

Running head: TEACHERS WHO COMMIT SEXUAL OFFENSES

A Description of Sexual Offending Committed by Canadian Teachers

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Abstract

The aim of this investigation was to undertake an analysis of teachers who sexually offend against children and adolescents, and the circumstances related to these offenses. Archival Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System (ViCLAS) reports were obtained from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and demographic and criminal characteristics for the offender, as well as information about the victim and offense, were selected for analyses. A descriptive approach was used to analyze the qualitative reports for a group of 113 Canadian sexual offenders between 1995 and 2002. The results provided a description of adult male teachers who offended within their position of trust, as well as offense, and victim characteristics. Offender profiles included information relating to age, marital status, mental health, substance abuse and primary motivation for the offenses. Offense characteristics included grooming methods, location, and sexual acts. Victim characteristics included age, gender, and family constellation. Implications for the identification and supervision of teachers at risk to sexually assault their students are discussed.

A Description of Sexual Offending Committed by Canadian Teachers

In addition to their primary caregivers, children are significantly impacted by individuals who act as parental and authority figures but are, nonetheless, biologically unrelated (e.g. teachers, childcare providers, coaches, etc.; Bowlby, 1980; Shumba, 2002). Individuals who commit sexual abuse in the capacity of a position of trust have been referred to as ‘professional perpetrators’. This term is used to describe those individuals who “use either the institutions or organizations within which they work to target and abuse children” (Sullivan & Beech, 2002, p. 153). A legal definition cited by Weiss (2002) stated: “A position of authority means that position occupied by a parent, relative, household member, teacher, employer or other person who, by reason of that position, is able to exercise undue influence over a child” (p. 35). It has been hypothesized that these individuals obtain such positions to achieve their desired goal to offend sexually (Nolan, 2001; Sullivan & Beech, 2002) and that they may represent a unique subset of sexual offenders based on the victim-offender relationship.

While a significant body of research has accumulated on the characteristics of sexual perpetrators inside the family unit (i.e., incest offenders; Firestone et al., 1999, Hanson, Gizzarelli, & Scott, 1994; Kingston, Firestone, Wexler, & Bradford, in press), far less attention has focused on the professional perpetrator. These offenders are likely included in research groups of extra-familial child molesters where the victim-offender relationship may be quite superficial or even nonexistent. However, research is now emerging which examines the features

of professional perpetrators, specifically the dynamics of abusive interactions and offender/victim characteristics (Hanson & Price, 2004; Haywood, Kravitz, Grossman, Wasyliv, & Hardy, 1996; Moulden, Firestone, & Wexler, 2007; Sullivan & Beech, 2002; Firestone, Moulden, & Wexler, in press).

Professional Perpetrators

Some common characteristics of professional perpetrators have been described in the literature. Most offenders were characterized by the following features: adult, single, male, often university educated, minimal substance abuse issues, generally prosocial attitudes, virtually no prior sexual or even criminal offenses, and few psychological deficits (Gallagher, 2000; Moulden, et al., 2007; Sullivan & Beech, 2002; Firestone et al., in press). While some research has suggested that professional perpetrators are controlling and manipulative, others have indicated that these types of offenders are socially inadequate (Sullivan & Beech, 2002). In terms of offense planning, Gallagher (1998) described an offense pathway that was characteristic of explicit planning (e.g., grooming) rather than one that was opportunistic in nature.

The modus operandi of adults working or volunteering with children provided additional insight into the grooming process of these offenders. Examining Canadian sexual offenders in a position of trust, Leclerc, Proulx, and McKibben (2005) found that professional perpetrators tended to show love and attention to potential victims, gradually desensitized victims to sexualized behavior, and then used subtle forms of coercion (not violence) to ensure that victims did not disclose the abuse. Moreover, the authors described this type of offender as fixated on children and therefore sought out opportunities to engage with and access children in a legitimate way.

With regard to offence pathways, Ward and Hudson (1998, 2000) proposed the self-regulation (SR) model of the offence process, which was developed specifically for sexual offenders, and was designed to account for the diversity evident in sexual offending behavior (Kingston & Yates, 2008; Ward, Loudon, Hudson, & Marshall, 1995; Yates & Kingston, 2006). The model was specifically based on SR theory (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996) and emphasized the internal and external processes that allow individuals to engage in goal-directed behavior (Karoly, 1993; Ward & Hudson, 1998). Particular importance is placed on the individual's goals with respect to sexual offending (approach-motivated versus avoidance-motivated) and the manner in which the individual attempts to achieve this goal (i.e., self-regulatory strategies). The combination of goals and strategies culminate in one of four pathways to sexual offending that vary across type of sexual offender (see Yates & Kingston, 2005, 2006).

