

Corpus Dei:

**Sexual Abuse and Crimes of the Vatican and
Italian Church, a study on public perceptions
and media coverage.**



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Parla di equità, ce ne fosse la metà

Saremmo già da un pezzo in fuga in mare aperto,

Parla di onestà, ce ne fosse la metà

Sareste già da un pezzo prossimi all'arresto.

- Willie Peyote, "Io non sono razzista ma...".

Abstract

The issue of Clerical Sexual Abuse has been prominent since the Middle Ages; however, it has been considered a threatening crime only since the 1980s. Instances like the Boston Globe's Spotlight article, the Irish government-mandate inquiries, and the breakthroughs in Spain journalism brought to light the ramifications of this crime in the Roman Catholic Church. Nonetheless, the literature concerning the Italian peninsula is scarce and new, focusing mostly on the history of sexual abuse by Ecclesiastes or recounting victims' experiences. This dissertation aims to fill the gaps surrounding public attitudes and media coverage, in order to uncover if one influences the other, and any surrounding issues. It has been accomplished through the use of a mixed methods approach, i.e. a survey dedicated to the Italian population and an interview with a prominent survivor association. The main findings highlight the lack of measures to prevent abuse from taking place, the collaboration between Church and State, and the diminished presence of reports of Clerical Sexual Abuse in mainstream Italian Media. Through the employment of Critical Criminology theories, especially correlating it to clericalism and the hegemony of media, this paper discovered that the ruling class highly influences the publication of articles surrounding this sexual violence, as they do not fit the political agenda. Therefore, the absence of reports leaves the population, mainly the elders and the Catholics, oblivious to the crimes taking place in their home Country. To accomplish substantial development, mainstream media in Italy needs reform, as its voice is the main tool that can lead the public to demand policy changes.

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Glossary and list of abbreviations

CSA	Clerical Sexual Abuse
cCSA	Child Clerical Sexual Abuse
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
Italian peninsula	Italy, San Marino, and Vatican City
The association	Rete L'ABUSO

1. Introduction

The awareness concerning the correlation between sexual abuse, paedophilia, criminality, and the Church, pre-eminently the Catholic one, is remarkably new (Marotta, 2021; Madu & Madu, 2021; Tallon & Terry, 2013). Particularly, before the campaigns regarding sexual abuse and incest in the 1970s, with a notable focus on the United States, the issue of child sexual abuse was not regarded as noteworthy (Clites, 2023). Especially, it was in the two decades before the new millennium that the voices of CSA survivors began to occupy the sociocultural environment (Clites, 2023; Tallon & Terry, 2013). During those twenty years, accounts of criminal activity in the Catholic Church surfaced worldwide, gaining attention from European countries such as Ireland, France, and Spain (Donnelly & Inglis, 2010; Pereda & Segura, 2021; Terry, 2015). Nonetheless, it is critical to consider that sexual abuse within the ecclesiastic personnel has been around since ancient times (Benadusi & Lagioia, 2022; Rashid & Barron, 2018). It constitutes a long-lasting problem within the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical order and its representatives (Benadusi & Lagioia, 2022). Nonetheless, the continuous cover-ups perpetuated by the Church, aiming to maintain the respectability and purity intrinsic to the Christian doctrine, resulted in considering these crimes only a modern problem (Blasi & Oviedo, 2020; Frawley-O'Dea, 2007; Marchlewska et al., 2023). However, the recent scandals and testimonies made this crime resurface, such as the 2002 Boston Globe's Spotlight investigation, the current campaign about Emanuela Orlandi's disappearance, and the findings regarding the Irish situation (Bisantz, 2023; Pilgrim, 2012; Pupilli, 2016). The ecclesiastical involvement in other lawbreaking activities, such as corruption and correlations with organised crime, encompasses a crucial issue that is highly underestimated (Faggioli, 2019; Terry,

2015). Precisely, the cases mentioned above greatly impacted the legal process and mediatic attention concerning CSA, which resulted in a crisis in the RCC (Doyle, 2012; Formicola, 2020). The inability to handle the surface of its criminal activities in its history exposed the numerous hierarchical cover-ups, hypocrisy, and feeble facade of this religious organisation (Faggioli & O'Reilly-Gindhart, 2021; Formicola, 2016).

Three main instances are fundamental pillars of the abuse emergence within the Church: the earliest testimonies of Scott Gastal against Father Gauthé, the Boston Scandal, and the Irish investigations (Benigno & Lavenia, 2021; Donnelly & Inglis, 2010; Moran, 2019; Pang et al., 2022). The former is characterised by the 1985 Louisianan process against Father Gauthé, and its significance relies on it being the first time a case of cCSA was discussed in court, covered by media, and exposed to the public (Benigno & Lavenia, 2021; Lytton, 2022). Gastal, 11 years old at the time, testified against Gauthé, who had been sexually abusing him for a year in a parish house (D'Antonio, 2013). No matter the fear, the threats, and the complications of coming forward, the Gastal family accused the cleric, who was then processed and found to have molested 37 children (D'Antonio, 2013; Nordheimer, 1985).

Furthermore, the 2002 Boston Globe's Spotlight article revealed the ramifications of paedophilia in the American Catholic Church, uncovering the alarming prevalence of this crime, by finding over seventy ecclesiastics guilty of cCSA in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston (Bisantz, 2023; Faggioli, 2023). Notably, most of the abuses were known by the local archdiocese, which considered them not severe enough, and therefore discarded the victims' accounts and accusations (Hilary & Huang, 2023; Boston Globe Spotlight Team). This occurrence is particularly crucial

when it comes to mediatic attention, as the scandal explored how deep-rooted the issue with CSA is, and, as a result, exposed worldwide the gravity of the matter (Renzetti & Yocum, 2013).

The latter is characterised by the numerous inquiries mandated by the Irish government concerning cCSA between 1990 and 2010, particularly after the conviction of Fr. Brendan Smyth in 1994 (Gleeson & Jones, 2015; Ring, 2018; Terry, 2015). Precisely, he was convicted of molesting 72 children while with the Norbertine Order and was sentenced to 12 years in prison (Powell & Scanlon, 2014). The media coverage was outstanding, as the pieces of investigative journalism by Chris Moore flooded the Irish news and exposed how the Ecclesiastes were aware of Smyth's abuses but did not report it to any authority (Hargaden, 2022; Powell & Scanlon, 2014). Following this calumny, the public perception of the Catholic Church's authority in Ireland became disrupted and its reputation was tarnished (Rosie, 2022). Following this example, recent studies, investigations, and research have been conducted in several Countries, such as the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, Germany, Spain, and Portugal (Death, 2018; Gleeson, 2016).

Nonetheless, research concerning the Italian peninsula is extremely scarce, especially considering the Vatican is situated there. Moreover, the publicity of CSA in Italy is diminished, as the Church is easily covering up most of its accused clerics and denying complicity (Benigno & Lavenia, 2021). This is where this dissertation finds its basis, aiming to fill the gaps present in the current Italian literature scenario. The largest report on the extent of CSA is made by the non-profit association Rete L'ABUSO, including victims, accusations, convictions, deniers clerics, and support spaces for both survivors and offenders, depicting 15 years of ongoing investigation (Rete L'ABUSO, 2023; Zanardi, 2018). It is evident that, with over 166 accused

priests in 2023 and only 164 convictions since 2008, this represents a neglected and undervalued issue (Rete L'ABUSO, 2023). Comparing this to the Irish example, the lack of government-mandated inquiries is evident, and therefore the absence of acknowledgement by the ruling class.

1.1 Aims and Objectives.

Aim:

Understand people's awareness and interpretation of the crimes perpetrated by the Catholic Church in the Italian peninsula.

Objectives:

1. Discover the Italian population's attitudes towards the prevalence of cCSA both worldwide, in the European context, and in Italy.
2. Determine the extent of Italian media coverage on CSA.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of support services that are available for victims of CSA in Italy.

The methodology employed for this research is through mixed methods, concerning both a survey and a semi-structured interview. The former will be shared with the Italian population asking about their position and attitudes towards the prevalence of this crime and how much CSA is represented in national media. Furthermore, the latter will be conducted with an Italian association will be used to gain an exhaustive perspective on the reports and the circumstances surrounding this crime.

