

# Perverts, press and public policy

How the print media represent  
sexual crime in Ireland and the UK.

# Background

- Sexual abuse is a significant social problem in Ireland and the UK.
- Research shows that there are significant differences between the reporting of sexual offences in the process and the reality of such offences on the ground.
- This paper examines some of those differences and looks at the role that of the media in the reporting of sexual abuse in Ireland and the UK.
- This study is funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Science.

# Literature

- Hawkins, 1994 : Prevention of abuse requires publics to be educated
- Brawley, 1995 : Intervention strategies seen as particularly important.
- Franklin & Howartt, 1996; Goddard & Saunders, 2000: media coverage can be abusive in itself, a disservice to victims
- ‘Name and shame’ campaigns condemned

# Current Methodology

- Irish Times/ UK Times/The Mirror databases on Nexis-Lexis
- Five weeks randomly sampled from each of ten years, yielding 50 weeks of stories in total
- Complex search term (all variants of sexual abuse/ assault, molestation, gross indecency, incest, rape and buggery) yielded the following:
  - 1127 stories from Irish Times
  - 868 stories from The Mirror
  - 961 stories from The Times (UK)
- Each story coded for 35 variables
- Irish Times complete, others are work in progress.

# Number of stories initial & final samples by newspaper

Title	Irish Times	Mirror	UK Times	Total
Initial	1127	868	961	3931
Final	571	512	317	1912



# Stories by victim type by newspaper

Title/ Victim	Irish Times	Mirror	UK Times	Total
Child	381	217	120	718
	66.7%	42.4%	38.0%	51.3%
Adult	176	237	146	559
	30.8%	46.3%	46.2%	39.9%
Unspecified	14	58	51	123
	2.5%	11.3%	15.8%	8.8%
Total	571	512	317	1400
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

# Crime type by newspaper

Count		Source Title			Total
		The Irish Times	The Mirror	The Times (UK)	
Specific crime	Rape	161	203	136	500
	Sexual assault	311	170	84	565
	Gross Indecency	0	11	3	14
	Buggery	11	0	0	11
	Incest	15	1	0	16
	Murder	16	48	45	109
	Sexual Harassment	13	30	25	68
	Child pornography	0	10	7	17
Total		527	473	300	1300

# Crime type by newspaper: children

Category of crime		Source Title			Total
		The Irish Times	The Mirror	The Times (UK)	
Child	Rape	58	48	36	142
	Sexual assault	255	92	40	387
	Gross Indecency	0	9	1	10
	Buggery	7	0	0	7
	Incest	14	0	0	14
	Murder	6	29	21	56
	Sexual Harassment	0	4	1	5
	Child pornography	0	10	7	17
Total		340	192	106	638



# Crime type by newspaper: adults

Category of crime		Source Title			Total
		The Irish Times	The Mirror	The Times (UK)	
Adult	Rape	95	123	69	287
	Sexual assault	52	63	33	148
	Gross Indecency	0	2	1	3
	Buggery	3	0	0	3
	Incest	1	1	0	2
	Murder	10	16	21	47
	Sexual Harassment	13	24	21	58
Total	174	229	145	548	

# Gender of Victims

			Source Title		
			The Irish Times	The Mirror	The Times (UK)
			Count	Count	Count
Category of crime	Child	Male	104	43	27
		Female	124	128	59
		Unspecified	153	46	34
	Adult	Male	20	29	19
		Female	132	190	117
		Unspecified	24	18	10
		Not Applicable			

# Gender of Perpetrators

			Source Title		
			The Irish Times	The Mirror	The Times (UK)
			Count	Count	Count
Category of crime	Child	Male	266	173	89
		Female	5	6	5
		Unspecified	110	38	26
	Adult	Not Applicable	110	38	26
		Male	148	188	118
		Female	2	5	3
		Unspecified	26	44	25
		Not Applicable	26	44	25

# Relationship to Perpetrators

Count		Source Title			Total
		The Irish Times	The Mirror	The Times (UK)	
Category of crime	Child				
	Stranger	10	50	21	81
	Parent	38	8	6	52
	Sibling	3	0	0	3
	Uncle/Aunt	10	1	2	13
	Other relative	6	2	5	13
	Authority figure	149	47	15	211
	Boy friend/girl friend	1	0	1	2
	Partner/Spouse	0	1	0	1
	Other	131	14	14	159
	New acquaintance	2	7	2	11
Colleague	0	7	2	9	
	Total	350	137	68	555

# Relationship to Perpetrators

Count		Source Title			Total
		The Irish Times	The Mirror	The Times (UK)	
Category of crime	Adult				
	Stranger	12	40	21	73
	Parent	1	0	0	1
	Uncle/Aunt	1	0	0	1
	Other relative	3	5	0	8
	Authority figure	16	41	32	89
	Boy friend/girlfriend	2	7	3	12
	Partner/Spouse	5	2	5	12
	Other	106	17	9	132
	New acquaintance	15	25	9	49
Colleague	1	21	19	41	
	Total	162	158	98	418



