Analysing the sexual abuse of children by workers in residential care homes: Characteristics, dynamics and contributory factors

Lorraine Green'

Published online: 31 Jan 2008.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 357

View related articles

Citing articles: 3 View citing articles

Analysing the sexual abuse of children by workers in residential care homes: Characteristics, dynamics and contributory factors

Lorraine Green[1]

Summary: *This article analyses why worker/child sexual abuse occurs in residential children's homes. The importance of previously documented features, such as inadequate complaints and whistle blowing procedures, and poor vetting, training and supervision of staff, are acknowledged. This exposition, however, concentrates on the tactics abusers employ to groom, entrap and silence children, whilst simultaneously controlling and silencing non-abusive staff. The success of these tactics is then contextualised within notions of Weberian rational-legal bureaucratic and charismatic power, as well as the location of some abusers within entrenched paedophile networks. Contributory factors, such as the enclosed and institutionalised nature of many settings and the inadequate, gendered and homophobic manner in which staff often deal with both sexuality and sexual abuse issues are also examined and analysed, as are children's own gendered pre-conceptions. Important theoretical constructions utilised include Goffman's theory of 'total institutions', the social construction of childhood, including childhood asexuality and the concept of 'organisation sexuality'.*

Keywords: *children's homes; sexual abuse; child sexual abuser tactics; total institutions; homophobia and gender*

Introduction

For many years there has been concern about sexual, psychological, and physical abuse in children's homes and other residential childcare settings, such as special schools and boarding schools (Stein, 1993; Gallagher, 1999a; Stanley et al 1999). Much of this abuse has remained undetected or un-responded to for significant periods of time (Gallagher, 1999a, b). Children living in these settings have been shown to be vulnerable to abuse, emanating, not only from adults within the settings, but from children's peers within and outside the settings (Farmer & Pollock, 1998), and from predatory and opportunistic adults outside, such as child sexual abusers, drug pushers and pimps (Green, 1998). This article is, however, concerned solely

1. Senior Lecturer in Sociology.
Address for Correspondence: Sociology Department, Southbourne, Collegiate Crescent Campus, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield S1 1WB, England.

with 'insider' adult sexual abuse of children and adolescents within residential settings, predominantly children's homes.

A number of inquiries have briefly alluded to the targeting or grooming techniques of abusers within children's homes (for example, Utting, 1997). A limited amount of literature also exists which looks at the personality characteristics of some abusers, such as their charisma (for example, Brannan et al 1993), relevant organisational characteristics, such as 'macho' care cultures, poor training, recruitment and management structures (Berridge & Brodie, 1996) and individual and societal power structures (Jones, 1994). This article attempts to give a more in-depth and multi-layered portrayal of the ways in which some abusers in children's homes manage to abuse children and often avoid detection and being made accountable for their actions, for significant periods of time.

This article therefore describes and analyses not only how children are abused but how abusers often also control and deride non-abusive staff to try and maintain their allegiance or compliance, or alternatively to ensure they are too fearful and demoralised to complain. Certain organisational features, such as the institutionalised, enclosed nature of the settings are also shown to render those within them, staff and children alike, vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. Other pertinent features include the staff's frequent inability and reluctance to deal with sexuality/sexual abuse issues and the effect of gendered, homophobic belief system on how both staff and children construe and respond to sexuality and sexual abuse issues. This article therefore tries to move from the individual pathology or 'bad apple' approach (Stanley et al, 1999) to an approach which contextualises abuser behaviour and inadequate responses to it, not only in the micro context of individual and group interactions but in the mesa or meza (mid-range) context of organisations themselves and their links with the macro context of societal structures and attitudes.

The theoretical constructs used to contextualise and explain why abuse takes place, include not only mesa theory such as Goffman's notion of 'total institutions', but wider macro structural and post-structural theory, such as the social construction of childhood and childhood asexuality, 'organisation sexuality' and the gendered nature of abuse within public patriarchies.

Research on child sexual abusers

In surveys of adult sex offenders, characteristics, such as their age, personality, ethnicity, social class and mental health, are proportionally similar to those found within the general population (Fisher, 1994; Pringle, 1993). Child sexual abusers, however, tend, overwhelmingly, to be male (MacLeod & Saraga, 1988; Hearn, 1999). Child sexual abuse is also often conducted in an all pervasive environment of secrecy and lies (Green, 1999) and is characterised by frequent offender denial and minimisation. Distinctions between intra-familial and extra-familial abuse and the subsequent demonisation of so-called serial paedophiles are additionally often unhelpful as many perpetrators abuse across both boundaries (MacLeod, 1999). Both

official statistics and studies of convicted offenders are also of limited use and may not be generalisable, because much sexual abuse is undetected or unreported and many studies of non-offender, male populations also show high report rates of either child sexual abuse (Finkelhor & Lewis, 1988) or of sexual attraction to children (Briere & Runtz, 1989). One study of 561 sex offenders, however, did show that the majority of offenders self-reported only a few victims and offences, whilst a minority accounted for the vast majority of offences and victims (Abel at al, 1987). Some studies show that child sexual abusers often go to great lengths to prepare and 'groom' their victims (Wolf, 1984), but all child sexual abusers need to overcome internal inhibitions, such as guilt and responsibility, and external barriers, such as child resistance and the presence of others, before abuse can occur (Finkelhor, 1986).

