DECONSTRUCTING MEDIA REPORTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE: AN ANALYSIS OF FRAMING IN IRISH PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE OF SEXUAL ABUSE, 1993-2002

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Introduction

The mass media play a significant role in setting public agendas on a wide variety of issues, such as attitudes to criminal sexual deviance. The literature dealing with the influences of media content on consumers shows that content can influence public perceptions on various issues, as well as helping to form or sustain attitudes. Media coverage can also alter public perceptions of the central participants in the process, depending on the type of coverage (Brewer & McCombs). As Fico and Balog indicate, agenda setting research indicates that "differences in news media attention to particular issues subsequently influences differences in the public's assessment of the importance of those issues" (23).

This paper deals with one contemporary issue of major significance in Ireland and elsewhere today, that of sexual abuse. After decades of denial, the extent of sexual abuse of both adults and children is being brought to light. It is clearly important that a sociological perspective is provided on this issue, in addition to examining criminal and therapeutic dimensions. To that end this paper focuses on the critical role of the mass media and the contribution of the media to shaping public opinion and serving as information providers on this core issue. It provides an initial analysis of newspaper coverage from the newspaper of record, *The Irish Times*, as a preliminary exercise to the examination of the attitudes of media professionals with respect to the issue of sexual abuse in Ireland.

The Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland report (SAVI), commissioned by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and carried out by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) in 2002, has shown that more than 42% of women and 28% of men reported some form of sexual abuse or assault in their lifetime (McGee et al. xxxv-xxxviii).

Further research by the RCSI indicates that the public is significantly misinformed about the prevalence, nature and source of sexual abuse, underestimating the level and extent of abuse generally, underestimating the conviction rate of abusers, overestimating the rate of incest, overestimating the extent of abuse carried out by specific categories of individuals (e.g. fathers, strangers, and clergy), overestimating the level of reporting to the civil authorities, and holding a stereotypical perspective of abusers as a certain type. At the same time the public has a good understanding of some issues related to the rape of women but are conflicted about the motivations for rape. This paper asks "why is it so?."

This research is part of a much larger project which focuses on the Irish coverage on sexual abuse in Ireland and locates itself as a service to media professionals, health professionals, and academics, as well as providing a basis for developing public policy. No research has as yet been published which undertakes a thorough examination of the media coverage in Ireland, in the light of media professionals' perspectives and the current state of knowledge in the public domain. In that respect the overall project breaks new ground.

One recommendation of the SAVI Report was that a "national public awareness campaign" be put in place as part of a programme for educating the Irish public on the issues involved. The authors of the SAVI Report were quite specific:

> The role of the media is crucial in developing an accurate and comprehensive understanding of sexual violence among the general public. Strategies to support the media in its representation of sexual violence should be considered as part of the public awareness campaign. (McGee et al. 290)

The overall project is a partial response to that recommendation, focusing as it does on the state of public knowledge of, and media content on, sexual abuse with a view to relating these to the existing state of knowledge on the topic in Ireland.

This is a timely and necessary development if the issues associated with sexual abuse are to be tackled at a national level. By coming to a clear understanding of the state of Irish research on the topic, while at the same time appreciating the dimensions of media coverage to date as well as the attitudes of media professionals, a way forward for public education can emerge which highlights the role of the academy and the media working in tandem.

Literature Review

Scholars have different views about the coverage of sexual abuse in the mass media. Hawkins et al. deal with how prevention of abuse requires publics to be educated. The need to focus on research and intervention strategies is seen as particularly important (Brawley). Franklin & Horwath as well as Goddard & Saunders see media coverage as sometimes abusive in itself and doing a disservice to victims.

