



CAUSES & CONTEXT STUDY

Questions and Answers

What is the Causes & Context study?

The U.S. Bishops in 2002 called for two studies on the issue of clergy sexual abuse in the United States. The John Jay College of Criminal Justice conducted both studies. The first, *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002* was completed in 2004. The second, *The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002* was released May 18, 2011.

What did the second study find?

The *Causes & Context* study found that there is no single “cause” of sexual abuse by priests. Most cases of abuse occurred in the period of 1965-1985, and most current reports are of abuse that took place more than 25 years ago. The study finds that the best way to protect children from abuse is to create safe environments where appropriate boundaries between adults and children are maintained. It also notes that sexual abuse of minors is a human problem that all society must always guard against.

Did the study note any trends?

The chief trend that emerged was the rise of sexual abuse incidents in the 1960s and 1970s and sharp decline in the mid-1980s. Even most reports that were filed after 2002 referenced abuse that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. The study also noted that the rise in sexual abuse incidents in American society occurred at a time also characterized by a societal disregard for other restrictive norms, such as that against drug use. Finally, seminary education in human formation coincided with the decline in sexual abuse in clergy.

When did most abuse occur?

The study states that “Data from multiple sources show that incidence of abuse behavior was highest between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. Sexual abuse continues to occur, but 94 percent of abuse incidents reported to the Catholic Church from 1950 through 2009 took place before 1990.”

What caused the sexual abuse crisis?

There was no single factor that led to an increase in the number of priests who abused minors from the 1960s through the mid-1980s. The study notes, “The rise in abuse cases in the 1960s and 1970s was influenced by social factors in American society generally. The increase in abusive behavior is consistent with the rise in other types of ‘deviant’ behavior, such as drug use and crime, as well as changes in social behavior, such as an increase in pre-marital sexual behavior and divorce.” The report adds that “most incidents of sexual abuse occurred decades ago, at a time when the impact of victimization was not fully understood and research on sexual offenders was in early stages of development.”

Was clerical celibacy a factor?

The study states that “celibacy has been constant in the Catholic Church since the 11th century and could not account for the rise and subsequent decline in abuse cases from the 1960s through the 1980s.” The fact that the commitment to celibacy was constant before, during and after the crisis period suggests that celibacy was not a cause of abusive behavior. Additionally, most sex offenders in society are not celibate clergy. In fact, most are married or in a relationship with an adult.

Is this a homosexuality issue?

The study reports that “the clinical data do not support the hypothesis that priests with a homosexual identity... are significantly more likely to sexually abuse children than those with a heterosexual orientation or behavior.” No evidence exists to suggest that sexual orientation, by itself, contributes to sex crimes against children. The American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics all concluded that homosexuality is not a risk factor for sex crimes against children.

Is the sexual abuse crisis still occurring?

More than 90 percent of the known cases of sexual abuse of minors occurred before 1990. Even though victims are still coming forward to report allegations of

abuse, most of these reports are based on abuse that occurred many years ago. Nonetheless, the Church must remain vigilant about the issue. Sadly, sexual abuse of minors is not likely to be completely eradicated in any institution, organization or other group where adults and minors interact. Education and vigilance are essential.

How does the rate of sexual abuse in the Church compare to the rate of sexual abuse of youth in the U.S. overall?

Because no other institution has allowed itself to be studied as thoroughly as the Catholic Church on the question of sexual abuse, an equal comparison is not possible. Based on the more limited data available for other institutions, however, the report concluded that “the incidence of child sexual abuse has declined in both the Catholic Church and in society generally, though the rate of decline is greater in the Catholic Church in the same time period.”

How did bishops respond when first faced with this problem?

The study found that “the challenge faced by the bishops who received a report of sexual abuse of a minor by a priest of the diocese was how to respond to the victim and family and how to make choices about a course of action for the priest involved. The responses to reports of sexual abuse of minors made before 1985 differed greatly from reports brought to dioceses in 1985 or in 2002. More than 80 percent of pre-1985 reports of sexual abuse were made to the diocese within a year of the incident, and three quarters of the reports were made by the victim or a family member. The most common request was that help be provided for the priest-offender. Often, the families did not want public attention nor did they wish to confront the priest; in other cases, families were pressured by Church leaders to keep the incident confidential.

Why were clergy put back in ministry?

Often up to and into the 1990s, clergy abusers were treated and returned to ministry, but only after they were determined to have been sufficiently “rehabilitated” based on the professional treatment standards of that time. The report notes that “like the general public, the leaders in the Church did not recognize the extent or harm of victimization. The

focus of the bishops until such time was on the priest-abuser.”

Is the Catholic Church safe for children?

Since 2002, the Catholic Church in the United States has maintained a zero-tolerance policy such that cases of child abuse are reported to civil authorities pursuant to local law, are internally investigated, and presented to a local review board of mostly laypersons. Additionally, those clergy who have admitted to acts of abuse or who have been found guilty of them are permanently removed from ministry and, among other consequences, can never present themselves to the public as a priest.

What policies are in place in the Archdiocese of Baltimore to protect children, assist victims, and remove abusers?

All allegations of child sexual abuse are immediately reported to civil authorities. Once the Archdiocese receives permission to approach the accused and victim, it does so immediately. In meetings with victims, the Archdiocese apologizes, offers immediate assistance and pays for counseling and therapy for victims and their families. The Archdiocese does this for as long as it is helpful, regardless of the age of the incident. Church employees or volunteers credibly accused of abuse, including priests, are permanently barred from ministry. All dioceses are audited each year by an independent and secular auditing firm to assure compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children & Young People*. Archdiocesan employees and volunteers who work with children undergo mandatory fingerprinting and criminal background checks, and they also receive training in how to create a safe environment and recognize abuse. Children – including those in Catholic schools and religious education programs – are taught to recognize abuse and protect themselves. The Archdiocese has done this for years not because a law required it, but because it is the right thing to do. The Church provides this support regardless of lawsuits and statutes of limitations, and has paid \$2.3 million in victim counseling, and \$6 million in direct payments to victims/survivors, including from insurance companies. The Archdiocese continues to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to protect children.

Victim's Assistance Hotline 866-417-7469

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