Blessed be the Children: A Case–Control Study of Sexual Abusers in the Catholic Church

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Individuals working in churches and other youth-serving institutions have a unique level of access to children, yet the problem of sexual abuse in institutional settings has received scant research attention. To address this gap, we analyzed data from a large sample of clergy ($N = 1,121$) and applied a social–ecological model of offending to identify risk factors for sexual abuse perpetration. Using a case–control study design that compared clergy sexual abusers with three control groups of clergy, this study focuses specifically on *individual*-, *relationship*-, and *community*-level factors associated with a higher risk of abuse in professional populations. Findings revealed that clergy sexual abusers tended to have more truncated pre-seminary dating histories, and that their dating and sexual partners were more likely to have been male than female. Self-reported sexual abuse history was associated with a greater likelihood of sexual abuse perpetration among clergy. Clergy abusers tended to be more involved with youth and adolescents in their ministries; however, they were observed to relate *less* well to youth and adolescents than their clergy counterparts. Given widespread changes in our cultural understanding of abuse as well as more specific changes in the organizational approach to seminary education, these differences underscore the role that youth-serving institutions and society can have in the primary prevention of child sexual abuse. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

A major barrier to child sexual abuse prevention efforts has been the lack of information about risk factors for abuse perpetration, specifically the interplay among individual, relationship, community, and societal-level factors that increase risk for the perpetration of sexual violence. The problem of abuse by professional perpetrators, or those who commit offenses in institutional settings through the nature of their position, has received insufficient research attention. Schools, churches, scouting organizations, and other youth-serving institutions are particularly vulnerable to the perpetration of sexual abuse because they offer situational contexts that may be favorable to opportunistic

offenders, and because so many children come into contact with nurturing adults in positions of trust within these institutions.

The most highly publicized of these cases of institutional child sexual abuse involves priests within the Catholic Church. Data from a survey of all dioceses and religious institutes in the United States revealed that approximately four percent of priests active between 1950 and 2002 had allegations of sexual abuse made against them (John Jay College, 2004), a rate significantly higher than expected in the general population (approximately 2.5%; Hidalgo, 2007). Despite the wealth of publicity surrounding sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, it is not, however, a problem unique to this institution. Children may be at risk in religious institutions of other denominations, as well as in schools, scouting organizations, athletic clubs, and other youth-serving organizations (see Bottoms et al., this issue). Although precise prevalence data are not available for institutions aside from the Catholic Church, it is thought that sexual abuse rates within these other institutions are also high (Terry & Tallon, 2004). In the last several years, cases of sexual abuse of children have been reported in universities (Penn State, Syracuse), schools (including, but not limited to, the prestigious Horace Mann and Poly Prep), and sporting organizations (such as USA Swimming, gymnastics, hockey, and weightlifting). Even though prevalence estimates suggest heightened rates of abuse within institutional settings (John Jay College, 2004; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010; Wurtele, 2012), the field lacks knowledge about risk markers for abuse in these settings. As little is currently known about the patterns and characteristics of abuse in other institutional settings, this paper will focus on identifying individual, relational, and community-level factors in the Catholic Church that may have relevance to other institutional settings.

Etiological Risk Factors for Sexual Abuse Perpetration

The World Health Organization (WHO) (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002) has identified multiple factors that may increase the risk for perpetration of sexual violence. The WHO social–ecological model of violence partitions risk into *individual-*, *relationship-*, *community-*, and *societal-level factors*. Within this model, *individual-level* risk factors are attributes and characteristics of an individual that increase their risk for engaging in sexual violence, such as substance abuse or belief in rape myths. *Relationship-level* risk factors are those that include the influence of relationships with others, or lack thereof, as catalysts for risk. *Community-level* risk factors are factors related to the environment that can increase risk and include weak community sanctions against perpetrators, poverty, male identity patterns, lack of police and judicial institutional support, and a pervasive tolerance of sexual assault within the community (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). Finally, *societal-level* risk factors may include social policies or other macro-level factors that encourage sexual violence.

Sexual violence is not caused by a single isolated risk factor, and, as such, theWHO socio-ecological model includes overlapping and interactive spheres of risk. Teten Tharp et al. (2012), who acknowledge the necessary convergence of multiple risk factors, found empirical support for 35 unique relationship and individual-level factors, including child sexual abuse victimization, exposure to family violence/conflict, parent–child relationship quality, and exposure to sexually explicit media. As well, Teten Tharp and colleagues (2012) found mixed evidence for psychological problems and interpersonal and social skills deficits. Sexual orientation/identity was observed to

be a significant risk factor but only in an adolescent sample (Teten Tharp et al., 2012). Religious affiliation was not a significant risk factor for sexual violence in their review.