When looking specifically at sexual abuse within children's homes, it has been shown that relevant factors are lack of careful placement planning, inadequate preparation, training and supervision of workers, differential responses to the sexualised behaviour of boys and girls, and low level use of child protection procedures to investigate and manage further instances of sexual abuse (Utting, 1991; Warner, 1992; Farmer & Pollock, 1998). It has also been claimed that various forms of abuse within a variety of different institutions can be linked to the acceptance of ideological treatment models that dehumanise residents (for example, 'Pindown', Levy & Kahan, 1991) and to the frequent stigmatising, stereotyping and devaluing of minority groups (Wardhaugh & Wilding, 1993). Much American research has also alluded to the tendency of organisations to 'cover-up' or minimise allegations because they are self monitoring and thus experience conflicts of interest between protecting the rights of clients and protecting organisational reputation (Durkin, 1982; Rosenthal, 1991). Additionally, there is evidence indicating that many staff in children's homes feel stressed, isolated and unsupported by management (Baldwin, 1990; Berridge & Brodie, 1996), which may hinder their ability to intervene appropriately in sexually abusive situations.

Much of the available information in relation to institutionalised child sexual abuse is derived from official inquiries, conducted in the aftermath of scandals, or from analyses of these inquiries (for example, Brannan et al, 1993). This may be problematic in that these inquiries are often conducted in a judicial manner, and tend to look at specific concrete issues such as training, supervision and vetting procedures, and to avoid addressing more theoretical and ideological issues, such as the importance of gender (Pringle, 1993) and sexuality and power. Although some inquiries do address relevant information, such as the fact that many institutional abusers have the ability to 'ingratiate themselves with adults and children', establish themselves in authority and trusting roles, and conceal their abuse through blackmail and threat, some of the statements and recommendations the inquiries make are both facile and uninformed. The demonisation of sexual abusers in these reports, suggesting they are qualitatively and identifiably different from their other male counterparts, (Utting, 1997 for example, refers to abusers as 'sexual terrorists') is extremely unhelpful. The Warner Report (1992) also made the controversial suggestion that all job candidates for residential posts should be robustly questioned about their sexual preferences. Sone (1993) argued that it seemed likely, however, that no candidate would admit to

paedophilia and more likely other sexual preferences, such as homosexuality, would be regarded suspiciously. Such a fear was substantiated when a later official report conflated male homosexuality with paedophilia by referring to males who abuse boys as 'homosexually abusive' (Utting, 1997, p.120).

Methodology and setting

This research, some of the findings of which are already located within the public domain (Parkin & Green, 1997; Green, 1998; Green & Parkin, 1999), corroborated previous research, which highlighted the importance of adequate vetting, supervision, training and support for residential workers, although one study has not corroborated the importance of training (see Sinclair & Gibbs, 1998). However, the findings which will be developed and theorised in this article are related to the manner in which children in residential care are sexually abused, and how the settings themselves, staff and child behaviour, and belief systems, potentiate, not only the likelihood of sexual abuse occurring, but of it remaining undetected or un-addressed for significant time periods.

This research is also significantly different from the inquiries and most other literature and research on child sexual abuse in institutions. This is, firstly, because of the prime and rare importance that was attached to child and ex-resident opinions (Penhale, 1999) and, secondly, the research was not exclusively focused on sexual abuse in residential care. It was concerned with the institutional culture concomitant with a wide range of sexual behaviours, knowledges and attitudes, emanating from staff, children and managers. It looked therefore at settings where sexual abuse had not taken place as well as those where it had and aimed to ascertain potentially common features which rendered children vulnerable to abuse in certain settings. These included how in general sexuality issues were dealt with. The researcher was also interested in not only analysing micro and mesa factors but locating them within wider macro features and discourses, in order that relationships between individual and organisational behaviour could be linked to wider structural features.

The findings explicated here emanate from qualitative research conducted between 1994 and 1997 in relation to children's homes. At present approximately 6,000 children or 0.05% of the overall child population under 16 are accommodated in children's homes (Gallagher, 1999a), although much greater numbers of children have contact with a wide range of other non-residential and residential institutions. These findings thus may also have some relevance as to how sexual abusers operate within a variety of different institutions that are frequented by children. Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale's (1999) edited text on institutional abuse also suggested there are many similarities in the way in which abuse is both intentionally and unintentionally perpetrated in a range of different institutions, catering for different client groups.

The research involved extensive ethnographic fieldwork in two different local authority homes over a two year period. It comprised semi-structured in-depth

interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis of agency documents. Thirty nine formal interviews took place within the ethnographic settings and respondents were comprised of residential workers and managers, social workers and children. However, only seven children were formally interviewed because of the poor content validity when triangulated with other data (Robson, 1993). More valid information was gained from the children via participant observation and informal conversation. The majority of the children were aged between 12 and 16. This was a normal age range for contemporary children's homes which increasingly act as a last-resort placement for a disproportionately high number of adolescents (as compared to younger children), many of whom display challenging behaviours and have previous histories of abuse and neglect (Kahan, 1993; Berridge & Brodie, 1996; 1998).

Sixty four further non-ethnographic interviews were also conducted with workers, managers and ex-residents from other organisations and settings. These workers included residential and ex-residential workers and managers, workers located in after-care projects and projects working with young prostitutes and rent boys and HIV/AIDS workers who had conducted sexuality work with children in care. Further documentary analysis was conducted upon publicly accessible, written material such as journal and newspaper articles, which reported on institutional child sexual abuse.

Assessing the representativeness of the findings is a difficult task, which can be linked explicitly to organisational access barriers and individual reluctance to participate. The majority of workers and a selected sample of social workers were interviewed in the two ethnographic settings. The two local authorities in which these homes were located were, however, the only two of the seven contacted, which were amenable to the research being conducted. The non-ethnographic residential and ex-residential workers interviewed were social work students, at different stages in their training, drawn from three different universities over a three year period. It was not possible to evaluate whether these workers were representative because they were self-selecting and not all social work students have residential child care experience.

Attempts were made via questionnaires and by asking participating students, to find out if other students with the relevant experience had declined to be interviewed and if so why. Unfortunately these yielded no useful information. It could be argued that the student social workers may have been atypical residential workers in that they had opted to become qualified. Even if one balances this potential lack of representativeness with the fact that both untrained and trained staff were interviewed in the ethnographic settings, it could still be counter-argued that these other staff were drawn from only two settings. Accessing ex-residents was similarly difficult and a variety of means were used including voluntary, social service and university contacts, and snowball sampling (Robson, 1993).