The dissertation aims will be accomplished by firstly analysing the literature on the topic, focusing pre-eminently on definitions, global literature, and Italy-based investigations. Furthermore, the methodology will be exposed, declaring the motivations for a mixed methods approach as a research structure. Subsequently, the findings will be presented and examined. Additionally, it will discuss the

interconnection between the data gathered and the literature analysed previously, aiming to explain the results through a critical theoretical approach. Lastly, the aforementioned points will be assessed, with limitations and recommendations being elucidated.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definitions

2.1.1 UK legislation on sexual offence

First and foremost, it is indispensable to delineate what the term “sexual offences” encompasses. The legal definition in the UK for rape is when a person penetrates with their penis a non-consenting individual’s vagina, mouth, or anus (CPS, 2022; Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 1). Furthermore, assault by penetration is when an individual penetrates an unwilling person’s vagina or anus with a part of their body or object (CPS, 2022; Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 2). Moreover, sexual assault is defined as when the violator sexually touches another person without their approval (CPS, 2022; Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 3). Additionally, forcing another individual to participate in intimate activities, share or produce private material, encompass other instances of what is considered a sexual offence (Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 4; Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 66). Notably, it is fundamental to comprehend that the lack of consent is a defining aspect of the crime, as the victims are unwilling to fulfil or partake in sexual activities (CPS, 2021; Sjölin, 2015; Sprague, 2021). Moreover, this type of crime is prevalent both with adults and underage victims (CPS, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative to investigate what sexual offences against children involve. The Sexual Offences Act (2003) differentiates between children under 13 and those under 18. For individuals under 13 years of age, the distinction between rape, assault by penetration, and sexual assault are the same as the aforementioned, with the only difference of the victim’s age. The dichotomy between the two ages, i.e. under 13 and 18, exists to underline that those younger than 13 years old are reputed to being unable to legally consent to any sexual act (Ministry of Justice, 2013). The separation also provides greater

protection those children who have not turned 14 yet (CPS, 2022; Ministry of Justice, 2013; Robinson, 2017).

Concerning those under 18, the legislation describes the perpetrator as someone 18 or over who engages in sexual activities, i.e. vaginal, anal, and oral penetration, or sexually touches a non-consenting minor (Hollin et al., 2010; Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 9). However, the adult can also be guilty of a crime when they are not personally sexually abusing the child. For instance, they can sexually communicate with the minor, and coerce, force, incite, or cause the victim to partake in intimate activities against the latter's will (Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 10; Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 14; Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 15). In the Act, more modern instances, such as online sexual grooming, have been clarified in the Explanatory Notes section of each comma. Regarding sexual communication, it is specified that it can happen through telephone conversations, the Internet, or meetings to gain the child's trust (Klimek, 2020; Sexual Offences Act, 2003). Another crime occurs when the adult engaging in sexual acts does so in the presence of a child or forces the minor to watch the act (Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 11, Sexual Offences Act, 2003, c. 12). Directly, the wide range of descriptions and the examinations of the numerous contexts where an intimate abuse can take place, whether it involves physical contact or not, result in solid foundations for law enforcement to investigate crimes.

2.1.2 Italian legislation on sexual offence

Nevertheless, as this research focuses on the Italian environment, it is imperative to analyse and compare how the respective legislation defines sexual abuse. Specifically, the Italian penal code lacks the differentiation between rape, assault by penetration, and sexual assault. Precisely, the commas in art. 609 are

divided between sexual violence, sexual violence with underage individuals, and group sexual violence, with the respecting aggravating circumstances (Codice Penale, 2022, art. 609; Fedorczyk, 2020). Sexual violence involves someone who with the use of force, threat, or abuse of authority, pushes another to engage in sexual acts (Codice Penale, 2022, art. 609-bis; Di Giovanni, 2023; Trotta, 2023). Added to the definition are other contextualisations, such as taking advantage of the victim's mental or physical state (Codice Penale, 2022, art. 609-bis.). Furthermore, aggravating circumstances concern the use of weapons or substances, if the perpetrator exercises authority over the victim, such as a parent, or if the perpetrator is a public officer (Codice Penale, 2022, art. 609-ter.). Concerning non-consensual sexual acts with underage individuals, when the victim is under 14 the sentence for the crime increases (Codice Penale, 2022, art. 609-ter, comma 5; Codice Penale, 2022, art. 609-quater). This age is crucial as that represents the age of consent in Italy (Cena & Tattoli, 2021; Macrì, 2010). Additionally, the age of sixteen is mentioned as it depicts the increased age of consent when a figure that exercises authority over the victim is involved, such as an educator or a parent (Codice Penale, 2022, art. 609-quater). Notably, the sentence increments if the abuse is done for monetary reasons, if multiple people are participating, if criminal organisations accomplish it, if the minor suffers life-threatening consequences, and if the reputation reiterations are severe (Codice Penale, 2022, art. 609-quater, comma 1-5). Sexual activities witnessed by a minor of 14, aiming to be seen by the victim, or showing them pornographic materials to force them to engage in intimate acts are mentioned in the article 609-quinquies, i.e. corruption of minors (Codice Penale, 2022). Furthermore, it represents a crime when an adult forces, through threats and violence or through promising gifts and rewards, a minor of 16 to engage in the

aforementioned lawbreaking activities, even via online platforms (Bernasconi, 2017; Codice Penale, 2022, art. 609-undecies).

Comparing the Italian legislation and the UK one, the overall definition of sexual violence is similar. Nonetheless, the latter offers definitions and diversifications between vaginal and anal penetration, i.e. rape, assault by penetration, and unwanted sexual touching. The Italian one only refers to “sexual acts”, which is a broad term that makes its circumscription highly vague (Lorusso & Manna, 2007; Magliocca, 2017). Moreover, when involving minors, Italy is more descriptive towards the age differentiations: in the UK the age of consent is 13, while the Italian one is 14, and it is increased to 16 when the perpetrator is someone close to the victim (Bernardi, 2022). In addition, another dissimilarity is the mention and description of abuse of a position of trust in the English legislation, especially concerning child sexual abuse, while the Italian only mentions the abuse of authority.

2.1.3 Clerical Sexual Abuse

Subsequently, after having presented and examined how sexual violence is represented in legislation, it is extremely valuable to analyse CSA in the Catholic Church regarding these descriptions. Precisely, it encompasses any sexualised activity that involves a member of an ecclesiastical order towards someone under their religious care (Ballano, 2023; Clergy Sexual Misconduct Information & Resources, 2021; Markowitz et al., 2021). Clergy misconduct concerns harassment, through touching, kissing, intercourse, inappropriate conversations, and innuendos (Martin, 2023; MCC, 2022). It is significant to note that the imbalance of power and authority between the two parties plays a critical role in the accomplishment of the abuse (Clergy Sexual Misconduct Information & Resources, 2021). Therefore, unbalanced power dynamics are at the core of these crimes, as the perpetrator

abuses the religious trust and jurisdiction they have over the victim (Clergy Sexual Misconduct Information & Resources, 2021; Edelman, 2020; Marotta, 2021; MCC, 2022). This is a significant instance represented throughout the literature, as it is described as an intrinsic aspect of minor sexual abuse. Precisely, Dressing et al. (2000) describe the improper use of clerical power as a contributor to intimate violence and an explanation as to how the Catholic Church improperly dealt with these crimes and attempted to hide them from public view. In addition, Haker (2023) considers the systemic misuse of authority, responsibility, and spiritual care a fundamental issue within the Catholic Church's hierarchy. This is exercised not only by targeting the victims' general vulnerabilities but particularly by focusing on the authority the clergyman has over the believer's spirituality (De Weger & Death, 2017). Precisely, the strategy is commonly used when grooming children intending to later sexually abuse them (De Weger & Death, 2017).

2.1.4 Clericalism

Another fundamental theoretical instance towards the facilitation of CSA is clericalism. This term refers to the religious hierarchy among ecclesiastical personnel, where a few selected hold the highest legislative power and authority in decision-making (Plante, 2020). In the RCC, this power is held by ordained clergy, who administer financial, liturgical, and spiritual choices, without consulting any outside clergy individuals (Plante, 2020; Seasoltz, 2010). This hierarchical order supports the idea that only clergymen, seen as superior, hold the authority to dictate how laypeople should experience their personal and private lives (Plante, 2020). However, religious teaching does not always appear congruent to clerical decisions, such as the employment of clericalism regarding the continuous cover-up towards sexual abuse perpetrated by clergymen (De Weger & Death, 2017; Seasoltz, 2010).

Clericalism, in addition, has been found especially between religious women, such as nuns, and their male counterparts (McPhillips & McEwan, 2022). Precisely, gendered violence is highly present within the Church hierarchy, as explained by McPhillips and McEwan (2022), which results in harmful behavioural expressions aimed at maintaining the priesthood at the top of the ecclesiastical pyramid. Particularly, since, predominantly, abusive clergymen and victims are identified as male, gender inequality also results in the belief that women cannot be victims or perpetrators of CSA (Cimboric & Cartor, 2006; McPhillips & McEwan, 2022; Winters et al., 2022). However, the outstanding cover-ups perpetrated by the Church concerning these cases still highly affect the amount of literature surrounding both male and female parts.

