

The Demographics of Minor Perpetrators of Sexually Assaulted Pediatric Patients from the Philippine General Hospital - Child Protection Unit (PGH-CPU) from January 2013 to December 2018

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ABSTRACT

Background. Child sexual assault has been underreported, more so, those who minor perpetrators have assaulted. Surveillance for these children, victims and perpetrators alike, must be established.

Objective. The objective was to describe the characteristic profile of the minor perpetrators who committed child sexual abuse seen in Philippine General Hospital - Child Protection Unit (PGH-CPU) from January 2013 to December 2018.

Methodology. This retrospective cohort study was conducted using chart review and data retrieval from the Child Protection Management Information System (CPMIS) of the PGH-CPU.

Results. There were 931 minor perpetrators. 55.9% were 15-19 years old and were predominantly male. 12.7% came from Cavite and 9.5% from Manila. Most were neighbors, acquaintances, and cousins of the victims. 39.4% were still students. 14.4% engaged in alcohol consumption. 7.7% have repeatedly abused children. 6.1% already had police blotter records. 7.3% were exposed to pornography. 7.5% are currently in jail, and 4.1% are in the same household as the victim.

Conclusion. A child's environment is potentially contributory to their actions. The minor perpetrators reported were observed to have adverse childhood experiences like violence in their families. Although sexual abuse cases focus on the victims, it is equally vital that authorities give attention to minor perpetrators because they are also children. Programs and interventions should be provided for them to grow up to be better individuals in society.

Keywords: minor perpetrators, sexual abuse, children

INTRODUCTION

The Child Protection Network (CPN) is an umbrella organization of the Women and Child Protection Unit in the Philippines. It comprises physicians, social workers, lawyers, police officers, and child advocates dedicated to ensuring that Filipino children are protected from different types of abuse. In 2017, the CPN reported 9192 cases of violence against children. Out of the 9192 cases, 5884 cases, or 64%, were children who were sexually abused. Most of the victims were teenagers aged 13 to 15, followed by the 16 to 17-year. Most perpetrators of child sexual abuse were neighbors, boyfriends, uncles, and fathers, mostly occurring at home, in the community, or during dating. While reports indicate that these were the top perpetrators, 345 cases, or 4% of the 9192 sexually abused cases, were done by minor perpetrators.

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These minor perpetrators were identified as 18 years old and younger.¹

Finkelhor and colleagues from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention presented data gathered in 2004 regarding juvenile sexual offenders using the National Incident-Based Reporting System. This system collects information regarding victims, offenders, and circumstances of various offenses in the United States. It was found that 25.8% of all sex offenders in the United States were juvenile sex offenders, and 35.6% of sex offenders were against children. They reported that only 3.1% of all violent juvenile offenders were actual sexual offenders; 46% were between 15 to 17 years old, while 38% ranged from 12 to 14 years old; 93% were male perpetrators. It was found that the majority of these juveniles tend to offend in groups (24%) as compared to their adult counterparts. Sexual acts did involve sodomy and fondling (13% and 49%, respectively), often occurring in the afternoon (12%) at home (69%) and in school (12%). Most of the victims were acquaintances (63%) and family members (25%).²

Minor perpetrators often target younger victims. 59% of victims of these juvenile sexual offenders were younger than 12 years old than adult sexual offenders whose usual target was 13 years of age and older. Offenders aged 6 to 9 years old usually victimize those in the 5- to 7-year-old age group, while offenders aged 15 to 17 age target children between 11 and 13 years old. It was also found that when juvenile offenders target male victims, they are usually younger than 12 years old and sexually immature, compared to female targets who were usually teenagers and sexually mature.²

Minor Perpetrators in the Philippines

In the Philippines, a case study method was done by Rubia (2002) about 42 minor perpetrators seen at the Philippine General Hospital - Child Protection Unit (PGH-CPU) from January 1998 to May 2000; these children were aged 7 to 16 years old. It revealed the following:³

- Most of these children had working mothers
- Most of their victims were below five years old
- Most of their victims were their neighbors, of which all knew their victims
- The most common abusive incident was stimulated or attempted penetration
- 34% occurred during playtime, and 24% happened while the minor perpetrator was taking care of the victim
- 26% of the victims were brought to isolated areas
- 43% of the minor perpetrators had poor school performance, 17% had developmental delay, and 7% had an intellectual disability
- Most of the children had poor impulse control and poor problem-solving skills
- 54% of the children had fathers who were alcoholics
- Most of the children were in families with problems financially
- Most children were involved in drinking, gambling, smoking, drug use, and checking pornographic materials.

