

# Females Who Sexually Abuse in Organisations Working With Children

Characteristics, International and Australian Prevalence Rates:  
Implications for Child Protection



**Child Wise**  
(ECPAT in Australia)  
PO Box 451, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia 3205  
Tel: +61 3 9645 8911 Fax: +61 3 9645 8922  
[ecpat@ecpat.org](mailto:ecpat@ecpat.org) [www.childwise.net](http://www.childwise.net)

**Author: Lise Hunt**  
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    PO Box 451  
    South Melbourne Vic, 3205  
    Australia

   Ph 61 3 9645 8911  
    Fax 61 3 9645 8922  
    www.childwise.net

Any enquiries or comments regarding this publication may be directed to Karen Flanagan at Child Wise 61 3 9645 8911 or [ecpat@ecpat.org](mailto:ecpat@ecpat.org)

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## Context for this report

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Child Wise is a not-for-profit organisation, working to prevent, protect and reduce the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Australia and overseas. Child Wise is the Australian representative of ECPAT International, which is a global campaign existing in over 70 countries committed to ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Since the inception of the award winning child abuse prevention program Choose With Care® (CWC), Child Wise has delivered training to thousands of professionals and volunteers working with children. The CWC training program aims to protect children from all forms of abuse, especially sexual abuse, by conducting training throughout Australia and overseas. The program assists organisations to improve screening, recruitment and management practices for staff and volunteers. To protect children it is essential to understand how child sexual abuse perpetrators operate. This needs to include female perpetrators. Recent and extensive media coverage highlights the number of females in a position of authority who have sexually abused children and young people in their care.

Little research has been carried out into the different organisational contexts in which child sexual abuse (CSA) can occur. Growing awareness in recent years of children being sexually abused by men and women within the church and education systems emphasises that those in a position of authority can and do use their positions to entrap vulnerable children. There is an element of confusion and intimidation surrounding a child's experience of being sexually abused by a person in a position of authority, which provides some explanation as to why children often delay or fail to report such abuse (Weiss, 2002). This element of confusion and intimidation is frequently compounded when the authority figure perpetrating the sexual abuse is female. Awareness of persons in a position of authority, including the possibility of females perpetrating CSA, highlights the need for organisations working with children to recruit employees conscientiously. This should include parents employing informal childcare staff. However, many organisations who primarily employ women often do not feel the need for such practices, as women are traditionally viewed as non-predatory.

Although research and clinical experience indicates that the majority of child sexual abusers are male, it must be acknowledged that females are also capable of perpetrating and do perpetrate sexual abuse against children. Child Wise trainers are often asked during the course of their training what percentage of females perpetrate CSA in organisational contexts. This question, together with the increasing reports of female perpetrated CSA in the media and lack of data in this area, was the impetus to review current research and compile this report.

The current data available to the public on female-perpetrated sexual offences does not distinguish between offences against a child or an adult. This makes the task of understanding female CSA perpetrators difficult. Recent Australian media attention and community reaction to several high profile cases relating to female perpetrators reveals a lack of awareness surrounding female-perpetrated CSA. When the sexual abuser is a

female it is probable that the impact of CSA on the victim is increased. When the sexual abuser is a trusted female such as a teacher, foster mother, or close family friend, the impact may increase in severity (Sanderson, 2004).

With these matters in mind, Child Wise has prepared this report to raise community awareness. The report also calls attention to the importance and value of early intervention in protecting children from CSA. By raising awareness of female-perpetrated CSA in Australia, this report aims to contribute to the ongoing protection of children, keeping them safe from sexual harm.

In order to enhance the CWC training program Lise Hunt (student with Australian College of Applied Psychology) was invited to conduct research and compile this report on our behalf. Lise has worked well beyond what was required of her placement to complete this comprehensive report. It includes the most up to date research and an overview of the literature on females who sexually abuse in organisations. We are most grateful to Lise for her support of Child Wise in its mission to protect children in Australia and overseas.

This report is structured in three components. First, a literature review of the characteristics of female perpetrators of CSA. This section also includes a discussion of current community attitudes and beliefs towards female perpetrators of CSA. The second component of this report examines existing international studies of prevalence rates. This is not an exhaustive look at all available studies, but rather an overview of some frequently-cited research available on female CSA perpetrators. The third and final component of this report deals with a review of the findings from available Australian statistics on female perpetrated sexual offences against children under the age of 17 years. This section also examines international studies indicating victim-offender relationships in an attempt to estimate what percentage of female-perpetrated CSA occurs in organisational contexts. This report concludes with implications for practice and several recommendations.

**Karen Flanagan**  
National Program Manager  
Choose With Care

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## Executive Summary

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This report examines the prevalence rate of females who sexually abuse in organisations working with children. ‘Organisation’ in this context is used as a generic term to cover a wide range of agencies and groups working with children (refer to definitions p.7). The report also reviews current information on typologies of female child sexual abuse (CSA) perpetrators and cultural and professional attitudes towards this phenomenon.

As victim-offender information is recorded separately across Australian states and territories, it was almost impossible to ascertain from the data that is publicly available when CSA occurred in intrafamilial, extrafamilial or organisational settings. Prevalence rates across different Australian jurisdictions were collected to provide rates of female-perpetrated CSA in the general population. Police report data was used for the majority of this analysis. Findings from police reports reveal that in Australia approximately 1% to 6% of reported CSA is perpetrated by females. Limitations in the scope of the present report reflect the poor comparability of national data on sexual abuse perpetrators, due to differences in legislation, and recording and counting practices across Australian states and territories. It must also be remembered that less than 10% of CSA ever gets reported (Edgardh & Ormstad, 2000).

This report on sexual abuse by females in an organisational context includes a review of existing international literature on victim-offender relationships. These studies provide information on the number of female perpetrators who were teachers, nuns, babysitters etc. By establishing what the literature tells us about the percentage of females who sexually offend in an organisational context, it may be possible to indicate the proportion of female-perpetrated CSA that occurs in Australian organisational settings.

The report concludes that of the 1% to 6% of females who perpetrate CSA in the Australian population, approximately 5% to 31% work in an organisational setting; primarily whilst babysitting. Thus, there is a need to raise awareness in the “informal” contexts in which childcare can occur (e.g. playgroups, informal day care and babysitters clubs) and the lack of scrutiny surrounding these areas.

Where possible, data was gathered from Australian court statistics and correctional services. This data confirms that numbers of female sexual abuse perpetrators diminish as cases progress through the justice system. Significantly, in Victoria less than 2% of cases involving female perpetrators of sexual abuse that are reported to police result in imprisonment, compared to 16.5% of cases involving males (Department of Justice, 2005). This suggests a tendency to ‘minimise’ the gravity of female perpetrated CSA.

Additional findings from this report relate to the characteristics of female CSA perpetrators. A review of existing literature on the typology of female perpetrators show conflicting findings depending on the cohort being studied, particularly with regard to co-offending behaviour and gender of victims. For example, some authors suggest females sexually offend primarily when coerced by males and tend to victimise male and female children equally (Finkelhor, William, & Burns, 1988). Detailed analyses available from

two Australian states however, confirm that females can and do perpetrate CSA of their own volition, without coercion and are capable of offending against multiple victims

Gender selection of victims, however, appears more age-dependent. This report found that juvenile females in two states tended to abuse significantly more females than males and this supports findings from previous studies. Evidence for adult female perpetrators however remains conflicting, with Victorian data indicating adult females sexually victimised slightly more females (113) than males (98), while South Australian data reports adult females abused more male victims (18) than female victims (4).

### **Key Findings**

- Police reports reveal that in Australia females perpetrate 1% to 6% of all reported CSA.
- This report found from the studies examined that between 5% and 31% of all female perpetrated CSA occurs in an organisational setting, primarily whilst babysitting.
- Less than 2% of cases involving female perpetrators of sexual abuse reported to police result in imprisonment, compared to 16.5% of cases involving males.
- Females can and do perpetrate CSA of their own volition, without coercion and are capable of offending against multiple victims.
- Female juveniles (Victoria and South Australia) sexually victimised more than double the number of females compared to male victims; 44 female victims compared to 21 male victims in Victoria and 16 female victims compared to 4 males victims in South Australia.
- Findings for adult female CSA perpetrators' selection of male and female victims remain conflicting.

### **Implications for practice**

Based on these findings it is important the community is aware that females are capable of perpetrating CSA. This is crucial not only for the wellbeing and safety of children but also pertains to the legal duty of care owed by organisations. Under Australian law, organisations can be held liable for selecting and retaining an employee or volunteer who is incompetent or unfit, or for the failure to take reasonable steps to prevent abuse. All organisations working with children need to be aware that females (as well as males) are capable of and do sexually victimise children. An organisation can prevent child abuse regardless of its size. Children's organisations have a legal responsibility to recruit conscientiously. Often an issue is not considered significant until statistical data is provided to support the case. It is anticipated the findings of this report will enhance public and professional awareness by highlighting the statistics available in Australia. Females must be screened and recruited as effectively as males if children are to be protected from child sexual abuse.

This study confirms that female perpetrated CSA is underreported. It is important to reiterate that case-report data, in particular criminal justice statistics, only reflect those cases that have come into contact with the criminal justice system. These figures do not take into account unreported cases, or reported cases that have not proceeded for the many

and complex reasons victims do not speak up about child sexual abuse. This complexity is compounded when the perpetrator is female.

## ***Recommendations***

### Risk Assessment

- Organisations working with children should implement formal recruitment & selection procedures, which investigate and screen all female and male volunteers, staff and casual workers.

### Policies

- The implementation of child safe policies within organisations to minimise risk to children must be gender neutral, acknowledging both males and females can and do perpetrate CSA.

### Uniform data collection system

- To enhance research and give a better understanding of female perpetrated CSA it is imperative that agreed definitions, counting rules and uniform data collection methods are implemented in Australia and overseas.

### Legislation

- National legislation with agreed purposes, definitions and principals will enhance consistency and stability of legal responses to CSA regardless of perpetrator gender.

## ***Sexual abuse prevention education***

- A national parent education strategy must be implemented to ensure parents are aware of the potential risks posed by some females and males in various childcare settings, children's programs and activities.
- Sexual abuse prevention programs should be gender neutral, acknowledging the possibility that both men and women are capable of perpetrating CSA. This information must be provided in a sensitive and empowering manner aimed at encouraging children to take action and speak up if they need to.
- It is important that the public, including professionals, staff, volunteers and community members working with children need to be sensitised to the possibility of sexual abuse being perpetrated by females and potential contexts in which it occurs.

## ***Support Services***

- A therapeutic response is required for women who feel they are at risk of perpetrating CSA.

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## Definitions

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<b>Child:</b>	<p>“A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, Article 1)</p>														
<b>Child sexual abuse</b>	<p>Sexual abuse occurs when someone uses their power, force or authority to involve a child/children in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Adapted from DHS (Victoria) definition 2002</p>														
<b>Abuser, perpetrator</b>	<p>These are words used to describe the person who sexually abuses a child.</p>														
<b>Alleged female perpetrator</b>	<p>Females reported to police for alleged sexual offence/s recorded against a child: unsubstantiated police report.</p>														
<b>Alleged sex offender</b>	<p>Persons (male or female) charged by police for alleged sexual offence/s against a child.</p>														
<b>Female sex offender</b>	<p>Females convicted of any sexual offence/s against a child.</p>														
<b>Organisation/s</b>	<p>Definition as per Choose With Care program: organisation/s is used as a generic term to cover a wide range of agencies and groups working with children. Unless otherwise stated this term is intended to include the following organisations. (The list is not exhaustive).</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">- Child care centres</td> <td style="width: 50%;">- Mentoring programs</td> </tr> <tr> <td>- Children and youth groups</td> <td>- Out of School Hours programs</td> </tr> <tr> <td>- Foster care agencies</td> <td>- Recreational activities</td> </tr> <tr> <td>- Health or welfare agencies</td> <td>- Sports clubs</td> </tr> <tr> <td>- International development agencies</td> <td>- Vacation care programs</td> </tr> <tr> <td>- Kindergartens</td> <td>- Babysitters</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>- Nannies</td> </tr> </table>	- Child care centres	- Mentoring programs	- Children and youth groups	- Out of School Hours programs	- Foster care agencies	- Recreational activities	- Health or welfare agencies	- Sports clubs	- International development agencies	- Vacation care programs	- Kindergartens	- Babysitters		- Nannies
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## Methodology

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The present research employs three stages of analysis. First, a literature review of some of the characteristics of female perpetrators of CSA and current attitudes and beliefs held by the community regarding this topic. The second stage involves a review of current available statistical data on female perpetrated CSA from the Australian criminal justice system. The third stage is a review of literature that offers a description of victim-perpetrator relationships. As there is very limited Australian research available for this purpose, international studies that clearly state the victim-offender relationships were used as a guide to estimate the amount of child sexual abuse perpetrated by females in organisational contexts. Statistics from the third stage of analysis were used to estimate what percentage of CSA perpetrated by females in the Australian population occurs in organisational settings. This data is an initial attempt to gain some insight as to what proportion of females sexually abuse in organisations working with children.

