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Research article

A situational crime prevention analysis of Anglican clergy's child protective practices

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ABSTRACT

To date, a predominant focus within the field of 'clerical collar crime' has revolved around institutional-level church responses to child sexual abuse events, survivors and offenders. Comparatively, little attention has been directed towards the micro-level and in particular, examining clerical responses to child sexual abuse. This article presents empirical findings concerning the 'everyday' child protective practices of Anglican clergy in the Diocese of Tasmania, Australia. Research data was acquired through open-ended qualitative interviews conducted with a sample of 34 clergy in a broader study of clerical culture, *habitus* and life amidst the 'church abuse crisis'. The framework of Situational Crime Prevention is employed to evaluate the feasibility of clergy's child-safe practices and comment on how these practices could be further altered through professional development. Research findings demonstrate that clergy possess an active awareness of risk, and execute a series of protective measures to minimise both sexual interactions with children and allegations of impropriety.

1. Introduction

For over a decade significant societal attention has been directed towards the issue of 'clerical collar crime', that is, clergy-child sexual abuse within Christian Church Institutions (hereinafter 'CCIs') across the Western world (Guerzoni & Graham, 2015; Keenan, 2012; Parkinson, 2013). Predominantly fixed within the context of the Roman Catholic Church, scholastic, ecclesiastic and government inquiries have orientated primarily around the examination of historical church responses to abuse events, offenders and survivors (Blake 2006; McGrath-Merkle, 2010; McLoone-Richards, 2012; Pilgrim, 2011), evaluations and estimations as to prevalence (John Jay College, 2011; Parkinson, Oates, & Jayakody, 2009), theorisations of causation (Keenan, 2012; Turner & Briken, 2015), understanding offenders (Plante, 2015; Saradjian & Nobus, 2003), and uncovering the experiences of survivors (Death, 2013). In Australia, where this article is authored, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses of Child Sexual Abuse has brought an exhaustive contribution to understandings of clerical abuse, and institutional abuse more broadly; the final report being released in December of 2017 (Doyle, 2017; Matthews, 2017). Increasingly it is the role of environmental and cultural factors that are being considered as the underlying enablers and causative variables of clergy-child sexual abuse, and child sexual abuse more broadly, as opposed to the traditional understanding of paraphilic orientation or deviant sexual interests (Keenan, 2012; Leclerc, Chiu, & Cale, 2016; Leclerc, Smallbone, & Wortley, 2013; Tallon & Terry, 2008; Terry & Freilich, 2012).

This article explores how Anglican clergy respond to the concern of child sexual abuse and protecting children in their ministry, through examining the reported practices utilised by clergy to prevent abuse events and inappropriate interactions with children on an every-day basis. These practices are here called the 'clerical child-protection *habitus*', as adapted from the work of Bourdieu (1984) discussing the internalised habits and means by which individuals perceive and respond to social phenomena. These practices are

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analysed through a Situational Crime Prevention framework to evaluate their feasibility as “child safe”. This paper is divided into several segments. First, a brief summary of key literature in the field concerning clerical attitudes towards child protection and situational crime prevention is provided, alongside that pertaining to clerical attitudes and responses to abuse. This is followed by detailing the research method and scope. The child protective practices reported by clergy are then grouped and sorted into the Situational Crime Prevention categories, which are in turn evaluated through and against the situational prevention model. The article concludes with a discussion of the deductions that can be made regarding clerical *habitus* towards child protection in the Anglican Church of Tasmania.

1.1. Clerical collar crime and situational crime prevention and clergy-child sexual abuse

A small pool of studies have been undertaken that examine clerical attitudes and practices, towards child sexual abuse and child protection (Harder & Haynie, 2012; Kane, 2008, 2013; Morrison, 2005; Morton, 2005). Collectively, it has been shown that clergy are being increasingly trained in child protection through denominational programs, are familiar with child protection policies and ideas, and are implementing structures and procedures within their churches to prevent child abuse (Harder & Haynie, 2012; Kane, 2008, 2013; Morrison, 2005; Morton, 2005). Clergy demonstrate increased knowledge in respect to both child protection techniques and requirements of abuse preventive policies, affirm their value, express a willingness for further training, and affirm their compliance to these policies (Harder & Haynie, 2012; Kane, 2013; Morrison, 2005; Morton, 2005). It seems that larger and wealthier churches are better at implementing child protection programs, policies and structures (Harder & Haynie, 2012). However, there is evidence of divergence from this knowledge on an everyday basis at the micro-level.

