

Female perpetrated sexual abuse criminology essay

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



The focus of this dissertation has been on female-perpetrated sexual abuse. The main aim 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 portrays FCSOs, how the CJS responds to them, and the impact on victims. This dissertation has highlighted the relevance of the subject to the study of criminology, and has analysed various academic research, pointing to a substantial gap in this area. More attention should be given to this branch of criminology in order to fully understand FCSOs and address these issues in a professional manner. The study began by looking at the historical portrayal of females in society, which suggests that women are benign, 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 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 was supported by Denov (2003), who stated that society refuses to believe that women are capable of child sexual abuse, which, if it does occur, 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 showed how the news articles varied a great deal in terms

of how they reported on the case, from manipulating readers into thinking that George was evil, to reporting on the actual facts of the case, which suggested she appeared to be acting under the control of a male perpetrator. Although the media may use emotive language and imagery to construct FCSOs as dangerous, this is not always the case. It appears society is in denial concerning female sexual offending. Indeed, many newspapers still tend to use terms such as 'affair' and 'relationship' when reporting on cases of FCSOs, as opposed to 'abuse' when reporting on male offenders (Tsopelas et al., 2012: 306). Chapter 5 demonstrated that this could hinder disclosure by victims, because if female sexual crimes are not regarded as serious by 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 Government policies show this disregard, it is understandable that professionals using these policies maintain a lack of awareness. The traditional concept of femininity still exists viewing women as victims rather than perpetrators. 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. 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 significantly impact on their recovery. 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 these 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, some constructions of FCSOs are very much interlinked with the traditional view of women as passive, and as care-givers, leading to an under-estimation of the volume and seriousness of these crimes. However, there is a different construction, diametrically opposed to this which juxtaposes FCSOs against the traditional concepts of femininity, and is expressed in the complete vilification of specific high-profile offenders, e. g. Vanessa George. Academic evidence points to the need for professionals to undergo training to increase their awareness of FCSOs, and not just base their perceptions on traditional concepts of femininity, and 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 and reduce the risk of reoffending on an individual basis. Also, from the analyses made throughout this dissertation, it could be suggested 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 victim-based surveys, female-perpetrated sexual abuse is an increasingly common problem in society, and yet it is one that has attracted very little academic research. The complexity of female sexual offending is often underestimated, but, if society as a whole can acknowledge the issues surrounding it, then more can be done to address the problem.