

Issues of female sexual offending criminology essay

[Law](#), [Criminology](#)



Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse how female sexual offenders are perceived and treated in society. This was achieved through secondary data analysis. The study starts by examining the background issues of female sexual offending, and presenting the potential typologies in order to understand the different kinds of female offenders. It then provides an examination of how they are portrayed within the media. The findings suggest that historically women were viewed as caring and nurturing, so alleged offenders have been largely ignored in media reports. Nowadays the media make use of a variety of influential methods to portray female sex offenders in a negative light. By demonising them, they create a stereotype for society to adopt. This portrayal is present in the critical discourse analysis used in articles concerning a recent high profile case. The study then looks at how the Criminal Justice System responds to female sex offenders. It identifies the need for the development of female-centred treatment programmes, and acknowledges the lack of awareness among professionals concerning these issues. It advocates increased education and training with regards to this type of offender. Having identified these problems, the study then analyses the impact of female sex abuse on victims, and the ways they, also, are dealt with by professionals. The findings revealed the complexities involved here. The study concludes that, while official statistics suggest that female sex offending seems to be increasing, it is still a hidden taboo in society. A lot of work still needs to be done to raise awareness and acknowledge past denial of female sex

offending. Only then can the sensitive issues involved be properly addressed, and both offenders and victims given appropriate treatment.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Aims of the dissertation

A staggering rise of 132% (2, 142) in calls made to ChildLine reporting female sexual abuse occurred in 2008/09, compared with 923 calls in 2004/05 (NSPCC, 2009). This emphasises the extent of the problem of female-perpetrated sexual abuse in society. This dissertation focuses on female child sexual abuse. Where offending behaviour is referred to, it relates to female child sexual offenders (FCSOs). The main purpose of the study is to raise awareness and analyse the complexity of issues surrounding the much-hidden crime of female-perpetrated sexual abuse, by identifying how these types of criminals are represented within the media and treated by the Criminal Justice System, using victims' accounts to analyse these complex issues. Different academic theories on female sexual criminality will be explored, and a case study used to compare the ways in which the media represents female sexual abuse. The following research questions will be addressed in order to fulfil the purpose of the study: How does the mass media represent female sexual offenders? How does the Criminal Justice System respond to female sexual offenders? What is the impact of female sexual offending on victims?

Chapter summaries

Following this chapter, Chapter 2 outlines the methodology used, explaining the reason for choosing it and the potential difficulties of using other types of methods. The next chapter explores the ways in which the media portrays FCSOs and analyses whether their representations have an impact on public perceptions. It uses the case study of Vanessa George to undertake a critical discourse analysis by comparing how different types of media reports reproduce social and political supremacy. Chapter 4 critically evaluates how FCSOs are treated within the Criminal Justice System. It focuses on whether professionals are biased in regard to female offending compared to male, as well as issues of female-perpetrators as victims caught up in male-perpetrated abuse. The following chapter analyses the effects of abuse on victims of female-perpetrated sexual crimes, looking specifically at victims' accounts. It also discusses the complex issues faced by victims when disclosing abuse. The concluding chapter summarises the aforementioned analyses drawn from the literature presented within each chapter, and draws conclusions from the main research questions presented above.

Background to the problem of FCSO

Sexual crimes against children have been known to occur in society for many years. These crimes are thought to be predominately committed by men. However in recent years female perpetrators have also become increasingly identified. Allen (1990) noted that it was not until the 1980s that academic data became available on female sexual offending, and it is only relatively recently that it has come to light as an academic/social issue. Conversely,

society is still reluctant to acknowledge that it is a problem, because male perpetrators account for a larger percentage of overall sexual offending (Bunting, 2007). However, when looked at closely, it is a more complex issue than it may originally seem. To accept that women are capable of committing sexual abuse would mean challenging the perceived gender role of women (Denov, 2003) as having a caring and gentle nature, leading society, particularly children, to trust them more than men (Saradjian, 2010). This is explored in further detail during the course of the dissertation.

Population of sexual offenders

Many academic researchers have estimated that women only account for 5% of all sexual crimes against children (Cortoni et al., 2009). It is difficult to provide accurate figures concerning female-perpetrated sexual offences that occur in society, as the vast majority of cases go unreported, due to various reasons, such as issues with disclosure, which are discussed in Chapter 5. However, official Home Office statistics can be quoted, showing that out of 3,500 female offenders currently in prison, 81 of them are FCSOs, compared to 9,837 adult male sexual offenders in prison (Moj, 2012). This demonstrates that FCSOs account for 2% of all incarcerated offenders, supporting academic research.

Issues

The statistics presented above show a prevalence of child sexual offending. However, they also support the view of a misconception in society that, because female sex offending is so rare, the problem does not actually exist (Bunting, 2007). Whilst male-perpetrated sexual abuse is more prevalent,

this does not mean that the rare cases of female sexual abuse are not just as damaging for victims. This is discussed in Chapter 5. The fact that female sexual offending is so uncommon in society affects the way in which the general public and criminal justice professionals respond to female perpetrators. The historical portrayal of females as the gentle sex becomes perplexing when confronted with the rare cases showing them to be evil, and creates difficulty for academics trying to explain the extent of the problem in present society.

Typologies

It is important to note that due to the rarity of FCSO cases, there is limited research to refer to. However, the research available provides clear outlines of the different typologies of FCSOs, and it is essential to understand these in order to address the issue of female-perpetrated sexual offending. There is a growing body of sources on offender typologies (Matraver, 2008; Sandler & Freeman; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). This dissertation focuses on one of the most predominantly cited studies by Mathews et al. (1989), who identified three main typologies of FCSO:

Teacher/lover

This type of offender usually targets adolescent male victims. They generally regard their abuse as a harmless way of educating their victims about sexuality. Due to the nature of the abuse, the offenders do not view the abuse they commit as being criminal. This form of abuse is often referred to in the media as 'a relationship' rather than abuse (Tsopelas et al., 2012), consequently downplaying the seriousness of the offence.

Predisposed

The predisposed female offender has herself commonly been a victim of severe child sexual abuse, committed over a long period of time. Her aim is to carry out non-threatening abuse to gain emotional intimacy. The abuse is normally committed against her own or other young children in subtle ways, which can be disguised as normal childcare duties (Denov, 2004b).

