provide food or drink, or failure to seek medical attention for the child during serious illness. Persistent neglect may involve the constant failure to prevent a child from exposing himself/herself to forms of danger or, involve a young child being left home alone by the parent(s) or caregiver(s).

## **2.5 Exposure to Family Violence (Domestic Violence)**

*Domestic Violence* can include the child witnessing violence or being aware of it happening between adults in the home. The literature on the effects of this form of abuse in relation to children is well documented and will be discussed in detail in a later section of this report (see Section 7.0).

## **3.0 SOME ANTECEDENTS OF CHILD ABUSE**

A number of previous reports have already identified the multi-factorial nature of child abuse (Keatsdale, 2003; Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 2000; Wilson & James, 2002; Lyon & de Cruz, 1994). It is generally accepted that there is no single cause of child abuse. Abuse usually occurs in families through a diversity of risk factors. These risk factors are often seen in combination rather than as single entities. However, at the core of all forms of child abuse is a basic lack of respect for the child.

The following are some of the factors that have been identified in the literature as antecedents to child abuse:

- poverty
- lack of education
- serious marital problems
- frequent changes of addresses
- violence between family members
- lack of support from the extended family
- loneliness and social isolation
- unemployment
- inadequate housing
- community tolerance of violence against children
- lack of community understanding about the consequence of child abuse and neglect on children
- parents under stress
- adults who are sexually and physically violent
- parents with health and mental health problems
- parents lacking parental skills.

Previous reports have also identified a diversity of personal characteristics related to the abusers of children. In some cases the abuser may display the following:

- very high expectations of the child and what the child should achieve
- the parent may have been abused as a child
- a lack of knowledge and skills in bringing up children
- low self esteem and self confidence
- depression
- alcohol or drug abuse
- mental or physical ill health
- work pressures.

## **4. 0 PREVALENCE AND INCIDENCE FIGURES OF CHILD ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA**

Prevalence refers to the total number of children who have experienced abuse or neglect in the Australian community at a given point in time. Incidence refers to changes over time in the number of children who have experienced abuse. Due to the reasons discussed in Section 1.0 of this report there are qualifications as to the accuracy of information about the prevalence of child abuse in Australia. Perhaps the most accurate statistics that are available relating to child abuse are the number of reports (notifications) of suspected child abuse made to statutory child protection departments (Child Abuse Prevention: Resource Sheet, 2004). The most recent data by State and Territory relating to the notification of child abuse are illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Number of notifications of abuse by State and Territory, 1999-00 to 2003-2004**

| Year    | NSW (a) | Vic           | Qld    | WA       | SA       | Tas      | ACT      | NT    | Total   |
|---------|---------|---------------|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|---------|
| 1999-00 | 30,398  | <b>36,805</b> | 19,057 | 2,645    | 15,181   | 422      | 1,189    | 1,437 | 107,134 |
| 2000-01 | 40,937  | <b>36,966</b> | 22,069 | 2,851    | 9,988(b) | 315      | 794      | 1,551 | 115,471 |
| 2001-02 | 55,208  | <b>37,976</b> | 27,592 | 3,045    | 11,203   | 508      | 801      | 1,605 | 137,938 |
| 2002-03 | 109,498 | <b>37,635</b> | 31,068 | 2,293(c) | 13,442   | 741      | 2,124(d) | 1,554 | 198,355 |
| 2003-04 | 115,541 | <b>36,956</b> | 35,023 | 2,417    | 14,917   | 7,248(e) | 5,325    | 1,957 | 219,384 |

Source: AIHW, 2005; Table 2.3

(a) The data for 2002-03 and 2003-04 should not be compared with previous years. New South Wales implemented a modification to the data system to support legislation and practice changes during 2003-04 which would make any comparison inaccurate.

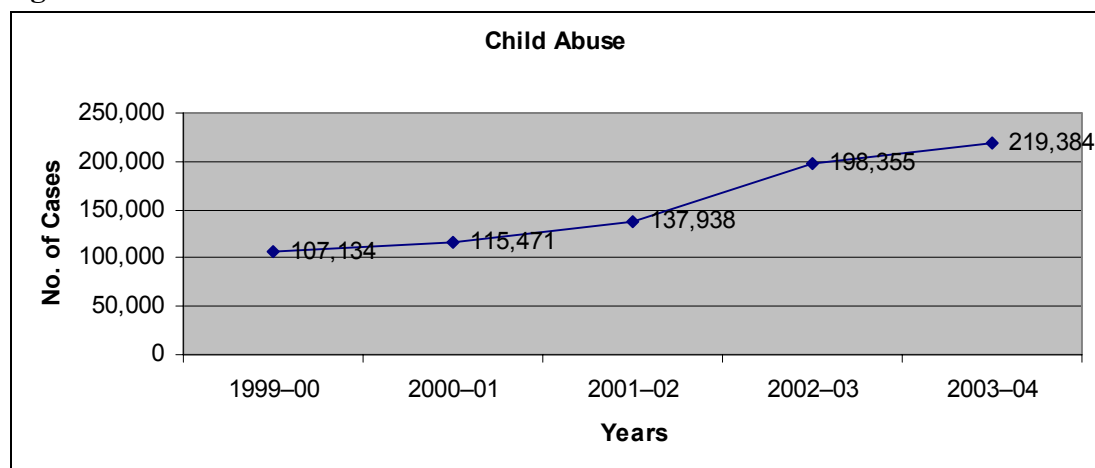
(b) In 2000-01 the classification of notifications in South Australia was changed to exclude reports that did not meet the criteria of reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect.

(c) The decline in the number of notifications for 2002-03 is associated with organisational and practice changes.

(d) From 2002-03 the number of notifications increased due to changed arrangements for recording reports of concern about children and young people. Recent publicity from the inquiries conducted by the Commissioner for Public Administration has also increased public awareness of child abuse.

(e) Data for 2003-04 and previous years should not be compared because of a change in recording practices due to the centralisation of the intake service, known as the Child Protection Advice and Referral Service. Now every call about a child is recorded as a notification, whereas, previously, workers made the decision locally about whether the call was in fact a notification based on the risk to the child. (AIHW, 2005)

The change in incidence of total notifications of child abuse in Australia from 1999 to 2004 is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Total number of notifications of abuse in Australia from 1999 – 2004**

Source: AIHW, 2005

At first glance the incidence of notification of abuse appears to have risen substantially from 107,134 in 1999-00 to 198,355 in 2002-2003. This amounts to one report for every 25 children in Australia, and one report of child abuse and neglect every two minutes (Foster, 2004). A slight increase in notifications is noted from 2002-2003 to 2003-2004.

However, as noted in the *Child Abuse Prevention: Resource Sheet* (2004, p.2) these

*figures do not necessarily mean that the actual occurrence of child abuse and neglect has increased over this time, but they do show that the reporting of cases to child protection services has increased.*

The quotation from the *Child Abuse Prevention: Resource Sheet* (2004) draws attention to the fact that any inference in relation to increases in the incidence of child abuse needs to be mindful of changes in a variety of factors. These factors include changes in population growth, in the propensity to report suspected abuse, in the definitions of abuse, and in the availability of resources necessary to identify, record and collate relevant data. Moreover, many notifications are re-notifications (the same children being reported two or more times). However, not every instance of child abuse or neglect is reported. There are also differences in definitions and systems across each State and Territory of Australia. Consequently, interpretations of these figures do have some limitations. However, they do give some indication of the incidence of child abuse and neglect being reported to authorities in Australia and it is generally agreed that fewer cases of abuse are reported than are actually occurring in the Australian population (*Child Abuse Prevention: Resource Sheet*, 2004).

While notification data provides evidence of abuse cases being reported, it needs to be recognized that not all notifications of child abuse are consequently substantiated. *Substantiation* refers to a report of suspected child abuse being made, appropriately investigated, and child protection authorities determining that there is reasonable cause to accept that the abuse or neglect has occurred (*Child Abuse Prevention: Resource Sheet*, 2004). Table 2 illustrates substantiation (and for comparison notification data) by State and Territory for the periods 1999 to 2003.

