

TRAJECTORIES OF ABUSE AND DISCLOSURE

Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Priests

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The distribution of the incidents of sexual abuse by Catholic priests in the United States (*event structure*) and the reports of these abuse events (*reporting structure*) present two distinct trajectories, confounding existing individual-level research results. Data from an institutional census of records of abuse between 1950 and 2002 show a steady increase in cases through the late 1970s and early 1980s, followed by a surge in reporting in the mid-1990s and again in 2002. These patterns are stable throughout all regions of the Catholic Church in the United States. Rather than analyze the abuse or reporting from a conventionally individual, psychological framework, this research reframes the analyses for the event structure and the reporting of abuse by priests.

Keywords: sexual abuse; prevalence; incidence; priests

The problem of sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests in the United States between 1950 and 2002 presents two distinct trajectories: the occurrence, or *event structure*, of the acts of sexual abuse by priests, and the response of the church leaders and representatives to the reporting of those events. The nature of the response by church officials is necessarily conditional on their knowledge of the events—knowledge framed by the timing and flow of reports, or the *reporting structure*. Data collected for the Nature and Scope study (John Jay College, 2004, 2006) present two very different distributions for the event occurrence structure and the reporting structure. The aim of the Nature and Scope study was straightforward: a first-ever attempt to learn the extent of sexual abuse of children by adult professionals in a national institution—in this case, Catholic priests. This article reviews the resultant data and the implications of national patterns for all 14 regions of the Catholic Church in the United States.

INCIDENCE AND PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Statistics about prevalence of sexual abuse of children in the United States, as well as the patterns of disclosure of abuse, are most often estimated from victimization surveys. To study the prevalence of sexual abuse, researchers rely on surveying or interviewing selected

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groups of people, or study samples. If the selection of the individuals to be interviewed avoids bias and yields a representative group, the social scientists then project from the responses and histories of the people in the sample to estimate the proportion of the overall population (from which the sample was drawn) who have experienced sexual abuse. Surveys of individual experiences of victimization are completely voluntary and the percentage of subjects who respond therefore varies, and the difficulty of asking questions about sexual abuse is openly acknowledged. It is thus not surprising that the estimates of the prevalence of sexual abuse of children vary widely. David Finkelhor and colleagues reported that 27% of females and 16% of males from a national survey had experienced sexual abuse as children (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990). Smaller studies have found a lower prevalence of abuse, reporting 6% of boys and 15% of girls victimized (Moore, Nord, & Petersen, 1989). A 1998 meta-analysis supports the Finkelhor et al. (1990) estimates, concluding that the various studies converged at 13% of boys and 30% to 40% of girls (Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999).

State-level public safety and child welfare agencies have, in recent years, generated annual data on known incidents of the sexual abuse of children (John Jay College, 2004). This incidence data, based on reports of crimes against children and publicly recorded incidents of neglect, allow annual counts and, thus, comparisons of change over time. Sexual abuse statutes, however, are state specific; procedures for reporting abuse of children to state child welfare agencies are also locality specific. Although these data may permit reliable analysis for an individual state, aggregation to the national level is very problematic.

Following federal legislation in 1993—the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act—a voluntary database of child protection statistics, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), was created. NCANDS publishes an annual report, *Child Maltreatment*, cataloguing state-reported incidents and demographic data to produce estimates of the incidence of child sexual abuse, defined as maltreatment that involves a child in sexual activity to provide sexual pleasure or financial gain to an adult. By the mid-1980s, there was a growing appreciation of the very substantial harms of domestic violence and abuse of children. Estimates of the prevalence of the child abuse and sexual victimization of children drew increasing research attention, following Monahan's (1981) study of the prediction of violent behavior.

Despite the indications of the scope of the problem, social science scholars and lay people typically approach the problem of sexual abuse of children and the reporting of this abuse in similar ways, asking questions at an individual level. Research on both problems has sought to understand what individual characteristics can be associated with either the behavior of the sexual abuser or the victim's decision to disclose an event of abuse. The implicit assumption of much of this research is that the reasons why an individual has committed an act of sexual abuse of a child, or why a victim made a decision to make the abuse public, are to be understood in terms of the individual's history and psychology (Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999). If these questions are rephrased in terms of the factors that influence the likelihood of child abuse behavior or reporting of abuse in a specific population, and reframed by the patterns of incidence and prevalence for the event structure and the reporting of abuse by victims, a new array of explanations are suggested.

