

# Female Perpetrators and Male Victims of Sexual Abuse: Facts and Resources

By Loree Cook-Daniels

When Michael munson and I did the largest study to date on transgender survivors of sexual violence in 2004, we were very surprised at one of our findings: 29.29% of the survivors had been sexually abused by one or more women. As we presented those findings at various conferences and workshops, we'd note that we didn't know what to make of this data, since it seemed so high. We also noted an "extremely high" rate of sexual assault survivors who were perceived as male at the time of their assault(s). This data was easier to explain: we knew from personal experience that law enforcement and social services providers often literally dis-count male accounts of sexual assault. We knew of cases where police refused to open a case for male victims, even when they were cut up and bleeding in the local Sexual Assault Treatment Center. When a local sexual assault service provider told us that 50% of the men who called asking for services "were lying," it was even more obvious: many "official" counts of male victims are systematic undercounts.

As we moved into providing services to these "atypical" survivors (those who are male and those who had a female perpetrator), we began looking more closely at the existing literature. We were surprised again: not only were our data echoed in other studies, but there was a vast and rich literature on why the popular conception of sexual assault is that it's done by men to women, end of story.

In part one of this two-part series, we will look at some of the data and resources on these "atypical" victims and perpetrators, mostly coming from the child sexual assault literature. In part two, we will examine some of the reasons why this data is not better known or universally replicated in studies of assaults on adult (including elder) men, and what the implications of that are for victims, perpetrators, the professionals who investigate abuse and serve victims, and even society at large.

## Female Perpetrators

Although this article is by no means a comprehensive literature review, it may be helpful to look at some studies' findings about the number of sexual abuse perpetrators who are female. Unfortunately, nearly all the available studies of female perpetrators are based on samples of people abused as children. We will discuss the implications of this in part two of this article. Meanwhile, some sample studies:

Age at abuse	Gender of victims	% female perpetrators	Year study published	Type of study	Number studied	First author
Up to 18	male	40%	2005	HMO users	17,337	Dube
	female	6%				
All ages	both	29%	2005	Transgender internet users	265	Munson and Cook-Daniels
Childhood	both	25%	1997	N/A	N/A	Pearson
Childhood	male	53.8%	1994	College students	26	Lisak
N/A	male	37%	1990	N/A	N/A	Ramsey-Klawnsnik
	female	19%				
Childhood	both	20%	1973 – 1987 cases	Substantiated CPS sexual abuse cases (nationwide)	N/A	American Humane Association

### RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONALS:

If you want to learn more about female sexual offenders, the following are some good places to start.

#### Female Sex Offenders

Canadian Children’s Rights Council

[www.canadiancrc.com/female\\_sexual\\_predators\\_awareness.aspx](http://www.canadiancrc.com/female_sexual_predators_awareness.aspx)

The Canadian Children’s Rights Council covers a broad range of topics, including the abuse of boys. Although the webpage is not well-organized, it does include leads (many quoting statistics) to a number of academic and mass media sources. Amongst a collection of news media articles on female perpetrators are notes to watch how the language used for female sexual perpetrators’ actions is quite different than that used for male sexual perpetrators. Website includes a few pictures of alleged and convicted female sexual abuse perpetrators.

#### Resources and Bibliography on Female Sexual Deviance and Sexually Abusive/Criminal Behavior

Compiled by Alan Listiak, Ph.D.

<http://www.atsa.com/pdfs/FemaleDevianceBiblio.pdf>

Just the “general reference” section of this bibliography contains more than 270 articles and books dating from 1935 through early 2004. After those twelve small-font pages, additional categories cover: news stories (many associated with particular well-known female perpetrators); novels/fiction; ritual sexual abuse, day care, and related issues; sexual harassment and stalking by females; sexual compulsivity/sexual addiction in females;

paraphilias and incest – feminist theory, psychoanalytic theory and case studies; female sadism-masochism, dominance-submission; sexual abuse and violence in lesbian relationships; and female sexuality and femininity. Note that many website links are no longer valid.

#### Female Sexual Abuser Books

Safer Society Press

<http://www.saferociety.org/allbks/femsexab.php>

This press, which has focused on sexual abuse prevention and treatment publications since 1982, offers books featuring research on mother-daughter incest and adolescent and adult female sex offenders. The press also publishes treatment manuals for therapists and workbooks for both adolescent and adult female sex offenders.

#### Female Sex Offenders

Center for Sex Offender Management

[http://www.csom.org/pubs/female\\_sex\\_offenders\\_brief.pdf](http://www.csom.org/pubs/female_sex_offenders_brief.pdf)

Although it repeatedly says “research and literature about this unique segment of the sex offender population remains in its infancy,” this March 2007 document does address what is known and suspected about female sex offenders and how they are (or should be) treated, both inside and outside of the criminal justice system. Paper includes rather extensive bibliography of recent publications on the topic.

