

Abusers, Beasts and Child Molesters:
The ABCs of constructing sexual abuse in the Irish print media.

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Introduction

The phenomenon of sexual abuse in Ireland, after decades of denial, represents a stark social reality, with which Ireland is slowly coming to terms. It is absolutely imperative that this phenomenon is analysed from a sociological perspective, as well as dealing with criminal and therapeutic dimensions. This paper is a timely response to that one essential aspect of that sociological need, focusing 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. By way of response to this issue, the paper 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.

Recent research has revealed the extent of sexual abuse in Ireland to be a significant, contemporary problem. 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., 2002).

Further research by the RCSI indicates that the public is significantly misinformed about the prevalence, nature and source of sexual abuse. The public underestimate the level and extent of abuse generally; underestimate the conviction rate of abusers; overestimate the rate of incest; overestimate the extent of abuse carried out by specific categories of individuals (e.g. fathers, strangers, and clergy); overestimate the level of reporting to the Gardaí; and hold 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 project takes such public misconceptions as its starting point and asks 'why are these so?'

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, 1996).

While there are 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 organizations, a process known as gatekeeping. It is important to understand what 'gates' apply in relation to the coverage of sexual abuse, in terms of examining what is covered, to what extent, and what is omitted from coverage (Shoemaker, 1991).

This paper 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 an 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.

It is important to note that one of the recommendations of the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland Report (SAVI) 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 are 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., 2002, p. 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. (1994) 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, 1995). Franklin & Howart (1996) as well as Goddard & Saunders (2000) 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. Kitlinger (1996) and McDevitt (1998) have written on the nature of sexual abuse as constructed in media reports in Ireland and elsewhere. Wilczynski & Sinclair (1999), and Jenkins (1998), raise questions about moral panics in respect of sexual abuse reportage. As Alder and Polk (2001) 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.' The use of sexual abuse

reportage in this context is not conducive to public education (Franklin & Howart 1996; Tomison, 1997). 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, 1996). 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 organizations (White, 1950; Breed, 1960, Bass, 1969; Altheide, 1976; Weaver, 1979; Gross, 1981; Peterson, 1981; Dimmick & Coit, 1982; Todd, 1983; Luttbeg, 1983; Stempel, 1985; Schudson, 1989; Salwen & Garrison, 1989; Schrott, 1990; Pan & McLeod, 1991; Shoemaker, 1991; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Kahneman and Tversky (1984) conducted a number of experiments that indicate clearly the power of frames. Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock (1991) report on the effect of framing in priming values differentially, establishing the salience of the one or the other. Edelman (1993) indicates the significance of omission in frames. Entmann (1993) cites the Cold War as an example of how frames follow Gamson's (1992) understanding of diagnosis, evaluation and description, by the fourfold process of defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies. Norris (1995) shows how news frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases and stereotyped images to reinforce certain 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 Nexis-Lexis database. For each of ten years, 1993-2002, a sample of five weeks was drawn to yield 50 weeks in all (see Appendix 1). For each of these fifty weeks, all stories meeting the search criteria¹ were recovered from the Nexis-Lexis 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. This resulted in a total data set of 495 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.

Table 1 Coding variables and assigned categories/values

VARIABLE	POSSIBLE VALUES
Category of crime	Child sexual abuse; Adult sexual abuse

¹ (sex* w/2 (abuse or assault or attack or offence or harassment or molestation)) or rape or bestiality or buggery or incest or (gross w/1 indecency) or paedophil* or (child* w/3 molest*)

Specifics of crime	Rape, sexual assault/abuse, gross indecency, buggery, incest, sodomy, murder, sexual harassment
Gender of victim	Male, female
Age of victim at crime	#
Age of victim at trial	#
Profession of victim	Open-ended
Relationship of victim to perpetrator	Stranger, parent, sibling, uncle/aunt, other relative, authority figure, boyfriend/girlfriend, partner spouse, recent acquaintance ² , colleague, other/not specified
Victim's marital status	Single, married, divorced/separated, other
Gender of perpetrator	Male, female
Age of perpetrator at crime	#
Age of perpetrator at trial	#
Profession of perpetrator	Open-ended
Perpetrator's marital status	Single, married, divorced/separated, other
No. of allegations in court	#
Type of story	Court report, news, letter to the editor, op-ed.

Results

Univariate

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 Percent	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.

Table 3 Frequency of story by type

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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² It was not originally intended to include this category but its occurrence in so many reports made it imperative.