METHOD

Unlike all other studies of the sexual abuse of children, the Nature and Scope study (John Jay College, 2004, 2006) was a census of incidents of child abuse in all units of a national institution during half a century, and the results were made public. The Boy Scouts of America were reported to have made a similar effort in the early 1990s but did not make the data public. Individual school districts and state boards of education surely monitor the sexual abuse of children by teachers and other staff members, but these data are not publicly available. All Roman Catholic dioceses were required to report data on each priest who was accused and on each known victim. Catholic religious institutes of men agreed to do the same. The full methodology is discussed in Terry (2008 [this issue]), but in short, the John Jay College researchers created three surveys for the dioceses and religious institutes to complete: a diocesan survey, a cleric survey, and a victim survey. The diocesan, or institute-level, survey included the count of priests active in ministry in the unit between 1950 and 2002, thus providing the denominator for the prevalence statistics. The victim surveys reported the first date of the occurrence of the abuse incident, its last date, and the date of the report to Church or civil authorities. These data permitted the research team to derive an overall prevalence statistic for various units of the Catholic Church as well as incidence counts by year for events and the reporting of events. These incidence counts allow the study of change over time within the institution of the Catholic Church in the United States. The variation in prevalence and incidence for these distributions was further examined using analysis of variance (ANOVA) and covariance (ANCOVA).

RESULTS

PREVALENCE—REPORTED EVENTS OF ABUSE

A primary purpose of the Nature and Scope study was to determine as accurately as possible the total number of incidents of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests in the United States between 1950 and the date of the study, 2002, and the total number of priests involved in these acts. The total number of accused priests, 4,392, includes diocesan priests, men incardinated to one of the 195 dioceses of the Catholic Church, and religious priests, men who belong to one of the 140 religious institutes of men. With 97% of the dioceses responding, all but 6 reported incidents of sexual abuse of children by priests in ministry in their parishes. If the number of accused diocesan priests is expressed as a percentage of all diocesan priests in active ministry during the study period, and the 195 dioceses are grouped by their geographic region, the average percentage of accused priests in a region of the Catholic Church ranges from 3% to 6%, as is shown in Table 1.

This specific regularity—the prevalence of accusations of child sexual abuse against 3% to 6% of all priests in active ministry—is again seen when the 195 dioceses are grouped by the size of the diocesan population, shown in Table 2. The average number of accused priests (of all diocesan priests in service per diocese) in each population category is similar to the distribution by geographic region. A similar proportion of the priests in service are accused, regardless of the size of the diocese. Thus, the problem of sexual abuse of children by priests cannot be said to have been clustered in dioceses in large urban areas.

TABLE 1: Percentage and Number of Diocesan Priests Accused of Sexual Abuse Grouped by Region of the Catholic Church

<i>U.S. Dioceses by Catholic Region</i>	<i>Accused Diocesan Priests as a Percentage of Priests in Ministry</i>			<i>No. of Diocesan Priests Accused of Abuse</i>		
	<i>Average per Diocese</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>Average per Diocese</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
1	5%	0	10%	40	0	165
2	4%	1%	9%	38	4	73
3	5%	0	24%	26	0	69
4	5%	0	10%	17	0	46
5	5%	0	11%	8	0	30
6	3%	0	8%	18	0	93
7	4%	1%	7%	24	5	116
8	5%	2%	16%	13	3	26
9	3%	1%	5%	17	2	64
10	5%	0	19%	7	0	31
11	4%	1%	9%	15	1	71
12	4%	2%	9%	7	2	21
13	6%	0	11%	10	0	24
14	5%	1%	10%	8	2	12

TABLE 2: Percentage and Number of Diocesan Priests Accused of Sexual Abuse Grouped by Diocesan Catholic Population

<i>U.S. Dioceses by Catholic Population</i>	<i>Accused Diocesan Priests as a Percentage of Priests in Ministry</i>			<i>No. of Diocesan Priests Accused of Abuse</i>		
	<i>Average per Diocese</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>Average per Diocese</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Group 1 (5,000–45,000)	4%	0	9%	3	0	10
Group 2 (45,001–66,000)	4%	0	11%	5	4	12
Group 3 (66,001–88,500)	6%	0	19%	9	0	41
Group 4 (88,501–122,000)	3%	0	6%	8	0	23
Group 5 (122,001–170,000)	5%	0	10%	13	0	35
Group 6 (170,001–239,000)	4%	0	10%	16	0	34
Group 7 (239,001–350,700)	4%	1%	9%	21	3	52
Group 8 (350,701–475,000)	5%	2%	7%	18	1	39
Group 9 (475,001–778,700)	4%	0	24%	24	0	64
Group 10 (778,701–4,500,000)	4%	0	10%	45	0	165