2.2 Global Literature

As mentioned in the introduction, CSA was considered only in the 1970s, when incest, domestic violence, and sexual abuse were starting to be considered criminal acts by feminist criminology (Gleeson & Jones, 2015). Feminists in that period were advocating for their voices to be heard, which gave courage to CSA survivors to come forward and expose the crimes (Clites, 2023). That is why the research on this topic is relatively new, even if it is a longstanding issue, present in the Christian Church since the Middle Ages (Minnis, 2021; Rashid & Barron, 2018). However, the relevance of the exposure of American cases, which appeared to be the most documented and significant, convinced the general European public that the ecclesiastical sexual abuses were only a foreign affair (Minguet-Civera, 2021; Weatherred, 2015).

Nevertheless, in the last two decades, noteworthy research has been conducted on European territories, such as Ireland. For example, the aforementioned denunciation

of the child sexual abuse perpetrated by Belfast priest Brendan Smyth depicted a major breakthrough in the mediatic representation of cCSA (Kerrigan & Pramaggiore, 2022; Scutari, 2018). Considering most of the research was from the USA or other English-speaking countries, this led to misjudging the other European territories as safe from CSA and aided the Church in covering up the abuse perpetrated in those latter areas (O'Reilly & Chalmers, 2014). However, it is only recently that the investigations have moved towards new Countries' perspectives, such as Poland (Fordham University, 2023; Guzik, 2020; Mandes, 2020). Precisely, the increment of allegations in this Christian territory, home to former Pope John Paul II, generated a further inquiry into the legitimacy of the Church and the prevalence of sexual violence outside Anglophone counties (Guzik, 2020; Mandes, 2020; Paszenda & Rogoż, 2023). Through the academic literature on the Polish events, it has been affirmed that it is needed to have regulations dedicated to safeguarding victims of cCSA (Mandes, 2020). It is fundamental to have impartial judges and agents of the law, able to face the religious hierarchy and aim to bring the offenders to justice without favouritism (Mandes, 2020; Motak, 2021; Przeworski, 2022). Additionally, Polish media has been found to lack critical understanding and credibility, which generates a public inclination towards the victimisation of the survivors (Mandes, 2020; Sadlon & Nowotny, 2022). Nonetheless, the majority of these changes can only be implemented following a reform within the Catholic Church and the Vatican (Guzik, 2020).

Concerning the adjustments attempted within the Vatican, in 2021, Pope Francis revised child sexual abuse and paedophilia as crimes against the person and their dignity, no longer against the clerical obligation of celibacy (Benadusi & Lagioia, 2022). However, this only represented a shift in the philosophical

comprehension of the offence, as the literature shows constant new allegations and the absence of convictions (Rete L'ABUSO, 2023). Nevertheless, several of these arising cases are generally two decades old, describing how the current studies mainly focus on the past, rather than the current denunciations (Böhm et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, few of them have considered the impact of media on the development of public awareness, and therefore, the Church's reaction and culpability (Dubec et al., 2023). The ones who cover this topic illustrate how the extensive coverage of news outlets and investigative journalism on CSA brought major changes in law-making and public awareness, particularly in Ireland with the Brendan Smyth case (Powell & Scanlon, 2015; Waller et al., 2020). However, none of them focuses on the Italian population and its reception of media and news. Especially how the relevance of public awareness and questioning the Church's authority may lead to substantial adjustments and accountability.

In addition, after having analysed the literature, it is evident that the main question that researchers ask is how to avoid this from happening and how to provide support to the victims (Fordham University, 2023). This originated with the first cases in the 1980s and is now being researched on a larger scale, considering the new perspectives given by the emerging claims by victims (Böhm et al., 2014; Fordham University, 2023). Concerning the motivations behind the clerical sexual acts of violence, the main outcome shown in the studies is the inability of religious personnel to adhere to celibacy (Gorrell, 2015; Tamarit & Balcells, 2022; Rashid & Barron, 2018). Precisely, Tamarit and Balcells (2022) affirm that it is generally combined with abuse of power, narcissism, psychosexual immaturity, clericalism, and the strict hierarchical structure of Ecclesiastes. However, the opinions of the studies differ majorly, as one side argues that the rooted cause of cCSA is

mandatory celibacy and, therefore, optional celibacy would eradicate the issue, while the other states that there is no link between abstinence and sexual violence (DeGroat, 2020; Hadebe, 2022; Li, et al., 2022; Orsi, 2017). The critical assessment describes that the correlation between the two depends on the psychological approach that one has towards celibacy, dividing them between celibacy-accepting and celibacy-rejecting people (De Weger, 2022; Tamarit & Balcells, 2022). Therefore, those who encounter difficulty in maintaining abstinence, are more prone to identify other methods to satisfy their needs (De Weger, 2022; Tamarit & Balcells, 2022).

2.3 Italian Literature

Notably, the preeminent examinations concerning the criminal activity of the ecclesiastical court by Italian authors and on Italian perspectives are books, such as “In Segreto: Crimini sessuali e clero tra età moderna e contemporanea” [In Secret: Sexual crimes and clergy between the modern and contemporary age], “Agnus Dei: gli abusi sessuali del clero in Italia” [Agnus Dei: clergy sexual abuses in Italy], and “Peccato o crimine: la Chiesa di fronte alla pedofilia” [Sin or Crime: the Church in front of paedophilia] (Benigno & Lagioia, 2021; Benadusi & Lagioia, 2022; Scarrafia et al., 2022). Respectively, the investigation presented in these books is primarily regarding the history of clergy and its abuses, as in *In Segreto* and *Peccato o Crimine*, or by recounting the personal experiences of victims, as in *Agnus Dei*. Additionally, it is evident how these texts are remarkably recent, which is a possible result of the interest it has only gained in the previous years, the inability of the Church to cover up many of its crimes, and the courage of the victims finally speaking out (Borowik & Grygiel, 2023; Formicola, 2023).

Additionally, when discussing the presence of Church-related crimes in the media, it is improbable to find any correlating to the contemporary discussion. In fact, the Italian cold case of Emanuela Orlandi is the main one dominating the news. Precisely, the abduction of Orlandi, a 15-year-old Vatican City citizen, on the 22nd of July 1983, represents a huge scandal for the whole Italian peninsula (Di Battista, 2023; Orlandi, 2018). The 40 years of investigations uncovered criminal relations between the Vatican and organised crime which aided in the abduction, such as Banda della Magliana, a criminal organisation based in Rome (Nazio, 2012). Moreover, recent discoveries which made the news include the declaration of a Vatican cardinal involved in child sexual exploitation during the time of Emanuela's disappearance (Rete L'ABUSO, 2024). In the media, this case has been covered by the Netflix docuseries "Vatican Girl: The Disappearance of Emanuela Orlandi" (Pandey, 2023). However, the Italian media was not particularly involved, as the production was produced by a UK production company.

Furthermore, research in Italy was favoured by the effects of the public starting to question the Church's authority abroad, which led to the completion of the Conferenza Episcopale Italiana's (CEI) reports on paedophilia. Precisely, the first study covers two years, i.e. 2020-2021, and depicts the victims that contacted them in this time window, showing 89 survivors, 82% of the total underage, and 68 clergy offenders, ranging from 40 to 60 years old (Open, 2022; Tourn, 2022). Nevertheless, it is noticeable how the choice of biennium produced minimal results, as the Covid-19 pandemic and respective lockdowns did not allow social interactions between victims and abusers (Benigno & Lavenia, 2022; Di Niro, 2022). Moreover, it only considers the reports done through the Church services, neglecting those to the Italian authorities or Rete L'ABUSO (Tourn, 2022). The second yearly report,

published in November 2023 and covering the events of 2022, uncovers 32 abusing clergymen and 54 victims (Giansoldati, 2023; Zanardi, 2023). The majority of victims are women and girls, i.e. 44, and mostly underage, i.e. 35 (Di Gregorio, 2023). However, the Italian Association for Victims of CSA “Rete L’ABUSO” affirms that they received a greater number of reports in the same period as covered in the CEI study (Zanardi, 2023). Precisely, they received notifications about 418 active abusive Ecclesiastes, resulting in approximately 10,002,960 victims in the last quinquennial (Rete L’ABUSO, 2023). Additionally, the crimes reported by the CEI not only do not get reported to the authorities, but also the document does not share valuable information concerning the abuses, such as geographical location, and therefore they lack the opportunity to be verified (Zanardi, 2023). It is then apparent that this examination, conducted by an assembly of ecclesiastical figures, only depicts partial results, aiming to maintain the positive facade of its organisation (Benigno & Lavenia, 2022).

