

FAMILY NARRATIVES OF CRISIS AND STRENGTH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY OF THE EFFECTS ON THE FAMILY SYSTEM WHEN A CHILD HAS
BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED BY A CATHOLIC PRIEST

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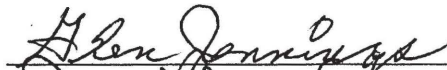


October 27, 2006

To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Karen Elaine Kudlac entitled "Family Narratives of Crisis and Strength: A Phenomenological Study of the Effects on the Family System When a Child Has Been Sexually Abused by a Catholic Priest." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Family Therapy.


Linda J. Brock, Ph.D., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:




Department Chair

Accepted:


Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

Helen Jean Dettling Monfrey and the Congregation of Divine Providence, both of whom believed in me.

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I thank the Congregation of Divine Providence for their trust in our Provident God and their belief in me. They and my faith community in Denton have shown me that through God, all things are possible. I especially thank my Denton faith community for their support, encouragement, flowers, and laughter. You are an invaluable treasure.

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to heal their families. May all who read this research have the courage to hear and profit from their stories.

I thank our Provident God for all the Graces that have been bestowed on me.

ABSTRACT

KAREN ELAINE KUDLAC

FAMILY NARRATIVES OF CRISIS AND STRENGTH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EFFECTS ON THE FAMILY SYSTEM WHEN A CHILD HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED BY A CATHOLIC PRIEST

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This qualitative research study examined the effects priest sexual abuse of children has had on the family system in order to learn more about what family therapists need to know when working with these families. The theoretical foundation for this study was family systems theory.

The research was designed using the phenomenological research approach in order to capture the families' rich meanings. Participants were recruited on a local, statewide, and national level. Purposive and snowball sampling yielded a sample of 18 participants from 12 families. They included mothers, fathers, sisters, husbands, wives, and adult children of persons who were sexually abused by a priest as a child. Three of the participants themselves had also been abused by a Catholic priest.

The researcher conducted 16 face-to-face, semi-structured, audiotaped interviews. Two participants were interviewed by telephone. Verbatim transcripts were read multiple times and categorized by content using a color coding system. After the analysis of the transcripts, the researcher believed she had captured the essence of each participant's story.

Two themes emerged from the final analysis of the interviewed data, *Crisis and the Functionality of Silence* and *Crisis and Growth Through the Mettle of Faith*. Under the first of these umbrella themes were the concepts of *silence* and the *emotional strain* on the family. *Blind faith* and *eyes wide open* were the concepts that explicate the second theme. Direct quotations from the participants' narratives give voice to their lived experiences and illustrate each theme.

In qualitative research, the researcher is part of the instrument. This study was conducted by a Catholic nun who is also a family therapist. The researcher's voice was included in Chapter Five to provide transparency for the research process and to describe some of the effects this study had on her spiritually and professionally.

The results of the study were compared with a review of the literature. Conclusions were drawn, and implications for abused families and for family therapists working with similar families are provided. Recommendations for future research and for the field of family therapy are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In June of 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops held their semi-annual meeting in Dallas, Texas. The bishops' focus for this meeting was the crisis of child sexual abuse by priests within the Catholic Church. Public awareness of priest sexual abuse increased significantly in the first 100 days of 2002 as a result of stories reported by the investigative staff of *The Boston Globe* (Investigative Staff of *The Boston Globe*, 2003; see also Greeley, 2004; Steinfels, 2003). By the summer of 2002, the topic of priest sexual abuse had been the focus of more than 12,000 stories in newsmagazines, major television and cable networks, the nation's top 50 newspapers, and wire services. Catholics were shocked and angry and they anticipated answers from the bishops (Steinfels, 2003). Therefore, considerable attention was on the bishops' meeting in Dallas.

By the mid 1980s, reports of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy started to surface at a much higher rate (Sipe, 1990; Thompson, Marolla, & Bromley, 1998). Until this time litigation was not a common means by which victims and their families had sought justice. In the mid-1980s, public agitation regarding sexual abuse of minors by priests began in the archdiocese of St. John's, Newfoundland, and in the diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana. Lawsuits were filed against Reverend James Hickey in Newfoundland and Reverend Gilbert Gauthier in Louisiana for sexually abusing minors and against their

respective dioceses for protecting the accused priests (Berry, 2000; Connors, 1995; Jenkins, 1996). Since the mid 1980s what had appeared to be new revelations to the Catholic Community were, in fact, data that many Church officials were aware of for quite some time (Berry, 2000; Wills, 2000). The structure of the Church seemed to be crumbling and people were confused, angry, and hurt over what appeared to be the Church's lack of pastoral care in regard to this matter. A wider spectrum of the public became aware that the scope and effects of the abuse were deeper and broader than first realized (Christopher, 2002).

Sexual abuse by a priest is viewed as a grim problem in terms of the number of perpetrators involved and the frequency of the abuse (Jenkins, 1996). There is documentation of priest sexual abuse cases dating back to the 19th century and earlier (Doyle, Sipe & Wall, 2006; Loftus, 2004). The recent John Jay report, which was published February, 2004, documented priest sexual abuse cases beginning in the 1950s (John Jay, 2004). Unfortunately, the phenomenon of child sexual abuse is not something that is new; however, venues such as research, media, child advocacy programs, and public court cases have raised the awareness of the public (Hopper, 2004). Sexual misconduct is a problem that many denominations have had to face within their churches, not just within the Catholic Church.

Childhood sexual abuse has occurred throughout human history. In 2002, ten percent of child abuse cases reported fell into the category of sexual abuse (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect [NCCAN], 2004; National Clearinghouse on Child

Abuse and Neglect Information [NCCANI], 1980 & 1988). Researchers believe that for the first time in history, society is beginning to face the true pervasiveness and significance of child sexual abuse. More government agencies are monitoring child abuse partially because of research studies on the effects of child sexual abuse (Hopper, 2004). As public awareness about child sexual abuse grows, increased attention has been given to this societal problem.

Statement of the Problem

Research regarding the lasting effects on survivors of sexual abuse indicates that victims have greater difficulties staying in healthy relationships, dealing with depression, and keeping jobs, as well as having other problems (Disch & Avery, 2001; Roberts, O'Connor, Dunn, & Golding, 2004; Woody, 2002). Furthermore, research suggests that child sexual abuse by a trusted religious figure, such as a Catholic priest, results in a significant decline in the victim's self-esteem and ability to trust others (Jenkins, 1996; Rossetti, 1995). An added dimension of the damage of clergy misconduct is destruction caused by a religious figure that people had trusted to be their spiritual guide. Clergy sexual abuse is shocking and among the most corrupt of ethical deviations (H. J. Flynn, 2002). Added complications for victims of priest sexual abuse include distrust of clergy, distrust of the hierarchal church, and distrust of organized religion in general (Fater & Mullaney, 2000). In recent years, researchers have examined the psychological, mental, emotional, social, and sexual development of victims of childhood sexual abuse (Hopper, 2004; Rossetti, 1995).

Research into the ramifications of clergy sexual abuse is imperative for a number of reasons. This study, which focuses on the family, will aid family therapists and other professionals in their work with families. A crisis event such as the sexual abuse crisis within the Catholic Church can create an opportunity for growth. A product of this clergy sexual abuse crisis can be the wealth of information on the effects of priest sexual abuse gained through further inquiry and research. Research such as this is an opportunity for positive changes, both in terms of intervention and of policy, to accrue within the Catholic Church as well as within other faith denominations.

Currently a limited number of research studies have focused on the effects of child sexual abuse by priests on the victims' emotional, psychological, and relational development. Research regarding child sexual abuse by priests has been conducted since the 1980s (Sipe, 1990) and continues because of the events within the Catholic Church since 2002; however, more research on this topic is needed (Loftus, 2004). Nonetheless, there is no evidence of any research studies published or conducted where the purpose of the research was to explore the effects priest sexual abuse had on the family members of the victim.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the systemic effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a Catholic priest. The focus of the study was to identify specific effects and therapeutic needs of families where a priest has abused a member of the family. Members within a system, such as a family system, are affected

by one member's trauma. It is believed that the abuse of one member in the system affects each member in the system. An underlying assumption of this study was that sexual abuse by a priest affected members of the family system.

The conceptual framework of family systems theory provided the paradigm for understanding the experiences of families who have had their trust betrayed by a priest perpetrator. Family systems theory is based on the assumptions that systems are relational, recursive, and reciprocal. The actions of one member will in turn affect other members, and the subsequent actions will continue a spiral of effects on the system. Although there is no research on the effects of priest abuse on the family system, research on incest victims provides information that might be useful in this situation. Distrust, anger, relational difficulties, and other effects felt by victims reach beyond the victim to the victim's family and future generations. An exploratory study such as this study can help identify specific effects and needs of families where a priest has abused a member of the family.

The phenomenological research method was utilized in order to capture the rich meanings of their experiences from family members. Purposive sampling using gatekeepers was employed to recruit family members of those who were sexually abused as minors by a priest. The researcher anticipated a challenge in acquiring an adequate sample due to the sensitivity of the topic; therefore, snowball sampling was also used to locate additional participants. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability technique used when participants may be difficult to locate (Babbie, 2001). Notices were also placed in

newspapers. Participant interviews were audio recorded in order to transcribe data for data analysis.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this research project:

Research Question 1. What are the systemic effects within the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a priest?

Research Question 2. What do family therapists need to know about working with families who have experienced clergy sexual abuse?

Definitions

For the purpose of clarification, the following terms are used throughout the study:

Chancery: In common parlance, the term chancery is typically used to refer to the place in a diocese where the office of the bishop and other diocesan department offices are located.

Clergy: The term clergy is used by many denominations when referring to men and women who are ordained ministers. For this study, the term clergy represents Roman Catholic priests. Priest and clergy are used synonymously.

Diocese: The term diocese will be used to include eparchies and archdioceses.

Eucharist: Catholics believe the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, is the body and blood of Jesus.

Family of Origin: The family in which one grew up.

Family of Creation: The family one creates, usually, but not limited to spouses and children.

Holy Orders: One of the seven sacraments in the Catholic Church. Only men who are ordained Catholic priests receive this sacrament.

Nun: “In the Roman Catholic Church, ‘nun’ and ‘religious sister’ have distinct meanings. Nuns and sisters are distinguished by the type of vows they take (solemn vow vs. simple vow).” It is common practice to use the term nun when referring to nuns and religious sisters (as defined by the Roman Catholic Church) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nun>).

Parishioner: Parishioner is used inclusively to refer to “all those to whom a clergyperson owes a professional and fiduciary obligation in their role as clergyperson” (Gonsiorek, 1999, p. 31).

Priest Perpetrator: An ordained priest within the Catholic Church who has violated another person sexually.

Rectory: The house where priests reside. Typically, until more recently, the rectory also housed the church offices and was located within walking distance of the church and school.

Secondary Victims of Sexual Abuse: Persons who have suffered tangential consequences of sexual abuse although they were not the abused (Benyei, 1998).

Sexual Abuse: Any form of sexual contact with a minor, including but not limited to rape; vaginal or rectal penetration; fondling of breasts, genitals, buttocks; oral contact with genitals; or any sexualized kissing or hugging (Benyei, 1998).

Victim: Anyone who has experienced sexual abuse by a Catholic priest or religious brother as a minor. This would include persons who view themselves as survivors.

Vowed Religious: A vowed religious is a priest, brother, or sister who has taken vows of chastity and obedience and poverty. Diocesan priests typically do not take a vow of poverty, but for the purpose of this study, they are included in the term vowed religious.

Assumptions

It was assumed:

1. That the participants were open, forthcoming, and truthful with the researcher.
2. That the participants were willing to share their insights.
3. That there is general societal disdain for child sexual abusers.
4. That there may have been discrepancies among family members' experiences.

Delimitations

As with any research, in qualitative studies, it is important for researchers to realize the delimitations inherent to their study (Haugaard & Repucci, 1998). By identifying the delimitations of a study, the generalizability of the study's results will have more credibility (Patton, 1990). Several factors delimited this study. These included the following:

1. Family members included in the study were members of the victim's family of procreation and orientation.
2. Participants in the study had to be 18 years of age or older.
3. The abused was a child when the abuse occurred.

4. By virtue of the nature of the experience (priest sexual abuse) being a very sensitive area, the researcher interviewed participants who were available to her. No attempt was made to capture a sample that was balanced in terms of any demographic indicators.

5. Participants in this study were family members who were willing to participate in this study.

6. Potential participants might have been reluctant to participate in the study because of their feelings toward the Catholic Church.

7. Participants may have refrained from responses that were more critical in an effort to fulfill their role as obedient Catholics.

8. The researcher's role and association with the Catholic Church might have had an effect on the participants. The degree of openness on the part of the participants could have depended on their opinion of the researcher's position within the Catholic Church.

The Researcher as Person

In qualitative studies, the researcher as a person is a part of the research process (Patton, 2002). The researcher is a vowed member of a Roman Catholic Religious Order within the United States and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) with over 14 years experience working systemically with families. The researcher realized that some of the delimitations for this study were specific to her position as researcher because of her background in family therapy as well as her role as a Roman Catholic nun.

The researcher made every effort to suspend any biases as she interviewed family members where a member of the family had been abused.

Summary

Sexual abuse by a priest is viewed as a grim problem and has become a major concern throughout the country. The purpose of the study was to explore the systemic effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a Catholic priest. Currently there are a limited number of research studies on the effects of priest sexual abuse on the individual; however, there is no evidence of research on the effects the abuse had on the family. It is hoped this study will give voice to the effects that priest sexual abuse has had on the family. The findings from this study will provide useful information to family therapists and other professionals. Research questions were examined using the phenomenological research method in order to capture the rich meanings of their experiences from family members. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used in order to obtain an adequate number of participants. Several assumptions were particular to this study, and significant factors delimited this study including the researcher's role within the Catholic Church.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Childhood sexual abuse has occurred throughout human history. In 2002, ten percent of reported child abuse cases reported fell into the category of sexual abuse (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect [NCCAN], 2004; National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information [NCCANI], 1980 & 1988). While there has been an increase in the number of studies on child sexual abuse, such studies about clergy are lacking. Sexual misconduct is a problem that many denominations have had to face within their churches. Public awareness of priest sexual abuse increased significantly in the first 100 days of 2002 because of stories reported by the investigative staff of *The Boston Globe* (Investigative Staff of *The Boston Globe*, 2003).

Currently a limited number of research studies have focused on the emotional, psychological, and relational effects of child sexual abuse by priests on the victims. A majority of literature published about the crisis within the Catholic Church has been anecdotal (Remer & Elliot, 1988a) although some research regarding child sexual abuse by priests has been conducted since the 1980s (Sipe, 1990) and continues as a result of events within the Catholic Church since 2002. More research on this topic is needed (Loftus, 2004). There are few empirical studies on the prevalence of priest sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church (Terry & Tallon, 2004). There is no evidence of any research studies published or conducted where the purpose of the

research was to explore the effects priest sexual abuse had on the family members of the victim.

The literature review covers five areas. The first briefly addresses child sexual abuse; next, a concise review of the problem of priest sexual abuse within the Catholic Church is discussed. Overviews of the two theoretical frameworks which frame this study are presented. A review of the effects of child sexual abuse on the victims as well as a summary of families and priest sexual abuse complete the literature review. A summary addressing the need for this type of research on the effects of priest sexual abuse on the family concludes this chapter.

Child Sexual Abuse

Research suggests some schoolteachers, scout leaders, coaches, and other adults who have access to children at levels similar to those of priests (Finkelhor, 2003) commit sexual abuse of children. A child being comfortable and/or familiar with his or her abuser is a widely accepted concept. Studies show that 70 – 80% of child sexual abuse occurs within a familiar system such as parents, family, stepfamilies, friends, and neighbors. Priests are included in this population (Finkelhor, 1980). Existing research suggests that sexual victimization of children is also committed at levels similar to those of priests by male clergy of other religious traditions, as well as by schoolteachers, scout leaders, coaches, and other men who have access to and control over children. A 2004 study on clergy sexual misconduct reports that 4% of priests in America are sexual predators; a comparable number almost certainly applies to other groups as well (Plante, 2004).

The results of Finkelhor's study of 796 college students in the 1970s reported that 19% of the women surveyed and 9% of the men in the sample had been sexually victimized as children. In a later study, 39% of the sample were male children who reported their abuse to their parents (Finkelhor, 1984). Statistically, 20% of women and 15% of men report having been sexually abused as children; 80% of that population were sexually abused by a member of their family (Plante, 2004). Accurate statistics on the prevalence of child sexual abuse are difficult to obtain for a number of reasons, one of which is non-disclosure of the abuse. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) reported that in approximately 77% of child abuse cases that are reported, the perpetrator is a parent; other relatives account for about 16% of reported cases (Gibson, 2004).

Priest Sexual Abuse within the Catholic Church

While there are a greater number of sexual abuse cases being reported, child sexual abuse by priests is not a new problem in the Catholic Church (Rossetti, 1995). Sexual misconduct by priests has been documented as far back as the sixteenth century (Doyle, et al., 2006; Loftus, 2004; Sipe, 1995). Information regarding the universality of child sexual abuse by clergy is limited. The prevalence of child sexual abuse is not unique to the Catholic Church. Sexual abuse of minors is a significant problem that damages society. Rossetti interviewed 1,810 adults and found that more than 19% of those surveyed had been victims of child sexual abuse as minors (Rossetti, 2002). His findings suggest that child sexual abuse is a societal problem, not just a problem in the

Catholic Church. He says, "While we are shocked ... that there would be 60 priests in the Archdiocese of Boston who have molested minors, we should be equally shocked at just how common child sexual abuse is throughout our society" (Rossetti, 2002, p. 10). More research on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in today's society and the characteristics of those who abuse children can be something positive that comes out of these terrible events within the Catholic Church (Gibson, 2003).

Statistical Reports

Statistics vary on the percentage of priests who sexually abuse minors. According to scholars in the field of priest sexual abuse, between two and six percent of priests abuse minors (Gibson, 2003; Quade, 1992; Rossetti, 2002; Sipe, 1990) although it is difficult to obtain an accurate percentage since the actual number of cases is unclear. Additionally, there is some confusion as to who is included in the statistics. Some studies report only priest abusers, while other studies include religious brothers. These numbers are also misleading in that the statistics are based on reported cases. It is uncertain how many cases of clergy abuse go unreported. For example, in the Archdiocese of Boston, two percent of priests in the Archdiocese have been accused of sexual misconduct over the last 50 years; in Philadelphia allegations against 1.6 percent of priests have been made in the last 50 years, and in Chicago the percentage has been 1.8 over the last 40 years (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004). The percentage of credible allegations against priests has been reported to be as high as ten percent in some U. S. dioceses (Cozzens, 2006).

The John Jay study completed in 2004 reported that 4,392 priests and deacons were accused of sexual abuse involving 10,667 people in the 50-year period studied. This amounts to accusations against about 4 percent of the estimated 110,000 priests who served in the country during that period. In February 2005, the Office of Media Relations for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) reported that there were over 600 cases of sexual misconduct by priests and deacons reported in 2004. Most of the alleged abuse had occurred between 1970 and 1974 (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). Additionally, “confusion exists not only in understanding the depth of the problem but also the construction of the problem” (Mendola, 1998, p. 29).

The USCCB commissioned the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to conduct research on the nature and scope of the problem of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons after their meeting in Dallas in 2002. Their findings were published in February 2004. Some advocacy groups contend the report does not give a full picture of the scope of the abuse. The number of priests who sexually abuse minors is not a statistic that is generally agreed upon; however, the John Jay study is the most recent and extensive study that has been conducted using audit information from dioceses and eparchies in the United States.

Celibacy and Priests

When a priest is ordained, he takes a vow of celibacy. Mandatory celibacy has been a requirement for priests since the 4th century (Doyle, et al., 2006; Scheper-Hughes & Devine, 2003). “Mandated celibacy became universal law at the Second Lateran

Council in 1139. It has been enforced unevenly and often callously for the last nine centuries” according to Cozzens (2006, p. 63). A connection between clergy and sexual abuse can be traced back to the 4th century (Doyle, et al., 2006). The Code of Canon Law defines the vow of celibacy as “a special gift of God, by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and can more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and humankind” (Canon 277.1). The fact that priests, brothers, and sisters take this vow is often scrutinized. In light of all the reports of priest sexual abuse in the last two decades, many people question the validity of the vow of celibacy (Doyle, et al., 2006).

In order to try to make sense of the problem of sexual abuse, the public oversimplifies certain aspects of the vowed life. One oversimplification is that vowing celibacy distorts one’s sexuality, resulting in a larger proportion of men with sexual problems within the priesthood. In fact, research has shown that psychological problems that give rise to child sexual abuse have developed before the man enters into a formation program for the priesthood (Rossetti, 2002). *The Report of the Archdiocesan Commission of Enquiry into the Sexual Abuse of Children by Members of the Clergy* (The Winter Report) concluded that they were not able to establish a direct correlation between priestly celibacy and child sexual abuse and that the incidence of child sexual abuse by clergy is not higher than the general population (Winter, et al., 1990, Volume 1).

Added to the reality that priests take a vow of celibacy, along with other vows, is the fact that there are men in the priesthood who are homosexual. The issue of

homosexuality in the priesthood has also raised questions in public opinion. Much of the criticism over celibacy and the priesthood includes the belief that allowing homosexual men to be ordained increases the risks for child sexual abuse by priests (Jenkins, 1996). Most priests who have had allegations of sexual abuse made against them were ordained before homosexuality became so evident in the seminary and in dioceses; therefore, the argument that there is a direct connection between the increased presence of homosexuals and child sexual abuse is highly unlikely (Greeley, 2004). Focusing on homosexuality within the priesthood has become the scapegoat for this current crisis that the Catholic Church is facing (Finkelhor, 2003). Most priests are faithful to their vow of celibacy regardless of their sexual orientation.

