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Child maltreatment in organisations: Risk factors and strategies for prevention

Mel Irenyi, Leah Bromfield, Lorraine Beyer and
Daryl Higgins

This paper investigates recent literature on child maltreatment in organisational settings. The paper begins with a discussion of Senate inquiries investigating the history and current concerns of organisational child maltreatment in Australian institutions before outlining some risk factors for children. The problematic notion of seeking to profile perpetrators of organisational child maltreatment in order to identify actual or potential high-risk individuals is then explored. The paper outlines some of the common myths and facts about perpetrators before considering organisational risk factors. This is followed by an outline of positive strategies to increase child safety in the context of organisations. Special attention is given to the development of current theoretical models, and strategies for responding to disclosure of past or current abuse.

What is organisational maltreatment?

In this report the term organisational maltreatment is used to describe maltreatment that occurs in the context of an organisation in the public, community or private sector in residential or non-residential settings (for example, in a school, child care centre or sporting club). The perpetrator may work either directly with children (for example, a teacher) or in an ancillary role (for example, a cleaner), or may be another child or young person connected to the organisation in some way. The abuse may occur physically at the organisation or perpetrators may obtain access to children through the organisation but the abuse happen elsewhere.

There are five different types of maltreatment: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and witnessing family violence. Maltreatment refers to acts of commission (harmful behaviours directed towards the child usually described as abuse) and acts of omission (failure to provide appropriate care usually referred to as neglect). Only a person who is responsible for caring for a child (i.e., a parent or person in the place of a parent) can be held accountable for not providing

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that care. In some organisations, carers are acting in the place of parents and are, therefore, in a position to neglect children through failing to provide adequate food or care. However, most often when we talk about maltreatment in organisations we are generally talking about abuse. There is little existing research investigating the issue of child neglect in organisational settings.

In the past, child maltreatment in the context of organisations has been generally under-researched, and has mostly focussed on sexual abuse (Higgins, 2004). There is still a great deal to be learned about the co-occurring nature of abuse. For example, there is evidence that children who experienced sexual abuse in residential institutions often had also experienced physical abuse, psychological maltreatment and neglect (Utting, 1997).

Researchers generally classify child maltreatment according to the relationship of the perpetrator to the child. The terms intra-familial (for abuse of family members) or extra-familial (for abuse of non-family members) are used. Most often, organisational maltreatment involves extra-familial abuse. Because of this, and because of the paucity of research into organisational maltreatment, much of the information in this report is drawn from research into extra-familial abuse. Research into extra-familial abuse, in general, is also limited but less so than research specifically into organisational maltreatment. This report presents information about the characteristics of children abused by non-family members and the characteristics of the perpetrators themselves. In exploring these issues, the literature draws on research about child-related occupations and organisations.

Background to the report

This paper is based on a report commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs on behalf of the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC) Child-Safe Organisations Working Group (Beyer, Higgins, & Bromfield, 2005). The Working Group comprises representatives from all Australian state and territory governments and the Australian Government. The purpose of the Working Group is to develop guidelines and an overarching framework that offers broad policy directions for a more cohesive national approach to creating child-safe organisations.

The aim of this paper is to summarise research regarding:

- factors that increase the vulnerability of children to maltreatment in organisational settings;

- the characteristics frequently associated with perpetrators of maltreatment in organisational settings;
- environments that increase or decrease a perpetrator's opportunity to abuse children; and
- strategies for maximising child safety within organisations.

Child maltreatment in organisational settings in Australia

Historical context

The history of child abuse in organisations in Australia is significant. As the three inquiries discussed below reveal, children have historically been vulnerable to multiple types and repeated episodes of abuse within Australian organisations. Statutory organisations responsible for caring for various groups of children removed from, or unable to live with, their families have been particularly problematic for vulnerable children.

Bringing Them Home

The National Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families, *Bringing Them Home*, revealed the extent of child abuse experienced by past generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Australian Government Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). The ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be particularly vulnerable to abuse will be discussed in more detail later. *Bringing Them Home* documents the widespread child abuse, including violence, exploitation and sexual abuse, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families. A West Australian Legal Service Study of 483 people who had been forcibly removed showed that 62.1% reported being physically abused and that 13.3% reported sexual abuse (Australian Government Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997).

While levels of abuse experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children differed between institutions and home-like organisational settings such as foster homes, there is evidence documented in the *Bringing Them Home* report that abuse occurred frequently in both types of settings.

Lost Innocents

The experience of child migrants to Australia was the subject of a Senate Inquiry titled *Lost Innocents* (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2001). The Inquiry received numerous submissions detailing maltreatment of children who travelled to Australia alone under approved child migration schemes.

The report disclosed extensive physical and psychological abuse of children, particularly in institutions. Sexual assaults were "...perpetrated by a range of persons including priests at the institution, members of families to whom children were sent on holidays or to work, workers at the institution, regular visitors to the institution, and also, in some institutions by other older children" (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2001, p. 72).

The children were depersonalised by acts such as changing children's names, lying about their parents, withholding letters and contact, and – in some cases – referring to children by numbers instead of names (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2001).

Forgotten Australians

The 2004 Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, titled *Forgotten Australians* (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2004) documents widespread sexual and psychological abuse, physical violence, exploitation and deprivation experienced by children in orphanages and other state care facilities.

Thirty-five per cent of adults institutionalised as children and who made submissions to the Inquiry (not all adults institutionalised as children) indicated they had been physically abused while 33% reported emotional abuse and 21% sexual abuse (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee,

2004). The rate of maltreatment reported by those who made submissions is likely to be higher than the rate of maltreatment experienced by all adults institutionalised as children. This may be because individuals who experienced maltreatment and inadequate levels of care have a greater motivation to provide a submission about their experience. Rates of maltreatment experienced by those in the care of religious organisations were higher than those in secular organisations.

Current context

Submissions to such inquiries have helped chronicle the history of organisational abuse in Australia, but this should not suggest the issue remains in the past. Recent sexual abuse prosecutions within schools, churches, child-care facilities and youth groups have demonstrated that organisational child abuse remains a current concern (for example, as reported in the media by Jamieson, 2005; Metcalf, 2006; Tinkler, 2005). The most recent senate inquiry *Protecting Vulnerable Children* shows that children removed from, or unable to live with, their parents remain vulnerable to maltreatment in out-of-home care (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2005).

Protecting vulnerable children

The report *Protecting Vulnerable Children* (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2005) addressed concerns about children in out-of-home care such as foster care, other residential-type organisations like juvenile justice and detention centres and children with disabilities in care. It also addressed the role of organisations within mainstream communities with whom vulnerable children potentially interact. The report found that in spite of regular State-commissioned inquiries into problems with the care and protection of children in out-of-home care, a system that was "...responsive, accountable and achieved outcomes in the best interest of children" (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2005, p. 22) had yet to be achieved. The Committee recommended, for example, that awareness of child protection issues and the long-term effects of being in care be included as components of tertiary teacher education courses. This and other recommendations highlight the need for awareness about child abuse and neglect in all child-focussed organisations, not just those in which children have been found to be vulnerable to maltreatment.

