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Child Sexual Abuse In the Media: Is Institutional Failure to Blame?

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CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE MEDIA:
IS INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE TO BLAME?

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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DEDICATION

For my daughter, Mary Holmberg Weatherred, who is my inspiration, every, day.

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I first and foremost wish to thank Dr. Erik Collins, Department Chair, and Sandra Hughes, Manager of Graduate Student Services, for giving me the opportunity to re-apply to the graduate school after a hiatus of more than twenty years. I am also very grateful to Dr. Andrea Tanner, who taught me theory, and Dr. Sei-Hill Kim, for teaching me content analysis, as both courses became critical components of this research. I am most appreciative of my committee members; Mr. Jay Bender for getting me through media law the second time around and Dr. Brooke McKeever for supporting my interest in child sexual abuse as a public health issue and providing helpful comments on how to improve my academic writing. A very special mention is in order for friend and colleague, Kathleen Trigg, who stepped in to assist me as a coder for content analysis at the very last minute. Most of all, I wish to thank Dr. Keith Kenney whose literature review course allowed me to explore the topic in great detail. Without his help, guidance, and inspiration, these pages would not exist. So, thank you Dr. Kenney, for being my thesis chair and the best mentor for student scholarship I have encountered thus far.

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a longitudinal content analysis study of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the United States national news media from 2002 through 2012. It finds that the U.S. national news media have shifted their focus from individual level causes to societal level causes for CSA. This shift has implications for changes in institutional policies and child protection laws throughout the country.

PREFACE

“I and the public know what all schoolchildren learn, those to whom evil is done do evil in return.” W. H. Auden, *September 1, 1939*

“Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing.” John Stuart Mill, *Inaugural address delivered to the University of Saint Andrews, February 1, 1867*

I became very interested in child sexual abuse and the legal issues related to sex offenders after witnessing the reactions to this issue by the board of trustees, president and heads of a private school. Soon thereafter, news of Jerry Sandusky’s arrest made daily national headlines. I began to wonder if the publicity surrounding the case would lead to any significant changes in mandatory reporting and child protection law in this country. My experience with the way institutional leaders chose to handle child sexual abuse cases was mirrored by what was happening at Pennsylvania State University, albeit on a much higher level.

Although mandatory reporting laws are in place in all 50 states, the penalties are inconsequential, and even then, apply only if one is able to prove negligence or failure to report child sexual abuse in a court of law. Not to mention whether victims are willing and able to file charges and complaints regarding failure to report. The secret nature of child sexual abuse and of mandatory reporters who choose to remain silent even if they entertain suspicions, allows these crimes to continue unabated and without punishment.

The lack of enforcement of mandatory reporting laws has already given rise to a belief that it is not in the best interest for institutional leaders to report child sexual abuse. However, it is possible that the lawsuits, fines, and loss of reputation of Penn State attributed to institutional failure might set an example for others to follow, thus tipping the scales of justice in support of the victims.

This thesis is the result of my attempt to not only examine the research that has already been conducted on child sexual abuse in the media, but to build on the work of previous scholars with my own study. The findings suggest that changes in how the media frame CSA *are* beginning to occur. I look forward to continuing my research on child sexual abuse in the health communication arena.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPTA	Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
CDC.....	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
NCCAN	National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect
WHO.....	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

JERRY SANDUSKY, PENN STATE AND CHILD PROTECTION IN THE NEWS

The arrest and conviction of former Pennsylvania State University assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky for child sexual abuse (CSA) made national headlines from the fall of 2010 throughout 2012. The constant national news coverage across the country brought sustained attention to this incident and the issues surrounding it. Prolonged focus on this particular case kept CSA in the minds of the public and its leaders, including legislators, university presidents and child protection advocates. This thesis investigates how the news media frame CSA. This is important because journalists can influence what institutional leaders, politicians and CSA advocates can do to address the problem.

When they emphasize certain items within a news story, journalists present specific news frames to the American public. These frames direct readers to attend to particular aspects of an issue. How the media frame CSA and whether this has changed over time is the theoretical foundation for this research.

Media advocacy is defined as the process by which advocates educate journalists about particular social issues in an attempt to create a catalyst for changes in legislation and policies. In the field of public health, social, political, economic, and cultural forces come together to improve upon the health and well being of citizens, and the news media

play an important role in advancing the discussion among the public and policy makers about particular public health issues (L. Wallack & Dorfman, 1996). The Sandusky CSA scandal was a newsworthy event covered by journalists that brought increased focus on institutional leaders and their role in handling CSA incidences. The extensive news coverage created a sense of urgency among government officials and university leaders to change their policies and procedures regarding CSA.

On June 22, 2012, Jerry Sandusky was convicted on 45 counts of child molestation. Less than 5 months later, in October 2012, Florida passed the Protection of Vulnerable Persons Act, Florida Senate Bill 1355. According to Florida Representative Chris Dorworth (R-Lake Mary), “When Florida took a hard look at its laws after the news of the Penn State scandal broke, we found some serious loopholes that needed to be fixed” (Francilus, 2012).

The new law makes incidences of CSA by a non-parent that are not reported to the Department of Children and Family Services a third degree felony punishable by up to 5 years in prison and a \$5,000 fine ("Protection of Vulnerable Persons," 2012). Currently, Florida has the strongest statute relating to institutional failure within the language of the act. The state will impose a fine of up to one million for any institution of higher learning, including any state university and non-public college that fails to report, or prevents any person from reporting, instances of CSA committed on the property of the institution or at an event sponsored by the institution ("Protection of Vulnerable Persons," 2012).

Most recently, the Pennsylvania state legislature has introduced and passed House Bills 726, 435 and 436, all further strengthening the state’s child protection laws. H.B.

726 reduces the threshold of injury required for a finding of child abuse and clearly defines specific acts, such as baby shaking, as child abuse. H.B. 435 added to a list of childcare workers and volunteers who must submit to background checks. The list of occupations required to report child abuse to authorities was expanded and more detailed procedures regarding mandatory reporting were included in H.B. 436. These laws were introduced as part of the Pennsylvania legislature's response to the Sandusky CSA scandal. A preliminary hearing in the trial of former Pennsylvania State University President of Graham Spanier, Vice President Gary Schultz, and Athletic Director Tim Curley was held on July 29, 2013, and a trial date is pending for 2014. They are charged with perjury, failure to report, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy.

Across the country, state mandatory reporting laws are coming under renewed scrutiny in the aftermath of the Penn State CSA scandal. It has caused at least 18 states to expand the reach of these laws and raised questions about how current laws are being enforced. Currently, 46 states and the District of Columbia have established penalties for failure to report child abuse, but in most states it is classified as a misdemeanor; in Arizona, Illinois, and Minnesota, it is considered a felony only under certain circumstances (Hafemeister, 2010). Most of these laws were enacted in the 1960s and fines equal the cost of a traffic ticket. In a recent USA TODAY review of 25 states and the District of Columbia, it was found that 16 averaged less than two cases of failure to report per year (Heath, 2011). The combined lack of enforcement and penalties means that there are no serious consequences for adults who choose not to report or actively conceal abuse. And although civil lawsuits are filed on behalf of victims against their offenders that allege a failure to report, those persons are rarely investigated or charged.

“These kinds of cases tend to not go forward, either civilly or criminally, unless the failure to report results in the death of a child, a very serious injury, or an enormous scandal that includes lots of victims,” according to Teresa Huizar, executive director of the National Children’s Alliance in Washington, DC (Persky, 2012, p. 6). The few cases brought by prosecutors have been tied to the highest profile incidences of cover up, most notably those of Catholic Bishops in both Missouri and Massachusetts, and the cases involving Penn State.

To date, Pennsylvania State University has completed settlement agreements with 26 men who claimed to have been sexually abused as children by Sandusky. This mediated level of liability assumed by the board of trustees has the intangible benefit of keeping multiple court battles out of the headlines in several media markets for years. The case has highlighted institutional culpability and caused changes in organizational policies and legislation throughout the country.

A recent review conducted by the *Associated Press* (AP) found that 55 out of 69 Bowl Championship Series (BCS) schools either reviewed or revised their policies regarding minors on campus in response to the Sandusky scandal, and 12 made changes requested by the U.S. Department of Education or in response to new laws passed within their states (Pells, 2013). According to the report, two schools, University of Oklahoma and the University of South Carolina, took no action. Many of these schools quickly made changes, counter intuitive to the normally slow process in which changes take place at these large institutions. “Given everything that’s been in the news, it’s not too surprising that universities would start to put out some policies and do some education,” says Mark Chaffin, director of research at the Center on Child Abuse and Neglect at the

University of Oklahoma (Pells, 2013, p. 2). That the news of the Sandusky scandal was a catalyst for changes in institutional organizational policies and state child protection laws is important when compared to how the American public views CSA. In 2008, Safe Horizon conducted a survey on bystanders of child abuse that found most Americans had been directly or indirectly affected by child abuse, but lacked the knowledge to stop it. One out of every five Americans, or 21%, said they had been a victim of child abuse, and 59% said they knew someone who had experienced it ("Safe Horizon Bystanders and Child Abuse Survey," 2008). The survey found that child abuse is a personal issue for Americans where 95% indicated concern. However, a bystander gap persists as, contrary to their personal experiences and concern, most Americans cannot identify warning signs of abuse, fear consequences of reporting, choose not to get involved, or have a lack of knowledge of what to do.

That the media are the vehicle by which most ordinary Americans learn about CSA has been consistently documented in CSA prevention literature. In fact, the media are cited as the most frequent source of information in CSA prevention education studies involving surveys of parents with reported results ranging from 90% to as high as 99% (Babatsikos, 2010; Elrod & Rubin, 1993; D. Finkelhor, 1984; Pullins & Jones, 2006). Furthermore, studies have found that even after exposure to CSA education, parents demonstrate a return to belief in CSA myths (Babatsikos, 2010; Rheingold, Zajac, & Patton, 2012).

What role do the media have in influencing how our society views CSA? In the past, scholars have found that the media highlight individual causes for CSA, focusing mainly on the perpetrators of the most horrific cases. If the media place a greater focus

on institutional culpability, this could have implications for future changes in public perceptions, institutional policies, and legislation. If child protection advocates can educate journalists on societal solutions for CSA, the resulting news coverage could influence how institutional leaders handle CSA cases in the future. Because CSA is considered a public health issue, how people perceive CSA and what can be done about it is important.

CSA AS A PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

CSA is considered a public health problem in the United States, with federal health officials calculating that child abuse costs \$1.27 million per year due to strains placed on the criminal justice, health care, and welfare systems (Fang, Brown, Florence, & Mercy, 2012). With an average lifetime cost of each victim of non-fatal child abuse estimated at \$210,012, the treatment for *all* child abuse, including CSA, can *potentially* cost more than any other significant health condition including stroke and type-2 diabetes (Fang et al., 2012). A call to action regarding the promotion of sexual health and responsible behavior published by the 16th Surgeon General, David Satcher, included CSA among a number of sexual-related public health problems in the U.S. (Satcher, 2001). The World Health Organization (WHO) considers CSA and its prevention to be a public health priority (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002). The report identified four levels of preventative focus: biological and personal risk factors, close relationships of family and friends, the community in which violence occurs, and the broader social context in which violence is either accepted or prohibited (Krug et al., 2002). By 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced its intent to focus more attention on the prevention of CSA (Hammond, 2003). The ultimate goal of the CDC is

to “create a social context in which child maltreatment is not tolerated, and where prevention and intervention services are evidence based, effective, widely available and socially valued” (Hammond, 2003, p. 83).

