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**PREVENTIVE MEASURES AGAINST THE SEXUAL  
ABUSE OF MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS IN  
PASTORAL MINISTRY TODAY**

**By**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Church and all her members are called to it. The need for an awareness of preventive measures against the sexual abuse of minors and of the vulnerable in pastoral ministry is of absolute importance. The efficient protection of minors and the attentiveness to ensure their human and spiritual development, in line with the dignity of the human person, are indispensable parts of the Gospel message. This article seeks to raise such an awareness of this crucial topic among the clergy, religious, and lay faithful who are directly or indirectly involved in pastoral ministry in the various dioceses in Africa in particular and other continents in general.

**Introduction**

The safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons is an extremely urgent need today. On May 7, 2019, Pope Francis alluded in his motu proprio, “Vox Estis Lux Mundi” that “the crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful. In order that these phenomena, in all their forms, never happen again, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church, so that personal sanctity and moral commitment can contribute to promoting the full credibility of the Gospel message

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— and the effectiveness of the Church's mission."<sup>2</sup>The efficacious protection of minors and the attentiveness to ensure their human and spiritual development, in line with the dignity of the human person, are indispensable parts of the Gospel message. The Church and all her members are called to it. Many agonizing actions have caused a profound examination of conscience for the entire Church, leading the Church to request forgiveness from the victims and from our society for the harm that has been caused. This response to these actions is the firm commencement for creativities of many different types, which are envisioned to heal the injuries, to accomplish justice, and to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents in the future.<sup>3</sup>

This article hopes to focus particularly in stimulating or raising awareness regarding the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults from sexual abuse today, by offering plans to increase consciousness of the distress of this sexual abuse, so as to avoid forthcoming occurrences of such abuse. By providing protective measures, this article will help in preventing further occurrences, raise awareness, and bring healing to victims and others.

With regard to the context, this article will describe the context in which the safeguarding mission of the Church is being addressed – that is, sexual abuse by clergy, religious, and lay faithful in a Church setting – and its impact on victims, their families, the faithful, and the life of the Church. Thus, this paper will seek to provide the clergy, religious, and lay faithful directly or indirectly involved in pastoral ministry with preventive measures for the protection of minors in their various ministries. This would also help build a cohesive and logical argument towards its aims: to enlighten and educate its readers.

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, "Vos Estis Lux Mundi," *apostolic letter in the form of motu proprio*, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507\\_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html), accessed 5 July 2020, art. 1

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, "Chirograph of his Holiness Pope Francis for the Institution of a Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors," 22 March 2014, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140322\\_chirografo-pontificia-commissione-tutela-minori.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140322_chirografo-pontificia-commissione-tutela-minori.html), accessed 5 July 2020.

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The statement of the problem includes the lack of awareness of the sexual abuse issue in many parishes and dioceses and the lack of education and formation to overcome it. At the end of this paper, we will be able to provide the reader with preventive factors to help overcome the problem. In order to achieve this aim, our article will transition from risk factors, preventive factors, consequences of sexual abuse, and the intervention of the Holy See. It will describe some of the elements critical in understanding and responding to the issue of sexual of abuse of minors commonly accepted in the field of safeguarding in the Catholic Church, namely the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (Pontificia Commissione per la Tuteladei Minori), established by Pope Francis in Rome on 22 March 2014, barely a year of his pontificate.

### **Risk Factors of Sexual Abuse of Minors**

It is imperative to begin with the risk factors because trying to eliminate the risk is an important part of prevention. In fact, it is indirectly a preventive measure. Therefore, the risk factors are also preventive measures. As Stéphane Joulain alludes, “though the responsibility of an abuse on a child rests solely on the person performing the abuse, a number of elements have been identified as risk factors and protective factors.”<sup>4</sup> Risk factors are particular dimensions of children’s life that increase the risk for children to be abused while protective factors are specific dimensions of children’s life that reduce the likelihood for children to be abused.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in order to build a safer environment for minors and the vulnerable in pastoral ministry today, there is a need to avoid the risks and enhance protective factors. Some living conditions put a child at risk of being abused. In order to prevent children in the future from sexual abuse, it is essential to examine the life of the victims in order to identify the risk factors, which are the factors that the perpetrator exploit in order to abuse minors and the vulnerable. This consideration involves the succour of “victimology.” By taking into consideration this field, great impact will be made to the over-all effort to protect children around the

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<sup>4</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse* (Centre for Child Protection, Rome, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2015), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

world, and it will be helpful in rescuing minors and vulnerable persons at risk.

