

### 4.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN WHO ALLEGED SEXUAL ABUSE BY CATHOLIC PRIESTS

This chapter is based on survey data that describes 10,667 incidents of alleged sexual abuse of youths under 18 by a Catholic priest or deacon, at least part of which occurred between the beginning of 1950 and the end of 2002. The following steps were taken to achieve that number:

- Dioceses, eparchies and religious communities submitted 10,822 incident-level surveys based on files for individual priests and deacons who had been accused of child sexual abuse.
- Allegations determined to have been documented by more than one survey have been unified as a single incident-level file.
- 155 surveys that were submitted for allegations made about acts that occurred when the person making the allegation was 18 or older, and about alleged events that occurred or ended before 1950, or that were associated to seminarians or religious brothers not eligible for the study were deleted and diocesan/religious community totals corrected.
- Not all questions were answered on each survey; as a result, each table shows the available responses, and the totals change from table to table.

The extent of childhood sexual victimization is difficult to estimate though it is a phenomenon that has been studied extensively over the last few decades. Despite the claim by many that it occurs in epidemic proportions, most of these studies have disagreed with respect to the true prevalence figure. Prevalence estimates of childhood sex abuse range from 2 to 62 percent, depending largely upon the methodology used in the research design (including the definition of child sexual abuse, sampling procedures, type of questions asked during one-on-one interviews, and gender of the respondents). One analysis of the various studies on victim prevalence found that the overall prevalence for male children who are sexually abused is 13 percent, and the prevalence of female children who are sexually abused ranges from 30 to 40 percent.<sup>1</sup> This study also identified three significant explanations as to why there is such a wide range in childhood sexual victimization rates, including the number of screening questions used to identify abuse victims, the size of the sample, and the year in which the study was conducted.<sup>2</sup>

The results of our study indicated that of all victims whose gender was reported, (Table 4.3.1) 81% were male and 19% were female.

*Table 4.3.1* GENDER OF ALLEGED VICTIM

Gender	Count	% of Total
Male	8,499	80.9%
Female	2,004	19.1%
Transsexual	2	.0%
Total	10,505	100.0%

98.5% of surveys reported the gender of the alleged victim.

Table 4.3.2 represents the age of the alleged victim at the time of the alleged event. If the event continued for multiple years, this table represents the age at which the abuse allegedly began. Each alleged victim is only represented once. Therefore, this table does not represent the duration of abuse or the ages of the alleged victims throughout the time they were abused. For instance, if a child was sexually abused from the age of three to nine, he or she is represented in this table at age three.

The majority of victims are males between the ages of 11-17, and just over half (50.7%) of all individuals who made allegations of abuse were between the ages of 11-14. The average age of all alleged victims is 12.6. This number has increased over time, however. In the 1950s, the average age was 11.5; in the 1960s it was 12; in the 1970s it was 12.87; in the 1980s it was 13.2; and by the 1990s it was 13.87.

*Table 4.3.2* VICTIM'S AGE AT FIRST INSTANCE OF ABUSE

Age in Years	Count	% of Total
1	4	.0%
2	11	.1%
3	22	.2%
4	41	.5%
5	82	1.0%
6	158	1.8%
7	220	2.5%
8	369	4.1%
9	362	4.0%
10	752	8.4%
11	895	10.0%
12	1,323	14.7%
13	1,141	12.8%
14	1,188	13.2%
15	1,042	11.6%
16	769	8.6%
17	577	6.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,956</b>	<b>100%</b>

Eighty-four percent of surveys included the age of the alleged victim at the time the abuse occurred or at the time the abuse began. It is important to understand that in retrospective studies, particularly where there is a delay in the reporting of the events, the possibility that alleged victims did not remember the specific dates correctly must be considered. (See Section 5.1 for a review of the research on this phenomenon, called "telescoping.")

The substantial majority of alleged victims of child sexual abuse, or almost four out of five, lived with both parents. Information about the residence of the alleged victim was provided on 70% of the Victim Surveys.

Table 4.3.3 VICTIM'S RESIDENCE / LIVING SITUATION

	Count	% of Total
Mother only	843	11.2%
Father only	81	1.1%
Both parents	5,905	78.6%
Brother(s)	29	.4%
Sister(s)	14	.2%
Other guardian	17	.2%
Grandparents	53	.7%
Boarding school	172	2.3%
Foster parents	29	.4%
Orphanage	159	2.1%
Home of priest	67	.9%
Church-related residence	53	.7%
Other	92	1.2%
Total	7,514	100%

<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Bolen and Maria Scannapieco, "Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse: A Corrective Metanalysis" *Social Service Review* (1999): 281.

<sup>2</sup> Bolen and Scannapieco.