One pathway within this scheme, the approach-explicit pathway, is characterized by intact self-regulation, antisocial goals, and explicit offense planning. As indicated throughout the limited research on professional perpetrators, it would appear that individuals may be likely to follow this pathway to offending, although this has not been empirically tested. The potential relationship between professional perpetrators and the approach-explicit pathway is of considerable interest, given that recent research has indicated that offenders following such a pathway to offending are more deviant and higher-risk to re-offend sexually than are other types of offense pathways (Bickley & Beech, 2002; Yates & Kingston, 2006).

Taken together, this limited research highlights some important differences between professional perpetrators and other sexual offenders; namely criminal characteristics, psychological factors, and offense planning. However, the findings also suggest that this type of

offender is particularly dangerous, given his/her access to victims, the trust vested in the individual by both victims and their parents, and the strategies used to exploit this trust for sexual purposes.

Teacher Sexual Offenders

Recent media attention has focused on various high-profile teachers who sexually assaulted their students (*R. vs. DeLuca*, 1996 as cited in Robins, 2000). Interestingly, while some research has been conducted on teachers who sexually abuse within university/college samples (Fromuth, Holt, & Parker, 2001; Timmerman, 2003), fewer studies have focused on younger, and perhaps, more vulnerable victims (i.e., primary and high school students). In a review of institutional abuse in the United Kingdom, Gallagher (2000) estimated incidence rates of 185 cases per year across England and Wales. When he examined community based settings specifically, he found that schools represented 44 percent of the abuse sites. Moreover, teachers represented the largest occupational group of sexual abusers (29%). In an attempt to summarize the limited data, Gallagher provided information about the offender, offense, and victim characteristics. Specifically he noted that 96 percent of teacher offenders were male, and almost all of them acted alone with regard to the sexual offense (92%). Based on Gallagher's estimations, these individuals were roughly between 40 and 49 years old at the time of reporting. He also indicated that offenders most often abused single victims, and these were usually girls between 12 and 17 years of age.

Some recent profiles of educators who sexually abuse high school students have been conducted outside North America (Nhundu & Shumba, 2001; Shumba, 2001; Zindi & Shumba,

1999) and as such, the characteristics of these offenders may differ from those findings derived from other populations and cultures. In a review of teacher sexual offender files selected from various urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe, Shumba (2001) examined the extent of abuse, and various offender and offense information. Between 1990 and 1997, the review revealed 212 cases of sexual abuse, 33 cases of physical abuse, and 1 case of emotional abuse. With regard to sexual abuse, the majority of the offenders were male (99%), less than 30 years of age (69%) and had sexual intercourse with the victim (66%). However, there was variability with respect to the type of sexual involvement. Included were acts such as viewing pornography, fondling and intercourse.

In a similar study, Nhundu and Shumba (2001) conducted a retrospective file review of 110 documented cases of child sexual abuse in rural areas of Zimbabwe. Over an 8-year period, approximately 14 cases of teacher sexual abuse occurred per year, with 98 percent of the victims identified as female. Similar to the study mentioned above, the majority of the cases were quite intrusive and often involved vaginal penetration (67%). Moreover, it was also found that most teachers were married at the time of the offense (59%) and had offended against victims between the ages of 8 and 16 years.

Other studies sought to establish the frequency and type of teacher-perpetrated sexual assault. Timmerman (2003) administered questionnaires to 2,808 high school students in the Netherlands. Results indicated that 27 percent of individuals revealed that the perpetrator was a school-related adult (e.g., teacher, principal). Similar to the results of other studies the majority of the perpetrators were male (86%) and the preponderance of victims were female.

In one of the few studies conducted in North America, Corbett, Gentry, and Pearson (1993) surveyed 185 college students and obtained retrospective accounts of the frequency and

type of teacher-perpetrated sexual aggression experienced during high school. The results indicated that 6 percent of the sample reported an incident of sexually inappropriate behavior. Specifically, the sexual assault consisted of inappropriate looks or comments (48%), inappropriate touching (23%), or penile penetration (29%).