All of them were exposed to vices and violence in their community

- Most of the children were abused physically

Another study was done by Aro (2007), reviewing the socio-demographic profiles of juvenile offenders seen at the PGH-CPU from January 2003 to January 2007. The results showed the following:³

- About the relationship of the minor perpetrator to their victims, 42% were neighbors, 15% were cousins, 12% were friends, and 11% were acquaintances
- 10% stated that they had been sexually abused by others as well
- 8% have seen pornography
- 2% were exposed to family violence
- 45% were out of school youths
- 6% had conduct disorders
- 20% use alcohol, 10% use *Rugby*, 1% use marijuana, and 0.5% use *shabu*
- 2.1% have committed theft and robbery

Causes and patterns for these behaviors have been attributed to exposure to domestic violence, child pornography, sexually explicit movies, advertisements, video games, and other forms of media.⁴ Some of these children have experienced sexual violence as well. Concern about the minor perpetrator population had spiked – attracting attention to clinicians, educators, and public safety officials.⁵

Psychological Makeup of Minor Perpetrators

Pineda (2008) had reported different psychological aspects of these children. She assessed that most of these minor perpetrators had ambivalent self-concepts; some wanted power, while others felt weak and isolated. These often resulted in insecurity, anxiety, timidity, and depression. Their sexual fantasies made them feel guilty, act impulsively and aggressively towards others and themselves.⁶

Another important psychological aspect found was their interpersonal relationships with family members, peers, and authority. Most of these children were found to be sensitive to criticism and suspicious towards others. Some were emotionally unattached to both their parents, while the others were attached to one parent and had emotional issues. Some were reported to have tension and conflict with their siblings. Most isolated themselves from their families.⁶

Most of these minor perpetrators showed suppressed anger and hostile feelings; pressure and tension at home were likely to contribute to these feelings. Most of them experienced conflicts, not just with family members, but also with other superiors, acquaintances, women, heterosexual relationships, guilt feelings, fears, and the past. They usually were very frustrated and used defense mechanisms such as repression, regression, reaction formation, displacement, isolation, projection, and compensation.⁶

Recent Plans of Action

Despite their delinquencies, these children were reported to yearn for love, affection, and emotional support from friends and families.⁶

Different treatment programs have been designed to prevent these minor offenders' sexual abuse cycle and relapse. These often-included empathy training, anger management, social and interpersonal skills training, cognitive restructuring, assertiveness training, journaling, and sex education.⁴

On the other hand, the CPN enumerated plans to end violence against children in general. They provided safe schools for teens in the effort to prevent sexual abuse of poor urban teens. They created national networks of protection units to provide effective and efficient multidisciplinary services. These services included interdisciplinary training on the protocol for case management of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. They also created protocols to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of their programs.¹

Child sexual assault has been underreported, especially those assaulted by minor perpetrators.⁷ Surveillance for these children, victims and perpetrators alike, must be established. However, the last study regarding the profile of minor perpetrators was done in March 2007.³

This study aimed to provide the recent demographics of minor perpetrators reported at the PGH-CPU for the past five years: January 2013 – December 2018. Most importantly, information from this research may be utilized for future studies, programs, and policies about the issue of rape and juvenile delinquencies.

METHODS

This was a retrospective cohort study of minor perpetrators of victims of sexual abuse who were seen and managed at the PGH-CPU from January 2013 to December 2018. This review was conducted using chart review and data retrieval from the Child Protection Management Information System (CPMIS) of the PGH-CPU, the first and largest CPU in the Philippines.

Data were collected on all minor perpetrators, aged 19 years old and below, associated with a pediatric patient seen at the PGH-CPU. Information about the minor perpetrators recorded in the CPMIS was from interviews of their victims and the victims' caregivers. The following were collected about each minor perpetrator: age, gender, relationship to the victim, current address, occupation, substance abuse history, history of violence, and criminal history. The lack of information about a history of substance abuse or the perpetrator's location did not exclude the subject from the analysis.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the University of the Philippines-Manila Research Ethics Board (UPMREB).

Table 1. Age and gender of minor perpetrators (n=931)

Categories of Assault	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		
≤ 9 years old	89	9.6%
10-14 years old	321	34.5%
15-19 years old	521	55.9%
Gender		
Male	909	97.6%
Female	22	2.4%

RESULTS

A total of 931 minor perpetrators were included in this study. Table 1 shows the age and distribution of these perpetrators. More than half of the minor perpetrators were 15 to 19 years old (55.9%), followed closely by 10 to 14-year-olds (34.5%), and, finally, children ≤ 9 years old (9.6%). The youngest minor perpetrator reported was three years old. More perpetrators were male (97.6%) than female (2.4%).

Figure 1 shows the regions and cities where the minor perpetrators came from. Most of the minor perpetrators reported coming from Cavite (12.7%) and Manila (9.5%). The rest have been throughout the Philippines. 61%, however, came from unknown or unspecified locations. On the other hand, 1.7% of these minor perpetrators came from other known areas such as barangay and DSWD custody and an unnamed boy's shelter.