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## Literature review – characteristics of and attitudes toward females who sexually abuse children

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As the purpose of this report is to explore what percentages of Australian women perpetrate CSA in an organisational setting it would appear that studying female perpetrators in one particular organisational context, for example day-care centres, may not provide an accurate portrait of the phenomenon. Findings of such studies (Finkelhor, Williams, & Burns, 1988) often do not reflect the proportion of female perpetrated CSA in other organisational contexts in the population at large. Furthermore, methods of establishing general prevalence rates of such a specific female sub-group in the general population may be limited, as this requires access to not readily available public statistics and involves analysis of victim-offender relationships. As victim-offender information is recorded and coded separately across Australian states and territories, this type of detailed analysis has proved difficult.

Literature and studies indicate that although males carry out the majority of child sexual abuse (CSA), sexual abuse by females does occur and may be more prevalent than we realise (Allen, 1990; Banning, 1989; Finkelhor, 1986; Johnson & Shrier, 1987; O'Connor, 1987; Ogilvie, 2004; Rosencrans, 1997). The reality that females do perpetrate CSA is slowly emerging into public awareness mainly due to recently publicised media reports in Australia (Karen Ellis case, Moynihan, 2005) and overseas (Howell, 2000; Johnson, 2004a; Jones, 2005; Lower, 2005; Milovanovic, 2004; Robinson, 2005). However, this increasing awareness has done little to resolve the confusion regarding typology and prevalence of female sex offending. Data remains inconclusive and can only provide an approximation.

All sexual abuse is widely thought to be underreported and this is particularly evident with females, thus causing a significant obstacle to understanding the true dimensions of this issue (Davin, 1999; Mathews, 1996). Percentages of any sexual abuse cases reported to police vary, but consistently remain low with approximately 2% of intrafamilial and 6% of extrafamilial CSA cases being reported (Russell, 1983). Thus, less than 10% of cases ever get reported (Edgardh & Ormstad, 2000) and even fewer proceed into the judicial system. Like all sex offences, the number of incarcerated female sex offenders is not indicative of the number of women who perpetrate sexual abuse against children and constitute at most a miniscule unrepresentative fraction of all female sexual abusers (Finkelhor, 1986).

Studies emanating from the United States, England and Canada addressing the topic of female sex offending tend to focus on typology and/or the sociological aspects. Literature addressing prevalence rates often does not distinguish between sexual abuse occurring within the intrafamilial context, (parent/step-parent, sibling/step sibling, aunt, cousin etc.) the extrafamilial context (neighbour, family friend, stranger) or the organisational context (teacher, childcare worker, babysitter etc.). This adds complexity to the identification of the different female sub-groups involved.

## ***Attitudes towards female perpetrated sexual abuse***

### *Professional attitudes*

The conclusion that female perpetrated CSA is less harmful than that perpetrated by a male is embedded in societal constructs. Denov (2004a) reports, “within the Canadian Criminal Code, until 1983 a woman could not be charged with committing rape or indecent assault and a male could not be a victim of such an assault”. Furthermore, Denov continues, “female sexual passivity was reaffirmed in law by implying that females could not be the instigator or the aggressor in cases of incest” (p.21).

An internet search yields a New Zealand press article (The Press, 2000) calling for changes to a law which allows female perpetrators of CSA to be let off; it “recognises only men as sex offenders”. Parts of the New Zealand Crimes Act are also based on 19<sup>th</sup> century assumptions that women are incapable of committing a range of sexual offences. Legislation in the United Kingdom remains gender specific as the majority of laws governing sexual offences continue to state that the victim must be female and the perpetrator must be male (Keenan & Maitland, 1999 cited in Denov, 2004a, p.21). Hence, currently under English law, a woman still cannot be charged for committing rape and a man cannot be a victim of rape. In some Australian states and territories a gender-neutral legislation regarding rape has been established stating “a person commits rape if he or she intentionally sexually penetrates another person without that person’s consent” (Crimes Act, Victorian, 1958).

Finkelhor et al’s (1988) study of sexual abuse in day care settings found ambivalent social responses to females who committed sex acts with children when compared to males committing the same acts. In 1988, Hetheron and Breadsall demonstrated that police officers and social workers tend to recommend less severe measures when the abuser is a female. Ten years on Hetheron (1999) cites examples of dismissive responses to allegations of female CSA at all points in the child abuse system. Denov (2001, 2004, 2004a) highlights this point in studies investigating professional attitudes towards female perpetrated CSA and its role in a culture of minimisation and denial. Denov’s (2001) study revealed how police officers and psychiatrists view female sex offending; assessing, and understanding it through a framework of gendered lenses and traditional scripts. Denov states, “For police officers and psychiatrists, it appeared to mean something to be sexually abused by a female, as it was often judged to be harmless and benign” (p.324).

Denov (2004a) in observing a Canadian Police Sexual Assault Unit over a two-year period found that of 2,600 cases of reported sexual abuse, 35 (1.2%) involved suspected female perpetrators. Denov claims that due to the exercise of police discretion, a significantly higher percentage of cases involving suspected female perpetrators were unsubstantiated. Of 35 female cases, 22 (64%) were unsubstantiated compared to 23% of male sexual abuse perpetrators. Some reasons given by the police for not pressing charges range from “it’s more difficult to prove an assault by a female” (p.94) to “the case was unfounded because she (the suspect) was dammed hot” (p. 94). The criminal law and professional community’s view of women as incapable of committing sexual offences may provide an explanation for the low number of reported cases, as such conjecture influences police decisions to charge alleged offenders.

Because police are the “gate keepers to the criminal justice system their attitudes and responses to people who report sexual assault is vitally important” (Victorian Law Reform

Commission, 2004). The public and professional assumption that sexual abuse by women is less severe and less harmful than sexual abuse by men has potentially dangerous implications for victims and perpetrators alike (Hetherington & Beardsall, 1988; Maynard & Wiederman, 1997; Rudin, Zalewski, & Bodmer-Turner, 1995). These beliefs affect professional attention and statutory intervention, which often leads to the minimisation of care and necessary support services the victims of female perpetrated sexual abuse may require (Denov, 2004). Sexual abuse by a female appears to be more damaging for some victims and leads to a deeper sense of betrayal than similar sexual abuse perpetrated by a male. Research (Denov, 2004, 2004a; Elliot, 1994; Saradjian, 1996) emphasises the long-term effects of confusion surrounding self-concept and self-identity that are unique to being sexually abused by a female.

### Media and public opinion

The media clearly has an impact on issues involving child sexual abuse. Media coverage of this subject serves to build societal awareness, and influence policy makers (McDevitt, 1996). Hunter (1990) in his book "Abused Boys" reveals many of his clients who were sexually victimised by women in childhood were told by family or friends that they "ought to feel happy, because they were lucky to have had the opportunity to be sexual at a young age" (p.36).

Fifteen years on, public attitudes have changed little. The public (in response to a story written in the Melbourne Age (Moynihan, 2005) reporting the abuse of a 15-year-old Melbourne schoolboy by a 37 year old female teacher and mother of three, Karen Ellis), were invited to express their views as to whether "justice had been done" or whether society "views male and female sex offenders differently". Of the 18 responses, 13 were identified as male and five were unknown. Out of the 13 males, only 3 believed justice had been done and that the female involved deserved to be jailed. Responses from the 5 unknowns indicated 3 people also agreed that justice had been done as the teacher broke the law. Only 6 people out of 18 (33%) agreed with the 6-month jail sentence the female teacher received. Comments disagreeing with the sentence ranged from "Its every boy's fantasy to sleep with his hot teacher. I think she did the kid a favour" to "The woman said it was consensual. There was no pressure applied etc...yet she still goes to jail". The schema involving a 15-year-old girl and a 37-year-old male teacher however, may have incited less favourable comments as it did with tennis coach Gavin Hopper (Stayner, 2004) who is now serving a 3 year jail sentence.

It is also possible that underreporting correlates with the way society views sex with older women particularly for boys. In this case, the sexual experience is often depicted by the media and viewed by society as a positive experience for the boy (Fromuth & Burkhart, 1989; Wakefield & Underwager, 1991). Research (Fromuth, Holt, & Parker, 2001; Dollar, Perry, Fromuth, & Holt, 2004) confirms societal perception of the relationship between a female adult and a male adolescent as being less psychologically traumatic and more positive and consistent with gender role stereotypes and sexual scripts. Denov (2004a) suggests that the socialisation of children to believe that only men are capable of sexual abuse "may contribute to the child's inability to interpret his or her experience as 'abuse' when approached sexually by a female" (p.25).

### ***Changing attitude towards childcare***

Although research indicates the majority of female perpetrated CSA is incestuous in nature (Denov, 2004; Elliot, 1994; Groth, 1979; Rudin et al., 1995), victims do report sexual abuse by women who are at times in a position of authority. The knowledge over the years of males in positions of authority (clergy, teachers, coaches) carrying out sexual abuse has resulted in a growing awareness of the need for more stringent recruitment procedures for organisations working with children, involving screening and police checks. Nevertheless, many organisations primarily employing women often do not feel the need for such practices as women are traditionally viewed as non-predatory.

The Victorian Corrections Sex Offender Program currently has two female sex offenders within the system and in both cases, the females involved were babysitting the victims at the time of the offences. A Victorian Corrections Sex Offender Program psychologist suggests there is a need to raise awareness of the more informal contexts in which childcare can occur (playgroups, babysitters clubs etc.) and the lack of scrutiny surrounding these areas, particularly when such services are voluntarily offered to the parents by women. (Anecdotally, many of the male sex offenders in the program revealed histories of sexual abuse by babysitters and/or much older women).

Although, Finkelhor et al. (1988) maintains that the risk of a child being sexually abused in an organisational setting such as day care is less than in their own home, it must be considered that sexual abuse can occur in any setting where children are found (Kelly, Brant & Waterman, 1993). We need to view female offenders as perpetrators of sexual crimes against children, not merely victims (Nathan, 2000) and highlight the different settings in which CSA can occur. The importance of raising general awareness and understanding of what represents sexually abusive behaviours by women cannot be overlooked by any organisation in contact with children. A multidimensional approach to screening is crucial but may prove difficult to implement within the informal context in which some childcare occurs.

### ***Cultural considerations***

Although it is not in the scope of this report to explore multicultural attitudes towards sexual abuse, it is important to mention it briefly in the context of female sex offenders. There are a range of cross-cultural differences concerning acceptable child rearing practices and displays of affection towards children, particularly regarding their genitals (Lawson, 1993). For example, a woman hired as a nanny from a reputable Australian agency inserted her little finger into the anus of a baby to “help the child with constipation”. Although the parents were distressed they did not pursue criminal charges accepting that the act was not sexually motivated. Cases such as these pose interesting definitional questions as to what constitutes CSA.

