



Abducted then Murdered Children

A CANADIAN STUDY *(PRELIMINARY RESULTS)*



CANADIAN CENTRE *for* CHILD PROTECTION®

Helping families. Protecting children.

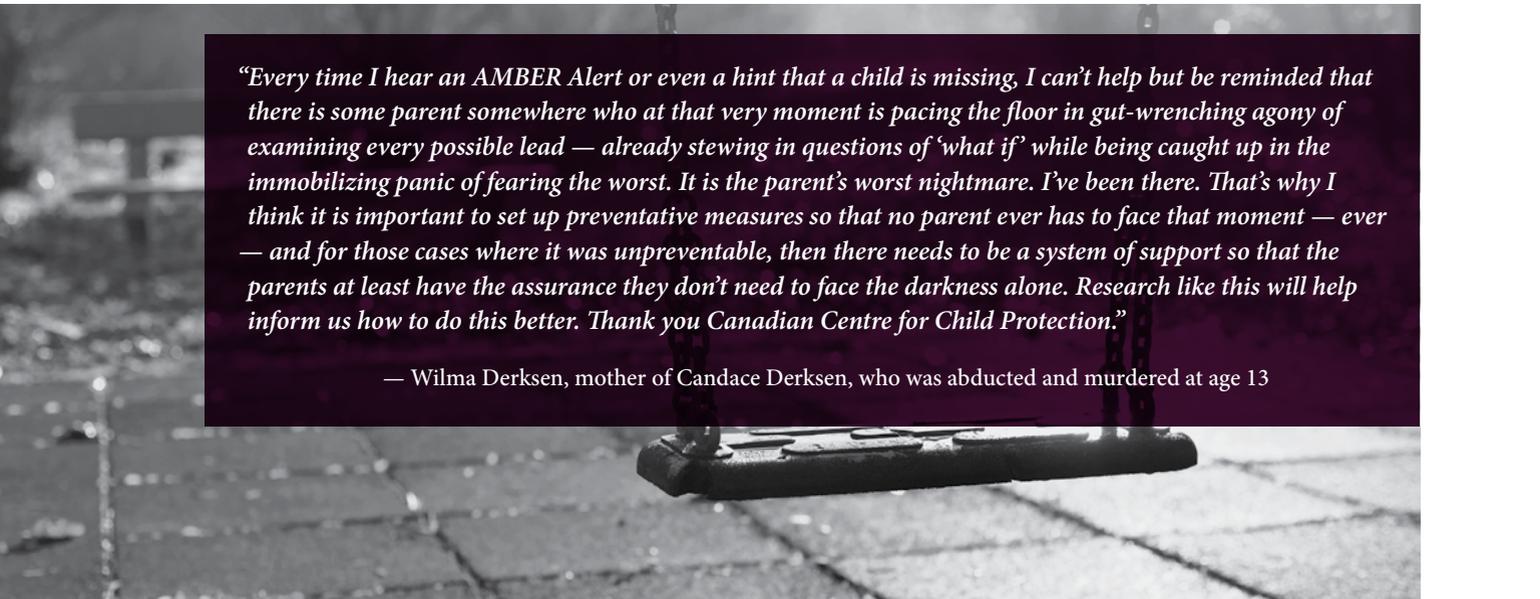
BACKGROUND

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection has undertaken a study related to abducted then murdered children in Canada. The project involves an environmental scan and examination of instances involving the abduction and subsequent murder of a child by a stranger or an acquaintance. The goal is to better understand the backgrounds of these children and gain insights into the methods of operation and histories of the offenders — all in an effort to help identify additional prevention and intervention strategies in the area of abducted and murdered children.

While cases of “stranger” abductions and murders of children in Canada are extremely rare, the impacts of such events on communities and the general public are significant. The apparent randomness and heinous nature of such crimes creates an atmosphere of fear and vulnerability, and undermines the public’s sense of security.