Valid	Child	321	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Adult	161	32.6	32.6	97.6
	Unspecified	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

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rape	149	30.2	30.4	30.4
	Sexual assault	294	59.5	60.0	90.4
	Gross Indecency	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 Harassment	7	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Unspecified	4	.8		
	Total	494	100.0		

Tables 5 and 6 indicate the gender of both victims and perpetrators with 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 Percent	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	

Tables 7 and 8 give frequencies for the marital status of victims and perpetrators. Marital status is stated outright (or can be inferred directly from the text) for 7.0% of victims and for 22.9% of perpetrators.

Table 7 Frequency of story by marital status of victim

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	13	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Married	9	1.8	1.8	4.4
	Other/	472	95.5	95.5	100.0

Total	Unspecified	494	100.0
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Table 8 Frequency of story by marital status of perpetrator

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	80	16.2	16.2	16.2
	Married	33	6.7	6.7	22.9
	Other/Unspecified	381	77.1	77.1	100.0
Total		494	100.0		

The relationship, if any, between the perpetrator and the victim is given in Table 9. The relationship is manifest in about 45% of all stories. Within these 223 stories, spouses/partners, parents, siblings and other relative account for 63 cases, about 28% of specified perpetrators; authority figures (clergy, medical personnel, policemen, etc.) account for 52% of specified perpetrators.

Table 9 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 office - and that was in relation to sexual harassment. The profession of perpetrators is given in Table 10. 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 10 Frequency of specified profession of perpetrators by story

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	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	

Turning to the age variables, we see some different patterns emerging. Four age variables were coded: the age of the victim at time of the crime and at time of trial, and similarly for the perpetrator. Means and standard deviations are given below in Table 11. The youngest victim was 3, the oldest 91; the youngest perpetrator at time of trial was 14, the oldest 76. The distribution of ages in all four categories is given in Figure 1.

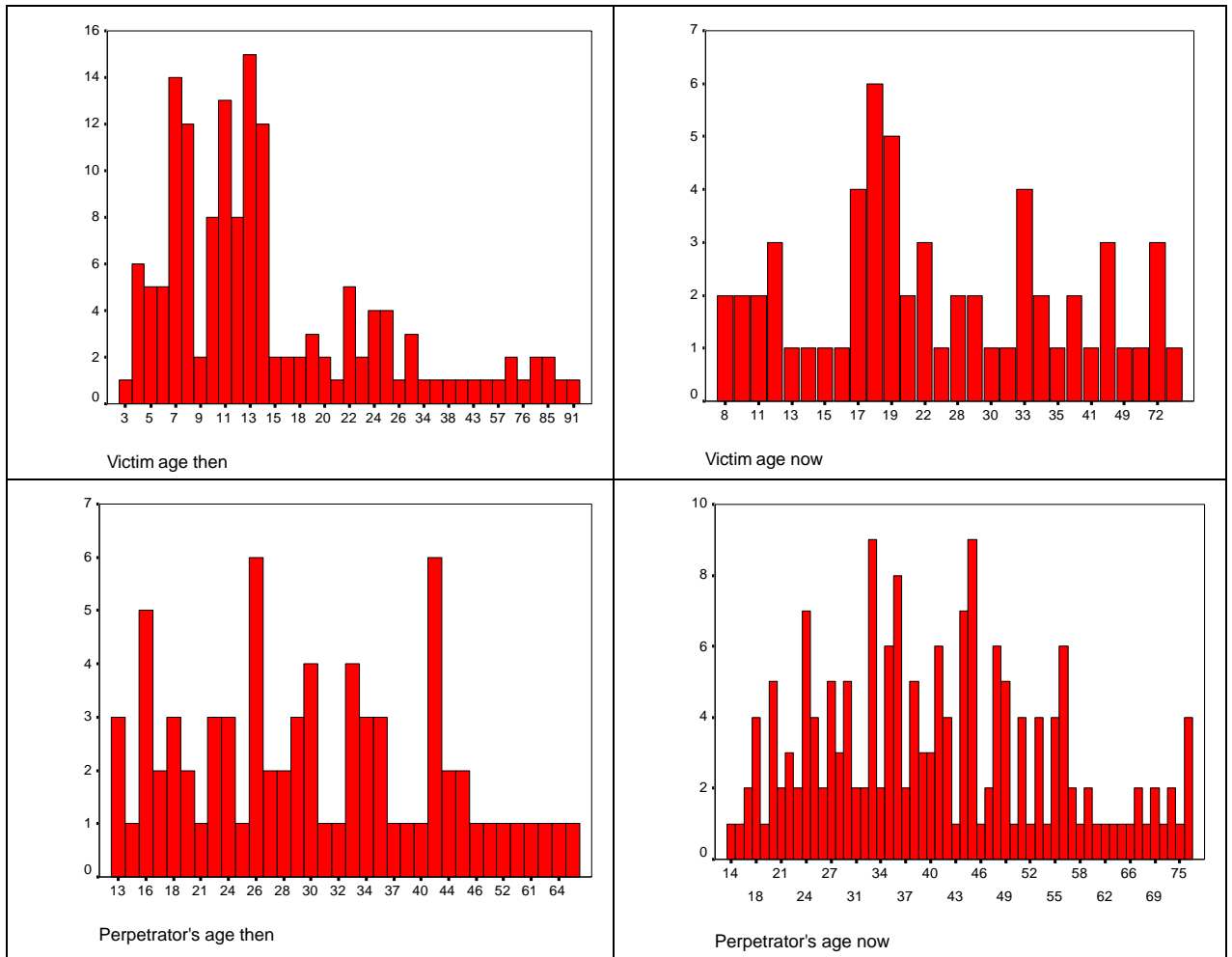
Table 11 Counts, maxima, minima, means and standard deviation for age variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Victim age then	148	3	91	17.97	17.912
Victim age now	59	8	82	27.54	17.206
Perpetrator's age then	74	13	70	31.42	12.840
Perpetrator's age now	174	14	76	40.82	14.826
Valid N (listwise)	32				