While experts estimate that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthday and that there are approximately 39 million adult survivors of CSA in America, these numbers are based on only reported and confirmed cases (David Finkelhor, 1994). Prominent CSA scholar, David Finkelhor, believes that the prevalence of CSA incidences may, in fact, be much higher despite a trend since the early 1990s of a decline in reported CSA cases (David Finkelhor & Jones, 2006). Prior to this decline, the number of reported CSA cases continuously increased, beginning with the passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974 (Myers, 2008). Finkelhor states that he will continue his research until he convinces the American public that CSA is more prevalent than people would like to imagine (D. Finkelhor, 1984).

HISTORY OF CSA AND THE NEWS MEDIA

How did CSA first come to be identified as a problem in this country? Most Americans are unaware that humane societies were established to provide shelter and foster homes for animals *before* resources were made available to assist children suffering from abuse or neglect. The first child protective service organizations were established under the umbrella of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in major U.S. metropolitan cities. The first Society for the Prevention and Cruelty to Children was created within the Humane Society of New York in response to the Mary Ellen Wilson child abuse case of 1873. It was not until 10 years later, in 1883 that the

first Cruelty to Children Act was passed. The history of CSA provides a contextual foundation for the importance of research about CSA and the media.

Over the past 50 years, media coverage of CSA has gone through many stages, both positive and negative. This period can be divided into five time frames based on major events that influenced CSA news coverage. The first time frame, 1960–1980 is considered the period of discovery of CSA, or early history. The 1980s, the second time frame, is defined by CSA legal historians as a “backlash” against child protective measures. It was followed by the passage of strict child sex offender laws throughout the 1990s, the third stage. During the fourth stage, 2000–2010, there was an intense focus on the Catholic Church CSA scandals, which led to a shift toward CSA within institutions. The fifth and current stage, from 2010 to the present, is defined by the prolonged and intense Sandusky CSA scandal coverage and release of the Boy Scout case files.

EARLY HISTORY 1960–1980

Prior to 1960, U.S. physicians, legislators, and media paid little attention to the subject of child abuse and neglect. Then, in 1962 pediatrician Henry Kempe published “The Battered-Child Syndrome,” which led to the implementation of policies, laws, and legislation (B. J. Nelson, 1986). As a result of Kempe’s article and subsequent media attention, by 1970, all 50 states passed legislation mandating that teachers, doctors, and other professionals report physical abuse (B. J. Nelson, 1986). The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), which was passed in 1974, led to creation of the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN). At this juncture, recognition of physical abuse of children was far greater than that of CSA, prompting David Walters to remark that “virtually no literature exists on the sexual abuse of children” (Walters, 1975,

p. 4), and for Kempe to note that “the sexual abuse of children and adolescents is another hidden pediatric problem and a neglected area” (Kempe, 1978, p. 382). Vincent De Francis was the first researcher to break new ground on the prevalence of CSA (Myers, 2008) when he claimed that the problem of the sexual abuse of children is of unknown national dimensions, but the findings strongly point to the probability of an enormous national incidence many times larger than actual reported incidences (De Francis, 1969). Media coverage of child abuse cases increased when CAPTA legislation was introduced. In fact, between 1977 and 1978, almost every national magazine had published articles about CSA (Myers, 2008).

THE BACKLASH 1980–1990

Media interest peaked in the 1980s as 14 high-profile daycare center cases were reported, and the news headlines contributed to daycare sexual abuse hysteria among the American public (David Finkelhor, Williams, Burns, & Kalinowski, 1988). Throughout this time period news reports about CSA became more critical of child protective services and began to characterize the system as irresponsible, out of control, with advocates compared to the Salem witch-hunters of colonial Massachusetts (Hechler, 1988). The 1980s and 90s reveal a backlash of public opinion against child protection measures as child protection legal historian, John Meyers noted, “There is growing evidence for a backlash against child protection.” (Myers, 1994, p. 17).

The passage of the Child Abuse Victim’s Rights Act in 1986 enabled CSA victims to file civil lawsuits against their perpetrators and the institutions that employed them, even after the statute of limitations had run out. At about the same time, celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey began to reveal past victimization. The increased media attention

caused some adults across the country to remember past histories of CSA. As psychologists and victims began to focus on these repressed memories, challengers began to label these memories false. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation was established in 1992 by the parents of Jennifer Freyd, a cognitive psychology professor who began to recall memories of incest (Jenny Kitzinger & Reilly, 1997). The foundation argues that it is not possible to repress and then accurately recall memories of systematic abuse during childhood. Two successful civil lawsuits initiated by Ross Cheit are considered the most well documented case law examples of repressed memory of CSA available to the public (Ross E Cheit, 1998; Freyd, 1996).

SEX OFFENDER LEGISLATION 1990–2000

Throughout the 1990s, news coverage of some of the most horrific child abduction cases combined with intense lobbying by parents of these victims resulted in the passage of several sex offender restriction laws. Megan’s Law, also known at the federal level as the Sexual Offender Jacob Wetterling Act of 1994, requires law enforcement to make sex offender registration available to the public and requires notification of address and employment status changes. Notification requirement details vary by state and many changes, such as the additional passage of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act in 2006, have been made. However, these laws have created controversy among politicians and the media as to whether they are effective in preventing CSA.

CATHOLIC CHURCH 2000–2010

The scope and extent of CSA committed by priests and covered up by Catholic Church leaders have received the most intense and longest running media coverage of

any CSA event. *The New York Times* ran 225 articles over 100 days, including 41 consecutive days on the front page (J. A. Nelson, 2009; Plante & McChesney, 2011). *Associated Press* readers ranked the Catholic Church scandal the third most important story of 2002 (R. E. Cheit, Shavit, & Reiss-Davis, 2010). According to the *Associated Press*, civil lawsuits filed against the Catholic Church on behalf of victims have resulted in settlements in excess of \$2 billion between 1950 and 2007 (Associated Press, 2007). Watchdog website Bishop Accountability estimates the total at more than \$3 billion through 2012 (Schaffer, 2012). Recently, the Pew Research Center documented two spikes in media coverage of the Catholic Church scandal. The intense media coverage in 2002 was initiated by a series of articles in *The Boston Globe* and spread across the United States, though there was very little European news coverage (Pew Research Center, 2010). Another spike in 2010 was heavily concentrated on Catholic Church CSA throughout Europe as well as on the Pope (Pew Research Center, 2010). The intense focus of the media on the Catholic Church and CSA have led some scholars to begin to apply media cultivation framework theory to examine how this coverage has impacted public opinion (Mancini & Shields, 2013).

SANDUSKY AND THE BOY SCOUTS 2010–PRESENT

Media coverage has also been prolonged and intense throughout the arrest and conviction of retired Pennsylvania State football coach and serial pedophile Jerry Sandusky. Former President Graham Spanier, Vice President Gary Schultz and Athletic Director Tim Curley face trial on perjury, failure to report suspected child abuse, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy.

In 2010, the press enjoined civil lawsuits to prompt a state Supreme Court judge to approve the release of decades of “ineligible volunteer” lists compiled by the Boy Scouts of America (The Los Angeles Times, 2012, October 18). The *Associated Press*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Oregonian* newspaper, and Oregon Public Broadcasting Corporation requested the release of more than 1,200 “perversion files” which were incorporated into an online database hosted by the *L.A. Times* (L.A. Times, 2012, October 18).

Beginning with the case of Mary Ellen Wilson, reported by *The New York Times* in 1873, and continuing to the present day, the news media have made the American public and policy makers aware of this issue. What effect do the media have on societal views of CSA or on legislation and policies? How much does media coverage influence public perceptions of CSA and potential solutions to the problem? In order to conduct a study about CSA in the media, it is important to understand previous research that has been conducted on this topic. What peer-reviewed research exists to date about the impact of the news media on CSA? A systematic literature review will determine any gaps as well as indicate what could be done to expand this area of inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW OF CSA IN THE MEDIA

A search was performed of EBSCO, JSTOR, Medline, Google, Google Scholar, and the Web of Social Science for articles which 1) included “child sexual abuse” and/or “media” in the title, abstract, or key words; 2) focused its research on CSA and the media; and 3) collected or analyzed data about CSA and the media using qualitative, quantitative, or both methods. Research across disciplines and geographic boundaries were included. Articles from the mainstream press and other non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded, as were research papers that did not utilize qualitative or quantitative methods. Articles about the effectiveness of CSA prevention and CSA awareness media campaigns were also excluded because they did not examine how the news media covers CSA. The search yielded 231 peer-reviewed journal articles. Narrowing the timeframe to articles published before 2013 resulted in 124 articles. Two literature reviews (Gough, 1996; Jenny Kitzinger, 1999), three books (Jenny Kitzinger, 2004; Myers, 1994; B. J. Nelson, 1986), one master’s thesis (Rossi, 2012), and a research paper (Lori Dorfman, 2003) were discovered and consulted using these criteria, but were excluded from analysis because they were not peer-reviewed research studies. David Gough’s 1996 article, “The Literature on Child Abuse and the Media,” is relevant to this review but was excluded because it focused on the work of British and Australian scholars, is not systematic or narrowly focused on CSA, and is more than 20 years old. More research

has been conducted and published since that time, although the number of studies remains small. Considering the date of publication, Gough's observations about the literature, specifically Jenny Kitzinger's research, are noteworthy. The other review, by Kitzinger herself, discussed how the media communicate risk across a wide variety of public health topics (Jenny Kitzinger, 1999). Two additional articles (L Dorfman, Mejia, Gonzalez, & Cheyne, 2012; O'Neil, 2010) located via Google were included as they were funded research studies about CSA and the media and published online. A total of 16 articles met the inclusion and exclusion criteria standards for this literature review (Weatherred, 2013).

To best categorize the 16 studies about CSA in the media, a framework model was designed. See Figure 2.1. The model reveals that a majority of the studies focused on media message content, a few on public perceptions of the CSA message, and two on media effects. An interpretation of the model and the studies follows.

LITERATURE REVIEW FRAMEWORK MODEL

Ten studies analyzed media content in an effort to determine themes and patterns within news coverage of CSA during a specific time period (Beckett, 1996; R. E. Cheit et al., 2010; Ross E. Cheit, 2003; Corbella, 2007; L Dorfman et al., 2012; Goddard, 2000; J. a. S. Kitzinger, Paula, 1995; Mejia, Cheyne, & Dorfman, 2012; Thakker, 2006; Wilczynski, 1999). Of these ten, most analyzed media content over a 1- to 3-year period. Only one adopted a longitudinal approach, analyzing content over two decades (Beckett, 1996). Four out of the 16 examined public perceptions of CSA news stories (Steven J. Collings, 2002a, 2002b; Jenny Kitzinger, 2000; O'Neil, 2010). Two studies were deemed outliers because they attempted to determine media effects (Ducat, Thomas, &

Blood, 2009; McDevitt, 1996): One sought to determine the effect of a law on media content (Ducat et al., 2009) and the other attempted to determine if media content had any effect on public perceptions of CSA (McDevitt, 1996). Neither was able to establish causality (Ducat et al., 2009; McDevitt, 1996).