Male-coerced

The male-coerced female offender commits abuse initially in the presence of their male co-offender. They will normally demonstrate extreme emotional dependency and submissive behaviour towards their male dominants. It has been suggested that this type of female perpetrator accounts for the largest percentage of FCSOs (Harris, 2010). This is supported by the view that historically child sexual offending is seen as a male-only crime, and that any involvement of females in the abuse is in a passive and subservient way, to please the male dominant (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010). FCSOs are often considered to be a heterogeneous population (Sandler & Freeman, 2007). The typologies above help to give an understanding of the wide diversity of characteristics held by FCSOs. The fact that each is different illustrates the extent of the problem in society. The concept of women who sexually abuse children is not as clear cut as it may seem. Cases involve complexities which influence the way in which criminal justice professionals respond to the offenders, and cause confusion among the public. Both can have an impact on victims. These issues will be addressed further during the course of this dissertation.

Chapter 2:

Methodology

Methodology

Having introduced the issue of female-perpetrated sexual offending, the focus is now on the chosen methodology used. The research for this dissertation was carried out using secondary data analysis. Secondary research methods refer to the evaluation of data and theories collected and founded by other researchers (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011). One of the most significant reasons for choosing secondary research is the problem surrounding ethical issues. Sexual offending is an extremely sensitive subject to discuss, and if the researcher is not a trained counsellor or psychologist, the research carried out may cause unnecessary psychological harm to participants (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Conducting primary research in this sensitive subject area could also cause potential harm to the researcher (Roberts, 2011), thus reinforcing the benefit of undergoing a critical literature review. Another predominant reason for choosing to conduct secondary data analysis relates to time. Due to the timescale for completion of this dissertation, it was more practical to consult secondary sources, which were more likely to produce higher-quality data than could be achieved through new empirical research (Stewart & Kamins, 1993). The aim of the dissertation is to give a broad insight into the issues surrounding female sexual offending. Empirical research would be less likely to provide such a wide view of the issues, compared with secondary data analysis, which gives researchers access to more information (Vartanian, 2010) to achieve the

desired aims. Therefore, due to the sensitivity of the subject area, the timescale and difficulty gaining access to relevant participants, empirical research was not feasible. The dissertation is thus a library-based critical literature review, requiring the use of a wide range of sources. Secondary data analysis is widely recognised as being capable of providing groundbreaking research for policy-making (Riedel, 2000). However, the potential disadvantages of secondary data also need to be considered. One important issue is validity. When using another researcher's data, it is important to understand that this was originally collected for a different purpose to the research aims of the current dissertation, and results shown in the primary research may show unintentional bias (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011). Use of such data may not be reliable for other research projects, and it is easy to interpret data from other researchers in different ways from to their original analysis. In order to avoid these pitfalls, each source of secondary data was studied thoroughly before use to ensure that it was suitable. An initial guide for researching relevant literature was the reading list for Level 3 module on sexual crimes against children; from this a snowball effect took place. A more in-depth search was completed using the university's library catalogue 'ifind research', employing relevant topical words and phrases such as 'female sexual offending' or 'female perpetrated child abuse'. In order to obtain recent academic journals and other research papers, a search in the CSA databases via Athens Account was conducted. Internet-based research was also carried out to explore current official statistics of the number of convicted sexual offenders in the UK from the Ministry of Justice, case reports and media coverage of female sexual

offending. The Home Office website and online newspapers, such as BBC News, were used to gain supplementary information, together with tabloid newspapers. A critical discourse analysis was carried out to explore the different themes of the ideologies emerging from the various forms of media reporting on the Vanessa George case.

Chapter 3:

How does the media represent female sexual offenders?

Introduction to the media

The mass media is known to be one of the most influential sources of providing news to members of the public. It also has a powerful impact on public perceptions of specific issues, for example sex offenders (Brayford & Deering, 2012). In order for a story to enter any form of the mass media, it needs to meet certain 'newsworthy' criteria which will help media companies to entice greater audiences, thus increasing overall profit (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Female sexual offending in society fulfils key aspects of 'newsworthy' criteria. The cases covered tend to include elements of seriousness and negativity, which is appealing to audiences (Greer, 2003). Child sexual offenders have long received much negative coverage by the mass media, causing a topic for public debate (Kitzinger, 2004). This chapter focuses on how the media represents FCSOs, with particular reference to the Vanessa George case. It also examines how the mass media is able to influence public perception of FCSOs. It is important to note that most academic research involving child sexual offenders, and also the media, focus on sexual offenders in general rather than specifically

FCSO's. Therefore this chapter adapts its conclusions from the limited research available. Another important issue to consider is that the media provides conflicting representations of women as offenders, in particular FCSOs. On the one hand, female offenders, like Myra Hindley, who receive large amounts of media attention, are demonised, but on the other hand, many other FCSOs go unnoticed in the media due to the traditional nurturing roles held by females in general (Giguere & Bumby, 2007). These contradictions are often mirrored in public reactions, creating complications. The challenges in understanding representations of FCSOs are explored during the course of the chapter.

How the media influences public perceptions of FCSOs

The 'hypodermic syringe model' is a theory which describes the media like a drug, injecting opinions directly into the minds of their audience (Kitzinger, 2004). This is one way of understanding the effect of the media on public perceptions of FCSOs. It can produce a powerful effect, as the amount of emotion produced by these offences could be why the media choose to report on them. Reports may cause outbursts of street anger and violence, which could be the effect of a moral panic, creating hysteria among the public (Thomas, 2005; Cohen, 1972). This is evident in the case of nursery worker Vanessa George (BBC, 2009) who abused children in her care. The media coverage of this case may have made the public start to look at women, particularly those working with children, in a different light, with the same suspicion as men. This is further discussed, later in the chapter. However, evidence suggests that this has only been provoked by the rare

number of FCSO cases actually are reported on, as most of the time society has a 'blind spot' regarding female-perpetrated sexual abuse. This is due to the care-giving roles which females are expected to hold towards children (Finkelhor et al., 1988), which, again, have a habit of being represented in various forms of the media: films, news reports, TV etc. It could be argued that, depending on which particular ideology the media decides to report on with regards to FCSO's, their portrayal will have a significant impact on how society views them. This illustrates the complications created by the media, in providing contradictory perceptions of FSCOs, causing confusion as to how the public should perceive them. The media often uses tactics such as emotive language and imagery to influence how the public view certain criminals. One example of this is the use of the iconic image of Myra Hindley within media reports. The picture showed her as emotionless and cold, in a way that makes her seem masculine (see appendix 1). Being such a powerful and well-known case, it also shaped how society imagines FCSOs to look (Kitzinger, 2004). Even though this was proved to be a co-offending case, it showed how society views any female involved in such crimes as going against the traditional gender model that woman are incapable of committing child sexual abuse. This relates to the theory used by feminists who argue that such women are regarded as 'double deviant', and receive harsher treatment by society, as they not only breach the law, but also break feminine norms (Heidensohn, 1987). Applying this theory, FCSOs may be regarded as the worst form of criminals, due to the seriousness of their offences. This could explain why they receive such negative portrayals within the media. However, a counter-argument is that females involved in child

sexual offending may be viewed by the general public as harmless, and their involvement is not perceived as a form of abuse. If the media do not themselves believe that female-perpetrated sexual abuse is a problem within society, then they can hardly provide such negative representations. This is supported by Denov (2003), who states that the public perceive FCSOs as committing less serious offences than male sexual offenders, due to the common belief that women cannot be capable of committing such crimes. Thus, it appears that the media is likely to hold similar views in order to serve the interests of the public, and will focus attention primarily on issues involving male sexual offenders. There is strong evidence to suggest that FCSOs are treated as 'double deviant', although some theorists would refute this, with the rationale that they are perceived as less serious criminals than their male counterparts. However, if we look at examples such as Myra Hindley, that is clearly a false supposition.