Through the information gleaned from this study, Canadians can advance their knowledge around this issue. Education is the best antidote to common public denial that this will “never happen to my child.” The stories of the children in this project offer that critical lens into the inherent vulnerability of children and why more must be done to stop offenders who wish to exploit that vulnerability.

The data set out in this report is based on the analysis conducted to date and is subject to change in the final report. The final report will include more data, and will be released later in 2016.



“Every time I hear an AMBER Alert or even a hint that a child is missing, I can’t help but be reminded that there is some parent somewhere who at that very moment is pacing the floor in gut-wrenching agony of examining every possible lead — already stewing in questions of ‘what if’ while being caught up in the immobilizing panic of fearing the worst. It is the parent’s worst nightmare. I’ve been there. That’s why I think it is important to set up preventative measures so that no parent ever has to face that moment — ever — and for those cases where it was unpreventable, then there needs to be a system of support so that the parents at least have the assurance they don’t need to face the darkness alone. Research like this will help inform us how to do this better. Thank you Canadian Centre for Child Protection.”

— Wilma Derksen, mother of Candace Derksen, who was abducted and murdered at age 13

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CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION

A total of 147 instances were eligible for inclusion in the *Abducted then Murdered Children: A Canadian Study*¹ based upon the following criteria:

TIME FRAME	The abduction and murder occurred between 1970 and 2010 .
AGE OF CHILD	The child was aged 16 or younger at the time of abduction.
BODY LOCATED	The child's body has to have been located , or if it has not been located, then there must be at least one person who has been convicted for the offence.
ABDUCTION	The available information was sufficient to reasonably conclude that the child was " abducted " or " kidnapped " prior to the murder, as those terms are defined in the <i>Criminal Code</i> of Canada. ²
OFFENDER/ SUSPECT	The person responsible (or believed to be responsible) for the abduction must not be the child's parent/guardian, step-parent, sibling or any other relative who resided in the same home as the child, or a person the child was dating at the time of abduction.

TERMINOLOGY

Instance → An instance refers to the abduction and murder of one child, or more than one child at the same time.

Case Type → There are two case types:

- **Convicted Offender Case:** At least one individual was convicted of the offence.³
- **Unresolved Case:** No one has been convicted of the offence.

Offender type → There are three offender types:

- **Single Offender:** One offender involved in one instance.
- **Multiple Offenders:** More than one offender involved in one instance.
- **Serial Offender:** One or more offenders involved in more than one instance.

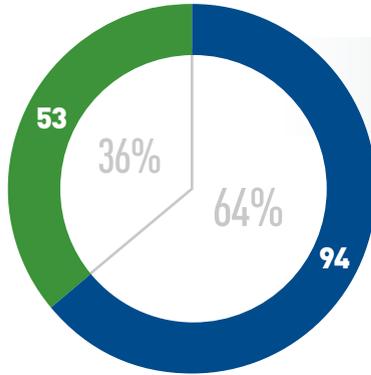
1 Instances that fit the case criteria but were not discovered until after data collection was complete are not included in the preliminary data but will be analyzed at a later date.

2 To be included in the study, the child had to have been moved from one location to another (even if only a short distance).