Etiological Risk Factors for Sex Abuse Perpetration Among Clergy

Despite increased knowledge about the nature and scope of clergy abuse, much remains to be known about the causal factors or correlates of offending within this population, and how risk of perpetration differs for cleric and non-cleric offender populations (including other institutional offenders as well as general offenders). Although widespread speculation has focused on issues such as homosexuality (Boston Globe, 2002; Plante, 2007) and the vow of celibacy (Boston Globe, 2002; Doyle, 2007), J. Loftus (2004) cautions that with regard to the sexual misconduct of priests "we have plenty of theories, lots of anecdotal therapeutic explanations, but very little fact" (p. 89). Indeed, there has been relatively little empirical effort aimed at enhancing knowledge of factors linked to perpetration of sexual violence among clergy offenders.

A review of the literature found only several small-scale studies that have examined factors that may be etiologically related to clergy offending (e.g., D'Alton, Guilfoyle, & Randall, 2013; Haywood, Kravitz, Wasyliw, Goldberg, & Cavanaugh, 1996; Falkenhain, Duckro, Hughes, Rossetti, & Gfeller, 1999; Langevin, Curnoe, & Bain, 2000; Plante & Aldridge, 2005; Ukeritis, 2005). For example, Haywood and colleagues (1996) found that the odds of a sexually abused cleric offending (as an adult) against children were 6.05 times higher than the odds of a non-abused cleric becoming a child molester. Whereas some studies have found that, aside from some basic demographic characteristics (education and IQ), clergy offenders tend to be similar to community sex offenders (Langevin et al., 2000; Ukeritis, 2005), other researchers have noted differences in pathways to offense, victim and offense characteristics, and even demographic and psychological characteristics (e.g., Hanson, Pfäfflin, & Lütz, 2004; Lee, 2007). This apparent contradiction underscores our limited understanding of cleric sexual abusers and the extent to which risk factors of sexual abusers as a whole may, or may not, apply to clergy offenders and other types of institutional sex offenders. Thus it is critical to our understanding of abuse in youth-serving organizations to address the extent to which current literature is applicable to offenses occurring within these settings, and this research can begin by developing an etiological model developed through an examination of the individual, relationship, and community-level risk factors in one institutional setting (i.e., the Catholic Church).

The Present Study

Although some researchers have compared clergy sex offenders with community sex offenders in an effort to ascertain differential etiological pathways to offending, no study has yet to compare characteristics of sexually abusive clergy with other groups of clergy. By examining risk factors between clergy sexual offenders and clergy non-sexual offenders, we hope to highlight factors that are distinct to clergy abusers and not merely distinct to all clergy (as compared with the general population). Thus this study aims to identify risk and protective factors for abuse corresponding to the first three (individual, relationship, and community) levels of a social–ecological model of violence among four groups of clergy:(1) a sample of clergy who received mental health treatment for sexual abuse of a minor; (2) a sample of clergy who received mental health treatment

for some form of non-criminal sexual misconduct *with adults*; (3) a sample of clergy who received mental health treatment for something other than sexual abuse or misconduct; and (4) a non-clinical sample who were not treated. Individual variables examined in this study include those related to the cleric's pre-seminary sexual history, sexual habits, and family history. Relationship variables examined include quality of cleric relationship to youth, adolescents, peers, and community. Community-level variables examined characteristics of the clergy work setting, such as living arrangements and access to youth. The data did not permit analysis of variables at the societal level. It was expected that clergy sexual abusers would show patterns that distinguish them from other clergy in individual, relationship, and community level domains.

METHOD

Sample Description

The data for this study were obtained from a publicly available database collected as part of the John Jay College (2011) *Causes and Context* study. The data from that study were collected by trained coders at two treatment facilities that provide residential treatment and evaluation services for members of the Catholic priesthood. The total sample included 1,121 North American clergy from the two facilities, with 720 files from Facility 1 (64%) and 401 files from Facility 2 (36%). The sample was composed of four groups with group membership determined by referral issue: (1) clergy referred to treatment for child sexual abuse (*Child Sexual Abusers*, $n = 215$); (2) clergy referred to treatment for inappropriate but non-criminal sexual behavior with adults (*Sexual Misconduct*, $n = 315$); (3) clergy referred to treatment for general clinical problems of a non-sexual nature, such as clinical depression or substance abuse (*Clinical*, $n = 494$); and (4) clergy undergoing routine employment evaluations having no previously identified clinical or sexual issues (*Control*, $n = 95$).

