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**Sexual abuse by educators: A comparison between male and female teachers who  
sexually abuse students**

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# **Sexual abuse by educators: A comparison between male and female teachers who sexually abuse students**

## **Abstract**

The study aimed to identify the differences in case characteristics and typologies of female and male teachers who perpetrated sexual abuse on students. Decisions of sexual misconduct reports in England from June 2006 to December 2016 were used. Quantitative and qualitative content analysis was conducted on 20 cases of male and female teacher sexual misconduct (N = 40). Regarding case characteristics, most were secondary school or college teachers, mid-career, with victims of the opposite sex. For differences, male teachers were older and more likely to have: perpetrated more severe and lengthier sexual abuse and previously received warnings. Interestingly, females and males were similar across the preliminary typology: minimisers and deniers; poor mental health or stressors; and young, early career. However, a fourth group of females emerged: 'I was overpowered'. The study furthers the understanding of sexual misconduct by teachers and should assist in the development of policies, guidelines, and legislation around prevention.

*Key words:* female sex offender, male sex offender, teacher, typologies, child sexual abuse, institutional abuse.

## **Introduction**

Despite the burgeoning research attention on child sexual abuse (CSA), far less is known about sexual offending in an organisational context, particularly in relation to sexual abuse perpetrated by teachers. Organisational abuse is considered as emotional, physical, or sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult on a child in a paid or voluntary work setting (Gallagher, 2000). In addition to occupational and academic achievements, teachers can have a positive impact on the mental health and future relationships of their students (Gillespie, 2005; Jaffe et al., 2013). Conversely, these areas of students' lives can be negatively impacted across the short- and long-term if a teacher perpetrates sexual misconduct (Jaffe et al., 2013; Knoll, 2010).

'Sexual misconduct' includes physical and non-physical sexual misconduct that is of a sexual nature or sexually motivated, which may exploit the trust of the professional position (National College for Teaching and Leadership [NCTL], 2018; Shakeshaft, 2004). Sexual misconduct by teachers appears to be quite prevalent. In a nationwide survey across the United States of America (USA) of grade 8 to 11 year-students (age 13 to 17), Shakeshaft (2004) found 10% of almost 4.5 million students reported some type of educator sexual misconduct.<sup>1</sup> In a different study that explored institutional abuse through child protection records across English and Welsh authorities, Gallagher (2000) found that the largest occupational group of sexual abusers were teachers (29%). Two recent national Inquiries have also found rates of between one-fifth and one-quarter of victims reported abuse by teachers. The Royal Commission in Australia (2017) found that 20.4% of victims reported being abused by a teacher and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (2017) in

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<sup>1</sup> Shakeshaft (2004) considered 'educator' as an individual, over the age of 18, who works in a school or other learning or educational setting (e.g., teacher school volunteer, special education aide).

England and Wales found 22% of victims reported sexual abuse by teachers or educational staff; the largest perpetrator group in an organisational setting.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these findings, there have been few studies that have explored sexual misconduct by teachers (Knoll, 2010) and even less have considered female teachers in the samples. This is concerning given that a recent study in the United Kingdom (UK) found that women perpetrated 'abuse of trust' offences (i.e., sexual offences perpetrated when an adult in a formal position of trust or authority abuses their position and engages in sexual activity with a young person aged 16 or 17 years old in their care) at a much higher proportional rate as opposed to men (13% of female-perpetrated child sexual offences compared with 1.6% of male-perpetrated child sexual offences) (Darling, 2018). In a different study, Ratliff and Watson (2014) examined sexual abuse by teachers in South-Eastern states of the USA between 2007 and 2011 and found 26% of perpetrators were female. It is also problematic if there are differences in the characteristics and typologies of offenders across the genders. Having a gender-biased (or gender-blind) view and response to this type of abuse may mean prevention measures and responses to both victims and perpetrators are unsuitable or inappropriate. To address these gaps, the current study provides a comparison between female and male teachers who have been found to have perpetrated sexual abuse against students. Such knowledge should assist in the prevention of sexual misconduct in educational settings.

