

The Primary Prevention of Female Sexual Offending: Current Opportunities

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Abstract

A public health approach to the primary prevention of sexual offending has generated positive outcomes. Recent campaigns have challenged societal stereotypes of sexual offenders; changed organizational policies and increased public knowledge. However, primary prevention has largely been missing for female sexual offenders. This is because female sexual abuse has generated much less attention than its male equivalent. To introduce relevant context, this article initially presents a short literature review. This aims to critically explore the extent of the issue and what motivates relevant women. Typologies are then applied to introduce the distinctions between solo offenders and co-offenders. This distinction is utilized to consider how primary prevention could address female sexual offending. Two key themes emerge in terms of societal stereotypes and key offending spaces. The current evidence highlights the need to challenge societal norms, which minimize women's propensity to commit sexual offences. It also appears significant to challenge stereotypes, which glorify attractive women who sexually abuse adolescent males. The opportunities within institutional spaces and the domestic setting are also considered, with deliberation to targeting relevant professionals and guardians in future primary prevention efforts.

Keywords

Child sexual abuse, female sexual offending, social constructions, primary prevention, gender and crime, solo offenders, co-offenders

Introduction

The primary prevention of sexual offending has long been an underused strategy in reducing rates of sexual crime. Primary prevention aims to prevent abuse before it

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occurs, ideally using a wide-scale public health approach.² A public health approach means that the risks concerning specific types of offending are clearly defined and widely shared. This approach, therefore, needs to involve the general public and be practical in its approach, for example by considering how environments can be modified to prevent sexual abuse.³ High-profile cases (e.g. Jimmy Saville) have led to some primary prevention efforts, which have resulted in a greater level of social understanding about some types of sexual abuse.⁴ Some campaigns have sought for instance to address the inaccurate stereotype of stranger danger in sexual offending, by introducing an accurate profile of typical abusers instead.⁵ However, primary prevention is especially lacking for sexual abuse perpetrated by women.

Female sexual offenders (FSOs) have generated less attention than male perpetrators. This is in part due to the criminal justice system's male-dominated perception of sexual abuse. For example, the legal definition of rape in England and Wales concerns 'penile penetration' (Sexual Offences Act, 2003), implying that solely males can be responsible for rape. There has been emerging public concern about this current legal definition⁶ which may suggest changing societal attitudes towards female sexual offending.

Societal stereotypes and social constructions are equally relevant to the lack of attention given to FSOs. Firstly, the sexual abuse of adolescent males by women had been stereotyped as both positive and harmless.⁷ Added to this, there is some societal disbelief that women commit sexual offences against children. This can be attributed to the conventional female nurturing role, which is a social construct deeply embedded in Western society.⁸

This article will contextualize female sexual offending by exploring its prevalence, recidivism rates and motivations. The distinction between co- and solo offenders will then be utilized to highlight opportunities for primary prevention. This distinction highlights the significance of specific spaces to female sexual offending. The dynamics and risks of child sexual abuse are already known to differ between virtual, institutional, public and domestic settings.⁹ This means that primary prevention needs to address specific settings that are most relevant to female sexual abusers.

² D. R. Laws, *Sexual Offending as a Public Health Problem: A North American Perspective*, 5 J SEXUAL AGGRESSION 30–44 (2000).

³ P. Goodyear-Brown, HANDBOOK OF SEXUAL ABUSE, IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT (2012).

⁴ K. F. McCartan et al., *The Construction of Community Understandings of Sexual Violence: Rethinking Public, Practitioner And Policy Discourses*, 21 J SEXUAL AGGRESSION 100–116 (2015).

⁵ J. Pearce, *Consultation with Experts on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children* (Council of Europe Report, 10–11 December 2009), available at https://uobrep.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10547/315162/ReportSexualAbuse_En_1_.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁶ UK Government and Parliament, *Change the Sexual Offences Act so Women Can Be Charged with Rape Against Males* (Petitions, 2020), Available at <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/300270>.

