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# 1 Understanding and Responding to People Who Sexually Abuse Children Whilst Employed In Positions of Trust: An Overview of the Relevant Literature – Part One: Offenders

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The starting point for understanding any issue is to review the existing knowledge. Chapters One and Two therefore outline key aspects from the literature regarding people who sexually abuse children whilst employed in positions of trust. This chapter relates primarily to offenders and offending behaviour, Chapter Two to organisational issues.

## **PEOPLE WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE CHILDREN IN ORGANISATIONAL POSITIONS OF TRUST – A DEFINITION**

For the purposes of this review of the literature this population was defined as anyone working with children who had sexually offended against a child or young person in a context directly related to their paid work or volunteering activity. Working with children here is used to include people working with children in health, social welfare, education, residential accommodation, leisure, sporting, religious activities and criminal justice systems and extends to the voluntary and private sectors (Beyer *et al.*, 2005). The term is further extended to include managers. Worker will be used as a generic term to describe anyone in this category.

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Inevitably the literature regarding this population relates primarily to those whose offending has come to the attention of law enforcement agencies, usually those who have been convicted. The literature relating to people who have abused but not been detected tends to focus, for obvious practical and ethical reasons, on a desire or willingness to abuse (Briere and Runtz, 1989; Freel, 2003) rather than on the *modus operandi* of unconvicted offenders. The findings from the literature must therefore be regarded with that potential limitation or bias.

## **HOW PREVALENT ARE SEXUAL OFFENCES COMMITTED AGAINST CHILDREN IN PROFESSIONAL OR WORKPLACE SETTINGS?**

One of the striking features of an issue about which there has been so much publicity is that there are no definitive figures relating to incidence. What is known about the prevalence of organisational, or institutional, abuse comes from disparate sources as there are no national figures collated on the basis of the context of sexual abuse (Kendrick, 1997). Press coverage will inevitably distort public perception with the issue gaining awareness following the murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman by Ian Huntley in Soham in 2002 and more recently the sexual abuse of children in nursery by Vanessa George (Plymouth SCB, 2010). However, statistical information is far more difficult to obtain. One indicator of the increase in official interest in the issue is public inquiries, of which there were 20 between 1967 and 2000, with 14 of those during the 1990s.

In the United States, a recognised expert in the field suggests that the most reliable estimate is that 9.6% of U.S. school students experience sexual abuse by an education professional (Shakeshaft, 2004). In the UK, the most recent information derived from retrospective studies with adults comes from the 2011 NSPCC study on the prevalence of maltreatment and victimisation of children which found only 0.7% reported sexual abuse by a professional (Radford *et al.*, 2011). In one police force, investigation of institutional abuse in 1994–5 constituted 4% of all Child Protection investigations (Gallagher, 2000). From these figures, it is clear that the precise extent of the prevalence, or indeed incidence, of such abuse is largely unknown.

## **CHARACTERISTICS AND BEHAVIOUR OF PEOPLE WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE CHILDREN IN ORGANISATIONAL POSITIONS OF TRUST**

The literature in relation to organisations and the potential for abuse is sparse and has relatively little to offer in terms of the attributes of those who have sexually abused specifically in professional settings. Nevertheless, this section presents what is known about sexual offending in workplace settings.

There is a single detailed study of people who sexually abuse children in organisational positions of trust carried out in the UK by Sullivan and Beech (2004). Because of the uniqueness of the study, and because of its marked contrast to some of the findings of the current study, it is intended to first review its findings before going on to outline the more general literature about those who sexually offend against children.

## **FINDINGS FROM A STUDY OF RESIDENTS IN A SPECIALIST TREATMENT SETTING WHO HAD SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN WHILST IN ORGANISATIONAL POSITIONS OF TRUST**

Over a five year period a sample of 41 men who admitted sexually abusing children with whom they worked in a professional capacity was drawn from residents in a specialist sexual abuse assessment and treatment centre. The centre also provided a comparison group of residents whose sexual offences had not been in professional settings. Whilst the study is informative, providing information from men admitting their offences and becoming increasingly disclosive as they progressed through a treatment programme, the sample will undoubtedly be skewed by virtue of the selectivity of being resident in such a specialist setting for which funding was required.

