

Children's harmful sexual behaviour in educational settings: Teachers' experiences and perspectives.

3rd Perth Symposium: Child Sexual Abuse Prevention “Harmful Sexual Behaviours In Children and Adolescents”

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Briggs 2012

Diversity of Language

- Significant debate about how to describe children and young people displaying sexualised behaviour without labelling them as sex offenders.
- Difficulties in defining such behaviour are compounded by a general lack of knowledge of childhood sexuality
- Applying the term 'harmful sexual behaviour' avoids labelling young children as sexual offenders (Cleland 2013, Ey & McInnes 2017, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence 2016)
- In Australia children can be held criminally responsible for sexual assault from the age of 10 years (Boyd & Bromfield, 2006).



Harmful sexual behaviour and sexually abusive behaviour displayed by children and young people

Growing evidence that CSA is perpetrated by other children and young people (McKibbin 2017; O'Brien 2010).

2008–09 to 2016–17 - Sexual assault and related offences displayed by youth aged 10-17 years, increased by 35% (from 1,103 to 1,490).

Non-assaultive sexual offences (increased from 243 to 653 offenders) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018).



Youth Sexual Assault and related Offences 2016-2017

National data

10 years	11 years	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	16 years	17 years	Total
19	25	94	208	326	315	283	220	1,490

(Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018)

Western Australia data

June 2015 - June 2016	June 2016 - June 2017
75.2	67.9

(Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018)



Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – WA data

4,803 recent allegations of **child sexual abuse** were reported to Western Australia Police 1 June 2008 – 30 July 2013

Average of **961** allegations per year (**2.61 per day**).

Number of child-to-child allegations not recorded

Table 13.2: Number of recent allegations of child sexual abuse reported to police from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2013, by year reported

	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2008–13
Female	769	828	706	708	945	3,956
Male	151	168	144	149	206	818
Unknown	8	3	3	6	9	29
All children	928	999	853	863	1,160	4,803

All children includes those whose gender was not recorded.

Source: Western Australia Police data

(Bromfield, Hirte, Octoman & Katz 2017)



Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – WA Data

For the period 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2013, **267 (6%)** recent allegations of child sexual abuse occurred in an institutional location

Table 13.1.4: Locations of allegations categorised as at an institutional location

Location	n	%
Bush camp	10	3.7
Child care/crèche	14	5.2
Church	4	1.5
Hospital/medical centre/dentist	9	3.4
Nursing home	2	0.7
Police premises	3	1.1
Prison/lockup	4	1.5
School	221	82.8
Total – allegations	267	

Source: Western Australia Police data

82.8% occurred
in a school

1 case every third
school day



What is harmful sexual behaviour in schools?