Summary

In brief, child abuse in organisations is not just an historical phenomenon. Australian Government senate inquiries have shown that abuse was present in the widespread institutional practices of the 19th and early 20th century, at the same time demonstrating that such practices still occur.

Risk factors for children

Noted family violence researcher, David Finkelhor, and his colleagues have argued that just by virtue of being children, *all* children are at risk of maltreatment (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994). This is because children rely on adults to meet their basic needs, they are more physically vulnerable than adults and because children lack social power.

Key message

While all children are at risk of maltreatment, research shows that some children face greater risks than others.

A broad range of factors contributes to children's vulnerability to organisational abuse. However, it is not possible to create a catalogue of reliable and easily identifiable risk factors (i.e., a 'profile'). This is because different levels of risk result from the interaction of many things, including the child's developmental age and stage and the environment in which he or she lives. This means that some children are more vulnerable than others and that children are at risk of different types of maltreatment at different times in their life.

Researchers have used a "developmental-ecological" theoretical approach to help describe and explain the way in which child, parental, familial, neighbourhood and wider social factors combine to increase or decrease a child's vulnerability to maltreatment. For more information on the developmental-ecological theoretical approach see Box 1.

Box 1 Developmental-ecological theory

The 'developmental-ecological' model originates from the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and provides a framework to understand the way in which individuals are influenced by their family, the community and society. The developmental-ecological model has four levels: (a) the macrosystem (cultural beliefs and values), (b) the exosystem (neighbourhood and community settings), (c) the microsystem (family environment) and (d) the individual (the individual's own characteristics and developmental stage) (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998). These levels interact with one another to shape individual development (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998).

Ecological models can be applied to research into both the causes and consequences of child maltreatment. An ecological perspective takes into account all victimisation experiences rather than focusing on the impact of one specific type of child abuse or neglect (Briere & Runtz, 1989).

In this model, child development is seen as a process in which biological and other child characteristics interact reciprocally with the environment over the course of life, so children affect their environments as well as being influenced by them. Parents and family remain significant influences throughout childhood, but are increasingly added to by other sources of environmental influence such as peers and the school environment (Sanson et al., 2002).

Theory based research is important as it helps us to move beyond the level of simply observing events to understanding why things occur. For example, research shows that young children experience neglect more than older children. Theory tells us that this is because the developmental stage of a child will determine the level of care they require to meet their basic needs.

Age

We expect children of different ages to be vulnerable to different types of maltreatment and to different perpetrators. For example, very young children often spend the majority of their time being cared for in domestic settings. At this time in their lives, children are most vulnerable to neglect or physical abuse. Older children come into contact with a wide range of adults because they are involved with less home-based activities such as school, sport, leisure interests and social activities and their related organisations, and are therefore more vulnerable to abuse perpetrated by a non-family member.

Two studies of abuse by extra-familial perpetrators, one by the Child Exploitation Unit in Melbourne, Australia, and the other of FBI records in the United States, supported the theory that, in some cases, a child's age impacted on the type of maltreatment he or she experienced. The Australian study, conducted between 1988 and 1996, showed that multiple child sex offenders targeted victims from a broad age range, but mostly between the ages of eight and 12 years (Petraitis & O'Connor, 1999). The US study investigated victimisation by babysitters and showed that victims aged one to three were at greatest risk of physical assault while those aged four to five years were most likely to experience sexual maltreatment (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2001).

Key message

The age of a child can influence the type of maltreatment he or she experiences.

Gender

As with age, gender influences the type of maltreatment children are likely to experience. A US study of incidence of child abuse and neglect found that girls were far more likely to be a victim of child sexual abuse than boys, and boys are more likely to be physically abused than girls (Sedlak &

Broadhurst, 1996). This finding is supported by recorded crime data in Australia, which showed that of victims of sexual assault under 15 years of age recorded in 2003, 76% were female and 24% were male (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

Gender also influences children's vulnerability to intra-familial or extra-familial abuse. Boys were much more likely than girls to be sexually victimised by extra-familial abusers (Bagley & Pritchard, 2000; Beech, 1998) and to have multiple male abusers (Petraitis & O'Connor, 1999). Girls were shown to be at greater risk than boys from intra-familial child sexual abuse (Petraitis & O'Connor, 1999). It is not yet clear why these gendered patterns of abuse exist. Potential reasons can be linked to stereotypes and expectations of gendered behaviour, however, even these suggested links raise questions regarding patterns of abuse.

While there are gender patterns in the types of abuse children experience, this does not mean that boys are not vulnerable to sexual abuse or that girls do not experience physical abuse. It is important to remember that all children can be vulnerable to all types of maltreatment.

Previous maltreatment

Children who have experienced maltreatment in the past (for example, children already in the child protection system) have an increased vulnerability to further abuse (Finkelhor & Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1994). In addition, most children who have been maltreated experience multiple types of abuse and neglect (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005; Higgins, 2004). Children previously maltreated by a family member are vulnerable to further maltreatment by an extra-familial perpetrator (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005)

There are potentially a number of reasons why children who have already experienced maltreatment have a higher risk of being maltreated again, including the impact on the child's psychological development from the previous maltreatment, the child being starved for attention, or—in cases of child neglect—inadequate supervision and attention leaving the child vulnerable to predatory perpetrators of child sexual abuse (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005).

Key message

Children who have experienced maltreatment in the past have an increased vulnerability to further abuse by family and non-family members.

Disability

Children with disabilities have been identified as particularly vulnerable to organisational maltreatment (Gallagher, 1998, 1999b; Sullivan & Beech, 2002). Children with particular needs, such as those with physical or intellectual disabilities or behavioural difficulties are more likely than other children to come into contact with organisations such as out-of-home care providers, thus increasing their potential exposure to perpetrators of child abuse (Gallagher, 1999a).

Vulnerability is also contributed to by children's cognitive impairment and inability to communicate clearly, among other characteristics. In addition, children who exhibit particularly challenging behaviours because of their disability can be especially vulnerable to maltreatment by carers with an inability to cope (Tomison, 1996).

A further issue for organisations that cater for children with disabilities is that of disclosure. Research suggests that incidents of sexual offences are reported even less by these vulnerable group than sexual offences in the broader community (which are also under-reported) (Gallagher, 1998, 1999b; Sullivan & Beech, 2002). The Senate report *Protecting Vulnerable Children* (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2005) noted that childhood disability also made the prosecution of perpetrators difficult in such cases.