The widespread condemnation of 'name and shame' campaigns in the UK as well as the mixed public reaction to the 'outing' of paedophiles after release from prison has given rise to concern about the nature of some elements of media coverage, as well

as mixed reactions by members of the public.[1] Both Kitzinger and McDevitt have written on the nature of sexual abuse as constructed in media reports in Ireland and elsewhere. Wilczynski Sinclair, as well as Jenkins, raise questions about moral panics in respect of sexual abuse reportage. As Alder Polk contend,

> the gradual evolution of an internationalised media, capable of the instantaneous transfer of 'infotainment' around the globe [... has created] a special appetite for the bizarre and unusual. (134)

The use of sexual abuse reportage in this context is not conducive to public education (Franklin & Howarth; Tomison). This project adds considerably to the literature by focusing on media construction in the Irish context.

Mass media play a role in the formation of public opinion, are selective in the messages transmitted, and are directive in trying to shape and mould opinion (Shoemaker & Reese). While there are clearly external forces at work in terms of what enters the news, it is abundantly evident that there is much left to the choices of the individual editor or journalist, as well as many influences that act from within media organisations (White; Breed; Bass; Altheide; Weaver; Gross; Stempel; Schudson; Shoemaker; Shoemaker & Reese). Gatekeeping theory suggests that it is important to understand what 'gates' apply in relation to the coverage of various issues, in terms of examining what is covered, to what extent, and what is omitted from coverage (Shoemaker).

Kahneman Tversky conducted a number of experiments that indicate clearly the power of frames. Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock report on the effect of framing in priming values differentially, establishing the salience of the one or the other. Edelman indicates the significance of omission in frames. Entmann cites the Cold War as an example of how frames follow Gamson's understanding of diagnosis, evaluation, and description by the fourfold process of defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies. Norris shows how news frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases, and stereotyped images to reinforce certain

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1   In December 2001, the *News of the World* retreated from its 'name and shame' campaign targeted against British paedophiles, with the stated aim of publishing details of all 100,000 of them. *The Independent* had referred to the campaign as the more extreme folly that continued to engage in scare-mongering, sensationalism and incitement to vigilante action. In the wake of the *News of the World* campaign, some parents in Portsmouth had their children carrying banners saying "Kill Them" and vigilantes gathered outside the homes of suspected paedophiles, shouted abuse and threw stones. An innocent man with a name similar to one of those listed by the newspaper had his windows broken and abuse hurled at him. Two vigilantes were jailed for life at the Old Bailey for murdering a retired sea captain whom they wrongly suspected of being a paedophile, by firebombing his flat in Grimsby. In another incident, a suspected paedophile was battered to death with a toaster, frying pan and iron bar by vigilantes in Glasgow. In Gwent, a group of protestors, who could not tell the difference between a paediatrician and a paedophile, hounded Dr Yvette Cloete, a respected paediatrician, from her home.

common ways of interpreting developments. This paper continues the theoretical analysis of framing in relation to the specific issue of sexual abuse which has not been previously researched.

Methods

The data for this content analysis were drawn from *The Irish Times* library on the Lexis-Nexis database. For each of ten years, 1993-2002, a sample of five weeks was drawn to yield fifty weeks in all. For each of these fifty weeks, all stories meeting the search criteria[2] were recovered from the Lexis-Nexis database. This yielded a total of 1127 stories. On subsequent examination, only those stories dealing with the issue of abuse per se in Ireland were deemed acceptable for analysis.[3] This resulted in a total data set of 494 stories, on which this paper is based.

Following selection stories were coded by date, year, length in words, and page number. Each story was then assessed to ascertain the outcomes to certain variables as seen in Table 1.

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2   (sex AND (abuse OR assault OR attack OR offence OR harassment OR molestation)) OR (rape OR bestiality OR buggery OR incest OR (gross AND indecency) OR paedophile OR (child AND molester).

3   For example, stories dealing with rape in wartime, stories of sex crime overseas or stories of agricultural production of oil-seed *rape* were all omitted.