We observe that there is no discernable spatial clustering at the regional level of the rate of accusations against priests, nor does density (John Jay College, 2004, p. 32) or size of the diocese affect the likelihood of prevalence of abuse accusations. Tests of the differences among regions or size categories using ANOVA returned no significant results. This procedure was repeated as an ANCOVA using first the number of dioceses in a region and then the number of parishes as covariates; again, the results were not significant. Within each spatial or demographic grouping, there is substantial variation in the percentage of priests accused in a diocese, but the range and average are consistent. The confidentiality provisions of the Nature and Scope study preclude any knowledge by any researcher of the specific location

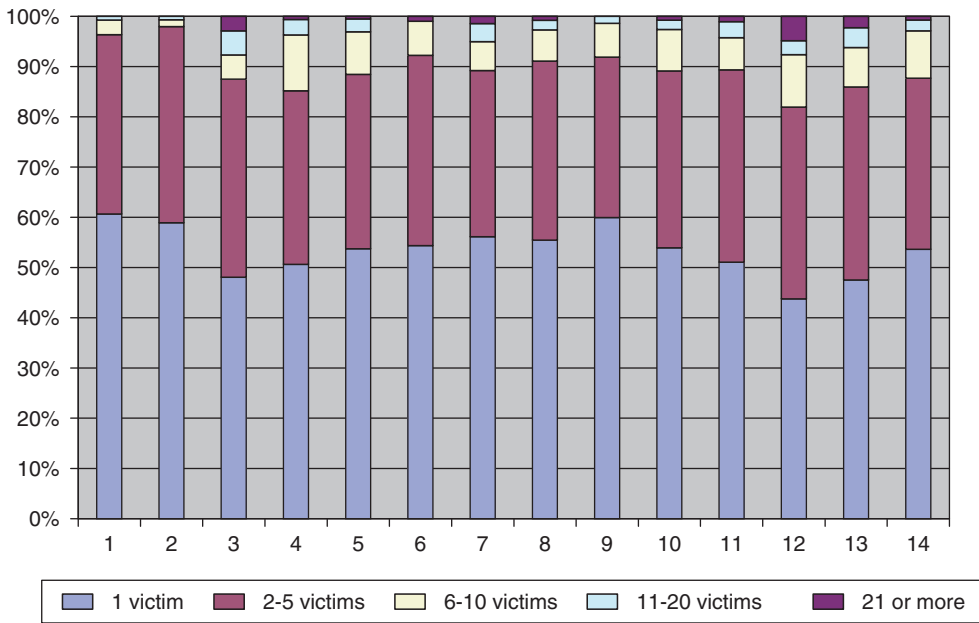


Figure 1: Distribution of Clerics by Reported Number of Victims and Region

of any diocese, so it is not possible to display a U.S. map of these data. Although the Nature and Scope study data does not allow investigation of the institutional differences between dioceses with 3% of priests accused and dioceses with 6% of priests accused, the ongoing Causes and Context study has this as a major research goal.

When the number of accusations against ordained members of religious institutes of men are expressed as a percentage of those in active ministry in each community and arrayed by the size of the religious community, a similar result is found (John Jay College, 2004, pp. 33-34). The prevalence of accusation for religious priests ranges from 1% to 3% of all religious priests in a community, and the average is 2.7% when all communities are considered. This statistic is based on data reported by 110 of the 140 religious institutes of men in the Catholic Church in the United States, or approximately four fifths of all religious communities of men.

Not only were priests in all regions of the Catholic Church involved in incidents of sexual abuse of children, but also the distribution of the priests by the number of their victims is also consistent. More than half of the accused priests were reported to have sexually abused only one minor child. Figure 1 shows the percentage of accused priests in each region grouped according to the number of their victims: those who had 1 victim, those with 2 to 5 victims, those with 6 to 10 victims, those with 11 to 20 victims, and those with more than 20 victims.