A proportion of men and women in the vowed religious life may be attracted to the celibate lifestyle consciously or unconsciously in order to avoid dealing with their own sexuality (Sipe, 1990). Scholars do not agree on whether or not priests are likely to be sex offenders compared to men who do not take a vow of celibacy. Some scholars contend that celibacy is a strong factor for sexual abuse in the Catholic Church (Scheper-Hughes, 1998), while others report that celibacy is not a mitigating factor (Greeley, 2004; Rossetti, 1996). Then there are clinicians and researchers who say that there are a number of men who enter the priesthood as a way to control their sexual compulsions for children (Burkett & Bruni, 1993) or that celibacy creates a patriarchal system that allows for power and control and creates a place where abusers can hide (Kennedy, 2001).

Nonetheless, the problem of sexual abuse of minors is not restricted to Catholic clergy, and there is no intrinsic correlation between priest sexual abuse and celibacy (Cozzens, 2002).

Access to Minors

In the film *Going My Way* Father O'Malley (played by Bing Cosby) portrayed a young priest who mentored a group of young boys. This image of priests has been a common conception held by many people. Children were taught to give the priest their respect. Many Catholic men can tell stories of early morning walks in the dark to serve mass for Father (Sipe, 1990). Priests were given easy access to the children through a variety of avenues, such as orphanages, schools, parishes, and altar boy outings. In addition to the settings developed by the very structure of priests' duties, priests also had access to minors through their close friendships with families they had met through their interactions in parishes. Priests as family friends held a place of honor and trust with the parents (Sipe, 1990). Parents thought nothing of turning their child over to the priest for guidance or giving the priest easy access to their homes, often to the extent that the priest had his own room. Most would never have thought that a priest was capable of something as destructive and immoral as sexual abuse (McGeary et al, 2002). Research shows, that in general, survivors of child sexual abuse previously looked up to their abusers as someone they admired and wanted to be like (Sipe, 1990).

Studies of survivors of clergy sexual abuse suggest that their abusers singled out vulnerable members of their congregations in order to get closer to them (Dish & Avery,

2001). Fortune (1999), in her work with women who were sexually abused by their pastors, observed that the pastors preyed on vulnerable women. In their research on sexualized professional relationships, Disch and Avery (2001) found that many of the people they surveyed described their experience as emotional dependence fostered by their abuser. Similar to other child sexual perpetrators, priests often groom their victims before victimizing the child. Grooming is a behavior that is typical of predators. They will often show extra attention, buy gifts, and go on outings with their intended victim, gradually building a level of trust and secrecy setting the victim up for victimization. For example, a victim states, "Though I did not know it, I was being groomed by Brother X for his own sexual gratification" (Christopher, 2002, p. 13). Media reports regarding clergy sexual abuse typically focus on boys as the victims. Several books and articles that can be found on this topic refer to boys, often altar servers, as being the primary target for predator priests (Bruni & Burkett, 2002; Dockecki, 2004).

Church's Response

In November 1991, the USCCB published a statement committing the Catholic Church's support in advocacy for children and families. They reported that the statistics on child abuse were alarmingly high, and they had many recommendations on what should be done to solve this problem. However, they did not acknowledge that they were aware of the severity of the problem within the Catholic Church or how they were going to address the problem within the Church (Bush, 1993). Sociologist Andrew Greeley (2002) believes that the bishops acted in sinful ways in how they responded initially to

this crisis. He states, “Their gravest sin was not to consider the victims, not even to talk to the victims and their families, to blind themselves to the terrible wreckage that sexual abuse causes for human lives” (p. 111).

At the bishop’s meeting in Dallas in 2002, Bishop Wilton Gregory, the president of the American Catholic Conference of Bishops, planned to take action on setting reforms for dealing with the issues of clergy sexual misconduct. His reforms passed almost unanimously. However, when the protocols were sent to Rome for approval, the curial review board did not agree with all the reforms the American bishops had outlined. A committee of American cardinals met with the curia, and when they returned to the United States, the cardinals were satisfied with the restrictions placed by the curia (Greeley, 2004). This led to another wave of outcries from the public. The feelings among many people who were victims of priest sexual abuse, either as primary victims or the family members, was that the Catholic Church was sweeping the reality of priest sexual abuse under the rug (Burkett & Bruni, 1993; Muller & Kenney, 2004; Quade, 1992; Steinfels, 2003).

Lay Catholics want the bishops to discontinue the era of secrecy within the Catholic Church. Bishops have been accused of covering up the abuse scandal with money and coercion (Steinfels, 2003). They are demanding that the bishops be open and honest with them. They want and need information on the true breadth and depth of the

scandal (E. P. Flynn, 2003). Lay Catholics have been deeply troubled by the sexual abuse crisis and want to help create a change, but they are met with opposition from bishops (Muller & Kenney, 2004).

Catholics in the United States

Devotion to the Catholic Church in the United States has entered a new era. Catholics in America are calling bishops to be accountable for the decisions they have made regarding the issue of sexual misconduct in the Catholic Church. They believe the bishops have a responsibility to the victims, their families, their dioceses, and to non-offending priests. Victims and their families need to be able to tell their stories in order to heal (Dale, 2006), and the hierarchy needs to listen to them and not try to keep them quiet with threats or by insisting on nondisclosure clauses when settlements have been made (E. P. Flynn, 2003).

Catholics feel a profound sense of betrayal by the institutional Church. There are several accounts in the literature that attest to the fact that when families went to their pastors and/or bishops, they were not treated pastorally (Bruni & Burkett, 2002; Cozzens, 2002; Gibson, 2003). Cozzens believes that the laity in the Catholic Church are taking a lead in asking for more accountability from the bishops. He states,

The weapons of silence and denial are slowly being turned into plowshares—sadly, less by responsible action on the part of the church leaders than by the courageous initiative of the victims, supported by family, friends, and members of their parish community. Reacting to the pleas of victims given a new voice by a

steady stream of media reports of clergy abuse, the church no longer remains silent (p. 141).

Catholics want the bishops to discontinue the era of secrecy within the Catholic Church. They are demanding that the bishops be open and honest with them. Michael Crosby, a Capuchin Franciscan Priest, examines the Catholic Church system through the lens of family systems theory. He illustrates how the concepts of a closed family system are found within the church system. He explains, "When family theory is applied to the institutional Catholic Church...the concepts get expressed in the institutional processes of thinking, passions, and behavior of the Catholic Church" (1991, p. 93). Crosby agrees that there needs to be serious examination of modes of operation among the church's leaders.

Some scholars see a declining Church while others see the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church as an opportunity for growth. Archbishop Harry Flynn agrees that the Catholic Church has an opportunity for healing and spiritual growth. Archbishop Flynn believes that Catholics are entering an era of "unshakable faith and the emergence of a church stronger and more full of love and hope than we humanly could ever imagine" (H. J. Flynn, 2002, p. 16).

The literature on clergy sexual abuse shows that families are divided in their continuing devotion to the Catholic Church. Their reactions to their faith in the Catholic Church differ from remaining loyal to the church to leaving the Catholic Church (Gibson, 2003). Current literature postulates that there has been a mass exodus of Catholics

leaving the Church because of the abuse crisis (The Investigative Staff of *The Boston Globe*, 2002; Bruni & Burkett, 2002; Dale, 2006; Gibson, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks guided this research. The researcher employed the phenomenological constructs of research to gather and analyze data. Family systems theory was the conceptual theory the researcher used to frame her work.

Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research recognizes the lived experience of individuals and how they make meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 1998). In a phenomenological study, the focus is on how people describe their experience and how they make sense of the experience (Patton, 2002). Anderson and Goolishian (1988) define human systems, such as a family, as “language-generating, meaning-generating systems” (p. 377). In phenomenological research, the goal is to get to the essence of the experience (Creswell, 1998). The assumption for this study was that families who have had a member sexually abused by a priest have a shared experience and that they have generated meanings specific to them based on their experiences.

The primary method of data collection in phenomenological research is considered to be the interview because it provides a situation where the participants' lived experiences can be explored (Kvale, 1996). The interview process is more than questions and responses between people; it is a collaborative process that provides aesthetically rich narratives (Morrissette, 1999).

Family Systems Theory

The conceptual framework of family systems theory provides the paradigm for understanding the experiences of families who have had their trust betrayed by a priest perpetrator. Family systems theory is based on the assumptions that systems are relational, recursive, and reciprocal. The actions of one member will in turn affect other members, and the subsequent actions will continue a spiral of effects on the system (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). Rather than focusing on individuals in order to understand the dynamics of the family, systems theory focuses on the family unit to understand how the family operates as a whole (Brown & Christensen, 1986).

Linear causality.

The concept of linear causality implies that changes occur in a linear one-way fashion. Systems theory focuses on communication as circular rather than linear because what affects *A* affects *B*, affecting change in *C*. A change in any part of this system will, in turn, affect the entire system (Brown & Christensen, 1986). Systems theorists do not concentrate on cause and effect; rather, the focus is on the relational dynamics.

Subsystems exist within systems such as siblings, parents, and the larger community. The arrangement of these subsystems is hierarchical (Colapinto, 1991). In addition, subsystems can form within communities. This is evident when agencies are brought into the family systems for various reasons, such as child maltreatment.

Boundaries.

Another concept of systems theory is the concept of boundaries, permeable borders between members within and outside of the system. Boundaries that are either too rigid or too permeable can create system malfunctions (Colapinto, 1991). In order for systems to continue to meet the various demands of the environment, they must be flexible. A family who is too rigid in its rules, not being able to be open and flexible, lacks the concept referred to as variety.

Homeostasis.

Another fundamental concept is homeostasis or equilibrium. A system's primary function is to maintain balance within the family or an emotional equilibrium. This need is inherent in some systems, and all attempts are made to maintain a balance although the balance may be an unhealthy balance (Nichols & Schwartz, 1984).

Narrative.

The term narrative refers to the discursive way humans organize and give meanings to the events in their lives (Anderson, 1997). According to Anderson, narrative is a dynamic process that constitutes the way that we organize the events and experiences of our lives to make sense of them (p. 212). A family's reality is socially constructed through the dialogical interchange and narratives that flow back and forth among the members (Etherington, 2000).

Effects of Child Sexual Abuse on the Family

Acts of kindness have rippling effects, as do acts of destruction. "In everyday circumstances, a single action with one member of the family can cause ripples of disruption to all other members. In a case of sexual abuse, it is more similar to having a hand grenade thrown into the center of the family" (Connolly, 2003, p. 5). The effects of child sexual abuse reach far beyond the primary victim. Families, congregations, and the faith community are all affected. Remer and Elliot (1988b) examined the impact of sexual assault of married women on the family, children, and marital relations. In their conjoint therapy work with women who were rape victims, Remer and Elliot realized that often the male's process in recovery would be disharmonious with the woman's recovery.

There may be a lag between the time of the woman's assault and the husband's learning of the assault, and the same may be true in families. Each family member deals with the offense in his/her own way, just as people do in response to other aspects of destruction. Research suggests that when a child is abused, the abuse happens not only to the victim but to the family as well (Remer & Elliot, 1988b).

Including family members in the therapeutic process when possible can be beneficial to the family. When addressing the needs of secondary victims, there are essentially two dynamics that should be addressed: the family members' need for support and increasing the family's understanding of the effects of the abuse on the person who was abused. Support for the family allows the family to realize there is someone available to them. Secondly, an exploration of the effects of abuse can aid the family in its

support of the person who was abused (Remer & Elliot, 1988b). The effects of child sexual abuse can be devastating to the family, yet frequently the family members become the forgotten victims of child sexual abuse (Keable, 2001).

Sexual abuse can have several effects on the family, such as shame, feelings of betrayal, fear, stigmatization, anger, placing blame on the victim, a need to take action, and more (McCourt & Peel, 1998). In addition, there is the danger of family members taking sides, splitting between those who believe the abuse occurred and those who do not. Family schisms cause extra suffering for victims and the family, especially when they find themselves cut off from previous support systems (Keable, 2001).

In addition, siblings of the abused child may feel threatened and need to be reassured that they will be protected. Alternatively, they may feel shunned or forgotten because of extra attention being given to the child who was abused (Benyie, 1998). The fear of exposure, guilt, shame, and the perceived loss of spirituality for all members can keep the abused person silent about the abuse. Sometimes the child who was abused is afraid that if he /she reveals the secret, the exposure will rob his/her family members of their faith (Doyle, Sipe, & Wall, 2006; Fater & Mullaney, 2000). The process of healing requires the balance of an individual, his/her needs and wants, and the system's needs and wants so that individuals in the system can become interdependent.

Families and Priest Sexual Abuse

Research on the lasting effects on survivors of sexual abuse indicates that victims have greater difficulties staying in healthy relationships, dealing with depression, and

keeping jobs, as well as having other problems (Burkett & Bruni, 1993, Crosby, 2006; Disch & Avery, 2001; Roberts, O'Connor, Dunn, & Golding, 2004; Woody, 2002). Furthermore, research suggests that child sexual abuse by a trusted religious figure, such as a Catholic priest, results in a significant decline in the victim's self-esteem and ability to trust others (Burkett & Bruni, 1993, Jenkins, 1996; Rossetti, 1995). An added dimension of the damage of clergy misconduct is destruction caused by a religious figure whom people trusted to be their spiritual guide. Although there is no research on the effects of priest abuse on the family system, research on families and child sexual abuse victims provides information that might be useful in this situation. Distrust, anger, and relational difficulties and other effects felt by victims reach beyond the victim to the victim's family and future generations (McCourt & Peel, 1998). Books such as *Unto Us a Child: Abuse and Deception in the Catholic Church* by J. Philips (2002) give striking portrayals of the destruction and systemic effects abuse by clergy has on the family.

Anger at the hierarchy within the Catholic Church has been an overwhelming effect for many victim/survivors and their families. As one survivor explains,

The hard truth for me, and I suggest for many others, is that my anger was rooted in the cries of a young boy who was betrayed and manipulated and violated not by a stranger, but by a member of his family. In our home priests were not just people from church: they were part of our extended family....I...became increasingly emotionally shut off from family, peers, and people in positions of authority (Sullivan, 2004, p. 12).

An additional effect that families experience is the feeling of being stripped of their trust in God for not protecting them. Religion plays an important part in the lives of many people. Kudlac (1991) contended, "Religion and religious beliefs are, for many people, a primary response to life, a reason for and focus of existence, a means of making sense of the world" (p. 277). Added to this, when the perpetrator is a priest, there is the effect that the church did not protect them and that they have lost support from their faith community. For example, one family whose son had been sexually abused by a priest lost their son to suicide and lost their trust in the church who would not listen to them. In the midst of the crisis the parents remain in the Catholic Church; however, their children do not. The father states, "God didn't hurt my son [the priest] did" (Russell, 2002, p. 53).

It is common for survivors to feel guilt and/or shame after being sexually abused (Horst, 1998). Family members also may feel ashamed, hurt, angry, and embarrassed. These various emotions may be directed at different people, including the victim. Children abused by priests keep their secret for a variety of reasons. In cases of sexual abuse by a priest, a particularly strong reason is fear of not being believed (Sullivan, 2004). Many Catholics could or would not believe that a priest could abuse a child. Some victim/survivors relate their stories of telling their parents about the abuse and being slapped, punished, and rebuked for telling what parents felt was a lie (Investigative Staff of *The Boston Globe*, 2002).

An added reality in the matter of child sexual abuse by priests is that there are times when other priests, office staff, and family members know about the abuse and are

afraid to speak up. There is a relational component in the problem of priest sexual abuse that needs to be addressed in the family and in parishes (Frawley-O'Dea, 2002). Families are bound by ties of loyalty or the obligation to help a family member if that person is in trouble. Loyalty ties often cause the member of the family to elevate group needs and values above those of the individual member. A downside to family loyalty is that the ties also allow a family or faith community to be blinded to the abuse in an effort to protect the church (Benyei, 1998).

In family therapy, therapists work with the system. When working with families, therapists need to be aware of what the victim is going through while also helping the other family members with their own recovery process. In families where child sexual abuse by a priest has occurred, the therapist will have to include discussions regarding issues of trust in the church, God, and priests. Families tell their stories of psychological anguish which was so immeasurable that even with the passing of time, the memories of the abuse continue to afflict the family (H. J. Flynn, 2002).

Some members of the family may continue to practice Catholicism while others may denounce all forms of organized religion or denounce the presence of God altogether. If the level of differentiation within the family is low, family members may have difficulty expressing themselves on these matters (Benyei, 1998).

The Need for Research

Continuing research into the ramifications of clergy sexual abuse is imperative for a number of reasons. An extensive search of published materials in the field of clergy

sexual misconduct produced no empirical research on families where clergy sexual abuse has occurred. A crisis event such as the sexual abuse crisis within the Catholic Church can create an opportunity for growth. A product of this crisis can be the wealth of information on the effects of priest sexual abuse gained through further inquiry and research. Research such as this is an opportunity for positive changes, both in terms of intervention and policy, to accrue within the Catholic Church as well as within other faith denominations. Currently a limited number of research studies have focused on the effects of child sexual abuse by priests on the victims' emotional, psychological, and relational development. Research regarding child sexual abuse by priests has been conducted since the 1980s (Sipe, 1990) and continues because of the events within the Catholic Church since 2002; however, more research on this topic is needed (Loftus, 2004). Nonetheless, there is no evidence of any research studies published or conducted where the purpose of the research was to explore the effects priest sexual abuse had on the family members of the victim.

This study was conducted in order to explore the effects of priest sexual abuse on the family. Studies on the effects of child sexual abuse on the family reveal common themes of shame, feelings of betrayal, lack of trust, and anger. Phenomenological research gives the researcher a rich description of families' experiences. This type of research is needed in order to get a more accurate picture of how priest sexual abuse has affected the family. A qualitative research approach was used as this type of research

design allows the researcher to look at relationships within the system in order to see the larger picture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Summary

While child sexual abuse is being studied in greater earnest, studies on child sexual abuse by clergy are lacking. There is limited anecdotal literature in the area of clergy sexual abuse on children and the effects on the family. Approximately four percent of priests have been accused of sexual abuse of minors. Historically priests have been revered and looked up to, often becoming surrogate members of the family. Bishops began to pay attention to the crisis of priest sexual abuse in the 1990s, but it was not until 2002 that the bishops considered creating policies to protect children. This lag in policymaking and the apparent apathy from the hierarchy has left many lay Catholics discouraged and angry. Families and faith communities are demanding accountability from bishops. A systemic framework was used for this study. Anecdotal accounts of the effect on families in clergy sexual misconduct are included in the literature review. An extensive search of published materials in the field of clergy sexual misconduct produced no empirical research on the effects on the family when a priest sexually abuses a child.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the systemic effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a Catholic priest. The results from this study will aid family therapists and other professionals who work with victims and their families. A qualitative research approach was used. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to look at relationships within the system in order to see the larger picture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Data were collected through in-person and phone interviews with family members where a priest had sexually abused a member of the family before the child was 18. The interviews were audio recorded for transcription. Phenomenological research methods were utilized in order to capture the rich meanings of family experiences.

Research Design

Phenomenological research recognizes the lived experience of individuals and how they make meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 1998). In a phenomenological study, the focus is on how people describe their experience and how they make sense of the experience (Patton, 2002). Anderson and Goolishian (1988) define human systems, such as a family, as “language-generating, meaning-generating systems” (p. 377). Meaning is socially constructed, there is no one ‘truth,’ and experiences have multiple meanings (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). In phenomenological research, the goal is to get to the essence

of the experience (Creswell, 1998). The assumption for this study was that families who have had a member sexually abused by a priest have a shared experience and that they have generated meanings specific to them based on their experiences.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection in phenomenological research is considered to be the interview because it provides a situation where the participants' lived experiences can be explored (Kvale, 1996). The interview process is more than questions and responses between people; it is a collaborative process that provides aesthetically rich narratives (Morrissette, 1999). The researcher, using a semi-structured interview protocol, interviewed family members. The interviews were audio recorded for accuracy. The participants decided the locations for the interviews. In phenomenological research, the recommendation is to interview participants in their natural setting (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996).

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the interview process is central to gathering data. The researcher is the instrument. When developing a qualitative interview protocol, Creswell (1998) suggests drafting a central question under which the researcher places sub questions. After drafting a central question and sub questions, two research questions crystallized. The research questions that guide this study were:

Research Question 1. What are the systemic effects within the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a priest?

Research Question 2. What do family therapists need to know about working with families who have experienced clergy sexual abuse?

Two questions were the focus of the interview. The researcher used prompts for clarification (Appendix E). The questions were:

Interview Question 1: Tell me your story.

Interview Question 2: What do you think family therapists need to know when working with a family where clergy sexual abuse has occurred?

Protection of Human Participants

This study underwent reviews by the Institutional Review Board of Texas Woman's University to protect the integrity of the study and its participants. The participants' confidentiality was protected by using a coding system. Numerical and alphabetical codes were assigned to each participant. Consecutive coding began with 002B and ended with 200. Participants 1 and 7 did not meet the criteria and were not included in the study. Only the researcher has access to identifying information. The participant's name appears on the consent form. No identifying information appears on the demographic form and transcripts. Transcripts, audio recordings, consent forms, and the list of participants who requested a summary of the research results were kept in a locked cabinet. All participant identifying data, audio recordings, and transcripts will be destroyed within two years of this study's completion.

Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions during the recruitment process as well as during the interview process. The researcher inquired if the participants

had any questions at the end of the interview. Participants were given a referral list of professional therapists and victim advocates (Appendix F). The referral list was tailored for the participants in their area. The participants in states that were not covered in the list were asked if they would like additional referrals in their area. No participant asked for additional referrals. In addition, the participants were able to contact the researcher directly at any point during and after the research process. Participants had the opportunity to e-mail the researcher or call if they needed additional help.

