

MS. ISOM: Right. In terms of like sex offender notification laws, certainly I don't think there are people out here who are going to say, absolutely, sex offender notification laws eliminate the possibility of sex abuse. I don't know of any law enforcement officer that would say that; but again it allows informed decisions.

If I know I have a sex offender on a street in my neighborhood, I'm probably going to tell my caregiver please do not walk my child down that street. It's something as simple as that. That information that I receive informs a decision I'm making about the safety of my children.

## SECTION VI VICTIMIZATION AND THE VICTIMS

The 37<sup>th</sup> Investigating Statewide Grand Jury commends the victims of sexual abuse for their bravery in coming forward to report child sexual abuse within the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. Whether reported immediately or years later, the strength of character necessary to come forward and confront their accusers is a strength those who abused them, or enabled their abuse, only pretended to possess.

The impact of child sexual abuse is profound. Our predecessors in the Philadelphia County Grand Jury investigated the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and found shockingly similar circumstances within that diocese. That Grand Jury called child sexual abuse "soul murder." Based upon our findings in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, we cannot disagree.

The Grand Jury explored the impact of child sexual abuse with an expert from the FBI, Supervisory Special Agent Adrienne N. Isom. The following exchange occurred:

MR. DYE: Perhaps the darkest part of these types of cases are now the emotional response, what this causes inside the victim as they struggle with the aftermath. Can you speak to what is the emotional response of the victim to victimization?

MS. ISOM: The thing that I would say we most frequently see and hear from victims are the ideas of guilt, shame and embarrassment I think are the main three, and loyalty, some of the loyalty as I just mentioned that develops; but many of these children once they get to a point -- we as humans take our experiences and then as we grow up and we age we start to apply information that we received to previous events.

So the child is growing up, may have been abused as a five or six year old but at the time didn't really recognize that was abuse. At they grow up, as they get older, they start to apply the information they are receiving to those instances and they are thinking back, oh, my gosh, that really was abusive contact. Then they feel shameful. Then they feel guilty that they didn't recognize it even though we all as adults now understand that they shouldn't have necessarily been in a position to recognize it as abusive conduct because they were five or six years old, whatever the case may be; but it really does resulting a lot of confusion, a lot of guilt and shame. Especially in those scenarios where you have the

ongoing relationships, they feel like they are destroying something that was built. We see that also a lot in homosexual relationships --again, the term relationship as you mentioned is not the best way to describe it but if we have an offender who has an ongoing sexual relationship with a minor, especially if it's a homosexual relationship, that guilt and shame is really an influence because that child is really confused maybe and doesn't understand, okay, am I homosexual, am I heterosexual and they may believe that others will judge them based on that. So it really does impact that whole disclosure process and their willingness to come forward with the information because they themselves are just confused and worried.

MR. DYE: What kind of disclosure challenges exist?

MS. ISOM: We will often see no disclosure whatsoever where they have not disclosed for years. We will sometimes see where law enforcement has come forward and talked to them and they denied there was any sort of abusive conduct. We will see incremental disclosures and then sometimes we'll even see victims who will bring forth information to law enforcement and then later recant that information later and say that it didn't happen.

MR. DYE: Again, it sounds terrible to say but we're talking about predators so it's the same kind of language one might use when discussing how a lion seeks its prey. With adolescents what makes the ideal victim?

MS. ISOM: Adolescence really is an ideal victim age range because there is a whole lot going on when you're in adolescence. I'm sure we can all think back during that phase. So all of the characteristics that we see in normal adolescence is some of what makes these victims very susceptible to sexual abuse. So in normal adolescence we all remember being curious about things and trying to kind of figure out the world as we're going along. We are in the midst of emotional immaturity, so we don't really understand how relationships exactly work and what's my role in a particular relationship. Hormones and puberty are in full force during that period of time so you go through again the curiosity aspect of things.

Sometimes that curiosity transfers into sexual activity. In the area of adolescence we see a lot of risk taking behaviors that develop and sometimes kids even get to the point where they might be described as rebellious and not following instructions by their parents or their educators, things of that nature. Kids that are in adolescence despite the fact that they may tell all of us as parents leave us alone, we don't want any contact with you, they really do have that need for attention, whether that be from a figure within their life like a parent or a role model but also from their peers. Then they are also at this age where they are trying to seek independence. They don't really want to be seen with mom or dad, they don't really want someone watching over them at all times. Then you add to that what could be present, the complicating circumstances. So if you have a child that is an adolescent who their parents are at that point that they finally feel like they can provide the opportunity for some independence, then that can certainly make them susceptible. If there are complicating factors like a lack of parental involvement in their life, if they are poverty stricken or suffering from any sort of financial difficulties. If you have a child that is feeling like they have a sexual identity crisis where they are just not sure, they are still trying to explore their own sexuality and in some cases are trying to make sure that they identify one way or the other and just the difficulties that come along with that. Certainly low self-esteem can impact it because the offenders will notice that

immediately and capitalize on that, providing a lot of compliments, encouragement, things of that nature. Then if they have been a prior sexual abuse victim it can also increase their susceptibility. So this period of adolescence really does make the kids really susceptible to victimization, and add to that the idea that abusive conduct doesn't necessarily have to hurt. Again, this is something that some people may consider kind of controversial but we all know -- we all have heard of situations where there has been some sort of horrific event where the child is definitely held down, maybe abducted off the street, tied up and horrible things have happened; but equally as horrible maybe those incidents where the offenders sexually abusing them but it doesn't hurt. So you can imagine the guilt and shame from a child who, for example, the offender is touching them and they developed an erection and the confusion that must be going on in their head as an adolescent by thinking my body responded physiologically in a certain way, it surely shouldn't have done that, that must mean I liked it but I don't really like it, what is going on in the mind of a kid who is not even cognitively fully developed at this point. It really does make them vulnerable.