Figure 2 shows the relationship of the minor perpetrators to their victims. From the ≤ 9 years old age group, most were neighbors (49.4%), of which 3.4% were females, and 46.1% were males. Classmates followed this with 12.4%, of which 2.3% were females, and 23.3% were males. This was then followed by cousins and friends, both with 9%; all were males. Other relationships were acquaintances, brothers, distant relatives, half or stepbrothers, non-family household members, playmates, and uncles.

For the 10 to 14-year-old age group, most minor perpetrators were neighbors with 43.3%, 43% were males, and 0.3% were females. Cousins followed this, all of which were male at 16.5%, then by friends with 8.7%, of which 8.1% were males, and 0.6% were females. The rest were acquaintances, boyfriends, brothers, distant relatives, half or stepbrothers, nephews, non-family household members, playmates, shelter residents, strangers, and uncles.

For the last age group, the 15-19-year-olds, topping the list were boyfriends or girlfriends with 19.4%, of which 0.2% were female, and 19.2% were male. Following this group were acquaintances with 18.2%, wherein 1% were female, and 17.3% were males, followed by neighbors with 14.6%, wherein 0.2% were females, and 14.4% were males. The rest were babysitters, brothers, half and stepbrothers, brothers-in-law, classmates, co-clients, co-workers, cousins, distant relatives, friends, nephews, non-family household members, pimps, playmates, strangers, a teacher, text mates, and uncles.

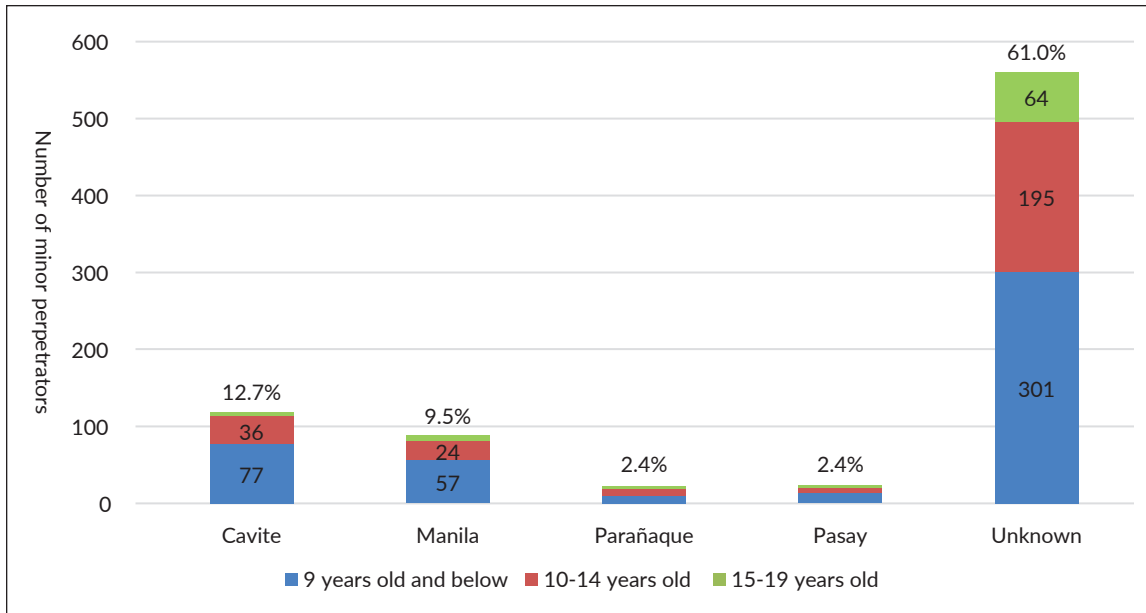


Figure 1. Place of origin of minor perpetrators.

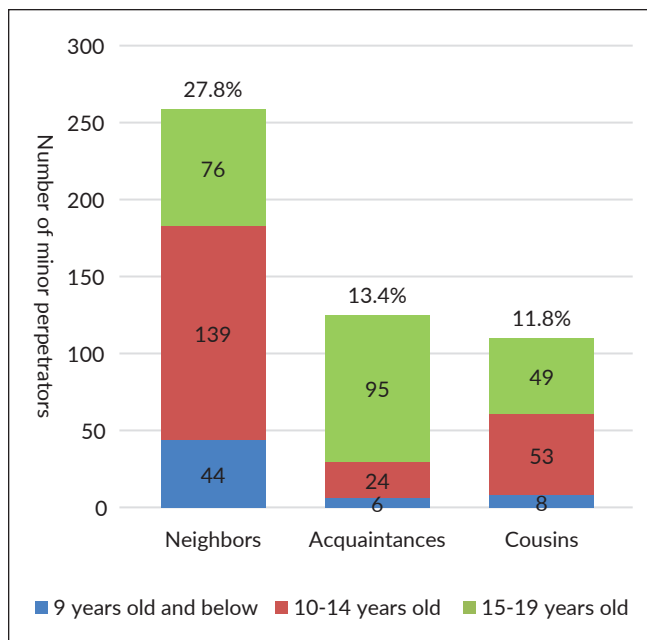


Figure 2. Relationship to the victim per age group.