⁷ P. Bradbury & E. Martellozzo, 'Lucky Boy!'; *Public Perceptions of Child Sexual Offending Committed by Women*, J VICTIMOL VICTIM JUSTICE (2021).

⁸ F. Cortoni, et al., *The Proportion of Sexual Offenders Who Are Female Is Higher Than Thought: A Meta-Analysis*, 44 CRIMINAL JUSTICE BEHAVIOR 145–162 (2017).

⁹ S. Smallbone & N. McKillop. *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: A Place Based Approach*, in *THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN: RECOGNITION AND REDRESS* 61–77 (M. Finnane & Y. Smaal eds., 2016).

Prevalence of Female Sexual Offending

FSOs represent a small amount of all sexual offenders. The largest available meta-analysis of 17 samples, taken from 12 countries, suggests around 2% of sexual offences reported to Police are perpetrated by women. However, the proportion of alleged FSOs is actually argued to rise to 12% in victimization data.¹⁰ In further contradiction to official statistics, NSPCC research indicates that FSOs are responsible for up to 5% of all sexual offences committed against children in England and Wales.¹¹ This disparity between official statistics and victim data is endemic within the field of sexual offending. It is often a cause of the underreporting of sexual crime to official sources, which occurs for a variety of valid reasons. It is likely that the societal minimization of female sexual offending affects the reporting rates of relevant offences. Despite underreporting, research has highlighted key characteristics of FSOs.

FSO Characteristics

Several studies have confirmed that FSOs are more likely to have suffered adversity and abuse in their childhood, which leads to dysfunction and vulnerability in their later lives.¹² A significant number of FSOs report a history of sexual abuse and parental neglect/trauma during childhood.¹³ These abusive early life experiences result in adult lives characterized by substance abuse, mental health concerns,¹⁴ abusive intimate relationships, social isolation¹⁵ and a lower socio-economic status.¹⁶ Experiences of trauma are also prevalent for male sexual offenders. However, these are even more significant for FSOs.¹⁷

In terms of re-offending, male sexual offenders are evidenced as having five-year sexual recidivism rates of roughly 10%–15%.¹⁸ This is much lower for FSOs, at rates suggested to be approximately 1%–3%.¹⁹ This contrast in recidivism rates suggests that women have different needs and motivations associated with sexual offending. Primary prevention should, therefore, take a gender-specific approach to sexual offending. It is widely accepted that a majority of male sexual offenders

¹⁰ *Supra* note 7.

¹¹ L. Bunting, *Females Who Sexually Offend Against Children: Responses of the Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems* (NSPCC, 2005).

¹² J. S. Levenson et al., *Adverse Childhood Experiences in the Lives of Female Sex Offenders*, 27 *SEX ABUSE* 258–83 (2015).

¹³ Ian A. Elliott et al., *Exploring Risk: Potential Static, Dynamic, Protective and Treatment Factors in the Clinical Histories of Female Sex Offenders*, 25 *J FAMILY VIOL* 595–602 (2010).

¹⁴ M.H. Colson et al., *Female sex offenders: A challenge to certain paradigms. Meta-analysis*, 22 *SEXOLOGIES* 109–117 (2013).

¹⁵ *Supra* note 12.

¹⁶ Pamela Nathan & Tony Ward, *Female Sex Offenders: Clinical and Demographic Features*, 8 *J SEXUAL AGGRESSION* 5–21 (2002).

¹⁷ *Supra* note 13.

¹⁸ R. Hanson & M. T. Bussière, *Predicting Relapse: A Meta-Analysis of Sexual Offender Recidivism Studies*. 66 *J CONSULT CLIN PSY* 348–62. (1998).

¹⁹ *Supra* note 7.

are motivated by their sexual needs and desires.²⁰ This is not as clear for FSOs and continues to be widely debated.