While the objectives differed, the entire body of research resulted in similar conclusions. All 16 studies found both media content and audience perception to be focused on individual blame for CSA. The way the media cover CSA is typical of coverage of crime stories in general: as an episodic event, focused on the most egregious, sensationalistic cases. Typical of this type of news coverage is a focus on “stranger danger” stories, resulting in spikes of CSA news directly related to the arrest and adjudication of the most extreme offenders and cases. The media spotlight is on the offender and the criminal justice system rather than on the larger societal implications of CSA. Each study documented that few news stories focused on law and public policy, CSA as a public health issue, or preventive measures.

MEDIA STUDIES

This group of scholars examined CSA in newspapers, television transcripts, magazines, and other periodical content. Because of the research focus on media content, this group is categorized as media studies. Kitzinger and Skidmore’s “Playing Safe: Media Coverage of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Strategies” is clearly the *seminal* work within this body of research. Conducted in the U.K., the study found news coverage of CSA to be episodic, individualistic, and focused on stranger danger with no mention of greater causality, societal implications or prevention (J. a. S. Kitzinger, Paula, 1995). Findings revealed 71% of newspaper articles and 83% of television coverage

were case-based with very few stories about the causes and prevention of CSA (J. a. S. Kitzinger, Paula, 1995). Recommendations were offered to CSA advocates, urging them to “capitalize on newsworthy events in order to promote the prevention debate and try to counter the tabloidization of news” (J. a. S. Kitzinger, Paula, 1995, p. 54). Although no theoretical framework was applied, this work is the first to make mention of what will be defined later as media advocacy, in published research about CSA and the media.

Although this is the seminal work, this group of scholars only gave it three citations.

American sociologist Katherine Beckett conducted the only longitudinal study of media representation of CSA (R. E. Cheit et al., 2010) and was the first to apply framing theory. Becket applied frame analysis to a set of specialized publications and four news magazines from 1970 to 1994 (Beckett, 1996). While the importance of CSA as an issue remained strong over time, the media frames changed. Different framing patterns were identified, but the individualistic, episodic focus of the media remained the same.

Cheit attempted to replicate Beckett’s work by applying her frame analysis to a later time period, however, he found that news stories were about a wide range of topics and not evenly distributed (R. E. Cheit et al., 2010). A spike was identified in 2002-2003, largely due to coverage of CSA in the Catholic Church. The spike mimicked similar patterns in how the news media cover crime. Ultimately, his findings contradicted Beckett’s claim of changes in the media over time as the spikes were found to be due to specific cases, followed by a significant drop off or complete lack of coverage between 1992 and 2004 (R. E. Cheit et al., 2010). Earlier Cheit established that the severity of CSA cases and number of charges led to increased news coverage in only a few select cases (Ross E. Cheit, 2003). The study successfully challenged the notion of

child abuse hysteria in the media, noting that there were far more actual criminal cases than were reported in the news (Ross E. Cheit, 2003). But, again the findings were that news was focused on the individualistic nature of a few sensational cases and there was a lack of reporting about the societal implications and reality of CSA. This article received the second largest number of citations among this group of scholars, with a total of five.

The most cited work, with six citations, is indistinguishable from previous research except that it applied moral panic theory, included other forms of child abuse in its analysis (Wilczynski, 1999), and was conducted by criminal justice scholars in Australia. They found that the media focus on the most horrific cases of both physical and sexual child abuse.

Framing theory and a discussion about potential media effects on public policies regarding CSA were presented in Thakker and Durrant's research, which clearly defined the gaps between research about CSA, the media, and public policy (Thakker, 2006). Their content analysis sought to assess the nature of news coverage of sex offending in New Zealand during a 1-year period and found it to be episodic. Despite their call for future research on the causal relationship between media coverage of CSA and public opinion and policies, they only received one additional citation from the scholars in this cohort.

South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual crime in the world, yet news coverage lags far behind the true extent of the problem throughout the country (Corbella, 2007). This study ultimately confirmed Cheit's 2003 findings that the number of press reports was much lower than the number of confirmed sex offense cases.

The first scholars to study the language of CSA in the news claimed that, “little attention has been paid to detailed analysis of the language used to describe child abuse and child victims in media texts” (Goddard, 2000, p. 39). Results revealed gender neglect; the victim was frequently referred to as “it” within news stories and this imprecise language amounted to “textual abuse of the child” (Goddard, 2000, p. 44). Subsequent work by other scholars would make the very same observations about language used in CSA news stories; however, this work received no citations.

Two content analysis studies conducted by Berkeley Media Studies Group (BSMG) and published in 2012 are the most recent contributions to this field of inquiry (L Dorfman et al., 2012; Mejia et al., 2012). The first study was completed before Sandusky was charged with CSA crimes and the second was conducted on the first nine days of Sandusky news reports. Both studies came to the same conclusions as previous researchers except for two important differences: the stranger danger aspect of media coverage had shifted to better represent the reality of CSA and the media had become more likely to report that perpetrators were likely to be someone a child knows and respects in the community (Mejia et al., 2012). The Sandusky study found certain aspects of news coverage had changed as well. Sports reporters covered CSA for the very first time and were focused on institutional accountability and failure, and comparisons between Penn State, Syracuse University, the Catholic Church, and the Boy Scouts were made (L Dorfman et al., 2012). The language used in Sandusky news reports was more precise and descriptive, and it was speculated that this might be due to the highly accessible and detailed grand jury report released on the Internet, making it easier for reporters to quickly access the specifics of the case (L Dorfman et al., 2012).

PUBLIC PERCEPTION STUDIES

A common theme throughout this small group of studies is that the *global* public views CSA as an individual problem and lacks understanding of CSA causes and prevention. Although the research focused on public perceptions of CSA in the media, the results were almost identical to the media studies. No clearly identifiable citation pattern exists within this group. For example, Collings conducted two of these studies, yet received only one citation.

Kitzinger combined years of focus group research on public perceptions of CSA news and applied the concepts of media templates and framing theory (Jenny Kitzinger, 2000). Findings revealed that the British public applied media frames of a previous CSA event to a recent CSA case in the news (Jenny Kitzinger, 2000). Despite the years of research Kitzinger conducted about both media coverage and public perceptions of CSA, she did not receive any citations for this particular work from the other scholars.

In both of his studies, Collings finds that stereotypical news reports of CSA have “the potential for influencing social judgments of child sexual abuse in ways that are likely to create a non-supportive environment for abuse victims” (Steven J. Collings, 2002a; 2002b, pp. 1144-1145). His findings were that offender blame, while good, perpetuated an individualistic view of CSA and did not have larger implications for the betterment of society (Steven J. Collings, 2002a).

CSA was addressed within the larger context of sexual violence in a Frameworks Institute study (O'Neil, 2010). While advocates seek solutions within a larger social and cultural framework, the American public continues to see sexual violence as an individual problem.

MEDIA EFFECTS OUTLIERS

Because this group of scholars conducted the only studies to focus on media effects of CSA news, they are categorized as outliers (Ducat et al., 2009; McDevitt, 1996). Although neither was able to establish causality, findings mimic the body of work in that the media were focused primarily on individual blame without putting CSA into a larger societal context.

McDevitt sought to investigate the relationship between CSA news stories and reports made to a mandated agency over a 25-year period. Findings were that media coverage and CSA incident reports increased at the same time, usually after changes in policy, revealing a lack of causality on the part of the media, but suggesting that changes in policy may precede increases in both media coverage and incident reports (McDevitt, 1996).

A group of Australian psychologists explored the effect of the passage of Victoria's Serious Sex Offender Monitoring Act of 2005 on newspaper reports of CSA (Ducat et al., 2009). It was hypothesized that the extent and nature of media coverage would be influenced by the passage of the new law, both with an increase in number of articles and type of coverage. Although the number of news articles doubled, the themes within CSA news stories remained the same (Ducat et al., 2009).

The model reveals that previous research pointed to individual responsibility for CSA within societies throughout the world. Because the bulk of research conducted about CSA in the media concluded that CSA is framed as a problem assigned to individuals, and because Americans, by and large, view society and its institutions to be

trustworthy and safe, the perception is that individuals are responsible for CSA and, thus, remain separate from institutional or societal culpability.

That both the Sandusky case and the Catholic Church have consistently made national news headlines, bringing focus on CSA within American institutions, has the news media become more focused on societal-level causes and solutions for the problem? Content analysis studies of the news can help media advocacy become more effective regarding CSA (Lori Dorfman, 2003). If content analysis supports media advocacy, thus leading to changes in public policy, one could apply the framing of responsibility theory to a longitudinal content analysis of CSA in the national news media. This research might expand on literature uncovered in this review and determine if any changes have occurred.