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These risk factors includes, in the first place, the victims' characteristics, namely, gender, age-group, and the cognitive and emotional states of the child. The second main factor is the family set-up, which includes family members, the absence of suitable guardianship, and the legal guardian of a child. The third main factor is the social environment of the child, which includes, poverty, war, forced labor, and sexual exploitation exposure.

The first main risk factor is the victim's characteristics.<sup>6</sup> Some of these characteristics are variable, while other are unalterable. The first factor is gender. From figures, it has been established that girls present a higher risk of being physically abused than boys, even though the abuse of boys is known to be under reported. Nonetheless, this is the situation for female children.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the girls have a higher risk of being sexually abused than boys, while for broad-spectrum violence against children, boys are more at risk.<sup>8</sup>

The second risk factor is the age group. It is challenging to estimate the most noticeable age group among victims of child sexual abuse. In some Western World countries, the number is below 12, while in developing countries, it might be more between 13 to 16.<sup>9</sup> Concerning the girls, Finkelhor observes that the risk started to be higher at age of 6 to 7. Then it increased and peaked between ages 10 to 12.<sup>10</sup> In the worldwide population, he further evaluated in 1980 that 11% of the girls were abused below 12 by an adult aged 18 and older; 6% were abused below 12 by an adolescent 5 years or

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>See D. Finkelhor (ed.), *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse* (Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986); D. Finkelhor, "The Prevention of Childhood Sexual Abuse," in *The Future of Children* 19(2009): 169–94; N. Pereda, G. Guilera, M. Forns, and J. Gomez-Benito, "The International Epidemiology of Child Sexual Abuse: A Continuation of Finkelhor," in *Child Abuse & Neglect* 33(2009): 331–42.

<sup>8</sup>See D. Finkelhor, "Risk Factors in the Sexual Victimization of Children," in *Child Abuse & Neglect* 4 (1980): 265–73.

<sup>9</sup>See "UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund," <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2013/09/unicef-the-united-nations-childrens-fund/>, accessed on 5 April 2020.

<sup>10</sup>See D. Finkelhor, *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*.

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more years older; 4% were sexually abused between the age of 13 to 16; so it is 21% of girls who were abused 1 out of 5. In 1994, in a meta-analysis, Finkelhor compared figures from 21 countries and specified that the singularity was reported differently as low as 7% for girls and 3% for boys and as high as 33% for girls and boys.<sup>11</sup> In 2009, Pereda and collaborators continued Finkelhor's work of 1994 by comparing data from 21 countries but from 39 different studies.<sup>12</sup> Even though the predominance of the manifestations is well known, there are still some variations. It is clear that it is challenging to find exactly comparable studies, since the population illustrations and variables are not the same and the approach of the research can be very different. For example, in 2011, more figures were available geographically in the UNICEF report, which encouraged researchers to look at local situations more closely.<sup>13</sup>

The third risk factor is the cognitive (reasoning) and emotional state of the child, which could present a risk of easily being abused. In the year 2000, Marshall accentuates that an insecure style of attachment – which has to do with the way a child seeks support, comfort, and security from an adult – low self-esteem, and poor social skills could expose a child to sexual abuse.<sup>14</sup> In 1980, Finkelhor had already pondered that the absence of closeness between a child and her or his mother is a risk factor because it is the absence of demonstration of affection.<sup>15</sup> However, this last element would have to be scrutinized from each particular culture, since affection is not showed in the same manner in the continent of North America, South-America, Africa, and Europe, or in Asia or Oceania. Nevertheless, the emotionally vulnerable state of a child makes her or him more at risk of pursuing emotional support from an adult. In addition, cognitive complications or mental health problems, such as mental and physical disorders, puts a minor or an adult at risk of being abused. It is for this reason that specific consideration ought to be given to minors and those struggling with their emotions, or those confronted with a physical handicap. Some

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<sup>11</sup>See D. Finkelhor, "The International Epidemiology of Child Sexual Abuse," in *Child Abuse & Neglect* 18 (1994): 409–17.