Comprehensively, it is observable that the current literature is still in constant development, particularly resulting from the exposure of clerical misconduct and the relevance it is gaining globally. By questioning authority and legitimacy, the general population begins to challenge the Church’s values, immunity, and takeaway messages (Dubec et al., 2023; Paszenda & Rogoż, 2023). However, this is only developing recently, as several Countries’ cultures rooted in Catholicism, such as Spain, Portugal, and Poland, are just now creating a dichotomy between State and Church (Tamarit et al., 2023). Italy, nonetheless, is still bonded to the Church, which is a consequence of its Christian history, conservatism, and Fascism, especially with the Lateran Treaty, which conceded exceptional benefits and power to the Holy See (Blancarte, 2023; Ozzano, 2019; Schwörer, 2018). Therefore, it might be harder for

this Country's population and ruling class to actively question the Church's legitimacy.

In conclusion, the gaps in the current Italian literature must be filled, and therefore this research aims to comprehend the public perception of the Italian peninsula population on the issue, especially concerning their understanding of the prevalence both within their Country and globally, and how they interact with the news outlets, targeting how often it sees it reported and on which platforms. Consequently, the analysis of these up-to-date results can aid the examination of the gravity of sexual abuse and crimes of the Vatican and Italian Church.

3. Methodology

In order to fill the gaps present in the literature concerning Clerical Sexual Abuse, the need to evaluate the Italian peninsula population's attitudes toward the Church misdemeanour is critical. This section will examine the mixed methods approach chosen to gather data: a survey to analyse the population perception, answering objectives 1 and 2, and an interview with an Italian association that researches the issue, focusing mostly on objectives 2 and 3. Firstly, it will analyse why surveys are the most appropriate approach to gather information about a large-scale sample of participants, considering advantages and disadvantages. Subsequently, it will assess why a semi-structured interview is an opportune technique to investigate the association analysis of sexual abuse within the Italian Church.

3.1 Survey

Taking into account that the geographical area is particularly extended, encompassing three Countries (Italy, Vatican City, and San Marino), and, therefore, the sample being reasonably abundant, the most suitable approach is through a survey (Nayak & Narayan, 2019; Rahman, et al., 2022; Terrell, 2022). This method is suggested when investigating a large number of participants (Goodfellow, 2023; Groves et al., 2011; Disman et al., 2017). Moreover, questionnaires generate quantitative data, describing the population's perspective and obtaining demographical values from the respective answers (Ponto, 2015). The selected method is especially advantageous as it is not time-consuming and allows for a rather quick and numerous data collection (Johnson, 2022; Nardi, 2018; Ponto, 2015). That is why the limited time window during which the data will be gathered, i.e. 4th of December to the 15th of January does not allow for in-depth approaches to

greater amounts of participants (Alamri, 2019; Prasanna, 2023; Tracy, 2019). However, there are specific disadvantages surrounding the use of quantitative methods. Precisely, the numerical data attained through surveys lacks personal experience, subjectivity, and meaning, as the information is obtained through generally broad multiple-choice questions and does not account for diverse individual responses (Queirós et al., 2017; Smith, 2021). To mitigate this drawback, instead of using a simple dichotomous scale of negative/positive responses, the data will be obtained through the Likert scale technique (Jebb et al., 2021). As this is research in social science, its use is appropriate considering its common employment in the fields of sociology, psychology, and politics (Batterton & Hale, 2017; Birkett, 2022; Taherdoost, 2019). Moreover, since the survey will be shared with people aged 18 and older, a 5-level answer, going from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, it will be easier for elder people to understand and consider their response (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). Additionally, it offers the opportunity for a certain critical interpretation and allows space for a more detailed analysis, rather than yes or no options (Bhat, 2019; Mohn, 2023). For example, other scales, like the dichotomous scale, would only present binary responses, avoiding a more exhaustive comprehension (Birkett, 2022).

Lastly, the questionnaire will be shared through the researcher’s personal social media accounts, inviting their acquaintances to share it with their friends and family, creating therefore a snowball sampling effect (Dragan & Isaic-Maniu, 2013).

Specifically, this typology of sampling involves asking participants to suggest the survey to their connections, who fit the criteria and are willing to partake in the research, who can then continue this chain reaction (Parker et al., 2019). This is

particularly valuable as the intention is to have a variety between age and provenance to collect diverse responses.

3.2 Interview

In addition to the questionnaire aimed to gather large-scale generalised data, this research will also include an interview. Precisely, it will be with an Italian-based association that supports victims and observes the clerical offending behaviour, convictions, and how the Italian criminal justice deals with this CSA. The choice of employing interviews as the selected method for this section is because the data obtained is qualitative, and they offer a more detailed and encyclopaedic overview of the issue (Busetto et al., 2020; Jamshed, 2014). Particularly, this will help clarify any gaps left by the quantitative data gathered from the survey.

It will be semi-structured, namely with a set of predetermined questions, but with granting a certain flexibility for further inquiries (Doody & Noonan, 2013). This will allow both the interviewee and the interviewer to seek any sort of clarification and gather additional information (Al Balushi, 2016; Doody & Noonan, 2013; Ruslin et al., 2022). In fact, as opposed to structured interviews, the semi-structured ones give space to expression (Al Balushi, 2016). However, interviews are time-consuming, especially because of their duration, transcription, and the respective analysis of the information gathered (McGrath et al., 2019; Rädiker, 2020). Therefore, the election of conducting a singular one with a preeminent association is ideal, rather than multiples with less knowledgeable contributors. The interview results will be interpreted using content analysis, in order to categorise the findings through codes and have an exhaustive understanding of the information found (Ungvarsky, 2023).

3.3 Ethics

Ethical implications when conducting primary research are especially vital. Precisely, the principles of ethics encompass informed consent and voluntary participation in primary research, anonymity and confidentiality, transparency about the topic and purpose of the study, responsibility towards the benefits of the examination, and the right to withdraw (Anabo et al., 2019; Haley, 2017; Yip et al., 2016). This research has been approved by the SCCJ Ethical Committee of the University of Portsmouth (Appendix 1), application reference 1196.

It has been exposed in the approval form that in the survey, anonymity will be ensured, as no personal data will be required, and no emails with which the participants complete the questionnaire will be shared with the researcher.

Furthermore, the purpose of the study will be exposed on the first page of the online survey, followed by a mandatory consent, that the contributors will need to tick if they wish to take part in the study. In addition, the right to withdraw will be until clicking on the “submit” button, as after the answers will be anonymised and it would be unattainable to detect who submitted them.

Regarding the interview, an invitation letter and participant information sheet have been shared with the association, exposing what the research encompasses, and what their contribution will result in. Moreover, a consent form has been shared with them and was signed, in order to start the collection of data.

Lastly, risk assessment and debriefing about the subject of the study is crucial, as sexual abuse is a sensitive topic, and the well-being of human beings is vital to safeguard (Miller et al., 2012; Panicker & Stanley, 2021). All the gathering of data will be concluded by thanking for the contribution, elucidating any support service

available, and informing of the researcher and supervisor's availability to enlighten any doubt.

4. Findings

In this section, the findings from the survey sent to the Italian population and the interview with the Association supporting victims of CSA will be presented and exposed. The survey will consider the 165 responses received in the time frame between the 4th of December 2023 and the 15th of January 2024. This section will first investigate the demographics found in the survey, presenting the prevalent responses. Subsequently, the population's awareness and acknowledgement of CSA both globally and within its Country will be examined, while also comparing it with the demographic values. Additionally, the media coverage results will be exposed, considering the extent of reports in both mainstream and social media, while also investigating which one is more reliable. Furthermore, the interview findings will be assessed through content analysis, illustrating the choices of codes and evidence, focusing on State support, mediatic coverage, and people's reactions.