The data for age distributions are more easily examined in graphical form. In Figure 1 it is clear that perpetrator ages are uniformly distributed at both time of offence and time of trial. Victim ages, however, show a distinct pattern. At the time of offence, victim ages are grouped in the under-15 segment, hardly surprising in that two thirds of stories are about child sexual abuse. The distribution of ages of victims at time of trial shows something different. The peaks are at the 17-21 mark, indicating that cases

come to trial when victims come to an age of majority, at least in some cases.

Figure 1 Bar graphs of age distributions

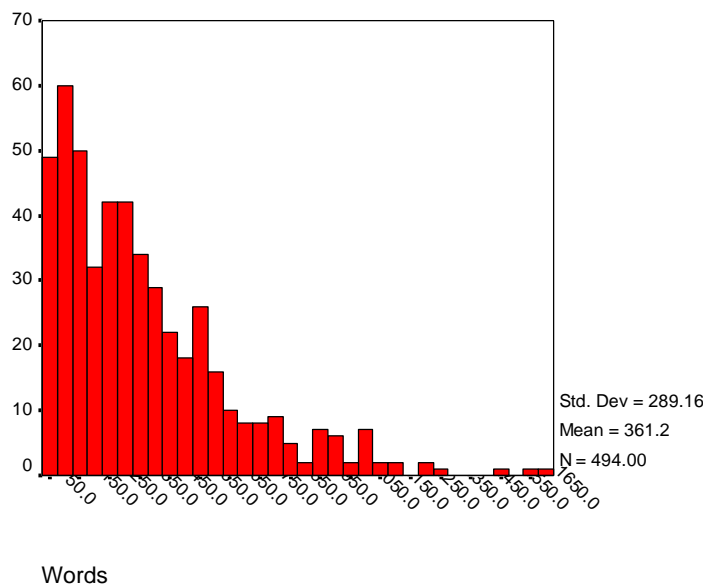


Finally, the length of story was also coded. This is a measure reported directly from Nexis-Lexis. Descriptive statistics are given in Table 12. The data can be seen graphically in Figure 2, a histogram of story length.

Table 12 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 2 Histogram of story length in words



Bivariate

Looking at some of variables in pairs, significant differences emerge. Table 13 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 13 Crosstabulation of year by crime type

Category of crime		Year										Total
		1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	
Child	Child	17	69	47	24	27	33	41	23	12	28	321
	Adult	23	15	9	17	11	32	16	20	10	8	161
	Unspecified					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 14. 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 14 Crosstabulation of category of crime by crime type

Category of crime		Specific crime							Total
		Rape	Sexual assault	Gross Indecency	Buggery	Incest	Murder	Sexual Harassment	
Child	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 15. 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 15 Crosstabulation of category of crime by victim gender

Category of crime		Victim gender			Total
		Male	Female	Unspecified	
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%

The figures given in Table 16 need to be interpreted with caution. Based on the construction arising from the newspaper reports, we know that the marital status of the perpetrator is likely to be mentioned (or inferred) more often in child sexual abuse cases than it is in adult sexual abuse. The specific figures are given in Table 16 but it should be borne in mind that the high number of references to clergy and religious act as an inflationary measure in relation to these figures. Here we see that, in those stories where the marital status of the perpetrator is mentioned or inferred, single people are three times as likely to be mentioned as married people, whereas in relation to adult sexual crime it is closer to 50:50.