## **Literature Review**

It has been suggested that some male offenders specifically pursue employment in an institutional context to sexually abuse children. These contexts generally include care settings, educational settings, and well as leisure and sports settings. In their study of 41 male perpetrators who sexually abused children in an institutional setting (across religious,

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<sup>2</sup> Teachers or educational staff in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (2017) included tutors, teachers as well as dormitory and house masters.

teaching, and child care settings), Sullivan and Beech (2004) found about 90% of perpetrators admitted they were sexually interested in children by age 21 and almost 57% indicated that part of their motivation to pursue their profession was to access children. In fact, Turner, Rettenberger, Lohmann, Eher, and Briken (2013) found males who sexually abused children in an institutional setting were more paedophilic than intrafamilial and extrafamilial perpetrators.<sup>3</sup> However, other studies have not found a specific motivation to abuse in choosing to enter a career working with children (posts – paid or voluntary – working with children in educational, care, sports, leisure or youth services) (Erooga, Allnock, & Telford, 2012). It is important to be cognisant that the age of the victim is dependent on the organisation under study (Darling, 2018) and this should be considered when interpreting the findings of previous studies, as should the proportion of men and women likely to be working in particular contexts. For example, studies of abuse in childcare or day care facilities show more women abuse pre-pubescent children, but women are overrepresented as employees in these organisations (Moulden, Firestone, & Wexler, 2007).

Adults who use their employment to target children appear to have distinct differences compared with other individuals who perpetrate child sexual offences. Some recurring characteristics of male perpetrators who use their employment to target children include: having a university-level education, no prior sexual offence history, and having few psychological deficits (Firestone, Moulden, & Wexler, 2009; Gallagher, 2000; Moulden et al., 2007). As this group of offenders appear to be distinct in their psychological and criminal characteristics as well as offence planning compared with offenders who sexually abuse outside of institutional settings, existing male child sexual offender typologies do not appear appropriate for this group of offenders.

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<sup>3</sup> These perpetrators involved adults who supervised children within an organisation or institution that were responsible for the care of children (e.g., teacher) and individuals who supervised children in a voluntary position (e.g., coach at a sports club).

Female-perpetrated sexual abuse is an important area of research as, contrary to earlier beliefs (e.g., Mathis, 1972) and prior depictions of romanticism in the media (Christensen, 2018a), females can inflict persistent psychological and physical impacts on victims (Christensen, 2018b). In their meta-analysis, Cortoni, Babchishin, and Rat (2017) found police reports and victimisation surveys indicated 2 percent and 12 percent of sexual offences were perpetrated by females, respectively. Regarding recidivism rates, meta-analyses suggest 13.7 percent for male sexual offenders (average follow-up 5.8 years) (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2009) and less than 3 percent for female sexual offenders (average follow-up 6.5 years) (Cortoni, Hanson, & Coache, 2010).

To the authors' knowledge, only several studies have explored female teachers who have engaged in sexual misconduct. In one study, Darling, Hackett, and Jamie (2018) explored 71 cases of female-perpetrated sexual abuse in an institutional context in the UK. Darling et al. (2018) found female teachers made up the majority of perpetrators (78%) across these settings. Darling et al. (2018) found about two-thirds of women were aged in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties ( $M=31.3$  years), solo offenders (only two co-offended with male partners), had been in their career for more than three years, did not have a criminal or professional misconduct history, and abused 15 to 16-year-old males (female high school teachers were the most frequent perpetrators included in their sample).

Contrary to public perceptions, Darling et al. (2018) found through their in-depth case analysis of professional regulator decisions, media reports, court reports, and relevant website content, these female perpetrators were neither inexperienced naïve teachers nor fit the stereotype of females coerced by men to offend against young children. Most appeared to offend as a result of situational and contextual factors rather than any evident sexual preference for children or pre-disposition to sexually offend. Their motivations to abuse were to meet emotional needs and for sexual gratification where these needs were not being

effectively met in other adult relationships. These women shared similarities found in other female sexual offender studies, including unstable lifestyles, relationship difficulties, emotional self-management problems, low self-esteem, isolation, and loneliness. However, there was less evidence of substance abuse, mental health problems, chaotic backgrounds, and previous victimisation among these women (Darling et al., 2018).

In their comparison study, Ratliff and Watson (2014) found female teachers were more likely to commit offences against older students (aged 13 or over) than male teachers (more likely to abuse students aged 12 or under), however, there was no significant difference in the grade level the teacher was working in at the time of abuse. In another study, Mototsune (2015) examined 260 male and 24 female cases reviewed by a disciplinary committee between 2000 and 2013 in Ontario and found several distinct differences between the genders. Specifically, male teachers were on average older than female teachers (37 and 32 years, respectively) and had longer offending careers than female teachers (27 and 20 months, respectively). Interestingly, all types of abuse (including anal, vaginal, and oral sexual abuse) were more common amongst female teachers; only harassment was more prevalent in cases involving male teachers. Regarding abuse location, male teachers predominantly used the school followed by their home, whereas female teachers mostly abused in their home followed by in the community. Darling et al. (2018) also found females often perpetrated abuse in their own home (46.3%) or in their cars (33.1%).