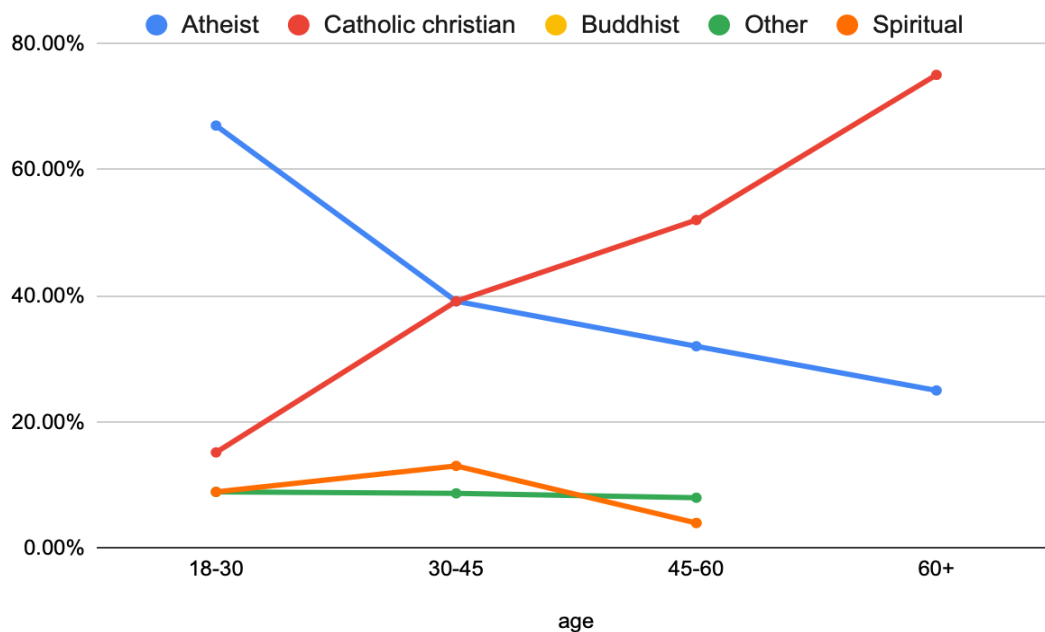
4.1 Survey Results

4.1.1 Demographics

Firstly, demographics are fundamental in research, as they differentiate the sample in different variables (Connelly, 2013; Veroff, N.D.). In this case age, gender, provenance, and religion were used. The majority of respondents are between 18-30, i.e. 68.29%. Followed by 45-60, 30-45, and lastly 60+. Moreover, 75% are women. Furthermore, most participants are from Northern Italy (80.49%). Atheist responders are predominant, i.e. 56.71%. Subsequently, Catholics encompass the 25.61%, Lastly, spiritual believers, Buddhists, and "other" are at the bottom.

Figure 1:

Religion VS Age



The above graph (Fig. 1) depicts an evident correlation between religiousness and age in Italy. The trend illustrates that older people are more likely to be Christian, and the youth are more prone to lack a religious faith. This is also proved by the Doxa (2019) survey surrounding religious beliefs in Italy, which found the elders more Catholic than their young counterparts.

4.1.2 Public Opinion

The next questions encompass the agreement levels, using the Likert Scale, between statements regarding CSA and the responders' opinions.

When asked if these crimes are prevalent in Europe and on a global scale, the prevalent response indicates an awareness concerning CSA outside their home Country.

When asked if CSA is a problem in Italy, 88.42% consider it such. If confronted with the demographic variables, in this case, age and religion, it is noticeable that the older the population is, the more likely they are to agree with the statement "I believe

CSA is not a problem in Italy” (Fig. 3). Moreover, atheists are more likely to firmly consider CSA an issue in respect to those who have other religious beliefs (Fig. 2).

Figure 2:

I believe CSA is not a problem in Italy VS Religion

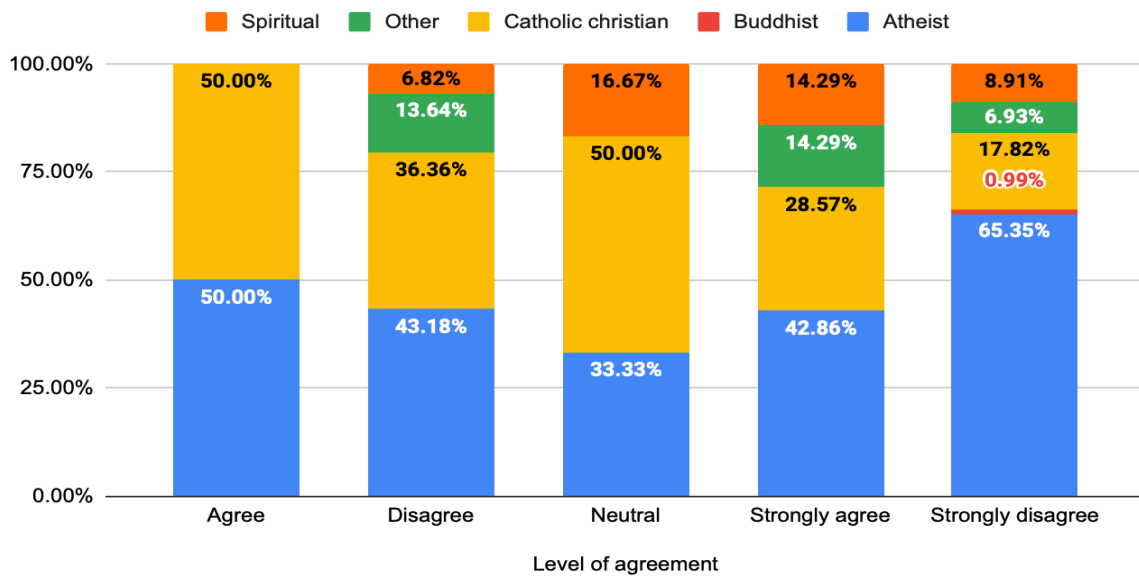
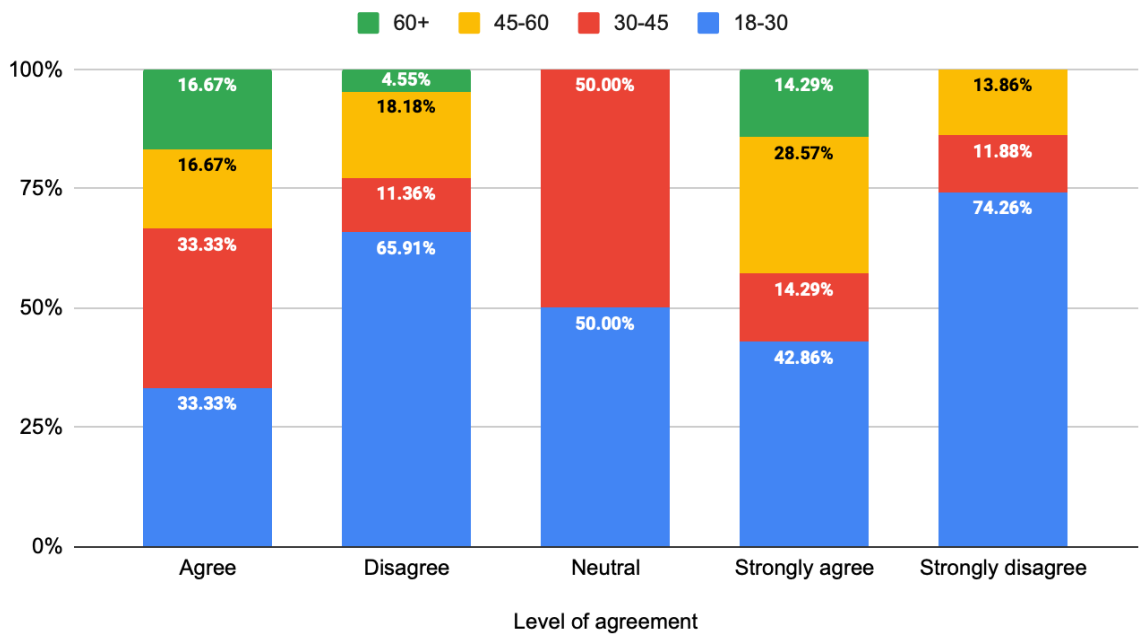


Figure 3:

I believe CSA is not a problem in Italy VS Age



4.1.3 Media Coverage

Lastly, the questions concerning the media coverage aim to understand if the general population sees these crimes reported in the news, mainstream media, and social media. The vast majority of respondents do not see the crimes being generally reported in mainstream media, respectively 43.90% disagree and 30.49% strongly disagree. The majority does not find it often reported in news outlets, such as TV broadcasts, and both national and local newspapers, i.e. 51.22% disagree and 31.71% strongly disagree. A smaller percentage, 10.37%, often see the crimes reported, and only 6.71% remains uncertain.

Of those agreeing, 70.59% find that TV News is the highest reporter, followed by 17.65% in national newspapers, and 11.76% not specified. None of the responders find it mostly talked about in local newspapers.

