

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Kent
Unit of Assessment: A4: Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
Title of case study: Developing assessment and treatment practices for female sexual offenders
1. Summary of the impact

This impact case study is based on a body of research that has enhanced the assessment and treatment of female sexual offenders internationally. This clinical impact was underpinned by a series of unique qualitative and quantitative studies that led to the discovery of female sexual offenders' offence styles and cognitive characteristics. The work has resulted in the development of effective clinical practice training and guidelines. It has been used by professionals to enhance their assessment and treatment of female sexual offenders whose specific needs had not previously been identified.

2. Underpinning research

The research outlined in this case study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and conducted by Professor Theresa Gannon (at Kent from 2005 – present) between 2006 and 2010. It examined female sexual offenders and their modus operandi using psychological methods never before applied to this group. In the first study, Professor Gannon and colleagues interviewed half of the imprisoned female sexual offender population in Britain and used novel qualitative grounded theory methods to develop the first female-specific theory of sexual offending (Gannon et al., 2008). This study highlighted several new gender-specific risk factors for sexual abuse that are not present in male sexual offenders. This study was published in *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* (ranked 3/52 in Criminology and Penology in ISI Thompson).

In a follow-up analysis of this model, Gannon and colleagues (2010) found that female sexual offenders followed three main 'pathways' or trajectories to offending. While one of these pathways was found to be similar to that previously reported in male sexual offenders, the others were unique to women. This research illustrated how the factors causing women to start, and then to continue, offending against children differ from those that underpin sexual offending by males. In particular, this research highlighted the existence of a Directed-Coerced Pathway (i.e., women whose sexual abuse is directed specifically by males and maintained via coercion and intimidation). A further pathway highlighted in the model was termed Implicit Disorganised. These women did not appear to set out specifically to sexually offend but – upon making contact with a victim and experiencing sexual arousal or emotional loneliness – offended impulsively. Gannon and colleagues' research showed that identifying these subtypes of female sexual offender is crucial for effective therapy since each subtype will have greatly differing treatment needs. For example, Directed-Coerced women are likely to require intervention on their passive personality styles. In contrast, Implicit-Disorganised women are likely to require intervention to assist them in regulating impulses. This work is incorporated in the latest book aimed at practitioners who work with sexual offenders (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010).

In a later series of studies, Professor Gannon and colleagues further elucidated the cognitive characteristics of female sexual offenders using a series of cognitive-experimental techniques never before adapted for use with female sexual offenders (e.g., a time recorded memory recognition task also published in *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*; and an Implicit Association Test; Gannon et al., 2009). In these studies, Gannon and her colleagues discovered that – unlike male sexual offenders – females did not cognitively sexualise children. However, female sexual offenders did evidence a distinct distrust of males that led them to interpret males' ambiguous behaviours in a highly threatening manner. This finding was important since it suggested that female sexual offenders' cognitive bias concerning men may 'disable' them from behaving more assertively when coerced by a man to sexually abuse children. In a subsequent follow up study, Gannon and colleagues (2012) examined female sexual offenders' self-reported offence-supportive cognitions and compared them to those documented in the male literature. Several important differences were discovered of paramount importance in providing gender-informed cognitive assessment and therapy for female sexual offenders.

As noted by the Director General of Women Offender Sector, Correctional Service Canada:

Prior to the research by Gannon and colleagues, virtually no studies focused on females in particular and many program or study descriptions even fail to indicate the gender of the participant or the subject group; the assumption of the offender as male is implicit.

As a result of this limitation of previous research:

sex offender assessment and intervention strategies have been developed and implemented for the male prototype, with little or no consideration of potential female-specific pathways or typologies. (section 5, item 2)

The research underpinning this impact case study addresses these limitations and has led to important enhancements of the assessment and treatment of this offender group.

3. References to the research

Gannon, T.A., Rose, M.R., & Ward, T. (2008). A descriptive model of the offense process for female sexual offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 20, 352-374. doi: 10.1177/1079063208322495 (see REF2)

Gannon, T.A., & Rose, M R. (2009). Offence-related interpretative bias in female child molesters: A preliminary study. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 21, 194-207. doi: 10.1177/1079063209332236 (see REF2)

Gannon, T.A., Rose, M.R., & Williams, S.E. (2009). Do female child molesters hold implicit associations between children and sex? A preliminary investigation. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 15, 55-61. doi: 10.1080/13552600802452559

Gannon, T.A., & Cortoni, F. (2010). *Female sexual offenders: Theory, assessment, & practice*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN: 978-0-470-68344-6

Gannon, T.A., Rose, M.R., & Ward, T. (2010). Pathways to female sexual offending: A preliminary study. *Psychology Crime and Law*, 16, 359-380. doi: 10.1080/10683160902754956

Gannon, T.A., Hoare, J., Rose, M. R., & Parrett, N. (2012). A re-examination of female child molesters' implicit theories: Evidence of female specificity? *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 18, 209-224. doi: 10.1080/10683161003752303

Research Funding:

Gannon, T.A. ESRC; What were they thinking: The cognition of women sex offenders. (ES/E0048221/1); 1 Dec 2006 – 31 July 2008; Award made: £83,000.