Twenty-seven of the participants were Roman Catholic priests, religious brothers, ministers or missionaries, 14 of whom had also worked in teaching roles and three of whom had primary care responsibilities with groups of children, either in residential homes or boarding schools. The religious brothers had also worked in boarding schools. There were two residential social workers, both of whom had also trained as teachers. Ten participants were teachers, two of whom also had carer responsibilities for children within residential school settings and one was a sports coach. The remaining two were a nursery carer, who also worked in a pre-school group and a social worker. A large proportion of the sample group also had voluntary or non-statutory involvement with children through church or children's organisations.

Sullivan and Beech (2004) noted significant differences in the clerics who sexually abused children from other child abusers, being older and having a higher IQ. This supports findings from earlier North American studies (Haywood, Kravitz, Grossman, Wasyliv, and Hardy 1996; Langevin, Curnoe, and Bain, 2000; Plante, Manuel, and Bryant, 1996). Mean age on arrival at the Centre (i.e. post discovery of the abuse) was higher, at 50.71 years, than with the other residents, with the oldest group being the faith community leaders who had a mean age of 53.15 years and the youngest group being the childcare workers with a mean age of 35.25 years. Overall, the sample of professional offenders were less likely to be married, in an adult sexual relationship or have

children of their own than the other residents. However, the proportion of Catholic clergy in the sample may render this finding atypical.

The majority (73%) of the professional offender sample were accused of sexually abusing only male children, while 22% were exclusively accused by females and 5% were alleged to have sexually abused both boys and girls. For the general centre population, 58% were accused of abusing girls and 21% were accused by boys and 21% accused by both, consistent with other research in this area (Haywood *et al.*, 1996; Loftus and Camargo, 1993). However, in terms of sexual interests whilst there was an exact correlation between girls being the child alleging the index offence and professional offenders' expressed preference, this was not the case when the child making the allegation was a boy (e.g. males were the victim in 73% of cases but were the offender's primary sexual preference in only 56%). Additionally, 24% of offenders reported an exclusive sexual interest in children.

Abel, Osborn, and Twigg (1993) estimate that around one half of adult sex offenders report an adolescent onset of sexual deviance. When their sample were asked to identify when they were first aware of their sexual arousal to children, Sullivan and Beech found that the overwhelming majority (90%) were aware of their sexual arousal to children prior to undertaking their professional careers. Based on a single study, however, it is not appropriate to generalise this finding to all professional sexual offenders.

Fifteen per cent said that gaining access to children in order to sexually abuse them formed a part of their career choice; a further 42% said abuse was part of their motivation for choosing their job and 25% said it was not. The majority of the sample (76%) reported using emotionally coercive methods to facilitate the abuse, one said he only used physical force and 22% reported using both. Other methods commonly used involved taking children away from the normal work environment: 77.5% arranged to meet children outside work with the specific intention of sexual abuse, and 67.5% reported taking children away overnight in order to sexually abuse them. Typically these were educational or recreational trips involving other professionals also accompanying the children, although some were private arrangements with parents. One participant spoke of abusing children on an annual summer camp where he was responsible for the infirmary and would sexually abuse children who became ill, upset or homesick.

Another common method of identifying children to sexually abuse was as part of their work in children's voluntary organisations. In total, 51.2% of the group admitted they had sexually abused children in voluntary settings. By contrast, in a sample of 207 Australian convicted sex offenders, Smallbone and Wortley (2001) found that of those who abused solely outside of their family settings, 18.9% had found their victims through organised activities such as sporting organisations or scouts.

Widespread use of the internet was just beginning at the time Sullivan and Beech's study was concluding. In 1995, the final year from which data for the study was drawn, the authors noted a new development in that the majority of

the professional offenders in the clinic admitted use of the internet either to access pornography or to attempt to contact children for potential sexual contact. Of those who participated in the study, 29.3% admitted using the internet to collect pornography (not specified whether indecent images of children or other pornographic images), whilst 9.8% admitted to also attempting to contact children via the internet to sexually abuse. In addition Sullivan, Beech, Craig, and Gannon (2010) report an emerging trend from current police investigations into internet facilitated sexual abuse of children, with significant numbers of those working with children offending in this way.

Whilst it is clear that children are vulnerable in professional relationships, it is instructive to be reminded of what offenders themselves have said about their offending patterns and particularly to review those issues which are most relevant to the likely context of professional relationships in organisational settings. This section on offender characteristics concludes with a review of what is known about grooming.

