



# Females who sexually abuse children - a gender responsive approach to assessment and intervention.

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# Programme

- ▶ 1. The social and personal contexts in which female sexual harm occurs
- ▶ 2. The challenge female sexual abuse presents for assessment and intervention.
- ▶ 3. Community and Reintegration considerations.

## Social and personal context in which female sexual harm occurs.

- ▶ “ Judging public perceptions of *female sex offenders*, is complicated by the inconsistency between the perpetration of child abuse and pervading societal views of women ---”

Elliot & Bailey 2014

## Factors which may impact definition of behaviours as abusive

- ▶ Constructs of female sexuality as non threatening
  - ▶ (Sexual humour that humiliates, open flirting while scantily dressed)
- ▶ Constructs of male socialisation
  - ▶ (He was very grown up and mature)
- ▶ Perceived lack of intent
  - ▶ (She's just 'over affectionate')
- ▶ Circumstances in which behaviours occur
  - ▶ (He forced her into it )
  - ▶ (Sexualisation of intimate care abuse occurring in what is perceived to be a loving ,caring relationship)
- ▶ Nature of behaviours
  - ▶ (Subtle behaviours which seem similar to 'normal' mothering behaviours).
- ▶ Definition of abusive behaviours associated with men
  - ▶ (Focus on penile penetration )
- ▶ World view which sees males as abusers and females as victims

## Cognitive reprocessing of sexual abuse by females

- ▶ 1. Sexual abuse perpetrated by females is perceived as less harmful than male-perpetrated abuse
- ▶ 2. Cognitive reconstruction occurs to consolidate perpetration of sex offenses by women with traditional views of women and womanhood.
- ▶ 3. The low detection and re-offense rates of female sex offenders lead to a conceptualization of female perpetration as so rare as to not be a valid risk.
- ▶ *The voices of many victims are disregarded or unheard!*

## Significance of Gender

*“ It is simply not possible to discuss---(the juvenile justice system) without considering gender--.Girls and boys do not inhabit the same worlds, and they do not have the same choices”*. Chesney-Lind & Shelden (2004)

*“Female sex offenders face gender bias within the criminal process---.Research has increasingly highlighted the need to move away from treating sex offenders as a homogenous group of white , adult male offenders ( Duncan 2006 quoted by Rainey 2013)*

# Gender Responsiveness

- ▶ “ ---- an understanding of the realities of women and girls -- that addresses and responds to their strengths and challenges.” Bloom 2006

## Realities reported by Female Sexual Abusers

- ▶ Multiple extensive abuse in childhood
- ▶ Previous exploitative and/or abusive relationships in adulthood
- ▶ Thinking which perceives all males as threatening
- ▶ History of depression prior to abusing
- ▶ Undiagnosed PTSD and other trauma symptoms
- ▶ Poor emotional regulation
- ▶ Emotional loneliness
- ▶ Social isolation
- ▶ Low self worth
- ▶ Traits of severe passivity and dependency
- ▶ Less likely to report use of drugs/alcohol
- ▶ Primary /lone carer for children
- ▶ Limited experience of financial independence
- ▶ Limited experience of employment /training
- ▶ Abuse of children over days, weeks or years.



# Three Paradoxes

- ▶ Girls are much more likely than boys to be victimised but men are much more likely to commit sexual offences. (Cortoni and Gannon 2011).
- ▶ Not all women who experience abuse in childhood go on to offend against others. (Ford 2006)
- ▶ Few females who abuse in adolescence carry on into adulthood.

## 2. Assessment and Intervention

# Longstanding typologies

- ▶ Sole females who abuse young children
- ▶ Sole females who abuse adolescents
- ▶ Females who are coerced/emotionally dependent on a male partner
- ▶ Females who are male accompanied
- ▶ Females who target adult victims

Mathews et al (1989); Saradjian (1996); Nathan & Ward (2002);  
Elliott et al (2007,2010,)

# Motivations

- ▶ Sexual gratification/deviant arousal
- ▶ Desire for affection, closeness, intimacy
- ▶ Fear of violence from partner
- ▶ Fear of loss of partner
- ▶ Pleasing partners
- ▶ Jealousy
- ▶ Revenge - for rejection or for own abuse
- ▶ Other motives related to own abuse
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Desire for power and control
- ▶ Money

Saradjian (1996); Saradjian & Eldridge (2000); Nathan & Ward (2002);  
Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Ford (2006); Gannon, Rose & Ward (2008)

