Proposing a Behavioral Taxonomy of Priest Sexual Grooming
International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy

Examination of a Nascent Taxonomy of Priest Sexual Grooming

Since 2013, my research team has analyzed publicly available personnel files of clergy who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse by their dioceses. Our latest research focuses on sexual grooming patterns used by abusive priests. In the IJCJSD manuscript, we examined 16 files from the Diocese of Joliet. In the Sexual Abuse manuscript, we examined 18 files from Saint John's Abbey. Findings suggest sexually abusive clergy use any of eight tactics to groom their victims, including: providing alcohol and drugs; giving gifts; going on trips; gradually increasing physical contact; providing faux mentorship; playing favorites with multiple potential victims; creating relationships with victims' families; and abusing the respect and reverence bestowed upon a priest. Findings help inform policy and protocol changes. We continue to examine these grooming behaviors as well as victims' feelings of reverential fear and religious duress in order to deepen our understanding of clergy sexual abuse.