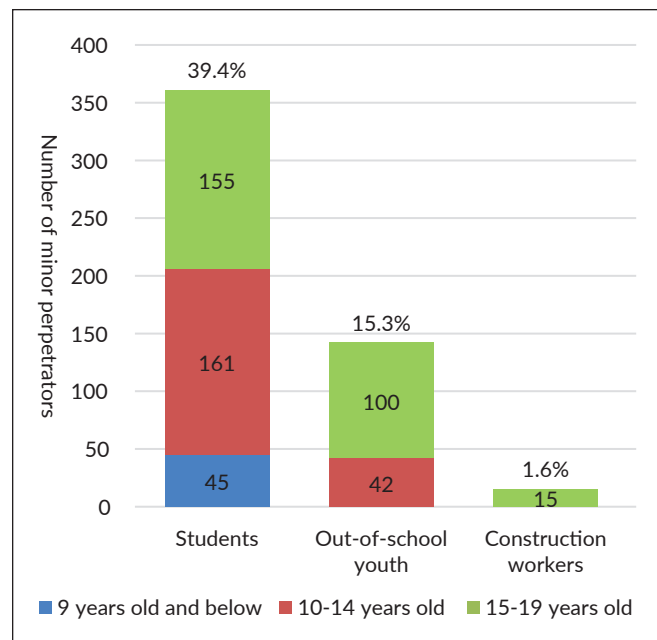


Figure 3. Occupation of minor perpetrators.

Across all age groups, the top three relationships to their victims were neighbors (27.8%), then acquaintances (13.4%), and cousins (11.8%).

Figure 3 lists down the occupations of these minor perpetrators. Across all age groups, the data showed that 39.4% of the minor perpetrators were students; most of them were specifically from the 6th grade (2.3%). This was followed by out-of-school children and youths with 15.3% and then construction workers with 1.6%

From the ≤ 9-year-old age group, half of the minor perpetrators were students (51.7%), wherein 7.9% of them were noted to be grade 2 and grade 3 students each. The remaining were kindergarten students, grade school students from grades 1 to 5, and 1st-year high school students. Only 3.4% of these students were females, while the rest were males. The other half (48.3%) had unknown occupations as reported by their victims.

For the 10- to 14-year-old age group, still half of the minor perpetrators were students (50.2%); explicitly topping

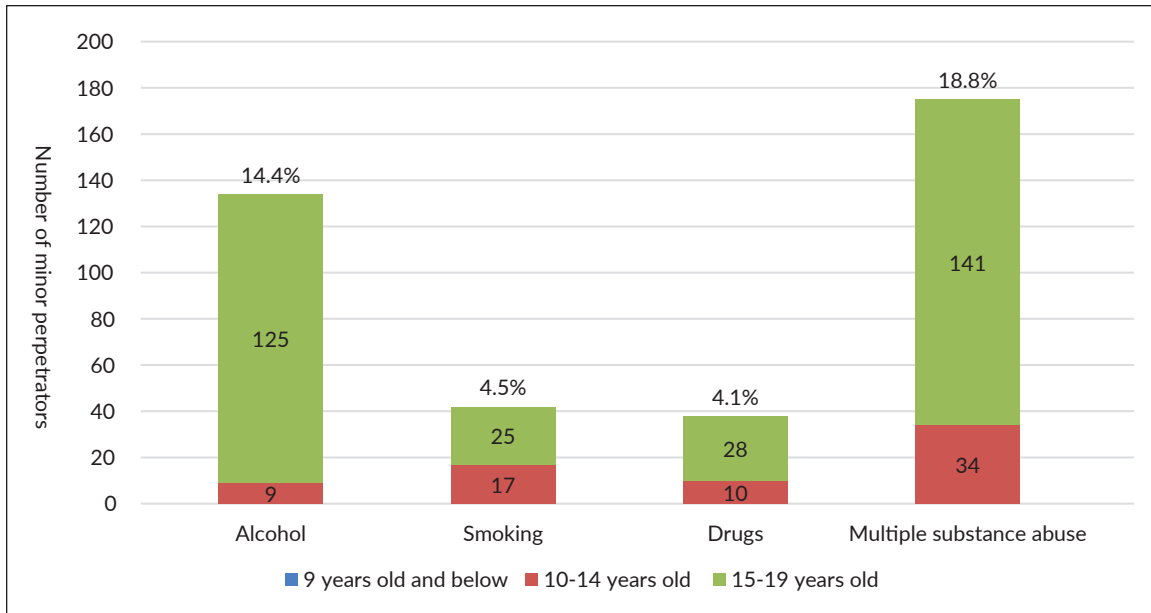


Figure 4. History of substance abuse of minor perpetrators.

the list again were those from the 6th grade with 5.3%. Notably, 13.1% of this group were out-of-school children and youths; caretakers, pimps, drivers, and vendors completed the list. 1.9% of the entire group were females, while 98.1% were male. 34.8% of this group had unknown occupations.