## GROOMING

Noting Gallagher's (2000) reservations about the term 'grooming' as euphemistic and preference for the term 'entrapment', grooming is used here to mean 'A process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults and the environment for the abuse of this child' (Craven, Brown, and Gilchrist, 2006, p. 297).

There are two widely cited studies in which treated sex offenders, those considered most likely to have an understanding of their own behaviour and be most disclosive, were interviewed about their modus operandi. They differ in that one (Conte, Wolf, and Smith, 1989) is a relatively small North American sample (n=20) with community based offenders whilst the other (Elliott, Browne, and Kilcoyne, 1995) draws on a larger sample (n = 91) of U.K. offenders from a range of community and custodial settings including special hospitals. There are, however, consistent themes which emerge and are illustrated here with quotes from the offenders themselves.

## TARGETING VULNERABILITY

The offenders interviewed across both studies claimed a particular ability to identify vulnerable children. This referred either to a child's status, home circumstances or age, or their emotional or psychological state. The interviews demonstrated that they manipulated that vulnerability as a means of gaining sexual access to those children. In Elliott *et al.*'s (1995) sample, for example, 49% reported being attracted to children who seemed to lack confidence or had low self-esteem: 'I would probably pick the one who appeared more needy ... Someone who had been a victim before: quiet, withdrawn, compliant' (Elliott *et al.*, 1995, p. 596).

## EXPLOITING RELATIONSHIPS

Of note in this context is the proportion of abusers who chose to develop a relationship which had ascribed authority in order to facilitate the abuse, with 48% of Elliott *et al.*'s sample using babysitting. In the same sample just under half felt a 'special relationship' was vital to either wishing to, or being able to, achieve the abuse. 'Unless the child and I like each other and find each other attractive, it doesn't work' (p. 584).

The majority of the Conte *et al.* (1989) sample described a process of developing a relationship prior to initiating sexual contact. What is possibly of most significance in this context are the features of the relationships described, and their similarity to the legitimate features of professional adult / child relationships: 'Playing, talking, giving special attention ... get the child to feel safe to talk with me ... making the child feel comfortable with me. Early on during the grooming process I used a lot of conversation ... and spent time alone with her. I kept telling her how proud I was of her and how special she was' (p. 297).

In an Australian study by Smallbone and Wortley (2001) 55% of the offenders gave the child non-sexual attention as part of the process of enabling the abuse to take place. In Elliott *et al.*'s sample, 30% used demonstrations of affection, understanding or love. It is indicative of how effective such methods can be that the Inquiry into sexual abuse of young children by Jason Dabbs in Nursery classes, where he was a student on placement, reports that a number of the children, even in the context of disclosing abuse, reported a liking for him (Hunt, 1994, para. 5.4.8).

The comments from the men in Conte *et al.*'s (1989) sample, when asked what they would include in a hypothetical manual on 'How to sexually abuse a child' are similar in theme and again match a number of the features of populations which will come into contact with professionals: 'Identify a child who would be looking for help, who is vulnerable ..., Target children who appear to be not close to their parents or children who have already been victimised. Look for some kind of deficiency. I would find a child who doesn't have a happy home life, because it would be easier to groom them ... Choose a kid who has been abused. Your victim will think that this time is not as bad.' (p. 298). And significantly, given the difficulty which other adults frequently experience in believing that such abuse is possible: 'Get as many people who are close to the victim to trust you' (p. 298).

These themes are echoed in Smallbone and Wortley's (2001) study of 207 incarcerated sex offenders who reported offences involving 1,010 children, 39% of which had resulted in convictions, which gives an insight into offenders' modus operandi. For extra-familial offenders, the category which would include organisational offenders, the most common locations for finding the children subsequently abused were a friend's home (36.5%) and through organised activities such as sporting associations or scouts (18.9%). For these offenders, the most commonly used strategies toward the child's carers were making

friends with them (44.4%) and spending time with the child when carers were also present (44.4%). 64.4% touched the child non-sexually in order to desensitise them, 59.3 % gave the children a lot of attention and 56% spent a lot of time with them doing things the child wanted to do.

Turning to abusers in organisations specifically, Abel *et al.* (1998) suggest that they gradually introduce physical and then sexual touching once a relationship with their victims is established. In Gallagher's (2000) study 43% of cases involved first initiating physical contact with the child. Colton and Vanstone's (1996) study with six organisational sexual offenders indicated that the offender was perceived as a peer, a father figure or a rescuer by his victim. By giving attention and gifts, they managed to develop an emotional relationship into which sexual contact was gradually introduced.

