

Running head: CLERICS WHO COMMIT SEXUAL OFFENCES

Clerics Who Commit Sexual Offences: Offender, Offence and Victim Characteristics

Philip Firestone, Heather M. Moulden
and Audrey F. Wexler,
School of Psychology, University of Ottawa,
Ottawa, Ontario Canada

Please address correspondence to Dr. Philip Firestone, School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, 120 University Private, Rm. 509, Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1N 6N5. Telephone: (613) 562-5800 ext. 4444. Facsimile: (613) 562-5253. Internet address: fireston@uottawa.ca

Reprint requests should be addressed to Dr. Philip Firestone, School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, 120 University Private, Rm. 603, Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1N 6N5.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank Superintendent Glenn Woods, Officer in Charge of Behavioural Sciences Branch of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Dena Robinson of the Behavioural Sciences Branch of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for their invaluable assistance with this project.

Keywords: Cleric sexual misconduct, child sexual abuse

Abstract

The aim of this investigation was to undertake an exploratory analysis of clerics who sexually offend and the circumstances related to these offences. Thirty-three adult male religious leaders who had been charged with a sexual offence against a child or adolescent were included in the study. Archival police reports were obtained from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and demographic and criminal characteristics were selected for analyses. The first part of the study examined descriptive information about offenders, their victims, as well as characteristics of the crimes. Notable trends included that religious leaders tend to offend against boys living with both parents. The offence often took place at the clergy's residence and involved him fondling the victim. In the second part of the study offenders with single and multiple victims were compared on crime variables, and differences were noted with respect to victim access. This study contributes to the scarce literature about the crimes committed by religious leaders by a) including all religious leaders rather than a strict focus on Roman Catholic priests, b) focusing on crime characteristics rather than personality or treatment variables, and c) providing a comprehensive description of crimes committed in Canada.

Clerics Who Commit Sexual Offences: Offender, Offence and Victim Characteristics

There has been considerable media attention given to religious leaders who have sexually molested members of their congregation (Fones, Levine, Althof, & Risen, 1999; Haywood, Kravitz, Grossman, Wasyliw, & Hardy, 1996). Although the true prevalence of sexual misconduct of religious leaders is unknown, it is estimated that nearly 400 million dollars in legal fees was spent during the early 1990's by the Catholic Church for victim settlements, medical costs, and legal expenses in the United States (Berry as cited in Haywood et al., 1996). In his review, Doyle (2003) cites over 1800 civil suits and 200 criminal trials involving sexual abuse by Catholic clergy over the past fifteen years.

Amid public concern over violations of professional and religious boundaries (Fones et al., 1999), church authorities have increasingly turned to mental health professionals to help manage sexual misconduct among its religious leaders (Fones et al., 1999; Haywood et al., 1996). Unfortunately, there has been a paucity of research examining sexual misconduct among this group. Existing empirical evidence, however, suggests that clerics tend to be qualitatively different from the general sex offender population. They tend to be older, better educated, and single (Haywood et al., 1996; Langevin, Curnoe, & Bain, 2000), and they are less likely than general sex offenders to be diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder (Fones et al., 1999; Langevin et al., 2000). Research on psychological characteristics suggests that sexually offending Roman Catholic clergy tend to be angry, resentful, entitled, and lack concern for others based on MMPI-2 profiles (Plante & Aldridge, 2005). Furthermore, research suggests that sexual misconduct perpetrated by clerics tends to be associated with sexual deviance (mostly homosexual pedophilia) as determined by phallometric testing (Langevin et al., 2000). A particularly curious finding in the limited literature is that clerics, in comparison to a non-cleric

sample of offenders, are significantly more likely to use physical force in the commission of the sexual act (Langevin et al., 2000), and are more likely to victimize adolescents or adults (Fones et al., 1999; Haywood et al., 1996).