4. Details of the impact

This research has swiftly led to impact on the assessment and treatment of offenders in the UK and internationally. Since 2010, a number of practitioner organisations worldwide (including both correctional and non-government organisations) have used Professor Gannon's research findings to inform their training, assessment and treatment practices. For example, the Correctional Service of Canada – one of the few worldwide correctional facilities to provide group female sexual offender treatment – now incorporate Gannon and colleagues' (2010, 2012) pathways into their training materials for all new facilitators who work with female sexual offenders (section 5, item 2). The research is used to guide clinicians in their evaluation and assessment of specific offence styles so that offenders' particular treatment needs may be identified more readily (section 5, item 1). The Lucy Faithfull Foundation (a UK non-government child protection charity) provides all of their professionals with training in the assessment of female sexual offenders using Professor Gannon and colleagues' pathways research (section 5, item 4). Similarly, in the USA, a number of states that provide assessment and treatment for female sexual offenders use the pathways research (e.g., Gannon et al., 2008) to aid them in their conceptualisation and assessment of female clients' treatment needs. For example, Assessment and Treatment Alternatives Inc. Philadelphia (a non-profit forensic mental health clinic) use the pathways research to underpin treatment assessment for each individual client.

Impact case study (REF3b)

Arizona Corrections, USA also use the pathways work and research on female sexual offenders' cognitive characteristics to underpin assessment and to structure therapeutic sessions with female sexual offenders. One of their Clinical Psychologists (section 5, item 3) states that Gannon and colleagues' pathways model:

provides a key guide for (1) how I approach my assessment of female sexual offenders (i.e., how I identify particular styles of female sex offender and their likely treatment targets), and also (2) how I approach the difficult task of structuring topics addressed throughout therapy. I have also used Gannon's research on the cognitive constructs associated with female sexual offending (i.e., Gannon, Hoare, Rose, & Parrett 2012) throughout my practice to structure discussions with female sex offender clients about their risky thought processes... Therefore, I use the pathways model to assist female sex offenders to look at the developmental life pathway they took that brought them to prison. The pathways model is notable here since it provides women with a model that is actually based on female sex offenders' own reflections and so highlights several gender relevant issues that we can discuss and explore (e.g., sexual development, abuse at the hands of males, childcare responsibilities, attitudes that develop toward males).

In a summary of research and practice in the area of female sexual offending, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (section 5, item 5, p. 9) cited Gannon and colleagues' (2008) work as being key in understanding the differences between male and female sexual abusers. The NSPCC described the work representing "a clear step forward in informing the assessment and treatment of women" (p. 29). This work (as well as Gannon et al., 2012; Gannon & Rose, 2009) has been cited in numerous practitioner resources for use in treating female sexual offenders (e.g., Section 5, item 6), NSPCC resources regarding practical safeguarding of children (section 5, item 7), and has also been cited in 'additional guidance' for civil servants dealing with female child sexual offender disclosure requests (section 5, item 8).

Further impact has been generated via dissemination to practitioner professionals. For example, in 2010 Professor Gannon was invited by the National Organisation for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (NOTA; a UK sexual abuse practitioner organisation hosting an international conference) to provide a keynote address to approximately 200 attendees regarding her complete body of research on female sexual offenders (section 5, item 9).

There appears to be a deficit in public understanding of the prevalence of sexual abuse committed by women. The extent and seriousness of the abuse may not be fully appreciated. As a result, victims may feel unable to report the abuse making it more difficult for professionals to detect and address the needs of victims of this abuse. For this reason, Professor Gannon has sought to use her research to heighten public awareness of this unrecognised form of abuse. For example, in 2009, Professor Gannon took advantage of an invitation to provide online commentary for The Guardian 'Comment is Free' online forum, which raised public awareness of female sexual offenders' characteristics and resulted in members of the public discussing the issue of female sexual offenders online (section 5, item 10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Contact details for source 4 (which is not available on the submission system due to the number of sources that can be entered) can be obtained by emailing psychref@kent.ac.uk and all sources can be obtained by emailing the same address.

1. Statement to corroborate use of the pathways research in Canada Corrections. Director General. Canada Corrections.
2. Fortin, D. (2012). *Women who have sexually offended and risk managing women who sexually offend training materials: Correctional Service of Canada*. Available from the Manager, Interventions and Policy, Women Offender Sector, Correctional Service of Canada.
3. Statement confirming use of the pathways research in Arizona Corrections. Clinical Psychologist, Arizona Corrections.

Impact case study (REF3b)

4. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation. Specialist assessment, intervention, training and case advice (Adult female sexual offender training). Contact Lucy Faithfull Foundation or see Ashfield, S. (2011). *Female sexual abusers: Facts and fiction*. Lucy Faithfull Foundation.
5. NSPCC (2011). *Sexual abuse: A public health challenge*. UK: NSPCC.
6. Ashfield, S. (2010). *Female sexual abusers-a gender responsive perspective*. Lucy Faithfull Foundation, or Eldridge, H. (2011). *Good practice in working with women who sexually abuse children*. Lucy Faithfull Foundation.
7. Erooga, M. (2009). *Towards safer organisations. Adults who pose a risk to children in the workplace and implications for recruitment and selection*. NSPCC Report. Available from www.nspcc.org.uk/inform.
8. Home Office (2010). *The child sex offender disclosure scheme. Additional guidance in relation to requests for disclosure where the subject of the application is female*. Home Office.
9. Gannon (2010). Keynote Address: *Female sexual offenders: Developments and innovations*. National Organisation for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. Belfast.
10. Gannon (2009). It's not just men who sexually abuse. *The Guardian*. Comment is free. Available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/nov/10/female-sexual-abuserschildren>.