<sup>12</sup>See N. Pereda et al., "The International Epidemiology of Child Sexual Abuse."

<sup>13</sup>See "UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund."

<sup>14</sup>See W. L. Marshall and L. E. Marshall, "The Origins of Sexual Offending," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 1.3 (2000): 250–63.

<sup>15</sup>See D. Finkelhor, *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*.

~~children lacking care from their “father figure” might look for~~ attention from another “father figure,” such as a priest or lay minister, thereby putting them more at risk of being abused by a minister who suffers from an attraction to children.<sup>16</sup> The second key factor is the family set-up<sup>17</sup> with family members as the first factor. Family is a gift for a child, and children a gift for families. Hence, it is also true that family members statistically symbolize a high risk to children. Therefore, family support is one of the main goals of participation in prevention strategies. In 1980 and 2008, Finkelhor underlined that 60% to 75% of victims of child sexual abuse knew the person who physically abused them, 44% are family related (highest rate 56% in his meta-analysis of 1994), 22% close nuclear family members, 6% father or stepfather. Family members normally have easier contact to their victim as they generally do not need to build trust or to resort to extreme violence because their relationship to the child reduces the confrontation capacity of the child.

Moreover, intra-family sex offenders are habitually “regressed sex offenders,”<sup>18</sup> and they are usually tied up in a relationship with an adult partner – contrary to a fixated one who very often lacks social abilities.<sup>19</sup> Finkelhor further stresses that many victims have experienced the following parenting situation: 29% did not have a father, but 47% had a stepfather (to have a stepfather doubles the risk of sexual abuse), 58% did not live with their mother, 35% had a stepmother. These victims are said to have experienced little display of affection in 32% of cases as compared to 34% who were not close to their mother. Domestic violence, whether verbal or physical, between parents and social isolation of the family have been recognized as risk factors. The sexual abuse of minors emerges in all social set-ups. Collected works make evident that, for a person to abuse a child, one significant element needs to be present (or rather absent), which is proper guardianship. In their parenting style, most of the parents of children who have been sexually abused

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<sup>16</sup>See K. Holt and C. Massey, “Sexual Preference or Opportunity: An Examination of Situational Factors by Gender of Victims of Clergy Abuse,” *Sexual Abuse* 25 (2012): 606–21.

<sup>17</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse*, 4.

<sup>18</sup>See N. A. Groth and H. J. Birnbaum, “Adult Sexual Orientation and Attraction to Underage Persons,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 7 (1978): 175–81.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

have shown signs of an absence of proper guardianship.<sup>20</sup> This is not to blame parents because a perpetrator cannot access a child if an adult is protecting her or him. Therefore, it is essential to look at the circumstances that increase the risk of absence of adequate guardianship.

The absence of adequate guardianship is a great risk factor because in order to abuse a child, an offender needs to have access to that particular child. That is why she or he needs either to be the legal guardian of the child or to have overcome vigilance from the legal guardian. Many reasons can contribute to that. First, the legal guardian of a child can be the father, the mother, or any other adult that the law recognizes as the lawful guardian of the child. If the legal guardian is also the perpetrator of the abuse, it is often difficult to notice the abuse right away, because people will not usually suspect the legal guardian. It is one of the reasons that make incest so difficult to expose. For example, a mother will not easily suspect the man she loves of abusing her children. Nor will a father easily suspect the woman he loves – or his other children – of abusing one of his children. In most cultures of the world, there is a natural self-assurance that the person sharing another person's life will care for that person. Nevertheless, one has to recall that the center of a family dynamic is not the child but the couple. First, there is a couple,<sup>21</sup> and then there are children. Nevertheless, this can be different in some cultures where the extended family has more standing than a nuclear family.