A number of different factors including religious ideologies determine the way a culture interprets CSA, Community beliefs and values also figure strongly in such customs (Fontes, 2005). For example, in many cultures where virginity is highly valued, including some parts of the United States and Canada, mothers are known to perform digital tests on their daughters virginity by inserting a finger into their daughter’s vagina to see if it goes in. If they are able to penetrate, the daughter may be rejected or abandoned, but the act of checking by the mother is not considered sexually abusive (Fontes, 2005). Anecdotal information obtained by Child Wise staff whilst training overseas, confirms the practice of

Cambodian mothers fondling the genitals of their male and female infants as a method of comforting the child. Japanese mothers typically initiate sexual acts with their sons. “Usually this occurs when they witness their sons masturbating for the first time” (Kitahara, 1989). Turkish mothers kiss the genitals of their male and female children during nappy changing as an expression of their love and admiration (Olsen, 1981).

Some of the above female behaviours involve fondling children while others are more invasive. Chasnoff, Burns, Schnoll, Burns, Chisum, & Kyle-Spore (1986) indicate that these kinds of activities perpetrated on young children and infants can manifest in behavioural and learning disturbances. Thus, it is difficult to know the long-term behavioural outcomes for children who have had such activities carried out as part of a cultural tradition. Under Australian law, some of the above acts may be indictable offences, but if such behaviours are an established part of culturally based child-rearing practices, they may be difficult to prevent and/or abolish. There is a need for the introduction of new education policies to achieve shifts in culturally recognised beliefs and behaviours (including our own cultural myths about women as nurturers and carers) and to create theoretical models of female sexual abuse that allow for cultural differences that are non invasive (Lawson, 1993). The cross-cultural nature of Australia and many other countries adds complexity to how such practices are responded to and/or managed. Employers (including parents) of childcare staff need to implement appropriate recruitment codes of conduct and education policies regarding acceptable child rearing practices when hiring staff from different cultural backgrounds.

### ***Why is sexual abuse by women difficult to identify?***

May (1993 cited in Denov, 2004, p.11) claims there are two factors that determine whether a behaviour is to be regarded criminal or not: 1) the act must be defined by law as criminal and 2) it must be detectable. Denov (2004a) suggests sexual offences by females in many Western countries have only recently been considered as criminal and the act itself has gone largely undetected. However, minimisation and denial of female perpetrated child sexual abuse is not a recent phenomenon. Acknowledgment of underreporting became apparent as early as 1944. Apfelberg, Sugar, & Pfeffer, (1944) remarked that women who exposed their genitals were arrested for intoxication or disorderly conduct instead, and furthermore, there are no instances “Of such charges as impairing the morals of a minor among women, although there are instances in which women have seduced minors” (p.768).

Until the late 1980s, clinical studies and research focused on male sex offenders and their female victims almost entirely. Currently, all Australian states and territories (except Western Australia) require professionals to report CSA, but training in child abuse and neglect often typically focuses on patterns of male/female sexual abuse (Rosencrans, 1997). Failure to report female perpetrated CSA, particularly mother–child abuse, may correlate with the unwillingness in society to believe that women can commit such acts (Banning, 1989; Hislop, 1999; Saradjian, 1996). Lawson (1991) suggests one of the primary reasons that cases of maternal sexual abuse are rarely identified is the cultural bias towards viewing mothers as asexual.

Current socialisation has done little to change this generally held schema. Men are still considered sexual aggressors. A man who sexually abuses a child, although shocking, is within the range of predictability. Williams and Farrell (1990) found in an examination of

43 cases of CSA in day-care settings, allegations made by a male child, or claims involving a female adult are less likely to be given legal action. However, the stereotype of an adult male fondling prepubescent females was more likely to elicit the attention of the authorities. It appears no matter how sexually aggressive the acts of female perpetrated CSA may be, attempts are made, predominantly by professionals, to reinterpret and transform such actions into misguided or mistaken extensions of love/childcare (Etherington, 1997), or sexual initiation in the case of the male adolescents (Denov, 2004a; Hunter, 1990; Saradjian, 1996).

An initial barrier to recognising and reporting sexual abuse by females is confusion as to what constitutes sexually abusive behaviours (Hetherington, 1999; Kelly, Wood, Gonzalez, MacDonald, & Waterman, 2002). Groth (1979) suggests reasons for the hidden nature of the problem stem from the following:

- 1) The ability of women to mask sexually inappropriate contact with children under the guise of bathing and dressing.
- 2) The incestuous nature of female offending silences victims: victims rarely report inappropriate sexual contact if the offender is a primary caretaker.
- 3) Gender socialisation in the role of denial and rationalisation (male victims are less likely to report sexual victimisation than girls are, especially when society views such encounters with older females as “initiation” into manhood or “that the boy got lucky”).

Furthermore, social tolerance of physical intimacy between women and children may cause difficulty for a child to recognise the behaviour of their mothers or other females as inappropriate. Societal taboos against viewing female behaviour as sexual may prevent victims from recognising non-coercive forms of inappropriate affection as sexual.

In a 1997 UK BBC1 TV programme on “The sexual abuse by women of children and teenagers”, a surprising 86% of the 127 survivors of sexual abuse were not believed when they said the abuser was female. Attitudes of professionals (whom victims report to) and organisational practices, play a crucial role in the construction of official crime statistics (Denov, 2004a), as it is at their discretion whether a report of female CSA is to be placed in the system or not. This has a direct bearing on case report numbers. These constructs provide the social basis that shapes criminal law with past (and current) judicial decisions propagating beliefs that young children, particularly boys, do not need protection from adolescent and older females.

### ***The underreported and incestuous nature of female sex offending***

Female perpetrators of CSA are more likely to be caretakers (Rudin et al., 1995). Significantly, the majority of female perpetrated CSA is incestuous in nature (Denov, 2004; Elliot, 1994; Rudin et al., 1995). However, Saradjian (1996) suggests this consistency may be a distortion as it is presumed that sexual abuse by a female caretaker would be viewed as the most disturbing form of sexual abuse. Therefore in general, the most disturbing cases are more likely to be recognised by authorities.

Sexual abuse by a female, particularly if the abuser is a mother, often remains the most hidden part of a victim’s life. Rosencran’s (1997) study of 93 females and 9 male victims of female perpetrated sexual abuse reports only 3% of the female victims and none of the male victims told anyone about the sexual abuse during their childhood, despite the fact 100% of the sample reported it was damaging. Johnson and Shrier’s (1987) study of 25

adolescent males (11 sexually abused by females) reveals that although the boy victims experienced the abuse as highly traumatic, none of the boys came forward to a mental health, social service, or criminal justice agency.

The nature of the problem Finkelhor (1986) suggests is the “secrecy and shame, the criminal sanctions against it, and the young age and dependent status of the victims which inhibits discovery and discourages voluntary reporting” (p18). Lawson (1993) suggests that female perpetrated CSA, particularly mother-son sexual abuse, is more likely to be “disclosed in long-term therapeutic treatment, and is rarely reported to child abuse authorities (or rarely treated seriously), and is not included in public statistics” (p.261). Thus, the context of victim disclosures is a critical factor in establishing accurate prevalence rates (Denov, 2004a).

### ***Implications for practice***

The myth that women as carers and nurturers are incapable of sexually abusing a child must be dispelled in order to provide effective treatment, care, and support for both the victim and the female sexual perpetrator. Hunter (1990) suggests the myth that male perpetrated CSA is more damaging and harmful to the victim than female perpetrated CSA must be confronted, as it can affect who is identified and treated within the different judicial and child protection systems. What’s more, the trauma of sexual abuse for the victim increases when compounded by prejudice and misunderstanding from the community, both professional and otherwise. Professional validation and acknowledgement appear to mitigate the negative effects of the sexual abuse (Denov, 2004a; Hunter, 1990; Sanderson; 2004).

Often we do not believe an issue is significant unless we can provide statistical data to support our case. The findings of this report will further contribute in raising public and professional awareness by keeping the dialogue open regarding this important social topic. The hidden nature of female perpetrated CSA has implications for policy, child protection, sentencing, education, recruitment, and the ability for children in a sexually abusive situation with a female to seek help.

### ***Characteristics of women who sexually abuse children***

As part of societal effort to transform female perpetrated CSA into an acceptable construct, generalisations of findings from the earlier literature (based on studies of convicted female offenders) tends to label all women who sexually abuse children as mentally ill, of low intelligence or under the influence of substances. However, Margolin (1986 cited in Saradjian 1996, p.3) warns against the sweeping generalisations of these case studies as it is often the most disturbed women or those who have committed more blatantly abusive acts who come to the attention of the authorities.

Studies of incarcerated female sex offenders do reveal these women manifest higher percentages of psychiatric impairment (Davin, 1999; Dunbar, 1999; Green & Kaplan, 1994; Kaplan & Green, 1995; O’Connor, 1987), prior histories of sexual and physical victimisation (Davin, 1999; Dunbar, 1999; Green & Kaplan, 1994; Hislop, 1999; Johnson, 2004; Kaplan & Green, 1995; Syed & Williams, 1996) and substance abuse (Dunbar, 1999; Harper, 1992; Syed & Williams, 1996).

Other literature however, implies women who sexually abuse children are often not psychotic, drunk or drugged when they engage in sexual acts with minors (Faller, 1987; Krug, 1989; Matthews, Mathews, & Speltz, 1991). It is suggested differences in psychopathology, addiction and use of violence may vary across the different categories and age groups of offenders. For example, Davin's (1999) study indicates independent offenders tend to exhibit significantly more severity in psychological disturbances compared to co-offenders. Although co-offenders appeared more "normal" they were more submissive, distrustful and easily influenced by others.

Saradjian's (1996) study of 50 females known to authorities for perpetrating CSA suggests "that women of any age, social class group, intellectual ability, type of employment and marital status can sexually abuse children" (p38). Finkelhor et al. (1988) study of CSA in a day care setting supports this finding by describing females who perpetrate sexual abuse as "more respectable" than the male perpetrators involved, as many of the women are regarded highly in their communities as businesswomen and civic leaders. Similarly female survivors of female perpetrated CSA in the Whetsell-Mitchell and Morse (1998) study report perpetrators to be the "pillars in their communities" (p.151).

Literature regarding women as lone offenders or co-offenders of CSA is also contradictory and may depend on the cohort being studied. While Finkelhor et al. (1988) found 73% of adult female perpetrated CSA occurred in the company of other abusers (either same-sex group or with a male) other studies reveal the figures for female co-offending varies between 25% and 77% (Faller, 1987; Kaufman, Wallace, Johnson, & Reeder, 1995; McCarty, 1986). Still, other literature confirms lower rates for female co-offending (Denov, 2004; Elliot's, 1993; Rudin et al., 1995). In contrast, Fehrenbach and Monastersky (1988), found all of the 28 adolescent female offenders in their study acted independently, without accomplices or coercion (the authors caution generalising from this sample to other populations). Further research is required in this area particularly to examine the relationship between age and co-offending behaviour in female perpetrators.

Personal communications with a Victorian Corrections Sex Offender Program psychologist suggest that not all co-offending behaviour is coerced. Some female perpetrators may begin offending with coercion from a male accomplice but are quite capable of continuing the offending behaviours in the absence of a male. A case example was cited of a wife who initially assisted her husband to sexually offend against a number of victims (male and female children, ranging in age from 2-9 years old). She later proceeded to sexually offend against all of the victims for her own needs, without her husband's presence or knowledge. Furthermore, in the course of treatment it was revealed the abuse of the children was driven by the needs of the woman, which related to sexual attraction, sexual arousal and sexual gratification. It was further suggested the female CSA perpetrator, during the time when the offences were committed, would have certainly met a diagnosis of paedophilia, including symptoms of arousal, fantasy (sexual thoughts of the child victims were almost totally consuming) and grooming, including befriending the victims and using blackmail to maintain secrecy.