In the present investigation, information from Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) crime reports was used to compile descriptive information regarding the offender (e.g., marital status, age), offence (e.g., location of offence, sexual acts in offence, extent of victim physical injury) and victim characteristics (e.g., age, gender, residence). This data is unique because it contains a wealth of information concerning attributes of offenders and their offences across Canada. Furthermore, the majority of empirical studies tend to focus on psychopathology and sexual deviance of sexually offending clerics in treatment (e.g., Bottoms, Shaver, Goodman, & Qin, 1995; Fones et al., 1999; Haywood et al., 1996), whereas the present study focuses on the characteristics of the crime rather than the offender, and includes all offenders, rather than only those participating in treatment.

There has been little research examining the crimes of clerics who sexually offend, and as such this study is intended to be exploratory. Two sets of analyses will be performed. The first part of the study will explore descriptive characteristics of the offender, victim, and sexual crime itself. The second section will compare those religious leaders who have offended against single versus multiple victims. The results from the present investigation may provide some insight to police about the “modus operandi” of clerics who sexually offend, and also inform community members and professionals of high risk factors or this group of offenders.

Method

Procedure for Data Collection and Treatment

Information for the study was obtained from RCMP crime reports of clergy who had been charged with a sexual offence. These reports were obtained following a request submitted to the RCMP to view all sex offence crime reports of charges and/or convictions involving perpetrators whose occupation was identified as a religious leader.

When a sexual or violent crime occurs investigating officers from municipal and provincial police forces complete a booklet of standardized questions, with one booklet completed for each incident involving the offender. If an offender has more than one victim a separate booklet is completed for each victim. Each question in the booklet provides a series of response options. For example the question of marital status includes the following response options: single, married/common/law, separated, divorced, widowed, homosexual relationship, and other. The completed booklet is then forwarded to one of ten specific provincial RCMP centres, where a trained investigator enters the data into a specialized database for serious and violent crime. Provincial databases are linked to a centralized RCMP file, which is regularly updated with new crime reports. Each crime report contains over 200 variables regarding offender and victim characteristics, as well as crime scene information. As such, they provide a valuable source of information.

Descriptive information of the offence, offender and their victim(s) were collected from these reports. Reports were based on information gathered during the course of the investigation, such as interviews with offenders, reports from victims and collateral sources, as well as physical evidence. Information relevant to the study included personal characteristics of the offender (e.g. age, marital status, relationship to victim, method of contact with victim), demographic

characteristics of the victim (e.g. age, gender, living condition), as well as crime scene information (e.g. extent of injury, sexual acts, location of offence). Variables were selected based on their relevance to the intended goal of the study; that is, to examine characteristics of crimes committed by clerics. No other information as to specific religious group was available.

Each variable (e.g., victim residence) contained many items (e.g., living with parents, living in group home/residential school). With the exception of the apparent age of the offender and victim, variables were coded into dichotomous items indicating the presence or absence of the characteristic, creating numerous categories for each variable.

Participants

The inclusion criteria required that the perpetrator be adult, male and that his relationship to the victim be identified as clergy. This resulted in a sample of 35 clerics who had come to the attention of the RCMP for a sexual offence against a child or adolescent between 1995 and 2002. One case was deleted because the offender's apparent age was an adolescent. One case was deleted because the offender was a woman. The final sample included 33 participants. The RCMP defines clergy as religious leaders of all ranks, denominations, and all religions. The data is organized according to identification number and there is no identifying information attached to these codes.

For the purpose of the RCMP crime database, the identity of an offender does not have to be established by charge or conviction. If, as a result of the investigation, the investigator(s) is satisfied that the identity of the offender is known, then the person can and should be listed as the offender. Suspects are not entered into the database as offenders.

Results

Data were analyzed using SPSS/Windows version 12.0. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Prior to analysis study variables were inspected for accuracy of data entry,

and missing data. Variables with more than 10% missing data were excluded from analyses. Cases with missing data were not included in analyses. Frequency analyses reflected total counts (i.e. total n minus the number of missing cases). The information in the Results section has been organized into two sections. The first section reviews descriptive results and the second section compares offenders with single and multiple victims on the same variables.