Measured Variables

Individual-level factors included (a) variables related to clergy upbringing, such as quality of relationship with parents, family breakup, family stress, or clergy report of sexual abuse during childhood, and (b) clergy dating and sexual history prior to seminary, including presence of romantic of sexual dating partners, gender of dating partners, and masturbation and pornography habits. *Relationship-level* factors routinely available in the clergy files included an examination of quality of clergy interaction with youth, adolescents, peers, and adult community members. *Community-level* markers focus on trends relevant to the work setting, areas of importance within the work environment, and factors integrating a social component. Factors examined included living arrangement (e.g., living alone or with others), role characteristics (e.g., access to youth and adolescents), as well as whether the cleric sought opportunities to work with youth.

A coding tool was developed for the John Jay College (2011) study to extract data routinely available in the treatment center files. Coding rules were established and data were transcribed onto a data collection tool developed for this study. All measured variables had between two (e.g., "record of childhood sexual abuse" was coded yes/no) and five levels (e.g., "how involved was cleric in working with youth" was coded not

at all, involved a little, somewhat involved, involved, or very involved). Coders were blind to the specific nature of this study's hypotheses.

Analytic Strategy

Descriptive statistics (%, *n*) were computed for individual-, relationship-, and community-level factors for each clergy group, and the distributions of these variables were compared across clergy groups using chi-square tests. Binary logistic regression analyses were then used to compare the Child Sexual Abuser group with each of the other comparison clergy groups, with the outcome being clergy group membership. Predictor variables were tested in a univariate fashion and consisted of variables in the individual, relationship, and community domains listed above. As the data were retrospective, results were interpreted and described in terms of risk or protective factors in the form of odds ratios (OR), along with their confidence limits. Analyses were conducted with SAS 9.2.

RESULTS

Following the social-ecology model, results of analyses are organized into *individual-*, *relationship-*, and *community-level* domains for both the clergy group comparisons and logistic regression analyses.

Clergy Group Comparison Analyses

Individual-Level Factors

With regard to family history, the clergy in our sample experienced a relatively stable upbringing (Table 1). Most clergy described their relationships with their parents positively (range across groups = 62.0–67.3%), whereas approximately one third of the

Table 1. Individual-level family history: descriptive statistics and clergy group comparisons

Variable	Level	Clergy group				*p*
		Child Sexual Abuser *n* = 215	Sexual Misconduct *n* = 315	Clinical *n* = 494	Control *n* = 95	
Family breakup	Death or divorce	73 (49.0%)	76 (37.6%)	146 (40.7%)	22 (73.3%)	<0.001
	No family breakup	76 (51.0%)	126 (62.4%)	213 (59.3%)	8 (26.7%)	
Perception of caregiver relationships	Conflicted	32 (20.5%)	55 (21.3%)	86 (21.5%)	15 (22.4%)	0.823
	Negative	19 (12.2%)	43 (16.7%)	55 (13.8%)	7 (10.4%)	
	Positive	105 (67.3%)	160 (62.0%)	259 (64.8%)	45 (67.2%)	
Family stress	Yes	101 (52.3%)	162 (55.7%)	255 (54.7%)	32 (38.1%)	0.031
Clergy report of childhood sexual abuse	Yes	52 (31.7%)	55 (24.6%)	84 (23.9%)	5 (5.6%)	<0.001

sample described a negative or more conflicted upbringing (range = 32.7–38.0%), with no significant differences across groups. A slight majority of clergy (53.2%) reported experiencing significant family stress (such as coping with the substance abuse or mental illness of a family member) at some point during childhood. There were statistically significant differences of reported family stress across groups, with the Child Sexual Abuser, Sexual Misconduct, and Clinical groups all reporting higher rates of family stress than the Control group. The Control group of clergy had significantly lower rates of reported childhood sexual abuse (i.e., their own victimization history) ($p < 0.001$) than each of the other three groups, though the three clinical and sexual groups were not significantly different from one another. Of interest, the Control group reported the highest rate of family breakup by death or divorce, a rate significantly higher than that of the Child Sexual Abuser, Sexual Misconduct, and Clinical groups ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2 presents descriptive and clergy group comparisons for pre-seminary sexual history and habits. Most clergy reported having at least one dating partner prior to seminary, though clergy in the Control group were significantly less likely to have had no romantic dating partners prior to seminary (11.5%) than those in the Child Sexual Abuser (32.3%), Sexual Misconduct (24.7%), or Clinical (25.6%) groups. Of those clergy who did date, almost all reported dating only females. Despite a dating history, fewer than half of clergy reported having any sexual partners prior to seminary (48.6%). More clergy from the Control group reported having sexual partners than those from other groups. The Sexual Abuser group reported a higher rate of male sexual partners (25.5%), while the Control group reported the lowest rate of male sexual partners (8.5%; $p = 0.001$). Only 15.7% of clergy denied masturbating prior to seminary, whereas 44.7% had reported masturbating "regularly" prior to seminary. Reported masturbatory practices were relatively consistent across groups. In contrast, use of

