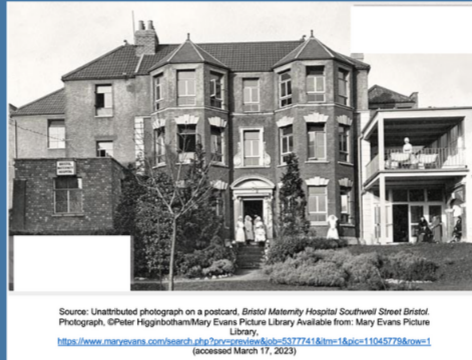


# The Problem of Child Sexual Abuse and the Extent of Public Awareness in Bristol, 1880-1914

Isobel Keene, BA History Oxford Brookes University

## Introduction

- CSA is deeply rooted in the 'dark figure' of unreported and unknown criminality
- Sexual abuse is still the most under-reported crime in western societies
- Therefore it continues to present unique problems for researchers
- However, it is important to research as it gives a voice to the victims and provides a wider understanding of its extent and the nature of the perpetrators and victims
- The years 1880-1914 were chosen as the timeframe because:
- The concept of childhood was constructed
  - Children were seen as innocents that needed to be protected
  - Rise in social reformers, children charities and sensational media coverage
  - W.T. Stead 1885
  - NSPCC 1889
- Introduction in important legislation
  - Criminal Law Amendment Act
  - Incest Act 1908



## Bristol in the Victorian Period

- Overpopulated
- Garrison town
- Working-class housing was a major problem
  - Single-roomed/shared facilities
  - Lack of privacy
- Industrial hub for consumer goods
  - Fry's Chocolate, Wills Tobacco
  - Large proportion of workforce were women and girls
- Domestic service largest employment for women and girls
  - Only other moral alternative of work
- Social Reform groups - protecting girls against sexual harm
- Charitable city
  - Many Rescue Homes for 'fallen' women and girls
  - 13 Homes by 1914
- Neglected in the wider historiography of crime
- Data only focuses on the SA of girls
- SA of boys occurred but disregarded by society and the law
- Women/girls character judged on sexual reputation/maturity
- Considered 'fallen' and a moral threat

## Methodology

- Patient Records from the Bristol Maternity Hospital
  - Opened in 1865
  - Main mission - reducing 'fallen' girls rather than providing maternity care (girls sent away for their confinements)
  - 1894 turned into the Temporary Home and Lying-in Hospital
  - After WW1 it turned into a maternity facility
- Quantitative & qualitative data
- Unique data that hasn't been analysed - often court proceedings
- Limitations
  - Restricted age range
  - Only girls who menstruated
  - Average age 14-16 in the timeframe
  - A specific case study of girls who were often overlooked/disregarded as victims for being less 'childlike'
- Provided data to reveal the extent of CSA/the likely victim and perpetrator
- Reports from the *Bristol Mercury* (small independent paper) & *Western Daily Press* (profitable regional paper)
- Only form of mass media
  - Overall consensus of what the public were being made aware about
- Reports on CSA in Bristol - no national cases
- Quantitative data
- Two principal search terms used
  - "Criminal Law Amendment Act"
  - "Indecent Assault"
- Limitations
  - BM stopped production in 1909 and the Archives stopped holding reports after 1900
  - Hard to gain individual accounts
- Data used to identify whether the media focused on specific narratives and if the public were being shielded from the crime's true nature

Figure 1.1 Patient Record from the Bristol Maternity Hospital c. 1891

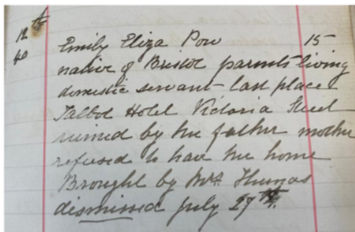


Table 1.1 The Number of Patients Under 16 in the BMH between 1880-1914

Age of Patients in the Home between 1880-1914	Number of Patients
7	1
8	0
9	0
10	1
11	0
12	0
13	3
14	24
15	68
16	117
<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>

Source: Database compiled from: Bristol Archives Records of Bristol Maternity Hospital and its Predecessors, 1864-1948, 37006/P1-17, (1880-1914); The British Newspaper Archive, Bristol Mercury and Western Daily Press (1880-1914).