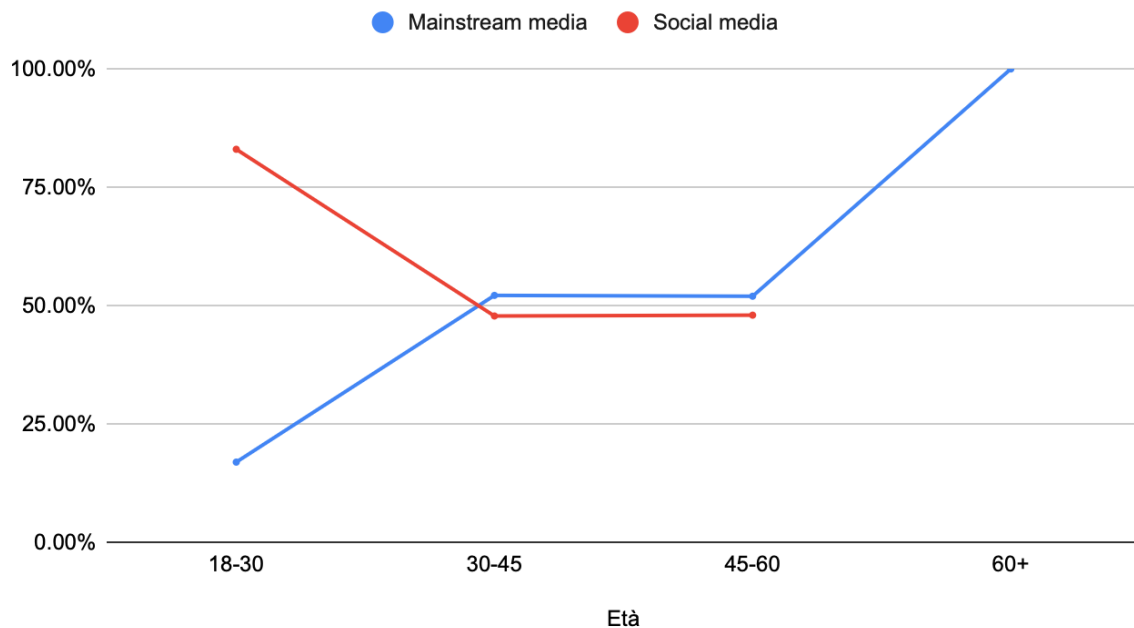
Considering social media, the predominant answers (56.1%) consider it often talked about on these networks. Neutral responses are subsequent, and then followed by those disagreeing.

Among those who agreed, Twitter (41.76%) is the predominant platform for reporting crimes, followed by Instagram. Additionally, TikTok has been chosen by 12.09% and Facebook by 10.99%.

The last survey question asks the participants to choose which one is more trustworthy between mainstream and social media. The prevalent answer is the latter, with a 70.7%

Figure 4:

Type of media trusted VS Age



It is noticeable in Fig. 4 that the young population trusts social networks more, which can be a consequence of the source of news they typically interact with. Ofcom (2023) found that in the UK younger adults obtain their news mainly through social media, whereas the older population relies more on broadcast TV.

4.2 Interview Results

Through content analysis, the categories concern the interconnection between the State and Church, the role of media, and public attitudes. Referring to the Table below (Table 1), it is evident how the State does not offer support and instead is complicit with the abusers. Furthermore, the issues surrounding mediatic reports encompass the inability to publish articles challenging Ecclesiastes, as they do not fit with the political agenda and the lack of coverage which does not enhance public demand for change. Lastly, the interview highlighted how the public is not

educated on the association support network, stigmatises the victims, especially within their community, and sides with the perpetrators.

Table 1:

Interview content analysis.

Category	Code	Evidence	Translation	Frequency
Relationship between the Church and State	Compliance with the criminal activity of the Church	“Abbiamo inviato 420 segnalazioni di preti pedofili e non hanno (il governo) risposto. Palesemente essendo consenzienti sul fatto di non fare prevenzione”.	“We sent 420 accusations on paedophile priests, and they (the government) did not answer. Obviously agreeing about not doing prevention”.	30
	Lack of acknowledgment of the extent of CSA in Italy	“Lo Stato non interviene, la magistratura non indaga”.	“The State does not intervene; the magistrates do not inquire”.	18
Media coverage of CSA	Unpublished articles	“Ci sono degli articoli che in Italia per forza sono censurati, no? Certo, se parli e metti in mezzo un cardinale o i prelati, la chiesa non ti è grata”.	“There are some articles that are censored in Italy, right? Of course, if you write about and involve a cardinal or prelates, the church is not grateful to you”.	10
	Fitting the political agenda	“I più sono regionali, locali, vengono finanziati poi alla fine dai segretari di partito”.	“The majority of newspapers are regional, local, they are then ultimately financed by the party secretaries”.	8
	Public consciousness	“La copertura mediatica è l'unica cosa che fa, dà consapevolezza	“Media coverage is the only thing that does it, it gives people awareness”.	15

alle persone”.

Public attitudes towards CSA	Public knowledge of support agencies	“In genere le vittime non passano dalla rete”.	“Generally, the victims, they do not go through the association network”.	6
	Lack of opposing reactions towards the Church	“Là (all'estero) scendono in piazza per la tutela dei figli, qui scendono in piazza per la tutela del prete”.	“There (abroad) they protest to protect their children, here they protest to protect the priest”.	6
	Victim blaming	“Il ragazzino perché ha tentato il prete”.	“Because the boy tempted the priest”.	7

5. Discussion

It is then fundamental to analyse the data gathered and compare the results with the exposed literature analysed in section 2. Precisely, it serves to respond to the aims of the dissertation and evaluate the fulfilment of the objectives exposed in the introduction. Firstly, objective 1 will be discussed, intertwining the interview, surveys, and literature review, by examining public awareness, and reactions to CSA exposure, and applying the critical criminology theories to explain it. Subsequently, the extent and implications of media coverage in Italy will be examined, employing the public responses from the survey, the assessment and the surrounding issues converged from the interview. Critical criminology and the hegemony of media will be taken into account, followed by the interconnection between mediatic reports and public consciousness. Additionally, the extent of support provided to victims will be incorporated, examining the difficulties it faces in the Italian peninsula. Lastly, the exposed points will be summarised.

5.1 Public awareness and attitudes towards CSA

First and foremost, the literature review exposed the key points concerning the surfacing of CSA worldwide, especially focusing on the cases that exposed the misconduct of the Church. Precisely, the Boston Globe's Spotlight report and the Irish Brendan Smyth's process as the main breakthroughs (Doyle, 2011; Kerrigan & Pramaggiore, 2022). This caused a schism between public opinion and trust in the Church on a global scale, which resulted in a request for change in policymaking (Guzik, 2020; Mancini & Shields, 2014). As mentioned in the interview, the other European Countries, even the most religious, such as Spain or France, demanded for the Church to come clean of its sexual abuses. The Italian population, however, does not challenge this institution and still defends its misbehaviour (Interviewee).

Therefore, a contrasting reaction does not happen, as the believers do not question the authority of the Church. In particular, the public action leans toward protecting the abuser, victim-blaming, and segregating the survivors from their community (Interviewee). This is a repercussion of what has been discussed in section 2.3, i.e. the inability to consider the Vatican and its functionaries as capable of criminal acts is a result of the long history of complicity between State and Church (Ozzano, 2019). Precisely, the right-wing populism of recent years, the historical fascist legacy, and the Lateran Treaty still safeguard the Church's integrity, together with the believers' trust in it (Interviewee; Mammone & Veltri, 2010).

On a European level, as exposed in section 2.2, government-mandated inquiries aided the population in challenging the innocent facade of Ecclesiastes. In Ireland, Catholics challenged their own beliefs and authority figures, the interlocutor explains. However, the Italian population sides with the criminals. Precisely, In April 2010, with Ireland and the rest of Europe producing reports, the Italian Berlusconi government speaks for the first and only time about CSA (Interviewee). However, the declaration is in favour of the Church, apologising for the "defamatory campaign against the Church and the Pope" (Rete L'ABUSO, 2021).

The numerous instances of complicity with the clerical misconduct increase the chances of Church personnel to successfully cover up their misdeeds. For example, law enforcement is not investigating the reports made to them, the silence from the Constitution guarantor, i.e. the Italian President, in front of the association's claims, and the non-fulfilment of the Lanzarote Convention and the UNCRC, particularly art. 19 and art. 34 (UNICEF, N.D.).

Taking into consideration the survey, the majority of responders consider CSA an issue in their own Country, not only on a global scale. However, the absence of

responses by those in power results in the inability to be heard and accomplish tangible policy changes. In fact, when the status quo gets challenged, the main reaction of the government is to silence the accusations (Interviewee).

Overall, the analysis presented in the literature review surrounding the inability of the state to separate its jurisdiction from that of the Church has been confirmed in the information gathered from the survey and the interview. Particularly, the population appears mostly aware of the prevalence of the issue, however, it is unable to challenge and provide an opposition. Precisely, it is noticeable that the Catholic population is more inclined to neglect these crimes concerning other Countries, i.e. Ireland and Spain, and continues to support the Church.