# Classification of Perpetrators

Count		Source Title			Total
		The Irish Times	The Mirror	The Times (UK)	
Child	Cleric/Religious	109	12	8	129
	Medical	1	4	6	11
	Teacher/Coach	21	26	8	55
	Soldier/Police/ Sailor/Prison Officer	11	13	5	29
	Farmer	3	1	1	5
	Other (Named)	7	7	2	16
	Entertainer	1	3	4	8
	Business	2	4	5	11
	Professional	1	0	3	4
	Student	0	4	1	5
	Legal	0	1	0	1
	Sports	0	1	0	1
	Blue Collar	4	18	4	26
	Total	160	94	47	301

# Classification of Perpetrators

Count

Category of crime		Source Title			Total
		The Irish Times	The Mirror	The Times (UK)	
Adult	Cleric/Religious	4	6	5	15
	Medical	4	20	15	39
	Teacher/Coach	1	6	1	8
	Soldier/Police/ Sailor/Prison Officer	10	18	16	44
	Farmer	2	0	4	6
	Other (Named)	0	8	2	10
	Entertainer	0	4	1	5
	Business	5	5	4	14
	Professional	0	7	13	20
	Student	1	2	1	4
	Legal	0	1	4	5
	Sports	0	5	2	7
	Blue Collar	2	27	11	40
	Politics	0	10	3	13
	Total	29	119	82	230

# Crime Context: UK

Offence	1995	1996	1997	1997/98 <sup>1</sup>	1998/99 <sup>1</sup>	1998/99 <sup>2</sup>	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02
Cruelty to or neglect of children <sup>4</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	2,300	2,631	2,558	3,048
Abandoning a child u 2	46	65	56	54	41	42	51	48	49
Child abduction	355	374	390	391	490	502	577	546	583
Buggery	818	728	645	657	567	566	437	401	354
Indecent assault on a male	3,150	3,130	3,503	3,885	3,672	3,683	3,614	3,530	3,613
Gross indecency between males	727	553	520	483	353	354	286	167	163
Rape of a female	4,986	5,759	6,281	6,523	7,139	7,132	7,809	7,929	9,008
Rape of a male	150	231	347	375	502	504	600	664	735
Indecent assault on a female	16,876	17,643	18,674	18,979	19,463	19,524	20,664	20,301	21,765
Unlawful sexual intercourse girl u 13	178	171	148	156	153	153	181	155	170
Unlawful sexual intercourse girl u 16	1,260	1,261	1,112	1,084	1,133	1,135	1,270	1,237	1,336
Incest	185	157	183	189	139	139	121	80	93
Procuration	207	132	131	142	155	215	138	129	130
Abduction	364	313	277	258	242	240	251	262	263
Bigamy	86	98	75	106	126	129	83	80	74
Soliciting or importuning by a man <sup>4</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	1,107	973	1,028	1,648
Abuse of position of trust <sup>6</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	12	408
Gross indecency with a child	1,287	1,215	1,269	1,314	1,271	1,293	1,365	1,336	1,665
<b>TOTAL SEXUAL OFFENCES</b>	<b>30,274</b>	<b>31,391</b>	<b>33,165</b>	<b>34,151</b>	<b>34,915</b>	<b>36,174</b>	<b>37,792</b>	<b>37,311</b>	<b>41,425</b>

# Crime Context: Ireland

## Sexual crime statistics for all persons

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Totals	Average
<b>Sexual assault</b>	368	382	604	551	602	598	431	549	1048	1626	6759	676
<b>Aggravated sexual assault</b>	14	9	17	8	11	11	5	12	18	24	129	13
<b>Rape * inc Sec. 4 2000&gt;</b>	143	184	191	180	256	292	218	290	401	497	2652	265
<b>Buggery</b>	12	9	17	34	80	29	78	23	36	94	412	41
<b>UCK girls U 17</b>	27	18	40	34	42	30	27	15	78	102	413	41
<b>Incest</b>	14	16	15	11	10	18	8	18	16	27	153	15
<b>Gross Indecency</b>	1	0	13	-	-	-	-	3	33	109	159	16
<b>Bestiality</b>	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	6	1
<b>Other sexual offences</b>	11	26	26	17	13	13	13	21	41	-	181	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>2583</b>	<b>2639</b>	<b>2918</b>	<b>2832</b>	<b>3012</b>	<b>2990</b>	<b>2779</b>	<b>2931</b>	<b>3674</b>		<b>10864</b>	<b>1086</b>

## Sexual crime statistics for persons under 18

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997			2000	2001	2002	TOTAL	
<b>Sexual assault</b>	250	267	391	288	310			87	106	141	2067	258
<b>Aggravated sexual assault</b>	7	5	5	4	4			0	0	4	33	4
<b>Rape</b>	53	69	85	71	97			48	67	47	576	72
<b>Buggery</b>	9	5	11	13	20			4	5	13	90	11
<b>UCK girls U 17</b>	30	20	47	35	41			5	8	18	239	30
<b>Incest</b>	10	7	6	5	5			4	5	21	67	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>477</b>			<b>148</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>3072</b>	<b>384</b>

# Conclusions

- Certain types of crime are over-reported, certain perpetrators are highlighted.
- Rape of both adults and children includes a blame component in reporting.
- Stranger danger is routinely emphasised.
- Familial abuse is diminished. In particular the extent of child sexual abuse is generally ignored.
- Child neglect is largely ignored.
- The narrow focus of coverage prevents the development of public outrage and works against the production of effective public policies.