The non-existence of guardianship might also be due to the poor social and economic circumstance of the family – for instance, when both parents are working lengthy periods (ranging from hours to months of absence), as in the case of migrant workers who leave children behind while working in another country.<sup>22</sup> It could also be that a single parent has to care for a child on her own and at the same time has to provide the income of the family. In such circumstances, the child is either left alone at home, or comes and goes from the house without the parents noticing due to their

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<sup>20</sup>See D. Finkelhor, *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*.

<sup>21</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse*, 6.

<sup>22</sup>See E. Graham and B. S. A. Yeoh, "Child Health and Migrant Parents in South-East Asia: Risk and Resilience Among Primary School-Aged Children," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 22.3 (2013): 297–314.

absence. Sporadically, the guardianship is delegated to another person – family relatives most of the time, but also babysitters, day care facilities, school teachers, sport coaches, music teachers, or people in charge of church activities and pastoral ministry like priests, ministers, catechists, and others. In these situations, those receiving the delegation have the same authority like the parents over the children. It gives them superior power, and the peril for abusing a minor increases.<sup>23</sup>

Other non-specified family risk factors include being in felonious environs, long-term sickness or early pregnancy of the mother, or suicide attempts by her. These features share a mutual dimension in that they substantially decrease the protective stimulus of the mother for her child. Consequently, those specific vulnerabilities of mothers should be privileged prevention targets.<sup>24</sup>

The third central risk factor is the social setting of the child.<sup>25</sup> The social and economic situation of the child's family can increase the risk of being physically abused. This includes factors like poverty, war, and forced labor and sexual exploitation exposure.

The first risk factor related to social setting is poverty, which has been recognized as a risk factor for child sexual abuse. This does not mean that all children living in poverty will be at risk of being abused, but poverty, along with other risk factors, accelerates the possibility of abuse.<sup>26</sup> Investigation revealed that some 33% of children being abused were from low-income household, 44% were living on poor farm set-ups, and 38% were socially isolated.<sup>27</sup> There, poverty increases the risk of a child who is left alone or opens to other risk factors interconnected to poverty, issues such as alcoholism, drug addiction, criminogenic environment, and

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<sup>23</sup>See K. Holt and C. Massey, "Sexual Preference or Opportunity,"

<sup>24</sup>See "UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund."

<sup>25</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse*, 7.

<sup>26</sup>See L. Richter, A. Dawes, and C. Higson-Smith (eds.), *Sexual Abuse of Young Children in Southern Africa*, (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup>See M. F. Burn, and S. Brown, "A Review of the Cognitive Distortions in Child Sex Offenders: An Examination of the Motivations and Mechanisms That Underlie the Justification for Abuse," *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 11.3 (2006): 225–36.



promiscuity.<sup>28</sup> War is the second risk factor related to social setting. In time of war or civil unrest, children are principally at risk of being sexually abused, by armed-force, military, or militia who forcibly enrol children in order to use them as sexual objects. The third risk factor related to social setting is forced labor and sexual exploitation exposure, that is, how some children are also open to the risk of being forced into labor at a very primary age. This makes them participate in the working condition of adults who could present a risk for the security of the child.<sup>29</sup> The commerce to sexual prostitution in the family is another risk. A child who is the son or daughter of a prostitute is at high risk of being open to sexual abuse at a very early age because the child will most likely follow the bad example of the prostitute if he or she has no strong education from school.

The fourth main risk factor is related to cultural factors. Cultural risk factors are not the same in all part of the world. Nonetheless, two frauds exist: intellectual colonialism and cultural relativism. Consider the issue of the patriarchal dimension of a society, which has been condemned by many researchers as one of the chief, cultural risk factors for child sexual abuse.<sup>30</sup> This assertion is not easy to confirm in specific cultures where males can be identified as a social protective factor.<sup>31</sup> Joulain argues that it will be of no surprise to anyone that in these cultural circumstances, the patriarchal system is not seen as problematic.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, he continues, any effort to single out this factor might be perceived as intellectual colonialism or politically motivated research, assuming that one's own position is free of any covert intentions. He suggests that they can be strong feedbacks against such an attitude because some may feel that it denigrates their culture. Nonetheless, Joulain points out, that the patriarchal system is dominant in this or that particular culture is not the same as saying that all people in those particular cultures are trying to exercise power at the expense of

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<sup>28</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse*,7.