### ***Typologies***

Several typologies have been established to explain motivations for child sexual offending. These typologies, which differ across female and male perpetrators, are a key element in the design of prevention and treatment programs (Christensen & Jansen, 2019). Although, until recently, there were no empirically-based typologies that described sexual



abuse in an organisational context for females. Rather, typologies had been proposed for female child sexual offenders, more broadly (e.g., Mathews, Matthews, and Speltz, 1989 as cited in Matthews, Mathews, & Speltz, 1991; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). For example, Mathews et al.'s (1989) typology identified females who: abused their own children (predisposed), abused children out of coercion by their male partner (male coerced/male accompanied), or abused adolescent males (teacher/lover). Darling (2018) highlighted the need for the categorisation of women who abuse within organisational contexts to more fully understand the characteristics and nature of this sample and subsequently developed an initial categorisation. Five categories of abusers were identified: immature regressed (n = 57); sexual and risky (n = 47); saviour syndrome (n = 10); unrequited infatuated (n = 3), and psychologically troubled (n = 2) (Darling, 2018).

*Immature regressed* were young women in their twenties and new to their profession, who developed over-friendly relationships with children in their mid-teenage years for intimacy needs or sexual gratification. *Sexual and risky* were women in their thirties who were concurrently in adult relationships and engaged in highly risky sexual behaviour with adolescents. *Saviour syndrome* were women in their mid-thirties to mid-forties who were experiencing problems and stressors in their adult relationships and became occupied helping the victim to fulfil their own emotional and intimacy needs. *Unrequited infatuated* were women in their thirties and forties who had mental health difficulties and were infatuated with males in their mid-teens, viewing them as potential romantic partners and professing their love. Finally, *psychologically troubled* were those with long-standing mental health problems who displayed extremely immature cognitions. Research is still yet to explore the types of female teachers specifically who sexually offend against their students.

Similarly, to date, there are no empirically-based typologies that describe sexual abuse by male teachers against their students. There has been limited attention paid to this

specific area of research to date, which may account for the lack of typology development. Instead, typologies have focused on male child sexual offenders, more broadly. One of the most well-known is Groth, Hobson, and Gary's (1982) fixated–regressed dichotomy. The fixated offender is considered to have a compulsive and persistent attraction to children, whereas the regressed offender is characterised by the precipitation of external stressors and situational factors. The Federal Bureau of Investigation have extended Groth et al.'s (1982) typologies through the inclusion of seven subgroups. The fixated offenders include: seductive, fixated, and sadistic offenders. The regressed offenders include: regressed, morally indiscriminate, sexually indiscriminate, and inadequate offenders (see Robertiello & Terry, 2007 for an overview of typologies).

### ***The Current Study***

The current study provides a comparison between male and female teachers who have perpetrated sexual abuse against students. The study aimed to identify the similarities and dissimilarities pertaining to the case characteristics and typologies. This study is only one of very few that has explored the differences in case characteristics across these two offending groups and to the authors' knowledge, it is the first study that identifies a preliminary typology for male and female teachers that perpetrate sexual abuse. Importantly, the authors do not consider typologies to be mutually exclusive due to the heterogenous nature of child sexual offenders, however, they perceive typologies as a helpful classification system with varying continuums of offenders within each group. Through understanding the subtypes of offenders, typologies have the potential to be used to develop both crime prevention strategies and guide the planning and implementation of treatment (Sandler & Freeman, 2007; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Findings from the current study have the potential to

inform the development of policies, practice guidelines, and legislation that prevents sexual relationships between students and teachers.

## **Method**

### ***Sample***

The sample consisted of 20 females and 20 males who had sexually abused students whilst working as teachers. The cases had all been considered by NCTL in England between June 2006 and December 2016.<sup>4</sup> Cases are referred to the NCTL by the public, employers, police, the Disclosure and Barring Service, and other interested stakeholders (NCTL, 2018). If an investigation commences, it may undergo three stages (initial assessment, consideration of Interim Prohibition Order, and formal investigation) prior to the hearing and a decision being made about the referred individual's future registration as a teacher (for more information see NCTL, 2018).