3 As of March 3, 2015. The term "offender" includes those held not criminally responsible.

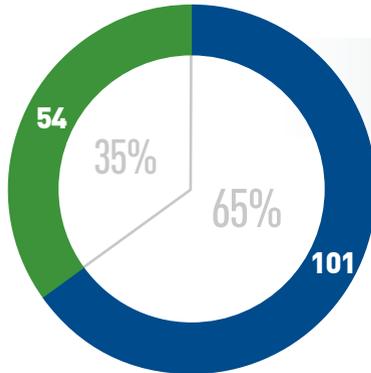


SUMMARY OF PRIMARY DATA



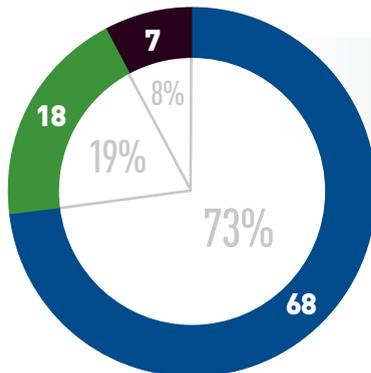
147 INSTANCES

- Convicted Offender Case type
- Unresolved Case type



155 VICTIMS

- Convicted Offender Case type
- Unresolved Case type



93 OFFENDERS

- Single Offender type (68 instances, 72 victims)
- Multiple Offenders type (7 instances, 8 victims)
- Serial Offender type (19 instances, 21 victims)

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Data may be presented as a whole (i.e., inclusive of all instances), according to Case Type or Offender Type, or as a subset of data as indicated by the context. Not all data points could be reliably ascertained for all instances studied. Percentages used relate to information that could be reliably ascertained. If information is unknown for 15% or more of a data set, it is noted either in the context of the statement or in a footnote. Analysis is ongoing and all percentages presented are subject to change in the final report.

DATA COLLECTION

The identification of the initial list of child victims to be included in this study was conducted through online searches as well as utilizing our knowledge as an agency working in the missing children space for the last 30 years. We also consulted with a number of law enforcement agencies and interviewed some former and current investigating officers in relation to some of the instances included in the study. We sought out and reviewed reported case law, inquest reports and/or reports from public inquiries, where available. When available and feasible, we also reviewed court files and obtained and reviewed copies of transcripts for some of the instances included. Parole board reports were ordered and reviewed for offenders (where possible).





CHILD VICTIMS

A total of **155 child victims** were included in the study. To help us to better understand the children who had been victimized, and to inform our education and awareness activities, we looked closely at issues such as sex, age and race.

SEX OF CHILD:

84% of victims in the study were **female** (130), and 16% were male (25). Female victims were highly represented across all age groups.



AGE OF CHILD:

The average victim was **11.6 years old**, with a significant proportion of victims between the ages of 14 and 16 years old (43%).⁴

RACE OF CHILD:

77% of the victims were (or were reliably assumed to be) **Caucasian**. The next highest representation by race was Aboriginal (17%). Among victims aged 14 to 16, the proportion of Aboriginal victims rose to 25%.

⁴ An instance was less likely to be of the convicted offender case type if the victim was 11 years old or older.

OFFENDERS

There were **93 convicted offenders** included in the study.⁵ We felt it would be important for investigators and others to have a better sense of the backgrounds of the individuals who carried out these crimes.

SEX OF OFFENDER:

92% of the offenders included in the study were **male**.

AGE OF OFFENDER:

The **average offender** was **25.9 years old**, and 69% of the offenders were under the age of 30. While most of the offenders were adults, 22% were under the age of 18.

RACE OF OFFENDER:

68% of the offenders were (or were reliably assumed to be) **Caucasian**. The next highest represented racial group was Aboriginal (17%).

CRIMINAL RECORD INFORMATION:

At least **55%** of the offenders had a **criminal record** prior to the time the offence was committed.⁶ Among those individuals who had a prior criminal record, at least 29% were found to have been convicted of a prior violent or sexual offence against a child. The most common offence for those with a prior record was a property offence — 65% of those offenders had been convicted of at least one property offence. The next most common offence for those with a prior record was a violent offence — 45% of those offenders had been convicted of at least one violent offence.

PAROLE/PROBATION INFORMATION:

Over **22%** of the offenders were either on **parole, probation or out on bail** at the time of committing the offence. Of that subset of offenders, 52% had been arrested or imprisoned for a sexual offence at some point in the past.

⁵ Five offenders were held to be not criminally responsible for the offence.

⁶ Criminal record information could not be reliably ascertained for 16 offenders.



Model in image and intended as illustrative.

MOTIVATION, METHOD OF ABDUCTION AND PRIOR CONTACT

To better understand the context in which these crimes occurred, we carefully examined the available information to assist in understanding what motivated an offender to abduct a child, whether the offender used a lure or used force to abduct the victim, and how many child victims had contact with the offender prior to the offence.