Of the thirty-three clerics, 39% had multiple victims, resulting in a total of 101 offender/victim pairs. The number of victims ranged from 1 to 20. Multiple victims were defined as two or more victims. Because one offender may have multiple victims thus entering into a frequency analysis multiple times, the results are biased toward those offenders with multiple victims. Typically a nesting procedure would be used to address the confounding of variance, however given the nature of the data (i.e. one sample, dichotomous) and analysis (i.e. descriptive statistics), this procedure was not appropriate. Therefore, the most typical case for each offender was selected to enter into the analyses. Typicality was determined based on the following factors: completeness of data, victim age and gender, sexual acts perpetrated, and location of offence. When equally typical cases were found, greater severity of the sex acts was the discriminating factor.

Descriptive Analyses

The analysis includes demographic information about the offender and victim, and presents a summary of the characteristics of the sexual crimes committed by religious leaders. An intriguing aspect of the information collected by the officers was that they noted the apparent age of the offender and the victim(s) as opposed to their chronological age. As part of a demographic profile, this knowledge may serve as an investigative tool and potentially aid the investigating officer in targeting particular suspects, because the apparent age provides a more

accurate description of how the offender looks and presents. The mean apparent age of the sample was 44.03 years ($SD=10.25$) and the modal age was 33 years old, with ages ranging from 28 to 65 years old. It was possible to ascertain the marital status of 29 cases under investigation. Of this group 24 had never been married, 4 were married or living in a common law relationship and one was divorced. Of the sample of 31 whose sexual orientation was coded, 20 were homosexual, 6 were bisexual and 5 were heterosexual.

In all cases except three, the relationship between the offender and victim was described as one where the offender assumed a position of authority as a clergy. In the three cases where this relationship was defined differently, all offenders were teachers at residential schools. Therefore, we decided to include these cases because these individuals were also members of the clergy, and were occupied as clergy at the time of the offence.

Table 1 provides data about the offender's method of establishing contact with the victim. It is evident that the vast majority of offenders used their position as clergy and the authority vested in these positions to initiate contact with the victims. The predominant gender of victims was male (67 %). Victims had a mean apparent age of 11.67 years ($SD=2.68$), and the modal age was 13 years old, with a range of 4 to 16 years. Victims were most likely to be residing with both parents (40%) at the time of the offence. Approximately one-quarter of the victims were attending residential schools/ group homes (23%), one-fifth lived with single parents (20%), and thirteen per cent were living in a correctional facility.

Table 1 about here

The largest proportion of offences took place in the clergy's residence. However, a significant number of offences also occurred at the victim's residence or at a religious facility (see Table 2). According to Table 3 performing fondling, masturbation and fellatio appear to be the most frequent sexual acts perpetrated by offenders against victims. Most victims did not sustain any physical injuries (88%), while the remaining proportion experienced minor injuries (required no medical treatment). Lastly, the victim-offender contact ended with the victim being released in 87 percent of the cases. In 10 percent of the cases the offence was interrupted or the victim was rescued (i.e. a third party intervened), and finally in 3 percent of cases the victim escaped.

Tables 2 & 3 about here

Comparison Analyses

The following analyses were performed to explore whether differences existed between repeat offenders and offenders with only one victim. Two cases were deleted because the discriminating information (offender identification) was missing. Because cases are organized according to offender-victim pairs, without the offender identification it could not be determined whether the crimes had been committed by the same offender. The total number of cases for the comparison analyses was thirty-one.

T-tests were performed to compare the apparent ages of the offender and victims, and no significant differences were found between groups. Likewise, no significant differences were found for victim gender. However, regardless of the number of victims, clergy generally offended against more males than females (68% and 32%, respectively). Chi-square analyses were performed to compare offenders with single versus multiple victims on the demographic

and crime characteristics. In cases when there was an observed frequency of fewer than five cases per cell, these comparisons were not performed (e.g. extent of injuries, end of contact). An examination of marital status (i.e. single, married/common-law) revealed no significant differences between groups. As shown in table 4, there was a strong association between offenders with only one victim and victims living with both parents. There was also a strong association between offenders with multiple victims and victims living in a residential school or group home. An examination of the location of the offence (see Table 5) revealed that offenders with multiple victims were more likely to offend at their own residence.

Tables 4 & 5 about here

There were no significant differences between offenders with single and multiple victims with respect to strategies to make contact with the victim (see Table 6). Table 7 summarizes the results for comparisons of the sexual acts committed by offenders with single versus multiple victims. A strong association existed for offenders with multiple victims and masturbation of the victim. No other group differences were observed.