Lee (1993) has argued that, when researching sensitive topics and/or dealing with rare or deviant populations, snowball or purposive sampling may sometimes be the only effective means of accessing these populations. In addition, although not all workers named the settings in which they were working or had been employed, some did. From the information given, it is possible to extrapolate that a minimum of 100 different settings and 14 different local authorities, as well as some voluntary and private organisations, were alluded to. These numbers suggest that although any

claims to representativeness or generalisability are ill advised, it can be argued that information was yielded from a wide variety of settings.

In terms of the qualitative research methods used, Hearn and Parkin (1987, 1995) suggest that the study of sexuality issues within organisations is not often amenable to traditional, positivistic survey type methods and that rumour, innuendo, gossip and second hand information are the currency most often used. It has also long been recognised that valid and reliable information on sexuality is difficult to obtain. However, research undertaken by Wight and West (1999) highlights that in-depth interviewing can yield data with greater validity than survey methods. In summary, the research outlined above makes no claims to representativeness. For any researcher investigating these sensitive issues, to be able to claim such representativeness would be most difficult. Epistemologically, however, the validity of this data is asserted because of the use of appropriate, grounded, exploratory qualitative methods, which uncovered rich, in-depth and textured information about multi-faceted, complex and sensitive phenomena. And as Popper (1963) has convincingly argued, science can never arrive at an absolute truth. Knowledge is always partial and provisional and thus subject to either revision or refutation, as new theories and knowledge emerge and accumulate (Lazar, 1998).

Tactics and characteristics of some institutional abusers

Abuser behaviour

In a recent cross-comparative study of responses to child sexual abuse in three European countries (Green, 1999), many of the children reported a variety of fear and manipulation tactics which child sexual abusers used to ensure their compliance and silence. These included: telling children the abuse was either normal or the fault of the child; that they or members of their family would be imprisoned or killed if they disclosed; manipulating other members of the family to mistreat them; locking them in dark rooms for long periods of time; and alternating between treating them as if they were very special and humiliating and frightening them.

In residential settings similar intimidatory tactics were used to weaken children's resistances and try and get them to view the child sexual abuser as an omnipotent and unchallengeable figure of power.

> *This child told me how the manager used to run the unit when he had been there before by waking kids up early in the morning, then keeping them awake all night and making them sit in front of a door freezing cold with just their boxer shorts on.* (residential worker)

> *The senior used love/hate bullying tactics with the boys. I only had contact with him on sporting activities and he used to give them big hugs when they'd abseiled down a rock but then he'd insist they went back up there and did it again and they were petrified but he'd turn nasty with them if they said no ... I remember once he was playing with the kids on the rope*

and we were quite high up and I was saying don't do that and I was terrified for the kids. And he was saying 'it'll be alright, teach them who's boss'. He never actually (sexually) touched them whilst I was there but it was the way he had them hanging over a cliff and was basically playing with their lives. (residential worker)

Other staff told me he made the boys dress in women's clothes with suspenders if they were naughty and run round the establishment like that as punishment. (ex-residential worker)

Children were also often groomed through child sexual abusers' building up trust with them and offering them inducements and privileges which the other children were not offered before they attempted to initiate sexual contact with them.

He let me stay up late at night and watch videos the others couldn't and bought me stuff and then when I trusted him and thought we were friends he tried to have sex with me. (ex resident)

He had certain little boys who were his favourites who he bought expensive presents for but if he thought they were misbehaving he would totally belittle them ... and deny them all privileges. (ex-residential worker)

Vulnerable children or children under stress also seemed to be targeted. This feature was also documented in a study which involved interviewing ninety one child sex offenders about the strategies they used for targeting children (Elliot et al, 1995).

Whenever there was a fight, he would always insist on splitting it up, taking the injured child into his room and then he would spend an inordinately long amount of time with him. (residential worker)

Alternatively abusers would try and weaken possible resistances through drugs or alcohol.

The boy told me he had taken them to his house and plied them with red wine and strong lager, then suggested they had a bath and had tried to touch them while they were in the bath. (residential worker)

There was also evidence to suggest that in some settings, certain children who were abused, were given considerable power and privileges by sexually abusive staff. This appeared to be done both to silence them and to enable them to control the other children, in a 'top dog' type relationship, similar to the one outlined in the Castle Hill Report (Brannan et al, 1993).

There was a lot of peer pressure and you couldn't do anything about it unless things were going really wrong .... you had certain rooms that had more things in them than others and it was considered that the strongest person in the house, the top dog, usually had the best room, the corner room. The top dog was also allowed to stay out whenever he

wanted and he wasn't made to do menial jobs around the house like the others. He bullied the others too but how ever hard you tried to sanction him he always got round it. (residential worker)

The behaviour of some child sexual abusers towards other staff members

These tactics were also often strengthened by the fact that many child sexual abusers were already in positions of institutional power, a fact also noted by Utting (1997). They would often exploit this power to the maximum and many workers reported being very fearful of senior staff who, at the time or later, were found to be abusing children.

> *I was scared of him and I think we all were except one bloke and he called you by your Christian name but insisted you called him Mr.* (residential worker)

Those who did not conform to abusive regimes were sometimes targeted for derisory treatment.

> *When I started standing up for my rights he kept on saying I wasn't pulling my weight and was aggressive. And he had me doing jobs like cleaning out the gutter, picking up litter and hoovering the house four or five times a day.* (ex-residential worker)

In the example below the worker could neither understand why he was being humiliated nor why the manager treated the children in a humiliating fashion, but could not procure any help or an explanation from other workers.