Cases were excluded if they involved co-perpetration or where the perpetrator was not in a professional position of trust to the victim(s). The female sample included all cases meeting the selection criteria during the time period under consideration. As there were more available male perpetrator cases during the same period, a random sample was selected from all relevant male cases.<sup>5</sup> Of the male cases, 75% concerned contemporaneously perpetrated abuse and 25% involved non-recent abuse (reported more than five years after the abuse had occurred). Regarding the female cases, 85% involved contemporaneously perpetrated abuse and 15% involved non-recent abuse. Only two cases perpetrated by males and only one case perpetrated by a female each had two victims. All other cases involved one victim.

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<sup>4</sup> While the NCTL refers to this behaviour as 'sexual misconduct' the authors prefer the term 'sexual abuse'. This is because engaging in any sexual activity with a child (whether contact or non-contact) is abusive by its very nature. Furthermore, even where the young person is over the legal age of consent (16 years) for sexual activity more generally, by the nature of the adult's position of trust deems the behaviour is a criminal offence in the UK.

<sup>5</sup> The random sample was attained through assigning a number to every case which appeared in this period, before using a random number generator to select the first 20 cases at random.

### ***Data Collection***

Due to the publicly available nature of the data on the national government website ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)), the project was confirmed by the Chair of the first author's University Human Research Ethics Committee as outside the scope of human research ethics approval. The data were collected from the professional conduct panel outcome decisions published by the NCTL. The NCTL is the professional regulatory body responsible for regulating the teaching profession in England and holding a register of approved and qualified individuals. The NCTL panel considers cases referred to its panel and makes a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Education on whether the individual should be de-registered. The ultimate decision is made by a named decision maker (a civil/public servant) on the Secretary of State's behalf (NCTL, 2016).

The method of data collection employed is similar to that conducted in several other recent studies into CSA perpetrated by teachers using publicly available data (Darling, 2018; Jaffe et al., 2013; Mototsune, 2015; Moulden, Firestone, Kingston, & Wexler, 2010). These published decisions are subject to stringent legal scrutiny during the professional conduct procedures, enhancing their validity and reliability and making them arguably more accurate than police reports (Almond, McManus, Giles, & Houston, 2015; Porter & Alison, 2004, 2006).

### ***Analytic Approach***

The study involved a mixed-methodology approach. For the quantitative element, the data was recorded against 15 variables covering: teacher characteristics (age at offence; age at determination; teacher type; stage of career; and previous warnings), victim characteristics (victim gender and age group), and other characteristics (length of abuse; continuation after it was discovered; most severe (primary) type of sexual abuse; location of abuse; perpetrator's response to the abuse; and whether there was: a prohibition order, the potential for

prohibition restoration, and intervention by the criminal justice system [CJS]). Data was input on a standardised data spreadsheet in Excel before subsequently running basic descriptive statistical output in IBM SPSS Statistics 25. This was checked and ratified by the second author.

For the qualitative element, a conventional content analysis was used with the categories being coded directly and inductively from the data (Lune & Berg, 2017). Content analysis is a systematic and detailed examination of a body of material to identify themes and meanings (Berg & Latin, 2008; Neuendorf, 2002). Due to the dearth of research on teachers who engage in sexual misconduct, an inductive approach was selected over a deductive approach. Similar to Darling's (2018) classification of women who sexually abuse children in organisational contexts, a combination of direct and interpretative coding was used to assess the descriptions, content, and language in the reports. In particular, the cases were explored in light of typical *modus operandi*, characteristics of teachers and their victims, as well as the teachers' motivations and responses to the abuse and the victims' responses to the abuse. The first author immersed herself in the data, making notes throughout the documents. The analytic stages outlined by Lune and Berg (2017, p. 184) were followed; after the data was collected, codes were inductively identified, before being transformed into categorical themes to isolate meaningful patterns and collapsed and expanded where necessary. The coding of several decision announcement records was quality reviewed, and ratified, by the second author.

## **Results**

### ***Cases Characteristics***

**Teachers.** Male teachers were older ( $M = 34.50$  years,  $SD = 10.95$ , minimum = 23 years, maximum = 58 years) than female teachers ( $M = 30.58$  years,  $SD = 6.15$ , minimum =

22 years, maximum = 46 years) at the time the abuse commenced. They were also older at the time of the professional conduct determination (see Table 1). Across both groups, teachers were mostly secondary school or college teachers, with few working in primary schools. Although a larger proportion of females were newly qualified compared with males, the largest proportion were at mid-career stage of their profession for both groups. None of the teachers had a criminal history (of either child sexual abuse offences or other offences). However, 35% of the males had previously received a verbal or written warning from their current (or former) employer due to concerns over their behaviour towards students. None of the females had received a warning.