Table 1: Coding variables and assigned categories/values

VARIABLE	POSSIBLE VALUES
category of crime	child sexual abuse; adult sexual abuse
specifics of crime	rape, sexual assault/abuse, gross indecency, buggery, incest, sodomy, murder, sexual harassment
gender of victim	male, female
profession of victim	open-ended
relationship of victim to perpetrator	stranger, parent, sibling, uncle/aunt, other relative, authority figure, boy-friend/girlfriend, partner spouse, recent acquaintance,[4] colleague, other/not specified
gender of perpetrator	male, female
profession of perpetrator	open-ended
type of story	court report, news, letter to the editor, op-ended.

Results

Table 2 shows the frequency of occurrence for each of the years in the sample. The years are not evenly distributed with the highest number of stories occurring in 1994 and the lowest in 2001.

Table 2: Frequency of story by year

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Per-cent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1993	40	8.1	8.1	8.1
	1994	84	17.0	17.0	25.1
	1995	56	11.3	11.3	36.4
	1996	41	8.3	8.3	44.7
	1997	39	7.9	7.9	52.6
	1998	66	13.4	13.4	66.0
	1999	58	11.7	11.7	77.7
	2000	47	9.5	9.5	87.2
	2001	26	5.3	5.3	92.5
	2002	37	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows the frequency of story by type of crime. Of the 494 stories in the sample, only some 12 are unspecified as to the type of victim, either because the text did not make the victim type explicit or else related to both children and adults simultaneously. It is interesting, nonetheless, to note the ratio of child sexual abuse to adult sexual abuse stories, of 2:1.

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4   It was not originally intended to include this category but its occurrence in so many reports made it imperative.

Table 3: Frequency of story by type

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Child	321	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Adult	161	32.6	32.6	97.6
	Not specified	12	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

The frequency of crime type is seen in Table 4, with sexual assault (generalised abuse) as the most commonly reported in newspaper stories with rape second. There are 15 references to murder as the outcome or principal component of sexual crime.

Table 4: Frequency of story by specific crime type

		Fre-quency	Percent	Valid Per-cent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rape	149	30.2	30.4	30.4
	Sexual assault	294	59.5	60.0	90.4
	Gross In-decency	1	.2	.2	90.6
	Buggery	10	2.0	2.0	92.7
	Incest	14	2.8	2.9	95.5
	Murder	15	3.0	3.1	98.6
	Sexual Harass-ment	7	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Un-speci-fied	4	.8		
	Total	494	100.0		

Tables 5 and 6 indicate the gender of both victims and perpetrators within the story texts. Of the victims whose gender is identified, females outnumber males by a ratio in excess of 2:1. In relation to perpetrators, however, female perpetrators comprise only 1.4% of all perpetrators.

Table 5: Frequency of story by gender of victim

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Per-cent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	112	22.7	22.7	22.7
	Female	240	48.6	48.6	71.3
	Unspecified	142	28.7	28.7	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Frequency of story by gender of perpetrator

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	377	76.3	76.3	76.3
	Female	7	1.4	1.4	77.7
	Unspecified	110	22.3	22.3	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

The relationship, if any, between the perpetrator and the victim is given in Table 7. The relationship is manifest in about 45% of all stories. Within these 223 stories, spouses/ partners, parents, siblings and other relatives account for 63 cases, about 28% of specified perpetrators; authority figures (clergy, medical personnel, policemen, etc.) account for 52% of specified perpetrators.

Table 7: Frequency of specified relationship between victim and perpetrator

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Other/Unspecified	271	54.9	54.9	54.9
	Authority figure	117	23.7	23.7	78.5
	Parent	37	7.5	7.5	86.0
	Stranger	22	4.5	4.5	90.5
	New acquaintance	18	3.6	3.6	94.1
	Uncle/Aunt	9	1.8	1.8	96.0
	Other relative	9	1.8	1.8	97.8
	Partner/Spouse	5	1.0	1.0	98.8
	Sibling	3	.6	.6	99.4
	Boyfriend/girlfriend	2	.4	.4	99.8
	Colleague	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