> *Because he was the manager you had no power. I actually sought help because I couldn't understand why he was doing these things but nobody would back me up. I went to other managers and they would send me to another manager ... even the union rep said he was sympathetic but couldn't do anything. Everybody knew something was wrong but no one would say or do anything* (residential worker)

Some workers talked about the subtle mental manipulation child sexual abusers used to control and mould staff.

> *He did it I feel through really working people's heads. At staff meetings he would draw circles and put things like motivation and where you are in them and you'd have to put percentages in them of where you thought you were at. And if you weren't in each circle as much as he thought you should be he would single you out as not pulling your weight in the staff group.* (residential worker)

Some child sexual abusers also tried to ascertain the levels of trust that existed between non-abusive staff and children and destroy any positive relationships that existed between them. One way this was done in one setting was through the use of

games, whereby children were asked to run to the members of staff that they liked the best. After it became apparent which staff were bonding with which children, child sexual abusers would then often use a variety of different methods to sever those bonds. Many of the child sexual abusers were also very astute at picking on staff weaknesses and trying to use these to mould the staff into working in a particular way.

At first I thought this manager was being very helpful to me but later on I thought he had lulled me into a false sense of security or was preparing me for how he wanted me to be or for working in a particular way. Where I was coming from I didn't have much trust in people anyway or confidence in going into that kind of environment. (residential worker)

He was very good at boosting you up and making you feel very powerful if you went along with him. (residential worker)

Sometimes this was successful for a while or at other times completely successful. In the example cited below the worker at first admired and emulated the manager because of his ability to control the children without overt physical force.

There was other people that used to say I was the manager's golden boy - 'you speak him'. And that was what you tended to do because you saw he had so much control. (residential worker)

(The following question is asked by the researcher because she is unsure if her interpretation of what the interviewee is saying, is correct)

Are you saying you were starting to imitate his behaviour? (interviewer)
Yes because when you are working with 14/15 year olds they can become really violent and you don't want that and have to restrain them. And you'd see him and the deputy talking to the children and the confrontation all being verbal and it never went any further.

Later, this particular worker realised that the fact that the manager was the only one who could control the children, resulted in the intended dependency and limited the power of other workers who did not conform to the way he worked.

The manager and his clique would have the control and they would hold the control and if the children were rioting they would come and bring it down, so it seemed as if you needed that manager there. (ex-residential worker)

Of particular interest was the manner in which some child sexual abusers were able to ascertain the sexual activities and preferences of staff, using this knowledge to bully them or sometimes to try and diminish their power and influence with the children.

There were two caseworkers, both married but having an affair, and they complained about him. In the dining hall he told everyone about this and went on about morals and asked the kids to let him know if they were making moves towards each other in public. So the kids just teased them after that. (residential worker)

Abusive sexual and misogynistic actions and remarks were also the hallmark of some abusers' behaviour towards staff.

> *He would make sexual remarks to both males and females. Once one member of staff was supposed to be having an affair with another and he was sat there asking this woman 'how did he give it to you? how big was it?' The man involved got up and walked off, later locking himself in his flat for three weeks and no one heard from him and then he just upped and left.* (residential worker)

Some of the incidents that were reported to have occurred in abusive regimes where child sexual abusers were operating were so horrific they almost defied belief, whilst at the same time showing the tremendous power such individuals possessed, even over other workers.

> *The interaction this manager had with women was pretty poor and derogatory. There was one woman there and ... he used to hold her down and put dog food round her private parts and let the dog eat it off her.* (residential worker)
> *How did she respond?* (interviewer)
> *That was the funny thing, she was laughing. It was like he had so much power, people let him do anything.* (residential worker)

In some situations paedophile rings were also operating, whereby one or more members of staff in an institution were involved in the abuse, although some abusers operated alone. Organised abuse frequently seemed to make it very difficult for staff to complain.

This ability, shown by some child sexual abusers, to either enlist the total support and devotion of some workers or to maintain the silence of others through diminution and harassment, fits very well with analyses of the Castle Hill Report (Brannan et al, 1993; Jones, 1994). These analyses demonstrated the influence of both charismatic authority (Weber, 1974), and structural and individual power defined by such factors as age, gender, class, economic status and sexual orientation. Castle Hill was a residential school for behaviourally disturbed boys. The principal, Ralph Morris, systematically sexually abused many of the boys living there over a significant time period. He was able to protect his position for many years via manipulation of both the lowly paid, low status, mainly female staff he employed and the children, and by persuading others that earlier abuse allegations were untruths and that he could not possibly be an abuser because he was a middle class, heterosexual pillar of the local community.

However, these examples of how some child sexual abusers manipulate and intimidate other workers should not be taken as the definitive norm in terms of child sexual abuser behaviour. Some staff in other institutions talked of how well-liked the child sexual abusers were by all staff and seemingly by the children and how totally shocked and sometimes disbelieving they were when sexual abuse was disclosed or discovered.

Child sexual abuser networks

It is also not always possible to ascertain when organised abuse is operating and when abusers are operating alone. Stein (1993), in relation to residential care, differentiates between *systematic abuse*, that is organised abuse of children by one or more staff members over a systematic time period; *individual abuse*, the sexual or physical abuse of a child by one member of staff; *institutional abuse*, which is caused by ineffective and ingrained organisational practices; and *sanctioned abuse*, which operates under the guise of therapy (as in 'Pindown', Levy & Kahan, 1991). However, it is often difficult to separate out different types of abuse as they may overlap and be subsumed by one another. For example, in one study of child sex offenders it was found that, although 93% operated alone, one in twelve were in contact with other sex offenders (Elliot et al, 1995). Therefore, it may not be easy to differentiate between *individual* and *systematic abuse*, or specify a possible transition from individual to systematic abuse.

