

How does gender influence juror attitudes towards cases of child sexual abuse in educational settings?



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Background

Statistics about the prevalence of female sexual abusers varies wildly. Overall, around 1.5% of the population may be affected by female perpetrated abuse, but when put into context it becomes apparent how many people that actual is. Such as, in the 2011 census Huddersfield had a population of 162,949 (Kirklees Council 2011). Following the earlier statistic, that would mean approximately 2,444 people have been affected by female perpetrated sexual abuse in some way in Huddersfield alone. However, other statistics suggest up to 20% of all sexual abuse cases may have been committed by a female (Townsend & Ryal, 2009), and this does not take into account that over 83% of sexual abuse victims do not report their experiences to the police so the true figure is unknown. (Office for National Statistics (2018).



Image 1. A screenshot of a headline from a popular tabloid newspaper from the 3rd June 2019. (Jones, 2019).

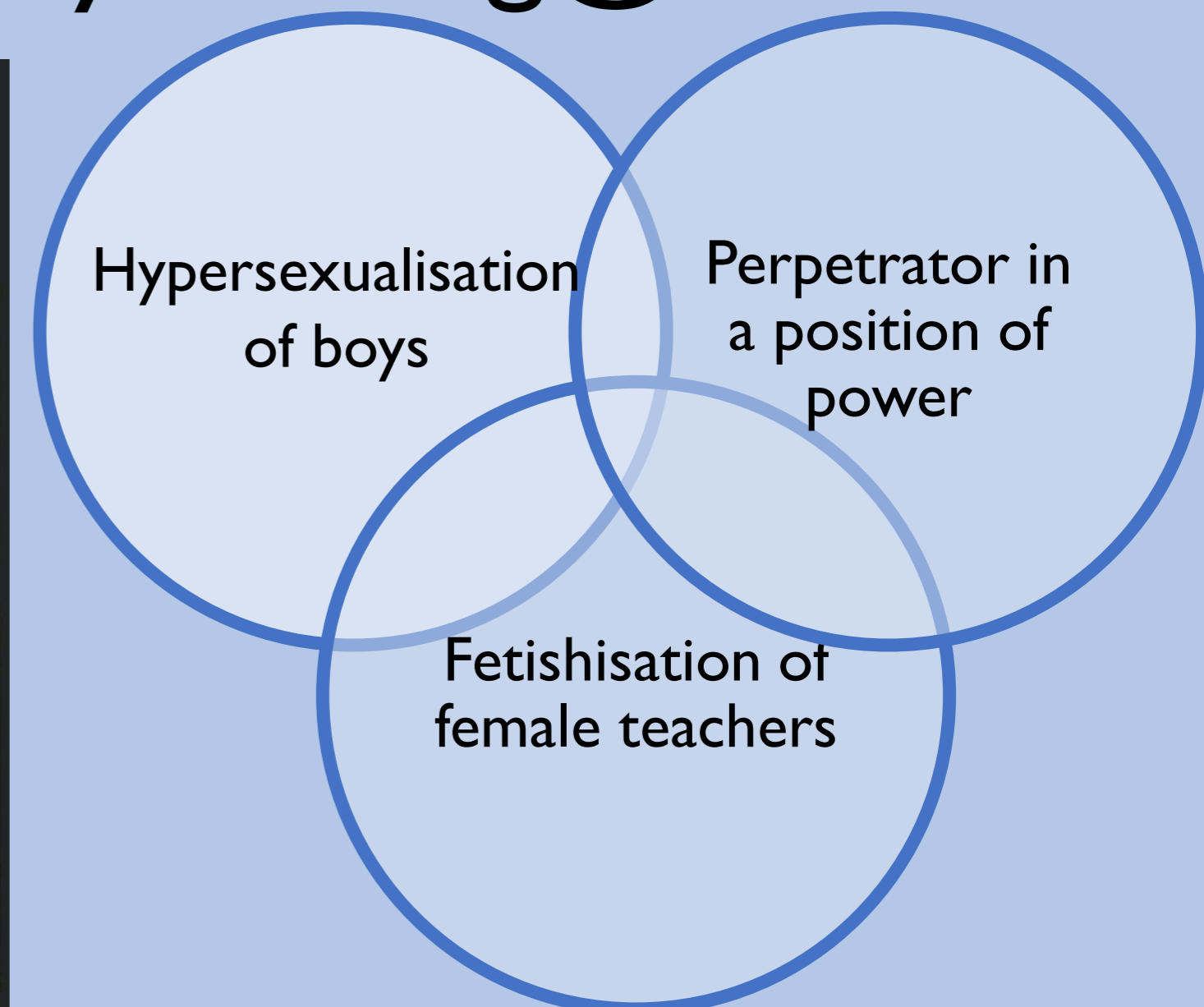


Diagram 1. A Venn diagram to represent of some of the factors that overlap to create this unique situation where abuse occurs and may not even be seen as such.

“Every schoolboys fantasy...”

“Wish this happened to me at school! If my son had this amazing opportunity I would say good on you boy get in there!”

- Comments to the article above made online. Names have been removed to preserve anonymity.

Undoubtedly men are more likely to be perpetrators of sexual abuse. However, female perpetrated abuse needs specialised treatment, for both victims and offenders (Bourke, et al., 2014.) In order to create evidence-based prevention and education programmes, we must first acknowledge and understand that female perpetrated abuse occurs (Peter, 2009), especially for the benefit of services such as Childline where around 17% of perpetrators of abuse are female (Childline, 2009.)