In the coding of these stories, references to the profession of the victims and perpetrators was recorded where it occurred. In 494 stories, only one victim was identified in terms of a profession – a prison officer – and that was in relation to sexual harassment. The profession of perpetrators is given in Table 8. In about one third of cases a profession is identified. The greatest concentration of these occurs in relation to clergy or religious perpetrators, with 94 of the 161 (58%) identified cases specifying those professions. Teachers are the next largest group (N=10, 6.2%) followed by sports coaches (N=9, 5.6%), soldiers (N=8, 5%), with guards/policemen comprising 4.3%, N=7.

Table 8: Frequency of specified profession of perpetrators by story

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Per-cent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		331	67.0	67.0	67.0
	Cleric	80	16.2	16.2	83.2
	Religious	14	2.8	2.8	86.0
	Teacher	10	2.0	2.0	88.1
	Coach	9	1.8	1.8	89.9
	Soldier	8	1.6	1.6	91.5
	Campaigner	6	1.2	1.2	92.7
	Garda	6	1.2	1.2	93.9
	Farmer	4	.8	.8	94.7
	Mariner	3	.6	.6	95.3
	Radio Owner	2	.4	.4	95.7
	Shopkeeper	2	.4	.4	96.2
	Doctor	2	.4	.4	96.6
	Manager	1	.2	.2	96.8
	Apprentice	1	.2	.2	97.0
	Barman	1	.2	.2	97.2
	Bus Driver	1	.2	.2	97.4
	Businessman	1	.2	.2	97.6
	Tiler	1	.2	.2	97.8
	Car Valet	1	.2	.2	98.0
	Caretaker	1	.2	.2	98.2
	Chiropractor	1	.2	.2	98.4
	Cleaner	1	.2	.2	98.6
	Taxi Driver	1	.2	.2	98.8
	Prison Officer	1	.2	.2	99.0
	Cook	1	.2	.2	99.2
	Policeman	1	.2	.2	99.4
	Nurse	1	.2	.2	99.6
	Scout Master	1	.2	.2	99.8
	Window Cleaner	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

Finally, the length of story was also coded. This is a measure reported directly from Lexis-Nexis. Descriptive statistics are given in Table 9. The data can be seen graphically in Figure 1, a histogram of story length.

Table 9: Count, maximum, minimum, mean and standard deviation for story length in words

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Words	494	30	1701	361.19	289.162
Valid N (listwise)	494				

Figure 1: Histogram of story length in words

Words
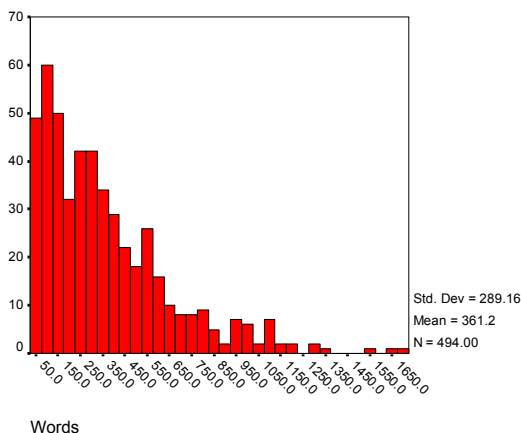
Looking at some of the variables in pairs, significant differences emerge. Table 10 breaks down the year data in terms of two kinds of crime, child sexual abuse and adult sexual abuse. Apart from 1993, the number of reports about child sexual abuse outstripped those of adult sexual abuse.

Table 10: Cross-tabulation of year by crime type

		Year										Total
		'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	
Category of crime	Child	17	69	47	24	27	33	41	23	12	28	321
	Adult	23	15	9	17	11	32	16	20	10	8	161
	Not speci-fied					1	1	1	4	4	1	12
Total		40	84	56	41	39	66	58	47	26	37	494

Looking at sub-categories in the two types of crime, we see other differences emerge in Table 11. In the adult category, the most common sex crime type against adults is rape (n=88, 55%) compared to sexual assault as the most common sex crime type against children (n=240, 75%).