Another measure of the distribution of sexual abuse of children by priests is the persistence of the offending by individual men—the duration of the patterns of abuse of children. The average duration of a priest’s participation in abuse is fairly evenly distributed across dioceses. Although in most dioceses, priests involved in incidents of abuse developed “careers” that lasted between 1 and 8 years, there are a significant number of dioceses with

clerics with longer periods of “activity” (see Mercado et al., 2008[this issue]). If the average duration of abuse for accused priests in a diocese is plotted against the size of the diocese, there is a very weak but positive relationship between the two variables: in bigger dioceses the episodes of abuse tended to last longer. This weak but positive relationship is observed with different fitting algorithms (cubic, quadratic, etc.). The product–moment correlation measuring the strength of the relationship between the number of parishes and the mean duration of abuse is .08 (nonsignificant). If the comparison is repeated using the variable of Catholic population of the diocese, the result is even smaller ($r = .018$).

These prevalence statistics show that, with the exception of six dioceses that had no known incidents, the abuse of children by Catholic priests was an institution-wide phenomenon.

INCIDENCE—EVENTS AND REPORTING

If the total annual counts of abuse incidents are considered, the overall incidence of abuse events increases steadily from 1950 to 1981 and then declines steadily (see Terry, 2008, Figure 1). If the regions of the Catholic Church are compared, the number of cases has peaked everywhere and is declining by 1985, as is depicted in Figure 2.

In contrast to the shape of distribution shown in Figures 1 and 2, the number of abuse incidents reported to diocesan leaders was only a fraction of the cases now known. The torrent of abuse reports (of events spanning all 50 years) occurs in 2002. The timing of reporting of abuse cases is consistent for all regions of the Church, as is shown in Figure 3.

The patterns of the incidence of child sexual abuse and the patterns of the reporting of these abuse events are observed to be stable throughout all regions of the Catholic Church in the United States. The accusation rate, or number of priests accused of sexual abuse of children for each 1000 priests in service, is 1.3 in 1960, rises to 8.6 in 1980, and then falls rapidly to 2.2 in 1990. The variation in annual rates reflects the overall shape of the annual count of abuse events (John Jay College, 2006). Despite the very substantial numbers of priests who left the Catholic Church between 1970 and 1985, the total number of priests in active ministry did not change quickly. In 1950, there were 42,970 priests in service and 45,713 in 2002, leaving the denominator for the rate largely unchanged. Another way of describing the pattern of change in the incidence of events of abuse is one that shows a consistent drop from the peak, the year with the highest count of events, to the level shown for 1990, as shown in Table 3.

The data on incidence of sexual abuse of children by priests reviewed here demonstrate that the phenomenon was national in scope and widely distributed throughout the United States. Despite data that show the incidence of abuse to have risen steadily between 1950 and 1980 and to have fallen sharply by 1990, most of these events were unknown to civil authorities or church leaders before the year 2000. Between 1950 and 1985, the total number of incidents of sexual abuse of children that had been reported to Catholic dioceses in the United States was 810; the total now reported to have occurred in that period exceeds 9,000. The total number of reports of child sexual abuse by priests is shown in Table 4, the number of reports by the year the report was received, summed to the decade.

When the distribution of the dates of the occurrence of *events* of sexual abuse is compared to the distribution of the dates of the *reports* of sexual abuse, Figures 2 and 3 illustrate what the statistics show: 90% of the almost 3,000 incidents reported in 2002 occurred more than

