

Clergy Sexual Abuse: Definition, Prevalence, Intervention

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Definition

- “minister, priests, rabbis, or other clergypersons or religious leaders who make sexual advances or propositions to persons in the congregations they serve who are not their spouses or significant others” (Baylor Clergy Sexual Misconduct Study, 2008).

Prevalence

Baylor Clergy Sexual Misconduct Study (Garland, 2008)

- Study/Survey characteristics
- More than 3% of women who had attended a congregation in the past month reported that they had been the object of CSM at some time in their adult lives
- 92% of these sexual advances had been made in secret (i.e., not in an open dating relationship)
- 67% of the offenders were married at the time of the advance
- Only 23% of survivors reported the abuse to religious authorities and only 11% to civil authorities. (Stacey, Darnell, & Shupe, 2000)
- 8% reporting having known about CSM in a congregation they attended.



Prevalence

Among Protestant Churches

- 10-14% of pastors have sexual contact with someone other than a spouse while in the ministry (Thoburn & Baker, 2011)
- In samples from other studies:
 - 19% of 374 ordained pastors reported an affair or inappropriate sexual contact (Goetz, 1992)
 - 12% of 300 ordained clergy reported having sexual intercourse with someone other than spouse (Muck, 1988)
- **An average number of seven women** involved in clergy sexual misconduct per affected congregation (the average size of most congregations is between 100-700). (Chaves & Garland, 2010)

Prevalence & Nature of Abuse

Among The Catholic Church

- Pope Francis reported that 2 percent of priests are pedophiles, called sexual abuse ‘A Leprosy’ (Pullela, 2014)
- Approximately 6% of Catholic priests have been sexually involved with minors with the vast majority (>80%) targeting post-pubescent adolescent boys rather than latency-aged children or young girls (Plante, 1999)
 - Though victims are often teenage boys, many offending clergy claim that they are heterosexual rather than homosexual in orientation (Bryant, 1999)

Prevalence

Among Other Religions

- Although reliable data are impossible to obtain at this time, sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy is found among other religious groups (e.g., Jewish, Muslim, etc...).
- “Our best estimates suggest that the 6% figure applied to Roman Catholic priests likely also applies to clergy members from other religious traditions.” (Plante, 1999, p. 172)

Prevalence

Compared to other helping professions

- Parallel studies indicate similar or lower prevalence rates among other professions (Thoburn & Baker, 2011; Flynn, 2003)
 - 7.1% of male psychiatrists
 - 5-7% of psychologists
 - 10% of physicians
 - > 1% of female psychologists and physicians
- Groups with roughly comparable prevalence rates
 - Boy Scout leaders, coaches, school bus drivers (Plante, 2003)

Characteristics of Clergy

Irons & Lasser (1994)

- All perpetrators met criteria for a DSM-IV diagnosis.
- 6 met the criteria for an Axis-II disorder (three were classified with narcissistic personality disorder); 15 met the criteria for Axis-II traits (narcissistic, dependent, obsessive-compulsive)
- 9 had problems with alcoholism/alcohol abuse.
- 15 were diagnosed as having a sexual disorder of some type (commonly compulsivity/addiction)

Irons & Lasser (1994): Findings/Conclusions

- None of the clergy members were diagnosed with sociopathic disorders and only 1 was diagnosed with antisocial traits.
- Likely that the most common perpetrator is going to be a person who doesn't present with extreme forms of mental problems.
 - Far more common to see perpetrators who are naïve, young, uneducated, or inexperienced in the mid-range of personality and emotional issues.
 - MMPI-2 results did not find a 4-9 spike in 24 of 25 participants in the study.
 - Significant differences in the 4 and 9 scales on the MMPI-2 was observed in Brodie's (2001) study

Characteristics of Clergy

Categories of perpetrators (Francis & Turner, 1995)

- Naïve and uninformed pastors who have failed to establish boundaries for themselves and others. Basically healthy.
 - Lack insight, see professional standards as too severe and restrictive, uncomfortable seeing themselves as distinct or separate from parishioners.
 - **Interventions:** education, supervision, short-term counseling
- Clergy with the intent of using others, see others has existing to meet their own needs. Personality Disorders.
 - Narcissistic personality, difficulty accepting evaluation or supervision, see no need for counseling or forced resignation/leave of absence, resent discipline after exhibiting apparent remorse (Steinke, 1989)

Characteristics of Clergy

Categories of perpetrators (Francis & Turner, 1995)

- Clergy who are addicted sexually (Muse, 1992)
 - Move from one parish/congregation and parishioner to another, fulfilling their needs for sexual and emotional gratification. Often a history of childhood sexual problems (compulsive masturbation, prostitution, a lack of impulse control).

Characteristics of Clergy

- Approximately 66% were sexually abused when they were minors (Bryant, 1999)
- Most experience other psychiatric or medical illnesses that contribute to problematic behavior.
 - Alcohol abuse, personality disorders, affective disorders, seizures (Bryant, 1999; Plante et al., 1996)
 - Damage in the frontal-temporal region of the brain (influencing impulse control and judgment/executive functioning; Lothstein, 1999)
- 56% of men rated their marriage as 'very happy' or 'happy' (Thoburn & Whitman, 2004); 41% reported marital dissatisfaction (Muck, 1988).

Prevention Strategies & Intervention

Prevention (Garland, 2008)

- Educate about CSM as ‘misconduct’ and an ‘abuse of power’
 - Illegal, not just immoral
- Provide religious education based on the Scriptures about the role of power, and its use and abuse
 - In the workplace, the community of faith, and the family

Intervention

- Relapse rate of a sample of 306 priests who were treated at the Saint Luke Institute in Maryland between 1985 and 2002 is reported to be 4.4% (Rossetti, 2002)

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How Clergy Sexual Misconduct Happens

- **Family members, friends, and victims ignored warning signs**
 - First indicators of CSM were ignored. Observers mistrusted their own judgment, considered themselves ‘hypersensitive’ because behavior was committed by a trusted leader.
- **Niceness culture**
 - Nice = non-confrontational, giving the other the ‘benefit of the doubt,’ overlooking social indiscretions in order to avoid embarrassment.
 - Even when people know about CSM, they often did not speak about their observations.

How Clergy Sexual Misconduct Happens

- **Ease of private communication**
- **No oversight**
 - Religious leaders often answer to no one about their daily activities
- **Multiple roles**
 - Religious leaders engage in multiple roles in addition to their role as leader, including counselor and personal friend. They obtain knowledge about congregant's personal lives and struggles and make the congregant vulnerable and dependent.
- **Trust in the sanctuary**
 - People tend to let their guard down, self-protection is not considered necessary

• (Garland, 2008) •