5.1.1 Critical Criminology, Italian Politics, and Clericalism

The theoretical concepts of critical criminology, developed based on Marxism, offer an in-depth analysis of society, crime understanding, and power relations (DeKeseredy, 2021). It considers the correlation between people in power and the working class, those socially and economically disadvantaged (DeKeseredy, 2021). For the purpose of this study, the main theories employed are the ones concerning power rhetoric and imbalances, which is a core circumstance in CSA, as explained in section 2.1 (Carrabine, 2014; Presser & Sandberg, 2019). Precisely, the intertwining of clericalism and the manoeuvring of people's ideas on CSA. The ecclesiastical hierarchy, as a global power institution, is able to maintain its candid facade in front of its believers. For instance, the CEI report exposed in section 2.3 hindered the extent of CSA in Italy by only reporting a small percentage of abuse, neglecting crucial details to prove their data is trustworthy (Zanardi, 2023). Consequently, this aids those holding the power to maintain their position, as the public reaction, especially Catholics, does not dispute those declarations (Benkert & Doyle, 2009;

Traina, 2023). Furthermore, it diminishes the support available to survivors, the extent of justice provided, and the safeguarding of future victims (Benkert & Doyle, 2009; Traina, 2023). Therefore, the power imbalance between the Catholic institution and the general public does not allow for a critical demand for change. Precisely, by covering up the abuses, the Church is not giving its followers reason to believe change is needed (Interviewee; Traina, 2023). Moreover, the interviewee explains that the current Italian right-wing government is strictly connected with the Vatican, and, as a consequence, the chances of reform are minimal (Table 1). Precisely, the acknowledgement by the ruling class is determined to be silenced, as it does not fit the political agenda (Interviewee). Therefore, the power held by the political class segregates the contrasting voices of the public, resulting in further cover-ups and disregard of CSA as a critical issue (Benkert & Doyle, 2009; Jewels, 2015; Traina, 2023).

5.2 Media Coverage

As exposed in the introduction, objective 2 of this research is to determine the extent of the media coverage in Italy. The literature review depicted the gargantuan turnaround in the USA and European Countries provided by the mediatic representation subsequent to the surfacing of CSA. Precisely, it increased public awareness and diminished the trust in the Church institution, tearing down the innocent facade constructed on decades of accusation evasion (Blasi & Oviedo, 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2023). In the Italian peninsula, the lack of analysis on the correlation between awareness of the issue and the amount of mediatic reports has been disregarded in research. The survey responses encompass a major silence on the topic by mainstream media. Consequently, this confirms the assumptions made in Section 2 on the lack of contemporary CSA coverage by the main outlets

consumed by Italians. However, the minority who agreed with the statement found that TV News coverage is the major one.

5.2.1 Critical criminology and the hegemony of media

The lack of reports in local and national newspapers is a result of articles questioning the authority of the Church not getting published. The interlocutor explains that Italian journalists are mainly freelance, and, therefore, avoid writing articles that would not get them paid. Moreover, the main source of funding for newspapers comes from political party secretaries (Table 1). Consequently, articles that disagree with the political agenda of the newspaper benefactor are not going to be published (Table 1). The lack of coverage is then a consequence of the hidden censorship caused by the financial needs of journalists, who must lean towards writing articles that fit the social and political agenda, creating therefore a spiral of silence (Interviewee).

Critical criminology, founded on Marxist ideology and Gramsci's additions, is able to explain this occurrence (Jewels, 2015). In this instance, the news outlets represent a tool owned by the ruling class, politicians, and the powerful, which are able to influence what is published (Carrabine, 2014; Jewels, 2015). Therefore, the lack of financial support when journalists write controversies results in the abandonment of writing articles questioning the status quo, and consequently only producing what appeals to those who pay them (Jewels, 2015; Murray, 2017; Ugwudike, 2015). The interconnection between the diminished extent of media coverage and the lack of public uprising against the religious institution is apparent. The mass media then tries to appease the population by focusing on other issues, such as criminalising the working class, immigrants, and other instances which conform to the political agenda (DeKeseredy, 2015; Jewels, 2015; Presser & Sandberg, 2019). This has also been

proved in the interview, as the interviewee explains that the media focuses on immigration issues and people of colour, rather than the ongoing issues concerning CSA. In this context, the role of hegemony, derived from Gramsci's theories, concerns the ability of the ruling class, especially political, to divert the population's focus from controversial opinions on the government and other institutions, i.e. Church, to other issues, e.g. immigration (Çoban, 2018; Jewels, 2015). This hidden censorship, explained exhaustively by the interviewee, leaves the population ignorant of the issue and threatens democracy. Additionally, it creates scepticism towards the Association when they report factual data. Precisely, the absence of free print in a democracy does not allow the population to make their own decisions and form opinions (Ofcom, 2022; Ukka, 2019).

It is then possible to explain that if people are more inclined towards mainstream media, owned by the powerful, they are less likely to question the credibility of those who present them with such reports. This also happened in Poland, as the media reports lacked credibility, but the public was unaware of it, and its opinions fluctuated towards victim-blaming (Mandes, 2020; Sadlon & Nowotny, 2022). Therefore, critical criminology and Gramsci's hegemony explain how older people are more inclined to trust more traditional media (Fig. 4) and believe that CSA is not an issue within Italy (Fig. 3).

5.2.2 Increasing public consciousness of CSA.

As depicted in Table 1, with the increase of mediatic reports, it is possible to shape people's opinions and acknowledgement. Particularly, the interviewee declares that: "de facto the population is not educated. If there is information, there is a reaction". When the media informs the public, it is able to change its habits and question the people in power (Interviewee). For example, "by educating the public,

you take your child to church and (when you discover that abuse is taking place) you do not take him anymore” (Interviewee). Referring to section 4.2, the print can shape ideology and protests, as “it creates a chain reaction aiming to protect your close ones. They are a reaction from the bottom that become a landmine” (Interviewee). However the lack of reports “avoids that any reactions from the bottom happen” (Interviewee). When investigating other Countries, such as Spain, it is noticeable that mediatic coverage produced public discontent, which subsequently led the Spanish prosecution to open an inquiry (Interviewee; Nùñez & Domìnguez, 2024). Specifically, what happened in Spain was that “the print dragged the politics, even if it did not want to be involved, and it dragged it inevitably” (Interviewee). The interviewee explains the cause of this, i.e. “(the print) is the one who has the power to force the government [...] upon request of the citizens”. Oppositely, in Italy, this does not happen, as the print does not report the crimes (Interviewee; Section 4.1.2). Consequently, this maintains the population ignorant of what happens within the Church's jurisdiction, and therefore, the public does not demand for radical change (Table 1).

5.3 Support to CSA victims and implications

Through the previous sections, the circumstances surrounding CSA and public opinions have been delineated. Precisely, how the Italian population is aware of the issue, how the government does not get involved, and how the Catholic community reacts to these scandals. This can be correlated to the available support to survivors, how they deal with the trauma, and the aftermath of the abuse. The association interviewed explains that its aims are helping the victims, being a structure created by survivors. Nonetheless, in order to exhaustively give support, they had the necessity to learn about jurisdiction and law, because “there is no State,

there are no laws (on CSA)” (Interviewee). The ongoing complicity between the government and the Church impedes the association to guide victims towards justice (Table 1). The Church is protected by the Lateran Treaty, which obstructs the extent of the support that the association can give, as the jurisdiction is within the Holy See, not the Italian law (Interviewee; Sternalski, 2013).

Notably, the continuous cover-up of the Vatican disrupts the support available to survivors. Reporting sexual abuse becomes time-barred in 12 months, but the association advocated for the difference between the factual crime date and the date when the victim is aware of having experienced abuse (Interviewee). Precisely, the time to elaborate and consider sexual abuse as such is subjective (Interviewee).

Through this, not only does the religious institution protect itself from prosecution but does not put the victim in a condition to be assisted and helped (Interviewee). When the accusations of abuse surface, the victim is unable to be supported in a timestamp close to the actual abuse. This is a consequence of the extended period between the abuse and the actual accomplishment of justice. The interlocutor clarifies: “This conspiracy of silence, this lack of denunciation, in some way, prevents the victim from receiving help”. Therefore, the victims, predominantly children, are unable to elaborate on their trauma immediately, which can lead to a disrupted life and imperfect emotional regulation (Interviewee).

Correlated to this is the community reactions exposed in section 5.1, the stigmatisation of those who denounce abuse interferes with the support available. Particularly, Catholics tend to side with the perpetrator, as they believe the facade that the Church proposes to them. Therefore, the scepticism towards the association’s data and the accusations of the victims increases the chances of not coming forward (Interviewee; Pope & Geske, 2019). What happens is that “people

who suffered such a violent trauma, they are not even publicly supported after finding the huge courage to come forward” (Interviewee). Additionally, those who find the courage usually refer to the Church support systems, whose plan is usually to move the abuser to another dioceses or structures, typically denominated ‘communities for priests in difficulty’ (Interviewee). These are owned by the Church within its jurisdiction. Therefore the acts do not get reported to law enforcement and the accused are able to leave as they wish, considering the lack of check-ups (Interviewee). Consequently, the safeguarding of further victims is absent, and the perpetrators are not prosecuted, educated, or rehabilitated.

