

Howard Temple's abuse and Gloriavale's petri dish of power, patriarchy & isolation - Paula Gosney



Paula Gosney's doctoral work examines grooming, female objectification and the power dynamics that enable sexual abuse.

As Gloriavale's former leader is sentenced, academic researcher Paula Gosney argues that New Zealand is failing the hundreds of children who live within the community.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) has declined since the 1990s in many Western countries, so why are we seeing yet another high-profile case at Gloriavale involving sexual crimes against girls and women? I argue it's because life inside the perimeter fences of this New Zealand religious commune is a world of patriarchal authority rarely seen in contemporary society.

CSA is ubiquitous and gendered, statistically tenacious across class demographics, ethnicity and religion, and, as evidenced by research from US sociologist David Finkelhor and corroborating studies, it is almost always committed by a male perpetrator. You may doubt the claim of declining rates - I certainly did. However, it's there in the research, and important we recognise what works and explore why some communities are resilient to this decline.

Researching grooming at Auckland University prompted me to look beyond our conditioned fear and interrogate the data rather than assume an ever-increasing pool of sexual predators preying on our children. I'll get to Gloriavale soon, but first, some good news. Following a post-WWII surge in CSA cases, driven by post-war trauma, family disruption and children in institutional care, growing awareness mobilised the women's movement, professionals and child protection organisations. This collective effort, combined with increased government resourcing and a fundamental cultural shift, led to a significant decline in abuse, beginning in the US in 1992. Finkelhor, founder of the Crimes Against Children Research Centre, reports a 62% drop since the early 1990s and is confident the decline is real, citing consistent reductions across all measures.

New Zealand's data is not as comprehensive as the United States, but the trend is consistent. Janet Fanslow from Auckland University found in her 2021 victimisation study that the most recent birth cohort reported the lowest instances of CSA. The New Zealand Justice Department statistics also reflect this trend. Interestingly, Fanslow's work showed that the decline in New Zealand started in the 80s, earlier than the US. She suggests that the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit in 1973 and establishing a nationwide network of Women's Refuges played an important role. This data, also seen in Australia, shows that coordinated, research-based interventions protect children.

However, the rise in online abuse and proliferation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is a significant concern, and despite the encouraging decline, far too many children are still victimised. In 2019, 2448 young people in New Zealand under the age of 18 reported a sexual assault. A third were younger than 12, and consistent with international figures, 80-90% of the perpetrators were known to the victims.

Decades of research mean the risk factors for CSA are clear. I will focus on the top four as we creep towards Gloriavale. The primary risk factor, aside from being female, is living with a male in a non-biological parental role - in many studies, it doubles the risk. A stepfather brings older step-siblings and male friends into the home, sometimes with alcohol and minimal supervision. While this doesn't apply to almost all loving stepfathers, we must discuss the statistical relevance and the mechanism. For a male parental figure to access sexual activity with a child, he must first sidestep or corrupt the mother's protective role. In a 2021 systematic review of incestuous families, Susan Pusch found that a lack of maternal care was a predictive factor for intrafamilial child sexual abuse. A female child who lived without her biological mother was three times more vulnerable to abuse than the average. This statistic also applies if the mother was sick or absent - not if she was working - as emotional absence is the risk factor, not physical absence. It is important to acknowledge the dysfunction rooted in structural inequality, such as limited education, financial vulnerability, and a disempowered mother living with a man who

demands authority, without sliding towards mother-blaming. Interestingly, and relevant to the environment at Gloriavale, a punitive mother also adds risk. Children that are punished for sexual curiosity can struggle to sense danger, and adolescents in prohibitive homes may seek out high-risk environments to satisfy their sexual curiosity.

In *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, And Other Sex Offenders*, Dr Anna Salter exposes the deceptive behaviour and psychological strategies of offenders through in-depth interviews. It's a chilling read, best avoided before bed, but few are cited more often on sexual offending than Salter. Time and again, she pulls us back to the predatory strategy of access and isolation. Child sex offenders gain access through their family relationships and professional choices, or are granted access because they are powerful, polished imposters. If the child is not already isolated through social anxiety, a limited friend group, disability, or a disruptive home, the offender patiently carves them from the pack. One community segment with a disproportionate number of child sex offenders is faith-based organisations. These organisations provide unique circumstances that allow predators to access children and avoid detection. Dr Susan Raine from MacEwan University highlights the reverence for church leaders, obedience, patriarchal authority and the use of scripture as factors that legitimise and conceal abuse. Which brings me to the petri dish.

Where in New Zealand do non-biological fathers live under the same roof (shared hostels) with complete authority over women and children and virtually no accountability?

Where do we see punitive, obedient mothers with no financial independence, who are dependent on men, living in an isolated community? In my view, it would be challenging to create a setting more conducive to abuse than Gloriavale. No carving from the pack is required. The young people of Gloriavale are already isolated - physically and intellectually - with no frame of reference for acceptable behaviour. Worse, they are raised on a doctrine demanding women obey and yield, or risk shame, physical punishment and ostracisation, while men have near-total impunity.

Gloriavale enforces communal dining and an archaic dress code for every meal. The Overseeing Shepherd controls books, music, sports, games, study, outside leave and holiday destinations. There is no freedom of creative expression or sexual identity, and social interaction is tightly regulated, using passive-aggressive bullying and shame to maintain submission. Why else would a 19-year-old woman submit to rape with a wooden device by Hopeful Christian in preparation for marriage? The same reason Lilia Tarawa, author of *Daughter of Gloriavale*, believed from age 16, women must marry, obey and yield to a man chosen for them by God.

"Here's a community of 600 people where the women are living in servitude. They haven't chosen it. They are born into it," the 2022 documentary *Gloriavale: New Zealand's Secret Cult* told its viewers.

Director Fergus Grady told ABC Australia, "I didn't fully comprehend how brainwashed and indoctrinated they were. If they were born in the community, they had no concept of what was happening outside the gates".

There have been numerous examples of abusers within Gloriavale's ranks being convicted and jailed for their crimes - well before Howard Temple's sentencing on Friday (the former community leader is appealing his 26-month jail term and has been released on bail).

Gloriavale may declare things have changed but for me this is a meaningless declaration in a segregated community with rules and values that do not align with the human rights our country says it upholds. That's the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, including the right to adopt and hold opinions without interference. The right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind in any form.

It is my view that fundamental human rights are systematically denied to every child born behind the Gloriavale perimeter fence. I believe that New Zealand is failing the approximately 400 children under 14 who live there, while we congratulate ourselves on being a progressive nation. If the Government is concerned about protecting religious freedom, it must also consider the lack of freedom afforded to those born within the community. I understand the concerns about reintegrating so many women and children into a society they've been taught is evil and dangerous. Perhaps the Government believes that addressing these issues can be done through oversight and legal sanctions without closing the community - a strategy only feasible if external educators have daily access to Gloriavale's youth to ensure they understand their rights and the opportunities afforded to all **Kiwi** children.

Chapter 6 of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care states that faith-based entities must act to prevent further abuse and neglect of children, young people and adults in their care. This cannot be achieved in an environment where women and children do not have enough information to understand their abuse and servitude.