Media representations of FCSOs

Historically, FCSOs have rarely been reported on by the media. This may be due to the myth that abuse by a female is seen as "a confused form of love" (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010, p. 13), and suggests that even if women do sexually abuse children, it is in a less aggressive manner than male sexual offenders, and may not necessarily inflict damage on a child. The media is less likely to report on these cases, as they do not fit the 'newsworthy' criteria discussed earlier. This could also be a reason why the public generally has a lack of knowledge concerning issues surrounding female child sexual offending. As Strickland (2008) argues, men are traditionally

viewed as having more aggressive personalities, and are more likely to commit criminal offences. Consequently, it can be argued that these stereotypes make it easy for the media to report on issues and cases linked to them. Moreover, the lack of reports on FCSOs could explain the reason for the lack of disclosure by their victims (Denov, 2003). This is discussed in Chapter 5. As indicated in Chapter 1, any abuse committed by females is usually referred to in the media as a relationship or 'affair' (Tsopelas et al., 2012, p. 306) compared with when the perpetrator is a man, in which case the reporters often refer to them as 'abusers', again resulting in a lack of reports on cases perpetrated by females. This encourages academics to ask the question of whether female-perpetrated child sexual abuse is simply under-reported by the media due to the above reasons, or if it is so uncommon that there are not enough cases for the media to actually report on. Nowadays the increasing amount of knowledge and awareness about issues of female child sexual offending has roused strong societal reactions, resulting in increased coverage in the media. Gakhal & Brown (2011) report on how newspapers portray female child sexual perpetrators as 'evil monsters'. This shows a dramatic change from when they were largely ignored in the media, or seen to be coerced into abuse by a male. This has given society a new perspective on the problem. One of the most dramatic cases with wide media coverage was that of Vanessa George. A mother of two, she worked at a nursery in Plymouth. In December 2009 she was convicted of sexual assault, and the making of and being in possession of/distributing indecent images of children, and was given an indeterminate prison sentence with a minimum requirement of seven years. In November

2010, a serious case review was conducted (PSCB, 2010), and it was discovered that the nursery provided an ideal environment for the abuse to be carried out. It found that certain gaps within the system allowed George to commit these offences, such as the nursery's phone line being out of order, allowing workers to bring their own mobile phones into the nursery for emergencies. This presented George with an opportunity to take indecent images of children on her mobile. Yet the media reports paid little attention to these mistakes, focusing primarily on her abusive behaviour. This is discussed further later in the chapter. It was also discovered during the investigation that she was an active part of a co-offending group, initiated by a male perpetrator, Colin Blanchard, and yet interestingly, the media attention focused primarily on George. In the serious case review, it was noted that she had no previous convictions and the abuse only started when she came into contact with Blanchard over the internet. George was manipulated into committing abuse and then sharing images with him. These facts were, however, expressed in a completely different manner throughout the media reporting on the case. This warrants further examination, by analysing reports from various media sources.

Analysis of the media reports on the Vanessa George case

Chapter 1 indicated that there is substantial evidence to suggest that many FCSOs are regarded as harmless because they may only target adolescent victims (Mathews et al., 1989). However, this is not applicable in the case of Vanessa George (BBC News, 2010). The media coverage generally concerning this case highlighted the serious issues surrounding female-

perpetrated sexual abuse in the UK, different media types reporting in diverse ways. In order to understand how the media represent FCSOs, a comparison needs to be made between the various media types, using a critical discourse analysis. There are many definitions of critical discourse analysis, but, within this dissertation it is referred to as the analysis of language used in speech and writing - within media reports - as a form of 'social practice', where specific ideologies are reproduced through the language in the texts (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This method is appropriate here, enabling analysis of the language used by the media when reporting on FCSOs, and uncover the hidden ideologies in the text which are used to change the reader's opinion on the issue of female sexual offending. It is also important to look at the discursive construction of FCSOs, which refers to the way in which the women are defined through the language used in media reports, and how these construct FCSOs as a concept. Almost every article written about FCSOs can be analysed using critical discourse analysis, reporters being required to make certain decisions as to how they want to represent particular ideologies in their article, e. g. the terms they use to describe an FCSO, or which quotes to use from members of the public. These can add to the way the ideology in the text is portrayed overall, and thus how it affects society as a whole (Richardson, 2007). The three main articles analysed were drawn from three different news outlets which hold conflicting ideological stances. Firstly, "Public enemy number one" was taken from The Sun (Coles, 2011), a newspaper which represents right-wing principles. Secondly, "Vanessa George jailed for child sex abuse" was extracted from The Guardian (Morris, 2009) which expresses mostly liberal interests. Finally,

" Little Ted's was ' ideal' place for Vanessa George abuse" was traced from BBC News online (2010b), which is commonly known to represent a centrism approach to reporting. The Sun, known for its exaggeration of the truth in order to attract the attention of more readers, reported on the case of Vanessa George as being one that caused so much outrage and shock that the police needed to step in to stop the abuse aimed at her by the public. The way the article presented these dramatic views is interesting for critical discourse analysis, as it was outwardly biased in presenting only the feelings expressed by parents of possible victims, rather than facts of the case. Therefore the analysis made could support the theory that the facts of the case are spun to present a particular viewpoint - in this case, that FCSOs are extremely disturbing to society - and uses particular language which is aimed to influence their readers into holding the same opinions. This is evident in the following quotes: " Public enemy number one", " Sick b****", " The van taking Vanessa George to prison is attacked" (see appendix 2 for more examples). All the above quotes use emotive language to express the disgust and anger felt by members of the public. These quotes are used to appropriate the public voice as that of the reporters, obscuring the ideological underpinnings of the article. This supports Gakhal & Brown's (2011) argument that the media provides stereotypical portrayals of sex offenders in general, using words linked with ' monsters' and ' evil perverts'. Moreover, this choice of language helped provide a negative perception of FCSOs. The fact that the reporter purposely used a collective noun in the article title - " Public enemy number one"- suggests that the paper was trying to give an impression that George was hated by all members of the

public, and that readers should share these feelings. While analysing this article, it was found that the only quotations and opinions used were those of parents involved in the case, who naturally held biased views. This shows how the reporter wanted to present only one ideological viewpoint.