**Table 2: Number of substantiations of abuse by State and Territory  
1999-00 to 2003-04**

| Year    | NSW (a)           | Vic          | Qld    | WA     | SA    | Tas | ACT    | NT  | Total             |
|---------|-------------------|--------------|--------|--------|-------|-----|--------|-----|-------------------|
| 1999-00 | 6,477             | <b>7,359</b> | 6,919  | 1,169  | 2,085 | 97  | 233    | 393 | 24,732            |
| 2000-01 | 7,501             | <b>7,608</b> | 8,395  | 1,191  | 1,998 | 103 | 222    | 349 | 27,367            |
| 2001-02 | 8,606             | <b>7,687</b> | 10,036 | 1,187  | 2,230 | 158 | 220    | 349 | 30,473            |
| 2002-03 | 16,765            | <b>7,287</b> | 12,203 | 888(b) | 2,423 | 213 | 310    | 327 | 40,416            |
| 2003-04 | not available (a) | <b>7,412</b> | 17,473 | 968    | 2,490 | 427 | 630(c) | 527 | not available (a) |

Source: AIHW, 2005; Table 2.4

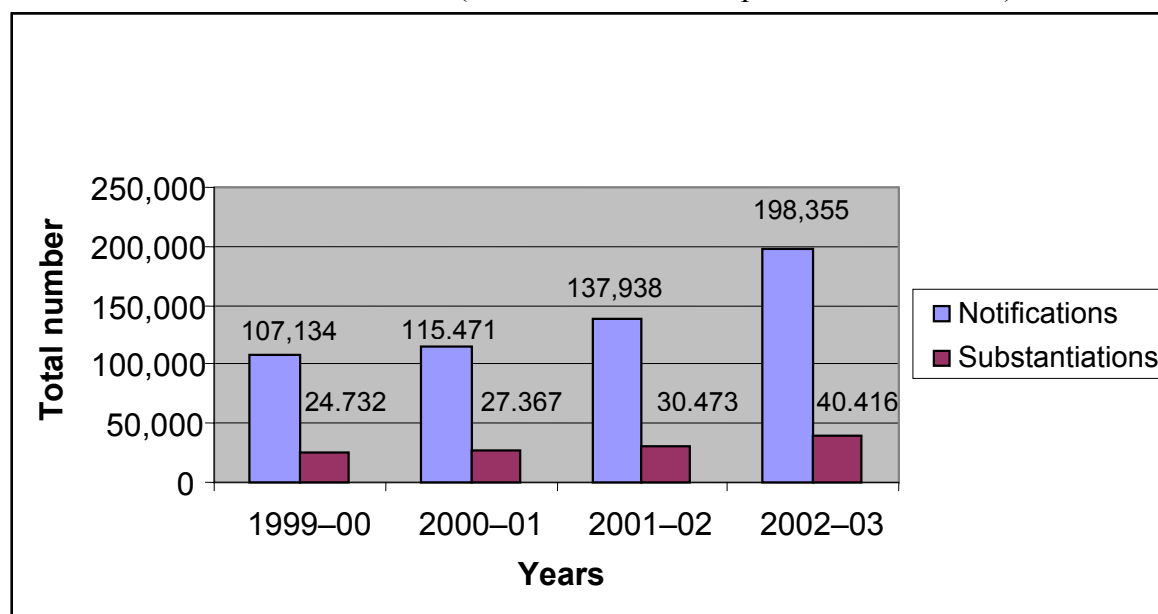
(a) The data for 2002-03 and previous years should not be compared. New South Wales implemented a modification to the data system to support legislation and practice changes during 2003-04 which would make any comparison inaccurate. Data for 2003-04 were not available due to the ongoing implementation of the data system.

(b) The decrease in substantiations in 2002-03 reflects the decrease in notifications.

(c) The increase in substantiations in 2003-04 relates to the increase in notifications in the ACT (AIHW, 2005)

The change in incidence of total substantiations (and for comparison notification data) of child abuse in Australia from 1999 to 2003 is illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Total number of substantiations of abuse in Australia  
1999-00 to 2002-03 (note: 2003-2004 comparisons unavailable)**



Source: AIHW, 2004

The incidence of substantiation of abuse appears to have risen significantly from 24,732 in 1999-00 to 40,416 in 2002-2003. However, the proportion of substantiations to notifications in 1999-2000 was 23% and in 2002-2003 was 20%. This tends to indicate that substantiation to notification rates are similar across the time periods sampled. Even so, substantiation figures indicate that one child was confirmed by

child protection services as having been harmed every 13 minutes (i.e. 40,416 children for the 2002-2003 year period; Foster, 2004). It is important, however, to take into account similar limitations to those identified for notification rates in drawing conclusions from these statistics.

It is important to again emphasize the inference limitations of the reported notification and substantiation data. The definition of what constitutes child abuse and neglect has changed and broadened in Australia over the last few years, and is likely to have impacted on the numbers reported. The States and Territory data are not strictly comparable due to differences in child protection legislation, policies, and procedures and practices. Overall increases in notification and substantiations rates could be attributed to increased community and media awareness, increased funding of child protection and general community support services and increases in child protection workers over the periods sampled. However, irrespective of how these numbers are interpreted, child abuse and neglect is one of Australia's most significant and alarming social problems. Adam Foster (Executive Officer NAPCAN) has reported that at a recent Summit on Child Abuse and Neglect, the *Australian Medical Association* described the problem as a *pandemic* (Foster, 2004). Table 3 summarises sources of estimates of levels of abuse from Australian data.

**Table 3: Summary of estimates of levels of abuse from Australian data (Keatsdale, 2003)**

| Source  | Estimate of abuse  |
|---|--|
| Child Protection services (AIHW, 2003)  | 5.7 per 1,000 children AR<br>Adjusted 6.0 per 1,000 children AR  |
| Children as victims of crime (ABS, 1999a)   | 7.0 per 1,000 children AR  |
| Family Court data (Frederico, Hewitt and Sheehan, 1998)                                 | 0.4 per 1,000 children AR  |
| Total of child protection, criminal justice and family court data                       | 10.93 per 1,000 children AR<br>145 per 1,000 PR                  |
| Kids Help Line  | 27.2 per 1,000 children PR                                       |
| Queensland cohort study (Stewart, Dennison and Waterson, 2002)                          | 70 per 1,000 children PR<br>4.4 per 1,000 children AR            |
| Queensland Young People's Mental Health Survey (Donald, Dower, Lucke and Raphael, 2000) | 44 per 1,000 children PR   |
| McGurk and Hazel (1998)   | 50 per 1,000 children estimated AR<br>8-16 per 1,000 children AR |
| Indermaur (2001)  | 110 - 142.5 per 1,000 children PR                                |
| ABS Women's Safety Survey (1996) in Coumarelos and Allen (1999) and Indermaur (2001)    | 30 - 50 per 1,000 children PR                                    |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Women's Health Australia survey (Parker and Lee, 2002)  | Retrospective 155 per 1,000 children PR<br>Prospective 100 per 1,000 children PR |
| Roberts (1995)  | 45 per 1,000 children PR   |
| NSW Domestic violence survey in McGurk and Hazel  | 32 per 1,000 children PR   |
| Goldman and Padayachi study in Project Axis<br>Q'ld Crime Commission and Q'ld Police (2000)                   | 450 per 1,000 female children PR<br>190 per 1,000 male children PR               |
| Fleming (1997)  | 200 per 1,000 female children PR   |
| Dunne, Purdie, Cook, Boyle and Najman (2002)  | 330 per 1,000 female children PR<br>170 per 1,000 male children PR               |
| Nelson, Heath, Madden, Cooper, Dinwiddie,<br>Bucholz, Glowinski, McLaughlin, Dunne, Statham and Martin (2002) | 167 per 1,000 female children PR<br>54 per 1,000 male children PR                |
| Fergusson and Mullen in Spataro, Moss and Wells (2001)  | 450 per 1,000 female children PR<br>200 per 1,000 male children PR               |
| Analysis of data on indigenous abuse from a variety of sources.   | At least 17.8 per 1,000 indigenous children AR                                   |

Source: Keatsdale, (2003). PR Prevalence rate; AR Annual rate

From Table 3 it can be seen that various researchers estimated that the annual rate of abuse ranged between 0.4 – 50 per 1,000 children

## **5.0 VICTORIAN CHILD ABUSE STATISTICS**

The Australian statistics related to child abuse can be deconstructed by State. The Victorian statistics are of special relevance to the focus of the present report. The Victorian statistics from 1992 to 2004 indicating notifications, investigations and substantiations of child abuse are detailed in Table 4.