Assertiveness strategies

In a research study examining the characteristics and modus operandi of child sexual abuse offenders, Smallbone and Wortley (2000) identified behaviours used by children to prevent sexual contact with offenders and which of those strategies were successful in deterring or preventing sexual abuse on some occasions. Assertive strategies such as telling an offender that the contact was unwanted were reported by offenders as being effective in preventing sexual contact. The implication is that child

abuse prevention programs that are able to teach children to respond assertively to unwanted sexual contact may prevent them from experiencing child sexual abuse. Research into children in public care also suggested that positive relationships with safe communities contributed to children's resilience (Gilligan, 1999, 2000). However, it is important to remember that while 'resistance' strategies may reduce a child's likelihood of being targeted by a perpetrator of child sexual abuse it does not guarantee their safety, particularly against those perpetrators willing to use physical force and other forms of coercion.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The risk factors that have been discussed in relation to all children (such as age, gender, disability) are equally relevant when considering the factors that influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's risk of abuse in organisations. However, there is evidence to suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more vulnerable to maltreatment than non-Indigenous children.

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in referrals to statutory child protection services and in out-of-home care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006). Rates of child sexual abuse are also much higher in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities than for non-Indigenous communities (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples, and family and non-family members have been identified as perpetrators (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002).

It is not clear whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's heightened risk for maltreatment extends to organisational settings. However, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in population data regarding poor health outcomes and disability, and are more likely to reside in out-of-home care, it stands to reason that they are over-represented in those groups who are vulnerable to maltreatment in organisational settings.

Negative social and structural conditions also potentially contribute specifically to child sexual abuse in a much more concrete sense as perpetrators exploit over-crowded living and sleeping conditions (Smallbone, Wortley, & Lancefield, 1999) and young substance-addicted people. Such problems are particularly prevalent in some semi-remote areas and further research is required to understand possible nexuses between location and prevalence (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Task Force on Violence, 1999).

Summary

There is little research into specific characteristics of children that increase or decrease their risk for organisational maltreatment. Thus, it may be that other factors also increase or decrease children's vulnerability. It is not possible to categorically exclude any combination of children's characteristics from contributing to their vulnerability. The best approach for organisations is to develop wide-ranging strategies and a pro-active, child-positive culture.

Perpetrators of child maltreatment in organisational settings

There are a number of drawbacks in attempting to develop a definitive picture of perpetrators of organisational child maltreatment illustrated throughout this section. Throughout the literature there is a significant emphasis on perpetrators of sexual abuse and a lack of attention to other types of maltreatment. Therefore, the majority of this section explores the idea of common traits of perpetrators who sexually abuse children with some overlapping discussion of other types of maltreatment occurring in an organisational setting. A further limitation is that while researchers attempt to typify abusers, these characteristics are based on known perpetrators. We do not know if those who have escaped detection share these characteristics.

Gender

Gender and perpetrators of child sexual abuse

As with vulnerable children, issues of gender influence the type of maltreatment a perpetrator is likely to inflict. Research shows a significant gender bias, with males far more likely than females to sexually abuse a child (Pritchard, 2004). While there is limited research that specifically examines

the characteristics of perpetrators in organisational settings, men accounted for more than three-quarters of babysitters who were convicted of child sex offences in spite of being half as likely to work as baby-sitters (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2001).

Key message

Research shows that males are far more likely than females to sexually abuse children.

Although males are more likely to perpetrate child sexual abuse than females, females do sometimes sexually abuse children (Pritchard, 2004) and have also been found to sometimes be involved as co-abusers with male partners (Gallagher, Hughes, & Parker, 1996). The proportion of reported perpetrators of child sexual abuse who are female is very low (Pritchard, 2004) but recent research has begun to question whether this is a reflection of the rarity of its occurrence or if there are other reasons for its under-reporting (Denov, 2004; van Dam, 2001).

Some literature suggests that the role of women as the primary carers for children, including being responsible for the hygiene of young children, may enable them to better hide sexually abusive behaviours directed towards children in their care (van Dam, 2001). For older boys in particular, societal attitudes do not encourage males to disclose their victimisation by women (van Dam, 2001). These societal attitudes are illustrated by lesser penalties applied in prosecuted cases to female perpetrators compared with males who committed similar acts (Metcalf, 2006).

Key message

Although males make up the majority of child sexual abuse perpetrators, it is possible that women perpetrate child sexual abuse more often than is currently detected.

Other research suggests that case report studies in particular might not be an accurate indication of prevalence of child sexual abuse by female perpetrators. Some of the reasons for this include: official crime statistics mostly reflect 'visible' crime that occurs in the public sphere while (child) sexual abuse is most likely to occur in the private sphere; the language and framing of some laws are gender specific and fail to define women's actions as criminal; professional culture and organisational practices impact on what acts are recorded as crimes, and that child sexual abuse perpetrated by women may be an under-reported crime within a category of already under-reported crimes (Denov, 2004).

Gender and perpetrators of neglect, physical and psychological abuse

Research investigating intra-familial maltreatment has shown that mothers are most frequently the perpetrators of child physical abuse, psychological maltreatment and neglect. These maltreatment types are most frequently associated with poor coping skills rather than a deliberate intent to harm the child. The tendency for mothers to be the main perpetrators of these maltreatment types has been partly explained by the fact that mothers are most frequently the primary carer of children and spend the most time with them (Beckett, 2003). In most organisations that provide primary care for children, such as day care, residential out-of-home care, and health services, women make up a greater proportion of both the paid and volunteer work force. Such roles can potentially place female workers in parent-like roles in home-like situations.

Key message

Organisations must be aware of the potential for both women and men to perpetrate any type of maltreatment.

Age

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse can be any age. However, a study of 205 extra-familial child sex offenders in Melbourne revealed that 85% were aged from 20 to 50 years (Petraitis & O'Connor, 1999). Extra-familial child sexual abusers in a British study were found to be younger than intra-familial child sexual abusers and to have an average age of 38 years (Bagley & Pritchard, 2000).

Australian police data show that in 2003/4 young people under 17 years of age perpetrated 14% of all rapes and 12% of all non-rape sexual assaults. In 2004/5 the corresponding figures were 13% and 9% (Boyd & Bromfield, in press). Young people can also be responsible for physically and emotionally abusive behaviour. However, responses to such behaviours are usually incorporated into policies to prevent bullying.

Perpetrator problems

Literature suggests that of those detected, the majority of sex-offenders were characterised by the presence of: substance abuse (Langevin & Watson, 1996), violence (Bagley & Pritchard, 2000) and physical and psychological impairments (Langevin & Watson, 1996). Langevin & Watson's review of literature about child sex abusers showed that alcohol was a significant risk factor while drug abuse was much less common. They determined that 52% of child sex offenders were alcoholics or heavy drinkers and that alcohol can be involved in order to get the courage to act or to mask subsequent remorse (van Dam, 2001).

In the same study, Langevin and Watson determined that between 5% and 10% of perpetrators had physical disorders such as diabetes and thyroid conditions. These conditions are associated with mood swings, depression, aggressiveness, and cognitive dysfunction. Psychological impairments were wide-ranging with up to 80% reporting a sexual disorder. Between 5% and 10% had experienced psychoses and loss of touch with reality, and between 40% and 60% reported neuropsychological impairment. However, the role these impairments played in the perpetration of child sexual abuse was not clear.