Participants

Participants for the study included the parents, spouses, siblings, and children of the person who had been sexually abused as a minor by a priest. Participants were over 18 years of age. A representation of 15 to 20 families was the target. The size of the sample for qualitative studies should be adequate to reinforce the study's purpose while maintaining the integrity of the study. Kvale (1996) suggests a sample size of 5-25 participants for a qualitative study. Participants for the study were recruited on a local, statewide, and national level in order to obtain a representation of at least 15 participants who have had a member of their family sexually victimized as a minor by a priest.

Purposive and snowball sampling were used for this study.

Sampling Procedures

In qualitative studies, when the researcher requires access to a certain group for the study, he or she gains access to the group through a gatekeeper. A gatekeeper is defined as someone who is in a position to have access to the group and can assist the researcher in

gaining access to the group (Creswell, 1998). Dioceses are required by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (2002) to have assistance coordinators to help persons who allege abuse by a priest find adequate assistance for their various needs. Several diocesan assistance coordinators were contacted for their help as gatekeepers. Assistance coordinators (also referred to as advocates) were enlisted in distributing recruitment materials to persons within their programs who expressed interest in participating in the study (Appendix A). Flyers were distributed at support group meetings, at workshops, and to individuals and professionals who work with this population. Additionally, newspaper advertisements (Appendix B) were placed in diocesan newspapers and public newspapers with the aid of the assistance coordinators or with permission from the appropriate offices. Potential participants called the diocesan assistance coordinators' office or the researcher for further information. When the participant indicated his or her desire to participate in the study, the researcher arranged a convenient date, time, and place for the interview. Because of the distance the interviewer had to travel for the interviews, she had several interviews scheduled before she traveled to each location.

In addition to using gatekeepers and recruitment materials for recruitment of participants, the researcher used snowball sampling. Snowball sampling, a nonprobability technique, was conducted by locating participants who met the criteria: adults (over 18) where priest sexual abuse of a minor had occurred within their family. This technique is used when participants may be difficult to locate (Babbie, 2001; Gable, 1994). In this

case, family members of priest sexual abuse victims are not a readily identifiable group of people. When setting up the appointment with potential participants, the researcher asked if they knew other family members who would be interested in participating in the study. All participation in this study was voluntary.

After 15 participants agreed to participate in the study, the target of 15 participants was met. After three additional family members were interviewed, the researcher suspended her data collection because data saturation occurred. Saturation occurs in data analysis when no new information or themes emerge (Creswell, 1998). The total number of participants was 18.

Pilot Study

Pilot studies are used to minimize potential errors and improve the credibility of the qualitative study (Sussman & Gilgun, 1996). The pilot study for this research included these protocols. The first three participants interviewed served as a pilot study in order to evaluate whether the interview questions captured the necessary information to address the research questions. The researcher inquired if there was something else the participants thought she should have added or done differently. No changes were made.

Interview Procedures

The interview process is central to the study. Two significant concepts in the interview process are respect and neutrality. It is the responsibility of the researcher as the instrument to convey an attitude of respect to the participants while at the same time maintaining a neutral stance (Patton, 2002). The researcher is a vowed member of a

Catholic Religious Order within the United States. She grew up in a strong Catholic environment during a time within the Catholic Church when priests and sisters were thought of as having no faults. She has been in the convent for over 20 years. The researcher's role and association with the Catholic Church may have had an effect on the participants. The degree of openness on the part of the participants may have been dependent on their opinion of the researcher's position within the Church. Participants may have refrained from responses that are more critical in an effort to fulfill their role as obedient Catholics. Alternatively, potential participants may have been reluctant to participate in the study because of their feelings toward the Church.

The researcher made every effort to suspend her biases when she interviewed family members. However, bias is intrinsic in all research (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). Bracketing is a technique that was used to suspend the researcher's preconceptions or biases so that the participants' true experience of the phenomenon was revealed to the researcher (Wimpenny, 2000). The researcher presented herself as a caring professional woman, dressed in professional business attire, to the participants.

The researcher arrived at the agreed upon place for the interview in a timely manner. After greeting the participant and thanking him or her for agreeing to be a participant in the study, she set up the digital recorder and/or audio recorder. A digital recorder was used because of its small size as well as the quality of the recording. In addition, an audio recorder was used as a back up measure. As a precaution, the researcher had with her an extra tape recorder, tapes, and batteries in case of equipment

malfunction. She also had paper and pens with which to take notes during the interview. The researcher ran a short test with the participant to insure that the recorder was picking up his or her voice.

After the researcher set up the equipment, she began with the interview protocol. The interview protocol (Appendix E) provided the researcher the opportunity to set the stage for the interview by giving the participants a sense of who the researcher was as a person before proceeding with the standardized open-ended interview questions. The researcher went over the consent form (Appendix C) with the participant. She clarified any questions the participant may have had and then asked the participant to sign two copies of the consent form. One copy of the consent form was left with the participant as well as a referral list of professionals (Appendix F) and the researcher's business card. The researcher provided the participant with a referral list including therapists' and local diocesan advocates' phone numbers if he or she felt a need to speak to a counselor because of the interview.

The proposed time for the interview process was a maximum of 90 minutes. While the majority of the interviews were within the allotted period, two interviews went over the 90-minute period. The interview consisted of two open-ended questions and demographic questions. Patton (2002) provides four reasons for using the standardized open-ended questions in qualitative inquiry:

1. The exact questions used will be available for review.
2. Variation is minimized among interviewers.

3. The interview is focused.

4. The conformity of the interview aids in data analysis.

The researcher used probes (Appendix G) when needed during the interview. The researcher obtained demographic information (Appendix D) from the participants at the beginning of the interview rather than at the end as was initially proposed. Demographic information can be boring and intrusive; therefore, scholars advise interviewers to gather demographic information at the end of the interview (Patton, 2002). However, the researcher noted in the first interview that having the demographic information at the beginning of the interview gave her a foundation on which to continue. This follows Moustakas' (1994) philosophy that "the interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participants will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively" (p. 114). Because of the topic of the interview, the researcher believed that it was important to spend a few minutes in social conversation in order to establish rapport with the participant. After the interview was complete, the researcher thanked the participant.

Copies of the summary of the results were sent to the participants who requested a copy of the results. They were encouraged to contact the researcher or the research advisor with any concerns or questions regarding the results of the study. The only direct benefit to the participant was that, at the completion of the study, he/she received a summary of the results upon request.

Treatment of Data

After the interview, the researcher listened to the recordings once before sending the recordings to the transcriber to be transcribed as verbatim print copies. The researcher listened to the recording all the way through, making notes as she listened to the interview. Notations were made of any recollections regarding silence, gestures, head nods, laughter, etc. that occurred during the interview. Field notes were written during and after the completion of each interview.

When the researcher received the print copies of the transcripts, she reviewed them for accuracy. The transcriber made notations of anything that was not clear and needed clarification. Each transcription included the participant's code number and date of interview on it. The researcher listened to the tapes again and filled in areas on the transcripts where the transcriber had left out or typed an incorrect word. The researcher added the pauses, voice inflections, and other non-verbal communication cues that took place during the interview. Three hard copies were printed: one was used for notations and color-coding, another was used for cutting the transcript to organize the categories. Patton (2002) recommends a copy for cutting and pasting even if the researcher is using a computer program for data analysis. The third printed copy and the diskette were locked away for safekeeping. The master list with participants' names and codes was stored separately from the transcripts and demographic information.

Data Analysis Procedures

A qualitative study allows the researcher to gather rich narratives. The way the researcher analyzes, interprets, and presents the data is important. "If a researcher presents data without analysis, the data excerpts necessarily will be partial, in that they will focus on one aspect of the phenomenon being studied" (Piercy & Benson, 2005, p. 108). Once the researcher completed the interviews, she sorted through and organized the data by reading the verbatim transcripts several times.

Data analysis for phenomenological research, according to Creswell (1998), consists of several steps. Briefly, the steps include developing a list of meaning statements from individuals, a grouping of meaning units, textural description of what happened, a structural description of how the phenomenon was experienced, and a description of the experience. There are several techniques for analyzing qualitative data. The researcher used Moustakas' (1994) method of analyzing phenomenological data as modified from the Van Kaam method of data analysis. Similar to Creswell (1998), Moustakas suggests the following steps for analysis: preliminary grouping, reduction and elimination, clustering, identifying themes, constructing individual textural and individual descriptions from each participant including verbatim examples. After these steps were completed, the researcher developed a composite narrative of the meanings and essence of the experience of the group as a whole.

Researcher as Person

The researcher realized conveying the emotional tone of the findings was important for this study. Although the researcher chose not to use alternate or aesthetic forms of data representation such as poetry, charts, drawings, etc., as suggested by Piercy and Benson (2005), she emphasized the emotional tone of the findings through her narrative of the research findings. In her deliberations on the “how” of presenting the data analysis and discussion chapters, the researcher realized she was in a writing quandary. While the researcher strived to present a scholarly narrative of her findings, she also wanted to insure that the voices of the participants were heard. This led the researcher to the debate of whether to present these chapters in the first person. The voices in this study are the families as well as the researcher’s. Webb (1992) contends that writing in the first person is acceptable when the writer has played a crucial role in the shaping of the data; in fact, she writes, “... in such instances, not to use the first person is deceptive and biased” (p. 747). Using the third person in scholarly writing conveys the impression that the ideas being discussed are impartial and value-free (Webb). The author chose to write her reflections on self as researcher in the first person.

Credibility

A technique used to improve credibility in qualitative research is triangulation. There are various forms of triangulation that a researcher may employ. In this study, the researcher utilized triangulating analysts. Triangulating analysts are two or more persons who independently analyze the data. Their findings are then compared with those of the

researcher. Triangulating is used to check bias in data analysis (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004; Patton, 2002). Two family therapists familiar with qualitative research methods analyzed and coded three of the transcripts looking for central themes. Panel members were given the typed transcripts of the first, third, and fifth interview to evaluate consistency in identifying themes. No identifying information was included in the transcripts, and the panel members did not see any demographic information. Each transcript was coded with the participant's code. The researcher compared her data analysis with the analysis from the two therapists for similar themes as well as for any new themes.

Ethical Considerations

By their very nature interviews have the potential of being life-changing for the participant and the interviewer (Patton, 2002). According to Patton, participants often reveal more information than they had intended. The purpose of the interview is to gather data, not to provide therapy. It is the responsibility of the interviewer to maintain a balance of empathy and neutrality during the interview process. The interviewer was alert to emotional discomfort on the part of the participants, and she gave them opportunities to take a break when needed. The interviewer did not give advice; however, she gave the participants a referral list with the names and phone numbers of therapists and local diocesan advocates.

Another ethical concern was the potential for loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality was protected to the extent that is allowed by law. Names remained

anonymous by the use of codes. Only the researcher and the transcriber had access to the digital and audio recordings. Names that were mentioned during the interview were deleted in the transcriptions. The digital recordings, hard copies of the transcriptions, and the computer diskettes containing the audio recording and the transcription text files were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. All diskettes, as well as printed and recorded materials, will be destroyed two years after the completion of the study. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be published in the researcher's dissertation as well as in other research publications. However, no names or other identifying information will be included in any publication.

A third consideration for this study is the care of the researcher. Because of the intensity of the topic, and because of who the researcher is, there was a potential for emotional and physical harm to the interviewer. As a safeguard for the interviewer, she had in place support systems that she utilized for de-briefing without breaching confidentiality. This included her advisor, her spiritual director, and a nun within her order. The de-briefing process in itself became a part of the data (Patton, 2002).

Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore the systemic effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a Catholic priest. Participants for the study were recruited with the help of gatekeepers, recruitment flyers, newspaper ads, and bulletin announcements. In order to have an adequate sample, the researcher desired a target group of 15 to 20 participants, giving the researcher a minimum of 15

participants. Participants were recruited on a local, statewide, and national level to the extent needed in order to obtain a representation of 15 families who have had a member of their family sexually victimized as a minor by a priest.

Data were gathered using structured open-ended questions. Interviews were digitally audio recorded and transcribed into print copies. The first three participants interviewed served as a pilot study in order to evaluate whether the interview questions captured the necessary information to address the research questions. The participants were able to provide deep descriptions of their stories; therefore, the questions were not modified. Two marriage and family therapists were used for triangulation of data analysis.

The researcher maintained a professional stance while interviewing participants. She was sensitive to the potential personal risks to the participants by being a part of the study. The participants' confidentiality was protected to the extent the law allows.

In qualitative studies, the researcher as a person is a part of the research process (Patton, 2002). Because of the intensity of the topic, there is a potential for emotional harm to the interviewer. As a safeguard for the interviewer, she had in place support systems that she utilized for de-briefing without breaching confidentiality.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of this phenomenological study on the effects of priest sexual abuse on the family are presented in this chapter. The researcher conducted a pilot study of the first three interviews to determine if the questions and her style of interviewing allowed the participants the freedom to give adequate descriptions of their experiences. No changes were made in the interview process. The researcher interviewed 20 participants who volunteered for the study. Two participants did not meet the criteria for the study; therefore, they were not included in the results. The sample for this study was 18 participants. Confidentiality was protected by assigning a combination number/letter code to each participant. Triangulators were used to help with the trustworthiness of the research. In this chapter, the researcher presents the demographics of the sample, the essence of the interviews, and a narrative of the emerging themes.

Sample Description

The sample size ($n = 18$) consisted of 77.7% ($n = 14$) female and 22.2% ($n = 4$) male, representing 12 families. The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 84 with a mean of 53.5. The researcher conducted individual interviews with the exception of one husband and wife couple. Twelve families were represented in this study.

The Families

Each participant received a participant code that consisted of a number and letter. The numbers (2-20) represent the individual and the letters (B-O) represent the family. In several cases, more than one family member represented the family. This added authenticity to the participants' stories given that the family's voice could be heard through more than one member. However, along with the multiple voices, the individual voices of the members were heard in their narratives. A brief description is presented in order to introduce the families. The researcher included a pictorial diagram (genogram) of each family system (Appendix H) in the appendices.

Family B: There are four girls in this family. The participant is the oldest child and she is speaking about her youngest sister. The family was told about the abuse more than 20 years ago; however, it was never talked about again until recently. With her sister's support and encouragement, the victim has begun to tell her story. The abuse began when the victim was in early elementary and the older sister was in high school. Two of the sisters are not as involved in supporting the victim. The priest was a close family friend who often stayed at the family's home and went on vacations with the family.

Family C: This family was represented by the wife of a man who was abused over 65 years ago by a priest who was also a member of the family, an uncle. The couple has been married over 35 years. He told his wife about his abuse 34 years ago. He has never told his children or anyone else in the family. The couple rarely mentions the abuse.

Family D: The researcher interviewed a brother and sister both in their early 20s. The participants' mother was sexually abused as a young adolescent. The mother was close to the priest who served as a parent figure to her. She went to him for counsel. The abuse lasted for five years. The brother and sister are the priest's offspring. The daughter learned of the abuse 12 years ago. The son learned about the abuse nine years ago.

Family E: The priest, a close family friend, abused this participant and her sister. The abuse lasted several years. For the participant it ended when she was in her late teens. She and her sister learned of each other's abuse last year. Family problems at home led this participant to confide and seek comfort from the priest. The family is divided in their support of these two women. Some members believe the participant should not have gone to the bishop to have the priest removed from ministry. The mother defends the priest because of the perceived good he did for the family.

Family H: The researcher interviewed the father in this family. At the time of the abuse, he had two sons; the younger was the victim. The mother was pregnant with a third son when they learned of the abuse. The parents learned about the abuse when a neighbor reported his suspicions to the parents. The father was closer to the priest than the mother was. The priest encouraged the parents to go on "date nights" where he would babysit. He would also encourage the couple to go away for the weekend while he watched the children. The younger son was six when the abuse started and it lasted about two years. The father remembers an incident that happened while they were away that did not make any sense until years later.

Family I: The victims in this family were the participant and her sister. The participant is the oldest in a family of six children. The abuse began for the participant when she was in the fourth grade and lasted until the eighth grade. For her sister the duration was the same, and she was about three years younger. The participant is now 49. She indicated she did not remember the abuse until 10 years ago. Her sister never forgot about her abuse; however, she never told anyone until after her sister remembered being abused. The abuser was a family friend and pastor at their church. The father never knew about the abuse. Her mother learned of the abuse shortly before she died.

Family J: The parents of the victim were interviewed together. Both participants are in their mid sixties. They have five children, two sons and three daughters. The priest was their pastor and a close family friend. He abused their youngest son from age six to age twelve. The parents were concerned about the “rough-housing” between the priest and their older son. When the older son was a teenager, the father asked him if the priest had ever been inappropriate with him. The son said no. They did not think about asking the younger son because he was so young at the time. The priest was considered a part of the family system. The parents learned of the abuse 11 years ago when the young man cried out for help. One of the couple’s daughters also agreed to participate in the study. She is in her mid thirties and has one young son. She learned of the abuse about six years ago.

Family K: There are 16 biological children in this family. The participant, a female, is one of the older children. Their parish priest abused her younger brother. The

mother used to confide in this priest, and the participant believes that he befriended/abused her brother because he knew about the family problems. She learned of the abuse ten years ago. She is 46. Her brother was 12 when the abuse began.

Family L: There were nine children in this family. The first child died when he was nine months old. The participants from this family included the mother, one of the older girls who was abused, and the victim's husband. The mother is in her 70s and the daughter and her husband are in their 50s. Of the eight children, the same priest abused three of the daughters and the youngest son. The youngest son told his family about the abuse about 15 years ago when he was in his mid 20s. The daughters were abused for many years during their elementary school years. The students, as well as some of the teachers, were aware of the sexual advances the priest made toward the girls in the school.

At that time, the nuns lived next to the church and school. In the 60s, pastors had control of the finances and physical facilities of the parish and school. When one of the nuns tried to protect the girls, the priest retaliated by withholding funds and other necessities. The priest was not a close family friend although he would often dine in their home, and the mother would send her daughters to his house with cakes and pies on a regular basis.

The husband said that they had been married for over 20 years before he learned of his wife's abuse. She told him about her abuse when his brother-in-law filed a suit against the priest. When the couple got married, the protocol in the Catholic Church was

to be married by the priest in the home parish. Since the husband was not Catholic, their only option was to be married in her parish; her abuser officiated at the wedding.

Family M: This 79-year-old participant has twelve children, five boys and seven girls. In addition, she raised nine foster children. The son who was abused is one of the middle children. The son was an altar boy for the priest, who also went on long vacations with the son. The family considered the priest a good influence on the children and he was considered a friend. The victim is in his 40s and was abused when he was an adolescent. The family learned of the abuse nine years ago. One of the victim's sisters also participated in the study. She is in her 40s and has four children.

Family N: This participant is a widow who is in her 80s. She had two adopted sons of the same age. A priest who was their youth leader abused them. The two children were together when the abuse occurred. The mother learned of the abuse three years ago. One of the sons committed suicide in his late teens, not long after the time of the abuse.

Family O: The young woman in family O is in her early 30s. Her mother was abused when she was in grade school. The mother's abuse happened around 1952; the mother is in her 60s. Her daughter was told about the abuse when she was a teenager during a time when the daughter was in counseling because of family problems.

The following information completes the description of the sample. Two ethnic groups were represented in the sample: Caucasian comprised 83.3% ($n = 15$) of the sample and 16.7% ($n = 3$) of the sample identified as Hispanic. The educational levels were elementary school ($n = 1$), high school ($n = 5$), bachelor's degree ($n = 6$), master's

degree (n = 3), and vocational degree (n = 2). Participants' economic level ranged from below \$20,000 (n = 1), \$20,000 to \$34,999 (n = 5), \$43,000 to \$52,999 (n = 6), to \$53,000 and above (n = 5). There were no participants who reported being in the \$35,000 to \$42,999 level. The overwhelming majority, 94.7% of the sample (n = 17), reported that they were Catholic. (One participant reported being National Catholic.¹) One participant did not practice any formal religion.

The researcher interviewed participants in five states: Texas (n = 5), Louisiana (n = 5), Kentucky (n = 6), Massachusetts (n = 1), and Florida (n = 1). All interviews were conducted in person with the exception of the interviews in Florida and Massachusetts which were conducted by telephone. The above and additional demographic information can be found in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

¹The Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) was founded in 1897 by a group of Polish immigrants in Scranton, Pennsylvania, led by Polish priest Father Francis Hodur.