Furthermore, it can be argued that this negative portrayal of George, an FCSO, by the media reinforces the argument previously put forward by Heidenson (1987) regarding female offenders as displaying 'double deviance'. On the other hand, the article in *The Guardian* expressed a more balanced stance, presenting the audience with facts of the case. The image of George used by the reporter shows her to be a smiling, friendly character. This could be aiming to send out a message to the public that, unlike the stereotypical image of most sexual offenders, an FCSO can be any ordinary woman. Perhaps, because such cases are so uncommon, there is not yet a stereotype of the female offender. Thus, it appears that the media can play on the fear of the public, to make them wary of whom they trust in caring for their child. Furthermore, its choice of image shows how George was part of a co-offending group (see appendix 3), and although she solely committed the abuse in Little Ted's nursery, she was in fact in contact with two others, one of whom (Blanchard), was coercing her to commit the offences. The article reported that George was 'besotted' with him. This is not simply presenting FCSOs in a negative light, but providing a more nuanced understanding of the case, and constructing her as submissive, under the control of Blanchard. It also covers other issues faced by society, for example the influence male sexual offenders have on females to force them to also commit sexual offences. However, when analysing this article, it can be argued that the

reporter was somewhat biased, using post-modified terms such as 'paedophile', which disguises the fact that the choice to commit these crimes is not just down to sexual preference, but is a way in which an offender exploits and holds power over children (Kelly, 1998). It also links to the same ideology presented in The Sun, by describing George in a negative light: "Cold and calculating". These quotes, however, came from the judge in charge of the case, possibly a more reliable source to reproduce the ideologies through language than that used by The Sun. The way in which The Guardian provides a balanced stance is arguably similar to how the BBC reported on the case of Vanessa George. They provided the facts of the case and referred to the serious case review (discussed earlier), as well as other reliable sources, such as the councillor for Plymouth's Efford and Lipson ward, in order to fulfil their reputation of being a dependable source. When analysing this article, it is clear that the ideology behind it is to provide the public with the facts, whilst preventing moral panic, by reporting on the positive responses of professionals towards the case. The reporter used passive verbs, such as 'reassured' (see appendix 4 for more examples), and quotations from Ofsted "Ofsted has already implemented a number of changes", to show the public that society can learn from the mistakes made in this case, and to prevent future similar cases. However, the BBC also used a disturbing 'criminal style' image of George within this article, which imitated the reporting techniques used in the Myra Hindley case, reinforcing the stereotypical image of how a FCSO may appear (Kitzinger, 2004). Therefore, it could be argued that no matter what type of media outlet, there is always some form of bias in the way reporters present their ideology

through the language and images they choose to use. Another observation made when analysing this article, is the sub-heading entitled 'Explicit culture', which goes on to report on the co-offending details of the case. The fact that the reporter used a sub-heading, together with the chosen language, shows an attempt to make readers aware of the increasingly serious problem of co-offending child sexual offenders within society. This critical discourse analysis has identified the right wing (The Sun) constructions of FCSOs as aggressive, sick and evil, which relates to the theory of female offenders being 'double deviant'. However, there are also competing constructions with a different ideological base coming from other media outlets such as the Guardian, constructing female sexual offending as a male-coerced crime. It is clear that these different media types report in different ways: some use stereotyping FCSOs as a powerful influential tool, others are more objective in presenting the facts of the case. It should be recognised, however, that all have had an impact in raising awareness of new issues faced by society with regards to female sexual offending. A lot of work still needs to be done within all areas of the mass media, in order to educate reporters. When they provide representations of FCSOs, they should appreciate the gravity of the issues raised, and the traumatic results that articles can have on victims and members of the public (Tsopeles et al., 2012). However, the primary aim of media companies is to sell more papers, so unfortunately they will continue to sensationalise articles to increase profits, using cases of female-perpetrated sexual offences to do so.

Chapter 4:

How does the Criminal Justice System respond to female sexual offenders?

Professionals' perceptions and awareness of FCSOs

As identified in Chapter 1, women only account for an estimated 5% of all sexual crimes against children (Cortoni et al., 2009). This percentage is not necessarily an accurate figure, as it may just be derived from the number of crimes reported to the authorities, ending in conviction. The real crime rate, also known as the 'dark figure' of crime, is impossible to detect (Biderman & Reiss, 1967) which could explain the reason for female sexual abuse being such a hidden crime. The fact that there is so little reported sexual offending by women could be a result of criminal justice professionals having a lack of understanding of these crimes. The issue of low estimates of female-perpetrated offending recorded rates could be directly linked to the gender of the perpetrators and their traditional gender roles are in society. As argued by Gannon & Cortoni (2010) in Chapter 1, child sexual crimes have historically been seen by society as male-only crimes, men being perceived as dominant in sexual encounters, and females as subservient, passive victims. Therefore it is not surprising that these stereotypes affect the way professionals view, and subsequently respond to FCSOs. Denov (2004) found that many police officers showed signs of disbelief when dealing with reports of female-perpetrated sexual offending, perceiving suspects as less serious, resulting in the seriousness of allegations made being minimised. This supports the argument that the way FCSOs are perceived by professionals affects how they deal with them. The argument by Denov (ibid) confirms the

results presented in Ramsay-Klawnsnik's (1990) study, which found that among 83 cases of female-perpetrated sexual abuse, only one of the offenders was given a criminal prosecution, even though there was a sufficient amount of evidence to prosecute the others. The general lack of awareness of female-perpetrated sexual abuse among professionals is evident in the study conducted into their attitudes by Denov (2001). She discovered that, on the whole, the police found it extremely difficult to accept that a woman could commit such offences, and maintained attitudes of males predominantly as perpetrators and females as victims of sexual abuse. These perceptions were evident in the discourse presented in Denov's findings; "A woman doesn't have the capacity to sexually assault" (ibid, p. 315). This could be due to the traditional gender roles which females hold in society, even though we have moved forward in time and women's positions in society have changed a great deal. This should mean that perceptions by professionals should also change, but this does not match the reality that has been shown in more recent studies, where they still hold traditional opinions. As Bunting (2005) suggests from her research, many professionals lack acceptance that women are capable of playing a part in, or even initiating, child sexual abuse. This supports Denov's (2001) findings, however, as we know, there is a small minority of cases, such as that of Vanessa George discussed earlier, which involve females playing a large role in some offending. Therefore it is right to raise questions as to why some professionals still hold these misconceptions, even when they are presented with evidence that this form of abuse does occur. Also, Denov's findings (ibid) may be rejected due to the small sample size of 23 professionals used.