Another study that referred to violence by child sexual abusers (Smallbone & Milne, 2000) suggested that where violence was used during an incident of child sexual abuse it was in order for the perpetrator to achieve their aims rather than because the perpetrator achieved gratification from violence.

Pre-employment screening for criminal histories related to substance abuse and violence, and clearly stated and enforced policies around bullying, violence and substance use in the workplace can contribute to a safer organisational environment in which children are less vulnerable to maltreatment.

Victim to offender cycle

A commonly held belief is that most males who sexually abuse children were themselves victims of child sexual abuse. This is referred to as the 'victim to offender cycle'. However, researchers are increasingly coming to see this theory as problematic. Boyd and Bromfield (in press) explain:

The two main reasons for the dispute are:

- the inconclusive nature of the research about the extent to which victims of sexual abuse do go on to sexually abuse; and
- the broader social and political factors in sexual abuse (such as the role of gender and power) are minimised.

For example, the victim to offender cycle is not generally thought to apply to girls who are victims of abuse. Liz Kelly points out that if the 'cycle' explanation held true, women would commit the majority of sexual abuse, as girls are the main victims of sexual abuse (Kelly, 1996). Thus there is an implicit (but often unarticulated) assumption in the 'victim to offender' cycle explanation that boys, and not girls, will go on to sexually abuse. This illustrates that gender is a fundamental factor in sexual abuse that is rarely made explicit in the treatment literature (for further discussion see Durham, 2006; Slattery, 2000). Despite the contestation of the 'victim to offender cycle' in academic circles, it continues to hold "strong appeal for practitioners" (Allan, 2006, p. 64). Yet the majority of male victims of child sexual abuse do not go on to abuse in later life. The proportion of male victims who do go on to abuse is not known, and any figure is an estimate at best.

Personality

Research suggests that specific personality traits and mannerisms are developed by child sex abusers to cultivate a relationship with families and carers as well as with the child (van Dam, 2001). It also shows that they are often highly likeable or 'charming' people who can attract acclaim and respect, but in spite of this have deviant attitudes about children that they used to justify their offending (Beech, 1998).

Multiple perpetrators of sexual abuse

Some children are sexually abused by multiple perpetrators. In some, but not all cases, this involves numbers of adults who act in concert to abuse children concurrently. Research from the United States showed that 17% of sexual abuse cases in day care involved multiple perpetrators (Finkelhor, Williams, & Burns, 1988). In some of these cases, particularly where the sexual abuse cases had high numbers of perpetrators in the one centre, the perpetrators acted in concert. In other cases, different perpetrators within the same centre were perpetrating alone.

Grooming

The literature shows that many perpetrators precede their abusive behaviour with a range of behaviours designed to gain the child's friendship and accustom them to the idea of being touched in an increasingly intimate way. Such behaviours may include:

- persistent physical contact such as tickling, wrestling, games requiring children to reach into an adult's pocket, and general 'roughhousing';
- seeking to spend an unusual amount of time with children;
- focusing on children of a consistent age and sex;
- attempting to see children outside of organised activities which initially brings them into contact with the children; and
- giving them gifts, trips and other favours (Salter, 1993; van Dam, 2001).

This is referred to as 'grooming'.

Just as children are 'groomed' by adults to allow them to perpetrate sexual acts, other adults are also 'groomed' (or desensitised) to perceive potentially risky behaviour as harmless. Frequent and inappropriate physical contact can serve to groom both the child and non-offending adults in his or her life (van Dam, 2001). Such behaviour can begin non-sexually, slowly escalating. In some cases, it can eventually become so pervasive that perpetrators are able to use it to mask abuse that is happening directly in front of adults. Grooming of adults through such physical contact with children also minimises the likelihood of disclosure and the chance that a child who discloses will be believed (van Dam, 2001).

In most situations, this behaviour will be normal play rather than an indicator of more sinister intent. However, if a person is involved in constant play of such kind and/or refuses to stop when requested by either the child or another staff member, it may be indicate a cause for concern. Organisations can help avoid unclear situations developing by implementing policies that prevent such physical contact. Such policies contribute to the safety of children and can reduce the chance of unfounded suspicions or allegations.

Myths and facts about perpetrators of child sexual abuse

Some commonly held myths circulate around the type of people who perpetrate child maltreatment within organisations. Wealthy or professional individuals, or those with standing in religious organisations, may be considered unlikely to perpetrate child abuse. On the other hand, because significant numbers of boys are victimised sexually within organisations (in contrast to experiencing incest within the home), many consider gay men to be highly likely to perpetrate child sexual abuse. As the research noted in van Dam (2001) illustrates, such common beliefs are inaccurate:

"Realistically, the sex offender may be ... an older person or a youth; wealthy or poor; a Caucasian or a person of colour; gay or straight; literate or illiterate; able or disabled; religious or non-religious; a professional, white or blue collar, or unemployed worker; a person with an extensive criminal record or one with no offence history at all" (Lloyd, 1987, p. 56, cited in van Dam, 2001).

The above quotation demonstrates the potential range of perpetrators, but in doing so implies that all categories of people have an equal likelihood of perpetrating child sexual abuse. However, research has indicated an increased statistical likelihood of perpetration by some populations. In many cases, as indicated below, the research data contradicts commonly held beliefs.

Sexual orientation of perpetrators

Myths about sexual orientation, particularly of male perpetrators of child sexual abuse, have often been framed around the perception that same-sex attracted men and women present a greater threat to children (Newton, 1992). The reality of child sexual abuse is that the “...vast majority of men convicted of molesting young boys did not classify themselves as homosexual” (Newton, 1992, p. 333).

There is very little research that has addressed the issue of sexual orientation and attraction to children and much of this work is dated. However, we know that:

- most men and women in society are heterosexual (Smith, 2003);
- a higher proportion of females than males experience child sexual abuse (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004); and
- the majority of child sexual abuse perpetrators are male (Pritchard, 2004).

Based on the combination of the available data it appears likely that most perpetrators of child sexual abuse are heterosexual males. There is no evidence to suggest that same-sex attracted men and women pose a greater threat to children than heterosexual men and women.

Social status

Dominant constructions of child sexual abusers tend to be stereotyped. Images of the unknown ‘dirty old man’ lurking in the shadows are frequently invoked, but are largely unrepresentative of apprehended perpetrators (van Dam, 2001). It is important to remember that perpetrators of child abuse have historically represented all types and variations of humanity.

A United States study conducted by (Abel, Becker, Mittleman, Rouleau, & Murphy, 1987 cited in van Dam, 2001) counters many of the stereotypes of child abuse perpetrators that are prevalent in contemporary society. The study showed that of 561 child sexual abuse perpetrators more than 64% were fully employed. This suggests that many of the perpetrators were financially comfortable and challenges the idea of the financially marginalised loner. Overall the group was well educated and about 25% were married. The majority reported their religious orientation as Christian and their intelligence paralleled the general US population of the time.