Method

A systematic review is underway that will include previous studies that have looked at sexual abuse within schools. They do not need to have looked at the gender of the perpetrator- this would have made the search too limited. We are currently working through screening abstracts and titles (see the PRISMA flowchart to the right) and will be including only formal educational settings- not nannies or babysitters, and only studies that occurred in either the UK, Australia, or North America. We have excluded studies before the 2003 Sexual Offences Act, and only included peer reviewed studies. Other than that, methodology will not be restricted, meaning this will include both qualitative and quantitative research.

PRISMA Flowchart

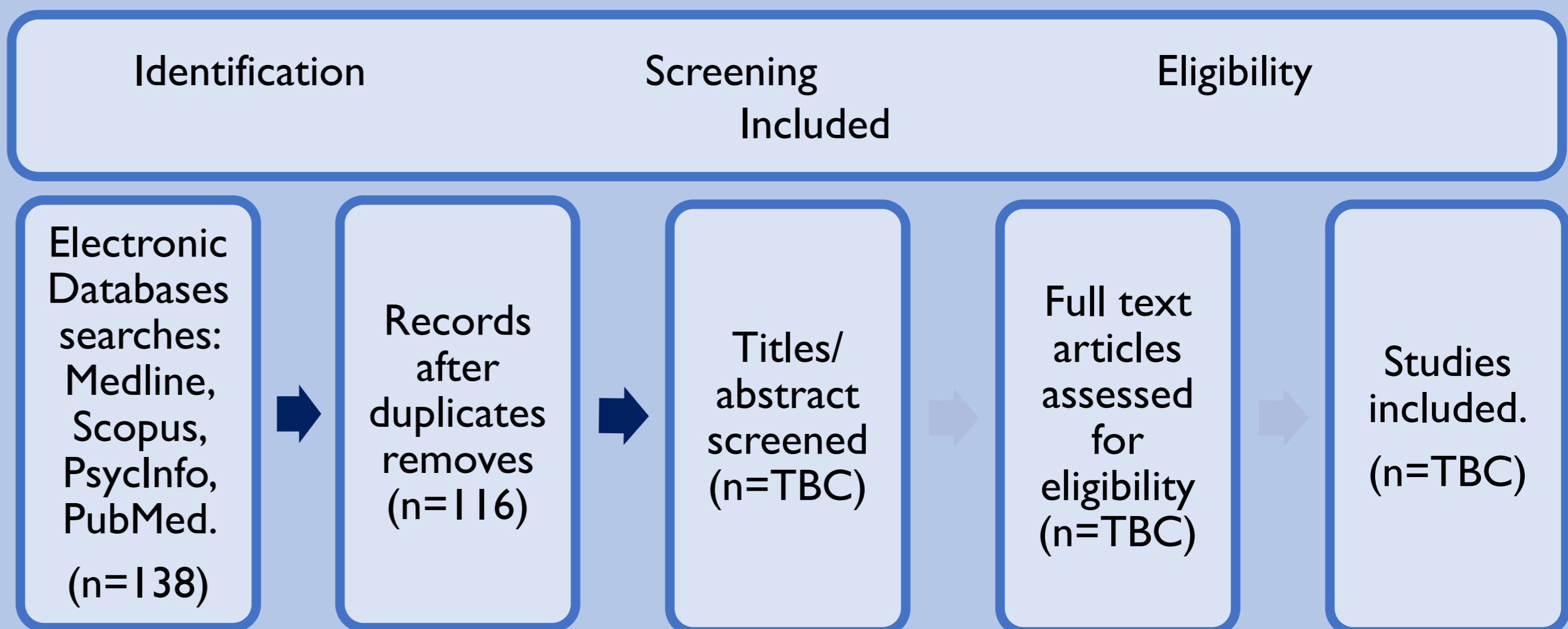


Diagram 2. A PRISMA flow diagram for the systematic review detailing the database searches, the number of abstracts screened and the full text retrieved. We are currently screening titles and abstracts and hope to publish this summer. (Adapted from Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, and Altman, 2009)

Potential Results and Implications

As we are not restricting methodology in our search, results will include both quantitative and qualitative studies. Therefore our results will be a mix of literature synthesis and potential meta-analysis, depending on results of the search. We hope to produce a more reliable statistic that helps to summarise the current situation with female perpetrated sexual abuse across the UK, Australia, and North America. This will also highlight areas that need more research, and offer suggestions for improvements within the UK and wider criminal justice systems. This review will offer a starting point for research into specialised treatments for female perpetrated abuse and the associated myths.

Bourke, A., Doherty, S., McBride, O., Morgan, K., & McGee, H. (2014). Female perpetrators of child sexual abuse: characteristics of the offender and victim. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 20 (8), 769-780.
 ChildLine. (2009). ChildLine Case notes: Calls to ChildLine about Sexual Abuse. London, UK: NSPCC.
 Jones, M. (2019, June 3). Miss Behaviour: Married female teacher, 33, had sex with 'stud' pupil, 14, in classroom on last day of school. *The Sun*. Retrieved from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9204534/teacher-jailed-sex-with-student-in-classroom/>
 Kirklees Council. (2011). *Census Information*. Retrieved from <https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/information-and-data/census-information.aspx>
 Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D.G., The PRISMA Group (2009). *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement*. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097
 Office for National Statistics (2018). *Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017*. Retrieved from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/sexualoffencesinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017/>
 Peter, T. (2009). Exploring taboos comparing male- and female-perpetrated child sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24, 1111-1128. doi:10.1177/0886260508322194
 Townsend, M. & Syal, R. (2009, October 4). Up to 64,000 women in UK 'are child-sex offenders'. *The Observer*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2009/oct/04/uk-female-child-sex-offenders>.