Tables 6 & 7 about here

Discussion

Compilation and analysis of detailed RCMP crime reports yielded descriptions of religious leaders who commit sexual offences, their potential victims, and offence characteristics. This is an important step in understanding religious leaders, and the characteristics of the sexual

crimes they commit. The typical clergy sex offender in this sample appeared to be 33-years-old, never married, and homosexual. This profile is consistent with previous descriptions of sexually offensive religious leaders (Plante & Aldridge, 2005). Offenders reviewed in the present study leveraged his position to access and abuse the victims. The victims appeared to be 11-years-old, were most likely males, and were living in two-parent families at the time of the offence. The finding that males are at increased risk in this group supports the claim that religious leaders who sexually offend are different from the general population of sexual offenders. Females are consistently identified as the typical victim of non-cleric sexual offenders across studies investigating police and victim reports. The research devoted to the study of Roman Catholic sexual offenders suggests that this finding may be a product of access to young men participating in religious activities, and the result of a common trend for Catholic clergy to self-identify their sexual orientation as homosexual (Haywood et al., 1996; Langevin, et al., 2000; Plante & Aldridge, 2005)

Interestingly other studies have concluded that clergy sex offenders are more likely to offend against adults (Robinson, Taylor, & Watson, 1999). In the present sample of 33 clergy offenders there were no adult victims. This finding is consistent with previous research that has also found adolescent males to be the preferred victim type (Abel, 1999; Abel, Becker, Mittleman, Cunningham-Rathner, & Rouleau, 1988; Bradford, Boulet, & Pawlak, 1992; Haywood et al., 1996; Loftus & Camargo, 1993), which was the case in the present study.

In the present investigation it was evident that the clergy's residence was a very high-risk area for the sexual offences. Typically the offences involved fondling, grabbing or hugging, masturbation, and fellatio. Most victims sustained no injuries and were released at the end of the offence. Many of these characteristics are consistent with previous literature. However, unlike

Langevin and his colleagues (Langevin et al., 2000), in the present study the use of physical force was found to be minimal amongst this sample of offenders. There are a number of reasons for this finding. It may be victims felt unable to resist the abuse given, and therefore offenders simply didn't need to use force. The period within which offences were coded for the present study is more recent than some previous research. The relationship between religious leadership and the community has shifted and some may say weakened over the last few decades, such that religious leaders do not hold the same unquestionable power they once did. Offenders in the present study may have relied on more manipulative techniques to gain victim compliance and elude detection, whereas 20 or 30 years ago victim reports of violence within the church were often hushed or simply ignored (see Doyle, 2003).

Comparisons of offenders with single and multiple victims suggest that the groups are not differentiated by the gender and age of the victim, the age of the offender, or the marital status of the offender. However, marked differences were noted between groups with respect to offence location and victim residence. Those offenders who sexually abused multiple victims were likely to offend at their own homes. The victims of multiple-victim offenders were also likely to reside in residential facilities, compared to victims of single-victim offenders, who were likely to be living with both parents at the time of the offence. These findings may suggest that the differentiating factor is one of victim access and supervision. Victims living in group homes or residential facilities may not enjoy the consistent and close supervision provided by parents. In fact, the clergy member may be the supervisor in such instances. This situation allows for greater access to victims, and little monitoring when it comes to offenders taking victims to their homes. This issue of trust also extends to single-victim offenders. However, it may be the case that victims were more likely to report to parents, or parents suspected abuse, which resulted in swift

response against the offenders, preventing his access to additional victims. Lastly, offenders with multiple victims were more likely to masturbate the victims, which is likely an artifact of the fact that boy victims are at greater risk for abuse.