Frank Beck systematically sexually abused children under the guise of what he called 'regression therapy' yet conversely the *sanctioned abuse* highlighted in the 'Pindown Regime' occurred through a misguided and uninformed attempt to control children with challenging conduct through behavioural principles (Levy & Kahan, 1991; Stanley, 1999). So, although in both settings children were subject to psychological and physical abuse, in the setting where Beck was the manager, the *sanctioned abuse* was simultaneously *systematic abuse*, as a deliberate method used to successfully sexually abuse children while lowering their resistance and ability to disclose or protest. A setting where *institutional abuse* is occurring may also be highly conducive to *systematic abuse* because abusers target vulnerable children in non-protective settings.

Issues of charisma and power

Some commentators employ Weberian notions of 'charismatic' power, as well as rational-legal bureaucratic power (Weber, 1974) to explain how abusers are able to abuse for long periods and dissuade others from investigating or believing children's allegations (for example, Brannan et al, 1993; Utting, 1997). The term 'charisma' here is used to describe a personality quality that can either induce extreme devotion or liking in people for those they see as leaders and/ or alternatively can lead to allegiance through fear and intimidation. Although many of the preceding quotations illustrate how charisma works in these setting, an analysis of newspaper reporting of institutional child sexual abuse scandals also appears to corroborate this notion of 'charismatic' power.

> [Mark Trotter's] shock of blonde hair, blue eyes, gold earring and open face were disarming. His exuberance, sense of fun, warmth and charm won him many friends ... Even now ... staff are reluctant to believe the worst. They knew him well. (Bosely, *The Guardian*, 18.9.96)

[Carrack's] courtliness impressed even his victims ... he was dashing, he wore smart clothes and drove an expensive two-seater sports car. (*The Guardian*, 15.1.97)

[Peter Righton] was a powerful personality who made friends easily and commanded natural respect. (Pilkington, *The Guardian*, 1.6.94)

[Frank Beck's] personal charisma and authority added to the power he held as officer in charge of the home and certainly helped to protect him from scrutiny. Staff have variously described him as Hitler-like and exceptionally caring. (*Social Work Today*, 5.12.91)

Issues of power, gender and the devaluation of children (Parkin, 1989; Pringle, 1993; Jones, 1994; Aymer, 1992; Wardhaugh & Wilding, 1993; Evans, 1994) are not only intensified with the utilisation of abusive charismatic power but they also seem to take on paramount importance when newspaper articles are analysed. These show that in some cases women trying to report abuse were often subject to violence, ignored, fired or paid off, while many men colluded with such abuse.

Birmingham's Social Services department has appointed a solicitor to investigate a series of allegations against staff... Staff at South View who complained social workers were having sex with children claimed they were harassed by senior colleagues. Eight women quit over a period of eighteen months before action was taken. (Hoyland, *The Guardian*, 23.10.89)

I tried to discuss [the abuse] with the hierarchy but they didn't want to know. I talked with a councillor and ... we met with the head of North Wales CID and an investigation was started but after six months it ground to a halt. I then was suspended and sacked for what was called a breakdown in communication with colleagues ... I put in a claim for unfair dismissal and they settled out of court ... I then went to the Welsh office who didn't want to know, the DSS, the Social Services Inspectorate. Early in 1991 I decided to put together all the information I had ... which I gave to the police and which was the foundation for their investigation when they were called in by Clwyd. (Alison Taylor, former children's home manager interviewed by *the Independent*, Short, 7.4.96)

The importance of contributory factors

The preceding sections have illustrated and analysed the methods used by some child sexual abusers to abuse children in residential care through the manipulation and intimidation of both children and other staff, as well as through drawing on both their rational-legal and charismatic power positions, and on the power and influence of other child sexual abusers and organised abuse networks. Notions of the powerlessness of both the children and female and some male care workers were also briefly alluded

to. However, to understand more fully the circumstances which enable abuse to take place and remain undetected and unaddressed for significant time periods, it is necessary to take a wider and more holistic view of children's homes. It is therefore important to analyse and contextualise the setting itself and how children and staff behave and are treated within it.

Children's homes as total institutions

Despite refutation by some commentators (for example, The Bonnington Report, 1984; Berridge, 1994; Berridge & Brodie, 1998) that children's homes are institutionalised in the ways described by Goffman (1961), this research showed the contrary. The majority of features delineated by Goffman as typifying 'total institutions', such as an emphasis on uniformity, control and surveillance over care, development and individuality, and the emergence of separate and divisive staff and resident cultures, were evident in the vast majority of homes (Green & Parkin, 1999). These homes were also characterised by the collapse of the normally geographically differentiated domains of home, family, education, work and so on into one domain, Although not geographically isolated, as were many of the old institutions described by Goffman, many homes were *socially* isolated from the wider organisation and the communities in which they were situated. The culture that resulted was divisive and enclosed, and conducive to sexual abuse taking place, not only by virtue of its isolation, but because staff often tended to focus on control and surveillance issues, becoming de-sensitised to the children's needs and development. Correspondingly, children were reluctant to trust staff with sensitive information because they conceptualised the situation as one of 'us' and 'them'. Abusive 'top dog' networks within the children's cultures also reduced the possibility that the children would trust and rely on one another because of the fear of being bullied. They were also a useful resource abusers could draw on to control children and persuade older children to groom younger ones for sexual abuse (see Brannan et al, 1993).

Staff responses to sexuality and sexual abuse issues

Many staff had little support, training or guidelines to help them deal with sexuality issues and most training around sexual abuse was focused more on how to organisationally report detection or disclosure, than on therapeutic techniques for working with abused children. Ambiguous and contradictory legislation around the age of consent was also of little help to staff. Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act, which prohibits local authority staff from 'promoting homosexuality as a pretended family relationship' to children, also dissuaded many staff from sensitively discussing same sex sexuality issues with children and adolescents. Staff responses were therefore overwhelmingly dictated by ignorance, fear and their own moral

values around gender and sexuality. Any responses were subsequently predominantly retro-active rather than proactive. Many staff also expressed the view that they would be seen as corrupting or contaminating 'innocent' children or encouraging rampant and indiscriminate sexual activity if they talked to the children about sexuality issues. The most common staff responses were to treat child sexual behaviour as if it were invisible, or to actively deny it was occurring or negate the importance it had for the children. Other responses included preventing or stopping sexual activity in the building or providing reactive, technical contraceptive and disease avoidance advice predominantly to females, who were thought to be sexually active. Because any sexuality work was centred on the young women and mainly instigated by females, such a response therefore obscured not only the fact that adult males could be abusers, but also that boys could be victims of sexual abuse.