Much of the research on teacher sexual aggressors has dealt with cultures that are distinct from North America and the methodology used in some of the studies have significant limitations (e.g., use of retrospective self-report). As such, an examination of a representative sample of sexually aggressive teachers should be established in order to provide a typical profile of offense behavior in North America. Knowledge about the modus operandi and offense behavior of offenders who hold this type of position of authority are important in order to establish prevention programs and/or implement employee selection and supervision procedures (Abel, Osborn, & Warberg, 1998; Leclerc, Proulx, & McKibben, 2005).

The purpose of the present study was to provide a description of Canadian teachers who have offended against their students. Not only does this description of offender, victim, and offense characteristics further our understanding of professional perpetrators in general, but it also provides a reference point for studying, screening, and interviewing these offenders. Specifically, we used the Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System (ViCLAS) to examine the demographic, criminal, and psychological features associated with those individuals investigated, charged, and/or convicted of sexually abusing a student.

Method

Procedure for Data Collection and Coding

Information for this study was obtained from ViCLAS crime reports for teachers who were considered high-probability offenders, specifically those under investigation, charged,

and/or prosecuted for a sexual offense. These reports were obtained following a request submitted to the RCMP to view all ViCLAS reports of investigations, charges and/or convictions involving perpetrators whose relationship with the victim was one of trust (i.e. clergy, babysitters). It is important to note, for the purpose of the RCMP crime database, the identity of an offender does not have to be established by charge or conviction. If, as a result of the investigation, the investigator(s) is satisfied that the identity of the offender is known, then the person can and should be listed as the offender.

When a sexual or violent crime occurs, investigating officers from municipal and provincial police forces in Canada complete a ViCLAS booklet of standardized questions, with one booklet completed for each of the incidents involving the offender. If an offender has more than one victim, a separate booklet is completed for each victim. Similarly, a separate booklet is completed for each unique incident, even if it involves the same perpetrator and victim. Each question in the booklet provides a series of response options (e.g., the question of marital status includes the following response options: single, married/common-law, separated, divorced, widowed, homosexual relationship, and other). The completed booklet is then forwarded to one of ten specific provincial RCMP centres where a trained investigator enters the data into a specialized RCMP database for serious and violent crime. Provincial databases are linked to a centralized RCMP file, which is regularly updated with new crime reports. Each crime report contains over 200 variables regarding offender and victim characteristics, as well as crime scene information. As such, they provide a valuable source of information for investigative and profiling purposes.

Descriptive information about the offender, offense, and the victim(s) was collected from these ViCLAS reports. Trained investigating officers made judgements based on information

gathered during the course of the investigation, such as interviews with offenders, victims and collateral sources, as well as physical evidence. Unfortunately, no examination of the reliability of such reports has been completed to date. However, such a study is currently underway (M. Martineau, personal communication, October 20, 2005). Information relevant to the study included personal characteristics of the offender (e.g., age, marital status, relationship to victim, method of contact with victim), demographic characteristics of the victim (e.g., age, gender, residence), as well as crime scene and offense information (e.g., extent of injury, sexual acts, location of offense).

Each nominal variable (e.g., victim residence) contained numerous items (e.g., living with both parents, living with single parents, living with siblings, living in group home/residential school, etc.). With the exception of the apparent age, and gender of the offender and victim, variables were coded dichotomously with items indicating the presence or absence of the characteristic, creating various categories for each variable. This was necessary because many variables had between 20 and 30 descriptors. Variables were selected based on completeness of the data, and the relevance to the intended goal of the study, that is, to examine descriptive characteristics of crimes committed by teachers.

Participants

The inclusion criteria requested information for those incidents resulting in an investigation, charges, or a prosecution of adult perpetrators whose relationship to the victim was identified as a teacher. Participants included 113 adult male teachers who had come to the attention of the RCMP for a sexual offense against a child or adolescent in their care between 1995 and 2002. Nine female teachers existed in the database, but were removed in order to create a uniform sample. Given low base rates and problems with reporting sexual offenses, it is

acknowledged that the data reported here represent only those sexual offenses detected, and therefore, are not representative of all sexual offenses committed by teachers in Canada.