### ***Similarities to male perpetrators of child sexual abuse***

Since most of the research on paraphilias is derived from studies of incarcerated male sex offenders, there is an evident research bias excluding females (Federoff, Fishell, & Fedoroff, 1999). Therefore, the male label paedophile has not been applied to female

perpetrators of CSA for their apparent inability to “fit” the diagnostic criteria (Dunbar, 1999). However, recent studies (Chow & Choy, 2002; Federoff et al., 1999; Denov, 2004a) highlight the existence of paedophilia in females. Chow and Choy (2002) concluded that the one female involved in their study fulfilled the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th ed, (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) diagnostic criteria for paedophilia and in many ways resembled the history of a man with paedophilia. This case involved the use of fantasy, preference of gender/age range, and cognitive distortions believing victims teased the offender, whilst minimising the harmful effects of the sexual abuse on the victim/s. However, unlike male paedophiles the female paedophile in this case did not actively socialise with children and did not use inducement or enticements to engage the children. Physical harm and threats were also not a factor. Federoff et al. (1999) study of the social and personal history characteristics of 14 women compared to 118 men who were similarly assessed for presumed paraphilic sexual disorders found 12 women were classified as having at least one paraphilia. The three most common paraphilic disorders in the female study group were paedophilia (36%), sexual sadism (29%), and exhibitionism (29%). The cases were drawn from the clinical records of a forensic psychiatrist who had conducted outpatient clinics for assessment and treatment of paraphilic disorders in three countries.

Thus, some female CSA perpetrators are similar to men, particularly those who act alone (Groth, 1979). Studies (Kaufman et al., 1995; Finkelhor, et al., 1988; Matthews et al., 1991; Syed, 2004) confirm many women can and do sexually abuse children of their own volition and women who target adolescent children use a similar entrapment process to those of male perpetrators (Saradjian, 1996). Cooperation is gained by bribery, coercion, fear of abandonment and the attribution of mutual responsibility to the child particularly in the case of adolescent boys. Females however, are more likely to exploit their victims by allowing other adults or children to use their victims sexually (Kaufman et al., 1995).

The element of sexual arousal is a much minimised issue concerning female sex offending. Additional research is required to ensure legal and therapeutic responses are appropriate.

### ***The use of violence***

It is believed that offences committed by female sex offenders do not generally involve violent force (Johnson & Shrier, 1987). Evidence however, as to the severity of CSA and use of violence by female perpetrators remains conflicting and may once again depend on the population being studied (Chasnoff et al., 1986; Faller, 1987, Finkelhor et al., 1988; Fehrenbach & Monastersky, 1988; Kelly et al., 1993; Rudin et al., 1995). Research claims 60% of sexual abuse by lone female perpetrators or female co-perpetrators is severe (Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 1990 cited in Rudin et al, 1995, p. 964). Syed & Williams (1996) confirms the violent perspective of female perpetrated sexual abuse. Syed found in 19 cases of incarcerated female sex offenders, 7 involved violence, consisting of: handling the victim roughly, beating or hitting the victim by hand and/or with bottles and a piece of wood, holding the victim down forcibly during intercourse, threatening the victim at knife point and killing a victim. In only 3 of the 19 cases could the absence of violence or force be confirmed while data on the remaining 9 cases was unclear or not available.

It appears that female perpetrators of CSA can and do use force. For example, forcible rape accounted for less than 1 percent of female arrests in 1992 however; in 2002, arrest

for forcible rape had increased by 4% for adult women and 73% percent for women under the age of 18 years (Strickland, 1988). Finkelhor et al. (1988) study of 270 day care centres in America reveals that more women committed multiple cases of sexual abuse and acts involving sexual penetration than men in a day care setting. Furthermore, the women were more likely to force children to sexually abuse others and were more frequently apt to participate in ritualistic sexual abuse.

There is evidence now that women are capable of the same severity of sexual abuse as men, achieving sexual gratification particularly from sexual sadism with children and can abuse a child in all the ways a male does; using digits and/or objects instead of a penis to obtain penetration (Kaufman et al., 1995; Salter, 2003; Saradjian, 1996). However, Saradjian (1996) suggests the primary differences between male and female sex offenders is not so much the differences that each gender looks for in the target child but rather how the female perpetrator constructs her perceptions and beliefs about the children she targets. That is, female perpetrators of CSA will interpret any possible aspect of the child's behaviour to validate the perception of the child they have construed, be it negative in the case of women who initially target young children and women coerced to offend or positive in the case of women who initially target adolescent children. These constructs and perceptions of the child being good or bad help justify, rationalise and facilitate the acts of abuse. This point is pivotal as these constructions play a crucial role in the victim's construction of self, particularly when the abuser is the sole or primary caretaker.

### ***Gender of the victims***

Victim gender selection of female perpetrators tends to yield conflicting reports. Finkelhor et al. (1988) found that females tend to victimise male and female children equally however, other studies report that sole female perpetrators of CSA are likely to abuse more girls than boys but to a lesser degree than males (Rudin et al., 1995). Ramsey-Klawnsnik (1990 cited in Rudin et al, 1995, p.964) reported that lone adult female perpetrators and co-perpetrators tended to abuse a greater proportion of boys than did lone male perpetrators. Contrarily, in an assessment of registered adult female sex offenders Vandiver and Walker (2002) report females comprised a slight majority (55%) of the victims.

Fehrenbach and Monastersky (1988) suggest however, that gender selection may be linked to the age of the female perpetrator. Their survey found that approximately 57% of their sample of female adolescent sex offenders had abused female youth while 36% had offended against male youth with two offenders assaulting both a male and a female. Similarly, Elliot (1993) reports girls are more likely to be the victims of sexual abuse by other girls. Matthews, Hunter, and Vuz, (1997) however suggest female adolescent sex offenders are more likely to abuse both male and female victims than are adolescent male offenders who tend to victimise mostly females.

In the case of young female perpetrators, Cavanagh-Johnson's (1989) study of 13 female perpetrators under the age of 13 years found that there were twice as many male victims as female. Blues, Moffat, and Telford (1999) nevertheless suggest that generally in the case of younger female perpetrators gender selection may depend on availability of the victims, as younger children tend to have less access to victims outside the family. In summary, females do engage in brutal acts of CSA and the extent of harm to the victim can be severe regardless of the victim's gender (Hetheron, 1999).

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## **International prevalence rates of females who sexually abuse children**

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It is incorrect to assert that female perpetrated CSA is a recent phenomenon. Hislop (1999) reports on alleged female perpetrated CSA in the earlier part of the twentieth century, long before the feminist influences of recent decades. Although rare, documented cases of female sex offences were published as early as the 1930's but for the most part were ignored.

Wulffen (1934 cited in Hislop, 1999, p.153) describes over two dozen cases that concern females acting out sexually against children and includes all manner of child sexual abuse. Wulffen reports incidents of female caretakers beating children for sexual gratification, sexual contact between older females and minors, several cases of incest (mother-son, mother-daughter, aunt-nephew and grandmother-grandson) sibling incest, and two cases of a wife co-operating in a husband's rape of a younger girl.

Chideckel (1935 cited in Hislop, 1999, p.154) commented briefly on the existence of police women and teachers who had beaten children for sexual gratification.

Benden and Blau (1937) noted a six year old male who had sexual contact with his mother and who was also attributed the responsibility for the contact.

Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) were among the first to document adolescent boys having sexual contact with older females and De Francis (1969 cited in Hislop 1999, p.156) was one of the first researchers to attempt to estimate the rates at which adult females have sexual contact with children. De Francis concluded, based on reported cases of female sex offenders, that 3% of sex offenders against children were female.

More recent prevalence rates of female sex offending tend to be by-products of general sexual abuse incidence studies from American and British research, which more often than not are plagued with methodological inconsistencies (Finkelhor, 1986). Prevalence rates will vary depending on the design of the study, the framing of the questions, the definitions used (Banning, 1989) and the population studied. Studies incorporating a broad range of data-gathering techniques including large-scale self-report surveys, in-depth interviews, and case-file analyses taken from victims and/or offenders indicate that case-report and self-report studies provide two conflicting portraits of the phenomenon (Denov, 2004a). The different percentages reported for female sex offending specifically relate to the type of sample selected and methodological apparatus employed in obtaining results. For example, self-report studies historically yield much higher rates of female perpetrated sex abuse than case-report studies. Although the limitations of self-report surveys influence their validity and reliability, the higher number of reported cases revealed in self-reports studies indicate the under-reporting of female CSA to official agencies (Denov, 2001, 2004a).

It is interesting to note that the scientific community are more likely to and consistently do quote figures from cases reported to the authorities than prevalence rates derived from self-report studies. This is due to the belief in the unreliability of self-report studies, primarily the memory of the participants and researcher bias that may be reflected in the design of the method. However, as indicated by Denov's (2001, 2004a) studies, the denial and minimisation of female perpetrated CSA by professionals and the culture of organisations within the child abuse and criminal justice system will ultimately impact the number of cases that are acknowledged, validated and reported. Thus, the statistics we regard as reliable are already fraught with biases and beliefs. As the initial recording of such data is still dependent on human judgement and discretion, such decisions are generally influenced by policy, which in turn is influenced by culture. This report does not view self-report data as any less valid, based on this supposition.

### ***Case report Studies***

Finkelhor's (1984) reanalysis of two research studies containing data on female perpetrators is regarded as reasonably accurate by researchers and is often cited. Findings from these two studies were based primarily on reports from women who came to the attention of child protection agencies. However, Finkelhor concluded that the information collected by the American Humane Association (1978) and National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN, 1979) on which the studies are based, contained methodological and definitional problems. Both studies collected data in a way that tended to obscure accurate numbers of female perpetrators as they include definitions of women as perpetrators if they "allowed" sexual abuse to happen to their children. Attempting to sort through the methodological and definitional difficulties Finkelhor's reconsideration, based on American Humane Association data, is that approximately 6% of sexual abuse against females and 14% of sexual abuse against males is thought to be perpetrated by females acting alone. The National Incidence Study (NCCAN, 1981) collected information on reported and unreported cases of CSA from professionals in 26 countries. This data indicates 13% of sexual abuse against females and 24% of sexual abuse against males is thought to be perpetrated by females. However, Finkelhor asserts the true rate of sexual abuse by females is probably 5% (range 0% to 10%) in the case of female victims and 20% (range 14% to 27%) in the case of male victims. Findings also indicated that women tend to molest girls more frequently than they tend to molest boys due to the larger proportion of female victims.

It must be stipulated both of these studies were conducted in 1979 around the time society was just beginning to accept the existence of CSA by males. Cultural biases are far more likely to have been in place surrounding the attitudes of professionals and victims to the likelihood of female perpetrated CSA. With such biases in place, it is doubtful that anything other than the extreme cases of female perpetrated CSA were reported or mentioned to professionals and the authorities. Nevertheless, the tendency for professionals to use this data as an estimate of the prevalence of female CSA must be explained by the supposed accurate reanalysis of the study by Finkelhor (1984) and the large size of the sample (44,700 cases reported in 1979). Despite the large population in this study and reanalysis by Finkelhor, it must be considered that societal biases and/or prejudices would have influenced victim reporting (both reported and unreported) and the ability of professionals to acknowledge such reports.

Fitzroy (2005) cites substantiated cases of child abuse recorded by the Victorian Department of Human Services, collected and published by the Allen Consulting Group (2003) for their review of the Child Protection system in Victoria from 2001–2002. Drawing on this data, 8.3% of substantiated cases of child abuse perpetrated by women involved the sexual assault of children (Allen Consulting Group, 2003 cited in Fitzroy, 2005, p.43).

O'Connor (1987) using Home Office Criminal Statistics from the United Kingdom concludes that between 1975 and 1984, females committed less than 1% of all sexual offences. Denov (2004a) suggests more recent Home Office figures reveal little variation in the earlier rates: in 2000, 2% of convicted adult sex offenders were female (Home Office, 2001 cited in Denov, 2004a, p.13).

Synder (2002 cited in Denov, 2004a, p.12) in a statistical report using data from U.S. National Incident-Based Reporting System in 12 States between 1991 to 1996 found 4% of offenders in sexual assaults against children were women.

