

ORGANISED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: A WEBINAR EXPLORING NEW RESEARCH INTO PERPETRATOR CULTURES

Supported and funded by the *Faculty of Education and Arts research program*

University of Newcastle

Monday 7 December 5.30pm – 7.30pm via Zoom



This webinar explores some of the complexities of the heinous crime of organised child sexual abuse. Five experts in the fields of criminology, sociology, law and social work consider the issue from a number of perspectives but with a focus on how child sexual abuse exists as an organised phenomenon.

Research into more complex understandings of institutional child sexual abuse have grown significantly over the last 20 years with multiple public inquiries and legal cases providing undisputed evidence of widespread abuse and organisational cover-ups.

Most recently, the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2012-2017) amassed significant evidence demonstrating the deleterious impacts of sexual abuse on victim/survivors and the failure of Australian institutions to deal responsibly with perpetrators. It is now clear that many institutions operated from cultural and management systems that prioritised the reputation of the institution at the expense of the safety of children.

What is less well known are the dynamics of the transmission of **organised perpetrator behaviour and cultures** between generations and within familial/domestic and institutional settings. It is this knowledge that is crucial to expanding effective responses to perpetrator culture through social policy, research, clinical approaches and the legal system.

The five presentations here provide new understandings of this area and point to gaps in the research as well as proposing new methods for investigation and exploration.

Dr Michael Salter (UNSW) will discuss the rise of the new QAnon ideology and its links to satanic ritual abuse, questioning the relationship between the two and whether QAnon represents a new form of survivor denial. **Dr Tamara Blakemore** (UON) will report on her innovative work with young offenders in the criminal justice systems and in particular the relationship between perpetration and intergenerational trauma. **Peter Gogarty** (UON) is a criminologist and a survivor of child sexual abuse in the Newcastle-Maitland diocese. His presentation examines the organised nature between perpetrators and those who conceal their crimes. **Dr Jodi Death** (QUT) will report on the new method of social network analysis as a tool for mapping perpetrator activity across Catholic institutions where widespread abuse was documented. Through mapping 'grey' and 'dark' networks of perpetrators, and those involved in institutional cover-ups, the organised aspect of CPCS networks is evidenced. Finally, **Dr Judy Courtin** will discuss challenges to the civil and criminal legal systems that deal with those who conceal the crimes of perpetrators and cite a number of case studies in Victoria, Australia.

The webinar is chaired by **Dr Kathleen McPhillips** from the University of Newcastle, a sociologist specialising in institutional child sexual abuse in religious organisations and leader of the Interdisciplinary Trauma Research Network. [Visit the website here.](#)

ABSTRACTS

After the panic: Taking ritual abuse seriously in the age of QAnon

Associate Professor Michael Salter, UNSW

Over the last five years, social media has promulgated an amorphous far-right political ideology known as QAnon, situating ritual abuse within a set of schizoid claims about a cabal of global elites. In their efforts to explain QAnon, journalists have drawn parallels to the so-called “satanic panic” of the 1980s and 1990s. However, an obvious difference is that QAnon remains only loosely connected to events outside the social media ecosystem, whereas the “panic” included extensive but contested victim accounts and forensic evidence. Indeed, children and adults have never ceased disclosing ritual abuse in the context of child sexual exploitation. This paper identifies the similarities and differences between the “Satanic panic” and QAnon and the implications for theory, policy and practice with survivors of child sexual exploitation.