<sup>29</sup> B. Audu, A. Geidam, and H. Jarma, "Child Labour and Sexual Assault Among Girls in Maiduguri, Nigeria," *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 104(2009): 64.

<sup>30</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse*,8.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

women and girls.<sup>33</sup>Joulain further states that this is a form of cultural relativism.<sup>34</sup>He reminds us that the truth is yet to be found amidst different agendas and suggests that academic thoroughness and universally recognized standardization of protocol for research could surely help.<sup>35</sup>Lastly, Joulain concludes by mentioning that while waiting for this dispute to be settled, it might be useful to remember the African proverb: “Until the lion has her or his own story teller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story.”

### **Preventive Factors of Abuse of Minors**

With regards to the preventive factors, there is a necessity to develop prevention models of intervention that can help the Church and all of society to move toward a better and safer environment for children. In order to develop better protective skills and set clear boundaries around children, different factors can help to promote protections. Most of the considerations on protection factors materialized following the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, an American psychologist who, in the 1970s, established a theory called the Ecological System Theory.<sup>36</sup>Bronfenbrenner recommended understanding the development of a person as the result of all the interactions of this person with its surroundings: family, friends, neighbors, school, religious groups, work, society, economic factors, and security – all of which, in turn, are influenced by values, beliefs, and ideologies.

Protective factors are divided in three categories or levels, which include the child itself, the parents, and the community, that is, what needs to be addressed with the child itself, what can be done with the parents, and finally how the community can contribute including institutions.<sup>37</sup> These three factors are much related. The appropriateness to a particular culture would probably need to be evaluated locally. Nonetheless, they are often accepted cross-

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>See U. Bronfenbrenner, “Toward an Experimental Ecology of Human Development,” *The American Psychologist* 33 (1977): 513–31.

<sup>37</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse*, 12.

culturally. Those elements are taken from a very good literature review done in the USA on protective factors.<sup>38</sup>

On the level of the child itself, some elements are important for a child to feel at ease with her or his own character and personality. It is important to help children to develop self-confidence. For that to occur, it is important to enhance a “sense of purpose,” that is, helping a child to understand that existence is made of goals which she or he can achieve, and that she or he was desired by her or his parents, and or by God.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, it is essential to increase children’s sense of “self-efficacy,” that is, helping a child to trust in his or her capacities to do something.<sup>40</sup> More than character, there are some skills that children should be helped to nurture, such as the following: “self-regulation skills,” which involves helping a child to develop healthy ways of dealing with his or her emotions and needs; “relational skills,” which involves helping to develop healthy attachment bonds and social competences; “problem-solving skills,” which involves helping children to develop skills and competences to deal with life situations, like exploring, dialoguing, negotiating, etc.; and “involvement in positive activities,” which involves all activities that children could participate in and that can foster their well-being and social skills, such as sports, music, and training.<sup>41</sup> All those elements contribute to help children build self-esteem and a sense of purpose in life, and confidence in themselves and their competences. These are very good factors to avoid the risk of seeking too much attention from other people to be valued or comforted. All the above will help and strengthen resilience in children, which is their capacity to face the different struggles of life and overcoming them.<sup>42</sup>

On the side of the parents, three main factors of protection seem important: “parenting competences, ” which involves helping

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<sup>38</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families and Development Services Group, Inc., “Protective Factors for Populations Served by the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families: A Literature Review and Theoretical Framework”(2013), 63.