Sexual Motivation

Several studies have identified the presence of sexual motivation for some FSOs.²¹ However, there are other primary motivations for relevant women. Some FSOs are strongly motivated by their emotional needs²²; a desire for intimacy²³ and seeking to establish power.²⁴ Crucially, sexual motivation appears to be affected by whether the FSO offends alone. Matthews et al.'s typology²⁵ separated solo offenders and FSOs with male co-offenders (co-offenders), which has led to the consideration of these two key groupings. Some FSOs commit offences in groups²⁶; however, there is not a large enough research base to consider prevention in this area.

The use of typologies has allowed for more information to be collated about the types of offences and victims most significant in female sexual offending. However, this article does not seek to suggest FSOs can be neatly fitted into categories as they can deviate from offending profiles and motivations within their category.²⁷ A recent meta-analysis of 86 studies confirms that FSOs are a heterogeneous group.²⁸ However, typologies are useful in considering potential focuses for primary prevention.

FSO Typologies

Matthews et al.²⁹ undertook qualitative interviews with 16 FSOs and created two accepted typologies for solo offenders. Their *Intergenerationally Predisposed Offender* had experienced sexual abuse within their family, construed sex as a part of love and abused familial victims. The *teacher/lover* formed a sexual relationship

²⁰ M. C. Seto, *The Motivation-Facilitation Model of Sexual Offending*, 31 *SEX ABUSE* 3–24 (2019).

²¹ A. R. Beech et al., *Assessing Female Sexual Offenders' Motivations and Cognitions: An Exploratory Study*, 15 *J SEXUAL AGGRESSION* 201–16 (2009).

²² K. L. Kaufman et al., *Comparing Female and Male Perpetrators' Modus Operandi: Victims' Reports of Sexual Abuse*, 10 *J INTERPERS VIOLENCE* 322–33 (1995).

²³ D. M. Vandiver & G. Kercher, *Offender and Victim Characteristics of Registered Female Sexual Offenders in Texas: A Proposed Typology of Female Sexual Offenders*, 16 *SEX ABUSE* 121–37 (2004).

²⁴ *Supra* note 15.

²⁵ J. L. Matthews et al., *Female Sexual Offenders: A Typology*, in *FEMALE SEXUAL ABUSE: FRONTLINE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION* 199–219 (M. Q. Patton ed., 1991).

²⁶ K. M. Budd et al., *Deconstructing Incidents of Female Perpetrated Sex Crimes: Comparing Female Sexual Offender Groupings*, 29 *SEX ABUSE* 267–90 (2017).

²⁷ G. Robertiello & K. J. Terry, *Can We Profile Sex Offenders? A Review of Sex Offender Typologies*, 12 *AGGRESS VIOLENT BEHAV* 508–18 (2007).

²⁸ S. Augarde & M. Rydon-Grange, *Female Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse: A Review of the Clinical and Empirical Literature – A 20-year Update*, 62 *AGGRESS VIOLENT BEHAV* (2022).

²⁹ *Supra* note 24.

with an adolescent male, which they interpreted as consensual and equal.³⁰ Vandiver and Kercher's³¹ examination of data concerning 471 FSOs extended this typology to involve other mentoring and care-taking roles. It is therefore suggested that solo FSOs either offend to fulfil their own sexual needs³² or as part of re-enacting previous sexual abuse.³³ The largest available meta-analysis suggests that solo offenders represent approximately two thirds of the FSO population.³⁴ Solo FSOs tend to be younger³⁵ and perpetrate sexual offences against predominantly male victims.³⁶

In contrast, co-offenders typically abuse female victims. These are most commonly a familial relation or their own child(ren).³⁷ Their victim profile is arguably influenced by the male co-offender and their sexual needs.³⁸ This is because a significant amount of co-offenders' relationships feature domestic abuse³⁹ which can also involve grooming of the younger female co-offender.⁴⁰ This reflects Matthew et al.'s⁴¹ typology relevant to co-offending: the *male-coerced offender*. This characterized an FSO who passively engaged in sexual offending to fulfil her intimate partner's demands.