There are several limitations to the present study. This study was limited by a small sample of religious leaders, which impacted the researchers' ability to perform some nonparametric analyses and the generalizability of the results. Unfortunately, information related to the religious denomination of the clerics was not available for the present study. This would have been extremely useful in specifying whether certain denominations are at greater risk than others and exploring the dynamics of the risk factors. Similarly, there were limitations surrounding access to specific articles of data. For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality some aspects of offenders, victims, and offence characteristics were restricted in the database provided to us so as to protect their identification, particularly in sensational cases, and also, we presume to avoid tendencies to make generalizations based on racial or religious membership. Finally, this project is purely exploratory and descriptive in nature. Because so little research exists on crime characteristics and police report data, particularly for this population, we were unable to make specific hypotheses at this time. However, this paper may provide a foundation for those interested in exploring this type of forensic information with clergy.

The present paper is part of a larger research project aimed at better understanding sexual offences committed by individuals in a position of authority. It is an attempt to provide a description of clergy sex offenders, and later compare them to other sexual offending groups. It is hoped that present information may assist in characterizing high risk individuals and high risk situations for those involved with developing prevention strategies to avoid the sexual exploitation of children and vulnerable populations.

Based on a comprehensive review of RCMP reports of sexual offences committed by Canadian clergy some important features of offending in this group have been identified. In summary, the most notable findings suggest that these offenders tend to abuse pubescent male victims, and engage in sexual acts of varying intrusiveness. The offences are often perpetrated in the offender's residence and many victims resided away from home at the time of the offence, suggesting issues of access and supervision are critical in the prevention of sexual abuse within this context. Few differences existed between those offenders who abused single versus multiple victims. However, victim residence and offence location were identified as variables to examine when classifying more predatory types of offenders. This research not only provides a description of offender, victim, and offence characteristics for clergy sexual offenders, but also identifies situations which represent a greater risk to potential victims. Supervision is critical in preventing child sexual abuse. Unfortunately, the actions of individuals in whom we trust, may require no less monitoring and scrutiny when the care of children is in question.

References

- Abel, G. G. (1999). *The assessment and treatment of child molesters*. Presented at the 30th Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Psychiatry and Law, October, Baltimore, MD.
- Abel, G. G., Becker, J. V., Mittleman, M., Cunningham-Rathner, J., Rouleau, J. L., & Murphy, W. (1987). Self-reported sex crimes of non-incarcerated paraphiliacs. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 2*, 3-25.
- Abel, G. G., Becker, J. V., Mittleman, M., Cunningham-Rathner, J., & Rouleau, J. L. (1988). Multiple paraphilic diagnosis among sex offenders. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry Law, 16*, 153-168.
- Bradford, J., Boulet, J., & Pawlak, A., (1992). The paraphilias: A multiplicity of deviant behaviors. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 37*, 104-108.
- Doyle, T. P. (2003). Roman Catholic clericalism, religious duress, and clergy sexual abuse. *Pastoral Psychology, 51*, 189-231.
- Fones, C. S., Levine, S. B., Althof, S. E., & Risen, C. B. (1999). The sexual struggles of 23 clergymen: A follow-up study. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 25*, 183-195.
- Furby, L., Weinrott, M. B., & Blackshaw, L. (1989). Sex offender recidivism: A review. *Psychological Bulletin, 10*, 3-30.
- Hansen, K. & Bussière, M. T. (1998). Predicting relapse: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66*, 348-362.
- Haywood, T. W., Kravitz, H. M., Grossman, L. S., Wasyliv, O. E., & Hardy, D. W. (1996). Psychological aspects of sexual functioning among cleric and non-cleric alleged sex offenders. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 20*, 527-536.

- Langevin, R., Curnoe, S., & Bain, J. (2000). A study of clerics who commit sexual offences: Are they different from other sex offenders? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24, 535-545.
- Loftus, J. & Camargo, R. (1993). Treating the clergy. *Annals of Sex Research*, 6, 287-303.
- Plante, T. G. (1996). Catholic priests who sexually abuse minors: Why do we hear so much yet know so little? *Pastoral Psychology*, 44, 305-310.
- Plante, T. G., & Aldridge, A. (2005). Psychological patterns among Roman Catholic clergy accused of sexual misconduct. *Pastoral Psychology*, 54, 73-80
- Robinson, T., Taylor, G., & Watson, D. (1999). *Clinical trends noticed in a group of Australian clergy who committed sexual boundary violations against children or adults in their care*. Paper presented at the 18th Annual Meeting of the Association for the treatment of Sexual Abusers, September, Lake Buena, Vista, FL.