Changes required to clerical practice was seen in some instances by clergy as excessive, intrusive, burdensome, and part of a denominational political agenda (Morrison, 2005). Similarly, there has been an observed resistance, a ‘deep ambivalence’, to shifting certain normative modes of clerical practice irrespective of the new expected behaviours (Morrison, 2005: 23). This is particularly the case with confidentiality of clerical conversations in counselling, pastoral care, and the sacrament of the confessional; clergy being of the perspective that clerical confidence should not be broken, irrespective of instances of being informed of child sexual abuse (Kane, 2013; Morrison, 2005). This mindset resulted in clergy admitting to not reporting knowledge of abuse to police or otherwise being delayed in this process, and purposely not implementing known child protective measures at a meso (parish) level (Morrison, 2005; Morton, 2005). Notwithstanding this, clergy have been found to be sensitive as to how their actions could be misconstrued as suspicious or deviant by their parishioners. Studies have shown that some participants were altering their ministerial practices, particularly in terms of personal boundaries and acts of physical contact, as a protective measure against being accused of sexual impropriety, described by priests as the “kiss of death” (Kane, 2008: 193; Morrison 2005; Rossetti, 1996). Comments in respect to this issue revealed a change in clergy’s dispositions towards environmental settings and risk management, as covered in the Situational Crime Prevention techniques (Kane, 2008; Morrison 2005).

Popularised by Clarke (1997), Situational Crime Prevention (hereinafter ‘the perspective’) is a criminological crime prevention paradigm which orientates around the observation of the causal link between the occurrence of crime, individual motivation, and certain environments and the opportunities these present. Situational Prevention scholars, also known as ‘Crime Scientists’, argue that these factors together form the core components of each criminal act, working on the principle that prior to criminal acts each individual, as a rational being, undertakes an active measurement of the *pro et contra* (the risks/costs and benefits) of a particular criminal action/omission at a particular time and place to determine whether the possible pleasure outweighs risk/harm involved (Allard, Wortley, & Stewart, 2008; Clarke, 1997; Li, Zhang, & Sarathy, 2010; Wortley, 2002). This process encompasses an analysis of the environment and situation within which the individual is placed, the surrounding present and absent variables (guardianship, surveillance, sufficient time), an evaluation of one’s abilities to undertake a particular action within the present environment, and a weighing up of the perceived or actual risks and benefits that the action may produce. For example, larceny usually occurs in poorly illuminated areas at opportune moments where resistance is unlikely/feeble, whilst cybercrime occurs where technological devices can be used to access internet domains which lack sufficient on-line protection. Central to the perspective is the observation that human nature is intertwined with the tendency to offend, so long as the right circumstances arise (Clarke, 1997; Cornish & Clarke, 2003: 72).

With the support of an increasing pool of empirical scholarship, Crime Scientists contend that crime may be minimised and prevented through the alteration of environmental and situational variables (precipitating factors), tailoring prevention recommendations to specifically target particular crimes and environments (Eck, 1997; Sutton, Cherney, & White, 2014; Wortley, 2002). The model incorporates ‘crime-specific analysis’, involving a five-stage process of:

- 1 Identification (crime or deviation);
- 2 Analysis (pinpointing causative variables, researching if techniques have worked elsewhere on similar issues/situations);
- 3 Implementation of techniques (as listed below);
- 4 Assessing the impact of the recommendations (has anything changed?);
- 5 Reporting and distributing the findings (to improve the practice of Situational Prevention) (Cornish & Clarke, 2003: 61; Gurette, Johnson, & Bowers, 2016).

Though the child abuse literature has historically favoured a psychological approach for understanding and formulating responses to sexual offences against children, recent movements have sought to broaden the scope to recognise the role of situational/environmental factors in offending (Terry & Ackerman, 2008; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Notwithstanding that there are a number of

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