Data Treatment

The data were organized according to identification numbers associated with offenders, victims, and offense incidents. There was no identifying information attached to the codes. Case files were organized and coded for each instance of an offense, in other words, each time the perpetrator offended, even if it was against the same victim. Multiple victims were defined as two or more victims. Because one offender may have had multiple victims, thus necessitating multiple entries, the results would have been biased toward those offenders with multiple victims. Typically, a nesting procedure would be used to address the confounding of variance. However, given the nature of the data (i.e. one sample, dichotomous variables) and analysis (i.e. descriptive statistics), such a procedure was not appropriate (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Therefore, the most typical case for each offender was entered into the data analyses.

Typicality was determined based on the following factors: completeness of data, victim age and gender, sexual acts perpetrated, and location of offense. When equally typical cases were found for the same offender, the greater the severity of the sexual offense was the discriminating factor. When cases could not be discriminated with respect to typicality for a given offender, the most typical case example of the sample was used. This resulted in the exclusion of 100 victims. Because complete information was not available for every offender/victim profile, and because the categories were not mutually exclusive, the totals do not always sum to 100 percent. Thus the sample size will vary depending upon how many cases were entered into the analyses.

Data were analyzed using SPSS/Windows version 13.0. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Prior to the analysis, study variables were inspected for accuracy of data entry and missing data. Two of the authors were responsible for entering and interpreting coded data. Ten percent of the data were examined for reliable entry and a correlation of $r = 0.83$ was determined. Cases where more than 15 percent of the data were missing were removed from the sample resulting in the loss of 18 cases. Cases with missing data were not included in individual frequency analyses. Therefore, frequency analyses reflected total counts (total minus missing).

Results

Descriptive data were analyzed for the offender and victim, as well as for the characteristics of the sexual crimes perpetrated by the male teachers. Ninety-five unique offender-victim pairs were included in the final analyses. Prior to the selection of typical victims, 24 percent of the sample had offended against multiple victims, and the number of victims ranged from one to twenty.

The ViCLAS database includes records of the apparent age for the offender and victim, rather than the chronological age. This unusual practice may be a function of the nature of the information collected. For profiling purposes, investigators may find that apparent age more accurately describes how an offender or victim look and act than actual age of the victim. The mean apparent age of the offenders was 37.28 (SD = 15.30), with ages ranging from 19 to 69 years. In this sample of adult male teachers, 53 percent were single, 39 percent were married or involved in a common-law relationship, 5 percent were divorced, 1 percent were involved in a same sex relationship, and 1 percent defined their relationship as “other”. The sexual orientation of the offenders included 42% heterosexual, 15% bisexual, and 29% homosexual. Given that the category of sexual orientation included items pertaining to various sexual practices and habits

(e.g., sexual orientation, paraphilias), offenders could be allocated into several categories. Only data pertaining to sexual orientation are reported and, as such, percentages do not sum to 100. It is important to note that the data reported were often based on the perception of the officers.

Teaching was the offenders' primary occupation in this sample (68%). However, some individuals worked in additional fields. A significant proportion of teachers were also members of the clergy (17%). This is not surprising given the role of religious leaders in education (e.g. Catholic school boards, residential schools). Six percent of offenders described their occupation as "other", and 2 percent identified themselves as students, and recreational supervisors, respectively. The remaining offenders reported working in the following fields: (social assistance, 1%; clerical, 1%; farmer, 1%; and personnel services, 1%).

By definition, the offender was known to the victim as a teacher. However, in some cases the offender had additional relationships with the victim. Clergy was the most common secondary relationship between offender and victim (15%), followed by "other" (10%), and acquaintance (5%). Offenders who knew victims through their role as community volunteer or group leader accounted for 3 percent of the sample each, and therapists/counselors, employers, ex-employees, and strangers each represented 2 percent of offender relationships to victims.

A number of psychological features were included in the dataset. According to ViCLAS reports, 99 percent of respondents described their offenses as sexually motivated. An additional 14 percent stated that they were also motivated by the excitement or thrill associated with committing the offense. Finally, only 1 percent of the sample was described as religiously or culturally motivated. With respect to substance related problems and psychological functioning, 6 percent of the sample were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offense.

Furthermore, a small proportion of the sample had received treatment for alcohol (5%), psychological (5%), sexual (4%) and other (2%) types of problems.