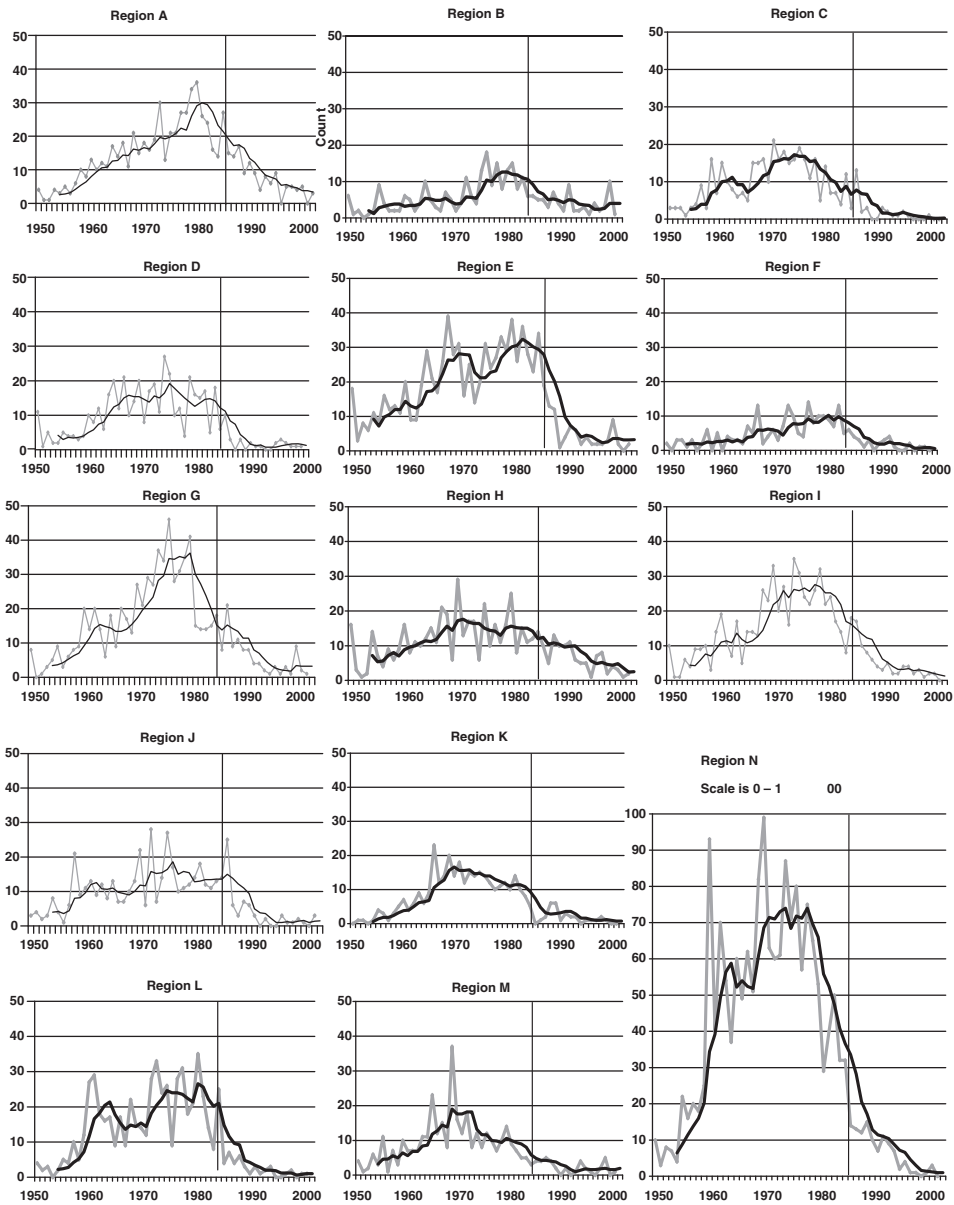


Figure 2: Regional Distribution of Reports of Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Priests by First Date of an Incident of Abuse

Note. The darker line is the 5% moving average; the horizontal line marks the year 1985. Region N shows a much greater number of incidents of abuse but within a very large base population.

20 years earlier. Table 5 is a display of the total reports of sexual abuse of children known to the Catholic Church by decade and shows the delay between the year the incident began and the year of the report. The total number of reports is shown in the final right-hand column and expressed as a percentage of all victims. The four preceding columns show the number