**Table 4: Number of Victorian notifications, investigations and substantiations 1992 to 2004**

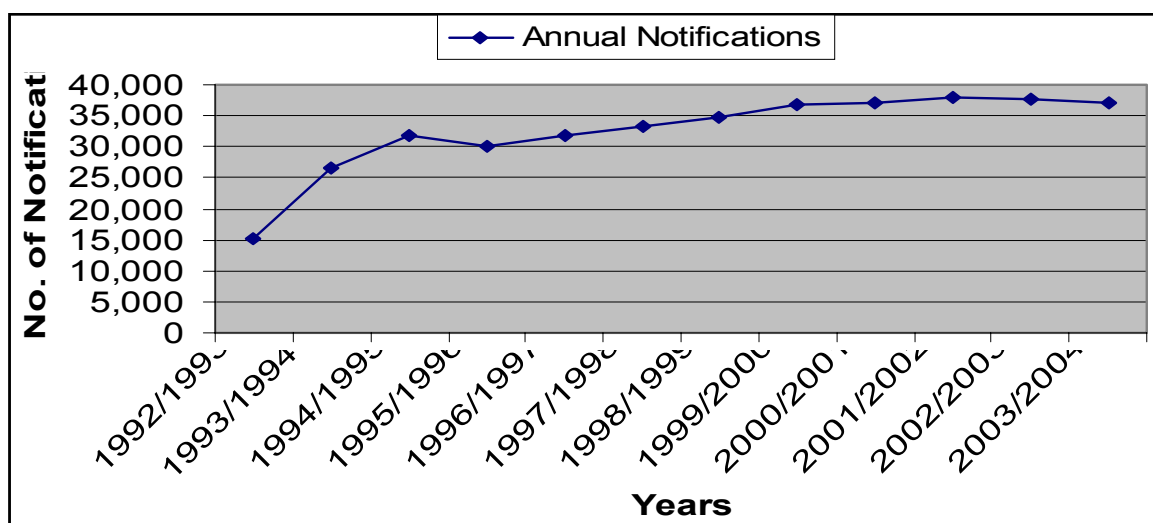
| Year       | Annual Notifications | Investigations | Substantiations |
|------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1992/1993  | 15,182               | -              | -               |
| 1993/1994* | 26,685               | -              | -               |
| 1994/1995  | 31,699               | -              | -               |
| 1995/1996  | 29,984               | 13,964         | 6,844           |
| 1996/1997  | 31,769               | 14,666         | 7,268           |
| 1997/1998  | 33,164               | 14,483         | 7,424           |
| 1998/1999  | 34,761               | 13,125         | 6,128           |
| 1999/2000  | 36,808               | 12,797         | 7,328           |
| 2000/2001  | 36,966               | 13,192         | 7,743           |
| 2001/2002  | 37,967               | 13,245         | 7,825           |
| 2002/2003  | 37,635               | 12,481         | 7,381           |
| 2003/2004  | 37,006               | 12,261         | 7,370           |

\* Legislation for mandatory reporting of sexual and physical abuse introduced.

(Source: *Child Protection Australia, 2002-03*; [www.dhs.vic.gov.au](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au); *Annual Report of Inquiries into Child Deaths: Child Protection 2004, Victorian Child Death Review Committee*)

The trend in notifications over the period detailed in Table 4 is illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Trend in Notifications of child abuse in Victoria**



The population of children in Victoria was estimated by the Department of Infrastructure to be 1,123,682 in 2003. In 2003, the number of notifications to the Victorian CPS was estimated to be 37,562. Approximately 33 notifications are

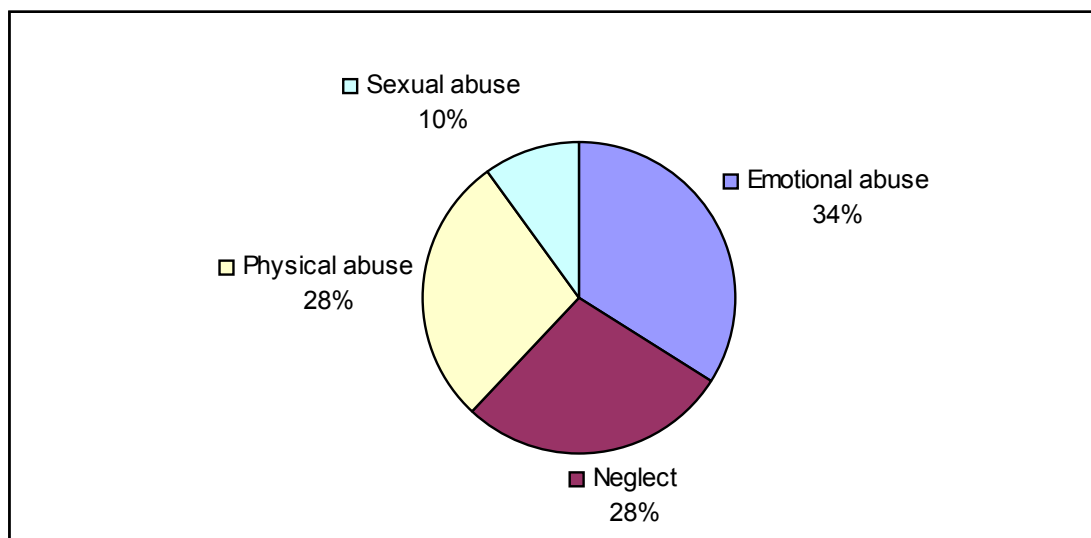
received per 1,000 of the 0–17 year-old population (*Annual Report of Inquiries into Child Deaths: Child Protection 2004, Victorian Child Death Review Committee*). *Child Protection Australia 2002-03* noted a 45% increase between 1997 and 2003 in the number of children in out-of-home care, and a continuing upward trend Australia-wide in the numbers of children on care and protection orders from 15,700 in 1997 to 22,000 in 2003. However, any interpretation that the trend illustrated in Figure 3 indicates a clear increase in child abuse must be made with caution. As Smallbone and Wortley (2001, p.1) have pointed out:

*There is no clear evidence, however, that the incidence of child abuse itself is increasing; rather, increased reporting rates appear partly to reflect a greater willingness by victims and others to report allegations of child abuse. Indeed, many alleged child abuse offences (eg. Sexual abuse) are not reported until long after they have occurred. Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that child abuse is a major social problem.*

## **6.0 TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA 2002-2003**

Around the tables illustrating notification and substantiation rates are the tragic realities of the types of child abuse. Figure 4 illustrates the types of abuse reported in the substantiated cases across Australia for 2002-2003.

**Figure 4: Types of abuse/neglect in substantiated cases across Australia, 2002-2003**



Source: National Child Protection Clearinghouse: Child Abuse Prevention Resource Sheet, 2004

Of the substantiated cases in 2002-2003, physical abuse comprised 28 per cent, sexual abuse 10 per cent, emotional abuse 34 per cent, and neglect 28 per cent. As already discussed in the report, victims of child maltreatment are unlikely to be subjected to only one type of abuse. For example, sexual abuse and physical abuse are always accompanied by emotional abuse. Primary types of abuse may also be accompanied by verbal assault, close confinement (such as locking a child in a room), and withholding food and other forms of adverse treatment. Within each type of abuse there is a continuum of severity ranging from mild to life threatening (Browne & Herbert, 1997, cited in Browne, 2002). In a recent media statement New South Wales (NSW) Police Commissioner Ken Moroney suggested the calling of a national summit to address what he has described as an *epidemic* of child sexual assault. Police Commissioner Ken Moroney's statement is understandable in the light of the finding that over the previous 12 months, police and the Department of Community Services (DoCS) (NSW) had reported more than 150 people and laid about 400 charges in relation to sexual and physical abuse against young children.

## **7.0 EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE AND RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD ABUSE**

Section 2.5 briefly noted that exposure to family violence or *Domestic Violence* can be included in a definition of child abuse. This section of the report will consider the relationship between domestic violence and child abuse in some detail. The impact of domestic violence on children should not be underestimated. Children are exposed to domestic violence by witnessing violence and abuse, intervening to protect their abused caretaker (usually mother), being present in a household filled with violence and terrorising behaviours as well as being directly abused. A study in the U.K. by Mullender et. al. (2000, cited in Laing, 2000) found children are far more aware of domestic violence than parents realise. The study also reported that one third of the mothers interviewed believed their children recognised the violence in their households. The reality is that when it occurs most if not all children are aware of domestic violence. Domestic violence has a substantial negative impact on children and this appears to occur if they are the sole direct targets of abuse, or where violence occurs in conjunction with inter-adult violence, or where they are exposed to violence against a parent or other family member (Review of Family Violence Laws: Consultation Paper, 2004).