**Victims.** While female teachers targeted a higher proportion of victims of the same sex compared with males, most victims were of the opposite sex to the teacher for both groups (see Table 1). The raw age of victims was not always provided, which meant that age categories were formulated based on the victim's school grade (see Table 1). Of the 22 and 21 victims abused by male and female teachers, respectively, most victims were pubescent or post-pubescent when the abuse commenced, between the ages of 13 to 17 years. The victims were pre-pubescent, aged 12 years or less, in very few cases. Of known cases, the age difference ranged from 6 to 38 years and 7 to 31 years for male and female teachers, respectively.

**Other characteristics.** The abuse perpetrated by male teachers was lengthier (12 months or longer) compared with females (mostly 6 to 12 months, or less than 6 months). However, females were more likely to continue the abuse after it had been discovered (see Table 1). Regarding abuse severity, male teachers were more likely to engage in more severe abuse (intercourse). While both groups were more likely to engage in contact rather than non-contact abuse, females engaged in a higher rate of non-contact abuse (sexualised talking in person or via technology). Female offenders abused at a higher rate outside of school,

however, most abuse perpetrated by both groups occurred outside the school (e.g., cinema, church, perpetrator's home or car) (see Table 1). Male and female teachers equally admitted the offence to the professional conduct board. All cases involving male teachers resulted in a prohibition order from teaching and most cases were not granted a review period; of those granted a review period, the average period was 4 years until the prohibition could be reviewed (range: 3 to 5 years). For female teachers, all but one case resulted in a prohibition order. Most were granted a review period; the average period until review was 3 years (range: 2 to 5 years). The CJS was involved in half of the cases involving male teachers, resulting in three convictions, one acquittal, with the remainder not proceeding past police. For females, only a minority of cases involved intervention from the CJS, which resulted in three cautions from police, one conviction, and one acquittal.

[Table 1 here]

### ***Preliminary Typology***

There appeared to be more similarities than dissimilarities across the types of male and female teachers in terms of their motivations, characteristics, and modus operandi. Three types of teachers emerged across both groups: (1) minimisers and deniers; (2) poor mental health or stressors; and (3) young, early career. A fourth group of teachers emerged that solely related to females: 'I was overpowered'. Each of these groups are discussed below and are supplemented with a range of direct quotations from the reports to offer richer detail to the findings.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Minimisers and deniers**

This group accounted for the largest category amongst the groups to emerge (7 female teachers and 10 male teachers). Most of these offenders emphatically denied the abuse for some time, until they finally admitted it, but then suggested that they did not develop a

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<sup>6</sup> Three cases involving male teachers could not be classified due to insufficient information in the report.

relationship with the child in a wilful manner (i.e., it was not sexually motivated) and attempted to minimise their offending. In one case, the offender attempted to suggest that the reason for his sexualised emails and poetry sent to the student was to accelerate the end of his marriage to his then wife—hoping that she would see the emails. The panel rejected this suggestion due to the more obvious approaches to end a marriage. Other examples of minimisation included:

He made it clear that he did not feel it was inappropriate for him to be contacting children aged 16 to 18 years on Facebook...Mr [Teacher: 1 Word], in his letter, states that did not intend to forge relationships with pupils outside of the school environment and thereby still seeks to minimise the seriousness of his behaviour...Whilst Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] admitted the allegations he sought to minimise the seriousness of his behaviour. (Male 15)

Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] says, “we kissed”, thereby implying a degree of mutuality and diminishing his own responsibility. Similarly, Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] writes that, “there was a peck on the cheek”, rather than expressly acknowledging that he was responsible for that kiss. Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] also originally sought to argue that Pupil A was not still on the school’s roll, so as to diminish the severity of his actions. (Male 18)

There were a minority of cases in which the offenders appeared to display thinking errors, with permission-giving self-statements. In one case, a female offender had been convicted of a sexual offence on her male student and was placed on the Sex Offenders Register. While she accepted that sending sexually explicit images was inappropriate, she did not consider herself to be guilty of a criminal offence because she did not intend to meet with the pupil outside school or engage in sexual activity, and suggested a miscarriage of justice had occurred. At times, she attempted to assign blame to the child as well as to her employer for the lack of management support at work. Across these cases, the panel often highlighted the lack of insight, deep-seated attitude, and lack of remorse displayed.