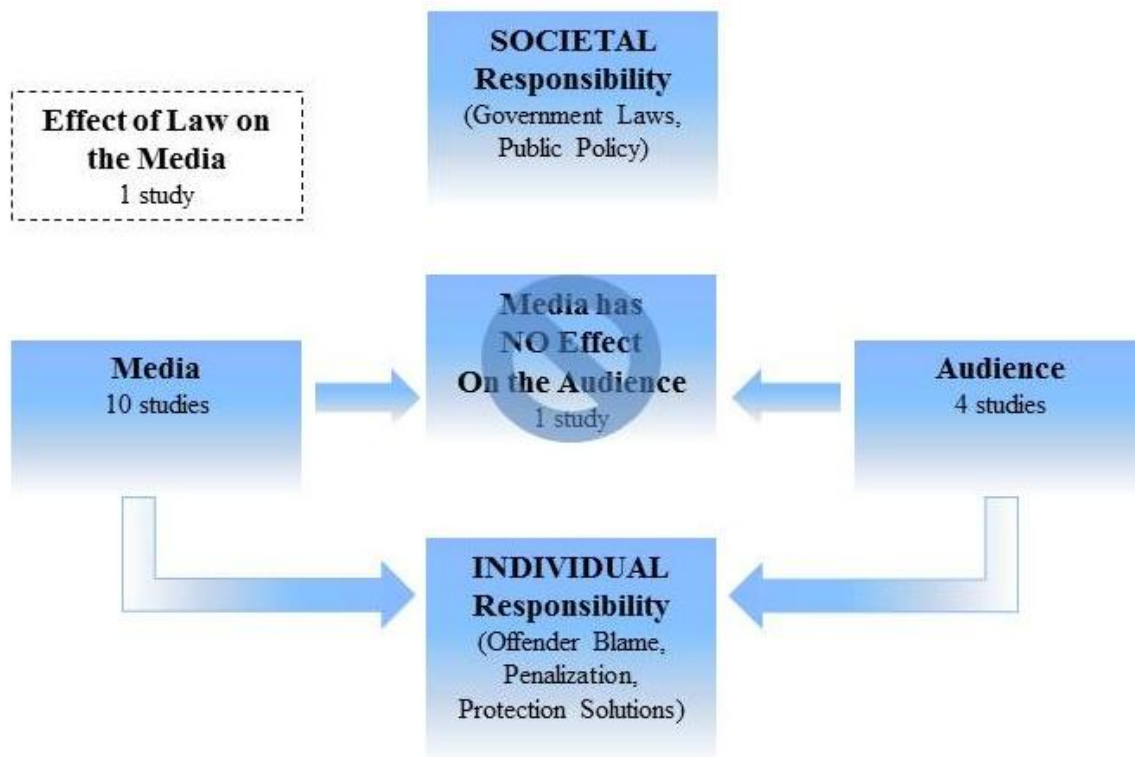


Figure 2.1 Framework Model for CSA in the Media Literature Review

CHAPTER 3

CONTENT ANALYSIS: THE FRAMING OF CSA IN THE MEDIA

The literature review led to the design of this content analysis study in order to explore how the media has framed CSA, specifically whether it is framed as an individual or societal level problem, from 2002 to 2012. The only study to cover a longer time frame was conducted by Katherine Beckett in 1996, which compared frames appearing within U.S. national magazines from 1980 through 1994, a 14-year span. In January 2013, Hove and colleagues published content analysis research on the years 2000 through 2008, but chose to include all types of child abuse; physical, sexual, verbal, mental and neglect (Hove, Paek, Isaacson, & Cole, 2013). They found that CSA received the most coverage, and that child abuse in general was framed thematically for societal causes and solutions, although there was no discernible pattern indicating a change if the frames had changed over time (Hove et al., 2013). Some of the differences as it relates to the current study are the selection of news sources, the selection and application of key word terms, sampling techniques, and the literature review. Television news is included so that comparisons can be made between how newspapers and television have framed CSA over the past decade. While some scholars chose to analyze certain specific national or local newspapers or leading news magazines, this study sought to examine national news media outlets, as local news organizations tend to follow the lead of the national media.

Because only eight studies have been conducted to date employing framing theory, and the majority of these scholars come from outside the communication field, this research seeks to build on the theoretical concepts of the framing of responsibility specifically for the advancement of media scholarship in health communication as it pertains to this issue.

FRAMING OF RESPONSIBILITY

The notion of framing among media communication scholars developed in tandem with agenda setting theory as a way to examine media influence. Framing focuses on the nature of news coverage rather than the amount of attention devoted to the issue. Most Americans learn about CSA from the news media, and for many people, the media are the only way they learn about this issue (Mejia et al., 2012).

Frames are “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). In other words, media frames are a way to organize events for journalists who report on it and for the public who are exposed to the news reports. In mass communication research, framing theory seeks to define how the news media shape public opinion (Scheufele, 1999). Framing plays a key role in the process of defining social problems by “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). In addition, both journalists and special interest groups can influence specific frames (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Furthermore, framing suggests how the public should think about an issue and what should be done about it. If certain aspects of CSA are featured more than others in news stories, what does this suggest about how the problem

should be fixed? Who is portrayed as being most responsible for causes and solutions for CSA in our society? The framing of responsibility is an effort to understand attribution; how people assign cause regarding social problems. It is during this process that the news media define a specific social problem, leading the public to make attributions of responsibility and make judgments based on the news frames (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002). For example, Shanto Iyengar in his body of research on the framing of responsibility for political issues and poverty, argues that news coverage is dominated by the episodic framing of stories to the exclusion of thematic framing, further illustrating the framing of responsibility model (Iyengar, 1990, 1996).

Because most people seek to identify the causes of social problems and assign responsibility, Wallack and colleagues (L. Wallack, 1993; L. M. Wallack, 1989) “observed that Americans frame issues to portray the larger social system as fundamentally sound and prefer to attribute problems to corrupt, inept, or irresponsible individuals “ (Hallahan, 1999, p. 220). This is referred to as fundamental attribution error or the tendency for people to assess the behavior of other people as being stable rather than caused by other outside factors. As a result, little attention is given to the broader systemic problems of society at large regarding preferable solutions to combat the problem. “Various problems—AIDS alcoholism, child abuse, cigarette addiction, drug abuse and overeating—have been framed as problems of individuals rather than society” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 220). Past research of a broad range of social problems has found that episodic and individual news media frames dominate (Iyengar, 1990, 1996; Kim & Anne Willis, 2007; Kim, Carvalho, & Davis, 2010; Kim, Carvalho, Davis, & Mullins, 2011; Kim et al., 2002). Thereby social causes and solutions are largely ignored while

individual causes and solutions are emphasized (L. M. Wallack, 1989). Furthermore, television's framing of news stories focuses more on storytelling by presenting an issue as it relates to a specific issue or person (Kim & Anne Willis, 2007), while thematic framing places the issue in a larger societal context. Episodic framing of issues places the blame for societal problems squarely on individuals to the exclusion of larger societal contributing factors to the issue (Kim & Anne Willis, 2007; Kim et al., 2010).

If social workers and advocates want the American public to think about CSA in terms of solutions that will benefit society and improve public health, then how the news media present CSA—as a societal or individual based problem—is important. This led to the formation of the following research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first question is quantitative in nature to account for frequency or lack of frequency of CSA news stories throughout the time period.

RQ1: How often do news stories about CSA appear in U.S. television and newspaper coverage?

This question was posed because previous research indicated a spike in news coverage that could be attributed to the Catholic Church. Coders coded the number of articles that were about Sandusky, the Catholic Church, the Boy Scouts, or Other categories. The next research question seeks to determine exactly how many news items are focused on these specific institutional CSA scandals.

RQ2: How much news coverage is about these specific CSA scandals?

The next research question seeks to firmly answer the nature of the news coverage, whether focused on individual or societal, episodic or thematic or both.

RQ3: Is news coverage about CSA focused on individual- or societal-level causes and solutions?

The next question seeks to determine whether differences in coverage exist between newspapers and television when covering CSA.

RQ4: Do newspapers and television differ in their focus on individual-level versus societal-level causes and solutions for CSA?

In order to determine whether changes have occurred over time in the framing of CSA by the media, the research question below was posed.

RQ5: Has the framing of responsibility shifted from individual to societal?

METHOD

TIME FRAME

Because previous research attributed a spike in 2002 to prolific news coverage of the Catholic Church (R. E. Cheit et al., 2010; Hove et al., 2013), this study begins in 2002. Furthermore, to differentiate from a recent study that examined the years 2007–2009 (Mejia et al., 2012) and sought patterns in the news coverage of CSA during the years not dominated by a specific individual or institutional case such as Michael Jackson or the Catholic Church, this research includes this time frame. In order to expand on the content analysis of the first nine days of Sandusky coverage (L Dorfman et al., 2012), all news coverage about CSA was included through 2012, up to and even after his conviction. Therefore, the time frame selected for study is from 2002 to 2012, an 11-year time period, to account for and include spikes in media coverage documented on both ends of the time period as well as news coverage that might fall between the two dominant events of the Catholic Church and Sandusky CSA scandals.

SAMPLE

Eight major national news organizations, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, ABC News, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, NBC News, and MSNBC News, were selected for content analysis. These organizations have historically and consistently been found to establish the tone and framing of news coverage of social issues such as CSA across the United States. This study is novel in its inclusion of television news coverage.

A preliminary search of the *Lexis/Nexis* Academic database for articles between 12/31/2001 and 01/01/2013 was conducted using the terms “*child sexual abuse*.” This resulted in thousands of new articles per organization that upon further examination contained numerous unrelated articles that might contaminate the content sample pool. Therefore, an additional search was conducted for the keywords in the body of news articles as a limiter to maintain the quality of the article pool and generate larger populations of articles to which a systematic and stratified sampling technique could be applied. Some populations remained small using this technique and a decision was made to census all news articles for Fox ($n=45$), MSNBC ($n=30$), and CBS ($n=28$). A stratified sampling technique was applied to the remaining news sources to obtain 80 articles from each. An exception was made for ABC because of a low population of 20 articles. In this case, no limiter was applied to the initial search, resulting in 91 articles, from which 80 were selected using a random number generator. Similarly, because NBC generated only 88 articles; a random number generator was employed to select 80. In this manner, a combination of a census and systematic stratified sampling technique was applied to the total population ($N=1,521$), resulting in a study sample of ($N=503$). The goal of conducting this detailed and systematic search method and sampling technique was to

generate a large but quality pool of articles from which to select a manageable, representative, reliable, and generalizable sample for content analysis (see Table 3.1).

CODING

A coding instrument was developed based on previous research about the framing of responsibility for social problems (Iyengar, 1990, 1996; Kim & Anne Willis, 2007; Kim et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2002; Kim, Shanahan, & Choi, 2012). Four quadrants were established for coding: individual-level causes, individual-level solutions, societal-level causes and societal-level solutions. Research and initial coder sheet development was conducted by reviewing articles about CSA independent of the sample combined with the results of a substantial literature review, both on the topic and previous studies, using the framing of responsibility theoretical framework. A codebook was developed to provide detailed definitions of terms and operationalization of the variables as they applied to the content for study. A copy of the coding sheet and codebook are located in Appendices A and B, respectively.

CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS FOR CSA

The coding sheet illustrates specifically what potential causes and solutions for CSA were included in the content analysis as the text of each article was coded. An obvious individual-level cause of CSA is the *perpetrator, sex offender, or pedophile*. Because these terms are used interchangeably within news stories, or as long as an offender was named, they were listed together as one variable. Another contributing cause is the silent nature of CSA because, in many cases, victims do not report or delay reporting of abuse, sometimes years after events. These two distinct qualifications of victim reporting were broken out as two variables: *victim did not report* and *victim*

delayed reporting. *Mental illness* as it relates to CSA perpetrators was also classified as an individual-level cause. Because, in many cases, children report CSA to a parent or other adult who may convince them not to report the incidence(s) to authorities, another variable included at the individual-level was that an *adult, parent or other adult did not report CSA*. In order to establish mutually exclusive variables to account for both individual level cases and solutions for these variables the opposite quadrant includes four variables considered possible solutions to the problem of the perpetrator, sex offender, pedophile of *charges filed, offender is accused, punish perpetrator*, and even *attempt to or kill the offender*. These variables were derived from pilot test coding of articles as solutions that appeared in news stories about CSA. To counter with a solution for victim non-reporting variables, *support and believe victims* was deemed the solution level variable. *Treat offenders* became the mutually exclusive solution to *mental illness* and *adult, parent or other non-reporting* was countered with *educate people or parents* as one solution variable and *encourage reporting* as another. Each individual level also included an ‘*other*’ category and coders were instructed to write in any other variables not accounted for in the coding sheet.