In keeping with the difficulty in arriving at a commonly agreed set of definitions for child abuse, domestic violence can also be difficult to define. Consequently, this report will adopt the definition supplied by Laing and Bobic (2002, p.14):

*Domestic violence occurs when one partner attempts by physical or psychological means to dominate and control the other (child or adolescent). Domestic violence takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms of domestic violence are: physical and sexual violence; threats and intimidation; emotional and social abuse; and financial deprivation. Domestic violence can involve a continuum of controlling behaviour and*

*violence, which can occur over a number of years.* (Laing, 2000, cited in Laing & Bobic, 2002)

Laing and Bobic (2002, p14) consider that other authors such as Stanko, Crisp, Hale and Lucraft (1998) provide a definition of domestic violence which is similar and adopted by international studies:

*Domestic violence is a generic term, which refers to abusive and assaultive behaviour between intimates, among members of a household, and / or between former partners. Its most dominant form is man to woman within a partnership or former partnership.*

Although domestic violence is observed across all levels of society, families at the lower end of the economic spectrum are more likely to be affected. Many families in which domestic violence is present struggle with multiple problems. These include poverty, substance abuse, and exposure to other forms of violence.

Several studies have found that both child sexual abuse and domestic violence exist concurrently in families. Goddard and Hiller's (1993) study of 206 cases of child abuse found domestic violence to exist in just under one half (40%) of the instances of sexual abuse and in just over one-half (55%) of the physical abuse cases (Hume, 2003). It has been suggested that child abuse may be present in 30% to 60% of families that experience some form of domestic violence (Carter, Weithorn & Behrman, 1999; Edleson, 1999). A study in the U.S.A. indicated that between 45% and 70% of children exposed to domestic violence are also victims of physical abuse, and that as many as 40% of child victims of physical abuse are also exposed to domestic violence (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). This study also found that children in households with domestic violence were also found to be at a higher risk for sexual abuse than were children in non-violent homes.

International research has shown that domestic violence and child abuse often co-occur in the same families (Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981; Hughes, 1988; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988; Bowker et al., 1990; McKernan, 1994, all cited in Laing, 2003).

Edleson (2001) concluded in a research review that between 30 and 60 percent of children are abused where the mother is in an abusive relationship. In an Australian study of 20 child protection cases, 60 per cent involved multiple forms of family violence (Stanley & Goddard, 1993, cited in Laing 2003). Where child sexual assault was present Goddard and Hiller (1993) found that 40 per cent of the cases involved some form of domestic violence. In 18 out of 19 cases where death occurred due to physical abuse and neglect there was an implication of domestic violence (NSW Child Review Team, 2001, cited in Laing, 2003).

The type of data presented in the studies cited has led some researchers to suggest that environments “*where both domestic violence and child abuse occur present the greatest risk to children’s safety*” (Stanley, 1997; De Panfilis & Zuravin, 1999; Miller, Fox & Garcia-Backwith, 1999, all cited in Laing, 2003). Indeed, a large number of cases involving domestic violence have been reported where children have been killed (Wilczynski, 1996; Edleson, 1999b; Fleck-Henderson, 2000, cited in Laing, 2003).

## **7.1 Types of Domestic Violence**

The set of behaviors classified within the definition of domestic violence are used by the abuser to instill fear and maintain power and control over the abused person (Barnardos Staff, Monograph 25). The five most commonly defined types of domestic violence are:

- **Physical violence** which includes hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, choking and the use of weapons to inflict injury
- **Psychological/emotional/verbal abuse** includes threats, insults and ridicule which can have the impact of undermining self-esteem and self-confidence and challenging perceptions of reality
- **Social abuse** which refers to social isolation caused by preventing contact with family and friends – this includes geographic isolation as well as cultural isolation and denial of access to community resources

- **Economic abuse / financial deprivation** which involves the withholding of financial support or expecting a partner (child) to manage on a minimum amount of money and the controlling or withholding ownership of goods and property
- **Sexual violence** which includes forced viewing of pornography, rape with or without the use of violence.

There are a number of ways that children can be aware of or involved in domestic violence. These include:

- **Witnessing** violent acts, hearing adults engage in verbal and physical violence from another room, and observing the consequences of physical violence, such as broken bones, bleeding, bruises etc.
- **Involvement** in the violence by being hit and/or abused while one parent/caregiver is abusing the other; the child intervening to physically protect a parent/caregiver; the child intervening to provide emotional or practical support to a parent/caregiver; the child being encouraged by one parent/caregiver to abuse the other; and the child being physically or emotionally abused by one parent/caregiver in an attempt to threaten or control the other.

In a study by Indermaur (2001) the percentage of young people who were aware of domestic violence in the total sample studied was decomposed by the type of violence (Table 5).

**Table 5: Young people's awareness of physical domestic violence contrasting the total sample with those living in households with high-risk parental behaviour**

|  | Male to female violence | Female to male violence |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Awareness among total sample</b>                | 23.4                    | 22.1                    |
| Households where male carer:                       |                         |                         |
| Gets drunk a lot (14%)                             | 55.0                    | 49.6                    |
| Hits children – other than for bad behaviour (10%) | 55.3                    | 43.0                    |
| Households where female carer:                     |                         |                         |
| Gets drunk a lot (6%)                              | 56.4                    | 55.6                    |
| Hits children – other than for bad behaviour (6%)  | 50.4                    | 50.4                    |

Source: Indermaur, 2001. Young Australians and Domestic Violence: Trends & Issues in crime and criminal justice. No.195.

## **7.2 Prevalence of Children Living With and Witnessing Domestic Violence**

The difficulties associated with measuring the prevalence of domestic violence are well documented and have been described by some as *research on children who witness family violence is a special case of counting the hard-to-count and measuring the hard-to measure* (Fantuzzo et al. 1997, cited in Laing, 2000).

An Australian study in 1996 of the prevalence of domestic violence (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996) found that 61% of women who reported violence by a current partner had children in their care at some time during the relationship. Alarming, 38% of those women reported that their children had witnessed the violence. A larger number of women reported violence in a previous relationship and 46% of this group reported that their children had witnessed the violence (Laing, 2000). In an international study Hughes (1992) reported that children are abused in at least 50% of violent families. Studies that have interviewed both mothers and children have reported that children and young people appear to have a higher level of

awareness of the violence than their mothers (Edleson, 1999a; Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson 1990; Mullender et al. 2000, cited in Laing, 2000).

In a recent study conducted by Access Economics Pty Ltd, for the Australian Government's Office of Status of Women it was estimated that:

- 263,800 children are living with victims of domestic violence in 2002/03
- 181,200 children have witnessed domestic violence in 2002/03.

Table 6 illustrates the number and proportions of children less than 18 years old witnessing domestic violence of women who had experienced domestic violence in the previous 12 months with children in their care (Access Economics, 2004). Table 6 provides a decomposition of this data by the age groups of the women.

**Table 6: Number and proportion of children less than 18 years old living with and witnessing domestic violence in 2002–03**

| <b>Age Group of Women</b>                | <b>18-24</b> | <b>25-29</b> | <b>30-34</b> | <b>35-44</b> | <b>45-54</b> | <b>55-59</b> | <b>60 and over</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Children Living with Domestic violence   | 24,300       | 56,800       | 53,600       | 115,400      | 13,600       | -            | -                  | 263,800      |
|  | 30%          | 77%          | 71%          | 71%          | 16%          | 0%           | 0%                 | 50%          |
| Children Who Witnessed Domestic Violence | 14,000       | 43,900       | 34,900       | 78,800       | 9,600        | -            | -                  | 181,200      |
|  | 17%          | 59%          | 46%          | 48%          | 11%          | 0%           | 0%                 | 36%          |
| <b>% of Population Under 18yrs</b>       |              |              |              |              |              |              |                    | <b>5%</b>    |

Source: Access Economics, Women Safety Survey cited in The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy: Part II (2004)

According to statistics released by the Australian Institute of Criminology (Indermaur, 2001) *one-quarter of children* have witnessed violent behaviour towards their mother or stepmother.

### **7.3 Victorian Statistics Related to Exposure to Domestic Violence and Effects on the Child**

In Victoria between 2002/03 28,453 domestic violence incidents were reported to police. A decomposition of these data to illustrate the exposure of children to domestic violence indicates that:

- children less than 5 years of age were present at 25% of those incidents,
- 9,876 children less than 5 years were present,
- 8,007 children less than 10 years of age were present,
- 8,494 young people between the ages of 10-16 years were present.