Summary

In this section we have discussed some of the key characteristics and issues that are central to perpetrators of organisational child maltreatment. We have considered issues such as age, gender, personality, past history, and behaviours common to perpetrators of child abuse. It is impossible to create a definitive profile of a perpetrator of organisational child maltreatment. In relation to child sexual abuse, however, it is possible for organisational staff

to develop a clear understanding of *patterns* of behaviour and accompanying personal characteristics that increase risk to children. Those involved in child-focussed organisations can also contribute to effective risk management by understanding that such patterns and situations leave children particularly vulnerable. This understanding can help in the development of risk management strategies that influence employment, staff management and professional practice policies.

Key message

While ‘profiling’ child sexual abuse perpetrators is problematic, organisations can be aware of patterns of behaviour that are associated with an increase risk to children.

Creating opportunities to abuse children

One key theme of the research in relation to child sexual abuse is ‘opportunity’. Unlike intra-familial perpetrators of child maltreatment who have access to children in private settings, perpetrators of organisational abuse must create ‘opportunities’ to offend by arranging both time alone with the child and a location for carrying out the abuse. Watching television, driving in the perpetrator’s car and sleeping in the perpetrator’s bed were common means of having time alone with the child (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001). For both intra- and extra-familial child sex abusers the most common location in which to perpetrate the abuse was the abuser’s home. Unlike intra-familial child-sex abusers, however, non-family members must develop relationships with the child and his or her

family from stranger status to trusted friend or professional in order to create the opportunity to offend.

The concept of opportunity as a motivator to offend was commonly raised in interviews with known perpetrators and was also identified as an issue for a small Canadian sample of 750 randomly selected males (Bagley, Bertrand, Bolitho, & Mallick, 2001). Of the Canadian respondents who were interested in sexual relations with a child, 15% had someone in mind and were awaiting the opportunity. Other perpetrators who did offend reported that they created their opportunities and placed themselves in particular settings in which they could abuse. Still others moved between a range of different settings to facilitate abusive contact. (Gallagher, 1998).

Researchers have used 'situational crime prevention' theory to understand the way in which perpetrators of child sexual abuse create 'opportunities' in which to offend. For further discussion about situational crime prevention, see Box 2.

Key message

Some perpetrators deliberately create opportunities by placing themselves in an occupation, sporting or service activity in order to gain access to children while others take advantage of opportune situations.

Australian research supports the notion of perpetrators creating or taking advantage of opportunities to offend. In one study of 205 offenders in Melbourne, 39% accessed children by participating in an organisation (Petraitis & O'Connor, 1999). Other Australian research with convicted child sex offenders by Smallbone and Wortley (2001) indicated that 18.9% found victims through organised activities such as sporting associations and scouts.

Summary

Research has shown that many perpetrators of child abuse are people who take advantage of situations, or who manipulate environments, in order to abuse children. This is contrary to the common belief that *all* perpetrators are dedicated predators. Using the situational crime prevention model empowers organisations to create environments that are child-safe and to minimise situations in which children are vulnerable.

Church responses to disclosures of abuse

In this section we discuss the specific responses to maltreatment allegations of one organisational type: churches. It is possible for maltreatment to occur within any organisation. However, the role of churches has traditionally included the provision of many child-related organisations and activities such as schools, institutional care, and youth groups. This means churches have been (and remain) vulnerable to infiltration by individuals seeking to gain access to children. In Australia, churches have been a significant focal point for attention in relation to problems in responding to organisational maltreatment. For example, Porter (2003) argues that "sexual abuse has either gone unnoticed or been suppressed in the churches" due in part to factors such as abuse of power, secrecy and a desire to preserve the public image of churches (p. 10). Much of this attention has occurred in the public sphere and been documented in the form of research reports or inquiries. Many churches have taken positive action to remedy their responses to disclosures of child maltreatment in response to this attention. Thus, churches present both an example of past problems in responding to allegations of child maltreatment and an example of positive action that can be taken to better protect children in organisations.

In 2004 the National Council of Churches conducted a national ecumenical consultation titled *Safe as Churches?* Although the consultation, organised by Australian Christian Churches, focused on child sexual abuse rather than child maltreatment in general, it discussed the development of strategies that are applicable to a broad concept of child protection. Some of the concepts discussed included the need for multiple strategies and a long-term commitment to child protection, a uniform national approach, multiple screening and selection processes, protection for those who disclose abuse and ongoing child protection training for all adults who work or volunteer with organisations for children (National Council of Churches, 2004).

In South Australia, the Anglican Church has also responded to recent disclosures of sex abuse within the Church. It established the Anglican Board of Inquiry into the handling of sexual abuse claims

Box 2 Situational crime prevention

Understanding environmental factors external to the individual and which influence behaviour is the cornerstone of much of the current crime prevention work. Situational crime prevention is based on the premise that all behaviour is the result of interactions between the person who is carrying out an act, their characteristics and the circumstances in which they are carrying out an act.

From a behavioural, social and environmental psychology perspective there is a subtle and intimate relationship between individuals and their environments. The behaviour of an individual may be highly variable from one situation to the next. For example, a person who may be described by some as aggressive does not behave uniformly in an aggressive manner, but rather, aggression is displayed occasionally and only when certain 'favourable' conditions are met (Wortley & Smallbone, submitted). While people obviously differ in their propensity to commit crime, it is suggested that, given the right circumstances, most people are capable of committing criminal acts (Mischel, 1968). The classic psychological experiment by Stanley Milgram and his team (in which they asked naive participants to administer electric shocks as part of an experiment on learning) demonstrated the capacity of most individuals, under the right circumstances, to acquiesce to authority and inflict harm on others (Milgram, 1974). The important factor is the environmental context.

Other research (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973) demonstrated that organisational environments may result in the failure of non-offending staff to oppose abusive actions. This has been illustrated in many historical responses to abuse by churches where members of the clergy accused of abuse were protected by non-offending staff and clergy in the church (Morrison, 2005; Parkinson, 2003). In such situations it is possible that abuse of power contributed to an organisational culture in which maltreatment was not acted upon appropriately to protect children or to achieve justice for victims (Higgins, 2001).

A situational crime prevention approach is about creating *safe environments* rather than creating *safe individuals*. This approach has been successful in reducing a range of criminal behaviour such as physical and sexual assaults of adults, car thefts, robbery and shop stealing and may be equally applicable to reduction of abuse and assaults of children in organisational settings. To implement this principle, the criminal event or environment (rather than the offender or the victim) becomes the unit of analysis (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006).

Situational prevention involves opportunity-reduction through manipulation of environmental dimensions – making crime more risky, increasing the effort to commit crime, reducing the rewards of crime and removing the excuses used to circumvent moral constraints on behaviour (Clarke, 1997a, 1997b; Clarke & Homel, 1997). Evaluations of situational prevention projects have not shown significant displacement of criminal behaviour from one area to another and have had positive benefits beyond what was originally intended (Clarke & Homel, 1997; Sherman, 1990).

within the Adelaide diocese. This reflected the Church's dissatisfaction with previous inadequate (and in some cases damaging) responses to disclosures of sexual abuse within the Church. In response to one of the recommendations from the Inquiry, the Church commissioned a report into the handling of sexual assault allegations within the Church. The report found that "[m]ore than half of the clergy surveyed have had suspicions or knowledge of at least one instance of child abuse" (Morrison, 2005, p. 4) but that many still had difficulties reconciling reporting with other pastoral concerns of confidentiality.