Table 16 Crosstabulation of category of crime by perpetrator's marital status

Category of crime		Perpetrator's marital status			Total
		Single	Married	Other	
Child		71	21		92
		77.2%	22.8%		100.0%
Adult		9	11	1	21
		42.9%	52.4%	4.8%	100.0%
Total		80	32	1	113
		70.8%	28.3%	.9%	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 17. 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 17 Crosstabulation of victim's relationship to perpetrator by category of crime

Victim's relationship to Perpetrator		Category of crime		Total
		Child	Adult	
Stranger		10	12	22
		45.5%	54.5%	100.0%

	3.1%	7.5%	4.6%	
Parent	36	1	37	
	11.2%	.6%	7.7%	
Sibling	3		3	
	.9%		.6%	
Uncle/Aunt	8	1	9	
	2.5%	.6%	1.9%	
Other relative	6	3	9	
	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%	
Authority figure	106	11	117	
	33.0%	6.8%	24.3%	
Boyfriend/girlfriend		2	2	
		1.2%	.4%	
Partner/Spouse		5	5	
		3.1%	1.0%	
Other	150	109	259	
	46.7%	67.7%	53.7%	
New acquaintance	2	16	18	
	.6%	9.9%	3.7%	
Colleague		1	1	
		.6%	.2%	
Total	321	161	482	
	100.0%	100.0%	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 18. 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. Turning to those cases where the profession of the perpetrator is identified, clergy and religious predominate in the child sexual abuse category, constituting

Table 18 Crosstabulation of perpetrator's profession by category of crime

Perpetrator's Profession	Category of crime		Total
	Child	Adult	
Unspecified	184	136	320
	57.3%	84.5%	66.4%
Apprentice		1	1
		.6%	.2%
Barman		1	1
		.6%	.2%
Bus Driver	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Businessman	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Campaigner	6		6
	1.9%		1.2%
Car Valet		1	1
		.6%	.2%
Caretaker	1		1
	.3%		.2%

Chiropractor		1	1
		.6%	.2%
Cleaner	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Cleric	78	2	80
	24.3%	1.2%	16.6%
Coach	9		9
	2.8%		1.9%
Cook	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Doctor	1	1	2
	.3%	.6%	.4%
Farmer	2	2	4
	.6%	1.2%	.8%
Garda	3	3	6
	.9%	1.9%	1.2%
Manager	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Mariner	3		3
	.9%		.6%
Nurse		1	1
		.6%	.2%
Policeman	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Prison Officer		1	1
		.6%	.2%
Radio Owner	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Religious	12	2	14
	3.7%	1.2%	2.9%
Scout Master	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Shopkeeper		2	2
		1.2%	.4%
Soldier	3	5	8
	.9%	3.1%	1.7%
Taxi Driver	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Teacher	9	1	10
	2.8%	.6%	2.1%
Tiler	1		1
	.3%		.2%
Window Cleaner		1	1
		.6%	.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 19. 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 19 Mean, medium and standard deviation for story length by crime type

Words		Category of crime	
		Child	Adult
	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 executive summary of the SAVI report is given as Appendix 2.

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 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 (see Appendix 2 for more complete details) 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 of boys and one quarter of all

contact abuse of girls is penetrative, either orally, anally or vaginally. These 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 is little other clue 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 news paper 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. Further research is warranted.

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Appendix 1

The table below shows the results of sampling 5 weeks from each of the ten years in the study. The random sample function from Microsoft Excel was used, with a total of 8 weeks sampled from each year. The additional weeks were sampled in case of duplication in the first five weeks. Each date represents a Monday and the subsequent data were drawn from Nexis-Lexis based on the week following the Monday through to Saturday.