Therefore, although her study produced reliable results, the sample was rather small so arguably her study is not representative of the perceptions of all professionals.

Professional responses to co-offending

As already discussed, it is known that there is a problem among professionals who show lack of awareness of issues surrounding FCSOs. This could be due to a lack of acceptance that women are capable of playing an equal or primary role in sexual offending (Bunting, 2005). These issues are linked to the traditional way that women are perceived as benign and nurturing in society (Denov, 2001). Therefore, it is not surprising that there is also a general lack of awareness around issues of co-offending. An early study estimated that co-offending accounts for 50-70% of sexual offences committed by female perpetrators (Grayston and DeLuca, 1999), differing from male perpetrators, who mainly commit offences alone. Therefore, co-offending is an important matter for professional responses, as it brings to light the issue of a female's responsibility and involvement in the abuse she has committed. Another issue of particular relevance is that police officers often assume that in cases involving co-offending, the female is often coerced by a male, even if they have evidence to suggest otherwise (Denov, 2004). This may be correlated with the denial society generally holds about female passivity and harmlessness, and gives professionals the excuse to easily accept that a woman has been forced into offending by a male, and is a victim, rather than admit they are a co-offender. As Bunting (2007) suggests, it is difficult for professionals to tell how much a female co-

offender is responsible for the abuse. Arguably, women who co-offend could use the perceptions by professionals to their advantage. They may choose to plead that they were coerced into the abuse, thus receiving more lenient treatment than their male co-offender. This is where more research needs to be conducted into co-offending. Given the lack of professional awareness of female perpetrated sexual abuse, it is not surprising that the public also hold such attitudes (Ford, 2006).

Professional responses to FCSOs

As already considered throughout this dissertation, female-perpetrated sexual abuse in society is an under-researched issue. Given this, there are many problems which professionals encounter when responding to these types of offenders. Hetherington & Beardsall (1998) conducted a study on UK police and social workers, and found that incarceration was viewed as being more effective when the sexual perpetrator was male rather than female. This is a difficult opinion to rely on as, during the time of the study, the statistics of FCSOs were even lower than the current small percentages. 50-100 females were cautioned for sexual offences in 1996 (Home Office, 1997). Therefore it was difficult to monitor if incarceration was effective for FCSOs at the time, as there were such small numbers compared with the number of male abusers. Since their study, there has been an increase in the number of FCSOs, to 81 who have gone on to receive custodial sentences (MoJ, 2012). Hence this form of punishment must be have a positive effect to a certain degree, or judges would not give out prison sentences to FCSOs. However, it should also be acknowledged that female sexual abuse is a more commonly

recognised crime nowadays, compared to when their study took place, which may account for the increase of custodial sentences. Hetherington & Beardsall (1998) found that while many professionals considered the seriousness of female-perpetrated child sexual abuse, they did not believe that this type of abuse was as serious as that committed by males. This opinion creates implications as it diverts FCSOs away from the Criminal Justice System, thus, their victims are less likely to receive the protection they need, consequently putting them at further risk than victims of male-perpetrated abuse. This argument is linked to the misconception among professionals that women are incapable of sexual aggression, which acts as a barrier to implementing appropriate responses to FCSOs (Bunting, 2007). Also, the fact that females are involved in such a small percentage of overall sexual offences could add to the delusion that female-perpetrated abuse is so rare that this problem does not actually exist (ibid). Thus professionals may also hold the same cultural denials and reflect this in the way they respond to FCSOs. This is represented in the findings from Bunting's (ibid) study, which revealed that two in five FCSOs were classified as medium or high risk offenders, and required management through a multi-agency approach. She contended that these offenders were not receiving the appropriate risk assessments due to lack of validated tools for female offenders. Responses in the survey emphasized how this deterred management responses from occurring and resulted in the risk of offenders being downgraded. Thus, added to the argument that professionals view FCSOs as less dangerous than males, and advocated the need for policy reform to create female orientated responses to sexual offenders.

Treatment of sexual offenders

Over the past decade, child sexual abuse has become an issue of high agenda among UK politicians. There has been a strong emphasis placed on creating multi-agency approaches in order to provide effective treatment and management of sexual offenders to prevent reoffending. Consequently, various pieces of legislation have been employed, such as the Sex Offender Act 1997, and the revised Sex Offender Act 2003. A variety of treatment programmes, mainly psychological therapy, have proven to be effective (Hansen et al., 2002; Lösel & Schmucker, 2005). However, these programmes have been designed to cater for the needs of the main group of sexual offenders in the UK - males - and are seen to ignore the needs of female sexual offenders because they make up such a small percentage overall (Bunting, 2007). The Home Office (2004) found that almost all the programmes in the National Probation Service sex offender strategy were exclusively designed for male offenders, with little mention of female offender focused strategies. Despite this acknowledgement by the Home Office, there are still currently no treatment programmes specifically developed for FCSOs in the UK (Gannon & Rose, 2008). The Lucy Faithful Foundation is one of the few UK child protection charities which specialise in the treatment of FCSOs. They work alongside professionals, offering a range of services and treatments in order to manage and reduce the risk of recidivism on an individual basis. They also offer specific training for professionals. Whilst this is not compulsory, it may benefit them in order to gain a better overall understanding of FCSOs (Denov, 2003). Due to the low numbers of female offenders undergoing such treatments, analyses cannot

be made at this point as to whether they are fully effective. However, it has been noted that overall psychometric scores, both pre and post treatment, have previously indicated a significant improvement among offenders in their individual key target areas (Eldridge, n/d cited in Ford, 2006) Some aspects of existing male treatments may also be appropriate for female offenders. However, by looking at the typologies of offenders presented in Chapter 1, it is clear that female and male abusers are different in many ways. Ford (2006) identifies that females who are coerced into abuse have completely different needs from those who initiate abuse. For example, the coerced women may need special attention to tackle their lack of assertiveness in order to form normal relationships. Another issue of particular relevance is an understanding of the complexity around the 'predisposed' FCSOs. The offenders within this group tend to have traumatic backgrounds, and consequently may require treatment and support to address the issues of their own pain and suffering, before being able to tackle the abuse they have committed (Matthews, 1998). However, it should not go unnoticed that this type of treatment may cause some problems relating to how FCSOs are dealt with. As Ford (2006) argues, the process may present challenges for professionals, as bringing the female perpetrators' own victimization experience into the programmes could negate somewhat from the crimes they have committed. This again offers the view that responsibility and blame for female-perpetrated crimes is displaced away from the fault of the offender. Therefore it is inappropriate to use pre-existing treatment programmes (specific to male offenders) within the Criminal Justice System to help treat females, when clearly they cannot

