



Special Edition: Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Guest Editor's Introduction

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One of the most unnerving aspects of child sexual abuse is that it is constantly manifesting in unexpected ways. The current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has collected testimony of abuse in churches, schools, out-of-home care, hospitals and religious communities, demonstrating the breadth of institutional arrangements whose structures and cultures have facilitated child sexual abuse. Cases of serious and prolonged sexual abuse in family contexts have been excluded from the terms of reference of the Royal Commission but nonetheless continue to surface in media reports. In 2013, twelve children were permanently removed from an extended family living in rural NSW in what has been described as one of the worst cases of child abuse in Australia, involving intergenerational incest going back at least three generations (Auebach 2014). Another recent high-profile case involved the use of the Internet to facilitate the sexual exploitation of an adopted child by his parents in Queensland (Ralston 2013). These cases challenge the received wisdom that child sexual abuse is characterised by the victimisation of one child by one opportunistic offender. Such incidents suggest instead that child sexual abuse takes varied and systemic forms, and can operate to perpetuate and entrench toxic cultures and power structures.

This special issue on *Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation* is a timely contribution to ongoing efforts to understand the multiplicity of child sexual abuse. It is an interdisciplinary collection of insights drawn from criminology, sociology, psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis, and includes papers from academic researchers alongside academic practitioners whose writing is grounded in their work with affected individuals and communities. A key aim of the special issue is to contextualise the diversity of child sexual abuse socially, politically and historically, recognising the dynamic and iterative relationships between sexual abuse and the contexts in which it takes place. The contributions to this special issue examine how the diversity and dynamics of abuse unfold at the individual, community and social level, and across time. The issue is focused on emerging or under-recognised forms of child sexual abuse, such as organised abuse and sexual exploitation, which illustrate recent shifts in the knowledge base and require new and innovative criminological thinking.

The special issue begins with a paper from **Warwick Middleton**, who examines how apparently disparate abuses, such as incest, organised abuse and torture, cluster in the lives of women subject to prolonged incest by their fathers. Prolonged incest functions in his paper as a lens through which to theorise the systemic qualities of severe sexual violence and its broader social and political implications, as well as its personal impacts on victims and survivors. Importantly, the paper identifies and challenges the defence mechanisms that function to

suppress knowledge of the abject abuse of the powerless by the powerful. The accumulation of evidence of severe, coordinated sexual violence against children and women has reached a 'tipping point', and the societies of the Global North are now beginning to grapple with unthinkably traumatic forms of sexual abuse that have persisted in our midst.

In the public imagination, the threat of organised sexual abuse has become indelibly linked to the Internet. The paper from **Janis Wolak** offers a much needed empirical analysis of the role of the internet in the organised sexual abuse of children. Concern about children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation online has focused on the threat of 'online sexual predators' but this study paints a more complex picture in which technology has been integrated into ongoing patterns of familial and extra-familial organised abuse. Drawing on law enforcement data, the paper finds significant differences between technology-facilitated organised abuse cases and other forms of technology-facilitated sexual offences against minors, which underscores the importance of studying the specific variants of child sex offending.

The media plays a major role in shaping public understanding and responses to complex child sexual abuse cases, even as investigators and authorities grapple with the challenges posed by multiple perpetrators and multiple victims. Two papers in the special issue examine the appropriation of such cases to further racist and anti-multicultural agendas. **Aisha Gill** and **Karen Harrison** address the recent prominence in the United Kingdom (UK) given to the sexual exploitation of teenaged girls by networks of South Asian men. Based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of newspaper reporting in five newspapers over two years, the paper suggests that coverage of so-called 'sex grooming' has conflated sexual violence with racialised communities and positioned South Asian men as sexually deviant 'folk devils'. This issue is explored further in a paper from **Selda Dagistanli** and **myself** comparing the highly publicised 2012 'sex grooming' prosecutions in Rochdale, UK, to the contested and ambiguous 1990 intervention into an alleged case of organised abuse in the same city. The paper highlights how 'culture' is positioned differently in racialised and non-racialised cases of organised abuse in ways that mystify the similarities between cases of multi-perpetrator sexual violence.

Adah Sachs brings her expertise as a mental health practitioner specialising in the treatment of severe trauma to her paper on the criminological implications of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). DID describes the fragmentation of identity and memory that can accompany early and prolonged trauma, and it is a common diagnosis amongst victims and survivors of severe sexual abuse. A lack of understanding and training in DID is a major obstacle to the investigation and prosecution of extreme abuse. This paper provides an introduction to DID for the criminologist and illustrates the complex needs and vulnerabilities of people living with DID using the clinical case study of 'Paula' (a pseudonym). By addressing Paula's experiences of violence from multiple perspectives, the paper highlights how an ordered and chronological account of victimisation can emerge through sensitive and informed inquiry. The paper provides a number of important guidelines for the criminological interviewing of people living with DID.

The struggle over the meaning of disclosures of severe abuse is also a theme in **Kate Richardson's** paper, which examines ongoing debates over the existence of ritual abuse in the UK. Ritual abuse describes the sexual abuse of children by groups of people in a ceremonial manner. Rejecting the polarised positions of either 'sceptic' or 'believer', the paper tells a more ambivalent story of the emergence of an unexpected variant of child sexual abuse to public awareness, amid the partial and flawed responses of multiple agencies and the press. In the wake of recent high-profile allegations, developing a nuanced understanding of organised abuse has become a pressing challenge. Richardson's paper calls for a reassessment of the social and historical significance of ritual abuse and she identifies a number of potential points for intervention and change.

In Australia, the current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has revealed how powerful institutions can overlook and deny the occurrence of child sexual abuse over years or decades. In a paper based on evidence given to the recent Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into clergy abuse, **Jodi Death** identifies a culture of resistance within the Catholic Church to accepting responsibility for institutional sexual abuse. She analyses how the Church was described to the Inquiry by various Catholic representatives in a manner that acknowledged the occurrence of sexual abuse by clergy but attributed it to historically contingent factors rather than intentional collusion or cover-up. She argues that this description of clergy abuse serves the twin purpose of denying the responsibility of institutional actors within the Church for clergy abuse and justifying an inadequate and legalistic response to victims.

The final paper for the special issue from **Susan Rayment-McHugh, Stephen Smallbone** and **Nick Tilley** identifies the continuities between the apparently disparate contexts in which endemic sexual violence takes place. Adopting an evolutionary approach, they emphasise the importance of individual and social controls in inhibiting the sexual abuse of children and the risk of abuse where such controls are degraded or weakened. They develop an innovative causal model to account for the dramatically increased prevalence of sexual violence in some conflict zones, isolated communities and institutional settings. By identifying the interaction between individual disposition, socialisation and circumstances, the paper examines how multiple factors can interact to increase or potentially decrease the risk of sexual violence.

The diverse backgrounds and expertise of the contributors to the special issue reflects the importance of ongoing, interdisciplinary inquiry into child sexual abuse and the various forms that it takes. I want to thank all the authors for their perseverance throughout the writing and editing process, which has produced a valuable resource that will be of keen interest to researchers, practitioners and survivors.

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