Table 1

Participant's Study Number, Sex, Age, Race, and Religion

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Religion
2B	52	Female	Caucasian	National Catholic
3C	77	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
4D	25	Female	Hispanic	Catholic
5D	27	Male	Hispanic	Catholic
6E	46	Female	Hispanic	Catholic
8H	58	Male	Caucasian	Catholic
9I	49	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
10J	63	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
11J	63	Male	Caucasian	Catholic
12J	36	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
13K	46	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
14L	74	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
15L	53	Male	Caucasian	Catholic
16L	51	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
17M	79	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
18M	47	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
19N	84	Female	Caucasian	Catholic
20O	34	Female	Caucasian	None

Table 2

Participants' Residence, Relationship, Income, Education, and Occupation

P #	Residence	Relationship	Economic	Education
2B	Massachusetts	Married	\$43,000-\$52,999	Vocational
3C	Texas	Married	\$43,000-\$52,999	Master's Degree
4D	Texas	Married	\$20,000-\$34,999	High School
5D	Texas	Single	Below \$20,000	High School
6E	Texas	Married	\$53,000-above	Bachelor's Degree
8H	Louisiana	Divorced	\$43,000-\$52,999	Bachelor's Degree
9I	Louisiana	Single	\$20,000-\$34,999	High School
10J	Louisiana	Married	\$53,000-above	Bachelor's Degree
11J	Louisiana	Married	\$53,000-above	Bachelor's Degree
12J	Louisiana	Single	\$20,000-\$34,999	Bachelor's Degree
13K	Louisiana	Divorced	Below \$20,000	Bachelor's Degree
14L	Kentucky	Married	\$43,000-\$52,999	High School
15L	Kentucky	Married	\$43,000-\$52,999	High School
16L	Kentucky	Married	\$43,000-\$52,999	Master's Degree
17M	Kentucky	Widowed	\$20,000-\$34,999	Elementary
18M	Kentucky	Married	\$53,000-above	Vocational
19N	Texas	Widowed	\$20,000-\$34,999	High School
20O	Florida	Married	\$53,000-above	Master's Degree

Table 3

Participants' Relationship to Abused, Previous Family Therapy, Priests or Nuns in the Family, and Occupation

P#	Relationship to Abused	Family Therapy	Family Member Vowed Religious	Occupation
2B	Sister	No	No	Dental Hygienist
3C	Spouse	Yes	Yes	Social Worker
4D	Mother	No	Yes	Student
5D	Mother	No	Yes	Student
6E	Self and Sister	No	No	Homemaker
8H	Son	Yes	No	Retired
9I	Self and Sister	No	No	Unemployed
10J	Son	Yes	No	Marriage
11J	Son	Yes	No	Architect
12J	Brother	Yes	No	Student
13K	Brother	No	No	Caretaker
14L	Son and	No	No	Caretaker
15L	Spouse	No	No	Delivery Driver
16L	Self and Siblings	No	No	Librarian
17M	Son	No	Yes	Homemaker
18M	Brother	Yes	Yes	Dental Hygienist
19N	Son	No	Yes	Retired
20O	Mother	Yes	Yes	Business Analyst

Findings

The purpose of the study was to explore the systemic effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a Catholic priest. The focus of the study was to identify specific effects and needs of families where a priest has abused a member of the family. To guide this study, the researcher focused on the following two research questions:

Research Question 1. What are the systemic effects within the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a priest?

Research Question 2. What do family therapists need to know about working with families who have experienced clergy sexual abuse?

In qualitative studies, the study is directed by the interview questions. The interview questions for this study were

1. Tell me your story.
2. What do you think family therapists need to know when working with a family where clergy sexual abuse has occurred?

The researcher analyzed the participants' narratives by preliminary grouping categories, followed by reducing the number of categories by clustering. As themes began to emerge, she constructed individual textural descriptions from each participant, which included verbatim examples. After these steps were completed, the researcher developed a composite narrative of the meanings and essence of the experience of the group as a whole. Two themes emerged—*crisis and the functionality of silence* and *crisis*

and the mettle of faith. These themes emerged from the data gathered from interview question one. When the researcher asked the participants “What do you think family therapists need to know when working with a family where clergy sexual abuse has occurred?”, family members were not able to answer the question directly. Therefore, no themes emerged from the second question.

In the Chinese culture, the word crisis is characterized by two images woven together, one for danger and the other for opportunity (Hopkins, 1995). The participants’ stories relate their journeys of crisis and faith.

Theme One: Crisis and the Functionality of Silence

The common thread that weaves the participants’ stories together is the families’ inability to “hear” what was not being said. The abused children doubted their ability to tell their stories in a way that would be heard by those whose job it was to protect them. For the families in this study, the abuse occurred during a time in history when the actions of priests and nuns were not often scrutinized. Having a priest for a close friend was an honor. After the families learned about the abuse, they doubted their loyalties. Parents and siblings who once had a loyalty to a priest realized that they had a greater loyalty to the victim. Parents questioned their inability to hear their children’s cries.

Stories of Silence

Humans create meanings from life experiences by the narratives they create about those experiences (Kudlac, 1992). Narrative is a way of looking at and expressing our experiences (Etherington, 2000), and in this study they are woven together to demonstrate

the richness of the participants' understanding of their experiences. Etherington writes, "Telling our story is a way of reclaiming ourselves, our experiences, and a way of finding our voice" (p. 17). The narratives created around the disclosure of the abuse were a significant element in the participants' telling of their stories. The following quotes illustrate the families' struggles to hear the voices of the abused through the victims' fears, doubts, and silence. These are the stories of mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sons, daughters, and sisters whose lives have been affected because of child sexual abuse by a priest. They tell the stories of the victims as well as their own stories.

In this interview, the sister is referring to the dismay she felt when she learned of her sister's abuse, which occurred in their home and on family vacations. The family had a relationship with the priest that lasted several years after the abuse ended. The ties were severed when the victim told her family about the abuse. When she first was told about the abuse, the participant remembers thinking that no one else would ever know what had happened in their house. She said, "I remember thinking to myself—NOBODY, NOBODY would ever believe this. As I said, I remember thinking, nobody would ever believe it. It, therefore, became this deep dark secret. Only my mother, my father, my two sisters, and I would know." (P2B)

In another family, the husband was abused as a young child by his uncle who was a priest. He has never discussed the abuse with anyone to his wife's knowledge except her. His wife stated, "I think he never told anybody. He said that if his mother had known, she would have killed him [the priest]." (P3C)

In the first example, the fear of reliving her abuse by telling her story is what kept the victim from disclosing until she was a young adult. After telling her family, the fear continued to paralyze her for 24 more years. After the family learned of the abuse, it was a topic they did not discuss until years later. In the second example, the man who was abused did not want anyone to know about his abuse. As his wife stated, “He would rather forget it.” It was the fear of others knowing that kept many of the families in the dark about the abuse.

In the following example, the priest, who was a friend of the family, abused this father’s middle son. In this case, the parents learned of the abuse while the abuse was still occurring. The silence that is demonstrated in this example is the continued silence exemplified by the fact that the family has never discussed the abuse with the youngest child. It was during the interview for this study that the father realized that they had never talked about the abuse with the youngest child. When he realized this, he expressed surprise. His response was, “I don’t think he [youngest son] knows about it. The fact is—he probably should know about it. No, YA! We never talked about it. In this house, you never—never—talked about it. It was taboo.” (P8F)

Several participants in this study attended Catholic elementary school. For many of the parents, sending their children to a Catholic school was non-negotiable. It was important to the families that their children received this type of education. It was an acceptable practice for the priest to get a child out of class to help him with an errand or project. In one example, the abusing priest came and got the victim so frequently that she

failed her grade level. The victim recalled, “I was nine years old when it started. He used to come and get me and my little sister out of class and take us to the rectory and that’s when most of the sexual abuse happened.” (P9I) Similar to the previous story, another victim said,

He would come and get us out of class. He used to come—one of the reasons I failed—was he came and got me out of math class so much until Sister Anthony George [not real name]—‘cause he got me out the year—first when I was a second grader—I missed almost all my math class every day because he’d come and get me. The sisters [nuns] would say—he would say—“I need to borrow—can [participant] come and help me do this” or—they would send us not knowing where or what they were sending us to. (P16L)

The practice of helping priests and nuns with odd jobs was commonplace within Catholic communities. Priests had easy access to children and no questions would be asked about their activities by teachers or parents.

Many participants expressed their beliefs that the actions of a priest or nun were beyond reproach. The conflict with what they were taught to believe about priests and their feelings is evident in this mother’s words, “YOU NEVER talked about a priest or nun. I DON’T CARE what they did or what you know—YOU KEEP your mouth shut. AND, you know—ah—he [my son] did, he just did!” (P17M) A similar idea was expressed by a sister who was also victimized,

I never told them. My parents, my mother especially, were very religious people. Consensus was that a priest was a man of God and could do no wrong. Yea. I had a feeling what he was doing to me and my sister was wrong, so which is right? So how does a nine-year old reconcile that? (P9I)

Several participants recalled stories of the victims reacting to the priest/abuser in a negative manner and their mothers questioning their child's reactions. Some of the victimized children explained later that this was their way of trying to tell the parents about the abuse. Years later when the stories about the abuse were being told, the victims would remind their families of the times that they had tried to tell about the abuse.

The mother in the example below questions how she did not notice her sons' signs of depression and discontent. After learning of the abuse, earlier events made sense to her. She has a hard time reconciling with the fact that she did not know about the abuse.

They DID NOT tell me. They did not tell me. I—I don't know how something that traumatic could be in them and not my knowing it, and not, and I not know it....Pick up on it or something like that. And like I say, it was under the rug, under the rug--under the rug. Mom and Daddy didn't know. And when he finally told me when all of this was coming out, ah he said—"You and Dad would not have believed it anyhow because you were such good Catholics that you would--a priest couldn't do things like that--a priest would not have--if I had the courage to say that a priest did a thing like that. You would not have believed it." (P19N)

A mother spoke of an incident when her son came home from one of his many vacations with the priest who was a close friend of the family:

He [My son] comes into house [after returning early from a trip] and he [the priest] comes in my house [behind the son] and says, "Your son is a son of a bitch." "I said, "WHAT? TELL me what happened!" I asked my son, "What happened?" Neither one of them would tell me what happened. [Son, when he was 23]... reminded me of that day and told me, "That's when I told him to leave me alone." He [the priest] brought him [my son] home to my house furious with my son for not allowing him to be abused. It's the most traumatic—um—we were so blind and dumb for not knowing what was going on. Our son could not tell us what was going on. (P10J)

The priest in the next example abused several children in one family. These thoughts come from the mother's written words given to the researcher in a letter after the interview. They exemplify this mother's war within herself over her faith in the Church and her role as a mother. She writes,

For so many years I have had to deal with the fact; that four of those children were my own....[My son] was in the third grade when he raped him, but Father [priest] was always putting [my son's] shirt in, or Father was tucking his [priest's] in, [my son] said he was doing something else, like groping him. I also found out that he raped [my son] more than once. [Priest] would take the children out of the classroom and take them somewhere in the rectory...The Sisters [nuns] and some

of the teachers were as much a part of the cover-up as the clergy, Bishop, and etc.

The only thing you cannot hide, is the trauma in the lives in the young people involved. (P14L)

In the interview, the mother explains one of her most vivid memories of her son's attempt to tell her that he was being abused by the priest:

I'll tell you—one day he came home from school. I knew I always had him come in the back door. He came in the front on the run. He was saying, I can remember like it was yesterday, he said, "I didn't do it, Mom, I didn't do it, I didn't do it, I didn't do." I said, "What didn't you do?" He said, "I didn't tear my shirt." He [priest] had gotten him in somewhere and torn his shirt off him. He had on an old [shirt]—[my son] was a small child. He was in the third grade at the time and he wore a size eight. He had on a size 12 shirt that he [the priest] had taken out of the rags or something left laying around the school that nobody—[pause]—it had big mustard stain on the front and that's what they sent that child home in. And the teachers didn't even notice it. It was a uniform shirt, white uniform shirt—or if they [teachers] they didn't say anything. I said something to him about it and he wouldn't talk to me. He said, "Father done it," but they called him Monsignor. "Monsignor done it." ...I asked him [priest] about it. He wouldn't tell me what—I said, "What on earth were you doing with that child that you tore his shirt off? What were you having him do?" He wouldn't answer me. He just got up in a huff and said he had to do something and went on. The girls had [already

complained]—see then, I didn't know that men bothered boys. ...I didn't think he'd bother the boys. (P14L)

The family was able to see in retrospect what they were not able to see at the time of the abuse.

This mother and daughter also recall a time when the victim tried to tell his mother about an abusive priest. The mother and daughter thought the friendship between the priest and young man was a positive influence on the young man. The mother explained:

We didn't ask--WE didn't ask--maybe we should have. I have lots of regrets. I think, why was we so stupid? An what—and when I said something to him [son], “Why did you keep your mouth shut?” He said, “Because you wouldn't have believed me.” He said, “Do you remember one time that I tried to get my point across to you and you just ignored me?” He said, “Remember,” he said “the time in the kitchen when he [priest] was there and he wanted to go down” to ah--to ah--what's the name--the camp,” he said, “and I didn't want to go? You shamed me for not wanting to go.” I said “yah.” He said, “I was trying to tell you something.” I said, “[Son] how would I know, how could I have known what was going on?” Why would I think something like that, you know? (P17M)

The sister continued the story,

Like he [my brother] would say, “Like well, mom, you really don't know this guy.” Joking. [We would say] “Mom, he was just kidding.” We all laughed,

you know, it was like a joke. We didn't take it serious. We would have NEVER thought that. And we—maybe we didn't want to believe [my brother], you know—you know. [Pause] We would have probably looked at him like you really are nuts, you know, so you know—anyways they come to grips with it.... And then—then my dad did say though—when he was close to dying, I went to visit him one night—um—and he said, "I just want to ask you something." I said, "What?" He said, "Did everybody think I handled [my son's] situation okay?"

And that—my dad had so much faith that when he made decisions—he didn't stew over things—my dad was very calm and very—like he knew. It surprised me that he asked me that because he was not that type of a person. And I said, [pause] and he said, "Did everybody think—did I do enough—was my response okay?" "Dad," then I said, "you were wonderful." What else could be done? In a lot of families, this drives the parents and the child apart and the family members apart, you know. And I said, "You didn't do that to them," I said, "No, I think everybody was amazed how you and Mom handled it." (P18M)

The quotes from this mother and her daughter are still another example of how, only in retrospect, the family could hear what the victim was trying to tell them.

The following excerpts demonstrate an outward progression of disclosure of a young girl's abuse by the parish priest from a family member, to a principal, to a stranger. This illustrates the despair the victim felt over the abuse, especially the despair that she could not protect her siblings. In the first excerpt, the participant described how

she tried to tell her mother after one of the many encounters with the priest/abuser. When her mother did not protect her, she got the courage to tell the school principal. When there were no positive results from trying to tell the principal, she considered telling a complete stranger:

Yes. She called Father up to the house. Uh hm. And talked to him. And he convinced her that he had only touched—I'll never forget his words—he only touched us as a LOVING [said in disgust] father would. And then she had me--mom always made him pies and stuff. She had me carry a lemon meringue pie she made him out to the car for him. I wanted to smash that in his face so bad... Yes she believed him. I WOULD HAVE BELIEVED HIM, if I had heard it, and I knew what happened. He was that convincing. But I can remember carrying that pie to the car for him and wanting so bad to smash it in his face [laugh]. [I said] Nothing. She didn't believe me the first time....

Sister Mary John of the Cross-[not real name] was so scary and so mean...everybody was so afraid of her. I can remember dragging—literally dragging my sister [who was also being abused] in there because I decided I wanted to tell Sister Mary John of the Cross—because I thought she was so scary maybe she could scare Father. Nobody else could and I thought maybe she could. I drug my sister with me, I went to the door, she was working ..., and she asked me what I wanted. I told her, I said, “Father's bothering me.” I DIDN'T explain what bothering me meant. I guess I didn't have the vocabulary to do that, I mean.

... I didn't KNOW HOW to explain. I just said, "bothering me." She talked to me for just a second and then she told me to go away and never come back again [30 second pause] So, if Sister Mary John of the Cross had listened to me and done something about it—that was the year that he started to—he started abusing my little brother. If she had listened to me—[my little brother] never would have been hurt....

Father always had a booth at the fair where he handed out literature.... Well, he would tell my mom that he was taking us to hand out literature at the fair and he would take my sister and I.... We literally fought to see who had to sit beside him because whoever was beside him, he had one hand on the wheel and one hand on you the entire time. Then he would tell one of us to go to the car with him to GET MORE LIT-A-TURE! He'd push you into the car and get on top of you.... I can remember coming back and I'm standing there and after he did this see, after he bothered you in the car, then he would go buy you cotton candy and then he would take the other one.

I can remember—even one time there was—um—there was a booth beside us when Barry Goldwater was running for president.... I can remember it because it had a fountain with all this gold colored water running out of it.... I can remember standing there crying with the cotton candy and looking at this gold water. I wondered if I went over there and told them because they were so rich—

‘cause they had this gold water and that was his name, Goldwater, that he—if they could do something to go help my sister. (P16L)

In her narrative, the participant tells about the progression of going to her mother and then to a person in authority, and when neither person helped her, in her child’s mind she envisioned going to a complete stranger who must have power. The progression in this story illustrates the abandonment she felt when she tried to get the abuse to stop by telling her story.

Another aspect of telling about the abuse was the victim’s fear that the family would not believe his or her story. Most of the priest/abusers were close family friends and were treated as members of the family; because of this close relationship, the children feared the family would believe the priests over them. The reactions of family members were varied. The following quotes are examples of the narratives the family members told themselves about why the victims were afraid their stories would not be believed.

In the first example, the father is explaining that priests, especially in his culture, were revered and no one ever questioned the actions of a priest. The participant defined “the cloak of the priesthood” as the invisible shield bestowed on priests, usually by some unspoken rule within the Catholic faith, which communicated the infallibility of priests to the Catholic community:

You see—with a priest comes with the cloak of a priest. For instance,
[pause]...something was going on, [the priest was abusing son]—ummm—which

he [my older son] knew was going on, and he [my older son] thought he could somehow fight him [the priest] off, but this guy had the cloak of the priest. If he [my older son] would have told me that uh someone [a priest] was uh abusing his little brother, I would say—"Oh no, how did you know that?" because I was into that realm of trust. (P8H).

During the era of the 50s-70s, there were two phenomena present—Catholics did not question the Church, and talk about sexual predators was minimal. Therefore, most victims truly believed they would not be believed if they told about the abuse. For example, participant 9I attempted suicide three times before she told her mother and siblings about the abuse. She recalls, "Who talked about pedophiles and adult men having sexual encounters with children 40 years ago?—UM—Especially PRIESTS!? NOBODY would believe—A—PRIEST?—UM—ya know?—NOBODY THAT I KNOW OF, that's for sure. That was a taboo subject. It almost killed me three times." (P9I)

Other examples of the blanket acceptance of priests and their actions are expressed in the words of these two mothers. After learning about the abuse, the mothers expressed their dismay that their children had been abused and could not find the words to tell their parents. One mother said,

I said to him, "Why didn't you tell us?"—"Why didn't you come out straight forward?"—because he is a straight forward kid, "why didn't you come out straight forward, and tell us?" [He said] "Because you wouldn't believe me!" and

he said, “Do you remember when...?” And he was trying to, you know, wake me up a little bit—he said, “This man isn’t who you think he is.” (P17M)

Another mother expressed her sentiments, “As close as I thought we had been—ah—evidently we weren’t all that close if he [my son] couldn’t tell me that and having my believing him. [Stops speaking] As close as I thought we were, evidently we weren’t close enough that he [my son] could tell me that I would believe him.” (19N)

In one family, a father and daughter told the researcher that the victim believed the abuse was normal. In the children’s minds, if the abuser was a close family friend and mom and dad continued their friendship, then the abuse must be okay. In the following family’s story, the father, mother, and daughter all explained how the youngest child believed that the abuse was normal. Here are their accounts:

A big part of this thing, he remembers that when he was enduring the abuse, that he thought we knew, he thought we must know, because we were good friends of the priest. The priest told him that we knew. He thought it was normal. (P11J, Father)

He [my brother] thought it was normal. ...He didn’t know any better. He thought we all knew and that if it was normal, it was ok...My parents never talked about anything like that—um—they just didn’t talk about it. They didn’t talk about that. That was not talked about. (P12J, Sister)

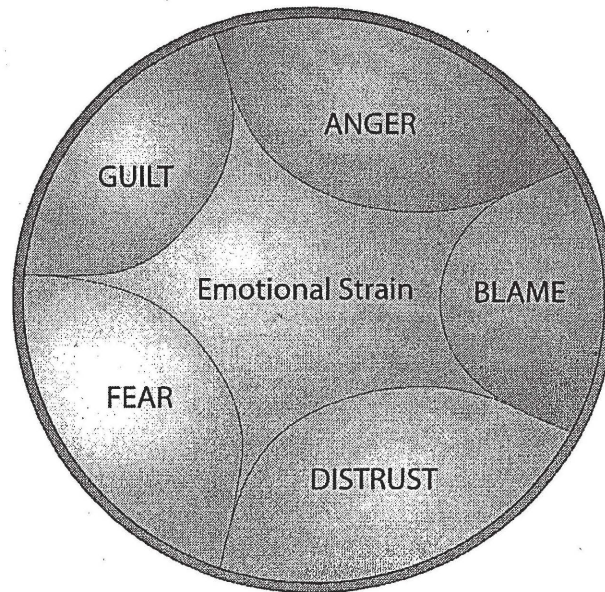
As the nation became more acutely aware of the sexual abuse crisis in the United States, the secrets about clergy sexual abuse that had been kept silent for so many years

began to be revealed. Consequently, by one or multiple members of a family remaining silent about the sexual abuse, the secret became a silent family secret. What the families in this study communicated was the victims' belief that the priests had more prestige or power than they, the victims, did. Because of secrets being revealed, the families are now faced with the emotions that come with knowing about the abuse, the emotions of the victims as well as their own. In many cases, this has created strain within the system.

Familial Strain

Family members described the many emotions they have experienced since learning of the abuse. The emotions that a majority of the participants discussed were anger, blame, fear, guilt, and distrust. In addition, members described how the disclosure and subsequent emotions have put a strain on the family dynamics. Evident in their stories were elements of support and lack of support, family cohesion and division. Figure 1 is a crosscut drawing of a family system to illustrate that the effects within the family cannot necessarily be observed from the outside.

Figure 1: Illustration of Emotional Affects Within the Family System



Anger was dominant among the participants. The participants expressed their own anger as well as the anger of the victim. Anger was directed at parents (specifically mothers), siblings, the abusers, and the Catholic Church.

In the example below, the participants expressed their feelings toward the priest/abuser. A father replied when asked about his anger, “Am I angry at HIM [the priest]? I think right now—I’m glad he’s dead!” (11J). Another participant expressed her confused feelings of anger toward and admiration of the priest. She stated, “When my sister started to talk about the abuse again [after 24 years], I would be very angry with him [the priest]. But then—umm--there was this little itty bitty reaction of me that would say—umm—‘could HE REALLY have done this?’ I really liked this man and admired him in a spiritual way...It was very hard for me to believe that he had this in him. I

believe he did it—but—um—I found it hard to believe he had it in him. Does that make sense?” (2B). These two quotations exemplify the feelings of anger toward the priest that various family members felt. They also illustrate the confusion some participants felt because the priests they are condemning were at one time close friends.