The growing number of formal responses to the broad issue of child abuse by religious organisations as evidenced by the above examples, and the establishment of non-denominational survivor

groups such as Broken Rites (Broken Rites, 2005) are indicative of broad community concern over organisational maltreatment within religious organisations.

In a case study examining the handling of a child sexual abuse case within a church, Higgins (2001) demonstrates some of the problems in past responses by churches to abuse allegations and the way in which the organisational culture contributed to poor responses. He provided suggestions for appropriate alternative courses of action, which are summarised below.

The case involved sexual contact between a 13-year-old girl and an 18-year-old male, both of whom were members of the congregation. The case was managed in the context of the church. In a meeting with the 13-year-old, the 18-year-old, both sets of parents and the church minister and youth leader, the 18-year-old admitted that they had been sexually intimate. The outcome of this meeting was that the 18-year-old and 13-year-old forgave each other for the sin they had committed together. No further action was taken. Some time later it was alleged by the 13-year-old that the sexual contact was non-consensual, police were involved and the 18-year-old was subject to criminal charges. Church leaders refused to co-operate with police or provide statements advising they had witnessed the 18-year-olds admission, although they later provided character references for the 18-year-old. The response by church leaders resulted in the church congregation experiencing conflict, with members taking sides, and some members ultimately leaving the church.

The case study exemplifies a number of ways in which allegations of sexual abuse within the church have been mishandled. In treating the abuse as a sin, church leaders treated the contact as mutual, ignoring Australian law, and the power and age imbalance between the perpetrator and victim. Their refusal to provide witness statements on behalf of the victim and provision of character references for the perpetrator was, in effect, victim blaming. Higgins (2001) asserts that religious sex role beliefs that posit men's sexuality as unable to be contained and women as the source of men's incitement; and church doctrines and practices that support patriarchy contribute to an organisational culture in which disclosure of sexual abuse is discouraged and victims are unsupported. Higgins (2001) provided suggestions for appropriate alternative courses of action, which are summarised below.

Minimisation and denial of initial allegations of sexual abuse

The failure to recognise abuse when it occurs may stem from a lack of understanding about the nature of abuse, the legal aspects of an age-discrepancy in sexual activity with a minor, and the victim-perpetrator dynamic and may lead to inappropriate attempts at "reconciliation". Also, leaders may fail to recognise there can be a delay in (a) victims recognising that what they experienced was abuse, and (b) the development of abuse-related symptoms (Higgins, 2001). In the past, minimisation or denial of allegations has also stemmed from a motivation to protect the public reputation of the church (Morrison, 2005).

Failure to encourage victims to report alleged assaults

Whether or not ministers of religion are covered by mandatory reporting laws in their jurisdiction, they still have a moral and ethical obligation to provide appropriate counsel to victims of sexual assault, and this should include encouraging them to make a report to the police of criminal behaviour. This performs three important roles. First, it sends a clear message to the victim that she/he is not responsible for the sexual activity and will be supported by the church community. Second, it removes the need for the church to try and act as judge and jury in the matter (it is the role of the police to investigate matters, and—if their investigations uncover sufficient substance to the victims' allegations—to prosecute the perpetrator). Finally, it shows responsibility for the safety of other minors who may already be, or are at risk of becoming, a victim.

Inappropriate response to legal actions

The role of law enforcement authorities is either ignored or downplayed in the practices and even the policies (where they exist) of many churches (Parkinson, 2003). Churches need to respond appropriately to the instigation of legal actions that follow from a victim's report of events to the police – and not see themselves as being a 'law unto themselves'.

Sex-role beliefs

Religious institutions, and individual churches have a responsibility to consider how their beliefs and behaviours perpetuate a misogynistic, patriarchal or stereotyped view of gender and sexuality. Males are presented as being (at least to some degree) unable to control their ‘natural’ urges for sexual gratification. In contrast, females are viewed as the source of the incitement of this overflowing male sexuality. Such stereotypes of males also make it hard for males to disclose or seek appropriate assistance in dealing with unwanted sexual experiences, as they may fear being seen as ‘less masculine’ (Watkins & Bentovim, 1992).

Doctrines and practices that support patriarchy

It is important for religious leaders, communities, theologians, and those who teach and train people for ministry (either lay or clergy) to consider how theological beliefs and church structures engender and maintain patriarchal views. This is a crucial issue, as these points of doctrine set a culture within the church about gender and power that can either be supportive of, or undermine the ability of a victim of sexual assault to (a) see the experience as ‘assault’, (b) be able to speak up about the experience, and (c) expect that appropriate action will take place.

Doctrines and practices that need to be considered here include:

- The absence of women in key leadership positions with any authority (absence of gender appropriate role models and support) (Higgins, 2001; Morrison, 2005).
- Patriarchal and authoritarian beliefs about the family (creating an environment in which victims are less likely to question the authority of their abuser, see Finkelhor, 1979; Higgins & McCabe, 1994).
- Doctrines about sin (an emphasis on ‘personal sin’ to the exclusion of issues of social justice can easily lead to victim-blaming).
- Teachings regarding repentance and forgiveness (may lead premature attempts to seek forgiveness from the victim or to holding victims partially responsible for their own abuse, see Parkinson, 2003).
- The role of civil authorities (teachings against the use of court proceedings, based on biblical passages referring to civil suits can lead to confusion about the appropriateness of reporting abuse).
- Reverencing of church leaders (e.g., priests being viewed as ‘indelibly marked’) can lead to a reluctance for (i) victims to be able to speak about abuse at the hands of clergy; (ii) members of the church to question the actions church leaders take in dealing with situations of abuse within the church.

Appropriate support for victims and perpetrators

Religious organisations should be sensitive to the needs of the victim (e.g., for the church to be a safe place), while at the same time providing accountability for perpetrators:

“Part of the problem concerning the church’s complacency about child sexual abuse is that church leaders have tended to accept offenders’ own explanations for their behaviour” (Parkinson, 2003, p. 55).

Polarisation of the church community

Conflicts of interest that arise at a leadership level need to be addressed, particularly if matters are brought before the courts.

Poor leadership

Poor leadership can be demonstrated and exacerbated by not having a clear set of policies and procedures in place before any situation has arisen. Following accepted guidelines for dealing with accused or convicted perpetrators (for example, Parkinson 2003 or the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’s Child Protection Guidelines, available at www.presbyterianireland.org/bsw/index.html) is a sign of good leadership. This can also be demonstrated by understanding and upholding the legal system (i.e., that it is the role of the legal system—not the church—to determine ‘guilt’).