Consistent with the other age groups, students were still a majority for the 15- to 19-year-old-age group with 30.9%. Among these students, mostly were 4th-year high school students (3.8%). Following these students were the out-of-school youths with 18.6% and then the construction workers with 2.9%. The other minor perpetrators were babysitters, barkers, a canteen assistant, a caregiver, caretakers, carwash boys, a cemetery maintenance boy, a collector of money, conductors, delivery boys, company employees, a farmer, fishers, a freelancer, a gasoline boy, guards, a motor fixer, a hairdresser, drivers, laborers, a networking person, pimps, a seaman, a technician, vendors, and a water boy. From this group, 2.1% were females while the rest were males; 31.9% also were reported with unknown occupations.

Figures 4 and 5 tally the different substances used by the minor perpetrators.

There is an increasing trend of usage of drugs and alcohol as the age increases. Across all age groups, alcohol was the most abused substance with 14.4%, followed by cigarette smoking with 4.5%, then by drugs with 4.1%. 18.8% of these minor perpetrators have used the three substances in combination.

Substance usage was noted to start within the 10- to 14-year-old age group, of which the use of a combination of alcohol, smoking, and drugs was the most prevalent (10.6%); all were males. This was followed by purely cigarette smoking with 5.3%, then by sole drug use with 3.1%, then by alcohol drinkers with 2.8%. All of the users were male.

For the 15- to 19-year-old age group, the majority still used alcohol, smoking, and drugs in combination (26.9%). This was followed by those who drank alcohol at 24%, then drug users and smokers, both with 4.6%. A few females (1.2%) used the said substances, while the rest were males (98.8%).

From the data, only 3.1% of the respondents were able to specify the type of drugs used by the minor perpetrators. Among these users, marijuana was the most used drug (3.8%); 28.6% of those who used marijuana were male from the 10- to 14-year-old age group, while the rest were still males from the 15- to 19-year-old age group with 71.4%.

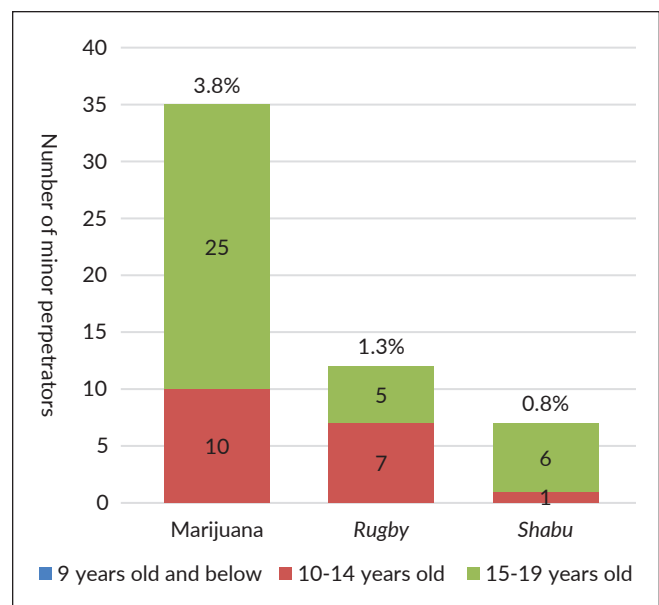


Figure 5. Drugs used by minor perpetrators.