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (2001 cited in Denov, 2004a, p.13) also reveals that of adults convicted of sexual assault in 2000, 1.5% were female.

Although case report literature reveals low numbers as regards to female sex offenders, it is important to reiterate that case-report data, in particular criminal justice statistics, only reflects those cases that have come into contact with the criminal justice system. These figures do not take into account unreported cases, or reported cases that have not proceeded for various reasons.

### ***Self-report studies***

Allen (1991 cited in Denov, 2004a, p.17) reports that of 75 males and 65 females convicted of sexual offences against children, approximately 36% of the male offenders and 72% female offenders report histories of sexual victimisation in childhood. Forty-five percent of male offenders and 75% of female offenders with prior histories of victimisation report sexual abuse by a female.

Dimock (1988) found that of 25 adult males sexually abused as children, 22 knew their perpetrators. Of the known perpetrators, 7 (28%) were females (4 mothers, 2 sisters and 1 step sister). All men in the study report sexual compulsiveness, masculinity identity confusion and relationship dysfunction as a long term impact of the abuse.

Etherington (1997) reports on 25 adult males who responded to an advertisement for male survivors of child sexual abuse. Findings reveal 52% of the respondents were abused by females, primarily their mothers.

Fromuth and Burkhart (1989) report findings of two samples of male college students. Fifteen per cent of 253 men in the first sample and 13% of the 329 men in the second sample reported sexual abuse in childhood. In the first sample 78% of respondents and 72% of respondent in the second sample reported sexual abuse by a female perpetrator.

Groth's (1979a) study of 384 convicted male rapist and child molesters found that 106 (31%) of these offenders reported histories of child sexual abuse. Of the 106 reporting

victimisation histories, 29 (27%) reported being sexually abused by a female perpetrator and 45 (42%) reported sexual abuse by a male perpetrator. Nine (9%) of the incidents involved a male peer and fifteen (14%) involved a female peer.

Johnson and Shrier's (1987) retrospective study of 25 sexually abused male patients from an adolescent medicine clinic between 1982 and 1984, found 11 (44%) of the victims reported being abused by females in childhood, which suggests sexual abuse by a female is far from being an uncommon experience. The mean age of the female perpetrators was 26 years, with a range of between 16-36 years. The female perpetrators were usually acquaintances of the victim – most often a neighbour, babysitter or older trusted adolescent or adult. The majority of females in this study used persuasion rather than force or threats (10 of 11 cases)

Kendall-Tackett (1987) report, of the 365 adults molested as children entering treatment at the Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Program (San Jose, California), 12 were molested by females (9 biological mothers and 3 female friends of the family). However Kendall-Tackett proposed the relative small numbers of reported female perpetrators in the study possibly related to the lack of differentiation of gender within neutral categories that describe “a family friend “ or “neighbour”. Kendall-Tackett also suggested anecdotal clinical data indicated that for many clients, sexual abuse by a female is more threatening and is only likely to be disclosed once sufficient trust with a therapist was established.

Russell's (1983) study of 930 women over the age of 18 years, interviewed in a random telephone survey in San Francisco, found 152 women reported 186 sexually abusive experiences with different perpetrators. Females perpetrated 4% of the intrafamilial (8 perpetrators) and 4% of extrafamilial (17 perpetrators) child sexual abuse.

### ***Sexual abuse perpetrated in an organisational context***

Faller (1989), in a study of the differences between male and female victims of childhood sexual abuse, reports the largest category of offenders were professionals, including day care workers. Kelley's (1989) study supports this claim reporting 55% of perpetrators in day cares centres were female and 45% were male. Williams and Farrell (1990) also found that females comprised 38% of alleged CSA perpetrators in day-care settings. Cases of female perpetration in day care are more likely to involve sexual abuse of multiple children over time and are less likely to involve single incidents of abuse. Females are also more likely than men to perpetrate acts that involve penetration including the insertion of foreign objects and fingers into the vagina and rectum as well as oral-genital acts (Kelly et al., 1993).

Finkelhor, Williams, and Burns (1988) published the results of a nationwide study of substantiated reports of sexual abuse in day care centres involving 1,639 young child victims. The study of 270 day-care centres provides a large cohort of non-related female perpetrators but may yield results that do not accurately reflect the incidences of female perpetrated CSA in all organisational settings. Day care centres reveal a much higher percentage of female perpetrated CSA than may be found in the general population due to the infrequent presence of men. Of the 382 substantiated CSA perpetrators, the majority 222 (60%) were male and 147 (40%) were female. Findings indicate that women were clearly involved in the abuse of both boys and girls in day care settings (59% of the 293 boys were sexually abused by at least one woman and 50% of the 471 girls were also

sexually abused by a female). The women range in age from 17-77 (median age 35) most were married (63%) and had children of their own (68%). About half the women were director/owners and half were childcare staff or teachers. The majority were educated and had no history of any other deviant behaviour. However, men were still responsible for the majority of the offences even though they represent only 5% of the staff. It is important to note that children in this study were sexually abused both by care giving staff (30%) and by others. These include family members of staff (25%), directors or owners of the day care centres (16%), non-professionals that included teachers aids or volunteers (15%), non child care staff that included janitors and bus drivers (8%) and perpetrators who were complete outsiders to the centres (5%).

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## Australian prevalence rates of females who sexually abuse children

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### ***Australian Data***

In attempting to obtain current figures for women who sexually abuse children in organisations in Australia, data was requested over a 5-year period from three levels of the criminal justice system within each state and territory;

1. Police Corporate Statistics
2. Court Statistics
3. The Department of Corrective Services

A request was made for Police statistics regarding the number of sex offences against children (under 17 years old) reported to police from 2000 to 2004 respectively. The questions asked were:

- How many of the offenders are male and female?
- Of the female offenders how many are adult and how many are juveniles?
- What is the ratio of male and female victims?
- What is the relationship of the offender to the victim?

Requests were also made regarding court statistics and incarcerations with correctional services as to the total number of male and female sex offenders having committed sexual offences against children under the age of 17 years over a five-year period. As certain data collection agencies required payment for data analysis, limitations applied to the scope of this research due to lack of available funding.

### ***Findings***

In the period allocated to data collection, information on female CSA perpetrators from at least one of the three justice systems was obtained from 5 states and 1 territory. Data from police reports and court lodgements regarding female perpetrated CSA required a specific computer search program as this information was not readily available. Officials from one state and one territory either did not respond to requests for data or were unwilling/unable to cooperate. Reasons given for not cooperating were concerns due to policy and privacy constraints or resource and systems limitations.

Following in table 1 is a brief overview of available Australian statistical data. A more detailed analysis was available from some states and this information is provided following table 1.

**Table 1**  
***Results of Available Australian Data of Female Perpetrated Child Sexual Assault***

Female perpetrated CSA over a 5 year period***	Police Reports	Police Charges	Court Statistics	Correctional Services
Australia Capital Territory	-	-	-	-
New South Wales	664**	-	-	11*
Northern Territory	5**	-	3	1
Queensland	-	-	-	-
South Australia	-	40**	22	-
Tasmania	-	4	-	-
Victoria	278**	-	-	5*
Western Australia	-	-	61**	-

\*\*\* As some states and territories either use a calendar year or financial year for counting purposes, some data is counted from 1999 to 2004 financial years whilst other data is counted from 2000 to 2004.

\*\* Includes female adult and juvenile alleged sex offenders who have offended against children.

\* Includes all female sex offenders. What proportion have offended against children is not known.

### **Australian Capital Territory**

*Police Reports* - Not Available

*Court Statistics* - Not available

*Correctional Services* - Not available

### **New South Wales**

#### *Police Reports*

The number of females New South Wales police suspect of having been involved in the commission of a sexual offence for the 5-year period 2000-2004 is 664 (approx 6% of total alleged sex offenders). Of these 195 (29.4%) were juvenile, 383 (57.7%) were adult and 86 (12.6%) were unknown females. Data regarding lone or co-offending behaviour, victim gender and relationship of perpetrator to the victim required a more detailed search.

#### *Court Statistics*

The number of female persons found guilty of a sexual offence against children as their principal offence in New South Wales Local and Higher Courts during the five-year period 1999 to 2003 was 12.

### Correctional Services

Female sex offenders represent approximately 0.4% (11 females) of all incarcerated sex offenders. Data for the 11 incarcerated female sex offenders does not detail the context of the offence or if it occurred against a child or an adult.

Table 2

#### *Incarcerated Sex Offenders by Offence Type and Perpetrator Gender*

Year	<b>Male offender</b> -Serious Sexual Assault	<b>Male offender</b> -Incest Carnal Knowledge	<b>Male offender</b> -Indecent Assault	<b>*Female offender</b> -Serious Sexual Assault	<b>*Female offender</b> -Incest Carnal Knowledge
2004	<b>457</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
2003	<b>451</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>3</b>	
2002	<b>393</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>60</b>	-	
2001	<b>411</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>3</b>	
2000	<b>447</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

\* This table includes all female offenders: Sex offences by female offenders may have occurred against child or adult victim.

## **Northern Territory**

### Police Reports

According to Northern Territory police reports, during the five-year period 2000 to 2004 there were a total number of 532 reported alleged sexual assault offenders. Females accounted for approximately 1% (5) of all reported sexual offences. Of the 5 reported female sex offenders, 2 were juvenile females and 3 were adult females. It is not clear if all sexual offences were against children. Data regarding patterns of lone offending and co-offending behaviour along with victim gender was unavailable.

### Court Statistics

The number of cases lodged in the Northern Territory during the five-year period 2000 to 2004 for selected sexual offences perpetrated by female was 3. All cases implicated female adults.

### Correctional Services

For the five-year period 2000 to 2004, one female adult was incarcerated for sexual offending.

## **Queensland**

Police Reports – Not available

Court Statistics – Not available

Correctional Services – Not available

## **South Australia**

### Police Reports

In South Australia, the number of individuals apprehended for incidents involving sexual offences against children under 17 years old for the 5-year period 2000-2004 was 1,652. Of the alleged offenders, 1,612 were male (1280 adult; 332 juvenile) and 40 (2.4%) were female (24 adult; 16 juvenile). The alleged adult female offenders ranged in age from 20-24 years to 40-49 years with the majority being between 30-39 years old. Of the juveniles, 11 were between 10-14 years old and 5 were between 15-17 years old. Of the 40 alleged female offenders, there was only one juvenile charged in the category of authority figure (Authority Figure in South Australia includes clergyman, employer, doctor/nurse, police officer, teacher/tutor, youth leader).

Twelve sole female juveniles were responsible for sexually offending against 20 different victims, while 4 juvenile females co-offending with an adult male offended against 4 different victims (NB 1 juvenile co-offended with male and offended alone; counted once here). Of the 24 adult females, 16 perpetrated as sole offenders against 22 victims and 8 co-offended with an adult male (and another female in 2 cases) against 10 different victims. Thus, 28 lone females (both adult and juvenile) sexually perpetrated CSA against more victims (42 victims) compared to 12 co-offending females (both adult and juvenile) who abused 14 victims. Data also indicates lone female juveniles in this population abused more female victims (16) than male victims (4); lone adult offenders abused more male victims (18) than female victims (4). Females co-offending with a male adult (including female juveniles) abused more female victims, (10) compared to male victims (3).

Thirty-one females (including female adults and/or juveniles co-offending with partner/s) participated in a single incident (1 victim), 7 females participated in two incidents (2 victims), 1 female adult participated in three incidents (3 victims) and 1 female juvenile participated in 8 incidents (8 victims), one of these being with a male adult co-offender. Data also indicates that sole males and males co-offending with females tend to sexually abuse more victims between the ages of 10-14 years; women tend to sexually abuse slightly more victims between 5-9 years old, followed by victims in the 10-14 age group.

### Court Statistics

The total number for all sexual offences with a female defendant for the five-year period 2000-2004 is 64 (1.83%) of total alleged sexual offenders. Of these, 22 females perpetrated sexual offences against a victim under the age of 17 years old and 10 were found guilty.