However, coercion is not the sole explanation or motivating factor, for co-offenders. Nathan and Ward⁴² created an additional typology of *male accompanied: the rejected/revengeful* when they found significant levels of revenge-seeking and jealousy in their small sample. Further complications have arisen with coercion, because some coerced co-offenders have sexual motivations of their own.⁴³ Thereafter, co-offenders are now separated into those who are *coerced*, and those who are *accompanied* by their male counterparts.

In exploring solo and co-offenders, there appear to be two main typologies for both types of FSO. This article will now consider these further, in order to consider the primary prevention approaches which could benefit these.

³⁰ *Supra* note 24.

³¹ *Supra* note 22.

³² *Supra* note 12.

³³ *Supra* note 24.

³⁴ *Supra* note 13.

³⁵ H. A. Miller & E. A. Marshall, *Comparing Solo- and Co-Offending Female Sex Offenders on Variables of Pathology, Offense Characteristics, and Recidivism*, 31 *SEX ABUSE* 972–90 (2019).

³⁶ T ten Bensel et al., *Female Sex Offenders: Is There a Difference Between Solo and Co-Offenders?* 34 *J INTERPERS VIOLENCE* 4061–84 (2019).

³⁷ R. Majeed-Ariss et al., *Descriptive Analysis of the Context of Child Sexual Abuse Reportedly Perpetrated by Female Suspects: Insights from Saint Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre*, 78 *J FORENSIC LEG MED* 102112 (2021).

³⁸ R. Williams et al., *Characteristics of Female Solo and Female Co-Offenders and Male Solo Sexual Offenders Against Children*, 31 *SEX ABUSE* 151–72 (2019).

³⁹ J. Saradijan & H. G. Hanks, *WOMEN WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE CHILDREN: FROM RESEARCH TO CLINICAL PRACTICE* (1996).

⁴⁰ M. Wijkman et al., *Female Sex Offenders: Specialists, Generalists and Once-Only Offenders*, 17 *J SEXUAL AGGRESSION* 34–45 (2011).

⁴¹ *Supra* note 24.

⁴² *Supra* note 15.

⁴³ A. R. Beech et al., *Assessing Female Sexual Offenders' Motivations and Cognitions: An Exploratory Study*, 15 *J SEXUAL AGGRESSION* 201–16 (2009).

Primary Prevention: Solo Offenders

Solo offenders who sexually offend against adolescent males typically do so within positions of trust. The *teacher/lover* may use grooming activities which are setting specific such as awarding better grades.⁴⁴ They are also likely to facilitate abusive relationships using social media (Darling et al., 2018).⁴⁵ Therefore, the *teacher/lover* typology has explicit implications on safety. However, societal stereotypes of adolescent male sexuality are an immediate barrier to prevention efforts.⁴⁶ These characterize them as having a high sex drive, for example. Therein, adolescent male victims of the *teacher/lover* can be perceived as being a 'lucky boy',⁴⁷ who has benefitted from sexual contact with an older woman. This continued glorification of sexual abuse perpetrated by women towards adolescent boys is of concern.⁴⁸ It has repercussions on feelings of shame; recovery from trauma and victims' perceived ability to report offences to police.⁴⁹

Unless the severity of this type of sexual abuse is recognized, there are clear implications for former and future victims. Society has generally begun to confront stereotypes of masculinity that are understood to be problematic in several ways.⁵⁰ This dialogue is beginning to have an effect in acknowledging male victimization. In fact, the violence against women policy in England and Wales has highlighted the male experience of victimization in various contexts, including sexual abuse.⁵¹ However, recent research suggests that the minimization of sexual offending remains especially pertinent in the cases of attractive *teacher/lovers*. Bradbury and Martellozzo⁵² suggest that reporting of these crimes are sexualized, reinforcing the glorification of adolescent males being abused by attractive women in positions of trust. Thus, there is a clear opportunity to utilize primary prevention to challenge this continuing dialogue, as part of a public health campaign.