## Table 1.1

- 209/214 patients in the range of 14-16
- Omits a large proportion of victims who couldn't or didn't get pregnant
- Can reflect the overall likelihood of the crime's occurrence as sexual intercourse doesn't always result in pregnancy
- Late Victorian period - vague understanding of the timings of conception
- SA not always in the form of penetrative assault
- Data alludes to extent to which other forms of CSA occurred
- 2 anomalies - 7 & 10 year old
- Provides evidence for a higher incidence of SA in young victims

Table 1.2 Occupation of Patient's Revised

Occupation Revised	Number of Patient
Prostitute	42
Dressmaker	1
Factory	12
Factory/service	1
Farmer	1
N/A	68
School	3
Service	83
Shop Assistant	2
Tailor	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>

Source: as for Table 1.1

## Table 1.2

- Limited evidence at first
- Qualitative data used to infer patients occupation
- Phrases "bad life," "bad house," "bad company," "Lock Hospital" = Prostitute
- Table 1.2 Revised data
- Likely victim working-class girls
  - Increased opportunity in employment
  - Working-class children less parental guidance/supervision once in employment
- Service most common occupation - most of demographic working-class
- Only 13 girls in factory employment
- Shows domestic service more opportunities
  - Isolated from protection, long hours, living in the household
- Revision shows: 12 servants going into prostitution category
- Vulnerability/lack of employment opportunities
- Common to be discharged from service no cause or warning
- Shows a limited presence of child prostitution
- After 1894 no patients were recorded as prostitutes

## Table 1.3

- Similar revision due to limited evidence
- Patients identified as prostitutes been categorised as getting pregnant by a 'client'
- Phrases: "Only in service a short time" & "limited time in service" = abuse happened in workplace
  - Phrases argued as alluding to the commonplace of SA & the frequent dismissal rates
- 91 patients had a familiar relationship with their abuser
- 56 patients worked with their abusers
- Domestic service most opportunity for CSA
  - Complicated private sphere
  - Power dynamic
  - Master, family members of master, other staff
- 17 SA by family
- Incest more common/severe form
- Alcohol & overcrowded housing providing the means
- Why not reflected in statistics?
- End of 19th century girls over 14 in regular employment
- Data shows means of opportunity shifted from the home to the workplace
- Was incest higher in cases involving younger or unemployed girls?

Table 1.3 Relations of Victims to their Perpetrator Revised

Pregnant by Revised	Number of Patients
Prostitution Client	42
From work	56
Related	17
Knew	17
Married Man	2
N/A	72
Lodger	1
Policeman	1
Soldier	1
Stranger	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>

Source: as for Table 1.1

Table 1.4 Relation of Victim to Perpetrator Listed in the Newspaper Articles

Perpetrators Relation to the Victim	Count of Perpetrators Relation to the Victim		Total
	BM	WDP	
Colleague	0	1	1
Employer	9	5	14
Family	17	7	24
Knew	2	1	3
Lodger	9	1	10
Neighbour	1	0	1
Stranger	56	15	71
Unknown	18	15	33

Source: as for Table 1.1

## Table 1.4

- Most controversial information to be recorded
- Majority happened between strangers
- Incorrect representation
- Sensationalised as censorship - ignite the fear
  - Warnings to society
  - Emotive language
- Figure for 'unknown' reflect media repressing information to support the narrative
- Unfamiliar perpetrators often described as 'monsters' separate them
- Created the narrative of 'monstrous stranger', 'stranger dangerous'
- Acts of incest difficult to navigate - too damaging, linked with housing issue
- Easier narrative - clear 'villain' providing a scapegoat for the government & not morally compromising the family structure

## References

- Allise Bultin, "'Monster, give me my child': How the Myth of the Paedophile as a Monstrous Stranger Took Shape in Emerging Discourses on Child Sexual Abuse in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 42, no. 2 (2021): 221-245.
- Bates, Victoria. *Sexual Forensics in Victorian and Edwardian England: Age, Crime and Consent in the Courts*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- D'Cruze, Shani. *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women*. Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998.
- Duckworth, Jeannie. *Fagin's Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002.
- Gosling, George. *Payment and Philanthropy in British Healthcare, 1918-48*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017.
- Higginbotham, Peter. "Magdalen Homes - Gloucestershire-Kent." *Children's Homes*, February 20, 2023. <http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/list/MH3.shtml>
- Jackson, Louise. *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2000.
- Wohl, Anthony. "Sex and the Single Room: Incest Among the Victorian Working Classes." In *The Victorian Family: Structure and Stresses*, edited by Anthony Wohl, 197-213. Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2016.