That sexuality issues in general were so poorly dealt with often resulted in children being unaware of what constituted sexual abuse. Furthermore, they were fearful of discussing anything connected with sexuality, including sexual abuse, with staff, because they had discerned that sexuality was a taboo issue and often responded to punitively.

Staff attitudes around gender and sexuality also affected how sexual abuse issues were construed and responded to. In one instance a male worker who was perceived as effeminate and assumed to be homosexual was suspended from his post because a boy in his care had disclosed to his room-mate he had been abused. The boy had not named the abuser or even implicated the residential home, and when he eventually named the abuser it turned out to be his previous foster father. There was a continual conflation of homosexuality with paedophilia by staff, echoing the inaccurate connection alluded to earlier in some of the inquiry reports. This resulted in staff who were thought to be gay being seen as actual or potential child sexual abusers, or ironically child sexual abusers being seen as gay even if they were known to have had adult sexual relationships with women.

Correspondingly staff and children sometimes also assumed that male children who had been abused were gay. Making this assumption implicitly placed some of the onus for the abuse on those who were abused.

> *We were really surprised this lad had been abused - he never showed any kind of gay tendencies - he was a real male and if any of the other boys had implied he had done sexual favours for money he would have gone mad.* (residential worker)

Boys who had been abused also showed great anxiety of disclosing abuse to male workers particularly, for fear they would be perceived as homosexual and either as complicit in the abuse or as a lesser valued male.

> *The boy refused to tell the officer in charge, Bob, about the abuse and I suppose he was defending his masculinity . . Bob was an awfully nice man and he could talk to the boys but I think the boy wouldn't tell him because he thought Bob might think he had been in a sexual relationship with someone gay and would think badly of him.* (residential worker)

Negative attitudes about homosexuality emanating from both children and staff, accompanied by the inaccurate assumptions that all child sexual abusers are homosexual, all male homosexuals are child sexual abusers, and boys abused by adult men have homosexual tendencies, therefore had a very worrying impact on how sexual abuse issues were conceptualised and dealt with in children's homes.

Unhelpful and ill informed staff responses and non responses to sexuality and sexual abuse issues also compounded and exacerbated the pre-existing sexual vulnerability of children, many of whom had previously been sexually abused and thus were more vulnerable to re-victimisation (Finkelhor, 1986). These children were not only frequently deprived of affection but also had very limited factual sexual knowledge. As a result their sexual needs would often become blurred and undifferentiated from other needs such as emotional ones, and 'quick-fix' sex with other teenagers would often be used to fulfil other needs. This suggests children's heightened vulnerability to adult sexual abuse in an isolated, institutionalised setting, where little affection from adults or other children is forthcoming, where sexual knowledge is limited, and where some children find themselves unable to differentiate between affection and sex.

Theoretical conceptualisation and implications

The institutionalised nature of many children's homes, and the ongoing and long term sexual abuse within them, does not appear surprising if one considers the low status position of residential care. The fact that many homes are inadequately resourced, and staffed by unsupported, untrained or poorly trained staff, yet provide a 'home' for children who display challenging behaviours and often have histories of abuse and betrayal is also relevant. Why this has been and continues to be the case, despite the exposure of a multitude of scandals and the subsequent inquiries, high profile policy statements, protective legislation such as the Children Act 1989, new policy directives such as *Quality Protects* and internal complaints procedures, could partially be explained by post-Foucauldian analyses of power, such as those offered by Rose (1989) and Parton (1994).

These analyses show not only how 'childhood is the most intensively governed sector of human existence' (Rose, 1989, p.121), but trace how our responses to children have been moulded by the rise of professional experts, the social and medical sciences, and the diffused and indistinct way in which they categorise and document children and childhood via psychological inscription devices. Such processes obscure the disempowerment and low socio-economic status of the majority of children in residential care and the families from which they emanate. Rose (1989) asserted that, from 1900 onwards, there was little difference between how delinquent and abused children were classified and treated - they were both seen as dangerous children requiring moral re-training. This objectification, homogenisation and 'normalisation' of childhood has also concealed the paradoxical manner in which the child protection system has concentrated on short-term, damage limitation (with children from

families of a low socio-economic status) at the expense of ongoing child care and child abuse prevention (Parton, 1991, 1994).

Adult sexual abuse of children in residential care needs, therefore, not only to be located within wider societal notions of child care, linked to notions of 'dangerous' and 'deviant', socio-economically deprived families and children (Parton, 1994) and to the institutionalisation of the settings (Goffman, 1961) but also to social constructions of children as innocent, asexual, passive and dependent on adults (Foucault, 1979; Hawkes, 1996; Kitzinger, 1997). These constructions result in children being left deliberately ignorant about various areas of knowledge such as sexuality and sexual abuse issues (Evans, 1994; Gittins, 1998)[1] as evidenced by staff comments and reluctance to deal with such issues. They also suggest children may be potentially pathologised and demonised if they voluntarily or involuntarily contravene discursive norms of assumed childhood innocence (for example, through sexual abuse or consensual peer sexual activity) or deference (for example, through delinquency) (Rose, 1989), in a way adults rarely are. Such an analysis seems pertinent to the treatment of children in residential care and their ongoing experiences of abuse.