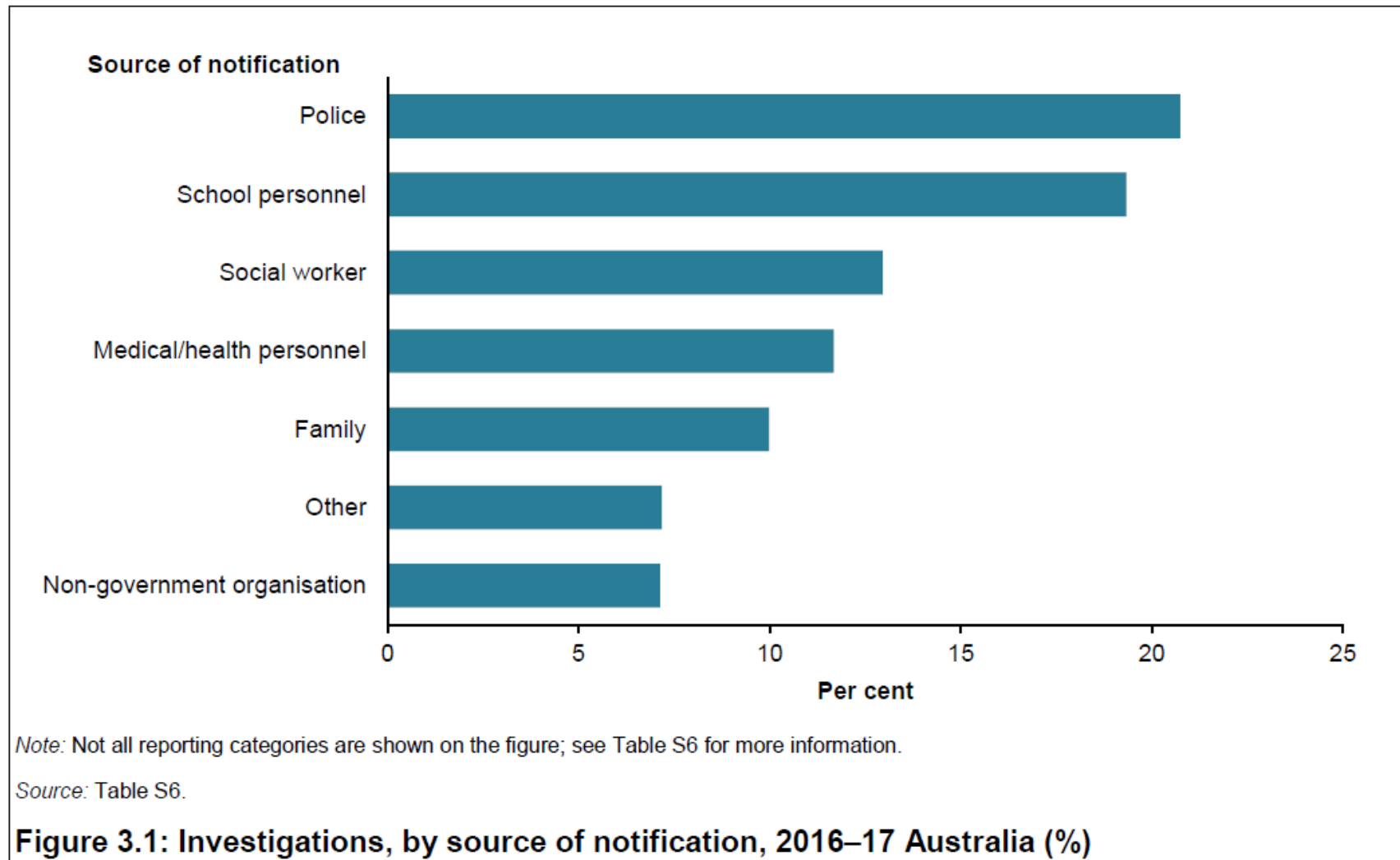
Harmful sexual behaviour towards peers can be described as children imposing sexual acts on others of the same or similar age.

If there is a reasonable age difference, it is commonly considered as sexual abuse.

Children who instigate sexual acts often try to lure, threaten, persuade, trick or bribe other children to engage in sexual activity and will generally try to conceal the behaviour from adults (Briggs 2012).

Sexual behaviours considered problematic differ according to age, but generally any sexual behaviour involving others, becomes compulsive, is non-consensual, or is controlling is considered problematic or harmful (Shlonsky, Albers, Tolliday, Wilson, Norvell, Kissinger, 2017).





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Teachers experiences with young children's sexual behaviour in schools/preschools

- Dearth of information and studies conducted (n = 6 between 1995 - 2016)
- All found that children were displaying sexual behaviour in educational settings
- Behaviours ranged from mainly mild sexual behaviour to more severe displays of sexual behaviour



Australian Research with Teachers and OSHC staff

- **Online survey - 29 questions**
 - Demographic data relating to their teaching career
 - Understanding of typical and harmful sexual behaviour
 - Details of experiences with children's displays of harmful sexual behaviour and responses
 - Training, supports available, and needs
- **107 educators (preschool, primary school, OSCH); 11 from WA**

(Ey & McInnes 2017a)



40% of educators observed children displaying sexual behaviour – upper primary

- A 13 year old girl offering blowjobs to boys in exchange for smokes.
- An in-depth explanation of what a 12 year old girl went through, the first time she had sex with her 19 year old boyfriend in the backseat of the bus coming home from an excursion.
- Genital kissing between a 15 year old boy and a 13 year old girl
- A student trying to blackmail another student into sending sexually explicit photos or show body parts. This involved a 12 year old boy and girl
- 12 year old male removing clothes and masturbating 11 year old male
- A student (female, Grade 6) had been sexually abused in a prior situation and then whilst at school, placed other students in situations where they felt pressured to do/say things that were sexually inappropriate. Behaviours included: written letters with sexually explicit descriptions, changing of online profiles to penis', asking another student to touch another student in a sexual way
- Year 6 boy sharing pornographic material on his phone to others.



