

## **Sexuality and Social Work Conference 2016**

### **The Sexual Abuse of Vulnerable People by Registered Social Workers in England – an Analysis of the Health and Care Professions Council Fitness to Practise cases**

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The sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults has recently been at the forefront of media attention in the UK with reports of incidents of historical sexual abuse committed by high profile celebrities such as the late Jimmy Savile. In that case a comprehensive inquiry into institutional locations of his multiple abuses was undertaken including at Broadmoor Special Hospital where he sexually abused women with mental health needs. That particular report concluded that it was unlikely that he, or others, would be able to perpetrate such abuses today. However, the contemporary sexual abuse of service users by professionals who work with them in the community remains an area of concern that has received limited attention. We know from data published in annual reports by the former regulator of social workers in England, the General Social Care Council, that between 2003 and 2008 40 % of their Fitness to Practise hearings were where a social worker had engaged in what was euphemistically called an 'inappropriate relationship'. This raises the question of whether there is something inherent in the social work task; the context of social work practise; the selection, education and training of social workers; or the particular access they have to particularly vulnerable people that leads to higher rates. The current regulator of social workers in England Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) does not publish such annual data but it is possible to review all cases from the public information about Fitness to Practise hearings. This paper presents an analysis of cases where a social worker has been struck off the HCPC register for the sexually abuse of a vulnerable person.