

## Major literature reviews on CSA reveals interesting trends and findings

6 October 2016

Over the past week or so the Royal Commission released two very interesting reviews of current literature dealing with child sexual abuse.

The first deals with the risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse and the second with the characteristics, motivations and offending behaviour of perpetrators.

The first review, [Risk Profiles for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse: A literature review](#), looks at some 400 different studies and found a few key consistencies stood out, including that children aged nine to 15 are the most at risk of being sexually abused while in the care of an institution.

The review also found that being female, from a low socio-economic family background, having a prior history of abuse or an intellectual disability were risk factors.

Another major risk factor is that screening processes, used to exclude people from joining organisations, are not as effective as widely believed and are unable to pick up perpetrators with no criminal history or a history that does not include sexual offences.

The review identified a lack of clearly defined policies, or variability in the comprehensiveness and appropriateness of child-safe policies.

The report found that while there was no "typical" sex offender, deviant sexual interests, distorted attitudes about sex and poor social skills were common, with perpetrators in many cases having a strong need for power and control.

The second review, [Evidence and frameworks for understanding perpetrators of institutional child sexual abuse](#), in part deals with child sexual abuse in religious institutions.

It found the largest amount of literature available concerning clergy abusers describes abuse within the Catholic Church.

In contrast, there appears to be limited information available regarding perpetrators in educational, sporting and out of home care settings with no research found concerning child sexual abuse in scouting institutions, or vulnerable child groups including those with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The available research does however have things to say about patterns of offending by Catholic clergy, most of which is based on the major US John Jay study undertaken in 2008.

When looking at the Catholic Church the pattern of sexual abuse committed by clergy does seem to be distinctive, in that the most victims were adolescent boys.

A situational explanation for this is supported by some evidence, including that churches provided many more opportunities for male sexual abusers to be alone with boys than with girls.

The John Jay study showed that from 1950 to 2002, approximately 4 per cent of all priests who were active in ministry throughout this time had allegations of sexual abuse made against them.

Similar patterns of victim age and gender to those from the Catholic Church were found in a study of 191 cases of reported child sexual abuse by 135 sexual abusers in the Anglican Church of Australia.

Similarly, a Canadian study of 33 clergy from various backgrounds found that 39 per cent had multiple victims, the majority of whom (67 per cent) were male, with a mean of 11.67 and a modal age of 13 years for all victims.

Clerical child sexual abusers have been compared with other sexual offenders in two studies, from which the researchers concluded that clerical and lay child sexual abusers are 'more similar than different'.

The report goes on to draw a range of conclusions and observations about child sexual abuse in many different institutions and provides an interesting picture of the current understanding of abuse.

In addition to improving child protection measures one of the other key issues for our community is what we do now to provide all the help we can for abuse survivors.

And from the perspective of the Council key to this is providing fair and just redress. As the Royal Commission enters its final stages this must remain at the very front of our thinking.

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6 October 2016