Table 2. Individual-level pre-seminary sexual history and habits: descriptive statistics and clergy group comparisons

		Clergy group				
Variable	Level	Child Sexual Abuser $n = 215$	Sexual Misconduct $n = 315$	Clinical $n = 494$	Control $n = 95$	p
Romantic dating partners—none	None	64 (32.3%)	74 (24.7%)	111 (25.6%)	10 (11.5%)	0.003
Gender of dating partners	Female only	120 (91.6%)	199 (91.3%)	299 (93.4%)	69 (94.5%)	0.692
	Male, or both male and female	11 (8.4%)	19 (8.7%)	21 (6.6%)	4 (5.5%)	.
Gender of sexual partners	Female only	47 (25.5%)	90 (31.6%)	119 (28.4%)	39 (47.6%)	0.001
	Male, or both male and female	47 (25.5%)	51 (17.9%)	71 (16.9%)	7 (8.5%)	.
Masturbation	Never	15 (16.1%)	20 (14.8%)	22 (13.9%)	13 (21.3%)	0.693
	Occasionally	27 (29.0%)	44 (32.6%)	47 (29.7%)	22 (36.1%)	.
	Regularly	40 (43.0%)	62 (45.9%)	77 (48.7%)	21 (34.4%)	.
	Seldom	11 (11.8%)	9 (6.7%)	12 (7.6%)	5 (8.2%)	.
Use of pornography	Yes	18 (25.7%)	34 (33.0%)	32 (18.8%)	31 (48.4%)	<0.001

pornography prior to seminary was reported less often by the Sexual and Clinical groups (range = 18.8–33.0%) than the Control group (48.4%; $p < 0.001$).

Relationship-Level Factors

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics and results of comparisons among clergy groups on relationship-level factors. Child Sexual Abusers did not relate as well to youth or adolescents as did their peers. Indeed, only 35.3% of Clergy Sexual Abusers were viewed as relating well to youth below the age of 13, whereas the Sexual Misconduct (73.3%), Clinical (85.3%), and Control (100%) groups were all significantly more likely to be viewed as relating well to youth below the age of 13. Likewise, Child Sexual Abusers were least likely to relate well to adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 (43.5%) as compared with their clergy peers (range = 70.8–75.6%), and this difference was again significant. Child Sexual Abusers also did not relate as well to community members as did their peers, with Clergy Sexual Abusers having the lowest rates of positive relationship (43.4%) and the Control group having the highest rates of positive relationship (76.5%). A different pattern emerged for clergy relationship to other clergy, with the Control group having significantly lower rates of positive relationship (24.2%), than the other three groups.

Community-Level Factors

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics and results of comparisons among clergy groups on community-level factors. Despite not relating well to youth, Child Sexual Abusers

Table 3. Relationship-level factors: descriptive statistics and clergy group comparisons

	Clergy group				
Variable	Child Sexual Abuser $n = 215$	Sexual Misconduct $n = 315$	Clinical $n = 494$	Control $n = 95$	p
Clergy relates well to peers	46 (43.0%)	91 (49.5%)	117 (41.9%)	8 (24.2%)	0.048
Clergy relates well to community members	23 (43.4%)	52 (59.1%)	62 (47.0%)	13 (76.5%)	0.033
Clergy relates well to adolescents	10 (43.5%)	17 (70.8%)	34 (75.6%)	6 (75.0%)	0.054
Clergy relates well to youth	6 (35.3%)	11 (73.3%)	29 (85.3%)	5 (100.0%)	0.001

Table 4. Community-level factors: descriptive statistics and clergy group comparisons