be fully effective, as FCSOs are a heterogeneous group, with diverse individual needs (Gannon & Rose, 2008). Nevertheless, FCSOs do need some form of treatment, as the lack of it could lead to mistaken opinions relating to how dangerous FCSOs can be (Frei, 2008), hence placing some children in further jeopardy. It could be argued that the lack of programmes for FCSOs could be due to low conviction rates. It has not been practical to develop programmes in the past when there are such low numbers of offenders spread across the wider national prison system (BBC, 2009). The Criminal Justice System budget is prioritised to focus on areas of most concern - male-perpetrated sexual offending - leaving FCSOs as a lesser necessity. Although there is currently no standardised sexual offender treatment programme available for FCSOs, the Ministry of Justice announced in 2009 their aim to develop the first-ever female sex offender management strategy. This strategy is aimed at standardising treatment for women by using individualised risk management and intervention plans (MoJ, 2009). This announcement came days prior to the sentencing of Vanessa George (BBC, 2009), showing how the issues raised regarding this case forced the Government to acknowledge a need for policy reform. Nonetheless, there have not been any more recently published documents by the Ministry of Justice to identify the stage of development of this strategy, thus it is difficult to tell when it will actually be implemented. In light of this, it can be argued that professionals are still failing to acknowledge the problem of female sexual offending. This was evident in a recent news piece which expressed the need for reform in the way professionals respond to child sexual abuse allegations (BBC, 2013). Due to the numerous reports of sexual abuse

committed by Jimmy Saville, it was clear that Government policies needed changing to prevent these sorts of cases from occurring again, and protecting more vulnerable children. However, the news report only refers to two male-perpetrated sexual abuse cases, those of Saville, and the Rochdale grooming case. This supports the arguments presented in Chapter 3 that the media, and professionals are failing to acknowledge the existence FCSOs, therefore, even if they reform policies, it appears they may still leave out a proportion of victims.

Lack of education concerning FCSOs among professionals

It has already been established that professionals as a whole tend to have a lack of awareness regarding FCSOs. In order to change this problem, they need to receive a substantial amount of education. The majority of professionals have not had to deal with FCSOs. There are so few who actually go through the Criminal Justice System that it has not been a priority to ensure that all professionals receive some form of educational training on FCSOs. As argued by Denov (2003), there are many ways which professionals could change their attitudes towards FCSOs, resulting in more efficient responses. One example, was introducing formal training schemes for criminal justice professionals, which could educate them properly about the problem, and prepare them for when they come into contact with FCSOs. This lack of education can lead to a variety of problems relating to the way professionals deal with FCSOs, and also cause issues for victims, such as being unable to disclose their abuse. Elliott (1994) found that 86% of her sample of victims of female-perpetrated sexual abuse were not believed by

professionals when they disclosed the gender of their perpetrator. The issues faced by victims will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Chapter 5:

What is the impact of female sexual offending on victims?

Psychological effects

Having explored how the media portrays FCSOs and how professionals respond to them, the emphasis is now on the impact on victims, beginning with the psychological effects of abuse. In recent years, much research attention has been paid to the impact sexual abuse has on victims. Many issues have been found, for example psychological and physical effects, eating disorders and substance misuse. However, the majority of research has focused on child sexual abuse committed by males, with very little emphasis placed on the effects of female-perpetrated sexual abuse (Denov, 2004a). Due to the rarity of female sexual abuse occurrences, it is difficult to judge the effects these cases have on their victims, especially as there is a lack of awareness generally of issues surrounding female sexual offending. However, we can learn from the limited amount of research available. Firstly, it has been found that despite common misconceptions, FCSOs can have seriously damaging effects on their victims, arguably even more so than male-perpetrated abuse (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010). It may be that the nature of abuse committed by females is not as aggressive as that committed by males, but this does not mean it is just as harmful in other ways. These crimes can often leave victims with feelings of shame, guilt and confusion, as sexual abuse of a child is a complete betrayal of trust, normally within family

relationships (ibid). This is even more so when the perpetrator is a women, due to the caring role she is supposed to hold in such a relationship. As argued by Elliott (1994), victims of female sexual abuse are often left with extremely confused feelings of love and hatred towards their abuser, especially when they are related. The victims in her study expressed that they could not understand how a mother is able to cause such harm:" There is something about a mother. When you're small, she should be the first person you go to if you're hurt, the first person to cuddle, who gives you love and care. So when she abuses you, it leads to an even greater sense of despair than when your father does it. In my dreams, I castrate my father and suffocate him. But I can't attack my mother. I'm torn between love and hate" Elliott (1994, p. 10). This victim's account reveals just how complex child abuse can be for children, and explains why victims struggle to deal with the abuse they have experienced. Although there are parallels between victims of male and female-perpetrated abuse, this victim has highlighted powerful distinctions between them, expressing how easy it is to hate the male perpetrator but how confusing it is to hold such negative feelings towards the female perpetrator. Arguably, some victims of female-perpetrated sexual offences find it easier to assume that the abuse is a result of their own errors, rather than acknowledging that their abuser might intentionally want to inflict harm on them (Munro, 2000). However, this is also often evident in victims of male-perpetrated abuse, showing yet another parallel. Despite these parallels, female sexual offending appears to be more complex and has a more disturbing impact on its victims than male-perpetrated abuse, due to the taboo surrounding it. Victims may look for

specific ways to help them cope with their mixed feelings, as they do not always have professional support. As with male-abuse victims, Denov (2004a) revealed that a number of victims of female-perpetrated abuse also turn to alcohol and substance misuse in order to submerge the pain and confusion they feel. She also found that victims showed instances of depression and difficulties in sexual contact with partners later in life. This shows how complex the aftermath of child sexual abuse can be, and that many victims have problems which continue late into life. The arguments of both Denov (ibid) and Elliott (1994), were supported by Dube et al. (2005), who agreed that victims present a variety of symptoms following abuse. They suggested that symptoms may often occur at particular stages in a victim's life: In the early years, victims often show signs of self-blame, are ashamed of their bodies and scared to disclose their abuse. In adolescence, they may resort to substance misuse, eating disorders and delinquency, which could arguably submerge their feelings and give them control over something in their life. As adults, victims may experience difficulties in interpersonal relationships, and are often afraid of touching their own children. It is evident from the research studies above and the issues raised in Chapters 3 and 4 that society has a confused understanding over the evil vs. gentle argument concerning FCSOs. Consequently, if members of the public are this confused, it is not surprising that victims themselves experience even more conflicting feelings, and resort to other ways to take control over their life, and find the means to deal with the pain they have experienced.