Deep Listening to Unheard Stories: Intergenerational Narratives of Violence, Abuse & Trauma

Dr Tamara Blakemore, University of Newcastle

(replaced by Louise Rak on 7 December – bio below)

Practice with young women who use violence in their relationships with mothers and grandmothers, in a site of historic institutional child sexual abuse, has revealed important insights to the role of violence, abuse and trauma in intergenerational experience and outcome. As practitioners, in our cross-cultural work we have observed young women who use violence in their relationships with female kin, often carry with them the voices and weight of trauma experienced by female forebears. Yet, in doing so, they often display little insight into the experiences of these often-resented mothers and grandmothers, who themselves were and are also victims of violence abuse and trauma. Instead, or perhaps as consequences, young women we work with seek refuges and respite from the heavy cloak of trauma – often dismissing the experience of their own and others’ victimisation, seeking instead to reassert agency in ways they see as self-protective. This brief paper presents discussion of these practice-driven insights and their relevance to understandings of trauma and harm within organised systems of family and community.

Surviving Organised Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church

Peter Gogarty, University of Newcastle

Peter Gogarty is a criminologist working at the University of Newcastle and a survivor of child sexual abuse in the Newcastle-Maitland diocese. Peter teaches undergraduate students' humanities, social sciences, criminology and law and covers thematic related to institutional child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in particular. He will address the issue of how in his case the priest perpetrator James Fletcher was known to other clergy during the period of abuse of a number of boys in a Hunter Valley Parish, yet they did not report his criminal activity. Years later, Peter became very active in advocating for survivors and for legal change and appeared at the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry and the Royal Commission. The senior cleric who failed to report the criminal behaviour of Fletcher was then charged with fail to disclose under NSW Law. This presentation examines the organised nature between perpetrators and those who conceal their crimes.

Using Mapping to Illuminate Perpetrator Networks

Dr Jodi Death, QUT

Understanding of the conditions that allowed Clergy Perpetrated Child Sexual Abuse (CPCSA) in Roman Catholic Institutions has advanced significantly since early revelations occurred in the 1990s. Bolstered by the exposé of the Boston Globe in 2002, international concern rose concerning the extent of CPCSA and the apparent (mis)management of the crisis by Church leaders. Two decades of public inquiries in many countries, as well as civil and criminal litigation, have established that Church policy and institutional conditions directly enabled the repeated perpetration of abuse. What has not been fully explored is the characterisation of abuse occurring in organised networks of perpetrators. This paper explores the ways in which Social Network Analysis can be used to understand CPCSA in Roman Catholic Institutions. Through mapping 'grey' and 'dark' networks of perpetrators, and those involved in institutional cover-ups, the organised aspect of CPCSA networks is evidenced.

Legal Responses to Concealment of Child Sexual Abuse

Dr Judy Courtin, Legal Practitioner, Melbourne

The concealment of child sex crimes within institutions in Australia has been endemic, enduring and resolute. My doctoral research found, inter alia, that a critical element of justice for victims of such abuse, is the criminal and financial accountability of the offending institution, and/or its individual members, for their witting disregard for the safety of children. The protection and enablement of the sex offender and upholding the reputation of the institution itself, have been the only matters of import for many institutions. Apart from one overturned conviction for the crime of concealment of institutional child abuse in Australia, there is not one other conviction. The criminal laws in Victoria and NSW, and their recent history, tell a troubling story for the delivery of justice for victims. Concealment of child sex crimes within Australian institutions also presents significant barriers within the civil jurisdiction and the law of negligence, which is central to the requisite proof for institutional liability in civil claims in this area.

BIOS

Dr Michael Salter is the Scientia Associate Professor of Criminology at the School of Social Sciences at UNSW and an expert in child sexual exploitation and gendered violence. Michael applies critical and feminist theory to the study of complex trauma, with a focus on intersections with technology.

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Dr Tamara Blakemore is a social work practitioner, researcher and educator dedicated to trauma-informed and community-driven efforts to build connection. Tamara maintains strong connections to the Australian Centre for Child Protection (UNISA), with whom she has produced work for the Royal Commission into Institutional Abuse. She is a sought-after speaker, trainer, consultant and has provided expert evidence to Senate inquiries. She remains active in frontline practice bringing authenticity and legitimacy to the reputation and responsiveness of her research work. Tamara is chief-investigator of Name.Narrate.Navigate (NNN), funded by the Departments of Social Services and Education in excess of \$900,000. NNN brings trauma-informed and culturally-led responses to young people who perpetrate, or are at risk of perpetrating, interpersonal, domestic and family violence (DFV) and the sector who support them. The program has to date worked with over 100 young people and over 500 sector representatives across the Hunter Region.