An examination of the eight issues addressed above will help churches to put in place measures to assist in the prevention and appropriate intervention of abuse within the church. Churches need to have developed (and to have accepted as a community) policies and procedures to deal with abuse before the issues arise. The policy should address:

- abuse of a minor or an adult by clergy;
- abuse of a minor by laity; and
- abuse of a minor by non-ordained church leader (e.g., pastoral care worker, Sunday school teacher, Youth group leader, Elder, Warden, etc.) (Higgins, 2001).

The National Council of Churches' consultations and other recent initiatives illustrate the commitment of some religious organisations to acknowledging past abuses and creating safer church organisations for the future. (National Council of Churches, 2004). One example of a response to the National Council of Church's recommendations was the establishment by the New South Wales Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia of a child protection unit in 2004. The aim of the child protection unit is to provide assistance, education and preventative measures to tackle the problem of child abuse within the church (McClellan, 2004). It is also responsible for supporting parishioners affected by child abuse (whether by clergy or not), responding to allegations of past or present child abuse within the church, screening all employees and volunteers whose roles are related to children and providing training in child abuse prevention.

Although institutional care and churches have been the focus of much scrutiny, they are by no means the only organisational settings in which children have been maltreated, or in which organisational responses have been less than adequate. All child-focused organisations, including schools, childcare programs, sporting clubs, recreational clubs such as Cubs, Scouts, Guides, and Brownies, and youth groups are potentially vulnerable to infiltration by perpetrators of child sex abuse, and require policies and procedures to assist in the prevention of organisational child maltreatment.

Managing the risk of child maltreatment in organisations

The task of protecting children in the care of organisations is multi-faceted. It requires attention to three key areas. These are: administrative functions (ensuring adoption of the latest screening and other personnel practices); physical environments (to reduce opportunities for situational maltreatment); and the organisation's culture (creating a child-focused environment of respect). The use of a wide range of policies serves to create the most effective models for child-safe organisations.

In this section, we examine what has been learned from past responses and current practices adopted by organisations to manage risk; the effectiveness or otherwise of those practices; and what else can be done. As with the literature on perpetrators of organisational abuse, the focus in this section is mostly on preventing child sexual abuse. However, many of the suggestions overlap with findings from inquiries into managing risk of physical and emotional maltreatment and neglect. In this section we discuss:

- screening;
- managing situational risks; and
- creating positive organisational cultures.

Screening

Screening typically involves a police records check of previous charges for crimes against children, sexual or physical assaults of adults and other relevant charges. Screening may also include an assessment of the individuals characteristics, however, as the research investigating characteristics of perpetrators showed, there is no reliable 'profile' of a perpetrator of child sexual abuse, or any other maltreatment type. The main aim of developing screening is, as far as an organisation is able, to make it as difficult as possible for unsuitable people to gain access to children who come into contact with organisations.

However, screening is not without its limitations. Such practices rely on previous offences or a categorical knowledge of perpetrator characteristics. Many child sex abusers are astute at knowing how to circumvent systems designed to prevent them from achieving their goals, and may also have assistance from other offenders at overcoming such barriers (Bibby, 1996). Research has also indicated that, when charged, the majority of perpetrators detected do not have prior convictions for any form of child maltreatment, and thus would not have been detected by screening processes. In order to address some of these limitations, some UK organisations have implemented additional measures to complement screening (see Berridge & Wenman, 1995; Lindsay, 1995).

Screening requirements in Australia

As a federation of states and territories, Australia does not have just one system of screening, but eight (see National Child Protection Clearinghouse, 2006). All states and territories have legal, policy or administrative requirements for screening certain persons working in child-related areas, although there are differences in the scope of the background checks and the range of persons covered. The diversity makes administration difficult for national organisations. The national Schedules prepared by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC) Child-Safe Organisations Working Group attempt to offer greater national coherence in the guidance offered to organisations.

Key message

Screening is an important means of preventing known perpetrators from infiltrating child-focused organisations.

Managing situational risks

Screening is an important means of preventing known perpetrators from infiltrating child-focused organisations. However, screening will only detect those people who have already been caught and convicted. Therefore screening by itself is not sufficient to protect children from potential abuse in organisations. Screening needs to be augmented by ongoing attention to policies and procedures and a positive organisational environment and culture in order to manage the risk of child maltreatment (Australian Council for Children and Youth Organisations (ACCYO), 2006).

Policies and procedures

An essential component of effective risk management strategies must be reliable, workable and easily implemented policy and procedures for responding effectively to allegations or disclosures of maltreatment.

The first step must be an assessment of existing facilitators and barriers to disclosure of both past and current maltreatment. Examples of poor organisational practices in responding to disclosures that have been highlighted in the literature include: staff ignoring signs of abuse or dismissing/failing to act upon disclosures (Sullivan & Beech, 2002); managers attempting to protect reputations of institutions by not reporting abuse; and reluctance by staff to co-operate with investigations (Nunno, 1999, cited in Gallagher, 1999b). Other negative responses to disclosure in the experience of some institutions have included whistleblowers being ridiculed, sacked, ostracised, disadvantaged on rosters and leave schedules, and reprimanded (Davidson & McNamara, 1999).

Policies and procedures for responding to disclosures of maltreatment should include a structure for responding to allegations of child abuse (both past and present) perpetrated by members of the organisation; and a framework for responding to and supporting children and their families affected by child abuse within the organisation.

In addition, regular and updated training on child maltreatment matters ensures the topic is discussed regularly and that staff members have the most current information available. It also encourages regular open discussion of any staff concerns and can contribute to an environment that supports early disclosure of abuse (Higgins, 2001).

Creating a positive organisational culture

An organisation that maintains a culture of knowledge about child maltreatment is able to respond to newly emerging research that shows, for example, that child sexual offenders are 'opportunity-takers'. This then allows for consideration of updated ways of contending with the threat of child

maltreatment. In turn, this requires determined offenders to expend increasing effort in order to create the opportunity to offend and leaves them at increasing risk of detection.

The research suggests that a positive organisational culture is one in which:

- adults and children have high confidence that disclosure will be treated seriously and acted upon promptly and appropriately (Petraitis & O'Connor, 1999; Wortley & Smallbone, submitted);
- children are treated as individuals with rights (for example, using a child's name rather than referring to them via a 'number') (Wardhaugh & Wilding, 1993);
- high risk offender-like behaviour, such as constant tickling and touching, is not accepted and is challenged directly and immediately (van Dam, 2001);
- management styles are open and egalitarian (Department of Health, 1992; Hughes, 1985; Lawson, Ambrose, & Clough, 1986);
- all people connected to the organisation are empowered and feel confident to raise concerns, including children and young people (Bichard, 2004; Utting, 1991; Wardhaugh & Wilding, 1993);
- environments are monitored to avoid situational risks developing (Department of Health, 1992; Hughes, 1985; Lawson, Ambrose, & Clough, 1986);
- all staff and volunteers are comprehensively trained in aspects of child abuse such as child and adult grooming (Utting, 1991); and
- there is a focus on being 'child-friendly' not just 'child-safe' (Blakester, 2006; NAPCAN, n/d).

