

## **CSA Prevalence in US Male Workers**

**WINGS Note:** The [Advocates for the Truth](#) team have reported statistics for current allegations against US male workers:

US male workers with allegations who are still living – 100 (active and ex-workers)

US male workers with allegations who are deceased – 47

US male workers with allegations – uncertain whether dead or alive – 13

Current total US male workers with credible allegations – 160

The following report provides detailed analysis of prevalence.

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### **Analysis of the Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) by Workers**

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**The author's history in the faith.** *Please note that I have the same name as my late cousin John T. VanDenBerg who had been removed from the work over CSA issues.*

I was born and raised in the church, the third generation on both sides of my family. My great Aunt Grace Hoops was one of the first workers recruited in the U.S. I left the "Truth" (hereafter referred to as the church) over 56 years ago. Even though I am not a follower of the faith, I have seen the value of the church. My own late Mother and her numerous sisters, who were raised in poverty, had much more fulfilled lives due to the consistency of the church and stabilizing nature of going to meetings.

My initial response upon hearing about the CSA scandals was that it happens in all faiths.

However, when hearing that the scandal was a major crisis, I did wonder about the prevalence of abusers among the workers, and decided to examine the rate of CSA within workers. I want to be clear that I do not have the goal of harming the church. Rather, I am hoping that this analysis could be used by church leadership to deal with the current crisis related to CSA by workers, and to inform members and ex-members.

**The CSA scandals.** I believe in religious freedom, and want each person to choose their own religion as they wish. However, after reading about the large scale of CSA reports and as more victims came forward, I made discrete queries with nine cousins from my very large family. All were born and raised in the church but had later left. I asked them if any had been sexually abused by workers. Just within the nine cousins interviewed, there were five reported incidents with workers, ranging from grooming to rape.

**My credentials and experience with men who commit CSA.** I am a retired Ph.D. level child psychologist who has had extensive experience with men who commit CSA. In my consultation within prisons, I have worked with many imprisoned pedophiles. I don't have extensive experience or training about women who are potential offenders, so I have focused this analysis solely on men.

**Reasons why men may commit CSA.** Many men with these tendencies become abusers because they were sexually abused as children (there is little evidence that genetics play a role), or they are from a family culture that illegally allows sexual activity between children and adults.

Studies of men who commit CSA suggest that power and control by the man over the child is another factor, especially if the man committing the crime knows the child.

**The effects of CSA on children.** It goes without saying that being sexually abused is a horrible experience for children which often has a severe negative effect over their lifespan. The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders cites some of the effects of CSA:

- Depression and thoughts of suicide
- Sexual anxiety and disorders, including promiscuity
- Difficulty maintaining appropriate boundaries with others, including enmeshed or avoidant relationships
- Poor body image and low self-esteem

In my own work with children who were sexually abused, I have observed that the betrayal of trust is a major factor in later life problems. Someone whom they trusted violated that trust, therefore all others might violate their trust. This can often lead to major relationship problems, including multiple divorces and lack of friends. In the church, workers are often put on a pedestal and are seen as respected authority figures. Therefore, when a worker commits CSA, the betrayal of trust is amplified.

**Results of my analysis.** I want to qualify this analysis as being limited due to the overall lack of accurate documentation within the church, which has minimal written materials beyond the Bible. I have depended on recently published sources from organizations who are studying and reporting on the CSA scandal within the church. These sources include interviews of former workers (non-abusers) and persons who were abused by workers. In addition, I did extensive interviews with a worker who had been accused of being an abuser and who had been removed from the ministry.

The numbers of workers is recorded differently depending on the source, but the numbers used in the following sections have been verified by at least two sources, but should be seen as approximate.

How many male workers in the US? In 2011, approximately 245 US living workers were males. These numbers are cited as approximate because of new workers coming on, workers leaving the work, and workers who have been removed from the work due to CSA allegations.

The data on overall CSA for men (not just workers). The incidence for all men who have admitted tendencies or who commit CSA is approximately 4% of all men. This data is argued within the field, and many population scientists say it is much higher. For this analysis, I will use the conservative 4% figure.

Applying the overall 4% number to the current approximately 245 male workers in the US. This means that *if male workers in the US had the same general prevalence numbers*, using the 4% figure, there would be approximately 10 male workers who were perpetrators, compared with all men. Even though there is evidence that CSA by workers has been occurring for many past decades, I have focused on present day workers who are living.

The present number of allegations against male workers in the US. Based on data from monitoring sites reported in the US (the FBI is currently actively investigating CSA within the

church), there are currently allegations or convictions against over 100 living male workers in the US (unduplicated).

Prevalence of CSA for US male workers. This means that male workers who are alleged or actual perpetrators are over-represented many times compared to the percentage of all men. Again, the core data on workers is not well reported, and these are primarily allegations and not convictions, but I am comfortable saying that the prevalence of potential or actual CSA perpetrators who are workers is much higher, at least ten times higher, or 1,000 percent higher than the number of all men who have tendencies or who commit CSA. These numbers are estimated due to the lack of precise data, but I am using conservative data regarding CSA for workers.