Societal-level causes and solutions for CSA were defined as: *mandatory reporter did not report* with the solution of *punish or prosecute non-reporters* as the mutually exclusive variables. Another societal-level cause was *victim/parent blaming* as a variable and solutions of *education, prevention and awareness*, combined, as one variable. Another societal cause was *institutional failure* as a variable and *institutional negligence* as another with the opposite solutions of *punish institutions* and *punish leaders*. Pilot testing revealed a divide between *church doctrine and secular law* issues

so this was listed as a societal cause with the opposite variable as a solution of *change organizational policies*. This same variable was also the solution listed for organizational policies as a cause of CSA. Because church doctrine and organizations have been found to have their own either published or unpublished rules and regulations regarding how discovery of CSA is handled, this variable was included along with suggestions for changes to policies within these organizations as potential solutions. Another contributing cause of CSA was found to be the *difficulty in prosecuting CSA cases* with the solution of *more resources for social work or law enforcement*. Another cause discovered within sample news stories was *supporting the accused offender*, usually by prominent officials or other pillars of the community, with *more thorough investigation of cases* as a solution. The last societal-level variable cause is *weak or ineffective laws* with the solution provided as *change, improve or enforce laws*, included as one variable. An ‘*other*’ variable was also listed as both a societal-level cause and solution variable, and coders were instructed to write in what these variables represented on the coding sheet.

INTERCODER RELIABILITY

Two coders, the primary author and a research assistant, coded articles selected from outside the sample time frame throughout a series of training sessions. Pilot test sessions allowed for refining, expanding, adding, or deleting variables, resulting in the final coding sheet. Inter-coder reliability was conducted by double coding a randomly selected sample size of articles ($n=78$), or 15.5% of the total sample ($N=503$). Final inter-coder reliability for all variables was measured using Krippendorff’s alpha, resulting in a range of $\alpha = .67$ to $\alpha = 1.0$ with an average reliability of .84 across all variables, thus

achieving acceptable reliability scores. Coding the remaining sample yielded a total of ($N=436$) articles because 65 were coded as unrelated and two were duplicates.

Table 3.1 Combined Census and Systematic Stratified Sample

News Organization	Segment	No. Articles	Sample	Parameters
CNN News	Body	460	80	Every 6th
NY Times	Body	450	80	Every 6th
Washington Post	Body	329	80	Every 4th
ABC News	None	91	80	Random ^a
NBC News	Body	88	80	Random ^a
Fox News	Body	45	45	Census ^b
MSNBC	Body	30	30	Census ^b
CBS News	Body	28	28	Census ^b
Totals		1521	503	

^a80 items were selected using a random number generator

^bSample was too small to use limiters

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In order to answer the first research question, the frequency with which news stories about CSA appeared from 2002 to 2012 is illustrated in Figure 4.1. From 2002 to 2003, there was a spike in news coverage primarily attributable to the Catholic Church CSA scandals as previously documented by other scholars. However, beginning in 2004 and continuing through 2010, a 7-year time period, fewer than 25 articles appeared each year. Another spike occurred from 2011 through 2012, attributable to news coverage of the Sandusky scandal.

The 436 articles were coded for content, specifically if the story was about the Catholic Church, Boy Scouts, Sandusky, or Other, in order to answer the second research question. Figure 4.2 reveals that the greatest amount of news coverage throughout 2011 and 2012 was devoted to the Sandusky scandal at Penn State ($n=169$), followed closely by news attributed to all other CSA topics throughout the time period ($n=162$). The Other category stories appeared to be more evenly distributed across the time period. Interestingly, there were 100 stories about the Catholic Church, with the majority appearing in 2002. News stories about the Catholic Church CSA scandals appeared less frequently than the Sandusky and Other topics combined. There were only *five* news stories about the Boy Scouts, all appearing in 2012, coinciding with the release of

“perversion files” to the public via the news media in October of that year. Figure 4.3 reveals the distribution of these topics across the 11-year time period.

To determine whether news coverage of CSA was more focused on individual or societal-level causes or solutions, frequencies were calculated for each variable by source. These frequencies are reported in Tables 4.1 through 4.4 as the results related to research question three: Is news coverage about CSA focused more on individual- or societal-level causes and solutions?

The individual cause of perpetrator/sex offender/pedophile appeared most frequently across all news organizations (n=312). This is more than likely because news stories do not cover CSA unless a perpetrator has been arrested and charged by law enforcement. The second most cited cause of CSA was that the victim delayed reporting of the incident (n=71), followed closely by an adult or parent choosing not to report CSA (n=64). These results reflect those of prevalence studies conducted by CSA scholars that led them to predict that the number of reported CSA cases is much lower than the number of actual CSA incidents. The lowest ranking individual causes mentioned in news articles within this sample was mental illness (n=38) and that the victim did not report CSA (n=31).

The individual solution most frequently mentioned in news stories was that charges were filed (n=276), followed by offender was accused (n=232), and perpetrator was punished (n=139), again indicating that actions by law enforcement predicate news stories about CSA. Other solutions were supporting and believing victims (n=80), the need to encourage reporting of CSA (n=55), educating people and parents (n=42), and treating sex offenders (n=30). The least mentioned solution was a victim or other person

taking the law into his or her own hands by attempting to kill or successfully killing an offender (n=5).

The most frequently mentioned societal cause of CSA across all news sources was institutional failure (n=230). Interestingly, supporting the accused offender was the second most frequent societal cause with (n=91) mentions. This suggests that a level of doubt persists when offenders, some of whom may be pillars of the community, are accused. Organizational policies as a cause (n=80), was closely followed by news indicating that a mandatory reporter did not report CSA (n=78). Weak and/or ineffective laws was ranked fifth in the number of citations (n=65). Church doctrine versus secular law was often mentioned in stories about the Catholic Church (n=52) surrounding the debate about whether the church should abide by secular law regarding incidences involving priests who commit CSA offenses. Citations for victim and parent blaming (n=48) indicate that this continues to exist at some level regarding CSA in the news. Institutional negligence was only cited (n=12) times, revealing a shift toward holding institutions, organizational policies, and mandatory reporters more accountable.

The most frequently mentioned societal solutions for CSA in this national news sample were punishing institutional leaders (n=128), punishing institutions (n=104), and changing organizational policies (n=87). A need to change, improve, or enforce laws (n=67); punish non-reporters (n=62); and prosecute non-reporters (n=57) received a similar number of mentions. Articles that talked about education, prevention, and awareness ranked lower among societal solutions (n=50), and providing more resources and support for social workers and law enforcement for CSA cases received the fewest mentions (n=18).

The mean scores for individual-level causes and solutions and societal-level causes and solutions were calculated to determine which attributes were mentioned more than others and to determine significance. The mean for individual-level causes is ($M=1.19$, $SD=.976$), societal-level causes is ($M=1.67$, $SD=1.44$), individual-level solutions is ($M=1.97$, $SD=1.38$) and societal-level solutions is ($M=1.41$, $SD=1.62$). These scores indicate that the relationship between means of individual-level causes and solutions as well as societal-level causes and solutions are *not* significant when tested to control for error rate, $z > 1.96$, $p < 1$. However, the result of the 2-tailed significance test between mean individual-level causes and societal-level causes was $t=.002$; and between mean individual-level solutions and societal-level solutions was $t=.0369$, indicating this to be a strong and relevant finding.

Additionally, when a paired samples t-test was conducted to compare these groups of variables, both results were significant. When individual causes and society level causes were compared, the results were significant at $t=6.54$, ($M=.479$), ($SD=1.52$). When individual solutions versus societal level solutions were compared, results were also significant at $t=5.79$, ($M=.552$), ($SD=1.99$). The news media are more likely to focus on social-level causes and individual-level solutions. These results indicate that news stories about CSA between 2002 and 2012 mentioned individual-level solutions for CSA more frequently despite placing the blame for CSA on societal-level causes.

To determine which type of news organizations focus more on individual or societal-level solutions for CSA, group statistics comparisons revealed that on average television news organizations are more likely to report on individual-level causes and solutions for CSA. Thus, the answer to research question four is that newspapers are

more likely to report about societal-level causes and solutions for CSA. Although the results revealed differences among means, these differences were not statistically significant per Table 4.5.

Has the framing of responsibility for CSA as reported in the news media changed over time? In an effort to answer this final research question, Figure 4.4 reveals that the focus on individual-level causes and solutions declined between 2002 and 2010, but spiked throughout 2011 and 2012. In addition, the focus has been on individual solutions rather than individual causes throughout the 11-year time period. Figure 4.5 indicates a decline in reporting on societal-level causes and solutions for CSA from 2002 until 2009, climbing to a peak almost in tandem in 2011, only to decline throughout 2012. Although societal-level causes are mentioned more frequently, reporting on societal-level solutions closely mimics the news media pattern of focus throughout the time period. Both figures illustrate two significant spikes in news coverage that occur throughout the 11-year time period. The first spike occurred in 2002 and can be attributed to the abundance of national news coverage about the Catholic Church CSA scandals throughout 2002. The second notable spike occurs from 2011 through 2012 and can be attributed to significant levels of news coverage about the Sandusky scandal at Pennsylvania State University.

LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to this study worth noting. The sample size was small considering the number of years included in the analysis. However, the quality of articles determined by the search parameters and the few unrelated articles make the study generalizable to the population of articles about CSA throughout the 11-year time period. Although most variables were accounted for in the analysis, one variable that

appeared in the 'other' category among coders was that a potential cause for CSA could be access to child pornography on the Internet. Further research conducted on this issue revealed that increased availability of child pornography on the Internet does not directly cause CSA, but potentially increases the likelihood that an offender will offend, and is also considered a CSA crime (Bourke & Hernandez, 2009).

Another limitation was the decision about whether to include the Boy Scouts as specific content to be coded. It could be argued that more news stories about Michael Jackson appeared in the sample, yet these were coded in the Other category. There were so few articles about the Boy Scouts that they could have been placed in the Other category for analysis. However, that there were only five articles in the sample over an 11-year period is an important finding, so the decision was made to include it among the reported results. Not including other CSA events for coding content, such as Michael Jackson or the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, also may have pre-disposed our findings relevant to institutional failure as most articles about the Catholic Church or Sandusky/Penn State mentioned institutional failure as a societal cause.