40% of educators observed children displaying sexual behaviour – mid primary

- Older child bribing younger children to engage in sexualised activity such as genital touching
- Male (year 3) threatening verbally to "fuck you up the ass" if friend did not comply; rubbing genitals, rubbing up against peer (male) - discussion relating to sexual behaviour, such as pornography - simulated intercourse
- A 10 year old boy displayed his penis to his friends showing them the drawings his 11 year old sister had done the night before
- Year 4 student female tries to coerce younger students into toilet areas so that she can touch them.
- Year 4 girl has been approaching other kids talking about sex, gave someone a note asking him to have sex with her, was sent home from camp for this.



40% of educators observed children displaying sexual behaviour – early childhood

- Two 5 year old students hiding in the play ground touching genitalia and simulating masturbation.
- 8 year old male touching peers genitals (6yo male and 7yo female). Ongoing problem at school and happened once while in care. Finds the situation funny and does not respond to discipline.
- A young boy (aged 7) kept going around to a range of girls from the ages 5 - 9 and tried to cuddles them and then put a jacket over them whilst sitting together so he could rub their legs and pretend they were a married couple. He was spoken to multiple times but every time we took an eye off him for a second he would try to do it again and made the girls extremely uncomfortable.
- Year 2 girl who discusses sexual behaviour with other students and talks about wanting to kiss them and "do sex" with them. Trying to hide herself behind furniture and encouraging boys in the class to do so with her. Trying to kiss the boys in the class



40% of educators observed children displaying sexual behaviour – early childhood

- A 6 year old girl told a 7 year old boy she would "sex" him when he came over to her house and that she had a secret closet at home where they could 'do it'. The boy was a friend of her brothers and he was worried about going over there and told me of his concerns. This same girl approx 6 months later, touched a girls genital in a cubicle of the girls toilet. She invited the girl to touch hers, she declined. The other girl was 5. The victim told her mother that evening and I referred this to leadership and their teacher. So as to not complicate or distress the victim I left these parties to speak to the children and parents
- A young boy aged 7 1/2 years inviting a girl of 10 1/2 to 'suck his dick' and the same child asking other children if they would like to see his genitals while sitting at the table during lunch. This occurred several times.
- Two boys in Year 1/2 putting genitals in each others mouths- not observed but reported.



40% of educators observed children displaying sexual behaviour – early childhood

- A 7 year old boy (year 2) continually thrusting his lower body towards the girls in his class whilst making 'sex' talk with them.
- Prep-2 - sexual play, simulated intercourse
- 6 year old child pulling down another boys pants and touching his penis.
- 3 girls touching each other all aged 6 all because one of them seen it on tv one night when they couldn't sleep and got up and turned the tv on.
- Year 1 girl coercing other students into toilet cubicles to remove underwear etc, this young girl is a repeat offender.
- Year 2 boy continually exposing himself and trying to get other boys to do the same in secret spots.
- Female - year 2 student getting boys to kiss her and touch her under clothing



Age unclear

- A student threatening to rape another student and tackling them to the ground. Also lots of pulling own pants down. Lots of obsession with sex, porn, sexual language (age unclear)
- Boys were in the toilet when once asked do you want to have sex? Then continued to demonstrate with him - this is what you do
- 2 boys asking a girl to expose herself to them. Exposing themselves to her. Teeming her they won't be her friend if she doesn't comply. Touching her inappropriately.
- Touching other students, hiding to show and touch others



Socially inappropriate Sexual behaviour

- Year 6 male student today drawing penis' over someone else's work
- A Year 3 male student simulating masturbation during dance performance in front of parents.
- Year 1 student using sexually explicit language
- Year One students pulling their own pants down in front of their peers (Ey & McInnes 2017a)



Educator Training

Educator training on child protection in Australia is scarce and is conventionally delivered through courses focusing on mandated reporting of child abuse to child protection authorities (n = 101)

