

Institution: The University of Huddersfield
Unit of Assessment: 22 Social Work and Social Policy
Title of case study: Child Sexual Abuse in the Caribbean: Critical Theory, Research, Policy and Practice
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research by the University of Huddersfield's Centre for Applied Childhood Studies (CACS) carried out between 2008-2009 has played a major role in tackling the problem of child sex abuse in the Caribbean. A study we have undertaken which UNICEF described as a "landmark" in the field has led to government acknowledgement of the problem, growing public awareness of its effects, new policies, legislative reform, innovative child protection programmes and improvements in the capabilities of professionals and agencies. The research is also helping to shape responses to child sexual abuse in other parts of the world.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The case study fits into the Institute for Research in Citizenship and Applied Human Sciences research area of Child Protection, Vulnerable Children and Families (see REF5). It exemplifies impact derived from communicating the multiple perspectives of stakeholders in ways which support issue resolution by promoting better mutual stakeholder understanding, and offering policymakers research-based analyses which they use to drive policies (see REF3a).</p> <p>Although a global problem, child sexual abuse is under-researched in poor and middle-income nations. Policy in these countries often follows trends set in the West where child protection systems tend to be narrow in remit, focussing more on surveillance than on prevention; are costly to administer; and can lack cultural relevance for other societies. As well as leading to a wide range of psychopathologies, child sexual abuse contributes to the region's status as having the second highest global prevalence rates of HIV and teenage pregnancy and high levels of family and community violence. Jones, at the University of Huddersfield's Centre for Applied Childhood Studies, has taken a different and original approach to investigating the issue. Moving away from an assumption of definitional consensus, she instead examined how child sexual abuse is linked to social constructions of childhood and to context-specific gendered and sexualised behaviours. Jones was the key researcher for the underpinning study^a which examined the social and cultural dynamics of child sexual abuse in six Caribbean countries: Anguilla, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat and St Kitts & Nevis. The research was commissioned by UNICEF and partially funded by the Department for International Development, with grants totalling £275,000 paid to the University of Huddersfield.</p> <p>The research showed how child sexual abuse, an extensive problem in all six countries, is not only about individual behaviours but is underpinned by a complex interplay of sociocultural, structural and economic factors which are at the same time historical, contemporary and intergenerational. Three main types of child sexual abuse were documented: intra-familial abuse, non-family abuse and transactional sexual abuse. New trends not previously identified in the region were uncovered: child sex tourism, cell-phone pornography and opportunistic abuse linked to natural disasters. In addition to the abuse of girls, the abuse of boys was reported as a growing concern, although homophobia and macho social norms led to this trend being suppressed (^a page 224). Despite the gravity of the problems, legislation, policy and services were found to be underdeveloped and ineffective overall. While good standards of individual professional practice were observed, it was concluded that child sexual abuse has become entrenched, in part as a result of widespread institutional inaction and systemic failings. Government responses were seen to be constrained by the fragility of economies characterised by reliance on narrow economic bases, primarily tourism, and the servicing of high levels of public debt.</p> <p>Caribbean societies were revealed to be underpinned by a deeply-rooted system of patriarchal beliefs, norms and structures likely to contribute to child sexual abuse. For example, masculine and feminine identities are often predicated on the reification of male sexual prowess and entitlement, juxtaposed against female acquiescence and affirmation. The research showed how unequal gender relations shaped sexual behaviour, social attitudes and vulnerabilities. These</p>

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social processes were identified as both causes and consequences of sexual abuse. Reinforced through cultural affirmation and patterns of socialisation linked to conceptualisations of childhood, this environment has led to sexual victimisation and the early sexualisation of children becoming widespread, with sex-for-trade viewed as normal in some communities. The research highlighted how children are made vulnerable to sexual victimisation through a set of interacting factors which enable abuse behaviours to thrive. The research showed that the culturally derived characterisation of age was an important issue. For example, reaching puberty often signified the end of childhood, and girls in this age group were considered by some men as legitimate sexual targets. Poverty, although not a direct causal factor for abuse, was found to increase the risk of commercial sexual exploitation^b.

The research has promoted a synergistic systems approach to child protection which attends to the interconnected, multi-layered facets of abuse in order to simultaneously generate attitude change, material improvements to the lives of abuse victims and actions which address structural inequalities. Crucially, the overall impact of interventions derived from this multi-level approach is regarded as greater than the sum of its individual parts, in relation to both preventing and responding to abuse^c. A key recommendation arising from the research, the findings of which have since been published in the first book about child sexual abuse in the Caribbean^d, concerns the need to shift discussion from a preoccupation with individual psychopathology to one that takes into account the social and cultural drivers of abuse^e, and so leads to a greater awareness of the role communities and families play in not only contributing to child abuse, but also in preventing it. The research was selected by the international dissemination organisation, the Alpha Galileo Foundation, as [‘featured research’](#)^f. It has also provided the impetus for further international research. For instance, CACS PhD students from Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Barbados and Trinidad have investigated child sexual abuse in these countries.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

^aJones, A. and Trotman Jemmott, E. (2009) [Perceptions of, Attitudes to and Opinions on Child Sexual Abuse in the Eastern Caribbean](#), Barbados: UNICEF.