### Correctional Services

Not available

## **Tasmania**

### Police Charges

Tasmania only counts cases charged by police with sex offences relating to the Criminal Code Act 1924. There were 4 alleged female sex offenders over a five year period (0.2% of total alleged sex offenders). Two of the cases charged (1 in 2001) and (1 in 2002) were for incidences occurring over 25 years ago. Of the four females, one perpetrated CSA

whilst babysitting and was charged with 7 counts of 'indecent assault', 3 counts of 'aggravated sexual assault' and 5 counts of 'rape'.

Court Statistics - Not available

Correctional Services - Not available

## Victoria

### Police Reports

For the five-year period 30<sup>th</sup> June 2000 - 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 Victorian Police Corporate Statistics detail 11,050 reported cases of sexual abuse against children under the age of 17 years. Of these, 10,772 were male and 278 (2.6%) were female. Of the 278 reported alleged female offenders, 65 were juvenile and 213 were adult. The number of female adults who sexually offended as a sole perpetrator was 136, whilst 83 acted with a co-offender. Of the juvenile female offenders 45 acted as sole offenders and 14 acted with a co-offender. Juvenile females offended against more than double the number of female victims (44) compared to male victims (21), whilst adult females sexually abused only slightly more female (113) than male (98) victims.

Court Statistics - Not available

### Correctional Services

For the five year period 30<sup>th</sup> June 2000 - 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 the number of sentenced female prisoners by most serious offence totalled 6. The data does not indicate if the sexual offence was against a child or an adult.

Table 3

Year	Male offender -Most Serious Offence	* Female offender -Most Serious Offence
2004	357	1
2003	351	-
2002	355	2
2001	351	3
2000	361	-

\* This table includes all female offenders: Sex offences by female offenders may have occurred against child or adult victim.

## Western Australia

Police reports – Not available

### Court Statistics

In Western Australia, the total number of court lodgements for sexual offences against a child for the 5-year period 2000-2004 was 2398. Of these 2284 were male (1954 adult and 330 juvenile), 61 were female (58 adult and 3 juvenile) and 51 were adults of unknown gender. One female adult was charged with 'Indecently Dealing with a Child over 16 Under their Authority' and another was charged with 'Sexually Penetrating a Child over 16 years under their care.

*Correctional Services* - Not available

### ***Limitations of Australian research on the incidence of female offending***

The difficulty in ascertaining accurate national figures for alleged female perpetrators of CSA in each state and territory is related to the variability of the incidence, offence type and levels of reporting across jurisdictions. There is confirmation that the initial processes used by police when a crime is reported varies across jurisdictions, resulting in inconsistent recording of crimes, particularly in the case of sexual assault (National Crime Statistics Unit, 2005). As seen by this report, some jurisdictions usually record a reported criminal incident on their recording system while other jurisdictions apply a form of threshold test prior to a record being made (substantiation or victim proceeding with charges).

In all states and territories, police report data of “How many females have perpetrated sexual offences against children under the age of 17 years old” was not readily available. Victim and offender data is organised separately and coded differently across the different jurisdictions. Accessible data only tends to relate to the total number of female or male perpetrators without distinguishing between offences against a child or adult. It was almost impossible to ascertain the relationships of the female perpetrators to their child victims using existing statistical data. This made it difficult to determine if the sexual abuse was intrafamilial, extrafamilial or if it occurred in an organisational setting.

Police report data was used for the majority of the analysis as it is presumed cases continuing into court have already been counted. Furthermore, court data from the Magistrate and Higher Courts many not provide an accurate portrait of all cases adjudicated as this report did not take into account data from the Children’s Court which may be also be relevant. (For example, one female adult participant in Fitzroy’s (2005) study was convicted in the Victorian Children’s Court in 2004 for perpetrating sexual assault). However, data from police reports, court lodgements, and correctional services confirm numbers of female sexual abuse perpetrators diminish substantially as cases move along in the justice system. Significantly, in Victoria, less than 2% of cases involving female perpetrators of CSA reported to police result in imprisonment as compared to 16.5% of cases involving males (Department of Justice, 2005).

### ***Discussion of Australian findings***

Comprehensive data available from two states (South Australia and Victoria) support findings regarding gender selection of victims. This report found juvenile females in two states tended to abuse significantly more females than males and supports findings from previous studies (Elliot, 1993; Fehrenbach & Monastersky, 1988). Female juveniles in Victoria and South Australia sexually abused more than double the number of female victims as compared to male victims. In Victoria, female juveniles sexually victimised 44 female victims compared to 21 males and in South Australia female juveniles sexually victimised 16 females compared to 4 males.

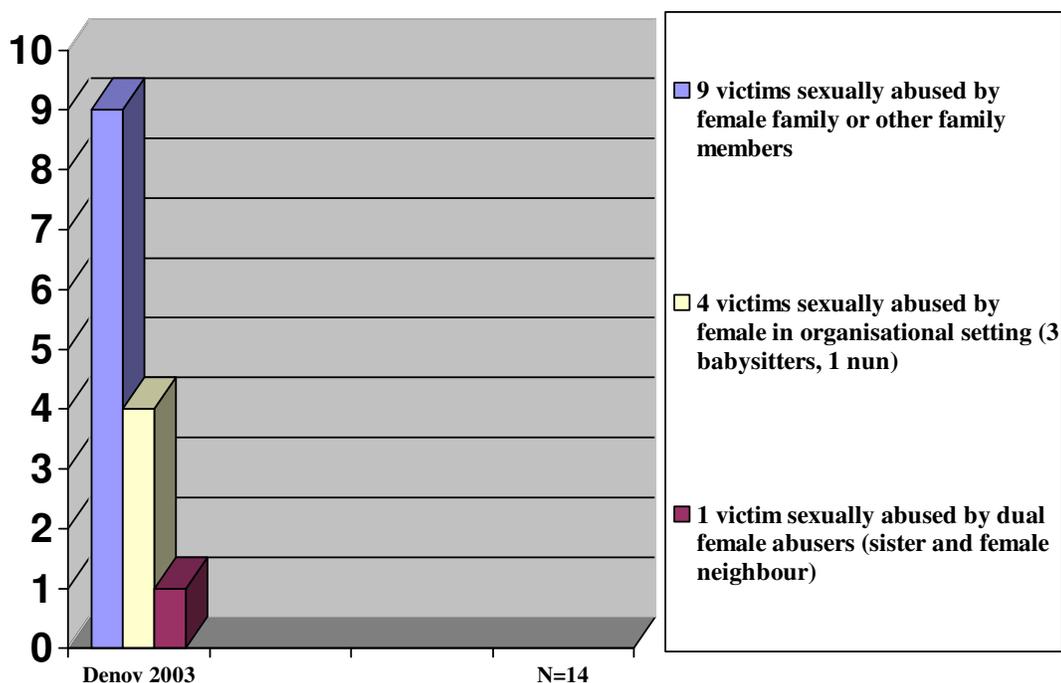
Evidence for adult female offenders however remains conflicting, with Victorian data indicating adult females sexually abuse slightly more female (113) than male (98) victims, while South Australian data reports adult females abused more male (18) than female (4)

victims. Conclusively, both states confirm females can and do perpetrate CSA of their own volition, without coercion and are capable of offending against multiple victims. Of the 40 female offenders in South Australia, 28 lone females (both adult and juvenile) sexually perpetrated CSA against more victims (42 victims) compared with 12 female adults and juveniles acting with co-offenders (13 victims). Of the 278 reported alleged female offenders in Victoria, 136 female adults sexually offended as a sole perpetrator and 83 acted with a co-offender, while 45 juvenile females sexually offended as sole perpetrator and 14 acted with a co-offender.

The incomparability of the Australian data limits the conclusions that can be drawn but findings do support American, British and Canadian studies, providing insight to the extent of reported cases of female perpetrated CSA in the Australian criminal justice system. This study found police reported cases of CSA perpetrated by females range from approximately less than 1% to 6% of all child sexual abuse. As this report is primarily interested in the number of women who perpetrate CSA in an organisational setting, only three states were able to provide some indication of this type of female perpetrated CSA. South Australian data indicated one juvenile was charged in the category of authority figure, in Western Australia 2 female adults were charged with care and authority offences, and in Tasmania one female perpetrated CSA whilst babysitting. As this data is too small to allow for any conclusions this report will next examine some international literature that provides details of victim-offender relationships. This information may begin to offer an estimate as to the number of women who perpetrate CSA in an organisational setting.

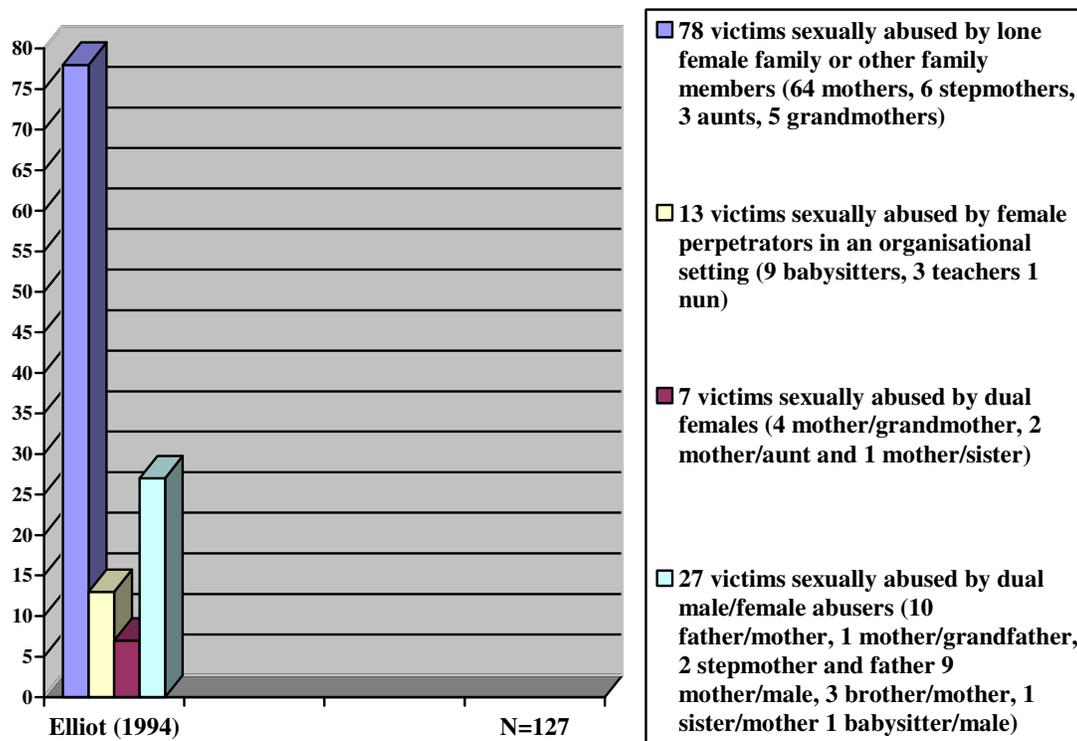
### ***How much female perpetrated CSA in organisations is known?***

Denov's (2003) study of 14 victims of female perpetrated CSA indicates female relatives sexually abused 9 victims (64%) and females not related to the victims sexually abused 4 victims (29%). Of those reporting sexual abuse by a non-related female 3 victims (75%) reported abuse by a female babysitter while one participant reported being abused by a nun at a local church (1 victim was sexually abused by both a sister and a neighbour and was not included in the related or non-related group).



***Figure 1. Denov's (2003) study of 14 victims of lone female perpetrators reveals approximately 28.6% of the female perpetrators in this study sexually abused children in an organisational setting.***

Elliot's (1994) study of 127 survivors (95 female and 27 male) of female perpetrated CSA reports the majority of victims were sexually abused by family members. Of the 95 female children sexually abused by females, 21 victims were abused by dual male/female co-offenders, (10 father/mother co-offenders, 7 mother/male co-offenders, 3 brother/mother co-offenders and 1 sister/mother pair), whilst 6 victims were abused by dual female co-offenders (4 mother/ grandmother and 2 mother/aunt co-offenders). Lone female family members were responsible for abusing 55 victims (42 by mother, 5 by stepmother, 3 by aunt, and 5 by grandmother). Of the 95 female victims, 13 were abused by females in an organisational setting (9 babysitters, 2 teachers and 1 nun).