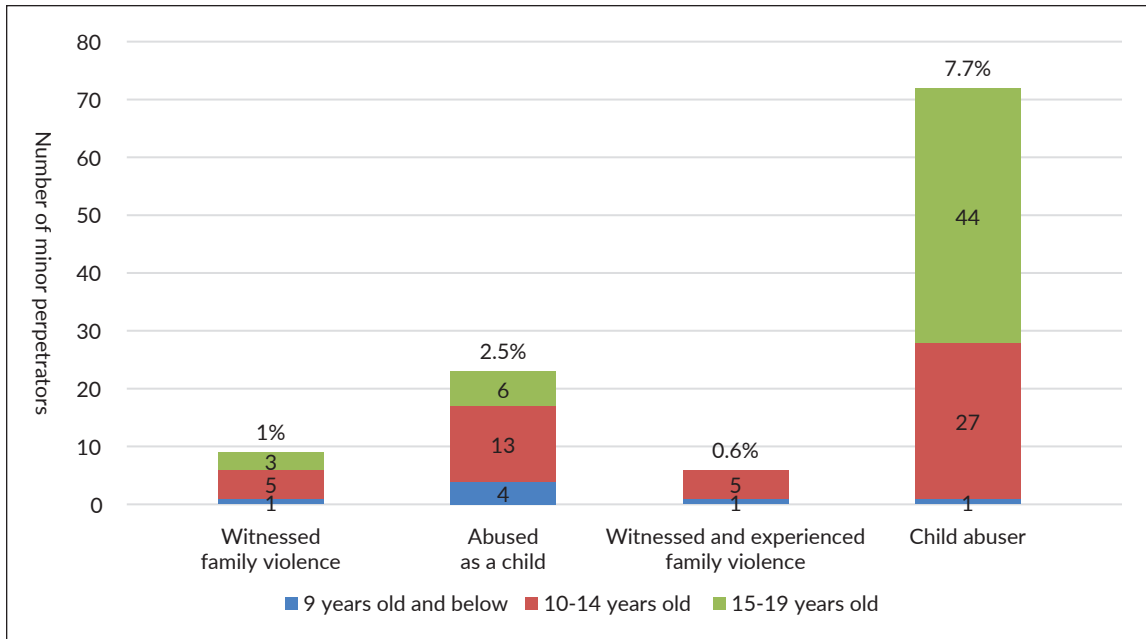


Figure 6. History of violence of minor perpetrators.

The youngest to use marijuana was 12 years old. This was followed by *Rugby* (1.3%), an inhaled solvent, with more than half of its users coming from the male 10- to 14-year-old age group with 58.3% and the remaining 41.7% from the male 15- to 19-year-old age group. The youngest to use *Rugby* was ten years old. *Shabu* (*methamphetamine*) usage was reported at 0.8%, wherein the majority of the users were males from the 15- to 19-year-old age group (85.7%) while the rest came from the 10- to 14-year-old age group (14.2%) – all still males. The youngest to use *shabu* was 14 years old.

Figure 6 reports the history of violence experienced by the minor perpetrators.

Most of the minor perpetrators have been reported as children’s abusers (7.7%) - defined as having had repeated reports of sexual abuse to the same victim or multiple victims. Most of these child abusers were males from the 15- to 19-year-old age group (59.7%), followed by males from the 10- to 14-year-old group (37.5%), then both females from the 15- to 19-year-old and males from the ≤ 9-year-old age group with 1.4% each.

Some minor perpetrators were abused as children (2.5%) by their parents and relatives, both sexually and physically. All of them were males, mostly coming from the 10- to 14-year-old age group (56.5%), followed by the 15- to 19-year-old age group (26.1%), then the ≤ 9-year-old age group (17.4%).

1% were reported to have witnessed family violence, while 0.6% were noted to have experienced and witnessed family violence and abuse.

Figure 7 notes the criminal histories of the minor perpetrators. According to the data, only 6.2% were known to have police blotters. These reports were primarily due to theft. From those with histories of police blotter records,

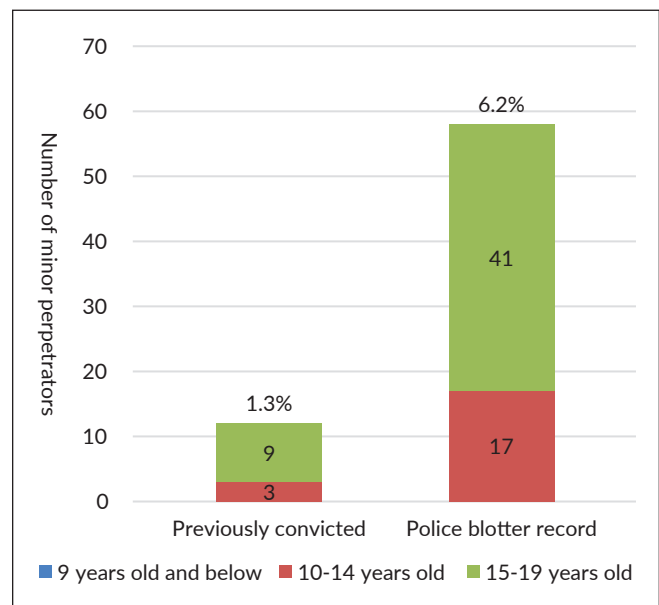


Figure 7. Criminal history of minor perpetrators.

70.7% were from the male 15- to 19-year-old age group, while the remaining 29.3% came from the 10- to 14-year-old male group. On the other hand, 1.3% of these minor perpetrators were previously convicted, primarily due to theft. Consistently, most of those previously convicted were males from the 15- to 19-year-old group (75%), followed by the males from the 10- to 14-year-old age group (25%).