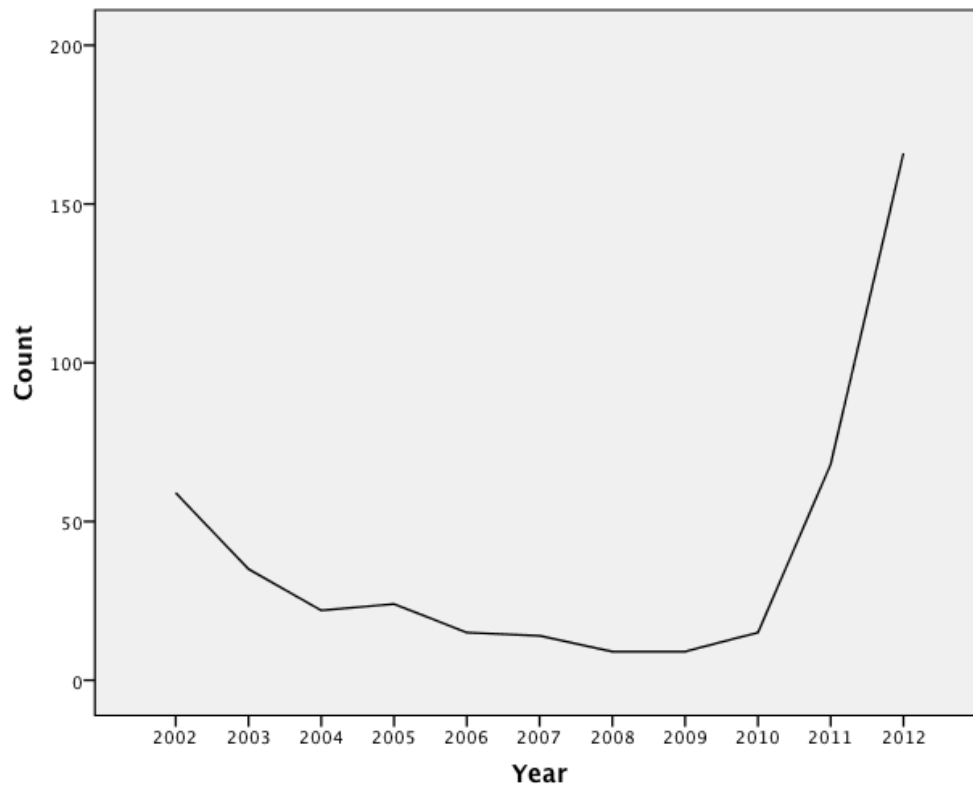


Figure 4.1 Frequency of News Stories about CSA 2002–2012

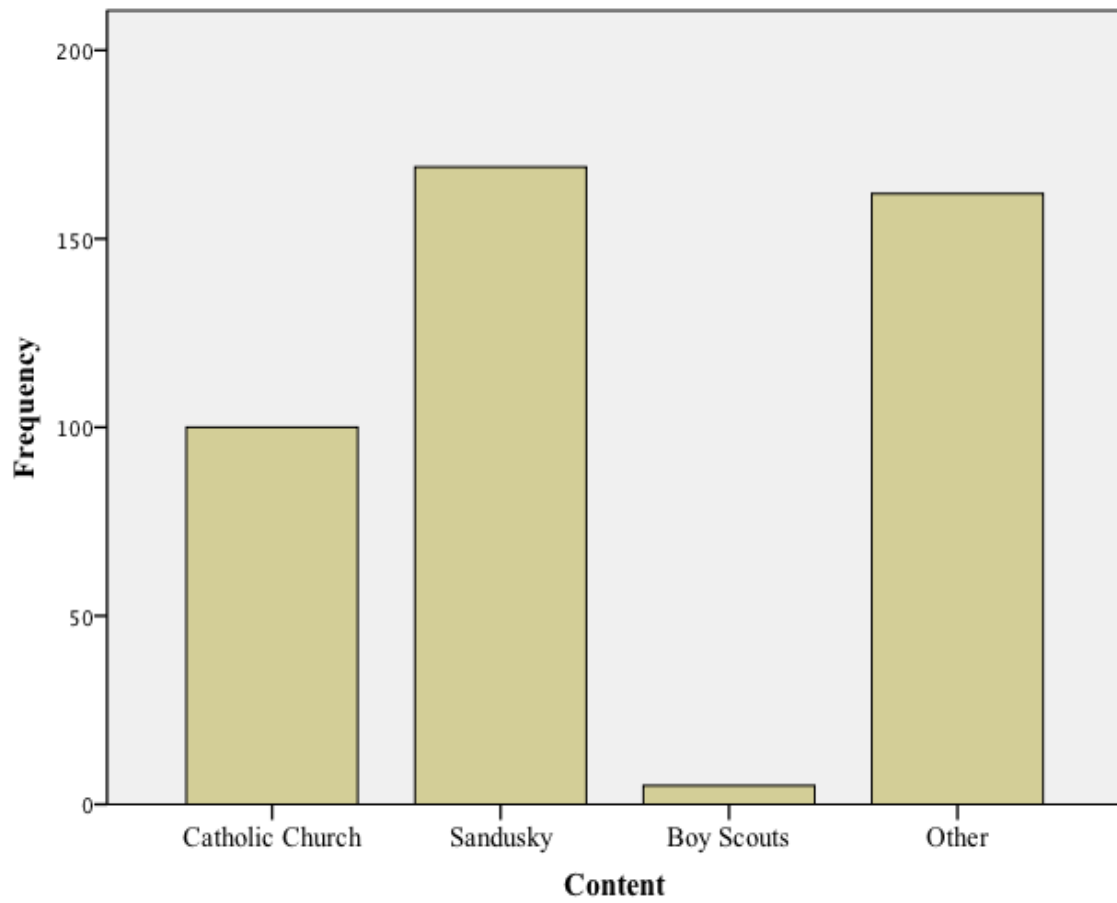


Figure 4.2 CSA Scandals News Content 2002–2012

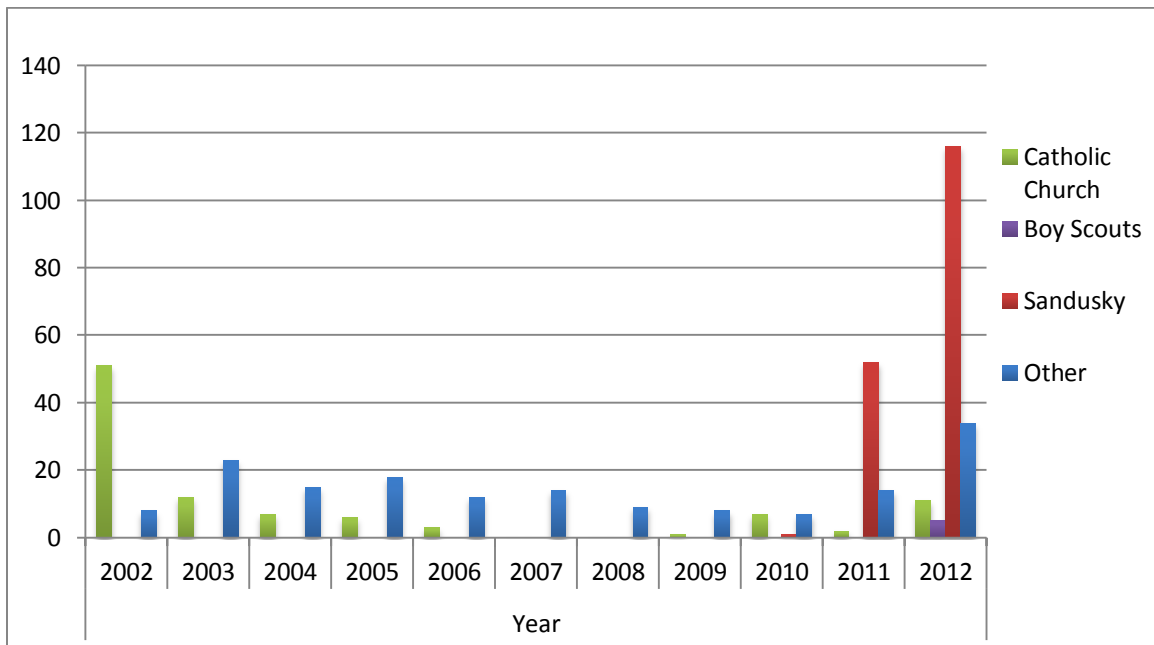


Figure 4.3 CSA News Content by Year, 2002–2012

Table 4.1 Individual-Level Causes of CSA in News Coverage by Source

News Source	Sex Offender	Victim				Mental Illness	Victim Did		Totals
		Delayed Reporting	Adult Did Not Report	Delayed Reporting	Adult Did Not Report		Not Report	Other	
CNN News	45	15	13	12	12	12	12	2	99
NBC News	51	12	21	5	5	5	5	3	97
ABC News	57	9	10	5	5	2	2	0	83
Washington Post	49	11	1	6	6	3	3	0	70
NY Times	37	7	4	3	3	1	1	0	52
MSNBC	29	4	7	3	3	1	1	0	44
CBS News	20	8	7	1	1	5	5	0	41
Fox News	24	5	1	3	3	2	2	1	36
Totals	312	71	64	38	38	31	6	522	

Table 4.2 Individual-Level Solutions for CSA in News Coverage by Source

News Source	Charges Filed		Accuse Offender		Punish Offender		Support Victim		Encourage Reporting		Educate Offender		Treat Offender		Kill Offender		Totals
CNN	38	37	27	15	17	13	8	2	0	157							
NBC News	47	44	18	19	14	2	2	0	1	147							
ABC News	53	52	31	4	1	3	2	0	0	146							
Washington Post	36	21	24	15	9	5	13	2	0	123							
New York Times	35	29	14	7	6	41	3	1	0	99							
Fox News	19	24	12	5	5	11	2	0	0	78							
MSNBC	28	14	9	9	1	2	2	0	0	65							
CBS News	20	11	4	6	2	2	0	0	0	45							
Totals	278	232	139	80	55	42	30	5	1	860							

Table 4.3 Societal-Level Causes of CSA in News Coverage by Source

News Source	Support		Mandatory Reporter			Church vs. Blaming			Other	Totals
	Institutional of Failure	Offender Policies	Org.	Did Not Report	Weak Laws	Difficulty Prosecuting	Secular Parent	Victim/ Institutional Negligence		
Washington Post	44	14	26	6	16	10	13	2	2	138
NY Times	46	17	15	12	10	6	14	9	0	132
NBC News	46	12	11	18	8	10	7	9	0	121
CNN	27	13	14	9	13	13	11	10	2	112
ABC News	34	18	3	11	1	11	4	4	0	87
MSNBC	19	6	7	15	3	5	0	4	0	60
Fox News	5	6	0	3	14	7	1	5	2	43
CBS News	9	5	4	4	0	2	2	5	0	33
Totals	230	91	80	78	65	64	52	48	6	726

Table 4.4 Societal-Level Solutions for CSA in News Coverage by Source

News Source	Punish Leaders	Punish Institutions	Punish Org.	Change Org. Policies	Change Enforce Laws	Punish Non-Reporters	Prosecute Non-Reporters	Investigate Cases Thoroughly	Increase Resources	Other	Totals
Washington Post	21	17	28	15	9	8	10	8	4	1	121
NBC News	27	17	14	8	12	10	5	15	4	0	112
NY Times	18	22	19	11	10	8	11	4	0	0	103
CNN	20	16	14	14	8	8	9	5	5	0	99
MSNBC	17	12	5	4	11	8	3	6	2	0	68
ABC News	16	12	4	1	7	9	3	2	1	0	55
Fox News	3	4	0	14	2	4	5	4	1	0	37
CBS News	6	4	3	0	3	2	4	1	1	0	24
Totals	128	104	87	67	62	57	50	45	18	1	619

Table 4.5 Newspapers vs. Television

Variable	Newspapers (n=134)		Television (n=302)	
	Mean \pm SD	SEM	Mean \pm SD	SEM
Individual-Level Causes	0.9 \pm 0.8	0.07	1.3 \pm 1.0	0.06
Individual-Level Solutions	1.6 \pm 1.4	0.12	2.1 \pm 1.3	0.08
Societal-Level Causes	2.0 \pm 1.5	0.13	1.5 \pm 1.4	0.08
Societal-Level Solutions	1.7 \pm 1.6	0.14	1.3 \pm 1.6	0.09