### **Poor mental health or stressors**



Several teachers appeared to be suffering from poor mental health or significant life stressors prior to and during the period of abuse (6 female teachers and 4 male teachers). Interestingly, these teachers appeared to display more remorse and insight for their actions during the prohibition hearing than any of the other groups. They did not downplay the seriousness of their behaviour, instead, they appeared to be frank, open, and accepted full responsibility of their abusive behaviour:

Whilst we note that Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] was suffering from depression during this time, when questioned by the Panel he accepted that throughout the period of the offence he knew that what he was doing was wrong...The Panel has also taken account of the fact that Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] has accepted the facts of the case and attended before the Panel expressing deep remorse, regret and shame for what he has done. (Male 7)

The Panel also considered Mr [Teacher: 1 Word]'s early admission of his conduct and the fact that he now shows remorse for his conduct, accepts that his conduct was inappropriate and that blame "lies squarely upon [his] shoulders"... Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] was struggling to cope with a close relative being diagnosed with cancer, the breakdown of a relationship and the effect that had on his mental health. (Male 12)

She stated that this was a completely unpremeditated moment which she deeply regrets. She stated that she was under extreme stress, tired and feared for her job. She stated that her emotions were "clearly overwhelming" her and she was vulnerable. She fully accepts her responsibility. (Female 5)

### **Young, early career**

A third group that emerged were young teachers who were mostly newly qualified (4 female teachers and 3 male teachers). In fact, one offender had graduated high school and went straight back to the same school after qualifying as a teacher. These teachers did not appear to plan the abusive behaviour. The victims involved in these cases were often older teenagers (15 to 18 years old) and appeared to 'consent' to take part in sexual activity.

Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] was a relatively newly qualified teacher who had not long completed his training and that his conduct in forming a romantic relationship with Pupil A, which the Panel found proven, is not an example of pre-planned predatory behaviour of a Teacher preying on a vulnerable pupil, but a one off relationship with Pupil A. Mr [Teacher: 1 Word]'s

representative indicated that Mr [Teacher: 1 Word]'s conduct related to a pupil who was aged 18 at the time and it was clear there was mutual attraction between two consenting adults. (Male 5)

In reaching this conclusion the Panel took into consideration the fact that Pupil A had indicated that she had engaged in the sexual activity with Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] willingly at the time; that Mr [Teacher: 1 Word] was only six years older than Pupil A...The Panel found this event to be an isolated incident, that had not been pre-planned by Mr [Teacher: 1 Word]. (Male 14)

In fact, the evidence presented suggests that the relationship established with Pupil A was platonic. The Panel does not consider that Ms [Teacher: 1 Word]'s behaviour was serial in nature, and does not consider that there is an ongoing risk to children and young persons in the future. (Female 2)

### **'I was overpowered'**

This theme emerged exclusively amongst the female teachers (3 female teachers).

These females suggested that they played a passive role in the relationship, with their victim playing the active role. The students were males and females all aged 15 years or older. These women appeared to suggest that they were scared and taken advantage of by the student, indicating that they were the victim in the relationship not the student. Such suggestions were met with denunciation from the panel:

Although in her statement Ms [Teacher: 1 Word] contends that she was, 'taken advantage of' by a pupil who was, 'authority hunting', the Panel considers that this does not reflect the professional nature of the pupil teacher relationship...Ms [Teacher: 1 Word] appears to show limited insight and has not acknowledged the impact that her behaviour may have had on the pupil. (Female 19)

The panel did not accept Ms [Teacher: 1 Word]'s account that she was acting under duress and was a victim of a sexual assault by Pupil A. In fact the panel found her to be a willing participant in that she initiated and facilitated the development of the relationship. (Female 20)

This suggestion was met with less denunciation in only one case, which involved a 16-year-old male victim who was over six-feet tall, had an intellectual disability, and had previously been physically abusive towards the teacher. However, the panel

raised concerns that her 'martyr syndrome' could lead to further poor professional judgement again in the future.

She thought she could cope and to use her own words was on, 'a crusade' to save Pupil A, even though she accepted that she was out of her depth. She told the Panel that she was scared of him and she realised at the time that he was the person who was really in control of their relationship. (Female 11)

### **Discussion and implications for policy and practice**

Aside from some of the demographic differences (i.e., male teachers being older and more likely to have perpetrated more severe and lengthier periods of sexual abuse as well as more likely to have received previous warnings) the lack of difference in the motivations, characteristics of abuse, and the modus operandi of male and female teachers was a particularly interesting finding in this study. Teachers of both sexes studied here appeared similar in three categories of the suggested preliminary typology: minimisers and deniers; poor mental health or stressors; young, early career, the exception being the fourth group, 'I was overpowered' involving female teachers only. Regarding this latter group, further research would be beneficial to examine the elements of control and power in such abusive relationships and establish whether such responses are a result of cognitive distortions on behalf of perpetrators or simply post-event rationalisations regarding their behaviour.

