

4.2 SUMMARY: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INCIDENTS OF ALLEGED SEXUAL ABUSE BY CATHOLIC PRIESTS

One of the most important tasks of this report is to provide a better understanding of the situations in which sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests occurred. The purpose of this chapter is to describe who has alleged child sexual abuse in the Church, his or her situational characteristics (e.g., age, gender and family situation), the relationship between the priest and the accuser, and the circumstances of the abuse (when and in what situation the abuse allegedly occurred). Through an appreciation of these characteristics, the Church would be better able to design policies aimed at removing opportunities in which such abuse could occur.

The study produced some important findings about the nature of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

- Unlike in the general population, more males than females were allegedly. In fact, there was a significant difference between genders, with four out of five alleged victims being male.
- The majority of alleged victims were post-pubescent, with only a small percentage of priests receiving allegations of abusing young children.
- The allegations of sexual abuse involved a variety of sexual acts, and most of the priests involved were alleged to have committed multiple acts per victim. Indeed, much of the sexual abuse reported involved serious sexual offenses.
- According to the allegations of sexual abuse, the most frequent context of the sexual incidents occurred during a social event. Additionally, many of the priests with allegations of abuse socialized with the family of the alleged victim.
- The most common place of occurrence was the residence of the priest though incidents of abuse allegedly occurred in a wide variety of locations.

Whatever the motivation of men to sexually abuse children, the abuse is less likely to occur if there are fewer opportunities for the abuse to happen. This chapter paints a picture of priests who are friendly with the families of their alleged victims and who spend much social time with those they allegedly abused. Several of the priests allegedly bought gifts or gave other types of enticements (e.g., let the youths drive cars or took them to sporting events) to those who made allegations against them. Thus, like in the general population, child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church appears to be committed by men close to the children they allegedly abuse. Many appear to use grooming tactics to entice children into complying with the abuse and the abuse frequently occurs in the home of the alleged abuser or victim.