In terms of targeting primary prevention for the potential *teacher/lover*, the spaces, themselves, are also significant. Relevant women offend within educational institutions, child-centred organizations and the like.⁵³ These types of

⁴⁴ M. Steely & T ten Bensel, *Child Sexual Abuse Within Educational Settings: A Qualitative Study on Female Teachers Who Sexually Abuse Their Students*, 41 *DEVIANT BEHAVIOR* 1440–53 (2020).

⁴⁵ A. J. Darling, et al., *Female Sex Offenders Who Abuse Children Whilst Working in Organisational Contexts: Offending, Conviction and Sentencing*, 24 *J SEXUAL AGGRESSION* 196–214 (2018).

⁴⁶ C. Hasset-Walker et al., *Do Female Sex Offenders Receive Preferential Treatment in Criminal Charging and Sentencing?* 35 *JUSTICE SYSTEM J* 62–86 (2014).

⁴⁷ *Supra* note 6.

⁴⁸ B. E. Oliver, *Preventing Female-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse*, 8 *TRAUMA VIOLENCE ABUSE* 19–32 (2007).

⁴⁹ *Supra* note 6.

⁵⁰ I. Borinca et al., *Men's Discomfort and Anticipated Sexual Misclassification Due to Counter-Stereotypical Behaviors: The Interplay between Traditional Masculinity Norms and Perceived Men's Feminization*, 85 *SEX ROLES* 128–41 (2021).

⁵¹ HM Government, *Position Statement on Male Victims of Crimes Considered in the Cross-Government Strategy on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)* (2019), available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/783996/Male_Victims_Position_Paper_Web_Accessible.pdf.

⁵² *Supra* note 6.

⁵³ *Supra* note 22.

settings can enable sexual abuse when female adults are able to provide additional support, which is often unmonitored.⁵⁴ These additional roles appear to be primarily given to women because of societal beliefs about the female nurturing role. Thus, women are perceived as posing less of a risk in institutional spaces.⁵⁵

It is significant that these spaces have been confronted in recent years by prevention efforts, following the significant implications of historic allegations of child abuse during the previous decade.⁵⁶ Relevant primary prevention campaigns have had an impact in challenging societal views, increasing public knowledge and changing organizational policies. For example, large youth serving organizations have implemented clearer sexual abuse prevention policies and staff training.⁵⁷

However, primary prevention needs to address the missing dialogue around the risks of sexual abuse committed by women in these spaces. In reviewing some of the policy implemented in large-scale organizations, these are very gender-neutral in their approach (e.g. the Catholic Church and the Scouts). This is unsurprising given societal minimization about women's propensity to commit sexual offences.⁵⁸ This has been evidenced in a recent study regarding perceptions of male and female school teachers. Christensen and Darling⁵⁹ identified 'gender blindness' in their study, wherein male teachers received significantly more warnings for inappropriate behaviour towards students. This demonstrates the implications of societal views which minimize the female capacity to engage in child sexual abuse on relevant professionals.

Schools, especially, would be a sensible target for further education and training on signs of female teacher–student abuse and appropriate intervention.⁶⁰ There is a small but distinct evidence base on the signs of inappropriate female teacher-to-student relations, which could be utilized to inform training and policy.⁶¹ This seems pertinent given that Darling and Hackett⁶² have raised concerns about the organizational culture and policies in their study of 136 *teacher/lovers* in Canada, the UK and the USA. Tailored training and education could thereafter be offered to any child-centred institution or organization.

