

Courts get tough on women who have sex with boys  
From James Bone in New York

COURTS across America are cracking down on women, especially teachers, who have sex with under-age boys. In the past month at least seven women, four of them teachers, have been charged or sentenced.

The flurry of prosecutions follows the sex-abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church. Experts say that the trend reflects a growing recognition that sexual abuse of boys can be just as serious as that of girls.

However, the courts are reluctant to punish women as harshly as men convicted of similar crimes. Whereas male abusers of girls routinely receive sentences of 15 to 20 years, women often avoid jail.

“Many people in society feel boys should want sex and it’s not harmful, and girls should not want sex and it is harmful,” said Robert Shoop, a professor at Kansas State University and the author of *Sexual Exploitation in Schools: How to Spot It and Stop It*. “The reality is, in both cases it’s illegal, it’s harmful and it’s wrong.”

A US Department of Education study released in June last year found that 7 per cent of pupils were victims of physical or sexual abuse by teachers or other school employees. Of those, 22 per cent were victimised by a woman. “Whether a boy might enjoy the attention or not is actually irrelevant. Many of the girls who are sexually abused by males say that they are willing or are in love,” said Professor Charol Shakeshaft, of Hofstra University, the author of the report. The recent prosecutions of teachers follow the celebrated case of Mary Kay Letourneau, a primary school instructor whose affair with a boy she met when he was 12 produced two daughters. Letourneau, now 42, finally married the boy, who is now 21, after serving seven years in jail for child rape.

This month Debra Lafave, 25, a middle-school teacher in Florida, avoided jail by striking a deal that will put her under house arrest for three years for having sex repeatedly with a 14-year-old pupil. Sandra Geisel, 42, was sentenced to six months in jail for having sex with a 16-year-old pupil in upstate New York. Margaret De Barraicua, 31, will spend a year in prison after being found with a 16-year-old remedial student in her parked car behind their school in Sacramento, California. A fourth teacher, Kimberly Ann Cordrey-McKinney, 32, was charged with having sex with a 16-year-old pupil after authorities discovered incriminating text messages. Nicole Barnhart, 36, a teacher from Colorado, is facing sexual assault charges after being discovered with a 16-year-old pupil she said had “begged” her to have sex with him.