Table 11: Cross-tabulation of category of crime by crime type

		Specific crime							Total
		Rape	Sexual assault	Gross inde-cency	Bug-gery	Incest	Murder	Sexual har-ass-ment	
Categ-ory of crime	Child	53	240	1	6	13	5		318
	Adult	88	51		3	1	10	7	160
Total		141	291	1	9	14	15	7	478

Turning to the issue of victim gender, we can see strong differences between the crime types in Table 12. Of those child victims whose sex is identified, 29% are male and 35.8% female, compared to 11.8% for adult males and 77% for adult females. In terms of reporting then, it would appear that boys and girls have about equal levels of sex crime against them, whereas sex crimes against adults are six times more likely to be against a woman than a man.

Table 12: Cross-tabulation of category of crime by victim gender

		Victim gen-der	Victim gen-der	Victim gender	Total
		Male	Female	Unspecified	
Category of crime	Child	93	115	113	321
		29.0%	35.8%	35.2%	100.0%
	Adult	19	124	18	161
		11.8%	77.0%	11.2%	100.0%
Total		112	239	131	482
		23.2%	49.6%	27.2%	100.0%

If we examine the relationship, such as it is, between victim and perpetrator in terms of crime type, we see the data in Table 13. Based on these figures, the perpetrators of sex crimes against adults are twice as likely to be strangers as the perpetrators of sex crimes against children. Family members (parents, spouses/partners, siblings, uncles/aunts, other relatives) are responsible for 16.5% of child sexual abuse and 6.2% of adult sexual abuse. The largest identified category in relation to child sexual abuse is that of the authority figure (33%), whereas the largest category in relation to adult sexual abuse is that of recent acquaintance.

Table 13: Cross-tabulation of victim's relationship to perpetrator by category of crime

	Category of crime					
	Child		Adult		Total	
Victim's relationship to perpetrator	N	%	N	%	N	%
Stranger	10	3.1%	12	7.5%	22	4.6%
Parent	36	11.2%	1	.6%	37	7.7%
Sibling	3	.9%			3	
Uncle/Aunt	8	2.5%	1	.6%	9	1.9%
Other relative	6	1.9%	3	1.9%	9	1.9%
Authority figure	106	33.0%	11	6.8%	117	24.3%
Boyfriend/ Girlfriend			2	1.2%	2	.4%
Partner/Spouse			5	3.1%	5	1.0%
Other	150	46.7%	109	67.7%	259	53.7%
New acquaintance	2	.6%	16	9.9%	18	3.7%
Colleague			1	.6%	1	.2%
Total	321	100.0%	161	100.0%	482	100.0%

Looking at the same crime category in relation to the identified professions of abusers, a similar picture emerges. The data are shown in Table 14. Again, these data need to be treated with some caution. Of those whose profession is specified, the largest categories in relation to children are clergy (24.3%), religious (3.8%), teachers and coaches (each at 2.8%), whereas for adults the largest categories are soldiers (3.1%) and guards (1.9%). It should be noted that these figures are generated from very different bases, with a profession being identified in 42.7% of child sexual abuse reports but only 15.5% of adult sexual abuse.