Disclosure issues

Although over recent years we have seen an increase in the prison population of FCSOs, they still make up a tiny percentage (0.82%) of overall sexual offenders. This does not mean that female-perpetrated abuse does not occur more often than reported. It may be that victims are more reluctant to disclose their abuse. There are many issues facing victims of both male and female-perpetrated abuse when it comes to disclosing it. However, the fact that these female-perpetrated crimes are so under-reported means that many victims may not realise they have been subjected to forms of sexual abuse. As discussed in Chapter 1, abuse by females can occur in subtle ways. This creates problems for professionals in being able to prove that abuse has occurred, and adds to the confusion of victims as to whether they were actually abused or not. A number of victims in Rosencranz's (1997) study revealed how incidents of abuse happened in ways to make them seem accidental, or a normal part of a childcare role, for example being watched while bathing and dressing, even when the child was old enough to take care of itself. This argument was supported by a later study, which included victims' reports on experiencing abuse in the form of vaginal examinations, and being forced to wash and bath their perpetrator (Denov, 2004b) - acts which could be interpreted as part of normal care-giving. Depending on how well their perpetrators disguise the abuse, these experiences may make victims naively think that what they are experiencing is not abuse, and adds to the problem of many offences not being disclosed. However, it does not explain the lack of disclosure from victims who experience more physically harmful abuse. Another issue relating to

disclosure is the difficulty victims may have in finding an opportunity to disclose their abuse. The majority of abuse cases only come to light when the victim is given a suitable opportunity to talk and a connection has been recognised as to what the victims are talking about (Jensen et al., 2005). In terms of female-perpetrated abuse it seems to be even harder for victims to disclose. It could be because it is much easier for FCSOs to conceal their abuse under the guise of childcare. They are often the sole care-giver, so are likely to be present when a child is in the company of someone he or she could disclose the abuse to, for example a doctor (Elliott, 1994). However, this focuses primarily on abuse committed by the primary care-giver, and is rejected by Aylward et al. (2002, cited in Ford, 2006). They suggested that although the majority of research focuses on abuse by females known to the victim, they found that in reality there were much lower rates (38%) of sexual abuse by relatives. The majority of offending in their study was committed by someone else known to the victim, but not a relative. Thus the relationship between the victim and the abuser cannot be the sole barrier to disclose. Other explanations need to be considered. Elliott (1994) provides reasons which could discourage victims from disclosing abuse. Firstly, children are disinclined to report their mothers or other family members if they are the primary care-giver, supporting the argument previously made regarding victims having confused feelings of love and hatred towards their perpetrator. Secondly, male adolescent victims often feel too humiliated to admit the abuse, especially if they, themselves, experienced arousal during the abuse, so instead become in denial. This feeling among victims was also evident in Denov's (2003) study, which found that although they expressed

overall fear and disgust towards their abuser, some also experienced physical pleasure during the abuse, and consequently struggled to comprehend these mixed feelings. This is also linked to the argument of masculinity in which male victims may not disclose their abuse as they feel that they should have been able to protect themselves. Disclosing it would label them as a victim, which is in direct conflict with their masculinity (Graham, 2006). Finally, Elliott (1994) recognised that victims may fear that if they pluck up the courage to disclose, professionals will not believe them. This is supported by her study of 127 survivors of child sexual abuse, which revealed that 86% were not believed when they disclosed that their perpetrator was female. However, it is important to note that acknowledgment and awareness of FCSOs among professionals has increased in recent times, therefore, Elliott's study may not be representative of victims' accounts today. A more up-to-date study, supporting Elliott's findings was conducted by Craissati et al. (2002), who found that most of the victims they interviewed felt unable to reveal their experiences, as they thought they would not be believed by professionals. Therefore, despite the increasing awareness of FCSOs among professionals, it appears that there still is not enough being done to help victims feel they can disclose their abuse. The impact of professionals on victims is discussed further in the next section.

Impact on victims of professionals' responses

As already identified in Chapter 4, various problems can arise for victims of female-perpetrated sexual abuse, especially with regards to disclosing it to

criminal justice professionals, and how they may respond to the disclosure. Whether this was a negative or positive experience for victims, it can impact the way they are able to recover and heal from their abuse. One of the most predominant studies into the effect professional responses may have on victims was by Denov (2003). She conducted a study into victims' experiences of reporting their sexual abuse and the impact of the different ways they were dealt with. 93% of victims in her sample disclosed their abuse between 1989-1998. It is important to note that during this time frame, it appears that society held strong cultural awareness of issues of child sexual abuse, which caused general panic among both the public and professionals alike (ibid). That said, there was little awareness of female-perpetrated abuse, the majority of 'panic' surrounding male sexual offenders.

Negative experiences of involvement with professionals

Denov's findings revealed how many victims had experienced negative encounters with professionals. She found that participants expressed distrust and betrayal, as they felt that they were not listened to when trying to disclose their abuse. This resulted in feeling they could no longer rely on professionals for help or support. When looking at these results, it is easy to assume that the professionals referred to were in the police service, as they deal with reported crimes. However, some of the victims' accounts included reactions from their psychologists, such as downplaying the seriousness of the abuse they experienced:" The message that I got from the psychologist was there's no problem and that I should consider myself lucky that I had

sexual contact with a women at such a young age (6)."... " For the following 4-5 years, I tried to convince myself that I didn't have a problem" (Denov, 2003, p. 57). The opinions expressed by this particular professional mirrors the argument put forward in Chapter 1 with regards to abusers of adolescents, in that these offenders do not perceive their abuse to be criminal. Instead, they see it as a relationship in which they can sexually educate their victims. This creates some confusion, as the victim above was too young to be regarded as an adolescent victim, and it is difficult to comprehend how a professional, trained in child sexual abuse, could react in such an appalling way. This demonstrates challenges faced by victims in coming to terms with female-perpetrated abuse and disclosing it to experts who fail to acknowledge its existence. It is also evident from the quote above, that the negative reaction to this form of sexual abuse made the victim question their abusive experience, potentially leading to denial that it even occurred. This issue of denial appeared in Peter's (2006) study, which explored the problem of sexually abusive mothers as either mad, bad, or a victim themselves. One of the victim's accounts in her study explained how she had actually given up trying to understand the abuse she experienced by her mother, because she felt that she could not make sense of something that society itself does not even acknowledge. This led to her being in complete denial that the mistreatment she experienced was actually a form of criminal abuse. It is evident that unaccommodating professionals, who show signs of disbelief, appear to exacerbate the negative experiences a victim has already been subject to, ultimately leading to secondary victimization.