### **Possible reasons for the high prevalence of reported CSA by workers.**

Workers often stay in homes with children. Workers, by church policy, do not have homes of their own, but instead stay in the homes of members. For workers with these tendencies or who are actual CSA perpetrators, this gives them access to children on a regular basis. In some instances, individual workers may stay in a particular home for weeks or months. Workers do not have their own families by requirement. One worker I interviewed said that he had been raised in a large family with many children, and upon entering the ministry, was always glad to be around children. This does not mean that these workers are more likely to commit CSA, but if they are already conditioned to see children as sex objects, they would have high levels of access to children.

Celibacy requirements. Workers are supposed to be celibate, and they often enter the ministry between 19 and 24 years old. Many will have had no or little experience with sexual relationships. This means that many if not most workers would experience sexual repression. This does not mean that sexually repressed men are more likely to commit CSA, but it says that those who are inclined to do so may also be sexually repressed.

Lack of formal training on physical contact with children. Workers I interviewed reported zero actual training in this area, with no formal written guidelines on touch, hugging, etc. Workers who are visiting in homes are often highly valued guests, and children often idolize them and may initiate physical contact with them such as hugging or sitting by them. Any training done is largely through mentorship from their companion worker, who is often an older and more experienced worker and who may or may not address these issues.

In contrast, in graduate school to become a child psychologist, I was extensively trained on what was appropriate contact with children. For example, we were to avoid any physical contact such as hugging. We were not to see client children outside the physical or nearby presence of their parents or guardians. Violation of these rules would have meant we would be asked to leave the graduate program.

The “forgiveness” culture of the church itself. The culture of the church is largely based on the principle that as frail humans, we are weak compared to God. The messages from workers are often centered on the notion that even professing members have to guard against so-called “worldly” tendencies or faults. As a professing young teen, I was often told I was to be humble and to realize that I was a sinner at heart. I was trained that these sins would be forgiven with the proper repentance and profession of faith, no exceptions. Repentance of sins is frequently mentioned in the New Testament. Repentance is key to being forgiven of sins.

This means that workers who commit CSA, admit their offenses, and who repent having done them, will almost always believe that even if their CSA were a sin, they would be forgiven. This blanket forgiveness could subtly encourage deviant behaviors. In a sense, these core forgiveness beliefs could be a form of grooming, of minimizing the actual deviant behaviors, similar to what perpetrators often do in preparing victims for abuse.

**What must be done?** Apparently, there is some controversy within the overseers (senior male workers who oversee the ministry in a region or province) and workers about what should be done to prevent CSA or how to intervene with workers who have allegations or convictions for CSA. Some overseers have led efforts to ensure safety of children, but others have downplayed the dangers and numbers.

In my professional opinion, speaking as a former church member and an expert in CSA areas, the church must be reformed in at least the following areas:

- The culture of the church must support unconditional protection of children, with constant vigilance about ensuring potential offenders are not around children.
- The church must establish key standards for how to determine if a worker has committed CSA, to avoid false or inaccurate accusations, or to ensure that actions must be taken. If there is a reasonable suspicion that CSA commitment has occurred, law enforcement and child welfare authorities must be notified.
- Once their offenses are verified, offending workers must not be allowed back into meetings or conventions. As an alternative, offending workers should be restricted to meetings with other offenders or adult church members who volunteer to join these meetings.
- No workers should stay in homes with children. This would be a controversial decision, but if the church is serious about child protection, it must be implemented. Of course, in the course of being ministers, workers will be around families, but removing staying in homes would increase the protection of children.
- The leaders of the church must never move offenders to other areas or countries, but rather remove them from the church.
- Overseers and others who recruit young workers should weed out potential workers who have sexual attraction to children. This will require development of written criteria for becoming a worker. The church must develop and teach standards around workers' physical contact with children and ensure that all new workers know and follow these standards. Overseers have selected a standardized instrument to use in this regard. If implemented with all workers, this would be a positive step.

**End Note: Sources.** The 4% figure used in this analysis comes primarily from the United States Sentencing Commission (2021), one of the most accurate of the sources for this type of information. Since the majority of sexual crimes go under-reported, the 4% figure is cited as conservative. In the literature for males who are sexual offenders, prevalence figures from reliable sources range from 3% to 16%. Even though the exact prevalence percentages are elusive, I stand by my statement that "I am comfortable saying that the prevalence of potential or actual CSA perpetrators who are workers is much higher, at least ten times higher, or 1,000 percent higher than the number of all men who have tendencies or who commit CSA".

*Submitted by John E. VanDenBerg, Ph.D. For comments about this analysis, contact John at [jevdb1@gmail.com](mailto:jevdb1@gmail.com)*