In the following family’s example, the mother, the sister of the victim, and the victim’s brother-in-law spoke of their anger and the victim’s anger toward the priest. As the brother-in-law stated, “I do know that it profoundly affected [my brother-in-law] big time—‘cause he was going to—HE DID confront the monsignor...he had a pistol and threatened to kill him. I don’t know what kept him from doing it.” This participant had similar thoughts when his wife told him the same priest had abused her. He exclaimed, “I wanted to kill him, or go out—or work him over. I mean—I’m just sayin’—I’m um um—I’m just raised an old country boy myself.” (P15L)

Anger was also directed toward family members. Participant 2B described how she and another sister had “the best of childhoods.” She has been supportive of her younger sister who was abused and is expressing her feelings toward the sister who was not abused:

It’s interesting how different family members behave altogether differently. I PERSONALLY JUST DON’T UNDERSTAND IT. I’m VERY disappointed [in her other sister]. I still love her and always will, but I’m very—very disappointed that she has not stepped up to the plate. That’s what family does and that’s the way we were raised. I just never will understand and she doesn’t want to talk

about it at all. ... That pisses me off. I'm sorry—um—that pisses me off. Excuse my language. It just does. (P2B)

In the above example, the feelings of anger toward her other sister came from the supportive sister because of the lack of support she have given the victim. In this next example, the sister of the victim is telling the story of how close the priest was to the family, especially to the mother. Her feelings of anger are directed towards her mother. She cried when she said, "I was angry at my mother for a long time. She should have known." These feelings of resentment resurfaced from an earlier time. Looking back, the participant recalled how the mother allowed the priest to take over parenting when the father was not present:

It caused a lot of tension—(sigh)—with my father. I kinda—um—took my father's side and got mad at my mother because she was so trusting, so open, telling him [the priest] to come over. ... I just kind of feel like she put him [priest] first above us—ya know?—so there's a lot of anger in that way and I know that's a big burden for her to carry and I would never really talk to her extensively about that because I don't think she can handle it. (P12J)

The father's response was, "He [the priest] irritated me to some extent. I didn't have the control to tell him to get lost... I had some resentment, but to this day I don't know why." (10J)

Emotions within the participating families were varied. Several families recounted their anger toward parents for not protecting them or their siblings. Typically, the blame

and anger were directed toward the mothers. Although the fathers' presence in the family was strong, the mothers were often the targets of the victim's and their siblings' anger. This victim said it this way, "Yah. Yah. Yah. Ah—but there's—I don't know. It's—I think for a while, ESPECIALLY from [my brother] there was anger at my mom because she didn't listen—and—I—did that also because she DID NOT LISTEN TO ME!—ah—[voice trails off]. (P16L)

Blame is an emotion similar to the anger that victims and their siblings placed on their parents, especially in three of the families where the mothers were more invested in developing the friendship with the priest than with their husbands. One daughter stated, "There were two and a half years when I could hardly talk to my mother because I blamed her too. A mother's job is to protect her children. 'And you failed miserably.'" (P9I)

While another daughter, who had also been victimized said,
My father would pass up the house when he saw the priest's car at our
house....My mom—this man did something horrible to us. She [my abused sister]
said to Mom, 'I can't change what you think [about priest]—but don't YOU talk
about these wonderful things to us that HE DID for us. (P6E)

Years later, her uncle informed her that the father thought the priest was having an affair with his wife.

Distrust is another area in which the victims and family members have dealt with after learning about the abuse. There were different areas of distrust represented among

the participants. A small percentage voiced their distrust of people in authority. In this group, it was reported that the distrust affects their relationships, most often their job relationships. For example, one father replied, "There are issues of trust. If you look back at his [my son's] relationships with other people—he has trust issues." (P8H) When asked about his son, another father replied, "He [my son] doesn't trust anyone. Maybe US a little bit. He hates authority—because—uh—Father [the priest] was authority. If the boss tries to tell him what to do, he goes into a rage." (P11J)

A victim tells her story about how, after years of abuse, she is beginning to trust people again, especially priests. She said,

You particularly don't trust priests. It's not everybody, but particularly priests you don't trust. They may or may not sense it. If you don't trust them—there are a lot of things you can't do—like—you don't talk to them. If there's something, you need—you just don't talk to them. You need to figure it out yourself. (P16L)

83.3% of the participants mentioned how protective they are of the next generation of children. After learning of the abuse, the victims and their siblings have become much more protective and less trusting than their parents were for their children. Because of their experiences, many of the siblings in the study referred to how protective they are of their own children. The first statement is an example from one mother protecting her eight-year-old daughter who was attending the same elementary school she did when she and her sister had been abused as children. She stated, "We were passing by the rectory one time and I told her—um—a little third grader—ah—if you ever have to

go in there, don't go! You call your mama! I'll come get you. She never understood. DON'T EVER GO THERE! That's a bad place. I had no clue at the time why I would tell her that." (P9I)

Another mother who had been abused in addition to some of her siblings emphatically exclaimed, "OH MY GOSH! I AM SO protective of [son]! ... Well, he was never allowed to be anywhere at the church I wasn't. If he was there, I had a hold of him or he was within two foot of me always!... The thought of him being left alone at CHURCH TERRIFIED me! It absolutely terrified me!" (P16L)

A victim's sister recalled the reasons her brother told the diocese of the abuse. One of his other sisters was allowing a priest to get too close to her children and he feared "something would happen to them like me." He did not want that to happen, so he expressed concern to the diocese about the current priest's friendship with his sister's family and subsequently took action against his own abuse. As a result, the participant tells her children, "TRUST no priest! You trust no one! If there's anything that you question, you come and tell us about it because they are normal human beings and there are some people out there that are not good people.... If you are ever anywhere and you feel uncomfortable, that's a situation where you can lie." (P18M)

The fear and lack of trust was clear in these examples of the extremes the parents go to to protect their own children. One person simply put it this way: "And you just don't trust, you know? Plus if you have an INKLING—a little—you know inkling—when you get these vibes from people—you know? You just don't trust." (P9I)

Before the disclosure of widespread abuse, families had trust in the priest, trust to the extent that they did not question the time the priest spent with their children. After being told about the abuse, this mother questioned herself and her ability to blindly trust:

Oh gosh—there's so much,--there's just so much—ah so [son] said—I said,—
“Well [son]”—I said,—“Didn't you know that...?” —[her son replied] “He [the priest] told me that this is healthy to do this act—that this is healthy that we should do this—it was good—it was right to do that—it was the right thing to do.”
And he said, “I thought he was God,” he said, “He told me that he had the power to do that.” He said, “I thought he was God.” (Long sigh) And it's just—it's unbelievable and you know—just like I said, “How do you ever get over something like that?” (P17M)

The next mother expressed similar feelings. She had an added concern of what other people would think of her as a mother if they knew what had happened to her children.

Two other parents also expressed this concern. She said,

I [mother] didn't have any trouble trusting [son] um huh nothing like that. But you was afraid to say anything what happened to the children because you didn't know what reaction they were going to have from people—you were going to get from—umm—you see—I'm very protective. I'm very particular who knows what happened—[son] has so many problems of his own I don't think he needs—
[trailed off]. (P14L).

Several participants, especially the siblings of the victims, expressed the guilt they feel for not protecting their siblings. One father said, “Ya-mea—he [my older son]—he felt guilt....So he wasn’t able to protect his little brother—so there’s a big loss there.”

(P8H) In some cases, the siblings knew of the abuse while it was going on because they too were being abused. In other cases, they did not know, yet they carry a sense of guilt for not knowing and stopping the abuse. For instance, this participant emphatically stated several times, “WE protected the GIRLS! THE GIRLS! We didn’t know men

BOTHERED boys.” (P16L) One woman who was victimized talked about how guilty she felt for not being able, at nine years old, to protect her little sister:

Poor thing—um—she really suffered so much. I find myself even today—I have to be very careful that I don’t allow myself to be her crutch—um—because a lot of that was my guilt—I have this enormous guilt that I didn’t stop it, that I didn’t take good care of her—that I didn’t—didn’t do a better job about protecting her.

...The guilt of not going up there and stopping him—oh—it was horrendous.

...My parents always said you are supposed to protect your little sister and brother. And I didn’t. (P9I)

In the following example, this sister was ten years older than her sister who was abused. She is recalling how she feels now knowing the abuse her sister went through:

There’s one word I can tell you—. Total guilt. Why her, not me? Total guilt. It’s very hard for me to explain because there’s so many different areas where I felt guilty. Number one, I feel guilt that it happened to her and not to me. I feel guilt

that I somehow wasn't aware and could have stopped it. And--my mother, I probably shouldn't say that, um, I feel that my mother feels terribly guilty that it happened in her own house and this was her child. And allowing him to stay at our house—um—the conditions were that had they [parents] not said, "Stay here," it wouldn't have happened. I know that it's very disturbing for her. It's very difficult for her to talk about. (P2B)

The guilt the family members felt over not knowing or being able to stop abuse was profound. The comments family members made expressed how diverse and all encompassing the guilt feelings were.

The strain on familial relationships was expressed in various forms although the sentiment was the same. Some of the families have been able to sustain their close relationships while in other families the strain of the disclosure about the abuse has divided an already strained family. One poignant story came from a large family with 12 children whose concern for their elderly father was evident. After being told about his son's abuse, the ill father took off his oxygen mask, walked over to the son, put his arm around him and said, "[Son], I will stand behind you till the day I die." (P17M) In the face of adversity, the family's concern for both the father and son was evident.

One consequence of supporting a victimized son or daughter is the financial and emotional strain that is created in the family. In the following example, the husband, wife, and their children do not agree on how much support is too much for the youngest son who was abused. This support has added stress to the marital and parental

relationships. The father in this family said, “Our children see what we’re doing—a whole lot more—um—for our son now and what we did for them—ah—or doing now for them....As far as my daughter—um—she—um—resents the amount of work we put—um—into our son and the finances—um.” (P11J) The mother continued the thought about their support when she spoke,

431 It’s really hard to express what this does to, surely the victim, but the family, too.

We can say what has happened, but the feelings that with everything is hard to express. I would like for us to be close under good circumstances, but this is a bad circumstance. I think we deal with it, but I don’t know if we dealt with it in the best way. There’s no book that says, this is what you do. (P10J)

One of the daughters in this family stated,

And now it’s kinda like my brother, my younger brother that got abused—um—they kind of spoil him. ...I don’t think it’s the best thing for him but they’re definitely over compensating him out of guilt—and—um—like giving him money, bailing him out, things like that. (P12J)

The next two examples demonstrate the different responses of the families. In “Family I,” the daughter was angry at her mother about her abuse; however, she valued her mother’s support and comfort. In this quotation, she is referring to the first time she had to go to the Bishop’s office to make an official statement about the abuse. Her mother went with her. This is her story:

My mother was there and never let go of my hand. She heard the whole story for the first time. She said [daughter's name], "I don't know how far I can go with you on this, but I'll be with you every step of the way I can handle." About a month into the process, she started having severe panic attacks; she stopped going to church. For my mom to stop going to church, that was a big deal....she was holding the Catholic Church responsible for what happened to her baby being so hurt....About a year after I told the diocese, my mother had a panic attack while she was driving....I blame the church for her death. (P9I)

The experience of support in "Family E" was a sharp contrast to the support of the previous family. In this family, a priest, a close family friend, abused the victim and one of her sisters. The abuse lasted several years while, at the same time, the priest was a comforting presence for the mother. In this statement, the victim is speaking about her family's divided loyalty. Her mother does not want to hear about their abuse. She does not doubt that it happened, but she says, "Why do you have to make a big deal of it?" The victim replied,

They say they [her siblings] believe you and support you (pause) but (long pause) this is what happened. The only thing I've been able to get. (Pause) Um they've told [my sister who was also abused] that they—um--that they don't think we should have told Mom because it hurt Mom too much. To me I guess it depends on the definition of support. They can say that behind our backs among each other, that they support us is totally different. They say they support us, that

they're behind us —ya know? They—have—have—not—all—there's been is criticism, name-calling. They say we're nuts, we're sick; we're crazy [rapidly]. They're going to pray for us because we need lots of prayer. Somehow, we're supposed to think, ah, ah, no big deal. Somehow, I'm the problem, I'm being overly sensitive. (P6E)

The stories of disclosure and the subsequent strain on the families were evident in the participants' discourse. Each participant shared his or her story of how and when they learned about the abuse. In their stories, the participants shared the feelings family members felt after being told about the abuse. The narratives regarding the victims' silence and disclosure of the abuse were significant elements in the participants' telling of their stories.

Theme Two: Crisis and Growth Through the Mettle of Faith

This research has been a study of the effects child sexual abuse by priests has had on family members and the subsequent challenges the families faced. The “Catholic” and faith components are important structures in this study. Each participant identified himself or herself as Catholic at the time of the abuse. Moreover, the majority of participants, victims and family members, continue to identify as Catholics. The participants in this study told stories of how and why they befriended priests. They believed in the hierarchal church and the trustworthiness of the priests. The families in this study had a strong Catholic heritage. As an example, 38.8% (n=7) of participants in the study indicated that they had a relative who was a nun or a priest. One might say that

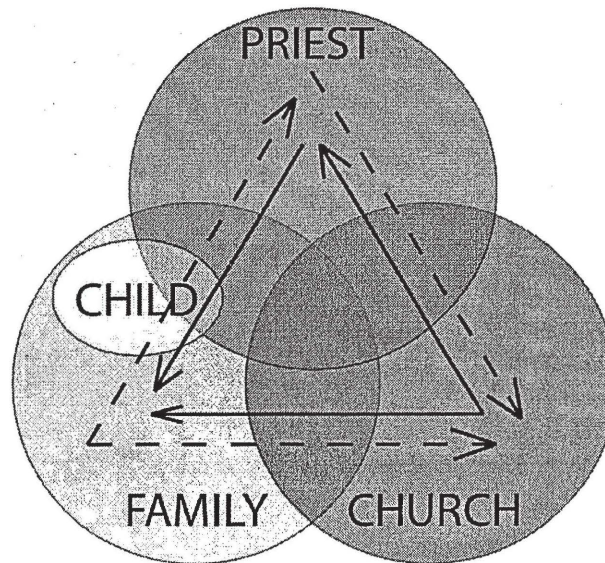
the families' faith was blind to any wrongdoing by the clergy or Church. When families began to learn about priests abusing their children, their faith in the Catholic Church was in danger of being shattered. The significance is multi-faceted; two aspects to be examined here are the level of trust given to the institution and the strength in the participants' faith.

The term "mettle" describes the courage, fortitude, and strength inherent in an individual. To demonstrate a person's mettle is to test his or her spirit, courage, or energy (Morris, 1973), typically through adversity. The families in this study have exemplified courage and fortitude that, woven together, demonstrate their unequivocal mettle. Through the crisis of the clergy sexual abuse within the Catholic Church and the effect the abuse has had on the family, the faithful in this study have been able to re-write their faith stories from one of dependence to interdependence. As the themes emerged, the concepts of crisis and opportunity were formulated. Additionally, the families' narratives exemplify their resiliency through the adversity.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship the families had with the Catholic Church and the priest, including the child/victim subsystem. The three interlocking systems demonstrate the connectedness of the three systems at the time of the abuse. Each system influences the other two systems although the influence was not reciprocally balanced as illustrated by the solid and broken arrows. The solid lines exemplify the strong influence the Church had on the family and the priest as well as the strong influence the priest had on the family. The broken lines illustrate the influence the family, including the child,

had on the priest and the influence the priest had on the Church although in each of these cases the influence was weaker.

Figure 2: Relationship of Family to Priest and Church



Blind Faith

The overwhelming majority of families represented in this study reported that the abusing priest was a trusted friend. Their faith in the Catholic Church and its teachings enabled them to follow church leaders without questions. The faith in their priests and the love for the victimized landed families into a double-bind situation. Families had difficulty accepting that the trust they placed in the priests had been betrayed. The voices in this study expressed disappointment in the Catholic Church for its slow response to the needs of the victims and their families. What was not as clear, however, was the amount of residual anger at the Church. Participants did not express anger at the Church as much as they expressed their desire for support.

Family members spoke about the offending priests and the Bishops' response to the allegations of abuse made against them. A majority of the participants expressed their concerns over the manner in which the Catholic Church initially responded to the abuse allegations. In this study, a few participants recalled that their encounters with the institutional church regarding the abuse of children began over 20 years ago. However, for most of the participants, the disclosure to the Church has been more recent. The Church's varied levels of response can be heard in the participants' stories.

The mother in the following example is speaking about the response her family received from priests in the chancery and in her parish after the story about her son's abuse was published in the newspaper. She was ashamed of what people might think of her as a mother; however, she anticipated support from her parish priest who instead shunned her. She did not receive any emotional comfort or support from clergy or fellow parishioners. She stated,

I think it was that—that—that we was misled. We knew one true Apostolic Church, but, true Apostolic?—but you know when things are wrong, things has to be corrected. You know? It was just—it was just these bad things went on and they act like everything is ok—you know? The cover-up—I should say—it was the anger about the cover-up—that's what it is....There was a good bit of write-ups in the paper that Mr. [family name] said this—and—you know?...Then that was going on for about a year or so—kind of a controversy—you know?...

Well in the meantime after all this all broke and we got cold shoulders from our parish priest.... Then one of the priests from a nearby parish had an open discussion one evening and we all went, even the in-laws [the children's spouses].... [The mother stood up to address the group] I said, "You know—we don't know what—where we stand. We are humiliated and"—ah—I said, "We did go"—I didn't want to go—but we did go to our parish priest and he down loaded it, and didn't want anything to do with it—and—ah—so I said, "Can you tell me, what is—what is the next step? What can we do to heal some?" And he [the priest in the nearby parish] said, "Go to the bishop." I said, "We DID go to the bishop." (P17M)

Her daughter's experience was similar to that of her mother:

He's [my brother] of all of us, he was really more into his religion and more interested in it and always wanted to serve—was—you know... I don't know if he would ever become a priest or not—but I'm thinking that's why it was so hurtful—why it still is so hurtful to him because he did put his whole faith and trust in this man, in the Church, and then he [the priest] betrayed him. We feel betrayed by the Church and by the bishops... because they brushed it aside. "Oh God, our priests and the Catholic Church. This can't get out about us," ya know? "We can't let people know that this is going on in our religion." So they kept brushing it aside. Because for years they painted themselves on a pedestal. Well, you paint yourself on a pedestal, you can't stay there. ...Because it wasn't only

just this priest, it was the whole Church, the whole hierarchy of the Church....I'm more mad at the Catholic Church....

The day it came out in the paper was the day we had our parish picnic. Everyone was looking at us and reading the paper. I just wanted someone—the people I knew from church—to come up to me and just say, “I’m sorry” or something. It’s like a death, but we couldn’t grieve. They didn’t say anything. Even some of my aunts and uncles don’t ask my mother how she is doing.

(P18M)

The feelings of isolation they felt within their faith community were common among the participants. Thus, it was another reason for victims and their families to remain silent about the abuse. In one family, two children grew up being called “the priest’s children” in their hometown; however, it was not until much later that they understood what the expression meant. In the following quotation, the victim’s son is explaining how he feels about knowing the priest is his father. He said,

I guess it affects me pretty bad because I don’t—I have this anger always with me. It’s got so many faces to it (pause) so many faces to it. It infuriates me that somebody who did such heinous crimes and how the Catholic Church has let him go back out into the parishes and young women and children are subjected to that again.... Bad. It makes me feel angry, angry at my mom for not being able to stay away from him. I just want to be normal, you know? I feel very crappy, like I’m worth—I don’t want to cuss—but I wanted to say another word. Like I’m worth

shit. [Soft voice] It's like I'm dirty, I'm—what's the word I'm looking for—less than—on account of I'm my father's son [the priest]. We had nowhere to turn.

The Catholic Church wasn't going to help us. (P5D)

Participants responded to the isolated feelings in various manners. Several participants joined groups or organizations to speak up against clergy sexual abuse. A few participants now speak publicly to Church and civic groups on behalf of victims and their families. Some participants remained silent until they were asked by family members to let their voices be heard. A participant summarized,

I agreed to do this because the ultimate reason is that I want people to understand the effect it can have on people's lives—on your soul. I think about so many victims...it's hard enough on your soul...it could kill you. It can kill the family.

(P6E)

A few participants expressed their feelings of disappointment toward the Catholic Church for not responding to their cries for help. In the quotation below, the sister of a victim spoke about her parish priest and his encouraging her to forget about her brother's abuse. She was seeking comfort and compassion from her pastor. The priest told her to "Sweep it under the rug and let it go." (P13K) However, she wanted an apology or some type of acknowledgment from the Catholic Church. She stated,

I felt like I wasn't getting anywhere with this sexual misconduct. It was really coming out in the papers. Everywhere you turned, it was right here in your face.

[Participant sobbing. Recorder turned off] Before it was just me. Now I find out

that it's these other people who are trying to deal with it. Still when I would call the churches, they didn't want to talk about it. They never returned phone calls.