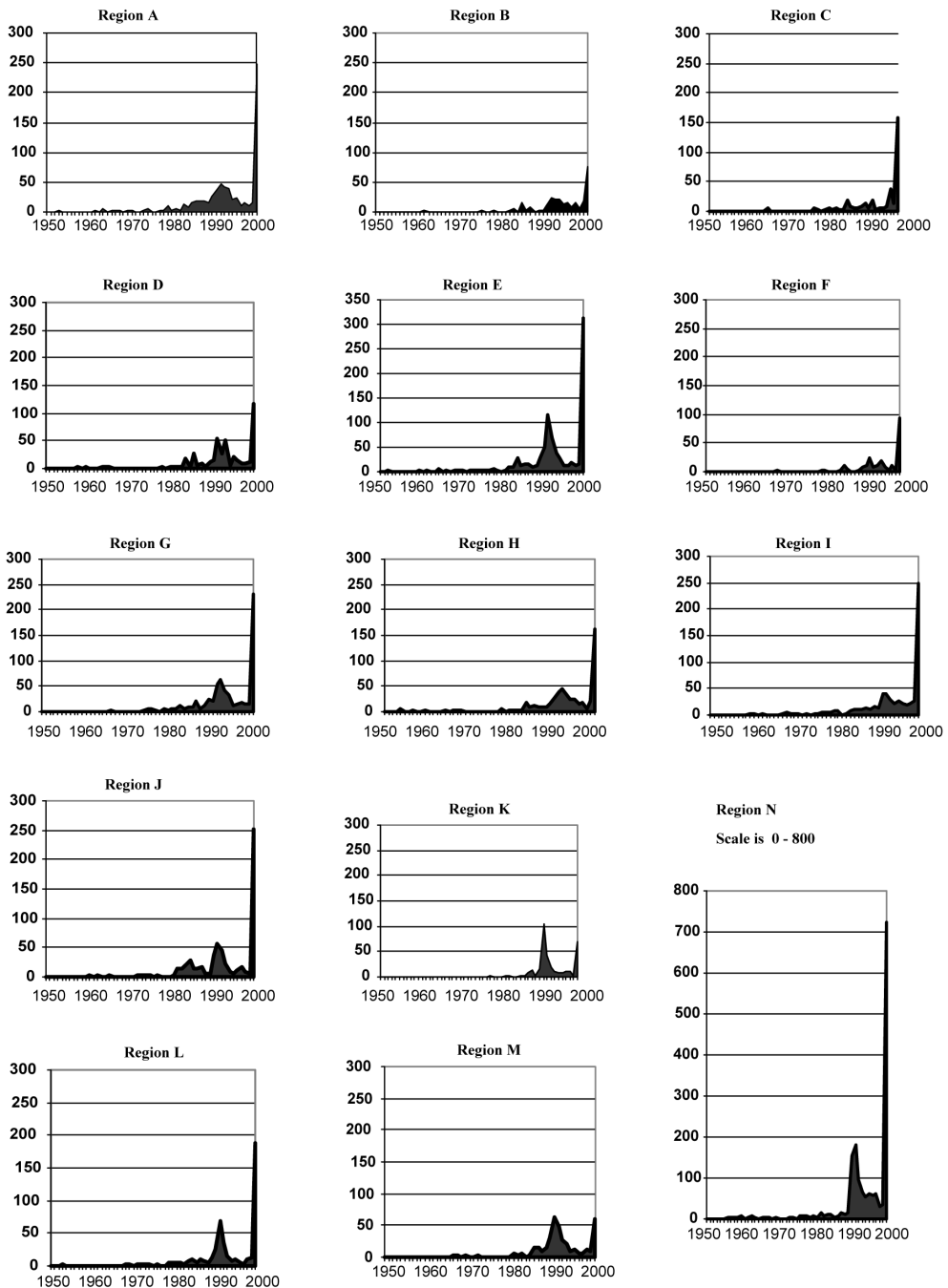


Figure 3: Regional Distribution of Reports of Child Sexual Abuse by Priests by Date of Report

reported within 1 year of the incident, within 5 years of the incident, and so forth. The counts in these columns are cumulative. Thus, in 1950, there were 53 reports of abuse, 68% made within 1 year, and all made within 5 years. In the 1990s through 2002, there were 8,547

TABLE 3: Change in Incidence of Child Sexual Abuse by Region

<i>Region</i>	<i>Peak Year</i>	<i>No. of Incidents in Peak Year</i>	<i>No. of Incidents in 1985</i>	<i>No. of Incidents in 1990</i>	<i>% Reduction, Peak to 1990</i>
A	1980	36	27	12	66.67
B	1977	18	6	7	61.11
C	1975	19	3	1	94.74
D	1980	27	18	3	88.89
E	1980	38	34	4	89.47
F	1978	14	5	3	78.57
G	1976	46	18	8	82.61
H	1970	29	14	10	65.52
I	1979	32	18	4	87.50
J	1975	29	14	6	79.31
K	1970	19	5	6	68.42
L	1981	35	25	3	91.43
M	1969	37	3	2	94.59
N	1970	99	32	10	89.90

TABLE 4: Reports of Incidents of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests, by Decade

<i>Decade</i>	<i>No. of Incidents Reported</i>	<i>% of Total Incidents</i>
1950–1959	53	0.5%
1960–1969	192	1.9%
1970–1979	268	2.6%
1980–1989	1,148	11.3%
1990–1999	4,022	39.4%
2000–2002	4,525	44.3%
<i>N</i>	10,208	100.0%

reports of abuse, 4.3% made within 1 year of the incident and only 11% within 10 years. By 30 years after the incident, 65% had been reported, and the remaining reports were made more than 30 years after they occurred.

