

# Sex abuse victims suffer Stockholm syndrome - study

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Grooming techniques used by child sex abusers facilitate a bond with the victims which often protects the abuser for decades, Massey University researchers believe.

Dr Shirley Julich and Dr Eileen Oak, in a paper published in *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, explored the relationship between grooming and Stockholm syndrome. The condition, named after a 1973 robbery in the Swedish capital, leads hostages or kidnap victims to be sympathetic towards their captors as a survival strategy.

"While most of us don't think of children and young people as hostages, they can be victims and held captive in chronic abusive relationships," Dr Julich said.

"They are particularly vulnerable to the forces of Stockholm syndrome which can be understood as a survival technique for children in this situation."

Dr Julich says offenders groom the wider environment, such as parents, carers, teachers, and social workers.

They do this by integrating themselves into situations where they are likely to have contact with children, often assuming a position of trust.

"They often target one-parent families to gain status, or they may target children or young people who have absent parents, and less protection," she said.

During the Stockholm robbery, several employees were held hostage for six days while their captors negotiated with police.

The hostages developed an emotional bond with their captors, believing if the robbers liked them, they would not hurt them.

The relationship became so strong the hostages came to see the police as the enemy and it continued after the siege.

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