(P13K)

In one family, the initial lack of ownership from the priest and diocese angered the victim's siblings. The participant said, "My brother had met with the priest and another priest hoping that the priest would at least acknowledge and be remorseful for what he had done, and yet he just defended himself and said, 'You were 13.'" (P18M) The mother of the same family said, "Some of my children are very angry [at the diocese for not helping] and you know, you know, it just hurts you—it bothered you to see them so angry, if you know something's wrong—don't you try to fix it?" (P17M)

A few participants were distressed that they were not informed of the reasons the priest had been sent to a treatment program. They believed that, if had they been notified about allegations against the priest, they would have been able to help their children sooner. One mother stated, "If we had known. If only we had known, maybe we could have done something for [my son]." (P11J)

Participants in this study believed in their Catholic heritage. They grew from a blind non-questioning following of the Catholic Church to a self-directed acceptance of their faith. As an example of the non-questioning stance many participants had toward the church's rules, several participants mentioned that the abusing priest had officiated at their weddings or those of their siblings. This was during a time when the families believed either that they could not ask another priest or they did not want to tell their

this affected the couples is illustrated here. A mother recalls asking her son, “Why [my son], why don’t you want him to marry you? He was a good friend to you.” (P17M) In a different interview, the husband spoke at length about his feelings about his marriage being blessed by the abusing priest. He said:

I didn’t feel—I didn’t feel—like that—had to step back—gosh, we’ve been living a sin—we really weren’t married—yet we went through the ceremony and everything. But I thought, and I thought, well if this priest done that, if this priest done that—man, this ain’t right....Thinking back, there I was standing right before one of the biggest hypocrites that—you know?—like I said—at the time I didn’t know that. That’s what I say—I just didn’t think that we actually—that we were really married. Married by a hypocrite and everything like that. (P15L)

Eyes Wide Open

Figure 3 illustrates the shift in the systems’ position after the disclosure. While still connected to the Church and to priests, the participants’ identity as Catholics is inextricably intertwined with their faith as Christians, not with the hierarchal Church. Family members in this study have shifted from an unquestioning acceptance of priests and the Church’s hierarchal infallibility to a position of inquiry. The families in this study describe their faith as what connects them to the Church rather than the Church system itself. Seventeen of the eighteen participants in the study are actively practicing Catholics. They continue to attend Mass, as well as participate in other church related activities.

Figure 3: Shift in Relationships of Family to Priests and the Church

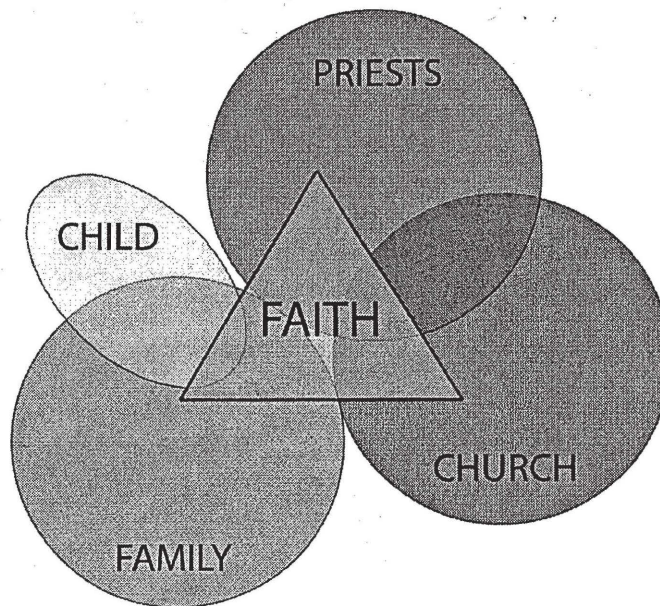


Figure 3 illustrates the continuing connection between priests and the Catholic Church. At the time of ordination, priests receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. The majority of priests are happy with their vocational choice and are faithful to their vows (Greeley, 2004). The child subsystem shift demonstrates his or her movement from that of dependency on the family to one of interdependence. Through their mettle, the majority of the participants have moved from looking to the hierarchy in the Catholic Church to the strength they have realized is within themselves. Their faith journeys are evident in their stories.

Typical of many, this excerpt exemplifies the participant's conviction that her faith is important to her family and her conviction that she will stand up against anyone who tries to take it away. She and her sisters are not able to go to services during Holy Week because they connect the services with memories of the abusive priest. She states,

I'm still Catholic because—um—Father took so much away from me—
ah—he's not taking my faith, because then he will have taken everything. I won't
give him the satisfaction. ...He's a man first and a priest second. He just
happened to be a priest that used his position. And although the church is
responsible because they covered it up—ah—I think it's time—um—to—for all
of us—the only way—they have acknowledged now that it happened—they have
started saying ok we're sorry, we did do this. Now they have to not do it again.
But it's time to move on. It's time to let it be in the past. I love my church—I
don't want it hurt. It's important to me. It's important to me enough that my child
be raised in a Catholic school....

Because I decided to take my life back and I want—I want all of my faith
back. And all the things that go with the faith. I want it all back. I want to be able
to say the rosary and I want to go to Mass and hear the Passion read—and—I
want to do all that without crying or something or having to leave. So I just—I'm
taking steps to do that, bit by bit, because I WANT IT ALL BACK. At the same
time I say a prayer for Father [abusing priest] at every Mass, I do, that he makes
his peace with God before he dies. (P16L)

Her mother's reply about her Catholic faith is similar. When she was asked about her
reasons for staying Catholic, she replied,

Well, the Lord didn't do anything to me. A man did, and he certainly didn't have
His [God's] permission to do it! So, it's somebody else's choice. He [God] didn't

do anything to me. I stay because of the Blessed Sacrament [Eucharist]. That's the one thing that keeps me together. When I was a kid we went to Mass every day.... You know after I got older, I could go to Mass on my own. And I've done it all my life. (P14L)

Central to the Catholic belief system is the teaching of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Various faith denominations remember Christ's death and resurrection by celebrating the Eucharist or The Last Supper. Eucharist is central to the Catholic faith. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2003) emphasizes the centrality of the Eucharist to the Catholic faith:

In the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering (No. 1368).

Several participants referred to the Eucharist as an important part of their lives. A few of the participants expressed sorrow that some of their family members did not attend the Catholic Church and receive the Eucharist. A mother, saddened by her son's departure from the Catholic Church states, "It hurts me that we can't go to Holy Communion together.... To receive Holy Communion together as a family means everything." (P19N) One participant spoke about the division between Catholics and non-Catholics in the family. She said,

We are really, really, Catholic or we don't go at all....I'm so involved in the Catholic Church but—I don't buy—the HOLY Catholic Church anymore. I don't see it that ways any more....I just—it doesn't do for me what it used to. I stay Catholic because of the sacrament, the Eucharist. (P18M)

The Catholic faith was important to the participants; the parents in the study expressed concern for their children who have left the Catholic Church. This mother of 12 states, I know that if they [her children] go—um—leave the Church and—um—go somewhere else—ah—they're leaving the only source of help. ...They're leaving the only source of help they have. If you lose your faith because of it [the abuse]—ah—you don't—what are you—what are you going to rely on? (P17M)

This mother who lost one son to suicide shares her conviction that there will be good that comes from the crisis in the Church. She explains,

The Church has been through bad things before and come out of it. But God always raises up somebody...to—to—to try to keep things going ahead making amends for bad mistakes....The good Lord ALWAYS sends somebody to try to make amends for those things and to keep the Church on the right path and He's going to do that now, too. He's going to do that now not only for my son, my very own son, which is His child too, and He loves him, but also for the whole Church. He's going to bring this whole, everything, some good out of it. (P19N)

All the participants, with the exception of one, were raised in the Catholic Church. The one participant who was not raised in the Church became Catholic as an adult. Each

participant, excluding the last participant, remains faithful to the Church's teachings. However, the participants are not as willing to befriend priests, blindly allowing them open access to their homes and families. In addition, they are more likely to question the hierarchy of the Church, especially when it relates to clergy sexual abuse.

What Family Therapists Need to Know

The purpose of the study was to explore the systemic effects on the family when a priest has sexually abused a family member as a child. Throughout this study, the researcher heard multiple stories from different family members expressing the same sentiment: "We want to be heard." Primarily as each person told his or her story, he or she expressed sentiments such as "It feels good to talk about it. I want someone to hear my story" (P8H), "I didn't think anyone would believe me" (P9I), and "I want someone who will let me talk about it." (P12K)

When participants were asked what they believed family therapists needed to know when working with families where clergy sexual abuse has occurred, they found it difficult to answer the question directly. However, through their dialogue, they were able to express what their needs were for the family system. In most of the families, their primary concern was for the welfare of the victim. From their stories, however, the researcher heard several needs expressed. Participants wanted someone to listen to them without judgment, to be a support to the family, to work systemically with the family, and to be non-judgmental of their Catholic beliefs.

A participant shared her insights about family therapy when she explained her negative experiences with family therapy. She believed that the therapist sided with the parents (P20O). A participant from a different family expressed her positive experience with a family therapist when her father was dying of cancer. She related her feelings, “That was a good experience, a positive thing with my dad, but I don’t think my sisters would go to family therapy now. They don’t want to talk about it. I would. I do go with my sister.” (P2B)

The mother in the next example illustrates how she likens the abuse to a death in the family. She talked about how the needs of the victim need to be met, and then she continued,

I think—I think they should know the hurt of the victim—I think they should know—um—and the damage it does to the victim. It changes their beliefs...also the family. The hurt of the family, I mean. It’s like I said, it’s like a death only it’s worse than a death because you can never forget it. (P17M)

The mother in “Family M” was expressing her need for family counseling as well as her belief that her abused son’s family would benefit from family therapy. The victim’s sister also compared finding out about the abuse to a death. She also felt the lack of support from the Catholic Church and her faith community. She stated:

Support—I think—would be big—somehow to try to get support for the people that have suffered somehow—to talk about it you—I think that its best to—other than just ourselves—um—there wasn’t anybody that we could—um—talk to—

just to go to and say—and talk about it that they would understand it.... No one else wanted to listen. (P18M)

A theme in this study is the importance of the Catholic faith to the participants. Participants did not express a need for therapists to practice any form of organized religion; however, some participants thought that having some knowledge of the hierarchy of the Church would be valuable. One participant stated it this way, “I would want someone to know about the Catholic Church and the hierarchy of it.” (P12K) Participants wanted therapists who were knowledgeable in systemic work and would listen to each family member.

Summary

The results of this phenomenological study about the effects of priest sexual abuse on the family were presented in this chapter. No changes were made in the interview process after a pilot study of the first three interviews was conducted. The sample size for this study was 18 participants. Twelve families were represented in the study, including spouses, parents, siblings, and children of the abused. The participants for this study reside in several different states. The participants’ confidentiality was protected by assigning a combination number/letter code to each participant. Triangulators were used to help with the credibility of the research. The demographics of the sample, the essence of the interviews, and a narrative of the emerging themes were presented in this chapter.

Two themes emerged from the interviews, *Crisis and the Functionality of Silence* and *Crisis and Growth Through the Mettle of Faith*. Families shared their stories about

the effects the abuse has had on their families, and, through these stories, they demonstrated their courage, strength, and faith. Their quotations illustrate the initial silence among the victims, the strain on the family, the participants' struggle with the Catholic Church, and the strength they continue to gather through their faith.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the systemic effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a Catholic priest. Research into the ramifications of clergy sexual abuse is imperative for numerous reasons. This study, which focuses on the family, will aid family therapists and other professionals in their work with families. A product of this clergy sexual abuse crisis can be the wealth of information on the effects of priest sexual abuse gained through further inquiry and research. Research such as this is an opportunity for positive changes, both in terms of intervention and policy, to accrue within the Catholic Church, as well as within other faith denominations.

Discussion

This chapter will include a discussion on the findings in this study, the voices of the families as well as the researcher's personal voice. Also included in the chapter are the conclusions, implications and limitations of this study as well as recommendations for future studies and family therapists.

Review of the Parameters of Study

Two research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1. What are the systemic effects within the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a priest?

Research Question 2. What do family therapists need to know about working with families who have experienced clergy sexual abuse?

The two interview questions were the following:

Interview Question 1: Tell me your story.

Interview Question 2: What do family therapists need to know when working with a family where clergy sexual abuse has occurred?

Eighteen participants were interviewed either in person (n=16) or by telephone (n=2). Each interview was audio taped and transcribed after the interview. Participants for this study reside in five states: Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Kentucky, and Massachusetts. Twelve families that included parents, siblings, spouses, and children of the victims were represented in the study. Three of the participants in the study were siblings of victims as well as victims themselves.

Review of Data Analysis

Phenomenological research methods were utilized in order to capture the rich meanings of family experiences. Each interview was transcribed and reviewed by the researcher. A number/letter code was assigned to each participant for confidentiality. The researcher used Moustakas' (1994) method of analyzing phenomenological data as

modified from the Van Kaam method of data analysis. Similar to Creswell (1998), Moustakas suggests the following steps for analysis: preliminary grouping, reduction and elimination, clustering, identifying themes, constructing individual textural and individual descriptions from each participant including verbatim examples. After these steps were completed, the researcher developed a composite narrative of the meanings and essence of the experience of the group as a whole.

The researcher categorized the participants' statements using a color coding system. Initially twenty-three categories were collapsed into six categories. The categories were family beliefs, effects, silence, church response, faith, and the families' relationship to the priests. The researcher read each interview and noted when a statement fit into one of the categories. After the transcripts were read multiple times, the researcher believed she had captured the essence of each participant's story. In each story, there were rudiments of the silence of the victims and the faith journey of the family members. Two themes emerged, *Crisis and the Functionality of Silence* and *Crisis and Growth Through the Mettle of Faith*. Elements of crisis in the family and within the Church were present in the narratives. The concept of crisis was a thread in the story; however, crisis was not the major impetus within each narrative. Another powerful aspect was the faith component in each person's story. No themes emerged from the second interview question.

Theme One: Crisis and the Functionality of Silence

The concepts of silence and the emotional strain on the family that emerged after the disclosure about the abuse are the foundation of theme one. The majority of the

families that were represented, with the exception of one family, found out about the abuse several years after the abuse stopped. The victims told their families about the abuse after they had reached adulthood. For many of the families, the victims came forward after the abuse crisis received national attention. This phenomenon is similar to what can be found in the literature. Literature reports that the rationale for many victims and their families who allowed things to be handled quietly between the diocese and victim was to keep the abuse secret to the public so as not to embarrass the Church (Christopher, 2002). Several victims wanted the priest removed from the priesthood so that the priest/abuser would not harm other children.

Silence

Historically, children who have been sexually abused do not readily divulge their abuse (Peters, 1986). The literature lists several reasons why victims typically do not tell about their abuse. Four primary reasons listed are guilt, fear of not being believed, shame, and loyalty. The data in this study show that victims listed fear of not being believed, shame, guilt, and their parents' loyalty to the priests as reasons for not disclosing the abuse when it happened.

Consistent with current literature, the fear of not being believed was among the top reasons the victims did not tell someone about their abuse. Oftentimes the victim of abuse senses that his or her story of abuse will not be believed. This is especially true in cases of sexual abuse by a priest (Sullivan, 2004). Many Catholics could or would not believe that a priest could abuse a child (McGeary, et al., 2002); this was also reflected in

this study. It is unfortunate that the Church's cloak of secrecy regarding priest sexual abuse left victims feeling as if they had no one in whom they could confide (Benyei, 1998).

According to the literature, victims of sexual abuse do not tell their parents about the abuse for several reasons. Among those are the parents' reactions to the child when the child discloses the abuse; the reactions range from disbelief, anger at the child and/or priest, rage at the priest, and parents' physically punishing the victim for telling such a story about the priest (The Investigative Staff of *The Boston Globe*, 2002). Children are taught that priests are next to God, more powerful than even their parents (Burkett & Bruni, 1993). Therefore, a priest was believed to be someone who could be trusted and who was beyond reproach. Children were aware of their parents' loyalties to the Church and priests which added to their fear of telling their parents. Many feared that they would be reprimanded for telling such a "lie" (Doyle, Sipe, & Wall, 2006). Parents were told by the priests and/or diocesan officials not to talk about the abuse; in order to be obedient Catholics, the family would keep their silence (Bruni & Burkett, 2002).

This too was demonstrated in this study by the participants' stories; they feared that their parents would not believe them. They knew their parents were loyal to the Catholic Church and to the priest. A few of the participants themselves questioned their own loyalty to the victim and the offending priest.

After the public watershed over the clergy sexual abuse crisis, parents had to deal with several realities. Their trust in the priests was betrayed, they blamed themselves for

not knowing about the abuse, they faced the reality of their children's feelings, and they realized the initial lack of response from the Church hierarchy. The literature postulates that befriending priests to the extent that they are treated as close and trusted family members is common among Catholic families (Winter, et al., Vol. 1, 1990), and predator priests often chose their victims from the most dedicated parishioners (McGeary, et al., 2002). In a report prepared for the USCCB, the findings indicate that the abusing priests were those who were friends with the families of their victims and spent social time with their victims. Similar to the general population, priests are more likely to abuse children with whom they have close contact (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004).

Catholics have been taught for generations to exalt, respect, and trust priests; parishioners usually believed that a priest would be a positive influence on their children (E. P. Flynn, 2003). Parents trusted the clergy with their intimate secrets, their homes, and their children (Bruni & Burkett, 2002). The priests were admired and respected by the families. Children naturally sense their parents' respect for the clergy, and the children themselves may admire the priests/abusers (Bruni & Burkett, 2002). This would add confusion for the child regarding his or her parents' loyalty.

Experts on child sexual abuse report that children often will drop verbal hints about something bad happening to them and will then wait for a response from their parents. If there is no response, the child internalizes the message that he or she would not be believed about the abuse (Peters, 1986). When the abuser is a trusted religious

figure, the disclosure and fear of not being believed can be stronger (Doyle, Sipe, & Wall, 2006).

Research indicates that sexual abusers single out vulnerable or needy families to befriend; however, it would be difficult from this sample to generalize this to those abused by priest predators. In this study, it appears that at least half of the families demonstrated stable loving family relationships. The abused represented in this study came from homes with both biological/adoptive parents, with the exception of one case where the victim was an orphan. Several participants told stories of when the victims tried to tell their mothers. In several cases, the primary parenting came from the mother. In many cases, the mother was a stay-at-home mom while the father worked. In several of the families, there was little or no parental involvement from the fathers.

Familial Strain

Family members described several emotions they experienced after hearing about the abuse. The emotions that a majority of the participants discussed were anger, blame, fear, guilt, and distrust. In addition, members described how the disclosure and subsequent emotions have put a strain on the family dynamics. This is consistent with current literature that lists several effects sexual abuse can have on the family, including shame, feelings of betrayal, fear, stigmatization, anger, and placing blame on the victim (McCourt & Peel, 1998). Benyei (1998) writes about family secrets and the reasons that family members do not readily report the abuse. She contends that secrets such as clergy abuse are too difficult to talk about because the family has to “revisit the pain in ways

that they cannot tolerate.” She continues, “As a result, the pain goes underground and is then expressed in a number of usually counterproductive ways” (p. 105).

The participants in this study exemplified the feelings of blame, fear, guilt, distrust, and anger. Other emotions mentioned in the literature such as shame, fear, stigmatization, and placing blame on the victim were alluded to but not specifically talked about. Feelings of being betrayed by the Catholic Church and by the priest were mentioned by a few participants.

Another effect that can cause strain on the family is family members taking sides, splitting between those who believe the abuse occurred and those who do not. Family schisms cause extra suffering for victims and the family, especially when they find themselves cut off from previous support systems (Keable, 2001). According to the literature regarding the systemic effects of sexual abuse, because the typical patterns of interaction have changed, all members of the system are affected by the abuse trauma whether or not they are aware of the abuse (Remer & Elliot, 1988b). Several participants spoke about the division within the family because of the different ways family members responded to the abused. According to the literature, siblings may feel shunned or forgotten because of extra attention being given to the child who was abused (Benyie, 1998).

The fear of exposure, guilt, shame, and the perceived loss of spirituality for all members can keep the abused person silent about the abuse. Sometimes the abused is afraid that if he or she reveals the secret, the exposure will rob his or her family members

of their faith (Fater & Mullaney, 2000). The process of healing requires the balance of an individual, his or her needs and wants, and the system's needs and wants so that individuals in the system can become interdependent.

Theme Two: Crisis and Growth through the Mettle of Faith

In this study, each participant, with the exception of one, identified himself or herself as Catholic on the demographic forms. As the themes emerged, the concepts of crisis and opportunity were formulated. This research has been a study of the effects sexual abuse by priests has had on family members and the subsequent challenges the families faced.

Blind Faith

Between the 1930s and 1950s, the number of Catholics who agreed with Church doctrine was high. American Catholics' institutional loyalty has declined steadily since the 1960s. However, Catholics continue to identify themselves as Catholic despite disagreements that they may have with the hierarchical church (Gibson, 2003). Gibson writes,

This dogged persistence of Catholic identity, in the face of centuries of tensions with priests and bishops, sharp disagreements with church teachings, and scandals culminating in this latest, greatest betrayal of the flock is largely a mystery.... Catholic identity is a countervailing, centripetal force that is hard for Catholics themselves to quantify, and harder for non-Catholics to understand (p. 81).

This trend appears to be true among the participants in this study. As devout Catholics, they did not question decisions or policy made by the Church. The literature indicates that after the extent of the sexual abuse crisis was made apparent, Catholics began to call for more accountability from priests and bishops (Gibson, 2003). This was demonstrated among the participants who spoke of disclosing the abuse and of going to the bishops in order to have predator priests removed.

Eyes Wide Open

According to the literature, Catholics feel a profound sense of betrayal by the institutional Church. There are several accounts in the literature that attest to the fact that when families went to their pastors and/or bishops, they were not treated pastorally (Bruni & Burkett, 2002; Cozzens, 2002; Gibson, 2003). Cozzens believes that the laity in the Catholic Church are taking a lead in asking for more accountability from the bishops. He states,

The weapons of silence and denial are slowly being turned into plowshares—sadly, less by responsible action on the part of the church leaders than by the courageous initiative of the victims, supported by family, friends, and members of their parish community. Reacting to the pleas of victims given a new voice by a steady stream of media reports of clergy abuse, the church no longer remains silent (p. 141).