The objective of this research was to understand the factors that are associated with an initial disclosure by a victim of an incident of sexual abuse as well as the delay in reporting of the event. Approximately 10% of incidents were reported to the Church within 1 year of the occurrence of the incidents, and these reports were most frequently made by parents or guardians.

Researchers who study the patterns of disclosure of child sexual abuse have investigated individual-level factors in two categories—victim characteristics and abuser characteristics—as well as situational factors. Studies have found that a number of factors can affect reporting, including age and gender (Paine & Hansen, 2002), relationship between the victim and abuser (Paine & Hansen, 2002; Smith et al., 2000), and the intrusiveness of the sexually abusive act (Arata, 1998; Bradley & Wood, 1996; DiPietro, Runyan, & Fredrickson, 1997; Sauzier, 1989). These studies are not consistent in their findings, however. For instance, Arata (1998) found that intrusive acts are likely to lead to disclosure delays, whereas Bradley and Wood (1996), DiPietro et al. (1997), and Sauzier (1989) have noted that intrusive acts spur reporting.

TABLE 5: Abuse Reports Made in Each Decade, Cumulative by Delay Category

	<i>No. Delayed by 1 Year</i>	<i>Within 5 Years</i>	<i>Within 10 Years</i>	<i>Within 30 Years</i>	<i>Total Reports (% of All Victims)</i>
1950s	36 (67.9%)	53 (100.0%)	NA	NA	53 (0.5%)
1960s	143 (74.5%)	179 (93.2%)	185 (96.4%)	187 (97.4%)	192 (1.9%)
1970s	190 (70.9%)	237 (88.4%)	253 (94.4%)	262 (97.8%)	268 (2.6%)
1980s	438 (38.2%)	680 (59.2%)	842 (73.3%)	1,086 (94.6%)	1,148 (11.2%)
1990s/2000s	368 (4.3%)	593 (6.9%)	908 (10.6%)	5,197 (60.8%)	8,547 (73.4%)
All victims with report delay data	1,175 (11.5%)	1,742 (17.1%)	2,188 (21.4%)	6,732 (65.9%)	10,208 (95.7%)

Note. NA = not applicable.

Eighty-one percent of the clergy abuse victims were boys, and based on the literature in this area, it would be expected that male victims would have a more significant delay in reporting than female sexual abuse victims. However, gender did not appear to have an effect on reporting. Both male and female victims of all ages are equally well represented in the pattern of delayed reporting.

It was the experience of many victims that the priest responsible for the sexual abuse was well acquainted with the immediate family. Again, in contrast to previous research, this relationship did not significantly affect reporting delays. Intrusiveness and force of sexual acts also did not have an effect on reporting. A substantial percentage of the acts reported in these data were explicit sexual acts, yet the severity of these acts do not predict the pattern of disclosure. The very limited research into same-sex sexual abuse does not help us understand what prompted such a large number of men in their 40s and 50s to come forward to describe the abuse that they experienced as adolescents at the hands of Catholic priests. In general, the prior research on disclosure does not illuminate the patterns of data displayed in Figures 3 and 4 and in Tables 4 and 5.

DISCUSSION: PATTERNS AND EXPLANATIONS

The National Review Board, a group of leading Catholics appointed to help resolve the crisis of child sexual abuse by priests, carried out a qualitative study in 2003. This group's first fundamental question was: Why did individuals with a disposition to prey sexually upon minors gain admission to the priesthood? (National Review Board, 2004, p. 2). The response to this question was poor screening of candidates for the seminary and poor formation while seminarians. If the question is examined, it is found to have two assumptions: first, that priests who would come to be accused of the sexual abuse of children had a predisposition to do so, and, second, that this inclination could be discerned at the point they entered the seminary or while they were seminarians. By its implication, this question considers the sexual abuse of a child to be a result of individual pathology or predisposition, a disordered psychological state. The data reviewed in this article would suggest that if these assessments were accurate (the presumption of poor screening and inadequate training), most Catholic institutions in the country were performing remarkably, and consistently, poorly.

The Nature and Scope data revealed that the first reported incident of abuse for the majority of priests occurred many years into ministry, an average of 11 years postordination

(John Jay College, 2006). If it is accurate to describe these men as having a disposition to abuse children, most did not act on that disposition for many years or, alternatively, their early incidents of abuse remain unreported. If the latter is the case, it is uniformly so. Furthermore, much of the substantial research into the development of sexual offending has found that evidence of early onset—that is, evidence of the behaviors associated with pedophilia or sexual abuse—is present during adolescence or early adulthood (Hunter, Figueredo, Malamuth, & Becker, 2003).