SEXUAL PURPOSE:

The motivation for abducting a child was **determined to be sexual** in **77%** of all instances that involved a convicted offender.⁷ The motive was determined through a combination of medical evidence, a legal finding made in the court proceedings, or an admission by the offender. All instances that involved a serial offender were sexually motivated.

METHOD OF ABDUCTION:

There are generally no witnesses to the abduction of a child and so it is very difficult to determine if the abductor physically forced the victim to accompany her/him initially, or if the tactic used was more subtle, such as a ruse or lure. However, it appears that in **just over half** of the instances that involved a convicted offender, the offender **manipulated the victim in some way initially**, which facilitated the abduction. Only 18% of instances appeared to have initially involved the use of force.

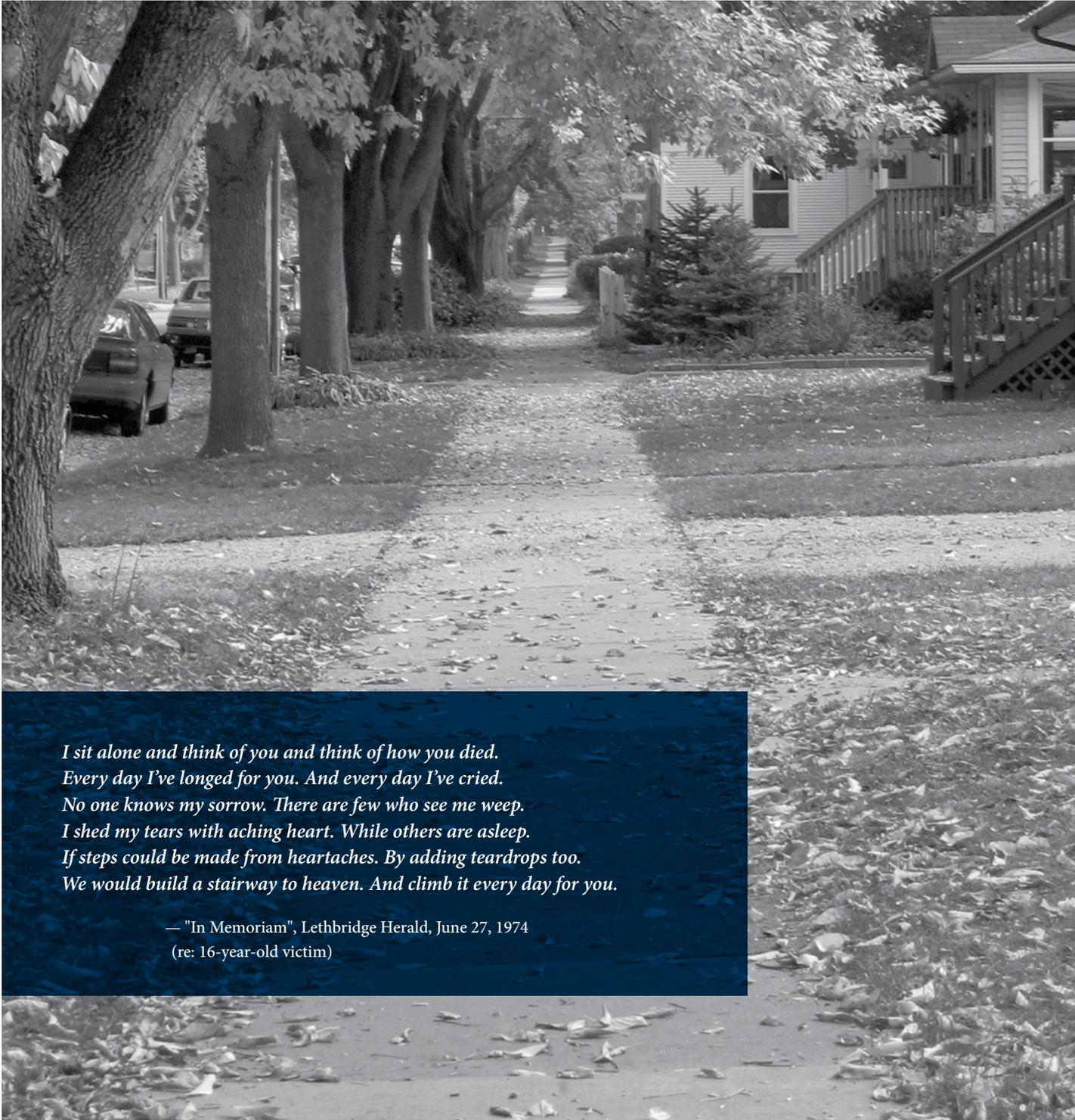
PRIOR CONTACT BETWEEN VICTIM AND OFFENDER:

