- 1 Delitala G, Masala A, Alagna S, Devilla L, Lodico G, Lottie G. Metergoline in the inhibition of puerperal lactation. *Br Med J* 1977;i:744-6.
- 2 Ferrari C, Caldara R, Romussi M, *et al*. Prolactin suppression by serotonin antagonists in man: further evidence for serotonergic control of prolactin secretion. *Neuroendocrinology* 1978;25:319-28.
- 3 Chiodini PG, Liuzzi A, Muller EE, *et al*. Inhibitory effect of an ergoline derivative, methergoline on growth hormone and prolactin levels in acromegalic patients. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab* 1976;43:356-63.
- 4 Besser GM, Delitala G, Grossman A, Yeo T. Metergoline and cyproheptadine suppress prolactin by a non-5-hydroxytryptaminergic, non-dopaminergic mechanism. *Br J Pharmacol* 1980;70:5-7.
- 5 Cavagnini F, Raggi U, Micossi P, DiLandro A, Invitti C. Effect of an anti-serotonergic drug, metergoline, on the ACTH and cortisol response to insulin hypoglycaemia and lysine-vasopressin in man. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab* 1976;43:306-12.

(Accepted 28 February 1985)

Royal Liverpool Hospital, Liverpool L7 8XP

I F CASSON, MD, MRCP, senior medical registrar
B A WALKER, MD, FRCP, consultant physician

University of Liverpool, Liverpool L69 3BX

L J HIPKIN, MD, FRCPATH, senior lecturer in endocrine pathology
P E BELCHETZ, MD, FRCP, senior lecturer in medicine

Correspondence to: Dr I F Casson.

Men who steal children

The stealing of children is a rare offence. d'Orbán described three characteristic patterns in women who steal children—namely, comforting offences, manipulative offences (with the intention of influencing a male partner), and offences by psychotic women.¹ The associated psychiatric problems include hysterical personality disorder, mental handicap, and schizophrenia² and also pseudocyesis.³ Child stealing is generally considered to be a crime committed by women. Until recently, however, most of the offences were committed by men,² and during 1977-82 the sexes were equally represented (34 men and 34 women).⁴ There are no previous reports on men who steal children, but d'Orbán hypothesised that men are likely to steal older children for sexual motives.² We gathered available evidence on child stealing offences committed by men.

Subjects and method

We inquired from colleagues in special hospitals, secure units, and a London remand prison about men charged with stealing children. We also collected press reports over six months in 1983. We examined four patients: three were charged with stealing children and one with theft of a car, but his admitted intention had been to use the vehicle to abduct a child. We also found two cases reported by the press. The table shows the salient features.

Comment

This small series of cases is not representative of all men charged with child stealing. Nevertheless, the findings confirm our hypothesis and suggest that men who steal children differ from women in that they abduct older children rather than babies and their motivation is sexual. The four men examined had personality disorders, but, unlike a high proportion of women who steal children, none was mentally ill. All the men were paedophiles and had a preference for children of a specific age and sex. Five had a history of sexual offences against children, and in case 6 the judge's reported

remarks also indicated a sexual motive. Two men (cases 1 and 3) had sadistic fantasies about children.

Interestingly, two men (cases 4 and 6) were acquitted because the children had apparently accompanied the men voluntarily and the prosecuting counsel could not prove that the abduction had entailed force or fraud, which was a necessary element of the offence of child stealing under section 56 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Another shortcoming of this law was that it did not apply to a natural parent, although nowadays most cases of abduction of children concern separated or divorced parents who abduct their own children. Until recently, the only legal protection in such cases was for a child to be made a ward of court, but in 1984 the House of Lords ruled that a parent can also be convicted of the common law offence of kidnapping his own child.⁵

The confusing legal position was simplified by the Child Abduction Act implemented in October 1984, which repealed the offence of child stealing under the 1861 Act and created two new offences—namely, abduction of a child under the age of 16 by a parent if the child is taken out of the United Kingdom without appropriate consent, and abduction of a child by other persons. Whereas the offence of child stealing required proof of force or fraud, the new offence of abduction of a child focuses on lack of consent by the parent or lawful guardian to the removal of the child and therefore provides stronger legal safeguards. The men in cases 4 and 6 who were acquitted of child stealing would probably have been convicted of abduction under the new legislation.

- 1 d'Orbán PT. Child stealing: a typology of female offenders. *British Journal of Criminology* 1976;16:275-81.
- 2 d'Orbán PT. Baby stealing. *Br Med J* 1972;ii:635-9.
- 3 d'Orbán PT. Child stealing and pseudocyesis. *Br J Psychiatry* 1982;141:196-8.
- 4 Home Office. *Criminal statistics England and Wales*. London: HMSO, 1977-82.
- 5 R v D. Law report. *The Times* 1984 Jun 22:14.

(Accepted 21 February 1985)

Academic Department of Psychiatry, Royal Free Hospital, London NW3 2QG

P T d'ORBÁN, MB, FRCPSYCH, consultant forensic psychiatrist

Maudsley Hospital, London SE5 8AZ

P HAYDN-SMITH, MB, MRCPSYCH, senior registrar in forensic psychiatry

Correspondence to: Dr P T d'Orbán.

Torsade de pointes induced by sotalol despite therapeutic plasma sotalol concentrations

Sotalol, a β blocking agent with additional group III antiarrhythmic properties, prolongs the QT interval in a manner that depends on concentration.¹ Prolongation of the QT interval by sotalol has been associated with ventricular tachyarrhythmias, but controversy exists over whether it occurs in the absence of high doses (480 mg and more a day), intoxication with sotalol, or renal failure.² Ventricular tachycardia due to prolongation of the QT interval has been reported in a patient taking normal doses of sotalol (320 mg daily), but the concentration of sotalol was not measured.³ We report a case of sustained torsade de pointes induced by sotalol that necessitated cardioversion. The patient was taking a normal oral dose of sotalol and had therapeutic plasma sotalol concentrations.

History of offenders

Case No	Age (years)	Charge	Age (years) and sex of victim	Previous sex offences	Outcome	Source
1	24	Child stealing	8 F	Four indecent exposures	Hospital order with restriction (psychopathic disorder)	Special hospital
2	29	Child stealing	4 F	Attempted rape (girl aged 5); indecent assault (girl aged 8)	Hospital order with restriction (psychopathic disorder)	Secure unit
3	26	Car theft (with intent to abduct girl)		Indecent assaults (girls aged 7 and 8)	Hospital order (psychopathic disorder)	Secure unit
4	27	Child stealing (three counts), indecent assault, administering drugs (diethylpropion)	11, 12, 13 M	Indecent assault (boy aged 10)	Acquitted of child stealing. Convicted of administering drug	Remand prison
5	48	Child stealing, attempted gross indecency	9 M	Numerous offences against boys	Six years' imprisonment	<i>The Times</i> (22 Dec 1983)
6	61	Child stealing	4, 5 F	Not known	Acquitted	<i>The Times</i> (19 Nov 1983)