<sup>39</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse*,13.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

parents to develop the suitable abilities and skills that will assist them to care for and relate to the child, as well as skills related to education, including sex education, and proper discipline; and “parent or caregiver well-being,” that is, the more the parents feel good about themselves, the more in control they are of their lives, the less they are exposed to the risk of seeking outside compensation.<sup>43</sup> For example, in 2015, Meinck pointed out that in some countries, the fact that the parents were traders or senior civil servants with a good and stable income, was a good factor of protection.<sup>44</sup>

The first two protective factors concern the parents or natural guardian of the child. The more they are empowered, the less they are exposed to the risk of having their child facing potential risk of abuse.<sup>45</sup> But parents and guardians need to pay attention to “positive peers” as well. Since children, and specially adolescents, are very sensitive to peer influences, it is very important to pay special attention to who a child relates as her or his peers. As mentioned in the risk factors, it is vital for Church and State to foster strong family and parenting policies in order to sustain families in their guardianship and educating mission. The parent’s welfare and capabilities ought to be a high priority objective for any effective protection planning.<sup>46</sup>

The third protective factor involves the community, such as a “positive school environment,” which plays a great role in helping children to acquire the social abilities indispensable for life. Schools are supposed to equip children with the intellectual tools for building their existence. “Positive community environment” is a very important goal of intervention. Children must benefit from a healthy neighborhood, religious practice, good social services, and proper health care, in which the children’s rights are respected and promoted. It is also essential that society clearly and unconditionally condemns sexual abuses. “Stable living situations” are also

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>44</sup>F. Meinck, L. D. Cluver, M. E. Boyes, and E. L. Mhlongo, “Risk and Protective Factors for Physical and Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents in Africa: A Review and Implications for Practice,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 16 (2015): 89.

<sup>45</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse*, 14.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

very necessary for the protection of the abuse of minors. This is because the situation in the country and the area the children are living in is of paramount importance. Countries where there is extreme poverty, war, and a poor economy, are more exposed to the risk of being exploited and endangered, than countries where children have a stable living condition. Therefore, it is important that while looking at the welfare of children, the welfare of the nation should also be considered important.<sup>47</sup>

### **Traumatic Consequences of Sexual Abuse<sup>48</sup>**

Earlier and recent research<sup>49</sup> on the consequences and indicators of sexual abuse of minors demonstrates that apart from psychosocial indicators, consequences can be proven on a physical, psychological, and behavioral level.<sup>50</sup> These consequences can occur over a short period of time (short-term consequences) or persist for a longer period of time (long-term consequences). Possible psychosocial consequences of sexual abuse may be powerlessness, the loss of trust, silence, shame, a sense of guilt, or the “desire to disappear.”<sup>51</sup> Sexually abused persons often think that they have not stood up to the abuse.<sup>52</sup> Persons who have been sexually abused try to make themselves “invisible” or try to “disappear” in order to make the sexual abuse and their suffering invisible to third parties. Finally, sexual abuse is a traumatic, stressful, experience, although not all affected children develop mental or physical health problems.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Katharina A. Fuchs, *Signs and Indicators of Sexual Abuse* (Centre for Child Protection, Rome, Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 2015), 4.

<sup>49</sup>See K. A. Kendall-Tackett, L. M. Williams, and D. Finkelhor, “The Impact of Sexual Abuse on Children: A Review and Synthesis of Recent Empirical Studies,” *Psychological Bulletin* 113 (1993):164–80.

<sup>50</sup>See D. M. Fergusson, J. M. Boden, and L. J. Horwood, “Exposure to Childhood Sexual and Physical Abuse and Adjustment in Early Adulthood,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 32 (2008): 607–19.

<sup>51</sup>See D. Finkelhor, *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*; D. R. Wilson, “Health Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse,” *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care* 46 (2010): 56–64.

<sup>52</sup>Stéphane Joulain, *Risk and Protective Factors of Sexual Abuse*, 6.

### Canonical Response to Sexual Abuse of Minor<sup>53</sup>

On 30 April 2001, Pope John Paul II promulgated the *Motu Proprio Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela* with the intention of addressing the disgraces of the sexual abuse of minors within the Catholic Church. Countless cases of abuse had already been reported, but this new regulation altered the way in which they were to be handled.<sup>54</sup>

Nine years later in 2010, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, following the steps of his predecessor addressed his brother bishops of Ireland emphasizing that “Besides fully implementing the norms of canon law in addressing cases of child abuse, continue to cooperate with the civil authorities in their area of competence. Clearly, religious superiors should do likewise.”<sup>55</sup>