In positions of trust, the mechanisms by which offenders made contact with victims were often based upon the relationship, and therefore appear manipulative rather than forceful. Most offenders used/abused their positions of authority to initiate contact with the victim (84%). A large proportion of individuals befriended the victim (40%), offered assistance to the victim (16%), offered money, treats, toys, or work (14%). To a lesser extent, offenders posed as an authority figure (6%), asked the victim for information or assistance (6%), offered the victim a ride (4%), and wanted to show the victim something (4%). In 2 percent of cases, the offender asked the victim to model for photographs.

The victims had a mean apparent age of 11.8 years ($SD = 3.18$), and ages ranged from 3 to 16 years. Victims were slightly more likely to be female (56%), although no differences existed between male ($M = 12.17$, $SD = 2.84$) and female ($M = 11.43$, $SD = 3.40$) victims with respect to age. Using 12-years-old as a benchmark, 60 percent of victims were adolescents. At the time of the offense, most victims were living with either both (65%) or one (11%) parent(s). In some cases, victims were living outside of the home in either a correctional facility (9%), with relatives (7%), or with a roommate (1%). However, in 15 percent of cases victims defined their residence as “other”.

A large proportion of offenses took place at school (elementary, junior high school, and high school; 44%), which in many cases was also the offender’s workplace (37%). Many offenses also took place at the offender’s residence (41%), victim’s residence (19%), in a religious facility (14%), and in other types of residences (12%). Less frequently, offenses took place in a dormitory (5%), a single-family dwelling (4%), a type of business location (4%), or

public place (4%). Small proportions of offenses occurred in the following places: a jail/detention center (3%), a wooded area (3%), a tent/camper (2%), the offender's vehicle (2%), a recreation or fitness facility (2%), an office building (2%), the yard of a home (2%), a public street (2%), or other outdoor space (2%). Each of the following places accounted for 1 percent of the offense locations: group home, hotel/motel, vehicle, college/university campus, library, public swimming pool, military installation, public park, highway, and outdoor parking lot.

Table 1 summarizes the sexual acts performed by the teachers during the offense. The most common sexual acts perpetrated included fondling or hugging the victim, masturbation, and kissing. A large proportion of offenders used minimal physical force (49%) and none of the victims sustained any physical injuries as a result of the offense. Lastly, victims were released in 93 percent of cases. In 5 percent of cases the victim escaped, and in 2 percent of cases the offense was interrupted or the victim was rescued (i.e. intervention by a third party).

Discussion

Analysis of ViCLAS crime reports yielded descriptions of sexually offensive male teachers, their victims, and the characteristics of the offenses themselves in a Canadian sample of sexual offenders. Sexual abuse by someone in a position of trust may represent some unique considerations. Because of the unsupervised access to potential victims and the trust that is bestowed upon teachers by the school, students, and parents, this group of offenders is likely difficult to detect and victims may be less likely to report the offense. Moreover, as a consequence of the inherent betrayal of this trust, victims may experience a greater frequency and longer duration of the effects of sexual abuse (see Bowlby, 1980).

In this sample of teachers, most offenders were male, which is true of other groups of professional perpetrators and sexual offenders in general. Therefore, the analysis was restricted

to male teachers so as to provide a more accurate description, unmarred by potential sex differences. Offenders were described in their mid-thirties, which is comparable to the average age of incarcerated sexual offenders in Canada, but slightly younger than other sexual offenders in a position of trust (Langevin, Curnoe, & Bain, 2000; Langevin, Glancy, Curnoe, & Bain, 1999; Sullivan & Beech, 2002). Although most were single, many offenders were married or in a common-law relationship. This pattern was similar to proportions published by Langevin and his colleagues for clerics and physicians (Langevin et al., 2000; Langevin et al., 1999). By definition, most men worked as teachers and came to know the victim through this position of authority. However, a point of interest is that many teachers in this group were also described as clergy. This is likely attributable to the role of religion in some Canadian schools, such as the historical use of residential school programs for aboriginals, and those of the Catholic faith.