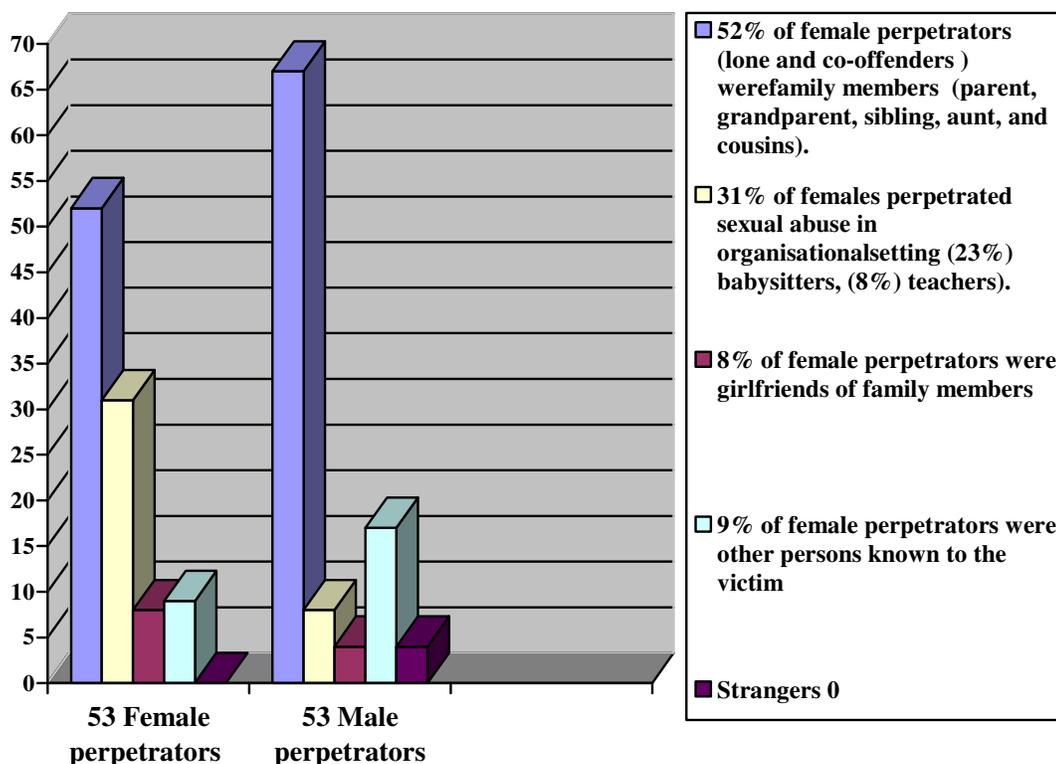


**Figure 2.** Elliot (1994) shows approximately 10% of the 127\* male and female children abused by females in an organisational setting. Elliot's research indicates the majority of female perpetrated CSA is incestuous as approximately 88.1% were female family members (61.4% of the lone female abusers and 26.7 of female co-offenders).

\*Study number for perpetrators does not correlate to the number of victims hence the above numbers add up to 125.

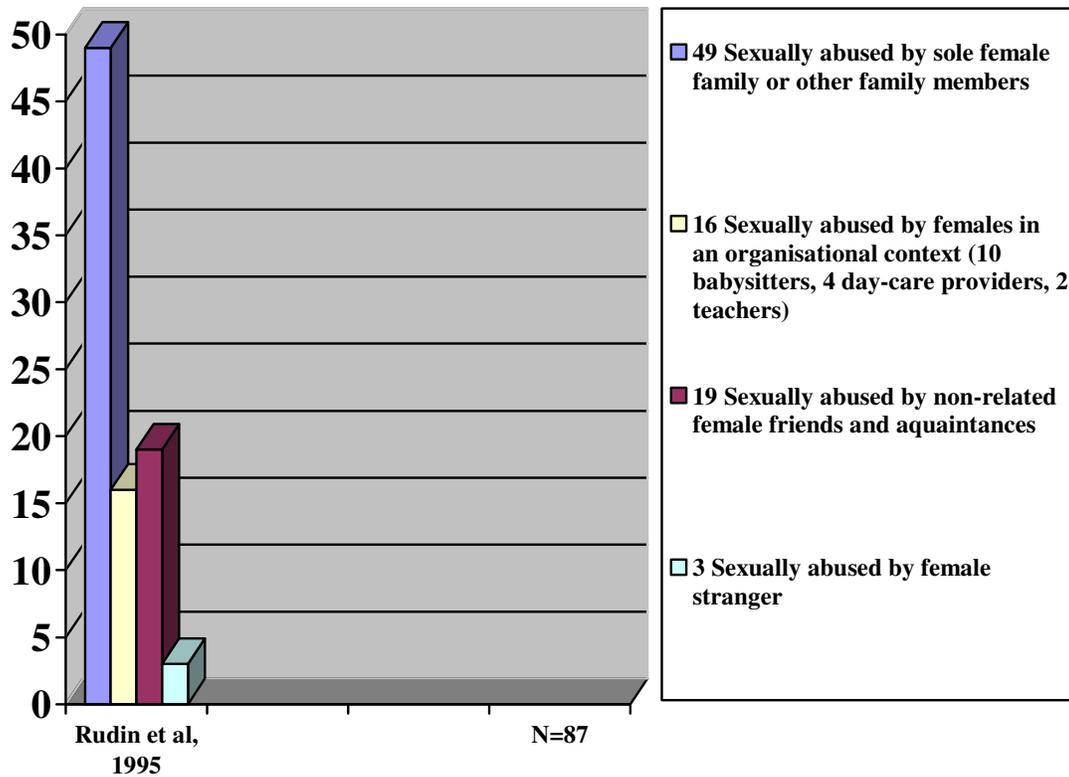
In comparing modus operandi of female and male perpetrators, Kaufman, Wallace, Johnson and Reeder (1995) examined case report data for victims of 53 female and 53 male perpetrators from 1983 to 1988. Findings indicate that although there was little difference regarding the relationship of the male and female offenders to their victims a much higher percentage of female offenders (23%) than males (8%) were babysitters. Furthermore, 8% of the female offenders were also teachers while no male offenders were teachers. Family members accounted for 52% of the female offenders (including mother, stepmother, foster mother, grandmother, sibling, aunt, and cousin), girlfriend (8%), other person known to the victim (9%) and no strangers. This study indicates that 31% of CSA perpetrated by female was in an organisational setting. The female offenders knew all their victims. The mean age for female perpetrators was 24.13 years old.

\*Legend only indicates female perpetrators percentages



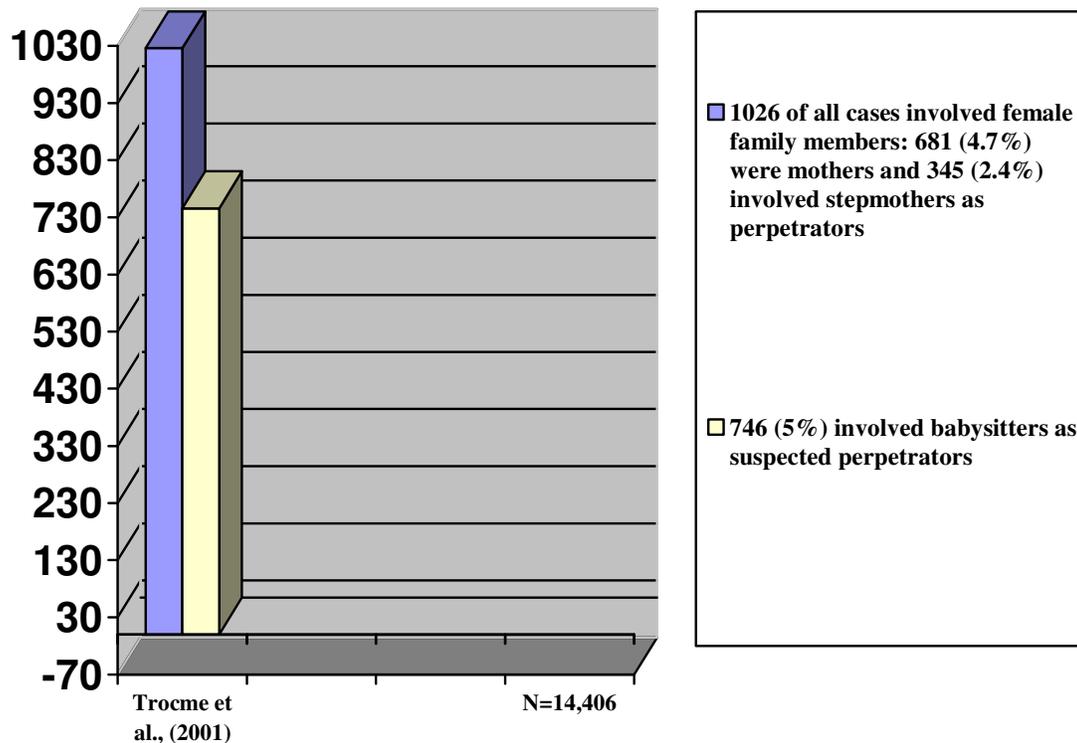
**Figure 3.** Kaufman et al., (1995) study shows 31% of females sexually abused children in an organisational setting. Of the 53 female perpetrators, (23%) were babysitters and (8%) were teachers. Of 53 male perpetrators, only (8%) were babysitters (believed to be husbands of babysitters) and none were teachers. Males did account for (4%) of strangers whilst the victim knew the female perpetrator in all cases.

Rudin, Zalewski, and Bodmer-Turner (1995) conducted a study of 211 victims from the Child Adolescent Sexual Abuse Resource Centre in San Francisco. Of the total, lone female perpetrators (60 adult and 27 juveniles) sexually abused 87 victims and lone male perpetrators were responsible for sexually abusing 93 victims. Of the 87 lone female perpetrators 2 were teachers, 4 were day-care providers and 10 were babysitters. Non-related female friends and acquaintances totalled 19, strangers 3 and the majority 49 were familial (mothers, foster-mother, grandmother, aunts, sisters, cousins, live in partner and stepsisters). Approximately 18.4% of the lone female perpetrators sexually abused children in an organisational setting.