#### Female-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse: Redefining the Construct of Sexual Abuse and Challenging Beliefs About Human Sexuality

Making Daughters Safe Again

<http://mdsasupport.homestead.com/ra.html>

Online article provides a relatively brief, well-cited (4-page) academic review of some of the literature on women who were sexually abused in childhood by their mothers.

#### Female Perpetration of Child Sexual Abuse: An Overview of the Problem

Canadian Children’s Rights Council

[http://www.canadiancrc.com/Newspaper\\_Articles/MovingF\\_Female\\_perpetrators\\_Child\\_sexual\\_abuse\\_JUL94.aspx](http://www.canadiancrc.com/Newspaper_Articles/MovingF_Female_perpetrators_Child_sexual_abuse_JUL94.aspx)

This online article is more reader-friendly than some of the more academic articles, utilizing more stories (such as one researcher having to change the topic of her dissertation due to the refusal of those treating women sex offenders to admit that) and citing less academic-focused studies such as ones conducted by the *Los Angeles Times*. Includes results from several studies showing widespread childhood sexual abuse by females.

## RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS:

It is extremely difficult to find resources specifically for people who were sexually abused by one or more women. A short bibliography of books and articles – many of them aimed at academics – is available at <http://www.forge-forward.org/transviolence/femaleperpetrators.php> Another good resource is:

Adult Victim Books

Safer Society Press

<http://www.saferociety.org/allbks/adtvic.php>

Ordering information for four books addressing adults who were sexually abused in childhood. Although the book descriptions do not specifically mention female perpetrators, Safer Society Press publishes books on female perpetrators, so there's a good chance the books they publish for survivors are inclusive, as well.

Two other resources addressing women abused by their mothers include:

Mother-Daughter Sexual Abuse Survivors: Making Daughters Safe Again

<http://mdsa-online.org/>

Comprehensive website discusses MDSA's in-person retreats and trainings, an upcoming book and documentary, resources, and links.

Mother-Daughter Rape: A Challenge for Feminism

South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault Australia

<http://www.secasa.com.au/index.php/workers/25/32>

Long article includes many quotes by women abused by their mothers. Addresses theoretical issues about the recognition of mother-daughter incest and touches on post-assault issues such as sense of body integrity, boundaries, self-harm, defense mechanisms, and adult sexuality and reproduction. Does include "notes" quoting only studies that found only a very small percentage of sexual offenders are women.

For men abused by women, see additional resources under "male victims," below.

## Male Victims:

Good data on male victims of sexual assault in adulthood are almost impossible to find, due to reasons we'll discuss in part two of this article. Therefore, the best data we have on male sexual assault

survivors are from studies of childhood sexual abuse, usually from retrospective accounts. Here is a sample:

Age at abuse	Male victims	Female victims	Year study published	Type of study	Number studied	First author
Up to 18	16%	25%	2005	HMO users	17,337	Dube
< 16	17% <sup>1</sup> / >25% <sup>2</sup>	N/A	1994, 1996	College students	N/A	Lisak & colleagues
< 18	29%	N/A	1995	College students	284	Collings
< 17	15.5% / 6.9% <sup>3</sup>	N/A	1994	Community sample	N/A	Bagley, Wood, Young
Childhood	16%	27%	1990	N/A	N/A	Finkelhor, et. al.

**RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONALS:**

Sexual Abuse of Males: Prevalence, Possible Lasting Effects, & Resources

Website by Jim Hopper, Ph.D.

<http://www.jimhopper.com/male%2Dab/>

Dr. Jim Hopper is a psychology instructor at Harvard Medical School. Although parts of his male survivors page only go through 1996 (when he completed a literature review), this is an actively-updated, comprehensive and indispensable resource. A particularly useful section is “Prevalence: Methods,” which gives what it promises (in plain English, no less!): “tools for critically understanding research.” These tools will help in evaluating not only sexual abuse studies, but also other types of studies.

Resources for Professionals

MaleSurvivor

<http://www.malesurvivor.org/professionals.html>

Provides instant access to more than two-dozen articles written by professionals on male sexual abuse survivors. Includes some treatment recommendations. Unfortunately, nearly every article is focused on men abused as children, not men assaulted as adults.

The Psychological Impact of Sexual Abuse: Content Analysis of Interviews with Male Survivors

<sup>1</sup> Involving physical contact

<sup>2</sup> Including non-contact forms of abuse

<sup>3</sup> Experienced multiple episodes

David Lisak, *Journal of Traumatic Studies*, 1994

Available online from:

[http://www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/Lisak \(1994\) Male Survivor Interviews.pdf](http://www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/Lisak (1994) Male Survivor Interviews.pdf)

This article was written for professionals/academics, but may be an eye-opening read for relatively highly-literate male survivors who aren't sure how "normal" they are. Quotes from only 26 male survivors are divided into fifteen psychological themes addressing the aftermath of the sexual assault of boys and men: anger, betrayal, fear, homosexuality issues, helplessness, isolation and alienation, legitimacy, loss, masculinity issues, negative childhood peer relations, negative schemas about people, negative schemas about self, problems with sexuality, self blame/guilt and shame/humiliation. Should be required reading for anyone who wonders if males are as damaged by sexual abuse as females.