Using a sample of 23 men who had at least one conviction for a sexual offence against a child with whom they were working professionally or as a volunteer, Leclerc, Proulx and McKibben (2005) found that modus operandi was related to their position of trust. Thus they were perceived as non-threatening to the child, could easily build a close relationship with a potential victim and used strategies such as giving attention to gain the child's trust (Table 1.1). The child could then be gradually desensitised, and their compliance in sexual activity gained by way of non-sexual touching. The authors suggest that due to their close relationship with the child, some offenders may believe that they do not need strategies to maintain victim silence. The methods used to gain victims' co-operation are instructive in this context, indicating as it does

**Table 1.1** *Strategies used by sex offenders to gain victims' co-operation*  
(Leclerc *et al.*, 2005)

Strategy	Number (per cent)
Giving the child non-sexual attention	23 (100%)
Touching the child non-sexually	22 (95.6%)
Saying nice things about them	19 (82.6%)
Touching the child sexually more and more from one time to the next	19 (82.6%)
Saying loving, caring things to the child	16 (69.5%)
Getting the victims sexually excited	15 (65.2%)
Talking more and more about sex	14 (60.8%)
Starting sexual contact as if it were no big deal	14 (60.8%)
Getting the victims very curious about sex	14 (60.8%)
Starting sexual contact when victims were upset or needing attention	9 (39.1%)
Saying how special they are to be doing this with you	4 (17.4%)
Saying that you are going to teach them something	3 (13.0%)
Telling that all their other friends have had sex by now	2 (8.7%)
Wearing less clothing and telling the child to do the same	2 (8.7%)
Saying that you will love them more if they do this with you	2 (8.7%)
Saying that you will spend more time with them	2 (8.7%)

how the particular circumstances of a professional relationship can be subverted. A number of the behaviours described here are echoed in the offence descriptions of the offenders in the current study.

## USE OF THE INTERNET

As a relatively recent phenomenon, use of the internet to access abuse images of children (child pornography) is still an area with considerable unknowns. One is the extent of the problem and another the issue of how far accessing such images is predictive of a likelihood to proceed to other forms of sexual offending. However, organisations increasingly have to decide on the significance of inappropriate images viewed by current or potential staff or volunteers. They may also have to make decisions about those who have been accessing illegal abusive images but are not charged with a criminal offence, as in the case of Operation Ore in the UK in 2002, when the criminal justice agencies did not have the logistical capacity to prosecute the number of offenders revealed in their investigation (BBC, 2003). In the context of this report, therefore, it is appropriate to consider possible risk of abuse from such individuals and their suitability to work in a child care setting.

The increased availability of access to the internet has brought in its wake the possibility of relatively easy access to images which previously would have been available only to someone with a significant commitment to obtaining them by physical, rather than virtual electronic, methods. Middleton, Elliott, Mandeville-Norden, and Beech (2006) observe that the internet combines 24 hour, 7 day a week access; affordability, with free material of their choice available to knowledgeable users and anonymity, thus ‘increasing the user’s sense of freedom, pace and ... willingness to experiment’ (p. 589). One, possibly rather startling, realisation is the proportion of the population who, by accessing these images, do appear to have some level of sexual interest in children which has not previously been reflected in levels of reporting of sexual abuse.

In terms of where computers were used for this purpose, a study by Wolak, Finkelhor, and Mitchell (2005) of 1,713 arrests for relevant offences in the USA found that 91% did so at home, but 17% had also done so at work, reinforcing the importance of organisational monitoring for inappropriate use of computer equipment.

Counterintuitive though it may appear, it is not possible to assume a sexual interest in children on the part of all those who access or possess abusive images. Wolak *et al.* (2005) suggest that they will include those who are:

- sexually interested in prepubescent children or young adolescents who use the images for sexual fantasy and gratification;
- sexually indiscriminate, in that they are seeking new and different stimuli;

- sexually curious, downloading a few images to satisfy that interest;
- interested in profiting financially by the sale of images or establishing pay per access web sites.