Catholics want the bishops to discontinue the era of secrecy within the Catholic Church. They are demanding that the bishops be open and honest with them. Michael

Crosby (1991), a Capuchin Franciscan Priest, examines the Catholic Church system through the lens of family systems theory. He illustrates how the concepts of a closed family system are found within the church system. He explains, "When family theory is applied to the institutional Catholic Church...the concepts get expressed in the institutional processes of thinking, passions, and behavior of the Catholic Church" (p. 93). Crosby agrees that there needs to be serious examination of modes of operation among the church's leaders.

Current literature postulates that there has been a mass exodus of Catholics leaving the Church because of the abuse crisis (The Investigative Staff of *The Boston Globe*, 2002; Bruni & Burkett, 2002; Dale, 2006; Gibson, 2003). The literature on clergy sexual abuse shows that families are divided in their continuing devotion to the Catholic Church. Their reactions to their faith in the Catholic Church differ from remaining loyal to the church to leaving the Catholic Church (Gibson, 2003).

The findings in this study indicate differently. In this study, some of the participants implied that the family member who had been abused left the Catholic Church. Those participants who were also victims, however, continue to worship in the Catholic Church. It was clear from the participants' stories that they wanted to see more accountability within the institutional church. They chose to continue in their Catholic faith, a different response than the literature espouses. The participants who stayed in the Catholic Church are working within the system for change.

Recent literature regarding clergy sexual abuse states that the majority of victims of priest sexual abuse are male. Media reports regarding clergy sexual abuse typically focus on boys as the victims. Several books and articles that can be found on this topic refer to prepubescent boys, often altar servers, as being the primary target for predator priests (Bruni & Burkett, 2002; Docecki, 2004). The USCCB commissioned the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to conduct research on the nature and scope of the problem of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons; in their report they stated, "Unlike in the general population, more males than females in this study made allegations of abuse against priests. In fact, there was a significant difference between genders, with four out of five alleged victims being male" (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, p. 56). Sipe (1990) states that it is four times more likely that parents and authorities learn about the abuse of males by a priest than it is for females. This sample represented almost equal proportions of male to female. Nineteen victims were represented in this study, 10 males and nine females. Only one victim was an altar boy.

The Researcher's Voice

In qualitative research, the researcher is part of the instrument. This study was conducted by a Catholic sister who is also a family therapist. I believe that an important part of this study is the researcher's voice. In a study such as this, to not let my voice be heard would be a disservice to the process. I will attempt to describe some of the effects this study has had on me as a person spiritually, and professionally.

The process for this study began in 2002 when the media focused national attention on the priest sexual abuse crisis within the Catholic Church. My concern for the victims and their families was almost palpable. As I listened to the news reports, I wanted to hear the families' stories. I wanted to learn how this abuse has affected them, and I wanted to know what a family therapist could do to help them. It was at that time that I began seriously reading about the priest sexual abuse crisis within the Catholic Church. I began gathering literature on the subject with the intention of a future research project. I wanted to conduct a research project that would benefit the field of family therapy and the Catholic Church in order to provide help and support to all who have been affected by this type of abuse.

In describing my position within the study, it is difficult for me to separate myself from a vowed religious and a family therapist. I identified with the participants because I was born into a traditionally Catholic family, and I grew up in the Catholic Church in the 60s. The 60s were a time when there were many changes happening within the Catholic Church. It is also the time that several of the cases in this study were reported to have happened.

To the best of my ability, I suspended my biases and assumptions about the abuse crisis while conducting the interviews and analyzing the data. As much as humanly possible, I listened to each story with no preconceived ideas or assumptions. However, having been raised in the Catholic Church, there were terms, statements, and references that I understood that a non-Catholic might not have grasped.

Initially gathering the data for this study was a slow process. I contacted different dioceses to inform them of my research. Two dioceses were very helpful and supportive in sending flyers out to various victim support groups. I was targeting areas where I knew there had been a number of accusations against priests. I contacted four diocesan newspapers; two allowed me to place an advertisement while two did not. I also placed advertisements in several public newspapers. I contacted the national offices of support groups for survivors of priest sexual abuse, but I did not get any response from them.

In addition to waiting for potential participants to contact me, I encountered other difficulties. I had interviews scheduled in Louisiana at the time that Hurricane Katrina was devastating that area. Afterwards I put advertisements in newspapers along the Gulf coast and the advertisements ran when Hurricane Rita made landfall. The loss of these interviews was a setback; however, I continued with arranging other interviews. I eventually made it to Louisiana for the interviews there.

Some participants responded to the newspaper advertisements or the flyers sent out by diocesan offices. Several participants contacted family members telling them about the study. I was then able to set up appointments to meet with other family members. I was able to travel to the locations where the participants lived. I believe that interviewing families in different parts of the United States added to the authenticity of the study. In addition, by meeting the participants in person, by my being able to sit with them in their own environments, their rich descriptions became even more powerful.

Several of the interviews took place in their homes or churches where the abuse had taken place.

Because of Texas Woman's University's and my own concern for potential participants, it was agreed that I would not use the title "Sister" on any of the recruitment materials. The rationale was that participants might feel coerced to participate if they knew a nun was conducting the study. My concerns were that if the potential participants were not told I was a sister, they would feel betrayed. Therefore, it was agreed upon that I would not put the title in the recruitment flyer or newspaper advertisements, but that I would put it on the consent form. Additionally, as I spoke to the potential participants, I told them that I was a sister. Initially some of the participants were surprised to hear that I was a nun, but then they appeared to be thankful that they had been told.

I do not know if they treated me differently or not because I am a nun. It would be difficult for me to determine because I was not treated any differently than I normally am. One participant I interviewed made a comment as he was walking me out to my rental car, a convertible (not my choice). He said, "If you come back to the area for more interviews, don't you be drivin' no convertible! You should not be drivin' no convertible." I was surprised that he felt that it was important for me to put his comment in this study. His expectation of vowed religious was that they would be humble servants to the people. For a priest or nun to drive fancy cars or wear fancy clothes was not an example of humility. I believe that his reaction had to do with his feelings of betrayal. He

had been betrayed by a priest who drove a fancy car. I was humbled by his reaction and grateful that he had shared his sentiments with me.

Another encounter that touched me deeply occurred after I interviewed the mother of eight children, four of whom were abused. She distrusted priests so much that she was very careful about where we met. She did not want any priest to know about the interview. I was moved by this woman's strength and sincerity. When we were finished with the interview, she left the room and came back carrying a Raggedy Ann® doll. She said that she had made one for each of her children and grandchildren and that she wanted me to have this one. She handed it to me and said, "Thank you for listening to our story. Thank you for doing this."

A consideration while conducting this study was the care of the researcher. In Chapter Three I had stated that I would seek spiritual and professional support as needed. My advisor was a considerable support for me in several ways. Her care and compassion for me as well as for this study helped me get through many difficult trials. I have a dear friend whose mentorship allowed me to talk about what effect the study was having on me. He helped me to continue moving forward in my research. The process was invaluable; he was able to add insight and laughter to my personal processing of this project. Both my advisor and mentor were so supportive and excited about this project that they gave me the energy to continue.

Another person that I relied on in this was my spiritual director. I have felt hurt and somewhat betrayed by the actions of the abusing priests. I, like many Catholics, look

to the Church for guidance and support. Prior to, and throughout this process, I have had to face my own feelings of anger, hurt, and embarrassment because of the crisis within the Church. Throughout this process, I relied on my spiritual director to help me sort out these feelings.

A surprise in this study for the researcher was the number of participants who continue to practice Catholicism. I did not realize this pattern until I started looking at the demographics. Then I started asking the participants why they remained Catholic. Most of them said the victim was no longer Catholic but they were. They did not say if the victim resented their Church involvement or not. The participants I interviewed who were victims were also practicing Catholics. They indicated that their involvement included but was not limited to attending Catholic Mass regularly, teaching religious education, and participating in parish activities. Participants are asking for a more pastoral response from the institutional church. Several participants indicated that the bishops currently serving in their home dioceses are finally reaching out to the victims.

What I learned from the interviews was how much resiliency and strength there were in the families. I did not expect to find the strength that I did. I expected to deal with a lot of resentment and anger, and I anticipated that some of their anger would be directed at me because of my position within the Catholic Church. Rather, the anger was placed on the offender and on the institutional Church.

The participants wanted their stories to be heard with no excuses wedged into their stories from persons outside of their family system. Some of their stories included

accounts of the lack of support from their fellow parishioners. This should be a statement to all churches. Just as with grief around death, when people do not know how to respond to someone who is grieving, people in this situation sometimes feel that they just do not know what to say. The participants were saying, "You do not have to say anything. Just let me know that you care." When fellow parishioners did not say anything, the victims felt as if the parishioners were blaming them. And some of them may have been. But all of them?

I wanted to produce a study that would benefit the field of family therapy and the Catholic Church. When I first began reading the literature on priest sexual abuse, I felt helpless when I read a victim's account of her abuse. I hurt for her because she had been hurt by representatives of the Church that I loved. I believe the entire Catholic Church is in need of the grace and peace that is gained from acknowledging our weaknesses. My hope is that studies such as this will provide the foundation needed to help those who have been affected by the abuse crisis. I acknowledge that some people might not agree with me or with the results of this study. My hope is that those who read the stories of the participants will do so with an open heart in order to "hear" their stories of their crisis and their faith. I believe this is an opportunity for the Catholic Church to hear the voices of the abused families and to respond to the needs of the families.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the systemic effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a child by a Catholic priest. Two research questions

guided this study. The first question focused on the effects on the family while the second question focused on what family therapists need to know. The results from this study provide implications for future research on the family system as well as implications for the field of family therapy.

As described in Chapter Two of this study, no research on the effects that priest sexual abuse of children on the family had been conducted prior to this research study. Two themes emerged from the data analysis of this study. The concepts of crisis and opportunity were the umbrella for the themes. The crisis event in each family presented the family with adverse affects that each person had to acknowledge. Each family member has had to deal with the impact learning about the abuse has had on him or her. Each family has had to deal with various emotions such as shame, blame, anger, distrust, and disbelief. For some families the disclosure about the abuse has strengthened the system, while for others it has put a strain on an already strained system. Nevertheless, the participants in this study indicated that after learning about the abuse, they have been able to face the adverse effects which has given them opportunities to experience their resiliency. Every family in the study, with the exception of one family, had befriended the priest/abuser.

It is not clear if the priest had abused children at his previous assignments or if he had any previous accusations against him. The significance for this study is that the families trusted the priest and befriended him because they liked him. This created complications for the abused child because cognitively he could not put an acceptable

meaning to being hurt by someone his parents admired. For some victims the message received was "My parents like the priest, so they must know about him hurting me; therefore, it must be normal." The result from this logic was that the abused stayed silent about her abuse.

The families in this study were a diverse representation of income levels living in rural and urban areas. The families in this study resided in rural and urban areas when the abuse occurred. There was no distinction of the abuse occurring more often in either locale. The sizes of the families were also diverse. Some families had two children while others had over ten children. In addition, there was a range of income and education levels of the families at the time of abuse. Some families were in the poverty range while others were upper middle class. In this study, priests did not choose their victims because of the family's financial status.

The results from this study show that not all families who have been affected by a priest sexually abusing their child leave the Catholic Church. Families that participated in this study live in various parts of the United States. Recruitment for participants was done through various avenues. Recruitment was not only accomplished through Catholic channels. Secular newspapers and public forums such as national support groups for survivors were also used for advertising the study. A proportionate number of participants replied after seeing the advertisement in the newspaper or at a support group meeting. It is difficult to predict if non-practicing Catholics saw the advertisements and decided not to participate because of feelings toward the Catholic Church. However, with

the participants who volunteered for the study, their choice to remain Catholic was evident. They credit their personal faith and belief in God for their strength to move forward. Their reasons for remaining in the Catholic Church are that they believe the healing power of God is stronger than the human power of the priest.

Woven into the stories of abuse for the families in this study were elements of concern and hope. As they told their stories, the researcher began to “hear” the deep levels of hurt, anger, and despair that the families initially felt when they learned of the abuse. Family members expressed their concern for the victim and the victim’s personal future. A concern for several families was the discrepancy of care and concern that was being given to the victim. An implication for the family is the attention that needs to be given to the family schism. It is important for family members to come together to tell the stories of how the abuse has affected each individual in order to develop a circular understanding of the effect to the system.

Victim’s Gender

Contrary to current literature regarding the victims of clergy sexual abuse being male, in this study victims were almost equal numbers of males to females. In this study, 19 victims were represented. Nine of the victims were male while ten of the victims represented were female. In one family, there were male and female victims. This sample represented almost equal proportions of male to female. Only one victim was an altar boy. This contradicts the findings in the John Jay Report and other publications that indicate that the predominance of victims are males.

While families expressed their concern for the victim, whether female or male, it appeared that more concern was given to male victims. This sample size is too small to generalize this point to all victims of clergy sexual abuse; however, it is important to note the construction of familial attitudes. In some of the cases, males were not protected as closely as females since the common belief was that men did not abuse boys. Because of education and the attention given to child sexual abuse, this assumption may no longer be as common as it once was although it is important to note that no blanket assumptions should be made to this effect.

Hearing the Family's Story

The message that was received from the participants is that they want to be heard. They want their story to be heard and not interrupted. Several avenues are available to family therapists to insure that each person's voice is heard. The primary element would be to listen to the stories and to not "hear too fast." In a situation such as this, if the therapist moves too quickly, she is hearing too fast, formulating ideas in her head rather than sitting back and hearing the story. The stories are difficult for families to tell, and oftentimes the client may jump from one story line to a very different story line.

Hearing each family member's story is beneficial; however, providing freedom for the family system to integrate each individual story into the family's story is critical. Because the abuse was kept silent for so long in most of these cases, giving the family members the opportunity to express their stories is crucial when developing new chapters in their family story. Feelings of anger, shame, blame, lack of support, guilt, and familial

division are areas that need to be addressed in therapy. Priest sexual abuse affects the entire system similar to the effects incest has on the system. Having knowledge about child sexual abuse, especially incest, can add to the therapists' understanding of the systemic effects abuse has on the family.

Allowing the client to tell his or her story without asking too many probing questions is a valuable asset for the family. Therapists who presently use theories such as narrative or collaborative language theory may feel comfortable with this type of process. This slowing down tactic may be more difficult for family therapists who employ other theories such as solution focused, emotive, etc. Key to the process is not providing interventions too quickly. The foundational intervention may be that the family was allowed to express its story. Families that have been affected by clergy sexual abuse want the opportunity for someone to listen to their accounts without pre-conceived assumptions or judgments.

Religious Identity

An added dimension for victims and their families in this study is that the abuser was a priest. This added a significant spiritual dimension to this study that the families need to address. Some family members expressed concern for their family member who had left the Catholic Church. For them, a significant effect of the abuse is the victims' leaving the Catholic Church. They blamed the priest for denying the victims the opportunity to grow in their faith. A sentiment several participants expressed was that the priest had robbed the child of his or her childhood and Catholic faith.

The families' identities were infused by Catholic traditions, worship, and teachings. As in other denominations, Catholics were taught to go to their pastor or parish priest for help with problems. Priests were trusted and revered. Multitudes of reasons make it hard on the faithful to hear of priests abusing minors. One reason is that everything that they believed to be true was no longer true. Catholics felt betrayed. It was more difficult to trust, and if that was the case, then Catholics began asking, "Whom can we turn to?" If the person Catholics had been taught to believe, their religious leader, could no longer be trusted, then humanly whom could they turn to? Many people affected by the abuse asked, "Where is God in all of this?" It is a natural concept to consider that if one claimed to have a relationship with God, he would direct his feelings toward God as well as to family members, the priest/abusers, and the Church.

The faith element was a significant element of the families' stories. Family therapists need to address the faith dimension in therapy. Kudlac (1991) contends that if the therapist does not address the faith dimension, the client may feel as if he or she is not being heard and accepted; in order for change to occur, it is vital for the family to feel heard. She states, "A therapist does not have to profess to be a theologian to enter into a conversation which includes the client's religious beliefs" (p. 281).

It would be important when working with an abused family that the therapist suspend her beliefs about the sexual abuse crisis and the Catholic Church. Kudlac (1991) states, "As therapists enter into a conversation with the family, it is imperative that they be aware of their own religious beliefs or convictions.... It is vitally important that they

not impose their values and beliefs on clients” (p. 281). What makes this especially true in this situation is that the stories and conjectures of others around the abuse and the Catholic Church are numerous. The job of the therapist is to allow the family to tell about its own experience.

Implications

The results of this study reveal several implications for professionals who work with victims of priest sexual abuse and/or their families. Implications for family therapists also apply to other professionals who work with individuals and families, such as pastoral counselors and spiritual directors. In addition, the Catholic Church can benefit from research such as this.

1. Priest sexual abuse affects the entire system similar to the effects incest has on the system. Having knowledge about child sexual abuse can add to the therapists’ understanding of the systemic effects priest sexual abuse has on the family.
2. Family therapists need to address the faith dimension in therapy, realizing that victims and their family members may continue to practice Catholicism.
3. The therapist should suspend her beliefs about the sexual abuse crisis and the Catholic Church.
4. It is essential for the therapist to allow the family members to tell their stories without interruption.
5. Feelings of anger, shame, blame, lack of support, guilt and familial division are areas that need to be addressed in therapy.

6. It is important for family members to come together to tell the stories of how the abuse has affected each individual in order to develop a circular understanding of the effect to the system.
7. Family therapists can teach families how to balance their need to protect their children from sexual predators while managing their personal fears.
8. Therapists need to be aware that the victims of priest sexual abuse are both male and female.
9. The Catholic Church can use the findings from studies such as this one to institute programs that will benefit the family system through therapy, education, spiritual support, as well as other avenues.
10. Research such as this is an opportunity for positive changes, both in terms of intervention and policy, to accrue within the Catholic Church, as well as within other faith denominations.

Limitations

The following factors limit this study's generalizability and conclusions. This was a non-probability sample. The results from this research study cannot be generalized to all persons who were sexually abused by priests. Because of the sensitivity of the topic (priest sexual abuse), the researcher interviewed participants who were available to her. The researcher used gatekeepers and snowball sampling to obtain her sample. She chose the cities where she would place newspaper advertisements based on the severity of the allegations of priest sexual abuse. The gatekeepers were chosen because of their

willingness to help the researcher in obtaining her sample. This also limited the study to particular geographical regions.

According to the literature, victims of sexual abuse are reluctant to tell their stories because of fear and shame, among other reasons (Fortune, 1998). Their families are often reluctant to disclose about the abuse for many of the same reasons (Benyei, 1998). The study was limited to participants who were willing to participate in the study. Because the sample was self-selecting, it is difficult to know what stories the researcher would hear from those who chose not to volunteer. No attempt was made to gather the participants' reactions to the analyzed data. Feedback of the analysis would strengthen the credibility of the study.

The researcher is a vowed religious; this may have influenced the level of disclosure on the part of some of the participants. It is not clear if potential participants were more willing or more reluctant to participate because of the researcher's vocation as a vowed religious. The fact that the researcher was a vowed religious was not publicized, but she introduced herself using the title "Sister" when she arranged appointments with the participants.

The sample size was adequate for a qualitative study of this type; however, a larger sample would add to the credibility of the study. No attempt was made to capture a sample that was balanced in terms of demographic indicators. All participants in the sample were Caucasian with the exception of three participants who were Hispanic.

Family members in the sample were mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, daughters, sons, and sisters. No brothers participated in the study.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

This study about the effects priest sexual abuse of children has on the family provides a foundation on which other research projects can build. Several of the recommendations suggest different group configurations with a similar intent to study the effects on the system that has experienced priest sexual abuse. Any of these studies could be duplicated by either male or female researchers who may or may not be a vowed religious.

1. The study was limited in size and geographical regions. Future studies could incorporate a larger sample from different geographical regions. Focusing on areas that are less Catholic might add a larger diversity to the sample, including persons who have left the Catholic Church.
2. Future research could structure a study to include the victim's story along with the family's story to determine how similar or dissimilar their stories are. In addition, including extended family members across generations would be beneficial to the field of family therapy.
3. Several participants noted how they are more protective of the next generation of children. Future research could focus on victims and their parenting styles of their children. Another configuration would be to include families who "went

public” about the abuse compared to families who told no one outside of the immediate family about the abuse.

4. The focus of this study was on the family system. Future studies could include the church system by interviewing families from a parish who were abused by a predator priest. Another element would be to include a comparison of abused and non-abused families from the parish.

5. Research comparing families where the abusing priest was a friend to those who had little interaction with the priest outside of church activities would add another dimension to the findings.

6. Another recommendation would be to combine qualitative and quantitative measures in future studies. The use of quantitative measures of family functioning combined with the family’s discourse would strengthen the study.

7. A longitudinal study of families contacted soon after they learned about the abuse that would be followed over a period of years would benefit the family therapy field.

Recommendations for the Field of Family Therapy

Providing therapy for families who have experienced child sexual abuse by a priest presents therapists with issues that might not be present in families where non-clergy sexual abuse has occurred. Listed in this section are recommendations to be considered in the education of family therapists.

1. Professional organizations such as The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) can provide programs and continuing education for therapists on this subject in order for the therapists to be better equipped to address some of the problems that are presented in families where this type of abuse has occurred.
2. Family Therapy Training programs have the opportunity to address these types of sexual abuse issues in their programs.
3. Supervisors might focus some of their continuing education on supervising therapists who treat families who have been abused by a priest.
4. Collegial groups that meet to hone and keep their skills might address topics such as the effects priest sexual abuse has on the family.
5. Education about Catholic teachings and other topics regarding the Catholic Church could benefit therapists who want more knowledge about the Church when working with a family who has experienced this type of abuse.

Summary

A limited number of research studies exist on the effect of priest sexual abuse. The literature is limited and virtually absent regarding the effects the abuse has had on the family system. This study sought to fill some of the void by focusing on the effects of priest sexual abuse of children on the family. A discussion incorporating the literature and the findings of this phenomenological study was included in this chapter. The process for analyzing the data and the conception of the themes were reviewed.