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Peter Gogarty has post graduate qualifications in the social sciences, business, law, criminal justice and criminology. Peter is currently researching alleged corporate criminality within the Catholic Church. Peter has written hundreds of articles on the topic of child protection and has appeared in documentaries and on news services around the world - talking on the international scandal of childhood sexual abuse. He routinely speaks at public gatherings and conferences and has contributed to research on paedophilia in Australia. Peter has made enduring contributions to child protection reforms in NSW criminal law.

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Dr Jodi Death's primary research interest is in child sexual abuse in institutional care. This includes identifying and responding to the voices and needs of survivors and developing an understanding of historic paedophile networks. This work builds on Jodi's PhD, which examined the role of forgiveness in ways that churches are responding to child sexual abuse by church leaders. As part of an interdisciplinary team, Jodi has completed work for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, considering children's perspectives of safety in Out of Home Care. Jodi's more recent work considers the ways in which the Family Law Court of Australia manages and responds to allegations of child sexual abuse in custody disputes.

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Following 25 years as a health professional, **Dr Judy Courtin** returned to study and completed her law degree. Her honours thesis examined the appellate journey for child sexual assault convictions in Victoria. The resultant injustice of extremely low reporting and conviction rates combined with very high successful appeal rates, impelled Judy to inquire further into this area of the law. Judy's PhD in the Faculty of Law, Monash University, researched sexual assaults within the Catholic Church and whether victims were finding justice. This provided the perfect vehicle for addressing the justice needs of victims of institutional sexual and other abuse. Judy commenced legal practice in 2016 and initially worked at a plaintiff law firm focusing on civil claims in this area. She represented clients at the Royal Commission and made submissions. Judy commenced her own legal practice in 2017, working solely on civil claims for victims of institutional abuse.



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Louise Rak is a skilled practitioner and manager across the social services. She has worked in areas of youth homelessness, OOHC, mental health, disability services, youth justice and early intervention across the Hunter and Central Coast regions in NSW for over 15 years. Louise designed the award winning Live, Learn, Grow program for University of Newcastle, demonstrating leadership and innovation in praxis for better outcomes for young



people with a care experience. Louise is actively involved in volunteering and in improving the lives of women and children in the Hunter. She is the Board Chairperson for Nova for Women and Children, an organisation that supports women and children impacted by violence and homelessness. Louise is the project manager for the Name.Narrate.Navigate (NNN) program for young people who use violence in their interpersonal relationships and the workers that support them. Louise has Masters Degrees in Counselling and Business Administration, a Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology, Graduate Diplomas in Psychology and Counselling for Health and Social Care, a Graduate Certificate in Business and a Bachelor's Degree in Social Science. She is currently undertaking her PhD in Social Work exploring narratives of young women who use violence in their interpersonal relationships.

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Dr Kathleen McPhillips is a sociologist in the school of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle. Her main areas of research are gender, religion and trauma. Kathleen employs feminist, psychoanalytic and sociological frameworks to understand the institutional politics of religious institutions with regard to the clerical child sexual abuse crisis. Kathleen has published extensively in this field and held numerous research

grants. Kathleen leads the Interdisciplinary Trauma Research Network in the Centre for the Study of Violence at the University of Newcastle which hosts a number of projects including the Survivor Story Project - a podcast of survivors recounting their life stories. Her most recent publications are in *Child Abuse and Neglect*, *Feminist Theology*, *Journal of Australian Studies*, *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* and *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*. Kathleen is also a psychotherapist with training in early childhood trauma and runs a private clinic in Newcastle.

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