In Victoria it is estimated that the 28,453 reported cases of domestic violence is only 20% of all domestic violence. Given that up to 80% of cases are not reported the number of children exposed to domestic violence may be greater. Police data collected by the Victorian Family Violence Database reported that just over 45% of family violence incidents (1999-2000 & 2000-2001) had one or more children present (VCCAV, 2002, cited in Mulroney, 2003). Approximately 55% of those seeking assistance from Victorian SAAP Services (1999-2000) because of domestic violence had one or more children accompanying them (Mulroney, 2003). It was found that domestic violence was the most common reason for a child to be referred to DoCS (NSW Department of Community Services, 2003).

In a sample of 20 Victorian families where significant child maltreatment had been substantiated and there was ongoing statutory child protection service involvement, Stanley and Goddard (1993) noted that each of the 20 families was identified as being involved in at least one other violent activity. In a later study (Stanley, 1997) of substantiated child protection cases the presence of psychological and physical violence between adults had a significant effect on the child in at least half of the selected cases (Tomison, 2000). Tomison's (1994, 1999, as cited in Tomison, 2000) studies of actual or suspected child maltreatment cases within the regional Victorian child protection network reported that in almost one third of the cases (66 of 213)

where there were two caregivers in an intimate relationship, case workers reported that one or both of the parents/caregivers was verbally and physically violent towards the other.

## **8.0 SHORT AND LONG TERM EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE**

It is difficult from the current research literature to fully understand why children react differently in the face of maltreatment or emotional abuse, and why some abused children show more severe consequences than others. However, considerable evidence exists which indicates that child sexual abuse is an adverse and damaging experience to children, with often harmful long-term effects (Hanks & Stratton, 2002). Physical injuries exist along a continuum from severe injury and death to no physical injuries at all. Children usually experience both short-term and long-term effects of sexual abuse. Short-term effects can be expressed as fear, anxiety, aggressive behaviours, angry outbursts, hostility and feeling got at (persecuted), and developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour. Long-term effects can be expressed as anxiety, depression, feeling isolated, lack of trust, poor self-esteem, self-harming behaviours (including eating disorders), dissociation, the range of traumatic and post-traumatic disorders, and guilt and shame (Hanks & Stratton, 2002).

Long-term effects of child abuse have been related to pathways into homelessness. Research reported by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2004) suggests that between 50 per cent to 75 per cent of young people who are homeless have experienced childhood sexual assault. Other pathways to homelessness involve issues related to drug and alcohol use, emotional difficulties, depression, self-harm and anger. Moreover, for some young people the abuse may not have occurred in the family home or have been perpetrated by a close family member but these factors still play a major role in them becoming homeless and remaining homeless for longer periods of time (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004). Periods in alternate care/foster placements have also been associated with homelessness.

Egeland et al. (1983, cited in Wilson & James, 2002) concluded from their longitudinal study that emotional abuse had the most serious consequences for a child's social and intellectual development. The findings from this study suggested that verbal abuse and psychological unavailability, as well as physical abuse and neglect, were associated with children who presented with anxious rather than secure attachments and showed frustration, hostility and anger. Children's developmental skills also show a decline in the presence of verbal abuse and the unavailability of their parents (Wilson & James, 2002).

One of the most obvious aspects of child maltreatment is neglect. Neglect is closely linked to emotional abuse (Hanks & Stratton, 2002). Children who suffer from the effects of neglect:

- are very passive in infancy
- are sometimes very active, but totally unfocused when older
- have a limited ability to attend to the behaviour of others
- show significant developmental delay
- have poor speech and learning ability
- have poor ability to interact socially
- are accident prone because they are not properly protected
- may have stunted growth. (Hanks & Stratton, 2002).

Table 6 summarises short and long- term consequences of child abuse reported in (Keatsdale, 2003).

**Table 6: Short and long –term consequences of child abuse (Keatsdale, 2003)**

| <b>IMMEDIATE AND SHORT-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD ABUSE</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Physical</b>   | Injury requiring medical treatment; failure to thrive and malnutrition; death.   |
| <b>Psychological and emotional</b>                          | Trauma as a result of the abuse; PTSD; anxiety; depression; multiple personality and dissociative disorders develop; mood and personality changes; emotional volatility; poorer self-esteem; somatic complaints and exacerbation of medical problems such as asthma.         |
| <b>Behavioural</b>  | Self-destructive behaviour; aggression; poor impulse control; behavioural problems; conduct disorder.  |
| <b>Cognitive and developmental</b>                          | Learning disorders including poor verbal processing, reading, and language delay; diminished intellectual performance; reduced academic performance.   |
| <b>Community interventions</b>                              | Child participates in programs like family support; child interviewed and examined for abuse; child may be removed and placed in out-of-home care.   |
| <b>MEDIUM AND LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD ABUSE</b>     |  |
| <b>Physical</b>   | Permanent physical disability or impairment; increased medical service usage and chronic unwellness; re-abuse of survivors.  |
| <b>Psychological and emotional</b>                          | Mental health problems including depression and PTSD; pervasive sense of worthlessness and diminished opportunities for a meaningful life; poor self-esteem and emotional adjustment; poorer happiness and greater distress.   |
| <b>Behavioural</b>  | Greater violence; juvenile delinquency and adult criminality; teenage pregnancy; welfare dependency; homelessness; suicide and suicide attempts; intergenerational abuse; substance abuse; substance abuse impacting on parenting capacity and health of their unborn child. |
| <b>Cognitive</b>  | Diminished school performance and educational problems; occupational and employment difficulties – unemployment and under employment.  |
| <b>Community intervention</b>                               | Children in out-of-home care for long periods of time; possibly becoming wards; opportunity for re-abuse; family may change and move as a result of criminal proceedings.  |

| SPECIFIC MEDIUM AND LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Physical</b>  | Fertility difficulties, sexual dysfunction and gynaecological problems; greater medical service utilisation including surgery; re-abuse of survivors – rape and domestic violence.  |
| <b>Psychological and emotional</b>                               | Mental health problems, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and dissociation disorders; relationship problems.   |
| <b>Behavioural</b>   | Self-destructive behaviours eating disorders and substance abuse; suicide and suicide attempts; sexualised behaviour.   |
| <b>Cognitive</b>   | Impact of dissociation disorders; diminished school performance and educational problems; occupational and employment difficulties – unemployment and under employment.   |
| <b>Community intervention</b>                                    | Likely to be traumatic; survivors questioned and physically examined; children in out-of-home care for long periods of time; required to provide evidence as part of criminal proceeding; family may change and move as a result of criminal proceedings. |

Source: Keatsdale (2003, p.52-53)

## 8.1 Short and Long Term Effects on Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

Children who have been exposed to domestic violence have in the past tended to be overlooked in the mistaken belief that the absence of physical harm meant that no real harm had occurred (Blanchard, 1993). Consequently, a number of authors have identified that children who witness domestic violence constitute the *silent, forgotten, or invisible victims* of family violence (Edleson, 1999; Kovacs & Tomison, 2003; Tomison, 2000). O’Keefe (1996) found that children exposed to both parent-to-child violence and witnessing interparental violence were adversely affected in an independent and additive manner. Multiple effects on the child were found where the child was being physically abused and the child was part of a family where domestic violence was prevalent (Stark & Filcraft, 1988; Bowker, 1988). While the indicators suggest that the majority of physical abuse is perpetuated by fathers or step-fathers there are mothers who physically abuse their children. Moreover, children often suffer neglect due to the mother’s practical and/or emotional absence from their parenting

role as a consequence of the domestic violence (<http://domestic-violence.tripod.com>; The Canberra Hospital).

Research into the effects of domestic violence suggests that this exposure has an adverse impact across a range of child functioning, produces different effects at different ages, increases the risk for child abuse, and is associated with other risk factors such as poverty and parental substance abuse (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). Moreover, children exposed to domestic violence tend to be more aggressive and exhibit behavioural problems in their schools and communities ranging from temper tantrums to fights. Internalised behaviour problems occur including depression, suicidal behaviours, anxiety, fears, phobias, insomnia, tics, bed-wetting, and low self-esteem (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). Children exposed to domestic violence may demonstrate impaired ability to concentrate, difficulty in their schoolwork, and record significantly lower scores on measures of verbal, motor, and cognitive skills (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999).