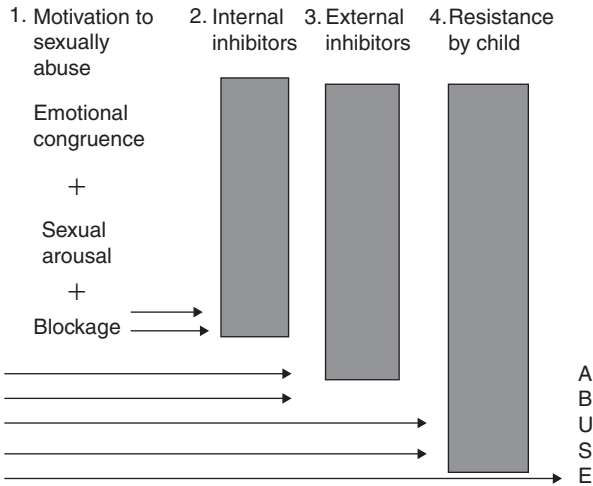
Wolak *et al.* (2005) found that 40% of the cases studied involved dual offences of possession of images and sexual assault, brought to light in the course of the same investigation. A further 15% had attempted to commit such offences, identified by soliciting undercover investigators posing as minors. Law-enforcement agencies have reported between 35%–51% of such dual cases when prior convictions were taken into account (Armagh, 2002). However, in the Wolak *et al.* (2005) study, 55% of these dual offenders were detected in investigations which began as allegations of child sexual abuse. When the case originated with an allegation or investigation of child pornography, the figure fell to 16.6%, though the authors consider this to be a conservative estimate.

It is, therefore very difficult to conclusively assess individual sexual interest in children or adolescents, even when there has been use of the internet to view indecent images of children. However, when considering the significance of such behaviours for employment, it would seem that, whatever the motivation, deliberately accessing such images is such a clear violation of accepted norms and expected standards that an individual doing so renders them unsuitable to work with children. In addition, though there is no evidence of a causal link between viewing abusive images and child abuse, it could also be argued that children have the right to be protected from those who might inappropriately regard them as sexual objects, as opposed to acknowledging their legitimate right to an age appropriate sexual identity, and that this in itself is would make them unsuitable to be a worker in this context.

As well as a possible precursor to abuse new technologies and indecent images also pose other risks to children in organisational settings. So for example their image might be captured for onward distribution or images might be used to coerce children into co-operating with abuse. The use of images and hence serve the broader motivation of the emotional and psychological misuse of children.

## **MOTIVATIONS TO SEXUALLY ABUSE**

The question of why someone sexually offends is complex, resulting from a number of factors operating at different levels. In one relatively simple but very accessible model, four stages are suggested as pre-conditions to abuse, with the three factors which comprise the elements of the first pre-condition (those in column 1 of Figure 1.1) described by the author as a framework in which to organise the various theories explaining child sexual abuse. The first concerns the emotional congruence that many child abusers appear to have with children. The second factor is the process whereby an adult would come



**Figure 1.1** Four preconditions model of sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1984).

to find a child sexually arousing. The third factor addresses the question of why some offenders are ‘blocked’ in their ability to meet their sexual and emotional needs in appropriate consenting adult relationships. This leads to the precondition whereby the normal inhibitions against having sexual contact with a child are either overcome or not present in those who sexually offend.

The four stage model itself attempts to explain the process by which a sexual offence can come to be committed. Interruption of the process at any stage will prevent the abusive act. The stages are:

**MOTIVATION TO ABUSE SEXUALLY**

In order for any sexual offence to occur the offender must be motivated to carry out such an act. The motivation is seen as arising from a number of sources which vary according to the individual’s experiences and situation and which are addressed in the four factor framework outlined above.

**OVERCOMING INTERNAL INHIBITIONS**

As is evident from the Freel (2003) and Briere and Runtz (1989) studies, there are a number of individuals who find the prospect of sexual activity with children arousing but who do not offend, presumably because of their internal inhibitions to doing so. The vast majority of sex offenders know that their behaviour is illegal and hence regarded as wrong and in order to offend have had to overcome any such inhibitions. They may do this in a number of ways, such as developing cognitive distortions to justify and excuse their behaviour.

They may also use alcohol or drugs as disinhibitors and then use cognitive distortions to blame the disinhibitors for the offending rather than seeing it as a way of allowing themselves to behave in a way that they already want to. Others may lack these inhibitions altogether.