Pope Francis promulgated on 9 May 2019<sup>56</sup> a *motu proprio* on his own accord, called “*Vos Estis Lux Mundi*” – translated as “you are the light of the world”<sup>57</sup> – which establishes new procedural norms to combat sexual abuse and to ensure that bishops and religious superiors are held accountable for their actions. It also establishes universal norms, which apply to the whole church.<sup>58</sup> The law is

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<sup>53</sup> P. Robert Geisinger, S.I., and Katharina A. Fuchs, *Canon Law: In-depth Explanation* (Centre for Child Protection, Rome, Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 2015), 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Benedict, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland,” addressed to his brother bishops, 19 March 2010, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20100319\\_church-ireland.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20100319_church-ireland.html), accessed 5 April 2020, no. 11.

<sup>56</sup> See Hannah Brockhaus, “Pope Francis Issues Norms for Reports of Abuse of Minors, Seminarians, and Religious,” <https://www.dioceseoflansing.org/news/pope-francis-issues-norms-reports-abuse-minors-seminarians-and-religious>, accessed 9 May 2019.

<sup>57</sup> See Hannah Brockhaus, “Pope Francis Signs *Motu Proprio* to Prevent and Denounce Abuses in the Catholic Church,” accessed, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/pope-francis-signs-motu-proprio-to-prevent-and-denounce-abuses-in-the-catholic-church>, accessed 9 May 2019.

<sup>58</sup> See Andrea Tornielli, “*New Norms for the Whole Church Against Those Who Abuse or Cover Up*,” <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-05/pope-francis-motu-proprio-sex-abuse-clergy-religious-church.html>, accessed 5 July 2020.

effective for a three-year experimental period<sup>59</sup> (ad experimentum), which came into force on 1 June 2019.<sup>60</sup> The document was issued three months after the sexual abuse summit convened by Pope Francis at the Vatican in February 2019.<sup>61</sup>

Before this, Pope Francis established a Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (Pontificia Commissione per la Tuteladei Minori) in Rome on 22 March 2014, as an institution within the Roman Curia of the Catholic Church, with a Centre for Child Protection (CCP), located at the Pontifical Gregorian University, a University founded by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Prior to the Centre's inauguration, a press conference was held that detailed their efforts in creating an International Research and Educational Facility dedicated to the prevention of the abuse of children and vulnerable adults. Among those present at the conference were Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston and President of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors; Fr. Hans Zollner, S.J., President of the Centre for Child Protection and member of the aforementioned Commission; and Prof. Dr. Karlijn Demasure, Executive Director of the Centre.<sup>62</sup> Cardinal O'Malley said: "We are painfully aware that still there are many parts of the world where sexual abuse in the Church has not been addressed. He hoped that organizations like the Centre for Child Protection will help to make the difference."<sup>63</sup>

The CCP offers adequate assistance to local Churches and dioceses by providing them with accurate and timely information, and educates those who seek information, using all available media. Furthermore, it has provided a healthy academic environment in the education of the protection of minors by creating a forum for everyone to be informed about what the Church is doing to protect

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<sup>59</sup>See Pope Francis, "Vos Estis Lux Mundi."

<sup>60</sup>See "Card Ouellet: *Motu Proprio Establishes Effective Measures Against Abuse*," <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-05/cardinal-ouellet-on-motu-proprio-vos-estis-lux-mundi.html>, accessed 5 July 2020.

<sup>61</sup>See Kurt Martens, "Pope Francis' New Sex Abuse Rules Are a Revolution for the Catholic Church," *America Magazine*, 10 May 2019, accessed 5 July 2020.

<sup>62</sup>See Junno Arocho Esteves, "Pope Blesses Expansion of Extended Program Following Three Year Pilot Phase," <https://zenit.org/2015/02/17/pontifical-gregorian-university-inaugurates-centre-for-child-protection/>, 17 February 2015, accessed 5 July 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

minors. An important mission is to provide education for all people who serve in Church organizations such as in parishes, together with parents, youth, children, and all members, especially in schools. Finally, in this same letter, the Holy Father stated that the Commission for the Protection of Minors “can be a new, important and effective means for helping him to encourage and advance the commitment of the Church at every level – Episcopal Conferences, Dioceses, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and others – to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.”<sup>64</sup>