Child abuse prevention programs for children

Some of the processes and policies to emerge in response to research are designed to effectively influence situational cues and environments in order to make the environment less conducive to attracting abusers and to deter offenders from acting. Child-focused prevention programs aim to educate children and assist them to identify situations where they will potentially be maltreated. They also seek to encourage children to disclose experiences of maltreatment (Richardson, Higgins, & Bromfield, 2005). One such example is the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program (Michaelson, 1997).

Summary

The areas of screening, policy and procedures and organisational culture and environment have been discussed separately in this paper. Although each of these elements of an organisation can be approached separately there are areas of overlap. A general culture of transparency and communication will inform the structures and environment utilised by an organisation and the way in which it used.

Responding to disclosure

As with adult sexual abuse cases, researchers suggest it is probable that reports of child sexual abuse fail to provide an accurate indication of the true extent of its prevalence. This is illustrated in the higher prevalence rates for child sexual abuse reported in adult retrospective studies compared with official reports (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990). Research has also showed that in some circumstances children repeatedly disclosed with no effective response until they located an adult prepared to act on their claims (van Dam, 2001). For tips on disclosure policies see Box 3.

Becoming a 'child-safe' organisation

A number of Australian organisations have been tackling the issue of organisational child maltreatment in a variety of ways over recent years including the Australian Council for Children and Youth Organisations (ACCYO) (2006). In 2005, ACCYO piloted a national accreditation process for organisations working with children. Extensive research underpins the training package and

Box 3 Tips for effective disclosure policies

Organisations that have contact with children need to demonstrate their capacity to respond appropriately to disclosures of maltreatment in order to gain, and keep, public confidence. This can be done by developing and maintaining policies and procedures in line with the following criteria:

- *Act on all disclosures:* All disclosures should be acted upon, regardless of how long ago the maltreatment occurred, who is disclosing and who is the alleged perpetrator.
- *Encourage early disclosure:* Research shows that maltreatment is often not disclosed until some years after the first incident, during which time the perpetrator has victimised many more children. Organisational policies ought to encourage children to disclose as soon as possible.
- *Clarify unacceptable behaviour:* All children and adults connected to an organisation need to be aware of what is deemed acceptable behaviour from both parties and that every person is equally accountable for their behaviour. Each person must also be aware of the consequences of unacceptable behaviour.
- *Empower children and adults to disclose:* Children and adults should be confident that all people involved with the organisation will be heard if they disclose maltreatment, no matter who the perpetrator is, and that all disclosures will be treated equally.
- *Be transparent:* Responses to disclosures must be open and transparent and involve the police, the statutory child protection services or other relevant authority. Managers or church leaders should not be given the power to determine the guilt or innocence of a person alleged to have perpetrated child maltreatment.
- *Respond appropriately to criminal behaviour:* Organisations must recognise the criminal status of abuse. Most child maltreatment and all sexual abuse is criminal behaviour and must be referred to external authorities (police and statutory child protection departments).

accreditation process that was trialled with more than 180 organisations. When finalised, the accreditation process is expected to include:

- training on issues relating to child protection in organisations (both online and face to face);
- standards designed to safeguard children in the care of organisations (and a standards implementation guide and tool kit to assist with policy formulation);
- workshops and forums to assist with implementation;
- a self-assessment phase;
- an external audit and accreditation phase;
- post accreditation assistance in maintaining the standards; and
- participation in workshops and training.

The objective of ACCYO is to contribute to worldwide standards of child protection policies and practices within organisations and, through uniformity, to reduce the risk and prevalence of child maltreatment in organisations. For organisations that already have police checks and a child protection policy in place, participation in the ACCYO accreditation program will formalise the processes and have them recognised at a national level. The first stage of the accreditation process will offer assistance to organisations with an existing child protection policy. The accreditation program being designed and tested by ACCYO goes beyond merely screening to ensure all viable steps have been taken to create a 'child-safe organisation'.

Gaps in the research

Primarily the limitations of this report relate to gaps within the research literature. Such gaps include the paucity of research on forms of child maltreatment other than sexual abuse. While the attention

paid to the causes, consequences and perpetrators of child sexual abuse has been both necessary and useful, a similar scrutiny is needed of other types of abuse against children in an organisational setting.

Significantly, the focus on intra-familial child maltreatment has led to an incomplete understanding of abuse within organisational settings. This has meant holistic strategies that take into account organisational culture and situational crime prevention in addition to administrative procedures, such as screening, have only recently been developed.

Implications

In addition, the policy climate around issues of child abuse has changed. Public attention and government inquiries into historic and contemporary institutional abuse and the response to abuse by churches and other organisations have reflected a growing need for social change. Existing and proposed changes to working with children checks are indicative of these social shifts.

Organisational maltreatment is outside of the area of expertise of most child welfare professionals who most often focus on intra-familial abuse. In many cases when such professionals respond to extra-familial abuse, it is at the individual level of victims or perpetrators rather than at the level of the environments in which they offend. However, child therapists may be working with children who are victims of abuse which occurred in an organisational context; and police may be responding to allegations of abuse that is said to have occurred in an organisational context. The majority of subscribers to the National Child Protection Clearinghouse's *Child Abuse Prevention Issues* papers work in child-focused organisations or have direct contact with children in their work, thus it is important to be aware of some of the factors that can increase and decrease the risk of organisational maltreatment occurring.

In this paper, we have sought to increase awareness about child maltreatment in organisational contexts within the general community and within those who work with organisations that have contact with children. Specifically, this paper has demonstrated the need for those working in child-focused organisations and those who have direct contact with children to:

- recognise that, although some children are more vulnerable than others, any child can be abused;
- be aware of factors that increase a child's vulnerability to maltreatment;
- understand that any person can perpetrate child abuse, although some people are more at risk of maltreating children than others;
- be aware of some of the factors which may indicate a need to assess, monitor or curtail the behaviour of others within the organisation, particularly with regard to possible grooming behaviours;
- create an organisational environment which limits the opportunity for children to be maltreated;
- create and maintain an organisational culture that is child-focused, transparent and respectful; and
- implement a comprehensive framework within organisations that ensures appropriate screening and policies for responding to maltreatment are in place.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to investigate recent literature on child maltreatment in organisational settings. Research shows that while some children are at greater risk than others, all children are potentially vulnerable to child maltreatment simply because they are children (i.e., dependent on adults for food, shelter, nurture, care and protection). Additionally, exposure to different types of abuse varies for children depending on age, gender and other social factors. It is not possible to accurately identify potential perpetrators of child maltreatment which means that every organisation that is responsible for the care of children needs to address the risks of maltreatment occurring. Organisations can best manage risk of child maltreatment by developing policies and procedures

that extend far beyond screening for criminal history at the time of employment. Developing a child-centred, child-safe culture of respect within an organisation that supports early disclosure, accountability by all adults, and challenging unacceptable behaviour is now identified as the future direction in managing organisational risk.

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- Foster carer/residential carer
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- Non-tertiary education or child-care professional (e.g. school teacher, careers advisor, child-care worker)
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