### OVERCOMING EXTERNAL INHIBITIONS

Once any internal inhibitions against carrying out the offence are overcome, an individual must then set up a situation in which the offence can occur and overcome any external obstacles that may arise. The grooming process would be part of this stage, as would seeking employment opportunities which enable access to children.

### OVERCOMING THE RESISTANCE OF THE CHILD

The final precondition focuses on the methods the offender employs to overcome any resistance the victim may offer. Grooming of the victim may involve developing a friendship with the child, using bribes of affection and gifts, threats or physical violence. Some offenders may target particular children who are perceived as being vulnerable in some way.

The model has been highly influential, and continues to provide a useful framework within which to consider sexually offending behaviour. Indeed Colton and Vanstone (1998) report that in their study of sexual abuse by men who work with children the four stages in the process were confirmed in all the men's stories. More recent developments offer a more sophisticated approach to the issue and these will be considered below. However, before doing so, it is helpful to briefly consider the implications of the Four Preconditions model for prevention. Aspects of preconditions 1 and 2 may be accessible during a selection and recruitment process, precondition 3 is potentially an issue which can be addressed through organisational situational prevention measures, discussed further below and precondition 4 by organisational empowerment of children about their rights and legitimate expectations of those working with them. This last aspect can only ever be a lesser component of an approach to protecting children and care should be taken to in no way imply that children have the responsibility for their own safety with adults who have a responsibility to care for them.

### OTHER MODELS OF KNOWN OFFENDER BEHAVIOUR

Understanding the behaviour of those who sexually abuse children is still a relatively new area of study. Thus models from the 1980s, the four factor model outlined above (Finkelhor, 1984) and the Multi-Factor Model of Deviant Sexuality (Wolf, 1984) which proposed the 'Addiction Cycle' of sexual offending,

continued to be influential with practitioners well into the 1990s. There is still no generally accepted model of child sexual abuse (Burn and Brown, 2006) and in view of there being no single causal explanation of sexual offending which has a strong empirical basis, Smallbone and Wortley (2001) suggest that most researchers agree that sexual offending against children is a 'multi-dimensional and multi-determined' phenomenon.

However, more recently, models have been proposed which review existing and more recent data in a continuing attempt to develop understanding of the elements of sexual offending behaviour further. Space precludes detailing them here, but the interested reader is referred to Hanson and Morton-Bourgon's (2004) review of various models based on a meta analysis of 95 studies involving more than 31,000 sex offenders; the multiple pathway model of the sexual offence process proposed by Ward and Hudson (1998) and Ward and Gannon's (2006) 'Comprehensive Good Lives Model of Treatment for Sex Offenders'. Of interest may also be Beech and Ward's (2004) 'The integration of etiology and risk in sexual offenders: A theoretical framework' which thoroughly reviews the most influential models.

## **THOUGHT PROCESSES AND COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS**

One of the issues which many non-specialists find it difficult to reconcile is how an apparently aware and otherwise sensitive professional can sexually abuse a child. Part of the answer may lie in the particular thought processes and cognitive distortions of the individual.

The four preconditions model (Finkelhor, 1984) referred to above includes the need to overcome any internal inhibitors to abuse, one element of which may be 'cognitive distortions' or thinking errors (Maletzky, 1998). Similarly other models consider distorted beliefs to be a contributory factor to the offence process (Ward and Gannon, 2006). Marziano, Ward, Beech, and Pattison (2006) define cognitive distortions as 'fundamental thinking errors that hinder an individual's ability to make realistic formulations and interpretations of the world, others, and him or herself' (p. 97).

Individuals with deviant sexual interest will not be able to commit sexual crimes unless they are willing to hurt others to obtain their goals, feel unable to stop themselves despite any inhibitors or unless they can convince themselves that they are not harming their victims (Hanson and Morton-Bourgon, 2004). Given the qualities sought for those working in 'caring' professions it could be hypothesised that convincing themselves that they are not harming their victims will be the predominant internal process for the majority of professional abusers.

Most people engage in biased or self-deceptive thinking in a number of situations, and usually in ways which are quite innocuous. There is a delicate balance between being motivated to be accurate in our beliefs and the motivation to

maintain a positive view of ourselves. The majority manage this balance in a constructive way and acknowledge when thinking needs to be re-examined or conclusions are manifestly not supported by the evidence. However, for child sex offenders, ‘the balance is disrupted by deviant motivations that become stronger than the motivation to be accurate ... through the routine activation of normal but biased thinking processes, child molesters gradually construct events in their mind in a way that allows them to protect their self view while bypassing their usual standards of judgement’ (Wright and Schneider, 1999, p. 92).