The findings suggest potential prevention measures, particularly regarding organisational policies and procedures. That over one-third of the male teachers had received prior warnings due to their behaviour towards students but none of the female teachers had, was a notable finding potentially indicating a 'gender blindness' to inappropriate behaviour by women. In both organisational environments and in wider society there is a need to be alert to any signs of concern in the relationships between female teachers and children in their care in the same way as those of male teachers. Where concerns about a teacher's conduct are raised, their ongoing relationships with children should be carefully monitored and any

further breaches dealt with quickly and seriously (Darling, 2018). Further, increased discourse on this topic in society is required to prevent such gender blindness and make victims of female-perpetrated sexual abuse more comfortable disclosing the abuse to a trusted adult (Christensen, 2018b).

That the majority of abusive behaviour occurred around the mid-career stage and the teachers had no prior sexual offence history is consistent with previous studies and an important finding (Darling et al., 2018; Firestone et al., 2009; Gallagher, 2000; Moulden et al., 2007). This suggests a lack of pre-disposition to offend or any specific motivation to abuse which might have led individuals to enter a profession working with children. This finding reveals the limited value of pre-employment checks solely in identifying many of those who may potentially harm children in their professional roles; more emphasis should be placed upon on-going monitoring and supervision of employees and volunteers once in post.

Furthermore, the lack of predisposition in teachers who engage in sexual misconduct emphasises the significance of situational and contextual factors as well as external stressors in the perpetration of abuse. The educational setting itself and the context of the relationships between children and adults therein could initiate sexually abusive behaviour where no previous motivation is present (Smallbone, Marshall & Wortley, 2008). Situational crime prevention approaches (see Smallbone et al., 2008 for their application to CSA) appear important in addressing the risk factors identified in these cases. There needs to be careful consideration of which particular situations, locations, and contexts within educational settings and associated environments may present key areas of risk.

In this study most of the abuse was actually found to have occurred outside of the school environment, hence the importance of clear policy and procedure around contact (both in person and via electronic means) between staff and students outside of the organisation.

The increasing use of technology, central to daily lives of children and young people, provides further opportunities for the development of inappropriate relationships between adults and children in a way not previously possible and in often unmonitored or unregulated environments. This appears to be a particular area of risk and one to which organisations should pay close regard in the development of their safeguarding policies and procedures. The role of stressors and mental health difficulties experienced by the teachers here in contributing to their abusive behaviour also indicates the need for good supervision and monitoring of educational staff throughout their careers as well as the provision of adequate support systems for staff who may be experiencing personal or professional difficulties.

While most female teachers perpetrated contact abuse, they perpetrated less serious contact abuse than men, contrasting with the results of other studies involving females who used their employment to target children as well as general female sexual offender studies (Darling et al., 2018; Kaufman, Wallace, Johnson & Reeder, 1995; Saradjian, 1996) where women have been shown to perpetrate serious contact sexual abuse and abuse in similar ways to men. However, given the finding here that female teachers were also found to have abused for shorter durations, this could be a reflection of female-perpetrated abuse being discovered earlier than male-perpetrated abuse in these cases (i.e., at a point where the nature of the sexualised behaviour had not progressed as far) rather than any specific proclivity of female teachers to engage in non-penetrative sexual abuse.

It was particularly evident that more female teachers continued with their abusive behaviour after it had been discovered than their male counterparts. This could potentially be the result of the extent of female perpetrator's emotional attachment and investment in the abusive relationship found in other studies (Darling & Antonopoulos, 2013; Darling, 2018) where some women have been particularly reluctant to give up what they perceive to be a genuine and lasting, equal relationship and have been prepared to give up their homes,

families, and careers in order not to do so. Such circumstances suggest that there should be close monitoring of both perpetrator and victim behaviour after sexual misconduct has been identified, including during any employment suspension period and police or professional regulator investigations.