The John Jay College research team worked hard to be able to discern the evidence of pathology or predisposition from the data reported by the dioceses. The Nature and Scope data do not support the findings that most of these acts of child sexual abuse were predicated by paraphilic behavior (see Tallon & Terry, 2008[this issue]). There were a small number of priests who initiated sexual abuse of children very soon after ordination and continued to be active abusers. These 152 men might indeed have been identified in advance of ordination, but they represent only 3.5% of those with abuse allegations.

Another individual-level question has been asked again and again: Is this problem of the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests not a result of the ordination of homosexuals? This question has been approached by a number of psychologists and scholars who argue for the recognition of ephebophilia as a psychological disorder (Cimboic, Wise, Rossetti, & Safer, 1999). Ephebophilia is defined as an exclusive and compulsive sexual interest in postpubescent boys. Because more than three quarters of the victims of sexual abuse by priests were boys, it was expected that the Nature and Scope data would sustain this hypothesis about the sexual interest in young men. On close examination, however, just more than 10% of priests accused of sexual abuse fit the proposed category of ephebophilia (based on the acts committed). Also, only 2% fit the classic model of pedophilia (based on multiple abusive sexual acts against prepubescent children; see Tallon & Terry, 2008).

It is not clear that sexual identity and sexually abusive behaviors have the same source. Moreover, it is not clear how many cases of sexually abusive behavior can be associated with paraphilias. Most incidents of incest are committed by men, as is most reported sexual abuse—but these presumably heterosexual fathers abuse a significant number of their sons. Psychologists who treat child sex offenders report that most of them self-identify as heterosexual, irrespective of the gender of the children they have abused (Frawley-O’Dea, 2007). If the reports of FBI agents and offenders alike are to be believed, Internet access to pornography—and specifically, to child pornography—has widely introduced new forms of sexual arousal. The human capacity for sexual response is more dynamic, and inconsistent, than sexual identity.

Along with prevalence surveys that reveal that a quarter to one third of girls, and a somewhat smaller fraction of boys, are sexually abused before reaching adulthood, data from NCANDS demonstrate the national scope of this problem. When NCANDS data are used to study the change in the level of victimization of children over time, the national-level results show the same pattern as the incidence of abuse events observed in the current study (Jones & Finkelhor, 2004).

The extent of the media coverage of the “crisis” of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church led to a sustained and prominent public dialogue about the sexual victimization of children in 2002. The almost-daily news reports, responses from Church officials, and commentary created a unique opportunity for individual victims to reflect on the incidents from their childhood. Unlike most adult victims of childhood sexual abuse, who may be confused

about personal complicity and experience guilt, the priests were explicitly held responsible for the acts of abuse, and the narratives of victimization generated strong support. This circumstance, we theorize, is unique: Had Catholic Church officials responded to victims coming forward in the early 1990s in a way that could remediate harms and seek reconciliation, the *Boston Globe* may never have had a story and the torrent of cases reported in 2002 may never have occurred.

Given the uniformity of the patterns of reported sexual abuse of children in dioceses across the United States, what circumstances in the selection, training, and daily lives of priests changed in the 50-year period to bring about change in the likelihood of engaging in sexual abuse behavior? The incidence of child sexual abuse by priests is a temporal phenomenon—covarying between 1960 and 1990 with overall patterns of abuse of children and other crimes, births to single mothers and attitudes toward sexual behavior, and with drug use and other risk-taking social behaviors. Rather than an exclusive focus on the individual pathology of priest-candidates and those who are ordained, it is also a question of how, and in what manner, the cultural and social changes occurring between 1960 and 1990 are related to the likelihood of sexual abuse by priests. If the perspective is shifted to one of studying change, what environmental and social factors between 1960 and 1990 can be understood as having increased the vulnerabilities in some priests and/or decreased the means to control behavior?

As indicated, researchers estimate that 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 4 or 5 boys experience sexual abuse before the age of majority. But almost everything we know about child sexual abuse comes from the study of those who have had contact with the criminal justice system—or those who sought help from treatment professionals. It can thus be said that our knowledge is based on a very limited and biased sample of those who sexually abuse children. We consider that the data collected in the Nature and Scope study is a unique resource for the study of sexual victimization of children—the only study to have data about acts and abusers from all units of a national institution but also to have that data during a 50-year period. The understanding of child sexual abuse behavior precedes its detection and prevention.

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