It is important to note at this point, that cross-sectional research studies can demonstrate only an association between the child witnessing domestic violence and behavioural difficulties in certain types of functioning. Clearly, inferences concerning causation are limited by the inappropriateness of experimental manipulations involving *the presence and dosage of violence* (Laing, 2000). As Laing (2000) points out, in relation to many studies to infer causative outcomes of domestic violence on children is not strictly correct.

In summary, this review of the current literature has identified a range of emotional and behavioural problems associated with children exposed to domestic violence. Importantly, previous studies have found that children who had witnessed the abuse but who had not been abused themselves showed the same level of negative effects as those who had witnessed and experienced abuse.

The literature (Report of the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force, 1988; [www.wesleymission.org.au](http://www.wesleymission.org.au)) suggests that children witnessing and experiencing abuse may demonstrate:

- nervous and withdrawn demeanour
- increased levels of anxiety for both males and females
- psychosomatic illnesses, including headaches, abdominal complaints, asthma, peptic ulcers, rheumatoid arthritis, stuttering and enuresis
- increased internalised problems such as depression
- decreased cognitive abilities and poor school performance
- decreased interpersonal sensitivity, that is, a reduction in ability to understand social situations including thoughts and feelings of people involved
- bed-wetting
- restlessness
- excessive cruelty to animals
- mimicking aggressive language and behaviour in their play
- violence toward their girlfriends
- running away from home
- low self-esteem
- poor conflict resolution skills
- repressed feelings of fear, anger, guilt, and confusion
- adjustment problems, fewer interests, fewer social activities
- stress-related physical ailments
- decreased empathy
- lower rating in social competence (especially boys)
- inability to form stable adult relationships
- higher risks of alcohol/drug abuse and juvenile delinquency.

## 9.0 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this report was to present current data and opinions related to child abuse in Australia. It is clear that although there may not be a universally agreed upon definition of child abuse both the data and informed opinion agree that child abuse in Australia is a very significant issue. Much of the data and opinion cited in the report relates to behaviour at the level of individual adult caregivers and the effects of these behaviours on the child. However, it is commonly accepted that the ultimate responsibility to provide remediation and preventative responses to the challenges presented by child abuse lies at the level of the broader community and society.

The data indicate tragic levels of child abuse in the Australian community. For example, the data presented support the inferences that:

- in 2002-2003 it was estimated that every two minutes there is one notification of child abuse reported in Australia
- 198,355 notifications of child abuse were reported in Australia in 2002-2003
- in 2002-2003 there was one report of child abuse for every 25 children in Australia
- in 2003-2004 child abuse notifications were 219,384.

While not all notifications of child abuse are later substantiated, there were:

- 40,416 cases in Australia substantiated in 2002-2003
- one child every 13 minutes was confirmed by child protection services as being harmed.

It is difficult to compare notification and substantiation rates across States and Territories over time due to differences and changes in legislation, classification of notifications, professional service practices and data reporting systems. However, it is clear that the data does not support an inference that significant reductions in child abuse have been achieved from 1999 to 2004.

The major classifications of child abuse indicate that emotional abuse is the most prevalent followed by physical abuse and neglect. It must be remembered, however, that these primary classifications may also be accompanied by verbal assault, isolation and the withholding of resources necessary for the wellbeing of the child.

The effects on the child of exposure to domestic violence have attracted much interest in the research literature. Children are exposed to domestic violence by witnessing violence and abuse and by being in a household filled with violence and the threat of terrorising behaviours. It appears that children are far more aware of the violence occurring than has been previously thought. The report cites estimates of between 30% and 60% of children exposed to domestic violence also suffer some form of abuse. It is estimated that over 5% of the Australian population less than 18 years old live with and witness domestic violence. Australian Institute of Criminology has estimated that 25% of children have witnessed violent behaviour toward their mother or stepmother. It has been suggested that environments where both domestic violence and child abuse occur represent the greatest risk to children's safety.

Abuse can have short and long –term effects on the child. While the short-term effects include recovery from physical injuries the long term effects include failure to thrive, learning difficulties and disorders, psychological and emotional disorders, and juvenile delinquency and homelessness. These short and long –term effects necessitate the involvement of a diversity of public and charitable services providing both short and long –term interventions. Of great importance is the acknowledgement by the wider community of the extent of child abuse in Australia and the scope of interventions necessary to meet the challenges presented to society.

In conclusion, the data and informed opinion cited in this report have identified the multi-factorial nature of child abuse and the need for a diversity of remedial and

preventative services. Factors such as styles of parenting which may lead to an abusive family environment need to be addressed from both an individual and social perspective. Taken together, these factors suggest a need for greater education, information dissemination and community and supporting services to assist families at risk.

## 10.0 References

- Access Economics Pty Ltd. (2004). *The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Community: Part 1 & 2*. Report prepared for the Australian Government's Office of the Status of Women.
- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004). *Child Protection Australia 2002-03*, AIHW Cat No. CWS 22. Child Welfare Series 34. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005). *Child Protection Australia 2003-04*, AIHW Cat No. CWS 24. Child Welfare Series 36. Canberra: AIHW.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003). *Recorded Crime-Victims*. (Catalogue No. 4510.0).
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003). *Recorded Crime-Victims*. (Catalogue No. 5410.0).
- Australian Bureau of statistics (1996). *Women's Safety Survey*. (Catalogue No. 4128.0).
- Australian Institute of Family Studies (2004). *Accsa Newsletter* no.4.
- Barnardos Staff. *Domestic Violence – Criminal Assault in the Home*, Monograph 25.
- Blanchard, A. (1993). Violence in Families. *Family Matters*, 34.
- Bowker, L.H. (1988). On the relationship between wife beating and child abuse. In Yllo K. and Bograd M. (1988) *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*, Sage.
- Browne, K. (2002). *Child abuse: defining, understanding and intervening*. In K. Wilson & A. James (Ed), *The Child Protection Handbook* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). Bailliere Tindall: London.
- Calder, R. (2001). *New Responses to Domestic Violence*, Australian Institute of Criminology.
- Carter, L.S., Weithorn, L.A., Behrman, R.E. (1999). Domestic Violence and Children: Analysis and Recommendations. *The Future of Children*. Vol.9, No.3, p4-20.
- Child Abuse Prevention Resource Sheet No.1, June (2004). *Child Abuse Statistics*, Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Child Sexual Abuse: understanding and responding. (2000). Published by Child Protection and Care, community Care Division, *Victorian Government Department of Human Services*.
- Corby, B. (2000). *Child Abuse; towards a knowledge base*. Open University Press: Buckingham.
- Domestic Violence Taskforce (1988). *Beyond These Walls*: Report for the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force. Department of Family Services and Welfare Housing, Brisbane.

- Edelson, J.L. (1999). The overlap between child maltreatment and women battering. *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp.134-154.
- Fantuzzo, J.W., Mohr, W.K. (1999). Prevalence and Effects of Child Exposure to Domestic Violence. *The Future of Children*, Vol. 9, No.3. p.21-23.
- Foster, A. (2004). Child Abuse in Australia: plotting future directions for NAPCAN, *Australian Institute of Family Studies*, NCPC Newsletter, Vol.12, No. 1.
- Goddard, C.R., Hillard, P. (1993). Child Sexual Abuse: Assault in a Violent Context. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*. Vol. 28, No. 1.
- Hanks, H., Stratton, P. (2002). *Consequences and indicators of child abuse*. In K. Wilson & A. James (Ed), *The Child Protection Handbook* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). Bailliere Tindall: London.
- Hughes, H.M. (1992). *Impact of Spouse Abuse on Children of Battered Women*. Violence Update, 8-11
- Hume, M. (2003). *The Relationship between Child Sexual Abuse, Domestic Violence and Separating Families*. Paper presented at the Child Sexual Abuse: Justice Response or Alternative Resolution Conference convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology.
- Indermaur, D. (2001). *Young Australians and Domestic Violence: trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, Australian Institute of Criminology.
- Keatsdale (2003). *The Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in Australia*, Keatsdale Pty Ltd Management Consultants for the Kids First Foundation.
- Kovacs, K., Tomison, A.M. (2003). An analysis of current Australian program initiatives for children exposed to domestic violence. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 38, no. 4.
- Laing, L. (2000). *Children, young people and domestic violence. Issue Paper 2*. Sydney: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, UNSW.
- Laing, L. (2003). *Domestic Violence in the Context of Child Abuse and Neglect*, Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, UNSW.
- Laing, L., Bobic, N. (2002). *Economic cost of domestic violence, Literature Review*. Sydney: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, UNSW.
- Lyon, C., de Cruz, P. (1993). *Child Abuse* (2<sup>nd</sup> Eds). Family Law.
- Mulroney, J. (2003). *Australian Statistics on Domestic Violence*. Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, UNSW.
- NSW Department of Community Services (2003). *Newsletter*, vol. 11, no.1, winter.
- O'Keefe, M. (1996). The differential effects of family violence on adolescent adjustment. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. 13.
- Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force 1988, *Beyond These Walls*, Report of the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force to the Minister for Family Services and Welfare Housing, Brisbane.