SD, standard deviation; SEM, standard error of means

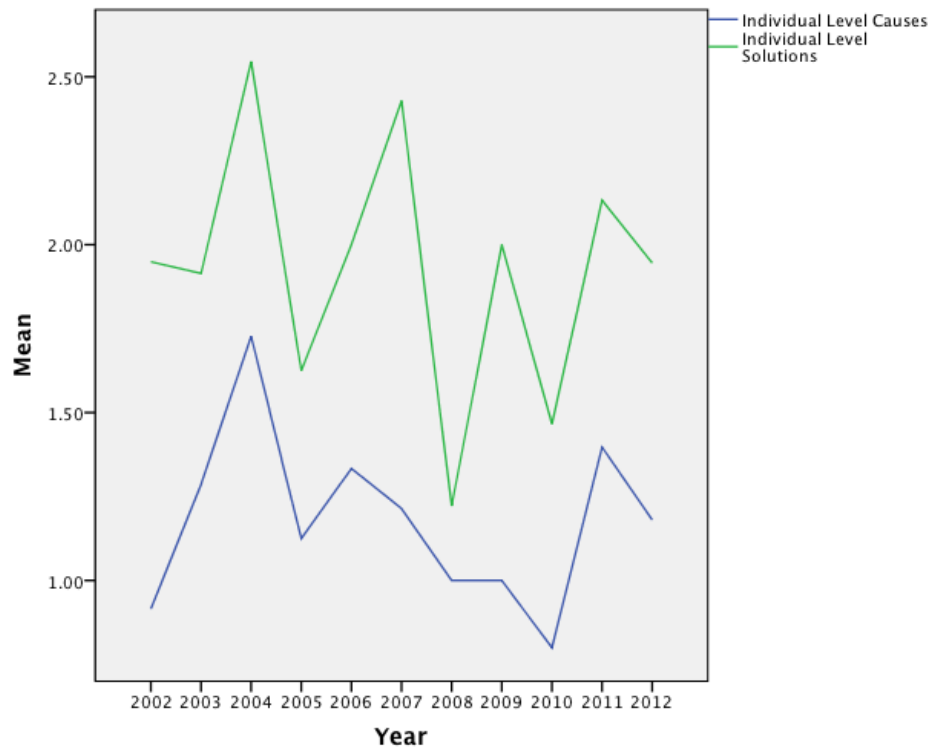


Figure 4.4 Individual-Level Causes vs. Individual-Level Solutions

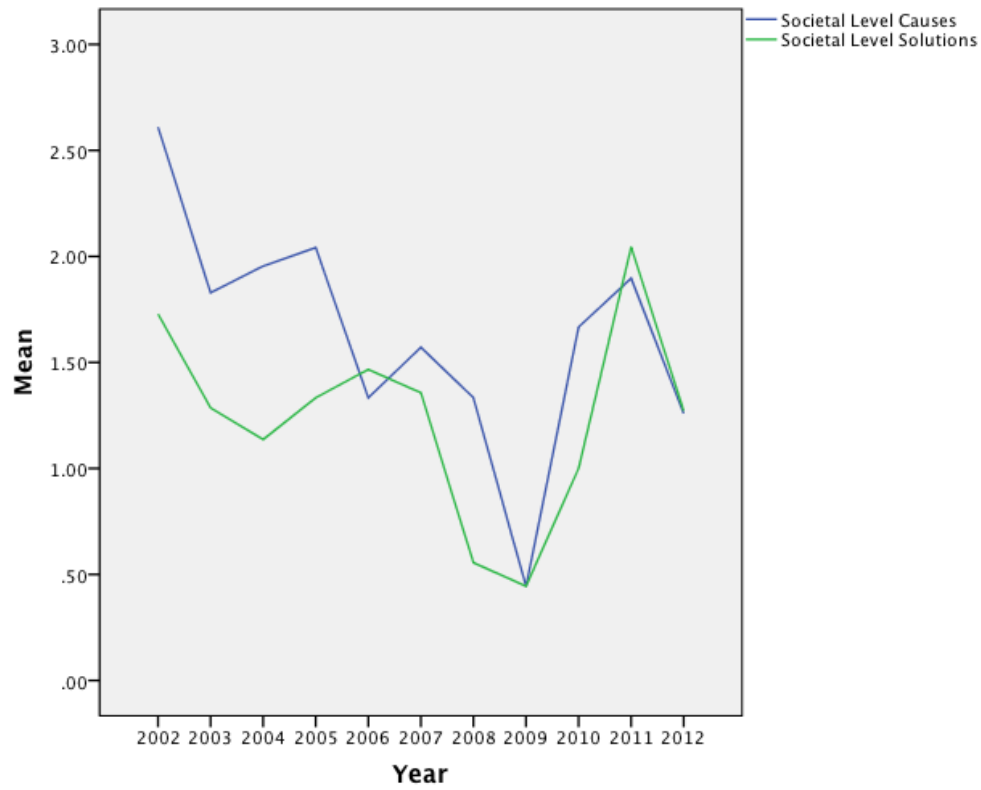


Figure 4.5 Societal-Level Causes vs. Societal-Level Solutions

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis clearly indicates that journalists have shifted their attention toward institutional failure as a major contributing factor in CSA scandals. Most importantly the findings reveal that over the past decade, the national news presented societal-level causes, yet individual-level solutions for CSA. Although the media continue to focus on some of the most egregious and notorious CSA cases, societal cause frames for CSA appear more frequently. However, solutions for CSA still remain highly focused on the individual, specifically the adjudication of sex offenders.

In the past, when scholars have attempted to assess the nature of CSA news coverage, the results revealed that media frames placed the blame for CSA squarely on individuals. Therefore, the most interesting and noteworthy finding is the increase in blame on institutions and their leaders for CSA. Figure 5.1 illustrates the strong correlation between this variable and the institutional failure of the Catholic Church and Penn State in relationship to the timing of these CSA events within the past decade.

These results replicate two spikes in news coverage from previous content analyses about the Catholic Church in 2002 and Sandusky in 2011 (R. E. Cheit et al., 2010; L Dorfman et al., 2012; Hove et al., 2013). However, overall, the national news media do not cover CSA as frequently, with less than 25 articles per year on average across all news sources. The results of the comparison between newspaper and

television coverage of CSA were predictable and not significant. That newspapers focus slightly more on societal-level causes and solutions is expected because print journalists have more space and time for in-depth reporting compared to television news reporters. This finding confirms differences that already exist between newspapers and television when covering social problems in general (Iyengar, 1996). The news media cite punishing sex offenders, institutional leaders and institutions as the best remedy while neglecting to mention education, prevention, and awareness. That societal-level solutions were not cited as often as individual solutions is an area that could shift if the focus on the failure of institutions and their leaders to protect children continues to increase. Changing organizational policies and making changes in the law are mentioned most often as a solution to this public health problem.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

That the news media have begun to focus more on societal-level causes for CSA indicates a considerable shift from the findings of prior research conducted on this issue. The lack of news coverage about solutions, specifically CSA prevention, education, and awareness, is an important finding as it reflects the results of the efforts of CSA professionals and advocates to educate journalists about this issue. This is an area that could be addressed and improved upon by public health experts as they interact with the media regarding CSA incidences, both locally and nationally. Child protection professionals should increase awareness of societal-level solutions via media advocacy efforts. Media advocacy tries to spotlight particular social and health issues, presenting policy-oriented solutions. The three-step process is: setting the agenda, framing the issue, and recommending a specific solution to the problem. In this way, social workers

could educate journalists about CSA by making themselves available to the news media when these cases come to their attention.

In order to achieve changes regarding CSA, it is important to consider the values on which society is based and how the news media can potentially influence public perceptions of the issue. Journalists should seek out CSA experts, researchers and advocates as sources when covering CSA cases. Rather than continue to focus on the offender and criminal justice process, the discussion should include more information about practical implications for improving child protection within local community organizations that work with children. News stories about CSA should also include more information about child protection resources and CSA awareness training. Journalists should also educate themselves about CSA and present solutions for how cases should be handled or prevented within schools, churches, sports and volunteer groups.

What does this signify to our nation's institutions? Institutional leaders can be part of the solution if they change existing policies and procedures regarding hiring practices and provide more education and training for employees on how to report CSA incidences. These leaders should review and revise existing policies regarding employee background checks, and provide education and awareness training for staff. That teachers and other professionals who work with children are sometimes not held accountable when accusations are made and even allowed to leave employment without repercussion needs to change. Human resource departments should redefine how these issues are handled within legal guidelines in order to better protect children.

In short, the combination of intense media coverage, stricter legislation, and the implementation of accountability procedures has replaced the option for institutions to “cover up” CSA reports. The financial and reputational liability is now far too great for leaders to choose to protect the institution over the safety of children.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis has implications for future research on perceptions of risk of CSA in our society as the greatest impact can be made not just through changes in the law and organizational policies, but the willingness of people to become educated about CSA.

Beginning in the 1970s, CSA prevention programs were developed. The focus of these programs was to inform children about CSA in schools. Since that time, research has found that 67% of adolescents report having school-based CSA education (David Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995). CSA prevention literature over the past 30 years has been primarily focused on evaluating these school-based prevention programs that provide children with the appropriate education and skills to recognize and thwart advances of sexual offenders. Some of this literature has attempted to assess the role of parents in combination with prevention efforts. Scholars have determined, however, that for a variety of reasons, parents are not proactively engaging in educating themselves or their children about CSA. Parents from all backgrounds expressed difficulty in talking about CSA with their children, describing it as more difficult to discuss than sexual intercourse, homosexuality, suicide, death, or abortion (D. Finkelhor, 1984). More importantly, over 50% of parents do not think their children are at risk of sexual abuse (Collins, 1996; D. Finkelhor, 1984).

While there has been an ongoing effort to recruit parents as partners in CSA prevention workshops, parent attendance typically remains unusually low, with from 27% (Pullins & Jones, 2006) to as few as 6.4% of parents attending (Wurtele, Kvaternick, & Franklin, 1992). More research has been called for to identify and assess barriers to parent participation in CSA prevention programs. CSA experts have called for a shift in responsibility for CSA education from children to adults because, “in no other area of child maltreatment or child safety do adults put the onus of responsibility onto children” (Wurtele, 2009, p. 1).

That our schoolteachers, principals, heads of universities, Boy Scout troop leaders, coaches and ministers are parents themselves, is important for the implementation of CSA education, awareness and prevention within these institutions. Institutional failure reflects upon the individuals within them and points to the need for a shift in behavior, attitudes, and knowledge about CSA and what to do about the problem.

Future research related to public health communication and risk perception theoretical models is needed. This work could attempt to measure and explain the public’s knowledge, attitudes and perception of risk regarding CSA. In this way, research could be grounded in theory with the ultimate goal of improving participation in CSA prevention education.