The gendered nature of adult child sexual abuse also needs to be contextualised within public patriarchies. These are controlled and managed by predominantly white, able bodied, middle class men (Hearn 1992, 1999) and espouse and shape particular constellations of organisational masculinity, which often condone or minimise the effects of aggressive and misogynistic male sexual behaviour. The concept of 'organisational sexuality' (Hearn & Parkin, 1987, 1995; Hearn et al, 1989) is particularly important here because although children's homes are 'homes' for children they are still organisations located within the public sphere. Sexuality is an issue continually relegated to the private sphere of the home, although certain hierarchical, heterosexist, masculinist representations of it are condoned or even actively, albeit, implicitly encouraged in organisations. Therefore the hegemonic combination of inaccurate notions of childhood as asexual and innocent and organisations as asexual entities, results in both sexuality and sexual abuse issues being even less likely to be dealt with appropriately.

When adult sexual abuse of children is problematised within organisations it tends to be done through alienating the abusers from images of so-called normal heterosexual males, by, for example, conflating male homosexuality with paedophilia. Such constructions and problematisations are conducive to ongoing homophobia, confusion and fear amongst the staff and the likelihood of abuse or further abuse occurring. The fact that male sexual abuse of boys, as well as girls, occurs can also be explained in a gendered manner. Liddle (1993) argues men are socialised into eroticising and fetishising those that are ideally constructed as being less powerful, smaller, more passive and more acquiescent than them, namely women. It is therefore only a small step to shift that eroticisation onto those even smaller, more powerless and more acquiescent than women, namely children.

Conclusion

It is, therefore, apparent that although certain characteristics and tactics of abusers are important, as are staff support, training, vetting and recruitment procedures, when analysing why child sexual abuse occurs and is often inappropriately dealt with in such settings, it is also extremely important to analyse and take into consideration other mesa, macro and structural and discursive factors. These include the institutionalisation of the settings; gendered and adultcentric constructions of both adult and child sexuality and how these are influenced by the manner in which public patriarchies operate and general social attitudes; issues of children's rights and their general powerlessness in this society, a powerlessness compounded and exacerbated by social constructions of the child as naturally passive, helpless, dependent and asexual, and the negation of particular children who contravene these socially constructed norms and who emanate from lower socio - economic groups.

When all these factors are taken into consideration, it is clear that the problem of continuing child sexual abuse in children's homes will not be solved purely by looking at practical issues and suggesting improved training, whistleblowing, recruitment and vetting procedures and the appointment of a children's commissioner, as advocated by the Waterhouse Report (2000). The problem is one that is intrinsically and inextricably connected with issues of power and powerlessness, how we perceive children, gender, sexuality and abuse and how wider social structures both explicitly and implicitly influence our ideas about morality and normality.

Note

1. It is ironic to note that child sexual abusers and the now dismantled PIE (Paedophile Information Exchange) also asserted that children were sexual beings, but skewed this knowledge to argue children enjoyed having sex with adults and were able to give informed consent. In doing so, they selectively ignored generational and gendered power inequalities between adults and children, and the fact that abusers often eroticise children's innocence and sexual ignorance (for further discussion see Evans, 1993)

References

Abel, G., Becker, J., Cunningham-Rathner, J. and Rouleau, J. (1987) Self-reported sex crimes of 561 nonincarcerated paraphiliacs. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2, 6, 3-25

Aymer, C. (1992) Women in residential work: Dilemmas and ambiguities. in M. Langan and L. Day (eds) *Women, Oppression and Social Work: Issues for anti discriminatory practice.* London: Routledge

Baldwin, N. (1990) *The Power to Care in Children's Homes.* Aldershot: Gower

Brannan, C., Jones, J.R. and Murch, J.D. (1993) Lessons from a residential special school

inquiry: Reflections on the Castle Hill Report. *Child Abuse Review*, 2, 271-275

Berridge, D (1994) Foster and residential care reassessed: A research perspective. *Children and Society*, 8, 2, 132-150

Berridge, D. and Brodie, I. (1996) Residential child care in England and Wales: The inquiries and after. in M. Hill and J. Aldgate (eds) *Child Welfare Services: Developments in Law, Policy, Practice and Research*. London: Jessica Kingsley

Berridge, D. and Brodie, I. (1998) *Children's Homes Revisited*. London: Jessica Kingsley

The Bonnington Report (1984) *Residential Care: The next ten years*. Surbiton: Social Care Association

Boseley, S. (1996) Monster in our midst. *The Guardian*, 18 September

Briere, J. and Runtz, M. (1989) University males' sexual interest in children: Predicting potential indices of 'paedophilia' in a nonforensic sample. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 13, 65-75

Department of Health (1998) *Quality Protects: Framework for Action*. London: DoH

Durkin (1982) No one will thank you: First thoughts on reporting institutional abuse. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 4, 109-113

Elliot, M., Browne, K. and Kilcoyne, J. (1995) *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention: What offenders tell us*. London: Kidscape Publications

Evans, D. (1993) *Sexual Citizenship: The material construction of sexualities*. London: Routledge

Evans, D. (1994) Falling angels: The material construction of children as sexual citizens. *International Journal of Children's Rights*. 2, 1-33

Farmer, E. and Pollock, S. (1998) *Sexually Abused and Abusing Children In Substitute Care*. Chichester: Wiley

Foucault, M. (1979) *A History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An introduction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Finkelhor, D. (1986) *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*. London: Sage

Finkelhor, D. and Lewis, I.S. (1988) An epidemiologic approach to the study of child molestation. in R. A. Prentky and V. Quinsey (eds) *Human Sexual Aggression: Current perspectives*. Vol. 528, New York: New York Academy of Sciences

Fisher, D. (1994) Adult sex offenders: Who are they? Why and how do they do it?' in T. Morrison, M. Erooga and R.C. Beckett (eds) *Sexual Offending Against Children: Assessment and treatment of male offenders*. London: Routledge

Gallagher, B. (1999a) Institutional abuse. in N. Parton and C. Wattam (eds) *Child Sexual Abuse: Responding to the Experiences of Children*. Chichester: Wiley