	Clergy group				
Variable	Child Sexual Abuser $n = 215$	Sexual Misconduct $n = 315$	Clinical $n = 494$	Control $n = 95$	p
Sought opportunities to work with youth	61 (67.0%)	38 (35.2%)	51 (29.0%)	0 (0.0%)	<0.001
Counseling adult parishioners	64 (85.3%)	129 (83.2%)	150 (82.0%)	7 (87.5%)	0.909
Counseling adolescents (13–18)	77 (86.5%)	53 (59.6%)	72 (57.6%)	1 (33.3%)	<0.001
Counseling youth (under 13)	54 (79.4%)	44 (56.4%)	71 (59.7%)	1 (33.3%)	0.011
Regular interaction with families	64 (90.1%)	68 (71.6%)	106 (76.3%)	4 (80.0%)	0.034
Clergy living in a religious institute	82 (62.1%)	85 (49.7%)	159 (52.5%)	1 (12.5%)	0.015

were significantly more likely (67%) to seek out opportunities to work with youth than were those in the Sexual Misconduct (35.2%), Clinical (29%), or Control (0%) groups ($p < 0.001$). Though groups were similar in the rate at which they were involved in the counseling of adult parishioners, Child Sexual Abusers were significantly more likely than members of other groups to be involved in the counseling of adolescents (86.5%) or counseling of youth under the age of 13 (79.4%). Child Sexual Abusers were also significantly more likely to have regular interaction with families (90.1%) than other clergy groups.

Logistic Regression Analyses

Individual-Level Factors

Results from logistic regression models predicting belonging to the Child Sexual Abuser clergy group as compared with other clergy groups as a function of familial background and sexual history variables are presented in Tables 5 and 6. Clergy who experienced parental or sibling death as a child were more likely to belong to the Child Sexual Abuser group, but only when compared with either the Sexual Misconduct (OR = 1.74, 95% CI = 1.11–2.75) or Clinical group (OR = 1.55, 95% CI = 1.03–2.32); this trend did not remain significant when comparing the Child Sexual Abuser group with the Control group (OR = 0.95, 95% CI = 0.32–2.84). Additionally, compared with the Control group, Child Sexual Abusers were over seven times more likely to have reported having been sexually abused (OR = 7.80, 95% CI = 3.26–23.15).

Compared with the Sexual Misconduct group, Child Sexual Abusers were significantly more likely to have not had multiple female dating partners (OR = 1.62, 95% CI = 1.05–2.50), and to have had at least one male sexual partner prior to seminary (OR = 1.80, 95% CI = 1.06–3.07). Additionally, compared with the Control group, Child Sexual Abusers were over three times more likely to have had no dating partners

Table 5. Individual-level family history factors: results of logistic regression analyses comparing Child Sexual Abuser clergy group with Sexual Misconduct, Clinical, and Control clergy groups

		Child Sexual Abuser versus:								
		Sexual Misconduct			Clinical			Control		
Variable	Level	OR	95% CI	N	OR	95% CI	N	OR	95% CI	N
Family breakup	Yes (death of parent or sibling)	**1.74**	**1.11–2.75**	351	**1.55**	**1.03–2.32**	508	0.95	0.32–2.84	179
	Yes (divorce/ separation)	1.04	0.43–2.37	351	0.88	0.39–1.81	508	**0.07**	**0.02–0.20**	179
Negative perception of caregiver relationships[a]		0.79	0.52–1.20	414	0.89	0.60–1.32	556	0.99	0.54–1.85	223
Family stress	None	1.14	0.79–1.65	484	1.10	0.79–1.54	659	**0.56**	**0.33–0.94**	277
Clergy report of childhood sexual abuse	Yes	1.43	0.91–2.23	388	1.48	0.98–2.23	516	**7.80**	**3.26–23.15**	253

Note: OR, odds ratio; CI, confidence interval. Bold indicates $p < 0.05$.
[a]Reference group = positive perception of caregiver relationships.

Table 6. Individual-level dating and sexual history pre-seminary factors: results of logistic regression analyses comparing Child Sexual Abuser clergy group with Sexual Misconduct, Clinical, and Control clergy groups

