

WOMEN WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE

Assessment, Treatment & Management

Franca Cortoni, PH.D., C.PSYCH.

A GIFR PROFESSIONAL BOOK



GLOBAL INSTITUTE
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Preface

Sexual offending by women is not a phenomenon new to the 21st century: Saradjian (2010) traced back to 1857 the first formal writings on child sexual abuse that included female offenders. What is new, perhaps, is the increased societal and professional recognition that women can and do engage of their own accord in sexual offending behavior. This recognition contrasts with early writings such as those of Mathis (1972), who believed it was unthinkable for a woman to engage in sexual contact with a child and, even if she did, “What harm could be done without a penis?” (p. 54). In fact, studies have shown that victims of female sexual offenders suffer the same traumatic effects as victims of male sexual offenders, but many professionals have long had difficulties accepting victims’ reports that they suffered their sexual abuse at the hand of a woman (Denov, 2004). As a result, the problem of female sexual offending has traditionally been downplayed and understudied, thus much remains to be learned.

This book is the result of many years of studying the phenomenon of sexual offending by women and developing corresponding evidence-based assessment and treatment practices for this population. It is now well-established that, while female sexual offending may appear similar to that of their male counterparts, a gender-informed approach is required to fully understand the processes and factors specific to women. This book reviews what we currently know about women who engage in sexual offending behavior and provides information regarding best current practices for the assessment, treatment, and management of female sexual offenders.

The book begins with setting the contextual issues related to female sexual offenders. Chapter 1 describes the nature of sexual offending by women, its prevalence, and the various types of female sexual offenders. It also debunks

myths that have contributed to the lack of recognition of female sexual offending. Chapter 2 describes the characteristics of women who have sexually offended and their differences from men who also offend. The next two chapters focus on explanations of female sexual offending. Chapter 3 reviews our understanding of the offense process among women, while chapter 4 provides some Level II theoretical explanations, based on available empirical evidence, for the development of sexual offending behavior among women.

The other four chapters of the book focus on clinical work with women who have been arrested and convicted for sexual offenses. Chapter 5 provides guidelines for the assessment of risk of sexual recidivism among women. It includes a review of the research on the recidivism rates of women, the factors related to that recidivism, and the implications for the conduct of the risk assessment. Chapter 6 provides guidelines to conduct an assessment of the treatment needs of women. It discusses the importance of conducting an analysis of the woman's life as well as the elements that led to the offending behavior. When appropriate, it includes suggestions for psychometric instruments for use in the assessment. The last two chapters of the book focus on interventions with female sexual offenders. Chapter 7 reviews best gender-informed practices for their treatment, while chapter 8 concludes with additional considerations for the management of female sexual offenders. It is my hope that the information provided in this book will prove useful to professionals who work with female sexual offenders.

About the Author

Franca Cortoni received her doctorate in clinical and forensic psychology from Queen's University at Kingston, Canada. Since 1989, she has worked with and conducted research on female and male sexual offenders. She worked for many years with the Correctional Service of Canada, where she provided assessment and treatment services to incarcerated male and female offenders, was director of an in-prison treatment program for high risk sexual offenders, and director of correctional research. In 2007, she moved to a full-time academic position in the School of Criminology at the Université de Montréal. Since 2008, she has been a Research Fellow at the International Centre of Comparative Criminology. Dr. Cortoni has published extensively and made numerous presentations at national and international conferences on both male and female sexual offender issues. She has edited a book on female sexual offenders, a book on criminal violence (in French), and a book on sexual aggression (also in French). Dr. Cortoni has also been associate editor of the *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, the official journal of NOTA (ATSA's sister organization in the United Kingdom), and associate editor of the ATSA journal, *Sexual Abuse*. She is presently serving a two-year term as president of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA).