

MACSAS CONFERENCE 2009 – EDINBURGH Saturday 17th October 2009

Summary of Key Note Presentations: Margaret Kennedy MACSAS

Summary of findings from PhD: The sexual Exploitation of Women by Clergy.

There have been very few previous studies on the abuse of women by clergy. In England only Orr McDonald (1997) and the Methodist Church report (1997). Two reports in America Flynn & Garland; and Lynas (1997) who looked at the experiences of 365 female clergy.

Diane Garland from Baylor University in America found that 1 in 33 women had been molested by clergy. She found abuse to be pervasive across America. However there was also found to be a misconduct definition in 36 states.

A key issue for the PhD study was to consider the language used to discuss what happens to women. **False naming** constitutes institutional violence (Carol Adams 1991).

My working definition: *sexual exploitation occurs where a person in authority, in role as clergy, minister or pastor sexualizes contact with female parishioner or those who seek his help, for his own sexual gratification. It constitutes exploitation whether or not the woman 'consented' if at the time they are a 'client' or 'parishioner'.*

Of the 63 women who took part in the research 38 had been abused in childhood: 66% sexually abused, 71% emotionally abused, 42% physically abused; 21% psychologically abused.

Previous research has found that women go to clergy for everything rather than to more suitably qualified professionals (86% to clergy as opposed to 12 ½ % to other professionals).

In the study the women defined the role of the clergy as: Parish priest 63%; Course supervisor/therapist 22% and Employer/Colleague 5%

Liz Kelly has identified a continuum of abuse from Verbal grooming through to Murder. None of the women in the study were murdered of course however all other aspects on the continuum were reported.

The analysis from the questionnaires and interviews focused on processes of targeting, grooming, entrapment, holding trapped and getting out from the women's perspective.

The level of violence was surprising and the need to silence the women at all times was a universal story. Women told of the priest/minister getting angry if they dared to tell anyone anything about the 'relationship'. They were told time and again that they were special people and that the minister depended on them. The power and control exerted by the ministers over the women was multi-factored.

Bishops try to turn the discourse to one of Boundary issues, that priests and ministers have just got their boundaries confused. It is not about Boundaries the stories these women told were of RAPE, ASSAULT and VIOLENCE, these were crimes not boundary issues.

Marie Fortune in America looked at how the relationship between the pastor and the woman moved from friendship into sexual relationship and places the boundary for abuse very far down

the line. However MKs study found that the pastor crossed the boundary into exploitation very early on. As soon as that boundary is crossed it is abuse.

The women reported complete confusion at what was happening. Some were told that rape was good for them.

Many took years to get out of the abusive relationship, locked in by secrecy, shame, fear and guilt. The impact on survivors was profound. In one case the priest was the woman's psychotherapist and made her pregnant. He forced her to have a termination. When the husband found out he divorced her and she was left with nothing.

The church refuses to understand the impact of these 'affairs' on the women.

Women need to be able to recover from their experiences. They need to repair the harm done and this is where therapy comes in, but they also need support which is different to therapy.

In terms of the power dynamics it is similar to child abuse and other professional abuse. There is a great deal of violence involved in abuse.

The research found, as have other studies, that the perpetrators had multiple victims. The church has failed to understand this dynamic, the nature of the abuse, the harm caused, and the fact that these men are a danger to women.