| | | Child Sexual Abuser versus: | | | | | | | | |
| | | Sexual Misconduct | | | Clinical | | | Control | | |
Variable	Level	OR	95% CI	N	OR	95% CI	N	OR	95% CI	N
Romantic dating partners	No	1.46	0.98–2.17	498	1.39	0.96–2.00	632	**3.68**	**1.86–7.99**	285
Gender of dating partners	Male, or both male and female	0.96	0.43–2.06	349	1.31	0.59–2.74	451	1.58	0.52–5.88	204
Multiple female dating partners	No: none	**1.62**	**1.05–2.5**	402	1.48	0.99–2.22	513	**4.56**	**2.24–10.13**	238
	No: only 1	1.67	0.80–3.45	402	1.14	0.59–2.15	513	1.04	0.45–2.45	238
Any sexual partners	Yes: male, or both male and female	**1.80**	**1.06–3.07**	236	**1.74**	**1.06–2.87**	287	**5.69**	**2.43–15.04**	141
	Yes: female only	0.84	0.54–1.29	469	1.00	0.66–1.52	603	**0.48**	**0.27–0.85**	266
Masturbation	Yes: regularly	0.86	0.40–1.89	228	0.76	0.36–1.65	251	1.65	0.66–4.13	154
Use of pornography	Yes	0.70	0.35–1.37	173	1.49	0.76–2.87	240	**0.37**	**0.18–0.75**	134

Note: OR, odds ratio; CI, confidence interval. Bold indicates $p < 0.05$.

(OR = 3.68, 95% CI = 1.86–7.99) and over five times more likely to have had at least one male sexual partner (OR = 5.69, 95% CI = 2.43–15.04), and significantly less likely to have reported use of pornography prior to seminary (OR = 0.37, 95% CI = 0.18–0.75).

Relationship-Level Factors

Table 7 presents results of logistic regression analyses comparing Child Sexual Abuser clergy with other clergy groups on relationship factors. Clergy in the Child Sexual Abuser group were less likely to relate well to community members as compared with the Control group (OR = 0.24, 95% CI = 0.06–0.77). As compared with the Clinical group, the Child Sexual Abusers were also less likely to relate well to adolescents (OR = 0.25, 95% CI = 0.08–0.71) and youth (OR = 0.09, 95% CI = 0.01–0.35).

Table 7. Relationship-level factors: results of logistic regression analyses comparing Child Sexual Abuser clergy group with Sexual Misconduct, Clinical, and Control clergy groups

| | Child Sexual Abuser versus: | | | | | | | | |
| | Sexual Misconduct | | | Clinical | | | Control | | |
Variable	OR	95% CI	N	OR	95% CI	N	OR	95% CI	N
Clergy relates well to peers	0.77	0.48–1.24	291	1.04	0.66–1.64	386	2.36	1.01–6.02	140
Clergy relates well to community members	0.53	0.26–1.05	141	0.87	0.45–1.64	185	**0.24**	**0.06–0.77**	70
Clergy relates well to adolescents	0.32	0.09–1.03	47	**0.25**	**0.08–0.71**	68	0.26	0.03–1.39	31
Clergy relates well to youth	**0.20**	**0.04–0.85**	32	**0.09**	**0.02–0.35**	51	.	.	22

Note: OR, odds ratio; CI, confidence interval. Bold indicates $p < 0.05$. Omitted results reflect non-convergence of statistical models due to sparse or no data.

The Child Sexual Abusers were also significantly less likely to relate well to youth than clergy in the Sexual Misconduct group (OR = 0.20, 95% CI = 0.04–0.85).

Community-Level Factors

Table 8 presents results of logistic regression analyses comparing Child Sexual Abuser clergy with other clergy groups on community factors, including post-ordination roles and relationships. Child Sexual Abusers were more likely than Control clergy to have worked in a counseling role with adolescents (OR = 12.83, 95% CI = 1.15–289.12) and lived in a religious institute (OR = 11.48, 95% CI = 1.96–217.90); however, these results should be interpreted cautiously given the wide magnitude of the confidence intervals. The Child Sexual Abuser group was also significantly more likely than both the Sexual Misconduct and the Clinical clergy groups to have worked with youth, counseled both youth and adolescents, and had regular interaction with families. Although those who lived in a religious institute were over-represented in the Child Sexual Abuser sample, this is likely to have been an artifact of increased rates of detection and reporting in religious communities.

DISCUSSION

Using a social–ecological model of violence, this study examined individual-, relationship-, and community-level risk factors that heighten—or lessen—risk for sexual abuse among a sample of clergy. By comparing abusive clergy with comparison groups of non-abusive clergy, several factors that relate to likelihood of engaging in sexual abuse perpetration were identified.