### **Initiative by Some Catholic Universities and Local Churches**

Some Catholic universities and local churches have taken this initiative to establish a Centre for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults in their respective local churches, which is in line with the invitation of Pope Francis in the Vatican on 2 February 2015, on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, where he called on all to have a close and complete cooperation with the Commission for the Protection of Minors. This has helped to support the mission of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. Pope Francis mentioned in his chirograph on 22 March 2014 that the Commission’s specific task is to propose to him the most opportune initiatives for protecting minors and vulnerable adults, in order that everything possible will be done to ensure that crimes such as those which have occurred no longer repeats in the Church. The Commission also promotes local responsibility in the particular Churches, uniting their efforts to those of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, for the protection of all children and vulnerable adults.”<sup>65</sup>

On 10 June 2019, St. Paul University (SPU) of Ottawa, Canada, Faculty of Canon Law announced the creation of a Centre for the Protection of Minors and a Graduate Diploma in Ecclesiastical Administration (GDEA) with a specialization in the Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Adults. To accommodate participants who retain their regular employment, the diploma offers the entire curriculum both at a distance and on campus. The mission of the

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<sup>64</sup> Pope Francis, “Chirograph of his Holiness Pope Francis for the Institution of a Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.”

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.



Centre, directed by Dr. Karlijn Demasure, aims at Safeguarding Minors and Vulnerable Persons and to help eliminate the threat and trauma of sexual abuse in society and in the Church by: promoting prevention through formation; offering healing assistance to victims/survivors, their families, and their communities; striving for justice; and contributing to reconciliation. The Centre is the first of its kind established in a Catholic university in North America. The Centre responds to the needs of the faithful in various settings by offering customized educational and practical services, such as workshops, seminars, auditing and consultation services, and research on overcoming the abuse of minors. Some of the materials in the GDEA are developed by the CCP, with which SPU is a collaborator.<sup>66</sup>

### **Proposals to Overcome the Problem**

The aim of this article was to enlighten and raise awareness of the preventive measures of the abuse of minors and vulnerable adults in pastoral ministry. Apart from these preventive measures, to further assist in overcoming the problem, this author proposes that other Catholic universities, institutions, and dioceses in Asia and other continents endeavor to also establish centers for the protection of minors following the example of SPU. These centers will help raise more awareness of the preventive measures necessary to overcome abuse and would enlighten the clergy, religious, and the lay faithful through diploma courses, conferences, workshops, etc.

### **Conclusion**

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An African bishop said: “No other topic is more important for the life of the Church like the protection of minors. If the Church is not committed to child protection, our efforts at evangelization will be to no effect; we will lose the trust of our people and gain the opprobrium of the world.” In order to continue enlightening the clergy, religious, and lay faithful, more studies are needed to ensure safety and best practices, as this paper has tried to demonstrate. Furthermore, helping the leadership of the Church to be informed is

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<sup>66</sup>See St. Paul University, “The Centre for Safeguarding Minors and Vulnerable Persons,” [https://ustpaul.ca/en/centre-for-safeguarding-minors-and-vulnerable-persons\\_7038\\_1109.htm](https://ustpaul.ca/en/centre-for-safeguarding-minors-and-vulnerable-persons_7038_1109.htm), accessed 5 July 2020.

of paramount importance, especially with issues of accountability, compliance, and monitoring. The centers for the protection of minors in Rome has also provided training to dioceses in developing countries that lack money and resources for enforcing programs and best practices in dealing with sexual abuse cases. As a former missionary bishop in the West Indies, Cardinal O'Malley is very familiar with this reality when he alludes: "In mission countries, there are quite limited resources and we would like to be able to address that by helping."<sup>67</sup> Many dioceses today have established offices to handle such abuses, and guidelines on the prevention of sexual abuse of minors and the respective parts in the civil law of a country on the rights of children and the protection of minors, have been published, including the canonical process for a canonical penal procedure. All these initiatives would help in overcoming further abuse.

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<sup>67</sup>Junno Arocho Esteves, "Pope Blesses Expansion of Extended Program Following Three Year Pilot Phase."