^bJones, A. (2013): ‘Pimping Your Child’: Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Transactional Child Sexual Abuse, in: *Understanding Child Sexual Abuse: Perspectives from the Caribbean*, Palgrave Macmillan.

^cPasura, D., Jones, A., and Da Breo, H. (2013): IMPACT: Interventions and Mitigations to Prevent the Abuse of Children – it’s Time: A Public Health Oriented Systems Model for Change, in *Understanding Child Sexual Abuse: Perspectives from the Caribbean*, Palgrave Macmillan.

^dJones, A. (Ed.) (2013), *Understanding Child Sexual Abuse: Perspectives from the Caribbean* Palgrave Macmillan.

^eJones A. (2013) ‘Deconstructing Narratives of Child Sexual Abuse’, in *Understanding Child Sexual Abuse: Perspectives from the Caribbean*, London: Palgrave Macmillan .

^f[The Alpha Galileo Foundation.](#)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

A letter from UNICEF¹ described the Centre for Applied Childhood Studies’ research into child sex abuse in the Caribbean as a ‘landmark’, stating that “UNICEF like the University [was] being flooded with emails from organizations and individuals who want to use the report for their work”. The study is one of only 40 worldwide, and the only one in the Caribbean, to have been selected as meeting UN standards for inclusion in a global review of quantitative research on violence against children. Seven studies considered of particular global significance, including ours, have been identified for in-depth assessment. The research has been widely reported in the mainstream media, significantly raising awareness.

Supported by an extensive public engagement process funded by the Department for International Development, Jones’ work was adopted by the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) and its constituent national governments as the foundation for policy and legislative reform across the region. All six governments that participated in the research produced National Action Plans on Child Sexual Abuse and named the study as the foundation for these policy documents. The documents were developed from the CACS research. For example, the plan for [Barbados](#)² opened with the statement that: “This National Action Plan (NAP) for addressing Child Sexual Abuse in Barbados was developed in response to the findings of the Study on Child Sexual

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Abuse in the Eastern Caribbean. This Study was conducted by UNICEF/UNIFEM in collaboration with the University of Huddersfield and Action for Children during the period October 2008 to June 2009. A key aim of these plans is the widespread development of 'culturally intelligent' child protection systems. In Dominica, the cultural acceptance of child sexual abuse is being challenged through what the [National Action Plan](#)³ described as a "sustained public education and advocacy campaign ... to make it difficult for perpetrators to be comfortable in public". Research recommendations on strengthening parenting have been translated into "work with parents from the pre-school level on the importance of child protection and the harmful effects of sexual abuse and strengthen their parenting skills". In translating the research into practice, a partnership with the government of Grenada and UNICEF has led to the development of IMPACT (Interventions and Mitigations to Prevent the Abuse of Children - It's Time), a strategic plan to create innovative, culturally relevant interventions that can be rigorously evaluated in order to produce best practice evidence for replication in other countries.

Between 2010 and 2012, in line with recommendations derived from the research, the Grenada Government embarked upon "the most intense period of family law reform undertaken in the history of Grenada". Having implemented progressive child protection laws, Grenada is now lauded for spearheading change in the region. Implementation of the IMPACT project began in August 2013 with the introduction of a psychotherapeutic service specifically designed to accommodate local sociocultural realities and utilise indigenous strengths. The programme, a first in the Caribbean, draws directly from the research and is being offered to girls who have been sexually abused in collaboration with [The Sweet Water Foundation](#), an NGO specialising in the prevention of sexual violence to women and girls in the Caribbean. Jones is leading programme evaluation with a view to regional scale-up. In an assessment of the impact of the CACS research, the Director of the Sweet Water Foundation, stated⁴ that the study "provided an evidence-based framework for naming and understanding the complex dimensions of the issue. Most importantly, it put the sexual abuse of children ... front and centre of the Regional cultural debate; and from there to those in Government, Non-Government, Practice, Policy, and the Law. People now had, for the first time, the irrefutable information they needed to tackle the prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse in a systematic, methodical manner". The Director also referred in the same testimony to the influence of the research in changing attitudes. Here she describes a group of men discussing the research: "They opened up in unprecedented and highly emotional manner. Some described their full knowledge of historic sexual abuses against both female and male children. They knew about it; some had participated in it or had let it happen by virtue of their silence and their silencing of the child victims and their families; and they were now ashamed and relieved to be able to make confession and rid themselves of the burden of associated guilt. They spoke in terms of what it meant to be a man, a father, a protector of children. They spoke of taking more responsibility for the upbringing of the young men in their villages, such that the young girls could inhabit a more safe world".