Table 14: Cross-tabulation of perpetrator's profession by category of crime

Perpetrator's profession	Category of crime				Total	
	Child		Adult			
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Unspecified	184	57.3%	136	84.5%	320	66.4%
Apprentice			1	.6%	1	.2%
Barman			1	.6%	1	.2%
Bus Driver	1	.3%			1	.2%
Business-man	1	.3%			1	.2%
Campaigner	6	1.9%			6	1.2%
Car Valet			1	.6%	1	.2%
Caretaker	1	.3%			1	.2%
Chiropractor			1	.6%	1	.2%
Cleaner	1	.3%			1	.2%
Cleric	78	24.3%	2	1.2%	80	16.6%
Coach	9	2.8%			9	1.9%
Cook	1	.3%			1	.2%
Doctor	1	.3%	1	.6%	2	.4%
Farmer	2	.6%	2	1.2%	4	.8%
Garda	3	.9%	3	1.9%	6	1.2%
Manager	1	.3%			1	.2%
Mariner	3	.9%			3	.6%
Nurse			1	.6%	1	.2%
Policeman	1	.3%			1	.2%
Prison Officer		1.6%			1	.2%
Radio Owner	1	.3%			1	.2%
Religious	12	3.7%	2	1.2%	14	2.9%
Scout Master	1	.3%			1	.2%
Shopkeeper			2	1.2%	2	.4%
Soldier	3	.9%	5	3.1%	8	1.7%
Taxi Driver	1	.3%			1	.2%
Teacher	9	2.8%	1	.6%	10	2.1%
Tiler	1	.3%			1	.2%
Window Cleaner			1	.6%	1	.2%
Total	321		161		482	
	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

Finally, looking at the issue of crime type and word length, we see that there are differences in story length according to crime type. The data are given in Table 15. Stories about child sexual abuse tend to be about 30% longer than stories about adult sexual abuse. This difference is statistically significant (t=4.14, p <.001).

Table 15: Mean, medium and standard deviation for story length by crime type

		Category of crime	
		Child	Adult
Words	Mean	398.69	292.11
	Median	314.00	257.00
	Std. Deviation	307.761	242.769

Discussion

The background for any analysis of these figures is the empirical data provided by the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland study (SAVI), which was carried out by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland at the request of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre.

The data in the tables and analysis above are empirical evidence of the content that is typical in *The Irish Times* when it comes to issues of sexual crime. As can be seen from the above, child sexual abuse appears to be double that of adult sexual abuse. There are twice as many stories about child sexual abuse and they tend to be significantly longer than those about adult sexual abuse. Female victims predominate in both categories, but male victims constitute at least 30% of child sexual abuse, whereas they make up only about 12% of adult sexual abuse. Rape or buggery of children accounts for some 20% of all child sexual abuse reports but constitutes more than 50% of all adult sexual abuse.

Examining those cases where the profession of the perpetrator is identified, the stories about child sexual abuse indicate that of 127 cases, clergy or religious are connected with 90, about 71%. In relation to adult sexual abuse stories, the profession of the perpetrator is identified in only 25 of 161 stories. The largest identifiable group within these 25 are soldiers, who constitute almost 20% of all reports.

The examination of the naming of perpetrators is worthy of further examination, predominating as it does in the case of child rather than adult sexual abuse. This predominance is statistically significant (t=416.4, p<.001) indicating that it is not a random or chance occurrence. Stories in which the perpetrator is named are also likely to be longer; 'named' stories have a mean of 331 words compared to 426 for 'unnamed' stories. This is also statistically significant (t=3.4, p<.001), again indicating that it is not a purely random occurrence.

It is important to note that the stories in the database can often refer to the same event several times if it is reported on different days over time. But it is also reasonable to suggest that the random nature of the sample is sufficient to ensure that what is here is pretty much representative of *The Irish Times* coverage of sexual crimes over the last ten years. There is, nonetheless, a significant discrepancy between what is represented here and what is represented by the findings of the SAVI report.

According to the SAVI report the ratio of boys to girls experiencing child sexual abuse is about 5:4, with more girls experiencing such abuse than boys (McGee 2002). SAVI goes on to report that one sixth of all contact-sexual-abuse of boys and one quarter of all contact-sexual-abuse of girls is penetrative, either orally, anally or vaginally. These data are in broad agreement with the empirical reports in *The Irish Times*.