Figure 8 shows the percentage of minor perpetrators with exposure to pornography. 7.3% of these minor perpetrators have been exposed to pornography. All of them were males,

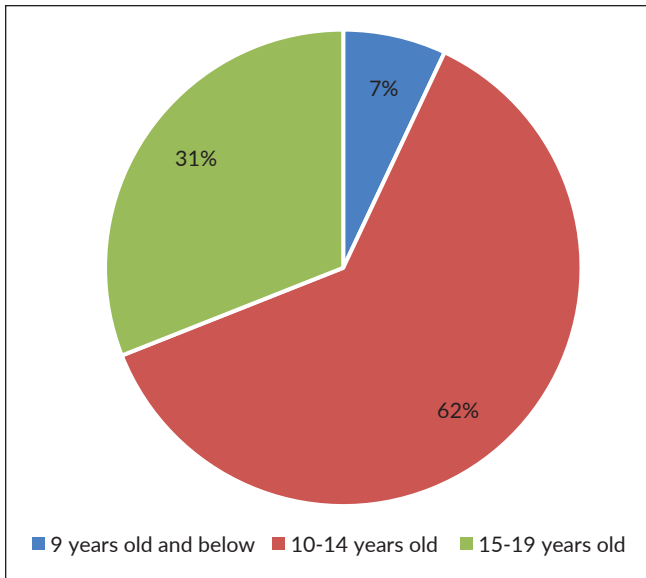


Figure 8. Exposure to pornography.

the majority coming from the 10- to 14-year-old age group (61.8%), followed by the 15- to 19-year-old age group (30.9%), then finally the ≤ 9-year-old age group (7.4%).

Post abuse, listed in Figure 9, are the current locations of the minor perpetrators. According to the data, only 7.5% of the perpetrators are in jail or police custody. Of those in police custody, 90% are from ages 15 to 19 years old, followed by those within the 10 to 14-year-old age group with 10% – all of them are male.

On the other hand, 59% are in locations known by the respondents but unspecified were exactly. Most of them are

males from the 15 to 19-year-old age group (50.5%) and 10 to 14-year-old age group (38.4%).

Notably, there are still those living in the same household as the victim (4.1%). Of which, 50.5% are males aged 15 to 19 years old, followed by males aged 10 to 14 years old with 38.4%. There were a few males aged 0 to 9 years old (5.3%) and a female aged 15 to 19 years old (0.7%)

Lastly, 29.4% of the perpetrators' locations are unknown to the victims.

DISCUSSION

There were 931 reported sexual abuse cases involving minor perpetrators in the past five years. Some of them were as young as three years old. Most of them were male, but there were females as well. Some of them came from Cavite and Manila, while the rest came from throughout the Philippines. They were usually known to their victims as acquaintances, classmates, playmates, cousins, and neighbors. Many of them are still living in the same household as their victims, a few are in jail, and a majority are still at large. Most were students; however, out-of-school children and youths came a close second. Most of them were known to drink alcohol – even as young as ten years old. At that same age, few have already started to inhale solvents, such as *Rugby*, while there have been marijuana users reported beginning at 12 years old. Data has also shown that some of them were also victims of sexual and physical abuse. Consequently, there were also some with criminal histories – mostly involving theft. It's also worth noting that the more accessible access to technology has given them more opportunities to view pornography.