A wide range of research-users have drawn on our research. In Montserrat, an Education Officer from the Early Childhood Department of the Ministry of Education, stated⁵: "More people are now aware of the different forms of child sexual abuse and protections have been put in place in early education settings; the research also played a role in the formation of the Montserrat Children's Society and was taken up by the Community Services Department to create new policy on safeguarding children". A lay church minister from Barbados reports⁶ that "The research was instrumental in the establishment of our NGO called 'Action for Justice'. This was birthed from the research as a major focus is on child sexual abuse. It has become a labour of love and through it we encourage persons to break the silence". In Grenada, following publication of the research, the Ministry of Social Development commissioned a review of its Health and Family Life Curriculum for Schools, substantively augmenting segments on sexual and reproductive health, drawing on the findings of the underpinning research.

In terms of regional impact, the study was included in the working document for the 23rd meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development in Guyana 2012, and has informed 14 behaviour change programmes across the Caribbean, including, for example: The 'Changes Programme', a psycho-educational group programme for female victims of gendered violence; 'Man to Man',

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another psycho-educational group programme for male perpetrators of violence which focuses on cultural assumptions around 'ownership' of women and children, perceived entitlements to sex and the upbringing of children in relation to these assumptions; The Barbados Ministry of Health 'Gender and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights' programme; and the Anguilla Safeguarding Project.

Jones has instigated follow-up work based on widespread interest in adoption of the research. For example, a week of training in culturally relevant child protection practice, held in Grenada in March 2011, was attended by 80 multi-disciplinary professionals. In Trinidad, between April-November 2011, a collaborative initiative with the University of the West Indies and Stop It Now! (USA) supported by an ESRC Knowledge Exchange Grant awarded to Jones⁷ resulted in 45 professionals attending advanced training on translating the research findings into practice. The evaluation of this activity demonstrated an improvement in awareness about the multi-faceted nature of child sexual abuse, and greater recognition of the benefits arising from using the research to inform professional practice. The research has also contributed to a new regional strategy for child sexual abuse, [The Bridgetown Declaration and Agenda for Action to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse in the Caribbean](#) which was ratified by government ministers from 18 countries in November 2012 at a UN conference at which Jones presented her research in a keynote presentation. Linked to this initiative, UNICEF has launched a public education campaign, 'Break the Silence' which aims to stimulate action against the sexual exploitation of children at the community and family levels. The research report has been listed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) as a key document in assessing progress on Millennium Development Goals, and has also informed the United Nation's first Human Development Report on the Caribbean.

At the international level, the research report was [promoted](#) in the 2010 'Strategic Thinking' section of the Communication Initiative website, an international development network of 75,000 individuals and organisations, generating requests from other countries for support in child sexual abuse prevention. In 2010, for instance, the Deputy Minister for Health and Family in the Maldives approached Jones to work with their Government in tackling child sexual abuse⁸. The invitation attested to the impact which the underpinning research has had in the Caribbean. The Deputy Minister stated in the invitation that: "*We are planning to have a National Child Protection Conference in the Maldives in November this year. As the Maldives is an island nation with 200 islands being inhabited with very small populations we share similar issues that you presented in your study of the Caribbean. We would like you to present your findings here in the Maldives to make people aware that we are not alone and there is a way to address it*". In September 2010, Jones was invited to participate in the Fifth Milestones Meeting of the World Health Organisation 'Global Campaign for Violence Prevention', South Africa, to contribute to 'shaping the field of global violence prevention'.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

¹ Factual statement 1 from UNICEF Representative.

² [National Action Plan on Child Sexual Abuse 2010-2013: Barbados.](#)

³ [National Action Plan on Child Sexual Abuse 2010-2013: Dominica.](#)

⁴ Factual Statement 2 in an email from the Director of [the Sweet Water Foundation](#).

⁵ Factual Statement 3 in an email from an Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Montserrat.

⁶ Factual Statement 4 in an email by founder of NGO 'Action for Justice'.

⁷ [Towards the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse: Cross-cultural Explorations, Explanations and Impact Evaluations.](#) Training programme based on the underpinning research and supported by an ESRC Knowledge Exchange Grant (RES-192-22-0132).

⁸ Factual Statement 5 in an email invitation from the Maldives Government to inform the development of a child protection strategy based on the underpinning research.