

## ***BETTER TOGETHER***

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

**F-47**

### **Placing 'Context' at the Heart of Sexual Abuse Prevention**

Symposium Chair: Carlene Firmin, MBE, MsC, MA Cantab, BA Hons  
University of Bedfordshire

From schools and transport hubs, to retail centers and parks, a range of contexts have provided settings in which young people have been able to sexually harm their peers. In order to prevent these behaviors from reoccurring or escalating in the future, research from the UK, US and Australia, amongst other countries, have evidenced the need to assess and intervene with the social conditions in which peer-sexual abuse occurs, as well as work with the individuals involved. This symposium builds on that evidence base through a set of three papers which share a conceptual framework, empirical data and intervention models associated with 'contextual' approaches to sexual abuse prevention. The first paper, by Dr. Carlene Firmin from the UK, will present a model of 'Contextual Safeguarding' – currently being applied in local areas across England to reform their multi-agency efforts to prevent harmful sexual behavior amongst young people. Secondly Professor Simon Hackett will use the framework of Contextual Safeguarding to present and analyze a sample of 510 cases which represent all reports of harmful sexual behavior concerning children and youth to one police region in the UK over a twelve-month period. Demonstrating the diversity of harmful sexual behaviors in a wide range of children, Hackett will explore the ethical and practical questions raised in the cases and will highlight how effective management of such cases in the community can be enhanced through explicit attention to contextual issues. Finally, Dr. Susan Rayment Mc-Hugh from Australia will showcase a community driven, contextual prevention program in Australia, addressing youth sexual violence and abuse. Led by two psychologists, this program brought together community leaders, local youth and families, professionals and para-professionals, and academics; to design, implement and evaluate a suite of prevention activities directly targeting safety in public parks, peer-groups, organizations and other community settings.

Informed by situational crime prevention principles and ecological practice models, this program compliments precisely the Contextual Safeguarding model developed in the UK.

Collectively they will ask, and answer, to what extent do the social rules/norms at play within peer, school and community settings enable sexual abuse? Is the physical design of parks, youth clubs and high streets conducive with sexual abuse prevention? In what ways do policymakers, public debate, intervention design and research communities need to develop their understanding of the contextual dynamics of harmful sexual

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behavior in order prevent future incidents of sexual abuse?

Ultimately when sexual abuse is viewed through a contextual lens we focus less on individual pathology and more on vulnerabilities within locations, communities, parent and peer relationships as central to the prevention agenda.

### **Contextual Risk, Safeguarding and Prevention – Reframing Responses to Sexual Abuse Amongst Adolescents**

Carlene Firmin, Professional Doctorate, MsC, MA Cantab  
University of Bedfordshire

Policymakers, practitioners and researchers in the UK have been increasingly conscious, over recent years, of the fact that adolescents' involvement in harmful sexual behaviors, and other forms of peer-abuse, is often associated with the social dynamics of their peer group, school, neighbourhoods and online communities. In order to prevent this behaviour therefore, a range of stakeholders required a lens through which to explore, and ultimately disrupt, the social dynamics of sexual abuse and prevent escalation. This paper presents a conceptual framework that has been developed in the UK to facilitate this process, and outlines how it has been applied by children's services, police, juvenile justice and community practitioners to reduce risks associated with harmful sexual behaviours in youth.

Contextual Safeguarding draws attention to the social rules at play within extra-familial settings where adolescents spend their time and the harmful attitudes or behaviours that they may display while they are there. Importantly it highlights the interplay and social rule-transference that occurs between different contexts, and the varied weightings that these contexts may have on the decisions that adolescents make. During these interactions parents often struggle to disrupt a young person's behavior and can be overwhelmed by the influence of their peers. Using co-creation techniques, case review and practitioner observations, Dr Carlene Firmin has used applied Contextual Safeguarding in 15 local authorities across England to respond to these challenges, and develop methods for assessing and intervening with the contexts associated to sexual abuse, which complement existing work with the individuals involved. This approach to assessment and intervention requires a paradigm shift in how prevention, assessment and intervention are perceived, and ultimately seeks to create situations, relationships and locations in which the risk of sexual abuse are reduced – via the social rules at play and the physical design of such spaces – rather than through the identification of 'risky' individuals. It builds upon ecological accounts of human development, and situational crime prevention theories, to offer a social model of sexual abuse prevention.

## **BETTER TOGETHER**

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### **Learning Goals:**

By attending this paper presentation, attendees will have:

- Developed an understanding of the social conditions of harmful sexual behaviours amongst youth
- Gained access to a framework through which to assess the peer, school and community dynamics associated with sexually abusive behaviours
- Understood the rationale for intervening with contexts, relationships and situations as a route for sexual violence prevention

### **Taking Contextual Prevention to the Community**

Susan Rayment-McHugh, Master of Psychology (Forensic), PhD Candidate  
University of the Sunshine Coast

Responses to sexual violence have traditionally been dominated by an individual-pathology framework, with perpetrators of abuse engaged in intensive, individually-based therapeutic interventions to prevent reoffending. Human behaviour, however, does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, behaviour, including sexual violence and abuse, is influenced by the immediate physical and social environments in which it occurs, suggesting the need for a far more contextual focus to intervention. Addressing sexual violence and abuse in contexts where problems are concentrated, for example a public park, school, social setting, or even a whole community, demands such a radically different approach. The *Neighbourhoods Project* in Australia adopted a contextual prevention model to prevent youth sexual violence and abuse in two communities, one a small remote Indigenous community, and the other a multi-cultural regional precinct. This approach offered a new way to think about sexual violence and abuse prevention, with a focus on making ‘places’ safer for children and youth, rather than making safer ‘individuals’. Prevention activities spanned education packages for local professionals and para-professionals, clinical programs for youth and families, community-wide engagement with the problem, a new policing strategy and crime prevention through environmental design initiatives, in order to create safer homes, organisations, social and public environments. Addressing problem behaviour by targeting and changing environments offered a non-stigmatising, practical approach for these communities, capable of producing measurable change.