Smallbone, S.W., Wortley, R.K. (2001). *Child Sexual Abuse: Offender Characteristics and Modus Operandi: Trends & Issues*, no.193. Australian Institute of Criminology.

Stanko, E.A., Crisp, D., Hale, C., Lucraft, H. (1998). *Counting the Costs: Estimating the impact of domestic violence in the London Borough of Hackney*. London: Crime Concern.

Stanley, J.R., Goddard, C.R. (1993). The association between child abuse and other family violence. *Australian Social Work*. vol.46, no.2.

Stark, E., Flitcraft, A. (1988). Women and Children at Risk: A feminist perspective on child abuse. *International Journal of Health Services*. vol.16, no.1.

The Canberra Hospital, *Children and Domestic Violence: A Child Protection Issue*. <http://auseinet.flinders.edu.au/resources/auseinet/conf99/children.pdf>

Tomison, A.M., (2000). *Exploring family violence: links between child maltreatment and domestic violence*, National Child Protection Clearinghouse.

Victorian Child Death Review Committee, (2004). *Annual Report of Inquiries into Child Deaths*.

Victorian Law Reform Commission (2004). *Review of Family Violence Laws: Consultation Paper*.

Wilson, K., James, A. (2002). *The Child Protection Handbook*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Eds). Bailliere Tindall: London.

<http://domestic-violence.tripod.com/Children/Children.htm>

[www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/nl2004/winter.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/nl2004/winter.html)

[www.dhs.vic.gov.au](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au)

[www.napcan.org.au/main.php?s=3&sub=24&](http://www.napcan.org.au/main.php?s=3&sub=24&)

[www.stopchildabuse.com.au](http://www.stopchildabuse.com.au)

[www.wesleymission.org.au/publications/r&d/family%20crisis.html](http://www.wesleymission.org.au/publications/r&d/family%20crisis.html)

## 11.0 APPENDIX

### Crimes Against Children In Australia

An adjunct to child abuse statistics are crimes against children. The following data details the frequency and nature of crimes against children. The majority of the data refers to children between the ages of 0-14. However, some statistics relate to children between the ages of 0-17.

This Appendix incorporates crimes against children data in the following areas:

- Murder
- Attempted Murder
- Assault
- Sexual Assault
- Kidnapping / Abduction
- Robbery (Armed & Unarmed).

**Table 1: Numbers of child and teenage victims of crime in Australia: Aged 0-14 years**

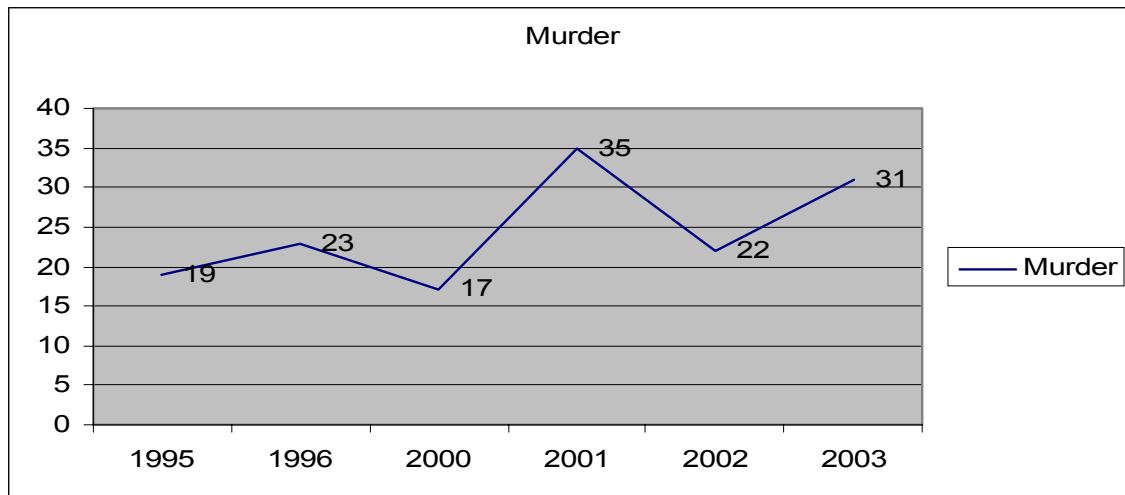
| Year                        | 1995 | 1996 | 2000  | 2001  | 2002  | 2003  |
|-----------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Murder</b>               | 19   | 23   | 17    | 35    | 22    | 31    |
| <b>Attempted Murder</b>     | 16   | 13   | 32    | 33    | 25    | 30    |
| <b>Assault</b>              | 7777 | 8838 | 10672 | 10952 | 11386 | 12395 |
| <b>Sexual Assault</b>       | 5401 | 5868 | 6378  | 6796  | 7391  | 7502  |
| <b>Kidnapping/Abduction</b> | 209  | 190  | 253   | 230   | 190   | 255   |
| <b>Robbery</b>              | 934  | 787  | 1165  | 1156  | 1089  | 1246  |

Source: ABS (2003); Catalogue No.5410.0; Catalogue No.4510.0

## Definitions and Data of Crimes Against Children

**Murder** is the willful killing of a child either intentionally or with reckless indifference to life (ABS, 2003).

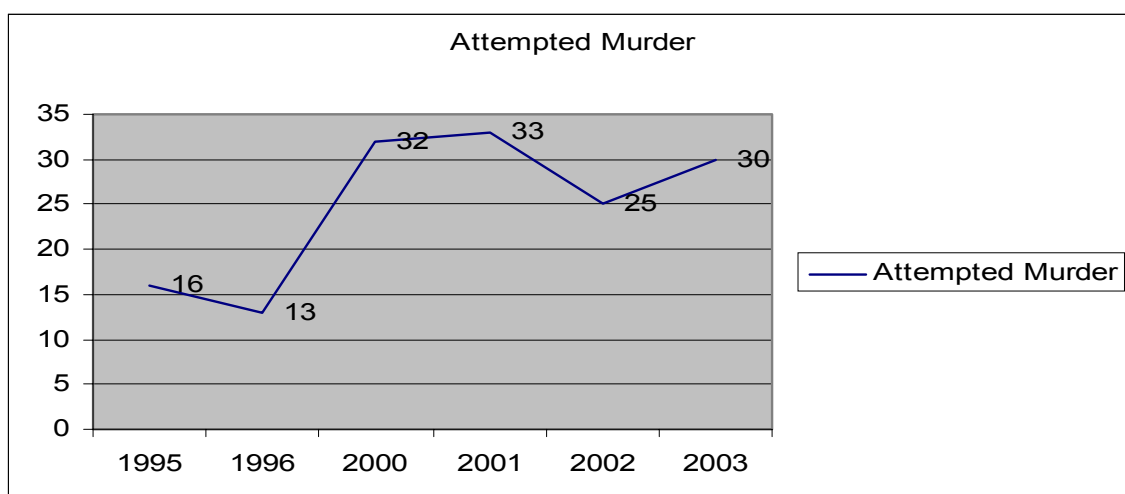
**Figure 1: Incidence of murder of children 1995-2003**