Gallagher, B. (1999b) The abuse of children in public care. *Child Abuse Review*, 8, 357-365

Gittins, D. (1998) *The Child In Question*. Basingstoke: Macmillan

Green, L. (1998) *Caged by Force, Entrapped by Discourse: A Study of the construction and control of children and their sexualities in residential children's homes*. unpublished PhD thesis. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield

Green, L. (1999) *Getting the Balance Right: A Cross Comparative Analysis of the Balance Between Legal Intervention and Therapeutic Support Systems in Relation to Responses to Child Sexual abuse in England, Belgium and the Netherlands*. Report prepared for the EC. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield, Centre for Applied Childhood Studies

Green, L and Parkin, W. (1999) Sexuality, sexual abuse and children's homes: Oppression or protection. in The Violence Against Children's Study Group's *Children, Child Abuse and Child Protection: Placing children centrally*. Chichester: Wiley

Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Hawkes, G. (1996) *A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality*. Buckingham: OUP

Hearn, J., Sheppard, D., Tancred Sheriff, P. and Burrell, G. (eds) (1989) *The Sexuality of Organization*. London: Sage

Hearn, J. (1992) *Men in the Public Eye*. London: Routledge

Hearn, J. (1999) Ageism, violence and abuse. in *Children, Child Abuse and Child Protection: Placing children centrally*. The Violence Against Children's Study Group, Chichester: Wiley

Hearn, J. and Parkin, W. (1987) *'Sex' at 'Work': The power and paradox of organisation sexuality*. New York: St Martin's Press

Hearn, J. and Parkin, W. (1995) *'Sex' at 'Work': The power and paradox of organisation sexuality*, New York: St Martin's Press (revised ed)

Hoyland, P. (1989) Investigation checks child abuse claims. *The Guardian*, 23 October

Jones, J. (1994) Towards an understanding of power relationships in residential care. *Early Child Development and Care*, 100, 69-76

Kahan, B. (1993) *Growing up in Groups*. London: HMSO

Kitzinger, J. (1997) Who are you kidding? Children, power and the struggle against sexual abuse. in A. James and A. Prout (eds) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. London: Falmer Press

Lee, R.M. (1993) *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*. London: Sage

Levy, A. and Kahan, B. (1991) *The Pindown Experience and the Protection of Children*. Stafford: Staffordshire County Council

Liddle, A.M. (1993) Gender desire and child sexual abuse: Accounting for the male majority. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 10, 103-126

MacLeod, M. (1999) 'Don't Just Do It: Children's Access to help and Protection'. in N. Parton and C. Wattam (eds) *Child Sexual Abuse: Responding to the experiences of children*. Chichester: Wiley

MacLeod, M. and Saraga, E. (1988) 'Challenging the Orthodox': Towards feminist theory and practice. *Feminist Review*, 28, 15-55

Parkin, W. (1989) Private experiences in the public domain. in J. Hearn, D. Sheppard, P. Tancred Sheriff and G. Burrell. (eds) (1989) *The Sexuality of Organization*, London: Sage

Parkin, W. and Green, L. (1997) Cultures of abuse within residential childcare, *Early Child Development and Care*, 133, 73-86

Parton, N. (1991) *Governing the Family: Child Care, Child protection and the state*, London: Macmillan

Parton, N. (1994) Problematics of Government: (Post) modernity and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 24, 9-32

Penhale, B. (1999) Introduction. in N. Stanley, J. Manthorpe and B. Penhale (eds) *Institutional Abuse: Perspectives across the lifecourse*, London: Routledge

Pilkington, E. (1994) 'Shadow of the attic', *The Guardian*, 1.6.94

Popper. K. R. (1963) *Conjectures and Refutations*. London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul

Pringle, K. (1993) 'Gender politics'. *Community Care*, 4 March, 1993: 16-17

Robson, C. (1993) *Real World Research*. Oxford: Blackwell

Rose, N. (1989) *Governing the Soul: The shaping of the private self*. London: Routledge

Rosenthal, J. (1991) A descriptive study of abuse and neglect in out-of-home placement. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 15, 129-137

Lazar, D. (1998) Selected Issues in the Philosophy of Social Science. in C. Searle (ed) (1998) *Researching Society and Culture*. London: Sage

Sinclair, I. and Gibbs, I. (1998) *Children's Homes: A Study in diversity*. Chichester: Wiley

Short, M. (1996) Unsafe secret society. *The Independent*, 20.12.96

Stanley, N; Manthorpe, J. and Penhale, B. (1999) (eds) *Institutional Abuse: Perspectives across the lifecourse*. London: Routledge

Stein, M. (1993) The uses and abuses of residential care. in H. Ferguson, R. Gilligan, and R. Torode (eds) *Surviving Childhood Adversity*. Dublin: Social Studies Press

Utting, W. (1991) *Children in the Public Care*, London: HMSO

Utting, W. (1997) *People Like Us: The report of the review of the safeguards for children living away from home*. The Welsh Office: DOH

Wardhaugh, J. and Wilding, P. (1993) 'Towards an explanation of the corruption of care. *Critical Social Policy*, 13, 4-32

Warner, N. (1992) *Choosing with Care: Report of inquiry into the selection, development and management of staff in children's homes*. Chaired by Norman Warner. London: HMSO

The Waterhouse Report (2000) Published as *Lost In Care: Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into the abuse of children in care in the former County Council areas of Gwynedd and Clwyd since 1974*. National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations

Weber, M. (1974) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Allen and Unwin

Wight, D. and West, P. (1999) Poor recall, misunderstandings and embarrassment: Interpreting discrepancies in young men's reported heterosexual behaviour. *Culture, Health and Society*, 1 (1), 55-78

Wolf, S. C. (1984) A multifactor model of deviant sexuality. paper presented at *Third International Conference on Victimology*, Lisbon