From the SAVI report we also learn that "a quarter (24 per cent) of perpetrators against girls were family members, half (52 per cent) were non-family but known to the abused girl and a quarter (24 per cent) were strangers" (McGee 2002). This is not balanced out by the news media reports. In the ten years under examination, only in

43 of 62 cases where the perpetrator relationship was identified, was a family member responsible, some 69% of cases. In relation to boys, SAVI states, "fewer family members were involved in child sexual abuse of boys. One in seven perpetrators (14 per cent) was a family member with two-thirds (66 per cent) non-family but known to the abused boy. One in five (20 per cent) were strangers." In the news media reports, only in 8 of 73 cases where the perpetrator relationship was identified was a family member responsible, some 11%.

Finally, there appears to be a discrepancy between the newspaper reports of various groups/professions involved in abuse and the SAVI findings. SAVI states:

> A relatively small percentage of perpetrators fitted the current stereotype of abusers of children: strangers were in the minority – over 80% of children were abused by those known to them. Fathers constituted 2.5% of all abusers with clerical/religious ministers or clerical/religious teachers constituting 3.2% of abusers. The most common other relative or authority figure categories were uncles (6.2%), cousins (4.4%), babysitters (4.4%), brothers (3.7%) and non-religious/clerical teachers (1.2%).

This profile made clear that apart from the broad conclusion that perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse are most likely to be known to the child and to be male, there are no prominent clues to identify likely abusers. Reflecting on what therapists see in counselling for abuse, while experiences such as sexual abuse by fathers are relatively rare, the chances of seeking therapy are dramatically increased if the abuse experienced is perpetrated by a close family member such as a father (McGee 2002).

In the newspaper context, fathers or mothers constituted 35 cases of 135, or 26% of all child sexual abuse cases, where the relationship was identified. Where SAVI identifies clergy/religious as being responsible for 3.2% of all child sexual abuse, the newspaper reports indicate clergy/religious as responsible for 75% of the sexual abuse of boys and 35% of the sexual abuse of girls. Where SAVI indicates teachers responsible for 1.2%, the newspaper reports indicate 5.7%.

What is evident is that there are significant discrepancies between the empirical evidence provided by the SAVI report as to the nature and extent of sexual abuse in Ireland and the representation of that abuse in the Irish print media. While there may be a variety of influences at work, it is important to ascertain the fundamental reasons for these discrepancies.

There are a number of historical dimensions here that are also significant. In recent years there have been numerous reports about abuse of children, physically, sexually, and emotionally, arising from the infamous 'industrial schools,' run by various religious orders in Ireland for the state. These have resulted in a number of investigations and tribunals with a large number of former residents coming forward to make complaints. The level of complainants may well skew the data.

In addition, the Catholic Church worldwide has been struggling with disclosures of sexual abuse of children by clergy. While there is as yet little evidence to suggest that

such abuse is more or less likely by clergy, the Catholic Church has been a central player in such reports. The prevalence of such reports also adds to the data.

These concerns aside, it is manifest that certain dimensions of sexual abuse remain uncovered, when comparing the SAVI data to the data in this paper. Much abuse is hidden, especially in interfamilial settings. Similarly, much abuse is not reported to the authorities, as in the case of rape.

Table 16: Dublin Rape Crisis Centre statistics on reporting of cases to the civil authorities, 2002.

	Child Sexual Abuse	Adult Rape/ Sexual Assault	All Cases
Reported	22%	37%	33%
Dropped	8%	16%	14%
Pending	40%	40%	40%
Convicted	29%	11%	16%
Guilty Plea	0%	1%	1%
Acquitted	2%	2%	2%
No information	21%	31%	28%

Table 16 above indicates the scale of the problem. In 2002, when the topic was already well aired and public, some 78% of all child sexual abuse cases brought to the attention of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre had not been reported to the civil authorities, with the figure of 63% applying to adult cases. There is little reason to believe that the situation is better elsewhere in Ireland. Further research on the media construction of sexual crime, together with an understanding of media professionals' self-understanding of their role in this process, remains a priority.

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