The other typology of solo offending concerns the *Intergenerationally Predisposed Offender*.⁶³ However, the literature is especially limited on this typology despite its clear implications on safety in domestic spaces. This theme will instead be considered using co-offenders. The FSO research base is further developed regarding co-offenders, because a significant amount of studies have involved a larger proportion of them.

⁵⁴ *Supra* note 44.

⁵⁵ A. J. Darling & S. Hackett, *Situational Factors in Female-Perpetrated Child Sexual Abuse in Organisations: Implications for Prevention*, 26 J SEXUAL AGGRESSION 5–22 (2020).

⁵⁶ NSPCC, *Protecting Children from Abuse by Someone in a Position of Trust or Authority* (2021), available at <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/briefings/preventing-abuse-positions-of-trust>.

⁵⁷ *Supra* note 3.

⁵⁸ *Supra* note 7.

⁵⁹ L. S. Christensen & A. J. Darling, *Sexual Abuse by Educators: A Comparison Between Male and Female Teachers Who Sexually Abuse Students*, 26 J SEXUAL AGGRESSION 23–35 (2020).

⁶⁰ *Supra* note 46.

⁶¹ *Supra* notes 43, 44 and 54.

⁶² *Supra* note 54.

⁶³ *Supra* note 24.

Primary Prevention: Co-offenders

Child sexual abuse is generally committed by known perpetrators.⁶⁴ Co-offenders are no exception to this, given that their victim profile primarily concerns known female children. Significantly, this type of abuse often occurs in the domestic setting. Snyder⁶⁵ considered approximately 60,000 victims of child sexual abuse, and found that 69% of victims aged 12 to 17 were abused in the home. Of note, that this increased for victims under the age of 12, to 84%. This emphasizes the importance and relevance of safety in domestic spaces to the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Domestic settings are particularly conducive to longer-term child sexual abuse. This is because they are private spaces with less outside scrutiny.⁶⁶ Moreover, the complexity of domestic life can make it more difficult to distinguish illegitimate caregiving behaviours, such as bathing. However, there is also a clear prevention opportunity because domestic settings are characterized by a number of potential guardians.

The routine activity approach suggests that a guardian is any person that discourages crime taking place.⁶⁷ However, Fassler et al.⁶⁸ found that having other adults in the home was not necessarily a protective factor. This finding has a multitude of potential reasons. For instance, potential guardians are not always able to actively supervise children due to other domestic or individual duties.⁶⁹ Moreover, guardians may have been groomed by relevant perpetrators.⁷⁰ Fear is a highly relevant factor in the context of FSOs, given *coerced* co-offenders are often in relationships characterized by domestic abuse.⁷¹ The threats and fear associated with such relationships could also arguably impact on other guardians in domestic settings e.g. older siblings.

Given the above, the definition of guardianship has been expanded. Reynald⁷² suggests that a guardian's role is being present but also capable of preventing crime. However, capability arguably relies on knowledge, thus the expectation of capability has been further reviewed. McKillop et al.⁷³ extended this to include

⁶⁴ S. Smallbone. & R. Wortley (2001). *Child Sexual Abuse: Offender Characteristics and Modus Operandi* (Trends in Crime and Criminal Justice Australian Institute of Criminology, 2001), available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.367.7742&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

⁶⁵ H. N. Snyder, *Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics* (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000) available at <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/sexual-assault-young-children-reported-law-enforcement-victim-incident-and>.

⁶⁶ N. McKillop et al., *(Re)Conceptualizing the Role of Guardianship in Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in the Home*, 23 CRIME PREV COMMUNITY SAF 1–18 (2021).

⁶⁷ L. E. Cohen & M. Felson, *Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach*, 44 AM SOCIOL REV 588–608 (1979).

⁶⁸ I. R. Fassler et al., *Predicting Long-Term Outcomes for Women Sexually Abused in Childhood: Contribution of Abuse Severity Versus Family Environment*. 29 CHILD ABUSE NEGL 269–84 (2005).