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## Offence supportive thinking demonstrated by some female abusers

- ▶ *Male needs are paramount*
- ▶ *This child is mine because I gave birth to it - therefore I can do with it whatever I wish.*
- ▶ *This child exists only as an extension of me and has no autonomy or identity aside from mine.*
- ▶ *Children exist to meet the needs of adults - what ever those needs may be*
- ▶ *Sex with adolescents may be 'wrong' but is not harmful.*
- ▶ These schemas may hold risks for other forms of harmful behaviours towards children, including a flawed ability to protect.
- ▶ (Elliott ,Beech,Eldridge,Ashfield 2012, Gannon and Rose 2009)

# Protective Factors For Adult Females

- ▶ Personal:
  - ▶ Pro-social/non-abusive attitudes
  - ▶ Awareness of abuse/consequences
  - ▶ Interpersonal/problem solving skills
  - ▶ Positive goals and interests
- ▶ Contextual
  - ▶ Social/support networks
  - ▶ Effective supervision and monitoring
- ▶ Treatment system
  - ▶ Open about abuse/Motivated towards assessment
  - ▶ Positive intervention/good co-ordination between professionals
  - ▶ Treatment plan set up

# Current assessment models proposed in relation to female sex offenders.

- ▶ NOMS model - FRANC tool
- ▶ Descriptive model - Gannon et al
- ▶ Coding framework - LFF
- ▶ Canadian Corrections model - piloted 2012 -Blanchette et al.
- ▶ USA- varies from state to state , some integrate females into male programmes.
- ▶ Europe- HCR -20 /FAM Van Vogel et al
- ▶ RSVP
- ▶ Ecological process model 2014 De Cou, Cole et al

# Meeting Needs

- ▶ The key to good intervention is to identify the needs the women were meeting by abusing children and to help them find non-abusive ways of meeting their needs.
  - ▶ Eldridge & Saradjian (2000)



# 3. Community and Reintegration Considerations

# Reality of abuse by women

- ▶ Women abuse boys and girls
- ▶ Women who choose older victims tend to choose in line with sexual orientation
- ▶ Women who choose younger victims are less clearly discriminating-
- ▶ Women can demonstrate all forms of harmful sexual behaviour
- ▶ Women can abuse with similar severity to males, including arousal to inflicting pain
- ▶ Sexual abuse may be preceded by other forms of harmful behaviour

## Impact studies

- ▶ There is relatively little research on victims of female sex offenders. However see:
- ▶ Rosencrans, B. (1996) Sample of 102(f)
- ▶ Saradjian, J. (1997) Sample of 40(m/f)
- ▶ Etherington, K. (1997) Sample of 7(m)
- ▶ Kelly et al (2002) Sample of 6(m)
- ▶ Denov, M. (2004) Sample of 15(m/f)
- ▶ Peter, T. (2008) Sample of 8(f)
- ▶ Ford, H. (2006) Review of the research

# Society's attitude to women impact on victims

- ▶ Abuse by women may be:
  - ▶ More traumatic as more unexpected
  - ▶ More confusing association between sex and nurturance
  - ▶ Greater sense of guilt and shame - 'something about me'
  - ▶ Viewed by male and female victims as more damaging than abuse by males.
  - ▶ Where intrafamilial, more problems of confusion and disbelief for other family members, including male carers. (Denov 2003,2004,Peter2006)



# Care and Contact Considerations

▶ Child victims have limited resilience for coping with stressors associated with arrest, conviction, sentence, post sentence registration.

1. Mum likely to be primary carer - established models of care
2. Male non offending parent often struggling with practical demands of juggling new parenting role with employment-financial implications
3. Non offending parent often struggling with own issues re masculinity & failure & not emotionally available to children
4. Male partners choose to stay in relationships so find ways to reconcile behaviours
5. No female available to step into the breach.
6. Children of female abusers more likely to seek reunification even after years of separation
7. Family members suffer significantly in terms of stigmatization, isolation, shock & denial, guilt, shame, rejection by family / friends / community

# Some basic therapeutic messages children need to receive about mum's behaviour

- Adults are supposed to meet their needs with other adults, not children.
- Everyone's feelings count. Feelings are OK.
- Sexuality is OK. It is different for adults & children.
- Some behaviours are Not OK
- It's ok that you still love or care for mum but need to confront concerns also.