See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil: Why Do Relatively Few Male Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse Receive Help for Abuse-Related Issues in Adulthood?

Guy R. Holmes, Liz Offen, and Glenn Waller, *Clinical Psychology Review* (1997)

Available online from:

<http://www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/Holmes Offen Waller 1997.pdf>

A very good exploration of the probable reasons why professionals may not have run into many men willing to reveal childhood sexual abuse, based upon a review of relevant literature. Examined and dismissed as myths are the possibilities that few men are sexually abused as children, and that childhood sexual abuse has little effect on men. Other theories that are better supported include: they are more likely to be seen by other systems, such as criminal justice; they tend not to define their childhood experiences as abusive, and do not think those experiences had a negative impact; the consequences of disclosure are seen as worse than the consequences of non-disclosure; there is a paucity of services for adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse; clinicians are less likely to suspect childhood sexual abuse in a male adult because of the social myth that men are perpetrators and women are victims; clinicians don't ask men about sexual abuse; clinicians don't believe men who do say they were victimized; and clinicians' belief that women are more affected by sexual abuse than are men. Concludes with a good discussion of how "social problems" are constructed and why sexual abuse of girls is on the radar, but sexual abuse of boys isn't.

Long-Term Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Gender of Victim

Shanta R. Dube, et. al., *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* (2005)

Available online from:

[http://www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/Dube \(2005\) Childhood sexual abuse by gender of victim.pdf](http://www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/Dube (2005) Childhood sexual abuse by gender of victim.pdf)

The data used in this review came from surveys of more than 17,000 members of a California HMO who went through a comprehensive history as part of their care. A quarter of the women (25%) and 16% of the men reported childhood sexual abuse. Compared with no sexual abuse, "there was a twofold increased risk for suicide attempts for both men and women...[and] a 40%

increased risk of marrying an alcoholic for both men and women.” More of the men reported “severe” sexual abuse, defined as intercourse. There was little difference in outcomes if the perpetrator was a man or a woman.

## RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS:

### MaleSurvivor

<http://www.malesurvivor.org/>

This comprehensive website includes many well-organized sections with information for and publications by or about male sexual abuse survivors. Survivor resources include in-person workshops throughout the United States and Canada, guides to locating and choosing a therapist, “Myths about Male Sexual Victimization,” online “chats,” bibliographies, and online stories by male survivors.

### Adult Victim Books

Safer Society Press

<http://www.safersociety.org/allbks/adtvic.php>

Ordering information for four books addressing adults who were sexually abused in childhood, including a *Survivor’s Manual for Women and Men* and *Beyond Betrayal: Taking Charge of Your Life After Boyhood Sexual Abuse*.

### For Men

South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault Australia

<http://www.secasa.com.au/sitemap.php>

Halfway down this site map is a list of “resources for men” that address male sexual assault survivors. Does include materials for men assaulted as adults.

## References:

Bagley, C., Wood, M., & Young, L. (1994). Victim to abuser: Mental health and behavioral sequels of child sexual abuse in a community survey of young adult males. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 18, 683-697.

Collings, SJ. (1995). The long-term effects of contact and noncontact forms of child sexual abuse in a sample of university men. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 19, 1-6.

Dube, SR, et. al. (2005). Long-term consequences of childhood sexual abuse by gender of victim. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 28, 430-438.

Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G., Lewis, IA, & Smith, C. (1990). Sexual abuse in a national survey of adult men and women: Prevalence, characteristics, and risk factors. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 14, 19-28.

Lisak, D. (1994). The psychological impact of sexual abuse: Content analysis of interviews with male survivors. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 7, 525-548.

Lisak, D., Hopper, J., & Song, P. (1996). Factors in the cycle of violence: Gender rigidity and emotional constriction. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 9, 721-743.

Munson, M., & Cook-Daniels, L. (2005). Transgender Sexual Violence Project. FORGE. Available at [http://www.forge-forward.org/transviolence/docs/FINAL\\_Graphs.pdf](http://www.forge-forward.org/transviolence/docs/FINAL_Graphs.pdf).

Pearson, P. (1997). *When she was bad: Violent women and the myth of innocence*. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc.

Ramsey-Klawnsnik, H. (1990). Sexual abuse by female perpetrators: Impact on children. Proceedings of the National Symposium on Child Victimization. Tyler, TX: Family Violence and Sexual Assault Institute.

*A version of this article was originally published by Victimization of the Elderly and Disabled, Vol. 11, No. 4, November/December 2008.*