

Study of Reported Child Sexual Abuse in the Anglican Church

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. Executive summary

Child sexual abuse occurs in all parts of society. Organizations such as schools and youth clubs that work with children and young people are especially vulnerable. Churches, which have an extensive range of activities involving children and young people, are no exception.

At the 2004 General Synod the Anglican Church of Australia took a proactive approach to the issue of child protection and put in place a number of strategies to improve policies and practices concerning child protection around the country. As part of this effort, the Professional Standards Commission requested a report on the nature and extent of reported child sexual abuse by clergy and church workers, including volunteers, since 1990. The study excluded Church schools and children's homes. Professor Patrick Parkinson and Emeritus Professor Kim Oates, both from the University of Sydney, were asked to conduct this study with the help of research assistant, Amanda Jayakody.

The aims of this research study were to:

- understand the characteristics of accused persons and complainants and the circumstances of the offence.
- ascertain patterns of abuse in relation to similarities or differences in gender and age of the child complainants.
- inform the Church on what steps could be taken towards better prevention of sexual abuse within church communities.

The report analyses 191 alleged cases of child sexual abuse, reported from 17 dioceses throughout Australia between 1990 and 2008 to see what

lessons can be learned to improve efforts at child protection. This represents most, but not all of the reported cases across Australia in that period.

The key findings were:

- Unlike the patterns of abuse in the general population, three quarters of complainants were male and most were between the ages of 10 to 15 at the time of abuse.
- Most accused persons were either clergy or were involved in some form of voluntary or paid youth work.
- There were 27 accused persons with more than 1 allegation in the sample. These 27 people accounted for 43% of all cases.
- Ongoing abuse lasting 3 years or more was significantly more common amongst male complainants.
- Most of the alleged abuse episodes occurred in the accused person's home or on church premises. Almost a quarter of the episodes of abuse of girls occurred in the girl's own home, compared with 7% of male cases.
- There were long delays in reporting offences to the church by the complainants, with an average delay of 23 years.
- Just over half of the cases were treated as substantiated by the church and a third as inconclusive, with erroneous allegations by child complainants being rare.

The report concludes with various recommendations to the Church on improving its child protection strategies in the light of these findings, and in responding better to complaints of past abuse.