

Clerical training fostered a predisposition to perpetrate child sexual abuse, study shows

February 18 2013

(Medical Xpress)—Clerical training fostered a predisposition to perpetrate child sexual abuse, study shows

The emotional and [sexual development](#) issues which likely predisposed some men who entered the seminary in Ireland to perpetrate [child sexual abuse](#) were exacerbated by the clerical training and culture they experienced, according to study findings published in the *International Journal of [Child Abuse](#) & Neglect*.

The research highlights that the prohibition of friendship, and the promotion of sexuality as sinful served to compound and amplify psychological conflicts that had developed during the offender's early life.

"What our research shows is a culture within the training of Irish Catholic priests that militated against the integration of emotional and sexual development and hindered psychological maturation, resulting in some men with very serious intimacy and relationship difficulties," says the first author of the report, Dr Paul D'Alton, UCD School of Psychology, University College Dublin, and St Vincent's University Hospital.

The study involved nine clergy who had perpetrated child [sexual abuse](#) and were attending professional psychotherapy. The interview schedules with the offenders were taken from a thematic analysis of a random selection of 'life stories' (autobiographical accounts of participants' life

histories completed as part of group therapy).

All of the participants displayed significant difficulties forming friendships and close relationships, a condition common among perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

"What appears among our study participants, and therefore is likely for other clerical offenders, is the experience of a culture and system that failed to re-balance or correct any early problems they may have had but rather acted to compound them through the strict imposition of certain beliefs and ideology," adds Dr D'Alton.

The findings published in *The International Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect* point to a prevailing ideology that compounded psychosexual and psychosocial vulnerabilities during the participants' clerical training, and thus fostered any predisposition to perpetrate sexual abuse.

According to Dr D'Alton, the findings support other studies suggesting several unique factors associated with sexual abuse within the clerical environment. Thus a multifactoral model of the development child sex offenders is indicated.

The study shows a failure of the culture and practices within clerical training to re-balance or resolve any psychological conflicts that had already developed during the offender's early life.

Provided by University College Dublin

Citation: Clerical training fostered a predisposition to perpetrate child sexual abuse, study shows (2013, February 18) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-02-clerical-fostered-predisposition-perpetrate-child.html>

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