Positive experiences of involvement with professionals

Although it has been shown that many victims of female sexual abuse have encountered negative experiences when dealing with professionals, there is much evidence to suggest that positive experiences also occur. Again, in Denov's (2003) study, it was evident from the victims' accounts that some professionals were supportive and treated the allegations made in a serious manner. These victims no longer felt afraid and alone but had an overwhelming sense of relief and reassurance. Professional responses had an important impact on their overall well-being. One victim described how "to feel so filthy and alone [before disclosing], and then to be reassured by [a professional]"..." to be told 'it's not your fault' was staggering." (ibid, p. 56). This proves just how much of a positive impact professionals can have on victims if they act appropriately. Denov's study also showed that a positive response can help victims with their healing process. Even if a case does not go through the Criminal Justice System, the fact that professionals acknowledge that female-perpetrated abuse can occur, may leave victims with a sense of reassurance in order to move forward with their lives. The findings of Denov's study revealed how professional response to disclosures, either positively or negatively, appears to have a vital impact on welfare of victims. Therefore, it is important for policy-makers to acknowledge this, learn from it, and put in the necessary measures in order to ensure that criminal justice professionals act in an appropriate manner when victims disclose abuse. As a result, they should have a positive impact on victims, and be able to assist in the healing process.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

Conclusion

The focus of this dissertation has been on female-perpetrated sexual abuse. The main aim of the study was to analyse the complexity of issues surrounding female sexual offending. It has addressed the research questions stated in Chapter 1 which refer to the way the media portray FCSOs, how the Criminal Justice System responds to them, and the impact they have on victims. It began by looking at the historical portrayal of females in society, which suggests that women are benignant, nurturing, harmless individuals, who must be psychologically disturbed to commit crimes (Hetherington, 1999). If we accept this view, it would be unusual or impossible for women to commit crimes which inflict physical and/or mental harm on the very children for whom they are supposed to harbour such love. Such abuse would not tie in with the cultural construct of femininity. This is supported by Denov (2003), who stated that society refuses to believe that women are capable of child sexual abuse, and if it does occur, then the abuse is seen as stereotypically harmless. This suggests that even if women do sexually abuse children, it is in a less aggressive, non-violent manner than male sexual offenders. Nonetheless, as the subsequent chapter revealed, when looking at specific cases in recent years, FCSOs have been portrayed in a much more negative light. Chapter 3 produced evidence to show that the media played a big part in influencing public perception of the high profile case of Vanessa George. The critical discourse analysis on the

news articles varied a great deal in terms of how they reported on the case, from manipulating readers in thinking that George was evil, to reporting on the actual facts of the case, which showed she appeared to be acting under the control of a male perpetrator. Although the media may use emotive language and imagery to show how FCSOs are dangerous, this is not always the case. As seen in Chapter 3, Tsopelas et al. (2012) pointed out, society is in denial concerning female sexual offending. Indeed, many newspapers still tend to use terms such as 'affair' and 'relations' when reporting on cases of female sexual offenders, as opposed to 'abuse' when reporting on male offenders. Chapter 5 demonstrated that this could hinder disclosure by victims, because if female sexual crimes are not regarded as serious in the media nor by the public, victims may believe it is not worth reporting their experiences. Chapter 4 identified this absence of awareness of female sexual offending is also seen in Government policy and practice. The programmes in the National Probation Service sex offender strategy have been exclusively developed for the needs of male offenders, with little emphasis on strategies for female perpetrators. If even Government policies show this disregard, it is understandable that professionals using these policies maintain a lack of awareness. This can have an impact on victims, and could potentially result in professionals being ineffective in the safeguarding of children, putting them at risk of becoming victims of female-perpetrated sexual abuse, as the stereotype still exists of women as gentle and caring: victims rather than perpetrators. Therefore, it may be concluded that more attention needs to be drawn to these issues, in order to increase the awareness of female sexual offending among professionals so they can deal with it more

effectively. The final chapter showed that despite the misconceptions presented by the media, and commonly held by professionals, the experience of victims of female sexual abuse may be just as harmful as those who suffer male sexual offending. Society in general and, more specifically, children, tend to trust women more than men because of their caring and gentle nature (Saradjian, 2010). Therefore it could be argued that sexual abuse by women is more damaging psychologically for victims, as it is also an abuse of trust. Elliott's (1994) study showed that female-perpetrated abuse is more damaging for victims, due to the torn feelings of love and hatred they may experience. This adds to issues surrounding disclosure of abuse by victims, as they themselves cannot understand why women can inflict such pain (ibid). This chapter also revealed that the way in which criminal justice professionals respond, whether negatively or positively, to victims of female sexual abuse can impact on their recovery in a significant way. Disclosure issues have been identified as a key problem with all victims of child sexual abuse cases. A reason for under-reporting of cases could be due to the attitudes and responses of professionals dealing with cases of female-perpetrated abuse. If female sexual offending has only been known to exist during the past few decades, it could be argued that professionals dealing with reported cases may not take them seriously, if they themselves do not believe women are capable of such abuse, due to the infrequency of such cases (Denov, 2003). This could leave victims feeling isolated from society, as they cannot trust professionals to help them. Thus it would appear that negative reactions by professionals not only add to the trauma experienced by victims, but also make them less trusting or willing to go

through the Criminal Justice ordeal when professionals show disbelief from the outset. To conclude, academic evidence points to the need for professionals to undergo training, to increase their awareness of FCSOs in order to protect victims from further suffering. The offender typologies in Chapter 1 identified that FCSOs are a heterogeneous population, and therefore the current male-centred treatment programmes are not appropriate for this group of offenders. Thus there is a need to develop specific treatment programmes to manage FCSOs to reduce the risk of reoffending on an individual basis. Also, from the analyses made throughout this dissertation, it could be suggest that as the mass media is a powerful tool in influencing public perceptions, it needs to acknowledge the issues surrounding female sexual offending in order to help increase public awareness. As is evidenced by official statistics, female-perpetrated sexual abuse is an increasingly common problem in society, and yet it is one that has attracted very little academic research. If society as a whole can acknowledge the issues surrounding this type of offending, then more can be done to address them.

Appendices