MR. DYE: Before I move on to specific offender behavior in this case, let's talk a little bit about the disclosure of sexual abuse and the factors that can impact the disclosure of sexual abuse. What are the general factors that impact victim disclosure of sexual abuse?

MS. ISOM: I think the easiest one to talk about first is really the nature of the relationship between the offender and the victim. If the offender is still involved in the child's life, certainly that is going to impact that disclosure process, how often are they seeing one another, are they engaged in regular communication with the child's parents or family members, are they an educator they are going to have to see every day, things of that nature.

We see a lot of cases where children will say, including this case, where they thought they wouldn't be believed, no one will believe me if I come forward and say this about the offender, the person that's touching me. That certainly impacts the disclosure process. The other thing is keeping in mind that when children are analyzing in their mind whether or not they should come forward about sexual abuse, the recognition to them that things in their life are going to change, so especially if you have a case where it's intra-familial sexual abuse where the offender is a parent or a caregiver, the child very easily understands that if I report information about my dad or about my caregiver that person is likely going to be removed from my life if it's reported to law enforcement. Children know that. From a very young age I think we all recognize that action reaction concept. So if a child is worried about coming forward about information and they recognize that, hey, mom doesn't work and dad has been touching me, if I talk about what dad's been doing, dad is going to leave and then we don't have food on the table next week. All of these things can impact that process of disclosure including that guilt and shame and embarrassment, those factors that we talked about.

This investigation found numerous occurrences of child sexual abuse between male priests and young boys and girls. Those unique factors were addressed by the FBI's expert.

MS. ISOM: As I mentioned previously, we see many male victims or we learn about male victims that have not come forward out of fear that they won't be believed but then also fear that people will judge them based on the type of abuse that was perpetrated on them. As I mentioned, especially we have kids in adolescence that are exploring their sexuality and if they were perpetrated on by a male offender they may believe in their mind that makes them homosexual. Perhaps for them for whatever reason that is an undesirable label that they want placed on them, so we see that as an issue. We also have -- if you think about the way that men are raised in our society, men are not necessarily taught that crying is okay. Certainly it depends on the household so I'm generalizing; but if you think about the way men are raised in our society, reporting this type of vulnerability or victimization is really just not something we inherently teach people. We don't necessarily teach men in our society that it's okay to cry, it's okay to react if something bad happens to you and then talking about issues and problems is also not something that's regularly encouraged. So we have children maybe that are being raised in a family or in their life that they don't feel like they can express that something bad is going on in their life or something bad is happening to them because it would be viewed as weakness. So those are really the things that we see that are really unique to the male victims.

The Grand Jury recognizes these terrible acts which occurred throughout Pennsylvania are almost unbearable to comprehend. The truth often is. However, the Grand Jury found a solution to the question posed by these terrible acts... who can we trust? The answer is both beautiful and heartening in the midst of so much pain; we must trust our children. We must listen to our children and hear them, for they have no greater guardian or friend. As discussed before us, SSA Isom spoke to the uncertainty that surely exists in the mind of a confused and hurting child.

MR. DYE: Generally with victims -- I want to hone in on one issue here -- what happens if the child lacks either -- because the offender is in such a position of power or is so well liked or because the parent literally doesn't exist, what happens in scenarios where the child lacks the presence of someone to report to because they are so either engrossed in the identity of the predator or they don't exist?

MS. ISOM: Certainly the most obvious thing that a child has to have is someone they feel like they can trust to go forward and report to. Generally again they are doing that assessment of is the person going to believe me. So if I have only one person in my life that I can report the information to and it's grandma, for example, is grandma actually going to believe me if I go forward and say this. They really do have to have that supportive person in their life that they feel comfortable disclosing such really personal information to because, again, when a child is disclosing this type of conduct -- imagine if you are expected to walk -- as we often say, I wouldn't want to walk into a room and talk about a sexual relationship with a bunch of strangers, a sexual relationship or sexual conduct that someone has made me engage in with a bunch of strangers and sometimes that's what children see, I don't want to tell about this abusive conduct to anyone.

The Grand Jury finds that the victims of sexual child abuse often engage in delayed reporting if they report at all. The reasons for delayed reporting are numerous and understandable. The trauma of sexual child abuse on the victims and their families cannot be overstated. Victims find themselves alive and walking but feeling dead or dying.

Victims reported feeling “black inside.” Many victims in this investigation did or contemplated committing suicide. The Grand Jury can say no better what a mother of a victim described. The devout Catholic mother said the sexual abuse of her son “ruined our lives.”

## SECTION VII

### CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury finds the acts of the predator priests and their enabling Bishops detailed in this report to be criminal. However, they cannot be prosecuted at this time. The statute of limitations for many of the loathsome and criminal actions detailed in this report has expired. In some limited cases the unnamed victim or victims are too deeply traumatized to testify in a court of law.

There is no applicable legal provision which would apply to religious ministers or church officials to permit the extension of the statute of limitations. Many of the accused are dead; answerable now only to a higher authority.

Pennsylvania law has changed since many of these offenses occurred. Some penalties have increased, some charging periods extended. The Grand Jury finds additional legislative action is required.

#### ***Abolish the statute of limitation for sexual offenses against minors.***

The Grand Jury recognizes this recommendation is not new. Victim advocates and previous grand juries have recommended such action. However this Grand Jury again recognizes a terrible fact. Child predators will offend on children, consume their innocence and escape justice until there can be no temporal escape from their crimes. This report detailed an account of a 70-year-old victim who came forward to report the devastating trauma of their youth. The victims of child sexual abuse never escape their victimization; it is inequitable and unjust to allow their victimizers to escape accountability.