Cognitive distortions can be defined as assumptions, sets of beliefs and self-statements that abusers use to deny, minimise, justify and rationalise their actions which serve to maintain their behaviour. They can thus serve to minimise the seriousness or extent of the offence – ‘I didn’t really do anything’; move blame away from themselves and so allow a denial of responsibility for their actions – ‘I wouldn’t have done anything he didn’t want to’; view children as holding similar sexual interests or desires as their own – ‘Kids enjoy sex with an experienced adult’ and misconstrue their victim’s behaviour to indicate sexual desire or intent – ‘When a child smiles at you it means they want to have sex’ (Murphy, 1990).

Biased reasoning includes justifying, minimising and blaming. Possibly because of incredulity that anyone could genuinely hold such beliefs, many people consider offenders’ accounts of their own perceptions to be deliberate lies. Whilst this will be the case for some, Wright and Schneider (1999) suggest that, rather than simply lying, these are reflective of general beliefs or assumptions already held by the offender and that they ‘... actually believe much of their explanation of what occurred or why it occurred despite its inaccuracy’ (p. 107).

## COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL ABUSERS

There are relatively few studies of the issues of cognitive distortions or emotional functioning which relate specifically to abusers in organisations. Those which do refer predominantly to clerics, predominantly from the catholic church and in one of the few broader study samples, that of Sullivan and Beech (2004) described above, clerics still formed a preponderance of the group. Some degree of caution must, therefore, be exercised in generalising results from these studies to the general population of abusers in organisations. They do, however, offer the most information available about the functioning of those who offend in this way.

From a small sample of 14 Catholic clergy in a residential treatment setting and based on models developed by Thompson, Marolla and Bromley (1998), Saradjian and Nobus (2003) used two broad types of category of distortions: *Disclaimers* and *Accounts*. Disclaimers were prospective interpretations intended to cushion anticipated reaction if the abuse were discovered and

Accounts were retrospective interpretations to explain unanticipated or untoward behaviour. The accounts were further divided into 'justifications that were an admission of responsibility but denial that the action was wrong' and 'excuses – admissions that the act was wrong but a denial of responsibility'. Both clearly served to shift responsibility for the abuse from the offender and enabled them to overcome inhibitions against abusing, minimised their perceptions of the effects of their abuse, reduced their guilt and so maintained the essentially positive self image that most of us need in order to maintain psychological well being.

Saradjian and Nobus (2003) also found that the position of power, trust and high esteem of the clergy proved an important dynamic in facilitating the abuse, in that their distorted belief system became supported and reinforced by selective processing of information derived from their position and the esteem of others. Again this may be a similar process for other organisational offenders, albeit not so pronounced, but relevant to particular positions of power where there is also a pronounced disparity.

## **FEMALE SEXUAL ABUSERS**

One of the most consistent findings in all the research on child abuse offending is that males are overwhelmingly more likely to be perpetrators of child sex abuse than are females. However, given the proportions of women employed or involved in social care and relevant occupations, it is relevant to consider what is established about women known to have abused. Utting (1997) indicates the importance of remaining aware of the possibility of abuse by women and Freel (2003) found 4% of the female public sector child care workers in his sample reported sexual interest in children with 2% indicating at least the possibility of having sex with a child if it was certain no one would find out and there would be no punishment. This is not, therefore, solely a theoretical possibility.

Other than in relation to foster care, where women feature in terms of a range of harmful or abusive behaviours and Nursery and Day Care with its higher reported rates of female sexual abusers, there is relatively little focus on women in the inquiries or literature and the studies which can be identified relate to females who sexually abuse in any setting (Grayston and De Luca, 1999; Matravers, 2005; Robins, 1998). The well publicised case of Vanessa George who sexually abused children in the nursery where she worked is a notable exception (Plymouth SCB, 2010).

Adult female sexual abusers account for only a tiny proportion of recorded sexual offences. Beckett (2005) estimates that adult females account for 5% of sex offending, though there is considerable variation in figures in the literature. Finkelhor (1986) has argued that rates for women who sexually abuse children have been under-estimated in the past, suggesting that the true figure for

women who sexually abuse children is 5% for those with girl victims and 20% for boy victims. An analysis of calls to ChildLine (NSPCC, 2009) between April 2008 and March 2009 found that 81% of callers who reported being sexually abused identified the gender of their abuser. Of these 6% of girls and 36% of boys stated that their abuser was female.