There are four relevant theoretical issue areas within health communication research that relate to the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of people regarding CSA education that could be further explored. One theory in public health literature is knowledge gap theory; the difference between what people think they know and what they actually know (Griffin, Dunwoody, & Neuwirth, 1999). Because previous research

indicates that this gap exists for people regarding CSA, an attempt to define this gap would be useful. Another issue is reliance on CSA myths (Steven J Collings, 1997). There have been conflicting findings among research that has attempted to test CSA myths, with most suggesting that people return to belief in myth even after exposure to CSA prevention education (Rheingold et al., 2007). There may be some mediating factors, such as the media, that are having a reverse effect on knowledge. Future research about perceptions of knowledge, derived from the information sufficiency and risk communication literature, pertaining to one's assessment of current knowledge of CSA might explain more about why people are not attending prevention education workshops (Kahlor, 2010). Another area that could be explored further is information avoidance. People avoid health information to maintain hope or deniability, resist overexposure, accept limits of action, maintain boundaries, and continue with life activities (Barbour, Rintamaki, Ramsey, & Brashers, 2012). Future research employing these concepts might attempt to explain why people actively avoid information about CSA. In this way, CSA prevention efforts could be modified according to the knowledge, messages, attitudes and preferences of people when it comes to learning more about CSA.

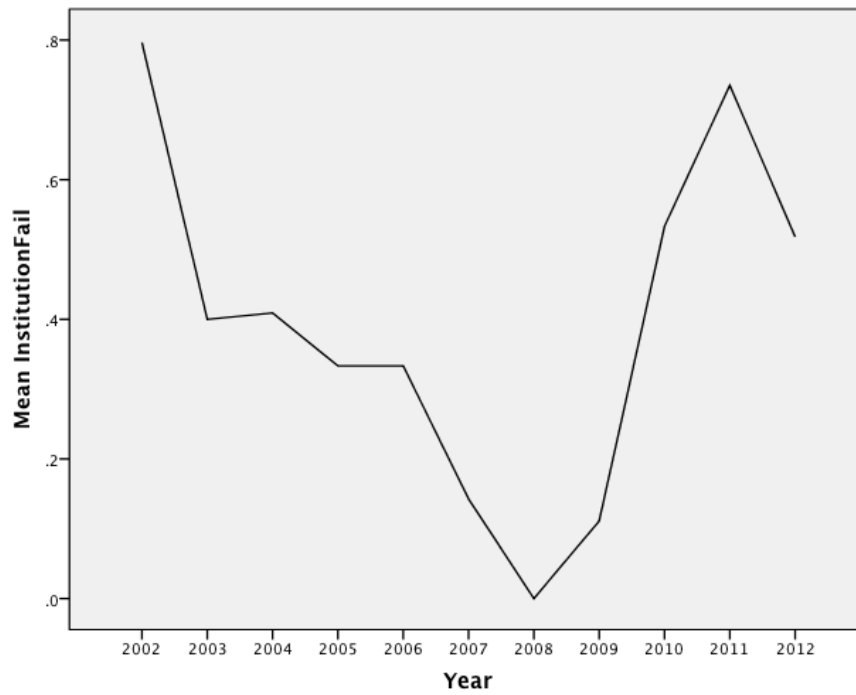


Figure 5.1 Institutional Failure Variable in CSA News Content

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APPENDIX A – CODING SHEET

The Framing of Child Sexual Abuse in the Media

Individual Level Causes of CSA

Perpetrator/Sex Offender/Pedophile

Victim did not report CSA

Victim delayed reporting

Mental illness

Adult (Parent/Other) did not report

Other

Societal Level Causes of CSA

Mandatory reporter did not report

Victim/Parent blaming

Institutional failure

Institutional negligence

Individual Level Solutions for CSA

Charges filed

Offender is accused

Punish perpetrator

Attempt to/kill offender

Support/believe victims

Treat offenders

Educate people/parents

Encourage reporting

Other

Societal Level Solutions for CSA

Punish non-reporters

Prosecute non-reporters

Education/prevention/awareness

Punish institutions

Punish leaders

Church doctrine vs. secular law
Organizational policies
Difficulty prosecuting CSA cases
Supporting the accused offender
Weak/Ineffective Laws
Other

Change organizational policies
More resources for social work/police
Thoroughly investigate cases
Change/Improve/Enforce Laws
Other

APPENDIX B – CODEBOOK

Definitions for Content Analysis:

The Framing of Child Sexual Abuse in the Media

CSA – Child Sexual Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse – Contact between a child and adult or other person who is significantly older or in a position of power or control over the child wherein the child is being used for sexual gratification by the adult or other person (APA, 1999). The law defines child sexual abuse as criminal or civil offenses where an adult engages in sexual activity with a minor or exploits a minor for the purposes of sexual gratification.

Perpetrator – Any person, adult, teen, adolescent, parent, teacher, who is suspected or has been convicted of committing CSA acts with a minor.

Sex Offender – Any person suspected of a CSA offense or who has been convicted, was previously convicted or paroled, or has at one time been listed on a sex offender registry.

Pedophile – A person 16 years of age or older with a psychiatric disorder typically characterized by a primary or exclusive sexual interest in prepubescent children.

NOTE: Any article that names an offender/accused offender anywhere in the article should have this box checked.

In cases of juvenile offenders, a person may not be named but, for example, it may say that a 14-year-old boy is charged with sexual assault—CHECK THE BOX. By law, the news media cannot name an accused perpetrator if he/she is a juvenile.

Victim of CSA – Person or juvenile at the time of offense on whom a sexual assault has been perpetrated.

Charges Filed – Any mention of charges pending, filed, law proceedings underway due to a prosecution.

Offender is Accused – Sometimes articles only mention that an offender has been accused and no charges have been filed.

Punish Perpetrator – In some cases, known offenders are fired from jobs or moved to other schools with references, although no charges may ever be filed.

Attempt to Kill/Kill Offender – In some cases, victims have attempted to kill the offender or have been successful in killing the offender.

Victim Did Not Report CSA – Victim did not report CSA. Example: Maybe parent did or the victim is now an adult who claims they were a victim of CSA, but never prosecuted. Example: Victim has filed charges for an incident that occurred in 1993, when he/she was 12 years old and the article is dated 2005.

Victim Delayed Reporting – Victim delayed reporting, but eventually reported the incident(s).

Support/Believe Victims – Mentions that victims should be believed and supported when they make claims of child sexual abuse.

Mental Illness – Pedophilia is considered a mental illness. Articles may mention the fact that it is a psychiatric disorder.

Treat Offenders – Any article that mentions offering treatment or that there is a lack of treatment for sex offenders/pedophiles/perpetrators of CSA.

Adult Did Not Report CSA – In many cases, adults whether parents, teachers, or other individuals had suspicions or were told of abuse by children and did not report or convinced the child not to report.

Educate People/Parents – Article mentions that average people such as parents or people in general (i.e., everyday public) need to be educated about CSA, reporting of CSA, and CSA prevention or awareness.

Encourage Reporting – Article mentions the need to encourage reporting of CSA.

Mandatory Reporting of CSA – Laws, which vary by state, designating a list of caregivers of children who under the law are duly obligated to report suspected child abuse, both physical and/or sexual. In most cases, physicians, social workers, law enforcement officials, and teachers are mandatory reporters under the law. Recently, some states (e.g., Georgia and Pennsylvania) have revised their mandatory reporting laws to include scout leaders, church leaders, YMCA and other volunteer organizations, and sports coaches.

Mandatory Reporter Did Not Report CSA – As defined above, a mandatory reporter did not report an incident or suspected incident of CSA.

Punish Non-reporters – Article mentions actions taken usually by institutions to punish individuals who do not report by removing them from job/volunteer leadership position, demotion, etc., but legal criminal charges for non-reporting may or may not occur.

Prosecute Non-reporters – Article mentions the need to or action taken to prosecute a mandatory reporter who did not report CSA.

Victim/Parent Blaming – Any mention about not believing the victim, any mention of credibility issues with or questions about parents of victims.

Education/Prevention and Awareness – Any mention or call for more education for CSA awareness in general or for improvement of mandatory reporting, training for teachers, coaches, other community leaders, parents, etc.

Examples: School-based training for children, for example, the good touch/bad touch program for elementary school children. National non-profits also provide education and awareness training for parents, teachers, volunteers, any adults or organizations that work with children.

Institutional Failure – As long as an institution (examples: Penn State, Boy Scouts, Catholic Church) is mentioned in connection with a lawsuit, etc., involving a CSA case, this box should be checked.

Institutional Negligence – In some cases the institution was unaware of a CSA incident, indicating that they were negligent rather than knowledgeable of events and failed to take action.

Punish Institutions – Article that mentions fines, sanctions, or other type punishment for institutions that cover up/do not report CSA. Example: Penn State 60 million NCAA sanctions.

Punish Leaders – Article that mentions firing/demotion/removal of teachers, leaders, or clergy, etc. In this way, the institutions seek to punish leaders, not via criminal law but within their ranks for non-reporting handling of CSA cases. Example: Firing of football coach Joe Paterno at Penn State.

Church Doctrine vs. Secular law – Article mentions discrepancies between people and/or institutions choosing to follow church doctrine/internal policies vs. the law. Arguments mentioned in articles re: clergy rights vs. rights of the state.

Organizational Policies – Some organizations/institutions have a set of policies and procedures either internally/or even unspoken about NOT reporting CSA incidents which people are choosing to follow rather than what mandatory reporting laws dictate.

Difficulty Prosecuting CSA Cases – Any article that talks about how difficult it is to obtain convictions, get people to report to law enforcement or social work, problems with the system.

Change Organizational Policies – Article mentions policies or anything about putting in place or changing policies regarding the reporting and handling of CSA cases within institutions.

Example: Instituting policies of reducing one-on-one adult/child situations in schools, scouts, churches, day camps, sports, etc.

Difficulty Prosecuting CSA Cases – Article mentions how hard it is to prosecute CSA cases.

Examples: Mentioning difficulty involved in: persuading victims to come forward and reveal abuse; prosecuting leaders in large institutions such as the Catholic Church or prosecuting “pillars of the community,” (e.g., Mormon FLDS); working with statutes of limitations; and getting victims to testify against family members, etc.

Supporting the Accused Offender – Article mentions people, perhaps leaders, supporting, taking sides with, or protecting the offender.

Weak/Ineffective Laws – Article mentions that laws are ineffective in keeping sex offenders in jail or weak laws regarding prosecution of CSA or larger institutions for negligence etc.

More Resources for Social Work/Police – Article mentions the need to provide more resources for social workers and law enforcement or that provisions have been made to increase support.

Thoroughly Investigate Cases – Article mentions the need to thoroughly investigate CSA cases for many reasons. Examples: to get convictions, document cases, because social workers are not able to substantiate cases, etc.

Weak/Ineffective Laws – Article mentions the need to strengthen or change laws regarding CSA. Example: Change state mandatory reporting laws to increase number of named professions/categories on the list of mandatory reporters.

Change/Improve Laws – Article talks about the need to make changes to CSA laws, e.g., increasing types of mandatory reporters, lengthening the statute of limitations during which victims can file charges, or restricting sex offenders.

Other (All Quadrants) – Should only be checked if you believe that an individual level cause, individual level solution, societal level cause, or societal level solution mentioned in the article cannot be categorized within the defined variables above. Most should fit one of the existing variables. If you find a variable that may fit the Other category, please bring it to my attention. Make a side note of the article number on a separate sheet of paper; write Other and what you think the Other is.