A lack of insight was identified among several teachers in the study, particularly those who were younger and newly qualified. However, there is some difficulty in determining clearly whether this was a genuine naivety and a lack of insight rather than a defensive rationalisation. Nonetheless, several prevention measures may assist in addressing this issue. Teacher training programmes as well as on-going professional development interventions should clearly articulate the required professional boundaries along with communicating the professional and legislative consequences of any inappropriate behaviour. Content should also include evidence and discussion of the reality of the impact of such abuse upon victims, regardless of their age, gender, or perceived ‘consent’ in the relationship. Teachers need to clearly understand their inherent position of power and trust in any relationship with children and young people in their care; that they are the adult in any given situation and the responsibility for their behaviour – professionally, morally, and ultimately legally – lies with them.

Several key areas for future research have been identified following this study. Replication of the study with additional samples would test the demographic differences between male and female teachers identified here. The preliminary typology presented here would benefit from further testing to determine its wider applicability. Given the suggestion of potential gender blindness to incidents of inappropriate behaviour by female teachers, it would seem pertinent to examine this further, to explore in relevant cases why adults sometimes fail to recognise and respond appropriately to early indications of inappropriate behaviour by women. This research has emphasised the relevance of situational factors in the

perpetration of sexual abuse by teachers and further exploration of the situations, locations and contexts within educational organisations that present the greatest areas of risk of sexual abuse would be welcome.

### **Limitations**

As is typical of studies involving the analysis of archival material the findings of the data analysis in this study are limited by the quality and nature of the data sources used. While the authors provide a classification system, it must be noted that due to the data sources being limited with specific information on situational influences and life histories, clear motivations for these behaviours cannot be identified. However, the source materials did provide an overview of the cases considered and contained sufficient information to address the required variables, allowing for the identification of key themes. A second limitation was the sample size. In turn, the validity of the preliminary typology would benefit from re-valuation in larger, independent samples.

### **Conclusion**

This research has contributed to the relatively limited understanding of, and comparison between, male and female teachers who perpetrate sexual abuse against students. This study found the characteristics, motivations, and modus operandi to be broadly similar across the genders. The importance of recognising the potential for female perpetration of such abuse in the same way as male perpetration has been identified. A preliminary typology of teachers who sexually abuse has been introduced as a starting point to understand the phenomenon. The findings indicated the relative importance of situational factors and external stressors rather than predispositions in the perpetration of abuse. The importance of clear professional boundaries, professional monitoring and supervision throughout teachers' careers as well as the provision of appropriate support systems for those experiencing

personal or professional difficulties was made evident. Consequently, it is hoped the findings can be used to improve prevention measures in educational settings as well as future responses to both perpetrators and victims.



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Table 1

*Case Characteristics of Male Versus Female Teachers*

	<b>Male Teachers</b>	<b>Female Teachers</b>
<b>Teacher Characteristics</b>		
Average age at offence (years)	34.50	30.58
Average age at determination (years)	40.05	33.42
<i>Teacher type</i>		
Secondary school or college	90%	95%
Primary school	10%	5%
<i>Stage of career</i>		
Senior level	15%	25%
Mid-career stage	70%	35%
Newly qualified	15%	30%
Missing	0%	10%
<i>Previous verbal or written warnings</i>		
Yes	35%	0%
No	65%	100%
<b>Victim Characteristics</b>		
<i>Victim gender</i>		
Female	95%	24%
Male	5%	76%
<i>Age category</i>		
18 years	15%	0%
13-17 years	60%	90%
≤12 years	10%	5%
Missing	15%	5%
<b>Other Characteristics</b>		
<i>Length of abuse</i>		
≥12 months	35%	10%
6-12 months	15%	40%
< 6 months	30%	40%
On-off incident	20%	5%
Missing	0%	5%
<i>Continuation after discovered</i>		
Yes	5%	25%
No <sup>1</sup>	95%	75%
<i>Primary sexual abuse</i>		
Intercourse	40%	15%
Touching genitals	20%	20%
Kissing/hugging	30%	20%
Non-contact (sexualised talk)	10%	45%
<i>Location of abuse</i>		
Outside of school	55%	80%
Within school	25%	10%

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated in the NCTL report, it was assumed that the abuse did not continue beyond discovery.

Mixed (outside and within school)	15%	10%
Missing	5%	0%
<i>Response to abuse</i>		
Admitted	85%	85%
Denied	15%	15%
<i>Prohibition order</i>		
Yes	100%	95%
No	0%	5%
<i>Potential for restoration</i>		
Yes	25%	55%
No	75%	45%
<i>CJS intervention</i>		
Yes	50%	25%
No	50%	75%

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