Allen, Bear and Knopp (1991) found that the occupational status of female sexual offenders was related to traditional roles occupied by women: 45% were service workers; 14% clerics; 12% labourers; 8% homemakers. Ten percent of the females were from professional occupations, with female offenders three times more likely to have professional occupations that bring them into contact with children compared to male offenders. The female professions included clinical psychology, nursing and nursing supervisors, all of which may have brought the offender into contact with children.

To understand patterns of abuse, a commonly referred to typology is that developed by Speltz, Matthews, and Matthews (1991). This has three types of adult female abuser: Predisposed Offenders, who initially target pre-pubescent children, Teacher-Lover Offenders, who initially target adolescents and view themselves as romantically involved or in love with their victim (the name derived from the view of the women that they are initiating their younger lover into sex), and Male-Coerced Offenders, who were initially coerced into offending by men. This last group are frequently involved in an abusive relationship with the man. There is also a small atypical group which includes those who are non-coerced co-offenders with men, those who are formally mentally ill and those who abuse in the context of ritual.

Reviewing typologies found in the literature, Gannon and Rose (2008) found empirical support for these general typologies, albeit with some suggested refinement within categories. From all the typologies identified they suggest the main categories of female offenders are women who engage with adolescents, usually male; women who offend alongside a co-perpetrating male (sometimes coerced and sometimes not); women who specifically target pre-pubescent children, and women who offend as part of a wider criminal career.

## COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS OF FEMALE SEX OFFENDERS

Using the three typologies developed by Speltz *et al.* (1991), Saradjian (1996) found that those in the Predisposed Offenders category, who initially targeted pre-pubescent children, rated the children's sexual interest as higher than their own and interpreted the children's behaviour as indicating that they wanted sexual contact. Those categorised as Teacher-Lover Offenders, who initially targeted adolescents attributed the sexual desire to the young person, manipulating and coercing the adolescents to act in specific ways and then attributing their compliance as sexual desire. The third category, Male-Coerced Offenders, most commonly interpreted the children's compliance in response to the men's

manipulation as sexual desire. For many of the women this perception was also a result of the man 'grooming' their perceptions. Wright and Schneider (1999) suggest similar patterns of cognitive distortions are seen in female offenders as outlined above in relation to males, though other authors are silent on this point.

It will be apparent from these typologies that settings where forming close emotional relationships with children would offer opportunities for this kind of pattern of abuse or indeed for boundaries to become blurred and abusive relationships develop.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter identifies features of abusers and their behaviour patterns and so illuminates issues which both recruitment and selection processes and development of organisational cultures and norms should take account of. Knowledge of the characteristics of known child abusers may assist in the development of tools for screening, recruitment and monitoring of suitability of staff working with children. In practice, however, child sexual abuse perpetrators are not easy to identify (Sullivan and Beech 2002; Murphy, Rau, and Worley, 1993). As inquiries have shown (e.g. that concerning Frank Beck (Kirkwood, 1993) and Castle Hill School (Brannan *et al.*, 1993a & b) many are intelligent and may be well qualified, present with the responses of a highly competent child care worker and be resourceful in gaining access to children via their employment (Moriarty, 1990). In the case of Vanessa George the Inquiry notes that 'There is no indication from this review that any professional could have reasonably predicted that (she) might be a risk to children. All the evidence currently points to (her) having no sexual interest in children until she made contact with (her co-perpetrator) via the internet' (Plymouth LSCB, 2010, 5.77).

There is no reliable 'profile' describing the characteristics of individuals likely to perpetrate child maltreatment in an organisational or institutional environment. There is no simple preventative or screening measure which can prevent abuse, meaning that current preventative processes are largely limited to vetting for individuals with known problem behaviour (e.g., a conviction).

A values based approach as described in Chapter 7 can add a valuable perspective, with its focus on previous behaviour different to that usually used. In conjunction with existing pre-employment screening process through interview already used by many organisations and systems of staff support, monitoring and evaluation to facilitate the identification and effective management of inappropriate behaviour by staff, particularly in the context of the development of a vigilant organisational culture driven by positive values, can all make a significant contribution to children being safer in organisational relationships.

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