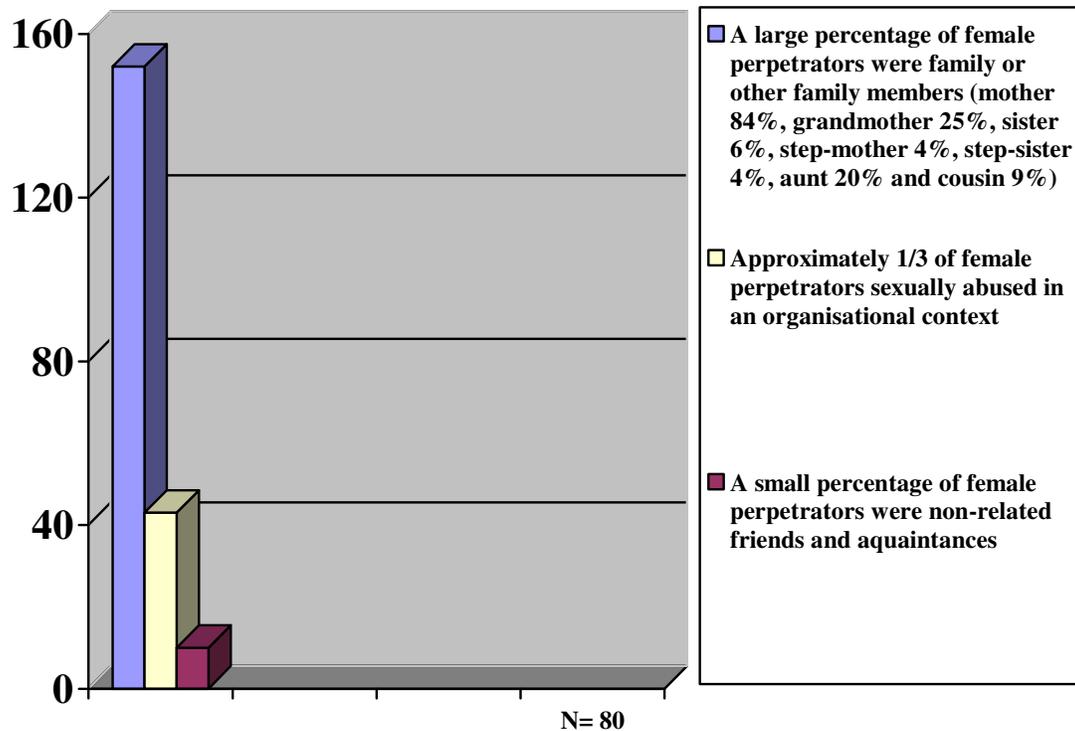
**Figure 4.** Rudin, Zalewski, and Bodmer-Turner (1995) study of 87 victims of sole female perpetrators reports approximately 18.4% (16) of the sole female perpetrators in the study sexually abused children in an organisational setting. Family members accounted for 56.3% (49) while non-related female friends and acquaintances account for 21.8% (19) and strangers accounted for 3.5% (3).

The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect Final Report (Trocmé et al., 2001) reveals that of an estimated 14,406 child sexual abuse cases investigated, 681 (4.7% of all cases reports) involved mothers as the suspected perpetrators. An additional 345 (2.4%) involved stepmothers as the suspected perpetrators and 746 (5%) involved babysitters as the suspected perpetrator. This study also provided the percentage of teachers and other professionals as suspected perpetrators but gender of the perpetrators remained unspecified.



**Figure 2.** The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect Final Report (Trocmé et al., 2001) reveals that of an estimated 14,406 child sexual abuse cases investigated 681 (4.7% of all cases reports) involved mothers and additional 345 (2.4%) involved stepmothers as the suspected perpetrators. 746 (5%) involved babysitters as suspected perpetrators.

Whetsell-Mitchell and Morse (1998) report of 80 survivors of female perpetrated CSA indicates multiple female perpetrators offended against 84% of the victims whilst lone perpetrators accounted for 16%. The vast majority of female CSA perpetrators were intrafamilial but approximately one third of the sexual abuse occurred in an organisational setting. What is significant in this study is the great variety of female perpetrators in an organisational context (e.g. babysitters, nurse/therapist, cult members, teachers, scout leaders, employee of family business, foster mother, minister, nun, optometrist, Sunday school teacher and youth director).



Whetsell-Mithell & Morse (1998) show approximately 1/3 of CSA occurred in an organisational context. The study reveals a great variety of females in different organisational contexts are capable of CSA (14% babysitters, 9% nurse/therapist, 6% cult members, 4% teachers, 3% scout leaders, 1% employee of family business, 1% foster mother, 1% minister, 1% nun, 1% optometrist, 1% Sunday school teacher and 1% youth director).

*\* The data in this study was presented in percentages which includes a large proportion of co-offending; hence total percentage value are more than 100%.*

### **Issues for consideration**

Although by no means exhaustive, the few studies reviewed in this section begin to provide some clues as to the percentage of female perpetrated CSA that occurs in an organisational setting. Results range from 5% (Trocme et al., 2001) to 31% (Kaufman et al, 1995). It must be remembered this is only an estimate due to the lack of significant research available in this area. Any approximations based on previous studies are not conclusive and more research is needed in this area to establish current reliable data.

What is of professional and public concern, as shown in the previous studies, are the findings that the vast majority of organisational sexual abuse by females (as defined by this report) occurs in a babysitting context. Such findings present difficulties in screening procedures for parents who tend to use local adolescents, or friends of friends as babysitters.

### ***Sexual abuse by person of authority***

Another way to explore female CSA in an organisational context is to examine the different legislation across jurisdictions under which a female sex offender may be charged. For example, legislation in some Australian states and territories indirectly recognises the occurrence of abuse in an organisational setting by including sections in the criminal law legislation specifically indicating sexual offences by an “authority figure”. The acknowledgement of sexual abuse by a female authority figure as a social issue was mentioned as early as 1982. Sarrel and Masters (1982) suggested classifying female perpetrated sexual assaults into four groups; 1) forced assault 2) babysitter abuse 3) incestuous abuse; and 4) dominant woman abuse. The recognition of babysitter abuse as a group by Sarrel and Masters begins to stipulate the different positions of authority a female has or is allocated in different childcare environments.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission (2004), recommended the inclusion of a non exhaustive list of authority figures in legislation that educates the community about the types of relationships in which sexual contact is prohibited (including, teacher and student; foster parent or legal guardian; religious instructors; employers; youth workers; sports coaches; counsellors; health professionals). Missing from this list are the more informal relationships such as mentors, nannies and babysitters. However, as this legislation also includes parents, stepparents, adopted parents and their children along with an age threshold for victims (generally around 16), this section is not entirely restricted to sexual abuse in an organisational context, which limits its usefulness in determining this specific sub-group of female sex offenders.

This report found that although many states and territories have included some gender-neutral terminology in sex crime legislation, not all fully recognise the constituent of ‘authority figure’. As the interpretation and definitions of this section of legislation may not be fully comprehended and/or integrated by the general judicial community, authorities reporting and recording females are more likely to record sex offenders into extrafamilial relationship categories rather than in a position of authority. Ideally, all apprehended females who sexually abuse a child (non-related) whilst the child is under their care or tutelage would come under some legislation of this type, thus providing a more accurate portrait of the number of women who sexually abuse children in organisational settings.

This trend towards recognising a position of authority in criminal law legislation nevertheless underscores the element of confusion and intimidation surrounding a child’s experience of being sexually abused by a person in a position of authority, and provides some explanation as to why children often delay or fail to report such abuse (Weiss, 2002). The element of confusion and intimidation is frequently compounded when the authority figure is also a woman.

### ***Conclusions and implications for practice***

To establish prevalence rates of CSA perpetrated by females in an organisational context it is important that authorities and professionals begin to distinguish between extrafamilial CSA and the other different relationships in which CSA can occur (e.g. teachers, foster parents, religious instructors, employers, youth workers, sports coaches, counsellors, health professionals and nannies and/or babysitters). The current interpretation of the legislative definition of ‘position of authority’ and the lack of clear definitions regarding what is meant by “care, supervision and authority” in the various Crime Acts or Criminal Code legislation limits research efforts in identifying specific extrafamilial patterns of CSA.

Statistics from previously reviewed studies indicating victim-offender relationships suggest 5% to 31% of all female perpetrated CSA occurs in organisational contexts; primarily whilst babysitting. Classifying CSA by a female babysitter as organisational abuse begins to bring awareness to the large proportion of female CSA that occurs in paid employment, significantly whilst babysitting. These types of definitions are necessary if accurate data is to be extracted. Specific victim-offender relationship data needs to be gathered from different Australian jurisdictions to educate communities that CSA by female professionals can and does occur in formal and informal children’s organisations.

In some Australian states, there are over fifty different categories of sex crimes according to age, gender of the victim and offence type. For example, in Western Australia, there are approximately 85 categories an offender may be charged under according to offence type and victim gender/age. Only about 26 categories give an indication as to victim-offender relationship. Often, the way charges are recorded and categorised is at the discretion of the reporting authority. How states and territories record victim-offender data will therefore directly affect the availability of this kind of information in the future.

Acknowledging the different contexts in which female perpetrated CSA can occur raises professional and public awareness of the need to protect children. This is crucial as children are encouraged and trained from an early time to obey preschool teachers, camp counsellors, school teachers, coaches, health or welfare workers, sports coaches, clergy, employers and others who stand in a position of custodial authority (Hallberg v. State, cited in Weiss, 2002, p.38). Raising awareness of female perpetrated CSA in organisational contexts will hopefully trigger other initiatives to prevent and ameliorate future incidents of sexual abuse, such as applying rigorous recruitment selection of men and women employed or volunteering to work and care for children.

Under Australian law, an organisation can be held liable for selecting and retaining an employee or volunteer who is incompetent or unfit, or for failing to provide adequate supervision of an employee or volunteer. The organisation may also be held liable for failing to take reasonable steps to prevent abuse. An organisation can prevent child abuse regardless of its size and now has a legal responsibility to conscientiously recruit.

It would be highly beneficial for professionals who are responsible for the care and education of children, to be informed as part of their formal education about the existence of female sex offending. In order that professional training is up to date and effective, it is essential to emphasise the importance of creating an environment where it is safe to talk about any concerns including female perpetrated sexual abuse. Moreover, encouraging

professionals to routinely enquire about female sexual behaviour in the context of their daily practice could facilitate disclosure of unidentified offenders as well as their victims (Denov, 2004a).

Education for children regarding sexual abuse and inappropriate touch must include non-biased attitudes towards gender in the context of personal safety. Children need to know that females are also capable of perpetrating sexual abuse by being informed about what behaviour by adults of either gender constitutes sexual abuse. Such education needs to be undertaken in a sensitive manner. Opening the dialogue in this manner allows victims of female perpetrated CSA to feel acknowledged, encouraged and supported to disclose incidents and provides them with the opportunity to seek professional help should they wish to.

Organisations including Child Wise who are concerned with the rights of children to grow up in a world free from harm or exploitation can use the findings of this report to inform their practice. In addition, this information can be used to inform child protection policy, organisational recruitment, selection and screening procedures. Our aim is to empower adults and children to speak up and report matters of concern regardless of gender issues. Child Wise hopes the findings of this report will stimulate further research into the subject of females who sexually abuse children to enhance child abuse prevention strategies.

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## Recommendations

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### Risk Assessment

- Organisations working with children should implement a formal recruitment and selection procedure, which investigates and screens all female and male volunteers, staff and casual workers. Screening procedures should not rely on police checks but rather endorse a broad range of background information, including signs of emotional problems, substance abuse, criminal behaviour, poor judgement and insensitivity and punitiveness towards children.

### Policies

- The implementation of child safe policies within organisations to minimise risk to children must be gender neutral, acknowledging both males and females can and do perpetrate CSA.

### Uniform data collection system

- To enhance research and a better understanding of female perpetrated CSA it is imperative that agreed definitions, counting rules and uniform data collection methods are implemented in Australia and overseas.

### Legislation

- National legislation with agreed purposes, definitions and principles will enhance consistency and stability to legal responses to CSA regardless of perpetrator gender.

### ***Sexual abuse prevention***

#### Education

- A national parent education strategy must be implemented to ensure parents are aware of the potential risks posed by some females and males in various childcare settings, children's programs and activities. Parents using babysitting services either professional or otherwise need to be aware that female babysitters are capable of perpetrating CSA. Moreover, educating parents provides the possibility of early detection and intervention in case their child is already a victim of sexual abuse.
- Sexual abuse prevention programs should be gender neutral, acknowledging the possibility that both men and women are capable of perpetrating CSA. This information must be provided in a sensitive and empowering manner aimed at encouraging children to take action and speak up if they need to. Children need education on healthy touching and whom they can talk to if they feel uncomfortable.
- It is important that the public, including professionals, staff, volunteers and community members working with children need to be sensitised to the possibility of sexual abuse being perpetrated by females and potential contexts in which it occurs.

- Community awareness and education is imperative to provide therapeutic services to both victims and perpetrators. Resources and support need to be made available also to professionals who come in contact with female perpetrators and their victims. Victims of female perpetrators may feel more secure in coming forward to disclose sexual abuse if they feel the community at large takes this issue seriously.

***Support Services***

- A therapeutic response is required for a woman who feels they are at risk of perpetrating CSA.

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