Victim age ranged from 3 to 16-years-old. Male and female victims were almost equally proportioned and both were approximately 12-years-old. This finding differs from previous research suggesting females are at an increased risk for molestation by teachers (Gallagher, 2000; Timmerman, 2003). Most victims came from two-parent homes. However, this is reflective of the distribution of Canadian families, where 48 percent of families are comprised of two parents (Statistics Canada, 2001). Therefore, this living arrangement should not be considered a risk factor for sexual abuse by teachers. Not surprisingly, most offenses were perpetrated at school. Unfortunately, the precise school location was not included, and such information would likely prove valuable in the identification and supervision of high-risk areas. Indeed, previous research has identified closets, bathrooms, and empty classrooms as locales of increased risk (Corbett, Gentry, & Pearson, 1993; Gallagher, 2000).

With respect to psychological functioning, few reports noted any psychological or substance abuse issues in the perpetrators. In fact, only a small number of offenders claimed to be under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offense. These low rates were consistent with those previously reported for other professional perpetrators (Gallagher, 2000). However, they represent an important difference when compared to research on sexual offenders in general, who tend to experience difficulties in these areas (Firestone, Bradford, McCoy, & Greenberg, 2000; Kafka, 2008; Wexler, Firestone, & Bradford, 2004). As noted earlier, most sexual offenses were committed at school, where teachers can most easily access victims. Given the obvious barriers to and consequences of being intoxicated at school, it is not surprising that alcohol may impact on these offenses to a lesser extent.

Researchers have described sexual offenders in positions of trust as manipulative and coercive, rather than violent or directive (Gallagher, 2000; Leclerc, et al., 2005). This was true in the present study where most offenders used their authority to initiate sexual contact with victims or befriended students to facilitate offending and reduce the likelihood of disclosure. This represents a difference from research on clergy who commit sexual offences who are more likely to use force and physical violence in commission of the offence (Langevin, et al., 2000; Firestone, et al.). Interestingly, the Canadian teachers were unlikely to use force, and in fact, none of the victims exhibited any physical injuries and were released by the offender. The offenses were almost exclusively sexually motivated, which is also similar to other professional perpetrators, and sexual offenders in general (Langevin et al., 1999; Sullivan & Beech, 2002). Offenders most commonly abused victims by fondling/grabbing or hugging, masturbating, and kissing. These offenses were somewhat less intrusive than those described by African

researchers (Nhundu & Schumba, 2001; Schumba, 2001). However, given the limitations of the present data, one cannot determine if this constitutes a cultural difference.

The offense process described above, which appears to be characteristic of the professional perpetrator in general, and teacher sexual offenders in particular, is remarkably similar to the approach-explicit pathway to sexual offending, as described in the self-regulation model of the offense process (Ward, Louden, Hudson, & Marshall, 1995; Ward & Hudson, 1998, 2000; Yates & Kingston, 2005). Offenders' abuse of their position of authority suggests that they hold approach-motivated goals to offending. The complex grooming strategies indicate intact self-regulatory skills indicative of this pathway. This offense pathway is particularly salient with respect to offender management because approach-explicit offenders are particularly more deviant and higher-risk to re-offend sexually than are other types of offense pathways (Bickley & Beech, 2002; Yates & Kingston, 2006). Moreover, with regard to treatment, the standard relapse prevention methods used with virtually all sexual offenders (Pithers, 1990; Pithers, Marques, Gibat, & Marlatt, 1983) may be less effective, given recent research questioning the validity of such treatment designs with this offense pathway specifically (Bickley & Beech, 2002; Yates & Kingston, 2005, 2006; Yates & Ward, in press). However, this description of teachers who sexually offend can be conceptualized within current theoretical frameworks for sexual aggression in general.

Previous research and the present data are largely consistent, particularly with respect to the offense itself. Male teachers seem to represent a group of men who use manipulation of the relationship to gain victim trust and, as such, present the sexual behavior as normative. The offender's behavior and the inherent trust and authority of the relationship, likely contribute to limited disclosure and significant confusion on the part of the victim.

Due to increased awareness of sexual abuse at school, the public is interested in the screening procedures used in hiring teachers. Sullivan and Beech (2002) have reviewed the literature and provided information regarding the policies within organizations to address the abuse perpetrated by individuals in professional organizations. Specifically, they outlined some key inquiries and responses from agencies that have resulted from instances of abuse. The recommendations focused primarily on the identification of past criminal history in potential employees and improved communication between various agencies with respect to offender information.