In conclusion, after discussing the findings and comparing the information and data gathered to the literature investigated in the literature review, focusing on the objectives delineated in section 1.1, i.e. public awareness, media coverage, and support available, it is evident that the Italian situation concerning CSA is problematic and necessitates radical changes. Precisely, even though the population appears aware of the extent of CSA and majorly considers it an issue, it is unable to demand change as the ruling class neglects and silences the accusations. Moreover, it strictly collaborates with the Church’s efforts to cover up the abuses, favoured by the current political situation and agenda, and the extent of clericalism within its institution. Concerning the media coverage, the absence of reports in mainstream news outlets does not inform the public about the ongoing issue, and therefore it is unable to create a reaction and a demand for change. It has been illustrated that in other Countries, the increase in reports, especially in traditional media, challenged the government to mandate inquiries. However, the Italian hegemony of the print is closely correlated with politics and, therefore, does not attempt to question its main funders. This also explains why social media is more trusted, as it does not follow a

certain agenda and it is more prone to report. Lastly, the extent of the support available to victims is extremely limited by the government's acknowledgement, as its collaboration with criminals and aid in cover-ups hinder victims from accessing the services and elaborate trauma.

6. Conclusion

As the last section of this dissertation, the research methods, data, and information exposed in the previous chapters will be synthesised in correlation with the study's aims and objectives. Firstly, it will expose how this dissertation filled the gaps in the literature by achieving its aims and objectives. Subsequently, this section will investigate the study's limitations. Moreover, recommendations for further research will be proposed. Lastly, the final points will be summarised.

6.1 Fulfilment of aims and objectives.

First and foremost, the innovative approach to Italian CSA abuse, i.e. survey directed to the population, and an interview with an association, generated promising results. As explained in section 1 and 2.3, Italian research is mainly focused on recounting the experiences of victims. However important, public attitudes and the extent of mediatic coverage were not considered in the literature in this geographical area. Therefore, this study aimed to fill these gaps, employing both a survey destined for the population to analyse awareness, knowledge, and mediatic consumption. Moreover, the adoption of an interview with a CSA survivor-based served to gather insightful data on victim support, Italian politics, and issues surrounding Italian media.

Through the survey, it was then evident how the majority of Italians, predominantly youth, are aware of these sexual abuses being preeminent in their home Country and consider them a problem. However, the interview exposed how Catholic beliefs appear as a tendency to perpetrate the Church abuses, through stigmatisation, discrimination, and victim-blaming towards those who come forward. Consequently, it was valuable to understand the shift between the two different opinions. Precisely, intertwining religion and age with the conception of CSA in Italy suggested an elder

and Catholic inclination towards ignorance in considering it a problem in Italy.

Therefore, the public attitude fluctuates depending on age, religion, and socio-cultural surroundings.

Moreover, media coverage was ground-breaking in correlation to the surfacing of CSA. The impact the instances of the Boston Globe, Father Gauthier, and Brendan Smyth had on denunciation is widely discussed in literature. However, the Italian mediatic interest in the issue was not included in current literature reports. Therefore, the primary data gathered exposed the inexistent coverage in mainstream media and the predominant one on social media, which are extensively more trusted. As explained in section 5.1.1, right-wing politics collaborates with the clerical cover-ups, aiming to maintain the population ignorant of the issue, especially the Catholics. As most newspapers are owned by politicians, this explains that those who mostly trust traditional media are also more prone to consider CSA not a problem in Italy.

Nevertheless, when traditional media challenges the politics of a State, they can force the government to take action, as happened in Spain and Ireland. Therefore, the second objective of this dissertation was accomplished by discovering the lack of media coverage, especially in traditional media, which leads to a distorted understanding of the extent of CSA in Italy by the public.

Lastly, strictly correlated to the collaboration between government and Church institutions is the limited support given to the victims. With a State complicit with criminal acts, i.e. CSA, the path to justice for victims is tedious. Especially for the lack of laws, the repercussions of their accusations, and the absence of immediate support. The continuous cover-ups, in fact, impede the victim from being aided in a period close to the abuse.

Therefore, combining the limited media representation, the inability of the population to ask for change through the main news outlets, as they do not challenge the status quo as it is their main financial income, and the ongoing hindered collaboration between the State and Church results in a convoluted process to comprehend CSA as a known, relevant, and threatening crime happening in Italy. With an unceasing coverage, i.e. what made other States aware of the abuses and led them to convict and make national government-mandated inquiries about it, a politic of silence, and an absent demand of change, CSA in the peninsula is determined to be covered up by authorities, generating more victims unable to recover and find justice.

6.2 Limitations

The lack of peer-reviewed academic journals based on the Italian situation represents a pivotal limitation in the accomplishment of this study, as the information and data are minimal. Therefore, this dissertation attempted to fill the gaps, however, it had to mainly compare the results to other Countries. Moreover, the lack of previous theoretical approaches led to an absent basis on which to base, analyse, and compare the present study.

Additionally, the presence of a singular support association on the Italian territory narrows the amount of information the volunteers were able to gather. Precisely, the lack of a wider communication network through several agencies results in information not being readily available, especially in a geographically extended area such as Italy.

6.3 Recommendations

In order to accomplish the conception of CSA as a relevant crime occurring in Italy, it is fundamental to increase the media coverage of it. As this was explained as the main breakthrough in other Countries, the print and traditional media are at the

base of a change in policy and possible government-mandate inquiries. In addition, governmental acknowledgement is fundamental, as the cooperation with Church cover-ups led to a politic of silence on the topic, aiming to keep the public ignorant. Therefore, the power of the ruling class is fundamental to take into account when researching CSA on the Italian territory.

In conclusion, this paper highlighted the interconnection between politics, media, and public awareness on CSA, and found how the first two can manipulate the third. It is therefore necessary to implement the aforementioned sections and take them into consideration when researching this topic. The hegemony of media is strictly correlated with the fluctuation of public attitudes towards these crimes. Notably, the internal politics of Italy are intertwined with what gets published in traditional newspapers and media, which also influence the population's opinion. Therefore, in order to achieve transparency on the current extent of CSA in the Italian peninsula, it is imperative to reform the interaction between ruling elites and media monopoly. By implementing that, the population will be able to form its own opinion and consider CSA a threatening problem in its home Country.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Ethical Approval

Approval Section - completed by the SCCJ Ethics Committee	
Date reviewed: 15/11/2023	
Reviewed by: David Shepherd	
SCCJ EC Ethical Opinion Outcome Record	
<p>Ethical approval - favourable ethical opinion</p> <p>You can commence data collection with the agreement of your supervisor.</p>	X
<p>Conditional ethical approval - provisional favourable ethical opinion subject to requirements.</p> <p>The 'Comments' section below sets out conditional requirements, the actions you must take before you start collecting data.</p> <p>Once your supervisor is satisfied that you have met these requirements, you may commence data collection <u>with their agreement</u>.</p>	
<p>Not approved - a favourable ethical opinion cannot be provided for the proposal in its present form.</p> <p>You must not commence data collection.</p> <p>The 'Comments' section below will advise you what needs to be addressed.</p> <p>You must revise your proposal in consultation with your supervisor. Once your supervisor is satisfied that you have addressed all of the comments below, you may resubmit for ethical opinion.</p>	
Ethics Committee Comments	
<p>Barbara,</p> <p>Thank you for your ethics submission. I am providing you with a provisional favourable ethical opinion. Once your supervisor is satisfied that you have met these requirements, you may commence data collection with their agreement. You do not need to resubmit to the Ethics Committee. There is just one condition:</p> <p>1. Approval for the interview is contingent on obtaining permission from Rete L'Abuso.</p> <p>Please note the ethics reference (1196) at the top of the form.</p>	

Good luck with your research.

David Shepherd

Appendix 2. Interview Questions

- INTRODUCTION
 - presentation
 - What association are you?
 - What are the objectives of the association?
- What's the problem? Is it a problem?
 - How widespread is it?
 - Americas, Europe, globally, Italy
- What are the circumstances surrounding these crimes?
- How do you collect your data?
- How do the Church and its employees react to your research?
- *Media coverage*: what is reported, how, and which are most focused on reporting these crimes (mainstream or social media)
 - With the increase in media coverage, can concrete changes be achieved?
- Are you aware of other problems concerning these crimes and the Church?

Appendix 3. Survey questions

- Demographic questions
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Provenance
 - Religion
- Attitude questions (Likert scale)
 - "I believe that CSA is prevalent in Europe".
 - "I believe that CSA is prevalent worldwide".
 - "I believe that CSA is more prevalent in the USA than Europe".
 - "I believe that CSA is more prevalent in Europe than Italy".
 - "I believe that CSA is not a problem in Italy".
- Media coverage questions (Likert scale)
 - "I see these cases represented in mainstream media".
 - "I believe these cases are often represented in mainstream media".
 - "If yes, in which ones is it most represented?"
 - "I believe these cases are often represented on social media".
 - "If yes, on which ones is it most represented?"
 - "Do you find mainstream media or social media more trustworthy?"