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
1st week	04 October 1993	30 May 1994	04 December 1995	05 February 1996	27 October 1997
2nd week	24 May 1993	19 September 1994	10 April 1995	11 March 1996	26 May 1997
3rd week	29 November 1993	14 March 1994	08 May 1995	23 December 1996	24 February 1997
4th week	14 June 1993	28 November 1994	23 October 1995	27 May 1996	11 August 1997
5th week	18 January 1993	17 January 1994	02 October 1995	22 January 1996	29 December 1997
1st Substitute	05 April 1993	12 December 1994	18 December 1995	11 March 1996	29 December 1997
2nd Substitute	01 March 1993	19 December 1994	07 August 1995	24 June 1996	04 August 1997
3rd Substitute	06 December 1993	17 October 1994	03 April 1995	02 September 1996	12 May 1997
Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
1st week	23 February 1998	15 March 1999	15 May 2000	02 July 2001	05 August 2002
2nd week	02 November 1998	22 November 1999	20 November 2000	10 September 2001	19 August 2002
3rd week	05 October 1998	14 June 1999	06 November 2000	12 March 2001	11 November 2002
4th week	24 August 1998	02 August 1999	06 March 2000	15 October 2001	25 February 2002
5th week	16 November 1998	23 August 1999	19 June 2000	17 December 2001	25 November 2002
1st Substitute	02 February 1998	08 March 1999	31 January 2000	09 April 2001	15 July 2002
2nd Substitute	24 August 1998	25 January 1999	20 November 2000	15 January 2001	25 March 2002
3rd Substitute	28 September 1998	01 February 1999	28 February 2000	22 October 2001	05 August 2002

Appendix 2 (McGee, 2002).

The SAVI Report Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland

OVERVIEW

Sexual violence is a serious problem affecting individuals, families and societies. In Ireland there has been a substantial increase in the numbers of sexual offences reported over the past 20 years. While the number of recorded crimes increases, there is still concern that there is considerable under-reporting of sexual violence in Irish society. The SAVI Report aims to provide the first comprehensive investigation of lifetime experiences of sexual violence and the uptake of related services in Ireland. ...

The SAVI Report was commissioned by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and undertaken by the Health Services Research Centre at the Department of Psychology, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. Additional support to the study was provided by two Government Departments - the Department of Health & Children and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

The prevalence of sexual violence in Ireland is unknown. Incomplete evidence from crime statistics, previous research reports and service uptake figures is insufficient to understand the nature and extent of the problem and to plan and evaluate services and preventive interventions.

The main aim of the SAVI study was to estimate the prevalence of various forms of sexual violence among Irish women and men across the lifespan from childhood through adulthood.

Additional aims of the study were to describe who had been abused, the perpetrators of abuse, the context in which abuse occurred and some psychological consequences of abuse; to describe the pattern of disclosure of such abuse to others, including professionals; to document public beliefs about and perceived prevalence of sexual violence; to assess public willingness to disclose abuse to others in the event of a future experience; to document particular challenges experienced in addressing sexual violence by marginalised groups; and to make recommendations for future developments in the areas of public awareness, prevention, service delivery and policy development.

METHOD

A survey assessing the prevalence of sexual violence was conducted by anonymous telephone interviews with randomly selected participants from the general population in Ireland. They were interviewed at home telephone numbers in the period March to June 2001.

Many ethical and safety considerations were built into the study design to ensure that a high quality and sensitive approach was used. Interviewers were highly qualified and underwent additional training and regular supervision in the

conduct of the interviews. A wide range of safety mechanisms were put in place to reassure participants about study authenticity and to provide them with access to professional services if required.

RESULTS

Study Population

Over 3,000 randomly selected Irish adults took part in the study (n = 3,120). This represented a 71 per cent participation rate of those invited. For a telephone survey, and on such a sensitive topic, this very high participation rate means that the findings can be taken as broadly representative of the general population in Ireland. The information available can therefore provide important and previously unavailable information on the extent and nature of sexual violence in Irish society.

Prevalence of Sexual Violence

Child Sexual Abuse (defined as sexual abuse of children and adolescents under age 17 years)

- **Girls:** One in five women (20.4 per cent) reported experiencing contact sexual abuse in childhood with a further one in ten (10.0 per cent) reporting non-contact sexual abuse. In over a quarter of cases of contact abuse (i.e. 5.6 per cent of all girls), the abuse involved penetrative sex – either vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- **Boys:** One in six men (16.2 per cent) reported experiencing contact sexual abuse in childhood with a further one in fourteen (7.4 per cent) reporting non-contact sexual abuse. In one of every six cases of contact abuse (i.e. 2.7 per cent of all boys), the abuse involved penetrative sex – either anal or oral sex.