With regard to individual level risk factors, a history of sexual abuse emerged as the most important risk factor. Clergy accused of sexual abuse were seven times more likely

Table 8. Community-level factors: results of logistic regression analyses comparing Child Sexual Abuser clergy group with Sexual Misconduct, Clinical, and Control clergy groups

| | | Child Sexual Abuser versus: | | | | | | | | |
| | | Sexual Misconduct | | | Clinical | | | Control | | |
Variable	Level	OR	95% CI	N	OR	95% CI	N	OR	95% CI	N
Sought opportunities to work with youth	Yes	**3.75**	**2.10–6.82**	199	**4.98**	**2.91–8.69**	267	.		93
Counseling adult parishioners	Yes	1.17	0.56–2.61	230	1.28	0.63–2.80	258	0.83	0.04–5.36	83
Counseling adolescents (13–18)	Yes	**4.36**	**2.13–9.46**	178	**4.72**	**2.40–9.92**	214	**12.83**	**1.15–289.12**	92
Counseling youth (under 13)	Yes	**2.98**	**1.45–6.39**	146	**2.61**	**1.33–5.36**	187	7.71	0.69–173.23	71
Regular interaction with families	Yes	**3.63**	**1.55–9.58**	166	**2.85**	**1.25–7.35**	210	2.29	0.11–18.45	76
Clergy living in a religious institute	Yes	**1.66**	**1.05–2.64**	303	1.49	0.98–2.26	435	**11.48**	**1.96–217.90**	140

Note: OR, odds ratio; CI, confidence interval. Bold indicates $p < 0.05$. Omitted results reflect non-convergence of statistical models due to sparse or no data.

to have reported a history of sexual abuse than clergy in the Control group. This is consistent with the findings of Haywood et al. (1996), who observed that the odds of a sexually abused cleric offending against children in adulthood were six times higher than that of the odds of a non-abused cleric offending in adulthood. While the review by Teten Tharp et al. (2012) found evidence for childhood sexual abuse as a risk factor in 20 out of 34 studies examining this factor, longitudinal research fails to show a causal relation between child sexual abuse victimization and sexual abuse perpetration (Widom, 1996; Widom & Massey, 2015). Although Child Sexual Abusers reported the highest rates of abuse, they were not significantly different from clergy in the Sexual Misconduct or Clinical groups. Thus, it may be the case that childhood sexual abuse increases the risk for psychopathology and/or risky sexual behavior generally but is not specific to sexual abuse (see, e.g., Fergusson, McLeod, & Horwood, 2013).

When examining sexual history and dating habits, differences between Child Sexual Abusers and other clergy emerged. Specifically, sexually abusive clergy had fewer female dating and sexual experiences prior to seminary and reported less use of pornography, suggesting that pre-seminary dating or sexual experiences might be considered a protective factor for abuse perpetration. Lack of intimate relationships with adults has been noted to be an important risk factor for sexual recidivism (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004). Whether this is suggestive of intimacy deficits or atypical sexual interest is unclear, although the desire and ability to form intimate relationships with adults appears to be etiologically relevant to clergy and non-clergy offending.

Notably, sexually abusive clergy were more likely to have dating and sexual experiences with a male than were other clergy members. Even though this is consistent with the stereotype that homosexuals are a threat to children, there is no empirical evidence to support this notion (see Freund, Watson, & Rienzo, 1989; Jenny, Roesler, & Poyer, 1994). This stereotype led the Boy Scouts of America to ban gay scout leaders and for the Catholic Church to ban ordination of gay priests. As Keenan (2012, p. 13), however, notes, "…to conclude that men who sexually abuse boys do so because of their homosexual orientation is to obscure the facts, in the same way that it is meaningless to suggest that heterosexual men abuse girls because they are heterosexual in orientation." Moreover, Holt and Massey (2012) provide evidence showing that male victims were not targeted more than female victims in the Catholic Church; although the majority of clergy victims have been boys, this can be shown to be related to the opportunity structure and victim availability in the Catholic Church (i.e., females were not allowed to be altar servers until the mid-1980s to early 1990s).

With regard to relationship-level risk factors, clergy abusers were judged by clinical staff as relating more poorly to children—both youth below age 13 and adolescents—as compared with control groups of clergy not referred for sexual abuse. Additionally clergy abusers were viewed as not relating as well to parishioners (i.e., community members). There has been some suggestion in the literature that sex offenders, and child molesters in particular, have social skills deficits and problems with intimacy, which could lead to seeking out inappropriate sexual partners to fill these needs (Marshall, 1989; Segal & Marshall, 1985). However these deficits were more specific to intimate relationships, and it is not clear whether these observations among sexually abusive clergy are a reflection of this theory of sexual offending or rather a more general asocial demeanor that could be a manifestation of more severe psychopathology.

