

## ***SHAPING THE FUTURE***

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | POSTER

### **Psychological Factors Influencing the Reporting of Alleged Sexual Abuse in Religious Institutions**

Craig Harper, PhD  
Nottingham Trent University  
Colin Perkins  
Church of England  
Debbie Johnson  
Church of England

In August 2018 a report was published of a two-year Grand Jury investigation into widespread sexual abuse of children in six Catholic dioceses in Pennsylvania. The publication received global media coverage; even when measured against similar reports from around the world, the Pennsylvania report produced particularly damning findings. It revealed a deliberate cover-up of the abuse by church authorities. In what may prove to be the report's defining phrase, the Grand Jury concluded that the Church engaged in systematic behaviours that looked "like a playbook for concealing the truth" (Office of the Attorney General, 2018, p. 3). The theme of institutional cover-up is now part of the permanent landscape against which abuse scandals are framed. What has perhaps received less attention is the psychological dynamics involved when people in institutional settings hear allegations of abuse in those same settings.

In this study, we used a cross-sectional experimental survey in order to examine the roles of ingroup identity, moral foundations, and social dominance orientation on reporting intentions and allegation credibility assessments of institutional sexual abuse among Church of England congregation members ( $n = 454$ ) and non-religious controls ( $n = 457$ ). While there were relatively few predictors of reporting intentions, we found that churchgoers were consistently more skeptical of allegations of abuse, with these trends being differentially moderated by ingroup identification, the endorsement of various moral impulses, and anti-egalitarianism.

We discuss our data in light of ongoing attempts to improve reporting procedures within the Church. In doing so, we identify ways of adapted safeguarding training packages so as to better motivate those within religious communities to report alleged sexual abuse within their institutions.

**Craig Harper** is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. His research interests lie in the psychological processes that underpin decision-making in relation to controversial social and political topics. Most of his research has been focused on how people form and express attitudes towards people with sexual convictions, with the aim being to promote progressive and evidence-based policies to prevent and reduce sexual victimisation. Away from forensically-based research, he is a member of the

***SHAPING THE FUTURE***

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | POSTER

Heterodox Academy, which is an organization seeking to promote viewpoint diversity and reduce political polarization in higher education.