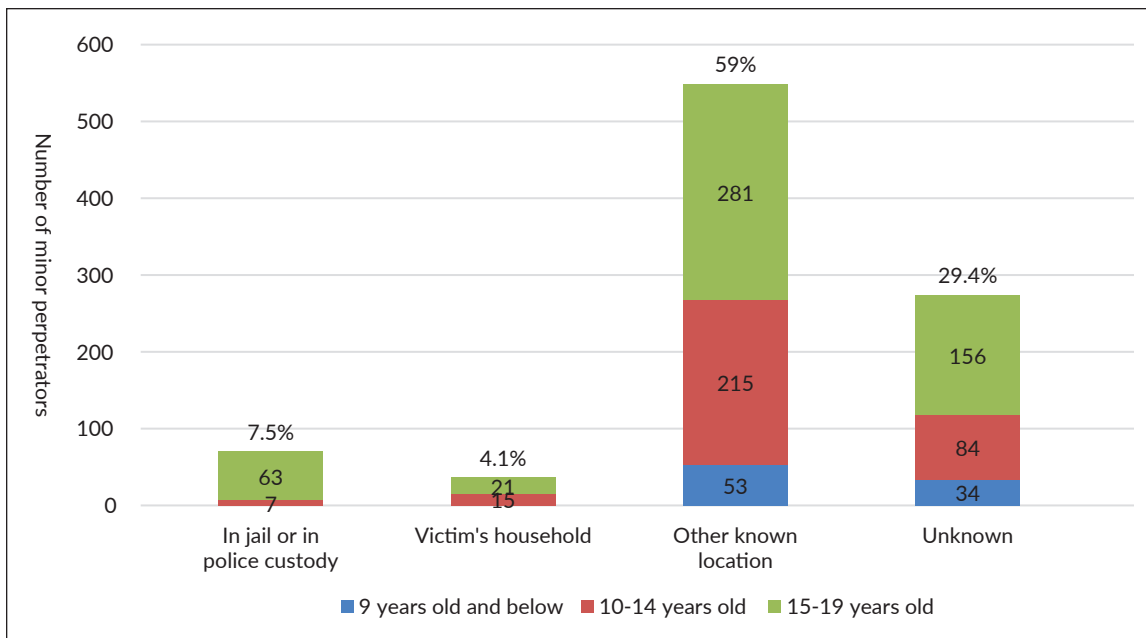


Figure 9. Current locations of minor perpetrators.

Table 2. Socio-demographics of minor perpetrators from the past 15 years

	January 2003 – January 2007	January 2013 – December 2018
Relationship to the victim	42% neighbors 15% cousins 12% friends 11% acquaintances	27.8% neighbors 13.4% acquaintances 11.8% cousins
Occupation	45% of out-of-school children and youths	39.4% students 15.3% of out-of-school children and youths
Substance abuse	20% alcohol 10% <i>Rugby</i> 1% marijuana 0.5% <i>shabu</i>	14.4% alcohol 4.5% smoking 3.8% marijuana 1.3% <i>Rugby</i> 0.8% <i>shabu</i>
History of violence	2% were exposed to family violence	1% witnessed family violence 0.6% experienced and witnessed family violence and abuse 2.5% abused as a child
Criminal history	2.1% have committed theft and robbery	6.2% have police blotters 1.3% have been previously convicted
Exposure to pornography	8% exposed to pornography	7.3% exposed to pornography

The last study regarding the profile of minor perpetrators was done in January 2007. Listed above is Table 2 comparing the socio-demographics taken from the previous research done by Aro (2007) of juvenile offenders seen at the PGH-CPU from January 2003 to January 2007, side by side with the latest socio-demographics from January 2013 to December 2018.

This table shows that the minor perpetrators were still neighbors, acquaintances, and cousins throughout the years.

There has also been a drop in the percentage of minor perpetrators that were out-of-school children and youths. This may be due to the more varied occupations that were reported.

Alcohol was still the most commonly abused substance throughout the years. Notably, there were more marijuana users this time around. The minor perpetrators still used both *Rugby* and *shabu*.

Both histories of exposure to family violence and criminal record were more in the past five years. On the other hand, the exposure to pornography was similar for the past 15 years.

The data gathered for this study was retrieved from CPMIS, which serves as the primary database of PGH-CPU. The database was able to provide rich information about CPU patients spanning the previous 17 years. It has provided convenience to researchers since the data that was retrieved was already organized under one system. However, the information retrieved still has its limitations. Details regarding circumstances of sexual abuse were very dependent on the patient, caregiver, and interviewer at the time of consultation. The data about the minor perpetrators were taken only from the interviews of the victims and their caregivers. Hence there was no verification or cross-referencing of details since the minor perpetrators were not interviewed personally by the interviewer. Another limitation is that the CPMIS standardized interview questionnaire used was created in a way that already had predetermined

answers to demographics; the interviewer will only need to press a dropdown box to choose an answer such as age, gender, place of origin, type of occupation of the perpetrator and so on. This resulted in a lack of information and even duplicated details (ex. Options for occupation in the dropdown box had grade-schooler, grade school student, grade 1 student, grade 2 student, and so on) of some demographics of the minor perpetrators reported.

While this study has its limitations, this can serve as a stepping stone for future programs and action plans for the CPN and other similar organizations. Improvement of perpetrator demographic data can be made through the improvement of the CPMIS. Since minor perpetrators are referred directly to local social workers under juvenile justice, cross-referencing details with local social workers can also be suggested to verify facts regarding the minor perpetrators. A CPMIS-like system can also be proposed to the local social workers, including information on the socio-economic class and any psychological risk factors to improve minor perpetrator data further. Finally, this socio-demographic profile could be updated every five years to track the prevalence of these minor perpetrators.

CONCLUSION

A child's environment is potentially contributory to their actions and thought processes. After reviewing each of their cases, a number of these minor perpetrators were observed to have been exposed to physical or sexual abuse and vices such as alcohol and illicit drug use. Although sexual abuse cases focus on the victims, it is crucial that clinicians and social workers also give attention to the minor perpetrators since they are children. Programs and interventions should be provided for them to grow up to be better individuals in society.

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Statement of Authorship

All authors participated in the data collection and analysis and approved the final version submitted.

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