Of the instances in which there was a convicted offender, **36%** involved **prior contact** between the offender⁸ and the victim at least once, and 64% involved no known prior contact between the offender and the victim.⁹

7 For instances with more than one offender, the motivation was coded as sexual if at least one offender was found to have had a sexual motivation.

8 Or one of the offenders, in instances that involved more than one offender.

9 It should be noted that in 15% of the instances in which there was no known prior contact, the offender did live in the same neighbourhood as the victim. Therefore, it is possible that the offender and victim had met, or at least that the offender was a “familiar face” to the victim.



*I sit alone and think of you and think of how you died.
Every day I've longed for you. And every day I've cried.
No one knows my sorrow. There are few who see me weep.
I shed my tears with aching heart. While others are asleep.
If steps could be made from heartaches. By adding teardrops too.
We would build a stairway to heaven. And climb it every day for you.*

— "In Memoriam", Lethbridge Herald, June 27, 1974
(re: 16-year-old victim)

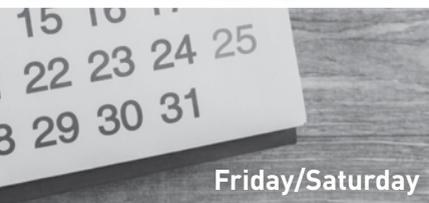
CIRCUMSTANCES OF ABDUCTION AND MURDER

There were 147 instances of abduction included in the study. It is hoped that by looking at the timing and the circumstances of these instances in the collective, valuable insight can be gleaned to assist in protecting children going forward.



TIME OF YEAR:

Abductions were most common during the late spring and summer months (i.e., June, July and August), with **41%** of all instances occurring within these 3 months.



DAYS OF THE WEEK:

There was a concentration of instances that occurred on Fridays and Saturdays (**45%**).



TIME OF DAY:¹⁰

Across all age groups, there was a high proportion of children who were last seen between the hours of 3:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. (**53%**).



PROXIMITY OF VICTIM TO OTHERS AT THE TIME OF ABDUCTION:¹¹

The abduction of a child often took place when a child was alone (**68%**). There were a limited number of instances that occurred while the child was in close proximity to her/his parent/guardian (**8%**) or to another child who knew the victim (**15%**).



CHILD ACTIVITY AT TIME OF ABDUCTION:¹²

In a high percentage of instances (**67%**) were in-transit at the time of abduction (i.e., walking, biking), such as travelling to school, a friend's home or a nearby park or mall.

Models in image and intended as illustrative.

¹⁰ Information based on data for 107/147 instances.

¹¹ Information based on data for 124/147 instances.

¹² Information based on data for 120/147 instances.



VEHICLE USE — ABDUCTION:

A **vehicle was used to abduct** a victim in **49%** of the instances that involved a convicted offender. The use of a vehicle to abduct a victim was far more likely if the instance involved at least one adult offender than if the instance involved only offenders under the age of 18.

VEHICLE USE — AT ANY POINT:

In **55%** of the instances that involved a convicted offender, a **vehicle was used at some point** during the commission of the offence (i.e., whether to abduct or at some later point). In almost all instances that involved the use of a vehicle at some point during the commission of the offence, at least one offender over the age of 18 was involved.