In terms of community-level risk factors, clergy abusers both sought out opportunities to work with youth and were involved with youth in their ministries. They were more likely to have had counseling experiences with both youth and adolescents and were more likely to have had regular interaction with families. Given that the Child Sexual Abusers in this sample were also found to relate more poorly to youth and parishioners, it is plausible that this increased contact with children and their families could be seen as predatory grooming behavior. Grooming is the term applied to the preparatory stages of abuse, where the offender gains the trust of the victim and their guardians in order to engage in the abuse while avoiding detection. This behavior among abusive clergy would be seen as "institutional grooming", where those in positions of trust, such as priests, commit the abuse (McAlinden, 2006).

Although those who lived in a religious institute were over-represented in the Child Sexual Abuser sample, this is likely to have been an artifact of increased rates of detection and reporting in religious communities. Prior findings (John Jay College, 2004) show that there are fewer allegations of abuse for priests living in religious institutes than among diocesan priests. Because diocesan priests tend to be more isolated from peers than their religious institute counterparts, it is likely that living in a religious community increases rates of detection and reporting.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Using the social–ecological model of violence risk as a framework, the findings of this study of clergy abusers suggest several levels of potential intervention for youth-serving organizations, particularly at a community level. An institutional culture that recognizes the seriousness of abuse and the contextual conditions in which it most often occurs can help increase levels of reporting and reduce opportunities for sexual abuse to take place. Indeed, there is growing evidence that institutional and societal conditions—including lack of proper seminary training (which includes sexual education and awareness), secrecy, and the power structure of the church—played a significant roles in spawning the crisis in the Catholic Church (John Jay College, 2011; Keenan, 2012)

In this study we found that abusive clergy sought out opportunities to work with youth, and, given their respected status within the community, it was likely that the children were unsupervised. Thus supervisors may want to limit unsupervised one-on-one time between adult caretakers and children, requiring at least two adults to be present during interactions. Because employers cannot monitor all situations and some high-risk situations may be inevitable (e.g., one-on-one time in a car), organizations can help to ensure safe environments by providing channels for employees or others to disclose inappropriate or questionable behavior. Programs have also been geared toward teaching children and adolescents how to identify and report abuse and thus youth-serving organizations may want to educate youth about sexual abuse, allowing them to identify inappropriate situations or behavior. Empowered youth can serve as the best allies in sexual abuse prevention, as discovery of questionable or inappropriate activities can lead to early intervention and monitoring.

Large-scale organizational education campaigns may gradually lead to changes in knowledge. The U.S. Conference on Catholic Bishops has mandated Safe Environment training, which includes child abuse prevention educational programming for all clergy, church employees, volunteers, and children. Providing factual information about abuse and providing avenues for suspected disclosure can help organizations

toward the primary prevention of abuse. Future research directed at the effectiveness of these organizational interventions could help other youth-serving institutions design and/or refine existing prevention measures.

Limitations

This study is not without limitation. First, the study relied upon data collected from archival treatment and evaluation records. Because these data were not collected systematically for research purposes, there was variation in the type and amount of data available in the archival files. Missing data is a problem typical of archival research, and this is especially common for human subject research using clinical populations. Furthermore, though coders were trained on use of the coding tool, we did not collect data on the inter-rater reliability. Next, some of the data relied upon for this study were based upon self-report and thus are subject to recall bias and validity of the reports of childhood abuse, and pre-seminary behavior could not be independently verified. Finally, the research was cross-sectional in nature and the assignment to groups was not randomized. Thus these findings do not allow for cause-and-effect-based conclusions.

Directions for Future Research

Although the sex abuse scandal within the Catholic Church rocked community faith in religious organizations, by opening itself up to investigation the Church provided the opportunity to better understand the risk factors for abuse within these youth-serving institutions. Future research that examines perpetrators of abuse in other institutional settings would help establish the generalizability of these findings. Whereas some individual, relational, and community risk factors for abuse present in the Catholic Church are likely to be similar to those in other faith-based or youth-serving organizations, further empirical work would allow us to examine how similar clergy offenders are to other types of professional perpetrator, and whether the risk markers that clergy exhibit are similar to those of professionals in other institutional settings. This sort of research would help advance the design of effective sexual abuse prevention policies. Further, although this study suggests the importance of situational factors in the commission of sexual abuse, more research is needed in this area. Even though considerable empirical work has underscored the importance of situational factors in general crime prevention, remarkably little research has been directed toward the study of community- and societal-level factors in sexual crime.

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