The *Neighbourhoods Project* brought together a team of academics, professionals and paraprofessionals, and local community leaders and members, to collaborate on the design, implementation and evaluation of a suite of contextual prevention strategies. Building on the conference theme of “better together”, this presentation will describe this contextual prevention initiative and pilot evaluation, with a particular focus on community engagement with the project. Steps taken to work collaboratively with the community will be shared, along with community perceptions, participation and feedback, highlighting the

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importance of working in partnership with communities to ensure the contextualisation of prevention efforts. The presentation will conclude by highlighting ways the *Neighbourhoods Project* approach in Australia compliments the Contextual Safeguarding model in the UK.

### **Learning Goals:**

- a) Develop an understanding of strengths and benefits of contextual prevention
- b) Gain awareness of how contextual prevention may be applied in community settings
- c) Understand how communities may be effectively engaged in a broad prevention agenda

### **Effective, Ethical, Contextual? The Management of 510 Cases of Harmful Sexual Behavior by UK Children and Youth in the Community**

Simon Hackett, PhD.  
Durham University

Building on the framework of contextual safeguarding which will be introduced in the first paper in the symposium, this presentation will review a sample of 510 cases which represent all reports of harmful sexual behaviour concerning children and youth to one police region in the UK over a twelve-month period. The importance of this data is that it represents behaviors across a wide range of age ranges and does not just report adjudicated youth, therefore casting light on the full spectrum of harmful sexual behaviors of concern across childhood. Analysis of the data highlights the way in which such behaviors are managed in the community and the casework decisions taken. The presentation will highlight the ethical and practical questions raised in the cases. The contextual safeguarding framework will be used to highlight how the effective management of such cases in the community can be enhanced through explicit attention to contextual issues.

### **Learning Goals:**

- To describe the diversity of behavior, motivation, context and outcome in a sample of UK cases of harmful sexual behaviour in childhood
- To demonstrate the significance of social conditions which influence harmful sexual behaviour
- To highlight how a framework for contextual case management can enhance community responses to harmful sexual behavior

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**Dr Carlene Firmin MBE** is a Principal Research Fellow at the University of Bedfordshire, where she leads their Contextual Safeguarding and peer-on-peer abuse research programmes. Carlene has spent over a decade researching young people's experiences of community and group-based violence and advocated for comprehensive approaches that keep adolescents safe in public places, schools and peer groups. Her theory of Contextual Safeguarding has informed policy and research agendas for advancing the protection of adolescents, and she has worked with practitioners across the UK to co-create contextual interventions and develop contextual safeguarding systems within children's social care. Carlene is widely published in child welfare, social work and criminology publications, and has also conducted 20 case reviews for safeguarding children's boards to identify opportunities for intervening with extra-familial forms of significant harm.

**Susan Rayment-McHugh** is a psychologist, Lecturer in Criminology and Justice at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland Australia, and Adjunct Research Fellow with the Griffith Criminology Institute. Sue has over 24 years' combined experience as a psychologist and researcher in the sexual violence and abuse fields; including as Clinical Manager of the Griffith Youth Forensic Service, a specialist forensic psychology service providing assessment and treatment for youth adjudicated for sexual offences; and as Project Co-Leader of the Neighbourhoods Project, Australia's first contextual, place-based initiative for preventing youth sexual violence and abuse in Indigenous communities, based on situational crime prevention principles. Sue has a Master's Degree in Forensic Psychology and submitted her PhD on endemic sexual violence and abuse in 2017. Her current research interests are focused on understanding and preventing sexual violence and abuse, including in Indigenous communities and in youth-serving institutions. Sue presents nationally and internationally in relation to sexual violence and abuse prevention and intervention.

**Simon Hackett** is Professor of Child Abuse and Neglect at Durham University, UK. He is Chair of NOTA, ATSA's sister organisation in the UK and Republic of Ireland (see [www.nota.co.uk](http://www.nota.co.uk)). Simon is past Editor-in-Chief of The Journal of Sexual Aggression. With Helen Masson, he has recently completed an ESRC funded study of long-term outcomes for children and youth between ten and twenty years after the initial identification of their sexually abusive behaviours. Simon's practice base with children and youth with sexually abusive behaviours extends back to the early 1990s. He was previously Programme Director of G-MAP, one of the UK's longest established community based intervention services for children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours. Simon is the author of four books and a wide variety of other book chapters and journal articles, including the (2014) publication 'Children and Young People with Harmful Sexual Behaviours' published by Research in Practice.