Source: ABS (2003); Catalogue No. 5410.0; Catalogue No. 4510.0

**Attempted Murder** is the attempt to unlawfully kill a child by any means, act or omission. (ABS, 2003).

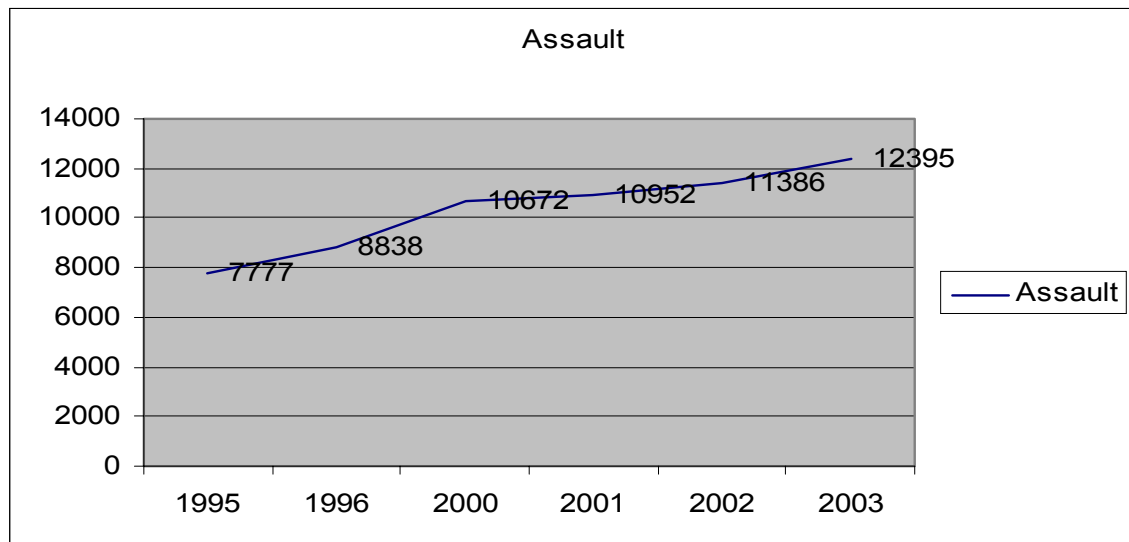
**Figure 2: Incidence of attempted murder of children 1995-2003**



Source: ABS (2003); Catalogue No. 5410.0; Catalogue No. 4510.0

**Assault** is the direct infliction of force, injury or violence upon a child, including attempts or threats, providing the attempts/threats are in the form of face-to-face direct confrontation and there is reason to believe that the attempts/threats can be immediately enacted (ABS, 2003).

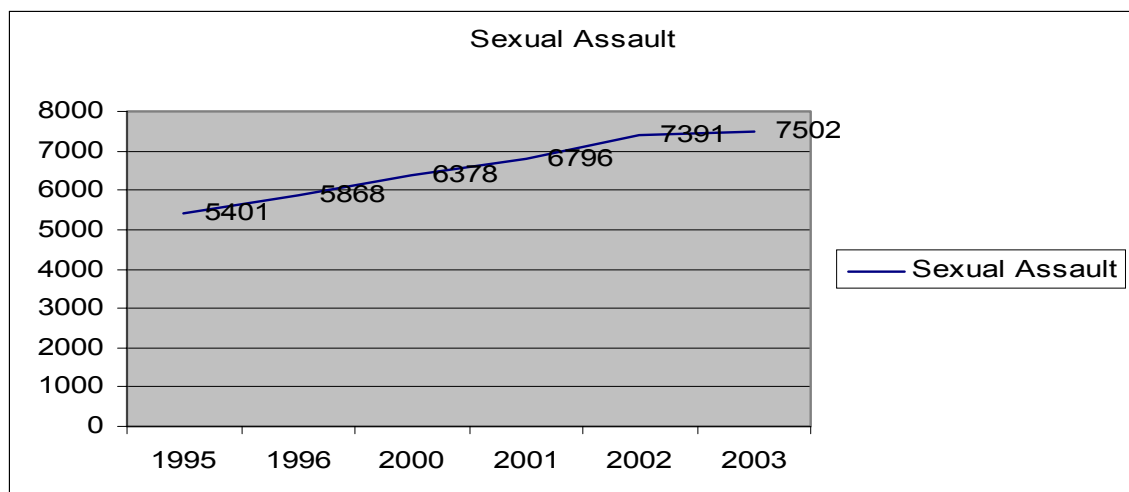
**Figure 3: Incidence of assault on children 1995-2003**



Source: ABS (2003); Catalogue No. 5410.0; Catalogue No. 4510.0

**Sexual Assault** is a physical assault of a sexual nature, directed toward a child (ABS, 2003).

**Figure 4: Incidence of sexual assault of children 1995-2003**

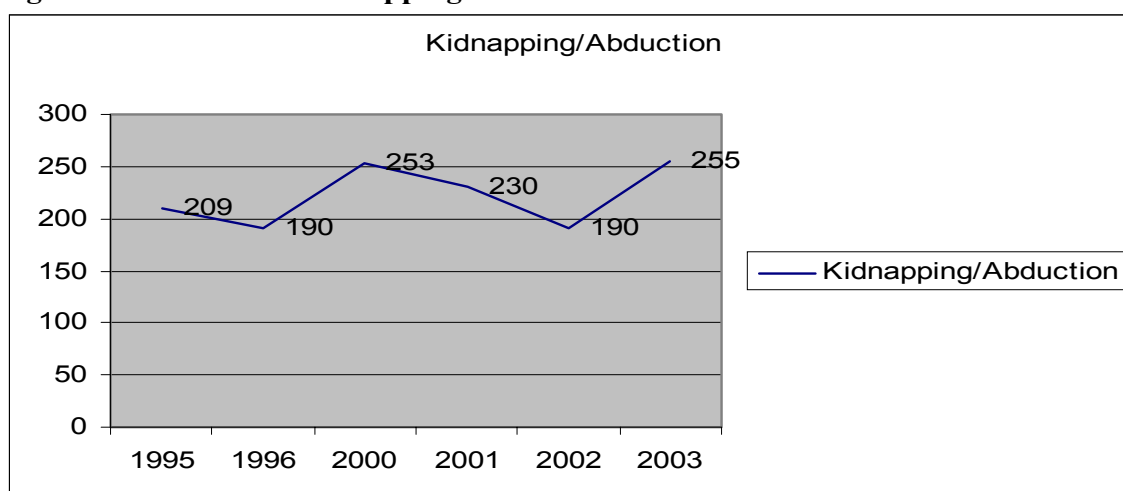


Source: ABS (2003); Catalogue No. 5410.0; Catalogue No. 4510.0

**Kidnapping / Abduction** is the unlawful seizing or taking away of another person:

- against that person's will,
- against the will of any parent, guardian or other person having lawful custody or care of that person (ABS, 2003).

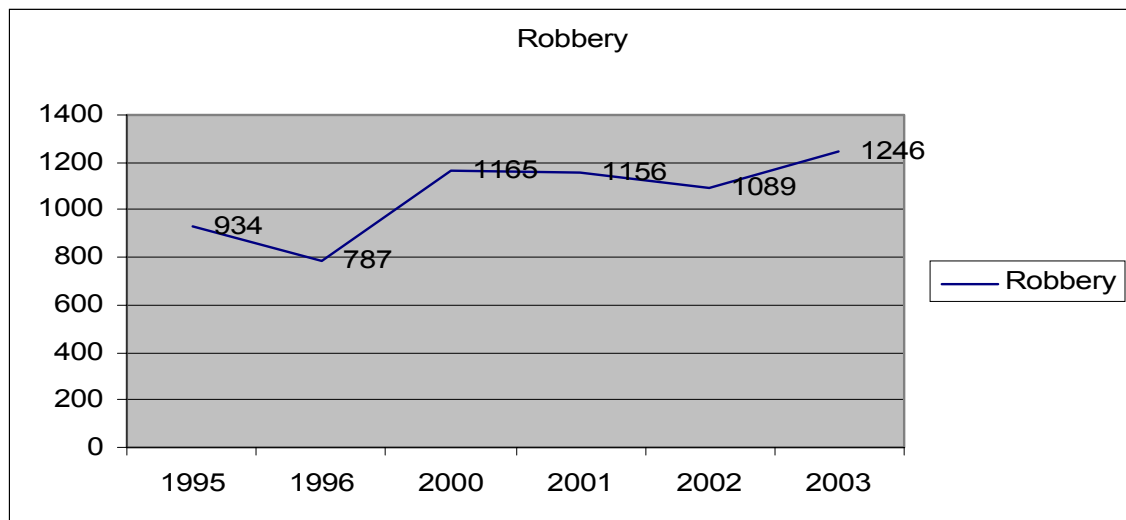
**Figure 5: Incidence of kidnapping/abduction of children 1995-2003**



Source: ABS (2003); Catalogue No. 5410.0; Catalogue No. 4510.0

**Robbery (Armed & Unarmed)** offences involve the unlawful taking of property, with intent to permanently deprive the owner of the property, from the immediate possession of a person, or control, custody or care of a person, accompanied by the use, and/or threatened use of immediate force or violence (ABS, 2003).

**Figure 6: Incidence of robbery (armed & unarmed) of children 1995-2003**



Source: ABS (2003); Catalogue No. 5410.0; Catalogue No. 4510.0