# Needs of the non-offending parent and other caregivers

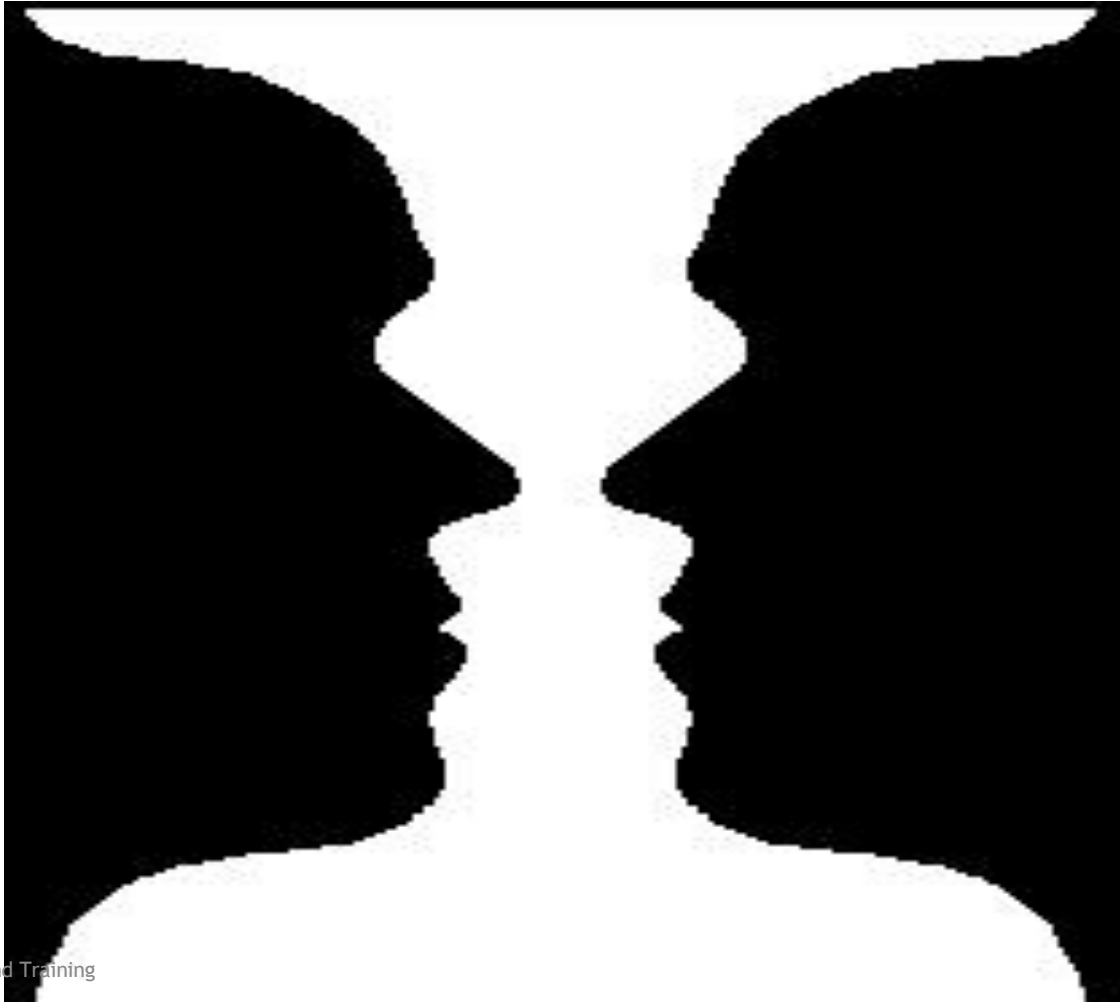
- ▶ Info about the possible impact of abuse / trauma upon children
- ▶ Advice on strategies to help child with any trauma symptoms
- ▶ Explanations / info about sex offending dynamics & links to offenders patterns
- ▶ Opportunity to process feelings associated with abuse
- ▶ Advice on boundaries, rules & routines
- ▶ Advice & support on open communication
- ▶ Advice on re-parenting / attachment strategies
- ▶ Advice on the needs of siblings / relatives & how to engage their support
- ▶ Advice & strategies on future protection needs
- ▶ Info about services

# Final Thoughts

*In order to engage effectively and therapeutically with this group, professionals need to reassess their personal belief systems and the degree to which these inform professional practice .*

Ashfield et al 2011





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