Adult Sexual Assault (defined as sexual violence against women or men aged 17 years and above)

- **Women:** One in five women (20.4 per cent) reported experiencing contact sexual assault as adults with a further one in twenty (5.1 per cent) reporting unwanted non-contact sexual experiences. Over a quarter of cases of contact abuse in adulthood (i.e. 6.1 per cent of all women) involved penetrative sex.
- **Men:** One in ten men (9.7 per cent) reported experiencing contact sexual assault as adults with a further 2.7 per cent reporting unwanted non-contact sexual experiences. One in ten cases of contact abuse in adulthood (i.e. 0.9 per cent of all men) involved penetrative sex.

Lifetime Experience of Sexual Abuse and Assault

- **Women:** More than four in ten (42 per cent) of women reported some form of sexual abuse or assault in their lifetime. The most serious form of abuse, penetrative abuse, was experienced by 10 per cent of women. Attempted penetration or contact abuse was experienced by 21 per cent, with a further 10 per cent experiencing non-contact abuse.
- **Men:** Over a quarter of men (28 per cent) reported some form of sexual abuse or assault in their lifetime. Penetrative abuse was experienced by 3 per cent of

men. Attempted penetration or contact abuse was experienced by 18 per cent, with a further 7 per cent experiencing non-contact abuse.

Characteristics of Sexual Abuse and Violence in Childhood and Adulthood

- Overall, almost one-third of women and a quarter of men reported some level of sexual abuse in childhood. Attempted or actual penetrative sex was experienced by 7.6 per cent of girls and 4.2 per cent of boys. Equivalent rape or attempted rape figures in adulthood were 7.4 per cent for women and 1.5 per cent for men. Hence, girls and women were more likely to be subjected to serious sexual crimes than boys and men. Levels of serious sexual crimes committed against women remained similar from childhood through adulthood. Risks for men were lower as children than they were for women and decreased three-fold from childhood to adult life.
- Of those disclosing abuse, over one-quarter (27.7 per cent) of women and one-fifth (19.5 per cent) of men were abused by different perpetrators as both children and adults (i.e. “revitalised”). For women, experiencing penetrative sexual abuse in childhood was associated with a sixteen-fold increase in risk of adult penetrative sexual abuse, and with a five-fold increase in risk of adult contact sexual violence. For men, experiencing penetrative sexual abuse in childhood was associated with a sixteen-fold increase in the risk of adult penetrative sexual violence, and an approximately twelve-fold increase in the risk of adult contact sexual violence. It is not possible to say that childhood abuse “causes” adult revictimisation. Childhood sexual abuse is, however, an important marker of increased risk of adult sexual violence.
- Most sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence occurred in the pre-pubescent period, with two-thirds (67 per cent) of abused girls and 62 per cent of abused boys having experienced abuse by twelve years of age.
- In four of ten cases (40 per cent), the experience of child sexual abuse was an ongoing, rather than a single, abuse event. For many of those who experienced ongoing abuse (58 per cent of girls and 42 per cent of boys), the duration of abuse was longer than one year.
- A third (36 per cent) of those who had experienced sexual abuse as a child now believe that their abuser was also abusing other children at the time.

Characteristics of Perpetrators and Context of Sexual Violence

- Most perpetrators of child sexual abuse (89 per cent) were men acting alone. Seven per cent of children were abused by one female perpetrator. In 4 per cent of cases more than one abuser was involved in the same incident(s).

Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse

- **Girls:** 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.
- **Boys:** 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 sum, in four-fifths of cases of child sexual abuse, the perpetrator was known to the abused person.
- The perpetrator was another child or adolescent (17 years old or younger) in one out of every four cases.
- 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 is little other clue 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.

Perpetrators of Sexual Violence against Adults

- Almost one-quarter (23.6 per cent) of perpetrators of sexual violence against women as adults were intimate partners or ex-partners. This was the case for very few (1.4 per cent) abused men. Instead, most perpetrators of abuse against men were friends or acquaintances (42 per cent). The risk of sexual assault by a stranger was higher for adults (representing 30 per cent of assaults on women and 38 per cent of assaults on men) than for children.
- Alcohol was involved in almost half of the cases of sexual assault that occurred as an adult. Of those who reported that alcohol was involved, both parties were drinking in 57 per cent of cases concerning sexual assault of women, and in 63 per cent of cases concerning sexual assault of men. Where only one party was drinking, the perpetrator was the one drinking in the majority of cases (84 per cent of female and 70 per cent of male assault cases).