In an attempt to identify current screening practices, Hanson and Price (2004) conducted telephone interviews with 19 youth organizations in Canada and the United States. With respect to employee screening procedures, all of the organizations utilized criminal reference checks. However, there was variability with the screening methods used (e.g., self-report interviews, home visits). Moreover, most organizations neglected to ask questions about sexual abuse potential (e.g., emotional identification with children). Interestingly, only one organization employed a psychologist/psychiatrist in the evaluation procedure. Finally, with regard to risk management, most organizations attempted to eliminate or reduce one-on-one contact between workers and children as a way to reduce sexual abuse (Hanson & Price, 2004).

A commonality in professional organizations is the use of a criminal reference check (Hanson & Price, 2004; Thomas, 2001 as cited in Sullivan & Beech, 2002). Indeed many organizations in Canada require this process for individuals working with children or vulnerable populations. Interestingly, however, teacher unions have opposed mandatory criminal checks because they feel such investigations are insulting to non-offending teachers. However, according to a commissioned report on sexual misconduct in Ontario, Robins (2000) stated that

even with mandatory criminal checks a number of loopholes existed, which allowed sexually offensive teachers to work. For example, at the time of the report not all provinces required criminal checks for certification. Furthermore, in some cases these checks only revealed convictions, but not charges and acquittals. These issues are compounded by poor inter-jurisdictional communication, and the tendency in some cases to move teachers among schools rather than pursue criminal charges.

Limitations

The nature of the data and methodological issues warrant some important caveats when interpreting and applying these results. It is acknowledged that many sexual offenses go undetected, and we suspect this is particularly true when abuse occurs within a previously trusting relationship, or by an authority figure. However, given that these data represent all those offenders who were primary suspects, or “high-probability” offenders, and not strictly those convicted of a sexual offense, these findings are more likely to capture those perpetrators who may be dismissed due to a lack of evidence, or reluctance on the part of victims and schools to report and/or prosecute.

Restricted access to specific aspects of the data may also limit the applicability of the results to this study. For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, some aspects of offender, victim, and offense characteristics were inaccessible in the database provided to us by the RCMP.

Finally, given the qualitative nature of the data, between-group analyses were precluded due to a lack of comparative data for sexual offenders who have not offended in a position of trust. However, little is known about sexual offenses committed in this context, particularly in

Canada and it is the intention of this study to provide a comprehensive and contemporary description of the problem and thus, a foundation for further research.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Professional perpetrators have often been overlooked in research studies pertaining to sexual abusers. Some individuals perceive teachers to be unlikely to commit a sexual offense, given their position of trust and dedication to children. However, given that certain sexual offenders will pursue such positions specifically for access to potential victims, as described in the self-regulation model (Ward & Hudson, 1998, 2000; Yates & Kingston, 2005), such individuals need to be accounted for when evaluating the risks posed to children in scholastic settings.

Based on reports that hundreds of incidents of sexual abuse occur every year (Robins, 2000), and that clearly, based on the present figures, a significant proportion go undetected, the need to acknowledge and prevent sexual abuse in schools is rooted in research of this overlooked group. For most, reconciling the nurturing and trusting persona of teachers with claims of risk is difficult. However, rather than suggest that teachers as a group present a risk to children, the purpose of this study was to identify which characteristics were associated with identified sexual abusers who have offended against their students. It is intended that this description may be used to help school boards mitigate risk, by recognizing particular high-risk situations, such as unsupervised meetings between male teachers and students, and poorly defined boundaries within teacher – student relationships. Furthermore, by acknowledging the risk in this particular setting, improved screening processes, such as mandatory criminal checks will facilitate student safety.

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Table 1. Sexual Acts Attempted and/or Committed by Teachers

Sexual Acts	% of Cases	Frequencies
Fondling	79	75
Masturbation	34	32
Kissing	24	23
Fellatio	19	18
Rubbing penis against victim	16	15
Digital penetration	14	13
Anal intercourse	11	10
Simulated intercourse	8	8
Vaginal intercourse	7	7
Sucking victim's breasts	4	4
Cunnilingus	4	4
Other	4	4
Ejaculation on victim	2	2
Licking	1	1
Sucking body parts	1	1
Tickling	1	1
Pinching with devices	1	1

Note. Percentages will not sum to 100. More than one option may be applied to each offender.

Frequency in parentheses.