PROXIMITY OF THE CHILD'S HOME AND THE OFFENDER'S HOME TO LOCATION OF ABDUCTION:

In **68%** of the instances where an approximate abduction location could be established, the abduction occurred within the **child's own neighbourhood** (e.g., within a few blocks of home or school).¹³

In **29%** of the instances with a convicted offender, the offender¹⁴ lived in the **same neighbourhood** as the place the child was abducted from. At least 59% of those instances occurred within a few blocks of the offender's home.

LOCATION CHILD TAKEN TO AFTER ABDUCTION:

In **37%** of the instances involving a convicted offender, the victim was taken to a **location that was within walking distance** from the place the child was last seen. In 25% of the instances involving a convicted offender where it is known where the child was taken initially, the offender took the victim back to his own home. Notably, serial offenders tended to take the child further away from the location of the abduction.

ESTIMATED ELAPSED TIME BETWEEN ABDUCTION AND MURDER:

The time that elapsed between the abduction and murder of the victim could be reliably ascertained for 60% of the victims included in the study. Of those victims, **70%** were murdered within **three hours** of abduction.

¹³ Information based on data for 104/147 instances.

¹⁴ Or one of the offenders, in instances that involved more than one offender.



“He had just gotten out of prison. We didn’t know him, but he had been hanging around the community. There were no community notifications back then.”

— Mother of an 11-year-old girl who was abducted and murdered
(personal communication)

Model in image and intended as illustrative.

LOCATION OF VICTIM'S BODY

In any missing child case, the focus is to find the child as quickly as possible. Fortunately, in the vast majority of reports made to police, the child is found alive and well. However, in the rare subset of cases captured by this study, the child was found deceased.¹⁵ As such, we looked closely at the circumstances surrounding the location of the child's body, recognizing its critical importance to the investigation and prosecution of the person(s) responsible.

TIME TO LOCATE:

Overall, **35%** of victims who were located, were located deceased within **one day** of their disappearance. 76% of the victims were located within a month of disappearance.

WHO LOCATED VICTIM'S BODY:

A significant percentage of victims (**41%**) were **located by a member of the public**; 20% were located by police. For the balance of victims, it could not be reliably determined who located the body.

VICTIM'S BODY LOCATION SITE:

55% of the victims for whom body location site was known were **located deceased outside of a populated area** such as a city or a town. The distance between the abduction location and the body location site was significantly less if the offender was under the age of 18.

"Her murder was the end of our innocence..... This is just as hard on me today as it was the day they found her body. You never really get over something like this. You just get through your day as best you can."

— Father of a 16-year-old victim, The Ottawa Citizen, July 28, 1998.



¹⁵ 3 victims were not found.

CURRENT STATUS OF OFFENDERS

Of the **93** offenders who have been convicted, **80%** are still incarcerated or being held in a medical facility. The most common conviction was for first degree murder, which carries a life sentence. A life sentence means that even if released, many of these individuals will be subject to parole conditions for their lifetime.



30 OFFENDERS
are **currently eligible** for some form of parole.



8 OFFENDERS
are eligible for full parole within the **next five years**.



4 OFFENDERS
are **currently out** on parole.



Model in image and intended as illustrative

“I felt like it was up to me or, somehow, if I cried hard enough or made all the right statements or got enough people to sign papers, that it would be up to me to keep this person in jail where he needs to be so there couldn’t possibly be another victim.”

— Mother of a 3-year-old victim, Coast Reporter, October 29, 2010.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the families of the victims who were included in the study. We had connected with several families prior to launching the study, and were able to connect with several more over the course of the study. We appreciate their taking the time to share their stories and acknowledge how difficult it would have been for them to do so. We also want to thank the police and other justice officials who were of assistance throughout the project.

The study was conducted, in part, with financial support from the Government of Canada's Department of Justice Victims Fund.



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