Source of education	N	%
Mandated reporting or responding to abuse and neglect	53	80.2
Professional development supplied through workplace	29	43.9
A book or Internet Resource	15	22.7
Pre-service education	14	21.2
Professional development sought on your own	11	16.6
Other	5	7.5

(Ey & McInnes 2017b)



Educator's training needs

89% want specific training

A whole of school approach

Distinguish between normal and problematic sexual behaviours

How to respond to school processes, the children involved and the parents of the children, as well as the general parent community

Educating children and the parent community in protective behaviours and appropriate sexual behaviours

Ensuring self-care when teachers are exposed to traumatising events

Education in the legal contexts applying to children's problematic sexual behaviours

Training in trauma informed practice

(Ey & McInnes 2017b)



Educator desires

Resources for children:

- expert counselling at the school level;
- access to community supports to refer families for help;
- access to suitable books and learning materials;
- negotiated education plans

Professional collaboration in managing the consequences of PSB with other suitably qualified professionals

(Ey & McInnes 2017b)



Interventions and services WA

Child Protection Services

Department of Justice

Department of Education

Department of Health

Government funded services

Private practices

(Commissioner for Children and Young People 2018)



Recommendations

- HSB is often a result of a range of problems or underlying vulnerabilities – universal approach
- Collaborative approach between families and all sectors involved in supporting the child's recovery
- Sensitive information sharing based on child at the centre (address legal and confidentiality issues)
- Developing and managing a care plan for children – response, intervention, management, safety, education (CBT, consent education, protective behaviours, self-regulation, help seeking)
- Specific training about HSB
- Further research



Specific for Education settings

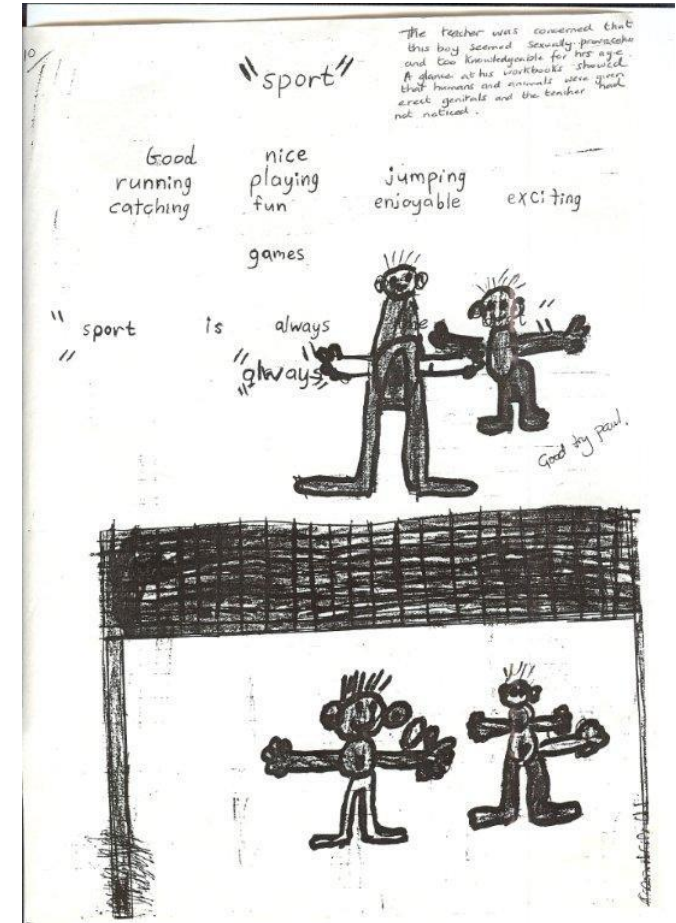
- Training specific to HSB for educators - confidence
- Behaviour policy specific to HSB
- Procedure manual – initial response to observation or disclosure, next steps, communicating with parents of target and agent, school community risk management
- Care Plan for agent and target
- Internal and accessible support (wellbeing officers, SSOs)
- Protective Behaviours Curriculum – monitored, confidence
- Resources for Parents



Questions



Freda Briggs Collection



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