Table 1

Manner of Victim Contact

Contact type	%
Used authority	90.9
Befriended the victim	45.5
Offered job, money, gift	24.2
Overpowered (physical)	7.0
Asked for assistance	6.1
Offered transportation	3.0

Note. Percentages will not sum to 100. More than one option may be applied to each offender. N = 33.

Table 2

Location of Offence

Location	%
Clergy residence	63.6
Religious facility	42.4
Victim residence	42
Offender workplace	36.4
School	24.2
Dormitory	9.1
Jail/group home	9.1
Offender motor vehicle	6.1
Single family dwelling	6.1

Note. Percentages will not sum to 100. More than one option may be applied to each offender. N = 33.

Table 3

Sexual Acts Attempted and/or Committed by Offender

Sexual Acts	%
Fondling	81.8
Masturbation	51.5
Fellatio	36.4
Anal intercourse	33.3
Kissing	30.3
Vaginal intercourse	18.2
Rub penis against victim	15.2
Simulated intercourse	12.1
Digital penetration	12.1
Cunnilingus	6.1
Licking	3.0
Tickling	3.0
Ejaculation on victim	3.0

Note. Percentages will not sum to 100. More than one option may be applied to each offender. N = 33.

Table 4

Comparison of Offenders with Single versus Multiple Victims: Victim Residence at Time of Offence

Victim Residence	Per cent of Victims		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	Φ
	Single	Multiple		
	(<i>n</i> = 16)	(<i>n</i> = 12)		
Both parents	62.5	16.7	5.88*	-.46
Single parent	18.8	25	.16	.08
Residential school/Group	6.3	41.7	5.11*	.43
Correctional facility	12.5	15.4	.05	.04

Note. Percentages will not sum to 100. More than one option may be applied to each offender.

**p* < .05.

Table 5

Comparison of Offenders with Single versus Multiple Victims: Location of Offence

Location	Per Cent of Victims		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	Φ
	Single	Multiple		
	(<i>n</i> = 18)	(<i>n</i> = 13)		
Clergy residence	44.4	84.6	5.13*	.41
Religious facility	38.9	46.2	.16	.07
Victim residence	33.3	54.5	1.27	.21
Offender workplace	38.9	38.5	.001	-.004
Single-family dwelling	11.1	0	-	
Dormitory	5.6	15.4	-	
Jail/detention	16.7	0	-	
Offender's vehicle	5.6	7.7	-	
School	22.2	30.8	-	

Note. Percentages will not sum to 100. More than one option may be applied to each offender.

**p* < .05.

Table 6

Comparison of Offenders with Single versus Multiple Victims: Manner of Victim Contact

Initiation of contact	Per cent of Victims		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	Φ
	Single (<i>n</i> = 18)	Multiple (<i>n</i> = 13)		
Used authority	83.3	100	2.40	.28
Befriended the victim	38.9	61.5	1.55	.22
Offered job, money, gift	22.2	30.8	.29	.10
Overpowered (physical)	11.8	0	-	
Asked for assistance	11.1	0	-	

Note. Note. Percentages will not sum to 100. More than one option may be applied to each offender.

Table 7

Comparison of Offenders with Single versus Multiple Victims: Sexual Acts Attempted and/or Committed by Offender

Sexual Acts	Per Cent of Victims		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	Φ
	Single (<i>n</i> = 18)	Multiple (<i>n</i> = 13)		
Fondling	77.8	84.6	.23	.08
Masturbation	33.3	84.6	8.02**	.51
Fellatio	27.8	46.2	-	
Anal intercourse	27.8	38.5	-	
Kissing	27.8	23.1	-	
Vaginal intercourse	22.2	15.4	-	
Rub penis against	11.1	23.1	-	
Simulated intercourse	5.6	15.4	-	
Digital penetration	5.6	15.4	-	
Cunnilingus				6.1
Licking				3.0
Tickling				3.0
Ejaculation on victim				3.0

Note. Percentages will not sum to 100. More than one option may be applied to each offender.

***p* < .01.