The researcher as the instrument was an important aspect of this study. The researcher's voice was included in this chapter. Conclusions based on the results from this study were presented. The implications for family therapists and other professionals who work with families were outlined as well as implications for the family system. Recommendations for further research on the family and clergy sexual abuse as well as recommendations for the field of family therapy concluded this chapter.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
Recruitment Flyer

**Participants Needed
For A
Texas Woman's University
Dissertation Research Project**

My name is Karen Kudlac, and I am a doctoral candidate conducting a research study for my dissertation. The purpose of the study is to explore the effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused as a minor by a Catholic priest. It is my hope that the results found will aid family therapists and other professionals in their work with victims/survivors and their families.

You are invited to participate in this study if someone in your family has been sexually abused when they were a minor by a priest. The study is open to all adult family members who are interested. You must be over 18 to participate in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I will conduct each interview myself. All interviews will be completely confidential. The time commitment for participants is approximately 90 minutes.

All personal information will be dealt with in a confidential manner. Your name will be known to me alone and will not be given to anyone.

If you are willing to participate in this study or have questions regarding the study please contact me. You may also contact my advisor Linda J. Brock, PhD at (940) 898-2713 or email her at LBrock@mail.twu.edu

If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact me at *(contact information deleted)*.

APPENDIX B

Newspaper Advertisement

Newspaper Advertisement

Has someone in your family been abused by a priest?

If so, you are invited to participate in a research study conducted by a doctoral candidate from Texas Woman's University. The results of the study will help us learn the best ways to work with survivors and their families.

- You must be 18 years of age or older and be willing to volunteer.
- You will be interviewed in a confidential manner; your privacy and identity will be completely protected.
- Each interview will be approximately 90 minutes.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact Karen Kudlac at (*contact information deleted*).

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Child sexual abuse by Catholic priests: The effects on family members

Investigator: Karen Kudlac, CDP, MS

Contact information deleted

Advisor: Linda Brock, PhD

LBrock@mail.twu.edu

Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in the dissertation research for Sister Karen Kudlac at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of priest sexual abuse on the family. This study is proposed in order to identify specific effects and needs of families where a member of the family has been abused by a priest.

Research Procedures

For the purpose of this qualitative study, the principal investigator will conduct face-to-face individual interviews with each family member. This interview will be scheduled at a time and place that is mutually agreed upon by you and the researcher. Your interview will be digitally audio recorded for later transcription and data analysis and to provide accuracy in reporting the information discussed. The maximum time commitment for the interview is approximately 90 minutes.

Potential Risks

A possible risk to you as a result of your participation in this study is release of confidential information. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. Your name will remain anonymous with codes. Only the researcher and the transcriber will have access to the digital audio recordings. Each of these persons has completed a training module for research. In order to minimize the risk of loss of

Participant's initials
Page 1 of 3

confidentiality, codes will be utilized to identify each participant. The number will identify each individual and the letter will identify each family. Any identifying information will be known only to the researcher. All information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. A master list with participant's names will be stored separately from other data. All disks will be erased and typed manuscripts will be shredded within two years of the study or upon approval of dissertation, whichever comes first. Any names you might mention during the interview will not be transcribed. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be published in the researcher's dissertation as well as in other research publications. However, no names or other identifying information will be included in any publication.

There will be two panel members. The panel members have knowledge in qualitative research and have completed a training module for research. Panel members will only have typed manuscripts of the first, third, and fifth transcript to help with the consistency in identifying themes. No identifying information will be included in the transcript and the panel members will not see any demographic information. Each transcript will be coded with the participant's code. All materials will be mailed. No materials or discussions about manuscripts will be transmitted via email.

Another potential risk is coercion. In order to minimize this risk, the researcher will be available to answer any questions you may have. All information you share with the researcher is confidential. You may stop the interview process at anytime, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Other potential risks related to your participation in this study include becoming distraught because of the topic of the interviews. You will be given a list of phone numbers of professionals in your area that you may contact if you feel the need to speak with someone professionally. You will also have the researcher's phone number if you desire to contact me. In addition, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty.

Participant's initials
Page 2 of 3

Becoming physically and/or emotionally drained during the interview are additional risks. If during the interview you feel you need to take a break, you should let the interviewer know. If you experience physical or emotional discomfort regarding the interview questions, you may stop answering any of the questions at any time. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The researcher will attempt to prevent any problems that might occur because of this research. Should any problems arise, you should report them immediately to the researcher for her assistance. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. However, Texas Woman's University does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because of your participation in this research.

Participation and Benefits

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation in the study at any time without penalty. The only direct benefit to you as a participant is that at the completion of the study you may request a summary of the results to be mailed to you.

Questions Regarding the Study

Should you have any questions related to this study, you may contact the researcher at (*contact information deleted*). Questions to your rights as a participant in this study or the manner in which this research is conducted may be addressed by contacting the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form for your own personal records.

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX D

Demographic Information

Demographic Information

DATE OF INTERVIEW: _____		PARTICIPANT CODE: _____		AGE: _____	
FEMALE: _____		MALE: _____		OCCUPATION: _____	
RACE/ETHNICITY: Asian _____ African American _____ Caucasian _____ Hispanic _____ Native American _____ Other _____					
STATE YOU RESIDE IN: _____			RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION: _____		
RELATIONSHIP STATUS: Married _____ Single _____ Divorced _____ Widowed _____ Other _____					
NUMBER OF CHILDREN: _____ CHILDREN'S AGES: _____, _____, _____, _____					
EDUCATION LEVEL: Elementary School _____ High School _____ Bachelor's Degree _____ Master's Degree _____ Doctorate Degree _____ Other _____					
SOCIO-ECONOMIC: below \$20,000 _____ \$20,000-\$34,999 _____ \$35,000-\$42,999 _____ \$43,000-\$52,999 _____ above \$53,000 _____					
ARE YOU A MEMBER OF AN ADVOCACY GROUP? (i.e. SNAP, VOCAL, LINKUP) YES _____ NO _____ If Yes, which one? _____					
IS ANY MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY A CATHOLIC PRIEST, RELIGIOUS BROTHER OR CATHOLIC NUN? YES _____ NO _____ IF YES SPECIFY RELATIONSHIP _____					
HOW DID YOUR FAMILY KNOW THE PRIEST PERPETRATOR? _____					
RELATIONSHIP TO THE PERSON WHO WAS SEXUALLY ABUSED? _____					
WHEN DID THE ABUSE OCCUR? _____					
WHEN DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE ABUSE? _____					
HAVE YOU HAD INDIVIDUAL THERAPY? YES _____ NO _____					
HAS YOUR FAMILY HAD FAMILY THERAPY? YES _____ NO _____					
TO YOUR KNOWLEDGE, HAVE ANY MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY HAD INDIVIDUAL THERAPY? YES _____ NO _____					
TO YOUR KNOWLEDGE, HAS THE FAMILY MEMBER WHO WAS SEXUALLY ABUSED BY A CATHOLIC PRIEST HAD ANY THERAPY? YES _____ NO _____					

APPENDIX E
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Participant's Code: _____

Date of Interview: _____

“The purpose of the study is to explore the systemic effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused by a priest. This purpose of this research is to identify specific effects and needs of families where a member of the family has been abused by a priest. An underlying assumption of this study is that sexual abuse by a priest affects members of the family system. In order to conduct this research, it is necessary to hear the stories of family members of those who have been victimized by a priest perpetrator. Your willingness to participate in this study will aid family therapists and other professionals who work with victims and their families. The interview questions for this study are geared at collecting data that will assist in this research.”

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As we discussed, the purpose of this research is to explore the systemic effects on the family when a family member has been sexually abused by a priest. Do you have any questions?”

“Before we begin the interview, let's go over the consent form.”

“Do you have any questions about the consent form? After you sign the form, I will give you a copy for your files.”

“The questions I ask you during this interview will be centered on how you experience the effects of the abuse on your family. During the interview, I will be making some notes. There is no need for you to use your name during the interview. If you need to mention a name, I might ask a clarifying question as to the relationship that person has to you so that I might refer to him or her as your husband, son, daughter, etc. Your name and any names of your relatives you mention will not be transferred to the transcript or any other record. Names of offending priests and church officials will not be recorded in transcript.”

“Do you have any questions before we begin?”

“Ok. I am going to turn on the recorder now. As I mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study is to explore the systemic effects priest sexual abuse has had on the family. I would like you to tell me your story. (Pause to hear story)

“What do you think family therapists need to know when working with families where clergy sexual abuse has occurred?”

Prompts:

What happened?

Nodding

How?

I see

How did you manage that?

Silence

What effect did that have?

Who else knew?

Did you tell anyone?

And that was, who?

Could you say more about that?

What else comes to mind?

Smiling

I see

Yes

What was that like?

Anything else?

What else happened?

APPENDIX F

Referral List for Person Participating in the study Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Priests: The Effects on Family Members

Referral List for Person Participating in the study
Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Priests: The Effects on Family Members

Denton, Texas

Counseling and Family Development Center
Texas Woman's University
Human Development Building
Room 114
Denton, TX 76204
(940) 898-2600

Linda J. Brock, PhD
225 W. Hickory
Suite C #2
Denton, Texas 76201
940-383-6677

Glen Jennings, EdD
1610 Mistywood Lane
Denton, Texas 76209
940-382-8437

San Antonio, Texas

Community Counseling Center
590 North General McMullen
Suite 3
San Antonio, TX. 78228
(210) 434-1054

Tom Stone, Jr., PhD
4241 E. Piedras Drive
San Antonio, TX. 78228
(210) 736-1866

Judy Anderson Perillo
Office of Victim Assistance and Safe Environment
Archdiocese of San Antonio
11201 Donaldson
San Antonio, TX 78228
(210) 734-7786

Saint Paul, Minnesota

Phyllis A. Willerscheidt
Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis
328 West Kellogg Boulevard
St. Paul, MN 55102
(651) 291-4497

Mary Lou Caskey
6550 York Ave. So. #503
Edina, Minnesota 55435
(953) 929-3103

APPENDIX G

Sample Master List for Participant's Address For Research Study Results

Sample Master List for Participant's Address
For Research Study Results

Participants will be asked if they want a copy of the research results. The appropriate answer will be checked and their address will be added if applicable.

Code Number	Name	Yes	No	Address

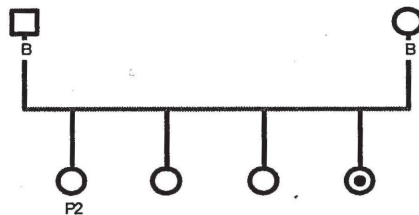
APPENDIX H

Descriptions and Genogram of Participating Families

Genogram Description of each Family Represented in the Study

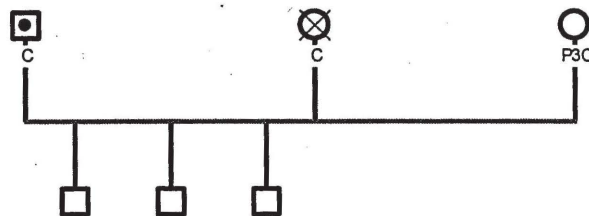
Family B

There are four girls in this family. The participant is the oldest child and she is speaking about her youngest sister. The family was told about the abuse more than 20 years ago; however, it was never talked about again until recently. With her sister's support and encouragement, the victim has begun to tell her story. The abuse began when the victim was in early elementary and the older sister was in high school. Two of the sisters are not as involved in supporting the victim. The priest was a close family friend who often stayed at the family's home and went on vacations with the family.



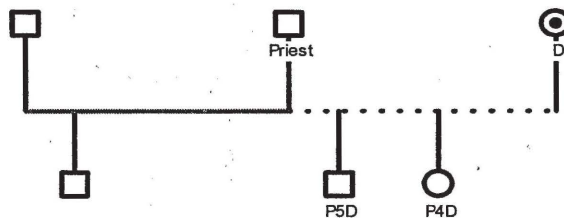
Family C

This family was represented by the wife of a man who was abused over 65 years ago by a priest who was also a member of the family, an uncle. The couple has been married over 35 years. He told his wife about his abuse 34 years ago. He has never told his children or anyone else in the family. The couple rarely mentions the abuse.



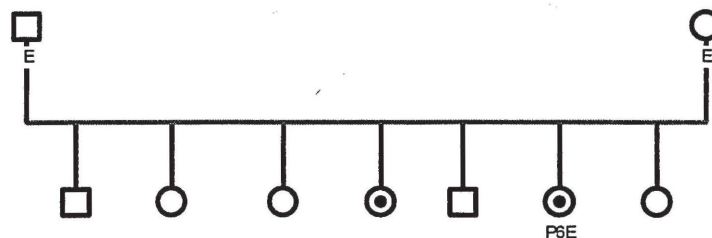
Family D

Family D: The researcher interviewed a brother and sister both in their early 20s. The participants' mother was sexually abused as a young adolescent. The mother was close to the priest who served as a parent figure to her. She went to him for counsel. The brother and sister are the priest's offspring. The daughter learned of the abuse 12 years ago.



Family E

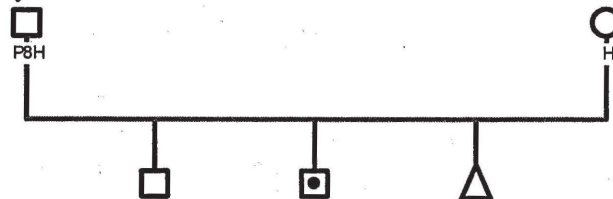
The priest, a close family friend, abused this participant and her sister. The abuse lasted several years. For the participant it ended when she was in her late teens. She and her sister learned of each other's abuse last year. Family problems at home led this participant to confide and seek comfort from the priest. The family is divided in their support of these two women. Some members believe the participant should not have gone to the bishop to have the priest removed from ministry. The mother defends the priest because of the perceived good he did for the family.



Family H

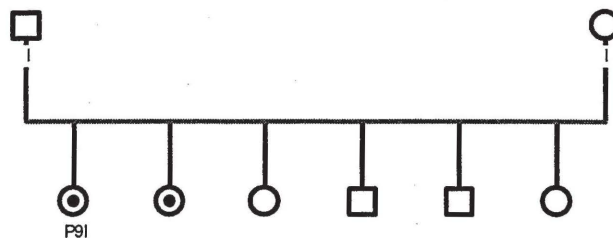
Family H: The researcher interviewed the father in this family. At the time of the abuse, he had two sons; the younger was the victim. The mother was pregnant with a third son when they learned of the abuse. The parents learned about the abuse when a

neighbor reported his suspicions to the parents. The father was closer to the priest than the mother was. The priest encouraged the parents to go on “date nights” where he would babysit. He would also encourage the couple to go away for the weekend while he watched the children. The younger son was six when the abuse started and it lasted about two years. The father remembers an incident that happened while they were away that did not make any sense until years later.



Family I

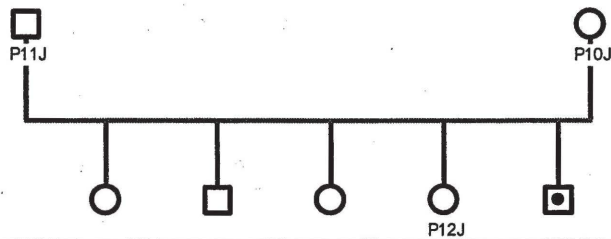
The victims in this family were the participant and her sister. The participant is the oldest in a family of six children. The abuse began for the participant when she was in the fourth grade and lasted until the eighth grade. For her sister the duration was the same, and she was about three years younger. The participant is now 49. She did not remember her abuse until 10 years ago. Her sister never forgot about her abuse; however, she never told anyone until after her sister remembered being abused. The abuser was a family friend and pastor at their church. The father never knew about the abuse. Her mother learned of the abuse shortly before she died.



Family J

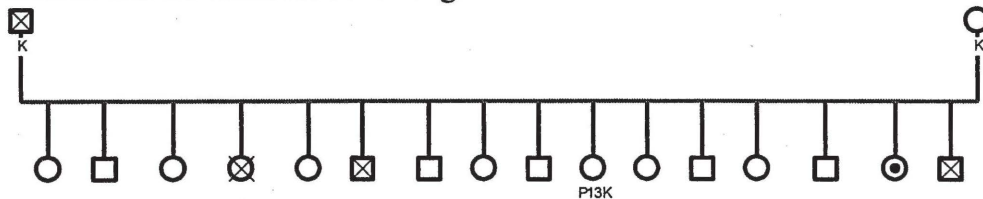
The parents of the victim were interviewed together. Both participants are in their mid sixties. They have five children, two sons and three daughters. The priest was their pastor and a close family friend. He abused their youngest son from age six to age twelve. The parents were concerned about the “rough-housing” between the priest and their older son. When the older son was a teenager, the father asked him if the priest had ever been

inappropriate with him. The son said no. They did not think about asking the younger son because he was so young at the time. The priest was considered a part of the family system. The parents learned of the abuse 11 years ago when the young man cried out for help. One of the couple's daughters also agreed to participate in the study. She is in her mid thirties and has one young son. She learned of the abuse about six years ago.



Family K

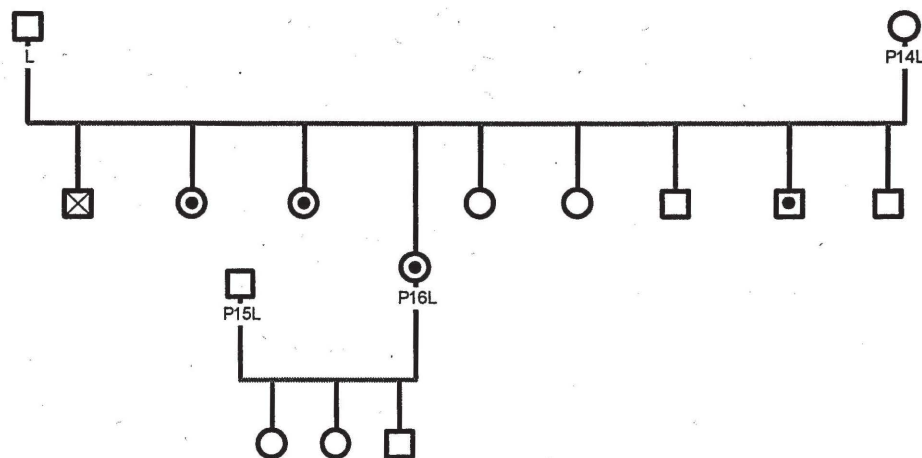
There are 16 biological children in this family. The participant, a female, is one of the older children. Their parish priest abused her younger brother. The mother used to confide in this priest, and the participant believes that he befriended/abused her brother because he knew about the family problems. She learned of the abuse ten years ago. She is 46. Her brother was 12 when the abuse began.



Family L

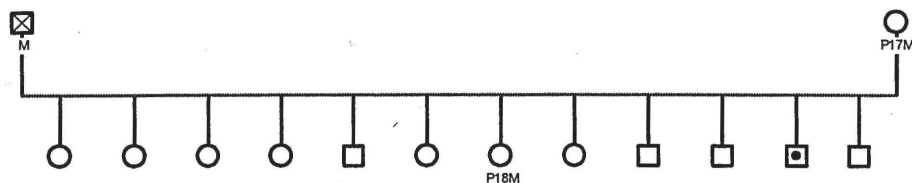
There were nine children in this family. The participants from this family included the mother, one of the older girls who was abused, and the victim's husband. The mother is in her 70s and the daughter and her husband are in their 50s. Of the eight children, the same priest abused three of the daughters and the youngest son. The youngest son told his family about the abuse about 15 years ago when he was in his mid 20s. The daughters were abused for many years during their elementary school years. The students, as well as some of the teachers, were aware of the sexual advances the priest made toward the girls in the school. The priest was not a close family friend although he would often dine in their home, and the mother would send her daughters to his house with cakes and pies on a regular basis. The

husband said that they had been married for over 20 years before he learned of his wife's abuse. She told him about her abuse when his brother-in-law filed a suit against the priest.



Family M

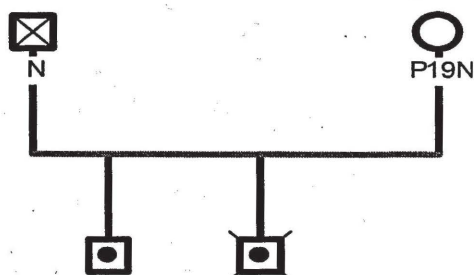
This 79-year-old participant has twelve children, five boys and seven girls. In addition, she raised nine foster children. The son who was abused is one of the middle children. The son was an altar boy for the priest, who also went on long vacations with the son. The family considered the priest a good influence on the children and he was considered a friend. The victim is in his 40s and was abused when he was an adolescent. The family learned of the abuse nine years ago. One of the victim's sisters also participated in the study. She is in her 40s and has four children.



Family N

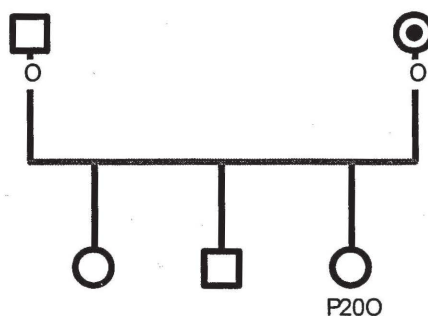
This participant is a widow who is in her 80s. She had two adopted sons of the same age. A priest who was their youth leader abused them. The two children were

together when the abuse occurred. The mother learned of the abuse three years ago. One of the sons committed suicide in his late teens, not long after the time of the abuse.



Family O

The young woman in family O is in her early 30s. Her mother was abused when she was in grade school. The mother's abuse happened around 1952; the mother is in her 60s. Her daughter was told about the abuse when she was a teenager during a time when the daughter was in counseling because of family problems.



Legend