⁶⁹ B. Leclerc et al., *Prevention Nearby: The Influence of the Presence of a Potential Guardian on the Severity of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27 SEX ABUSE 189–204 (2015).

⁷⁰ *Supra* note 67.

⁷¹ *Supra* note 12.

⁷² D. M. Reynald, *Guardianship*, in THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMINOLOGY 716–31 (G. J. N. Bruinsma & S. D. Johnson eds., 2017).

⁷³ *Supra* note 65.

confidence *within* the guardian's own capability. This appears highly relevant to overcoming fear for all potential guardians in a *co-offender's* home characterized by domestic abuse.

The role of guardians in preventing sexual abuse in domestic settings cannot be underemphasized. Leclerc et al.⁷⁴ found that the presence of a guardian reduced the risk of child sexual abuse in the home by 86%. This is significant and perhaps surprising, given the lack of easily accessible information on signs of abuse and intervention regarding suspected child sexual abuse in the home.⁷⁵ However, this study did not consider FSOs. The same results would not be anticipated given the lack of dialogue about women who perpetrate sexual abuse in the domestic setting. In order to have both confidence and capability, guardians need to have knowledge. This reinforces the importance of primary prevention which targets societal disbelief about FSOs, and strongly suggests potential guardians need to be a key part of its target audience.

Potential guardians have been largely ignored in the primary prevention of child sexual abuse.⁷⁶ Prevention efforts have become more aware of this as an opportunity,⁷⁷ which has led to some organizations sharing preventative information. However, where these do exist they are gender-neutral (e.g. Stop it Now!). This article has already demonstrated that FSOs are different to their male counterparts, so distinct knowledge is needed in the public domain to give potential guardians confidence and capability. This could commence using a dialogue targeted at guardians about women's potential to co-offend in the home—both as *accompanied* and *coerced* offenders. Given the findings about solo offenders, generally raising the profile of both female and male sexual abusers is overall likely to increase awareness and support prevention.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Public knowledge about FSOs is lacking. This has resulted in the maintained glorification and minimization of female-perpetrated sexual abuse. This article has therefore argued for the need for primary prevention efforts to distinctly address sexual abuse perpetrated by women. There is a missing public dialogue about FSOs,⁷⁹ despite this becoming increasingly established about men who commit sexual abuse. It is important to highlight that the gender-specific prevention of sexual abuse requires knowledge about relevant risk and protective factors.⁸⁰ This is an important reason for the evidence base on FSOs to continue to expand.

It has been demonstrated that women perpetrate proportionately significantly less sexual abuse than men. They also have lower rates of recidivism. It is

⁷⁴ *Supra* note 68.

⁷⁵ *Supra* note 68.

⁷⁶ J. Rudolph et al., *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Opportunities: Parenting, Programs, and the Reduction of Risk*, 23 *CHILD MALTREAT* 96–106 (2018).

⁷⁷ *Supra* note 3.

⁷⁸ *Supra* note 54.

⁷⁹ *Supra* note 47.

⁸⁰ S. Smallbone et al., *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse. Evidence, Policy and Practice* (2014).

extremely important to raise public awareness about FSOs, not least to prevent future victims. However, primary prevention efforts need to be proportionate and balanced in their approach.⁸¹ Thus, primary prevention efforts could initially address the existing dialogue because this is not gender-specific. They could highlight the potential for women in positions of trust to commit sexual offences against adolescent males, and their possible role as co-offenders within the home.

This article contends that primary prevention should prioritize relevant spaces for FSOs, including institutions (e.g. schools) and the domestic setting. This could include the distinct acknowledgement of FSOs in existing policies but also specific training opportunities for relevant professionals. Moreover, this article has argued that guardians should also be targeted in prevention efforts. They appear to be inherently important in navigating the complex domestic setting to prevent child sexual abuse.⁸²

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⁸¹ *Supra* note 54.

⁸² *Supra* note 65.