News



Faithful attend the Sunday Mass in Einsiedeln, Switzerland, Sunday, 31 May 2020. A sweeping year-long study of sex abuse by priests and others within the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland published Tuesday has turned up more than 1,000 cases since the mid-20th century, involving 510 people accused of misconduct and over 900 victims affected. (Urs Flueeler/Keystone via AP, File)

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A sweeping, year-long study of sex abuse by Catholic priests and others in Switzerland published Sept. 12 has turned up more than 1,000 cases since the mid-20th century, as the Swiss church becomes the latest in Europe to reckon with the abuse scandal.

With few exceptions, those accused of wrongdoing were all male. Nearly three-fourths of the documents examined showed the sexual abuse involved minors.

The report, commissioned by the Swiss Conference of Bishops and led by two University of Zurich historians, offers a deep look at sexual abuse and harassment that has confounded the Catholic Church across the globe in recent decades — upending the lives of many victims and their families, and tarnishing the image of the institution.

The authors said in a statement that they identified 1,002 "situations of sexual abuse," including accusations against 510 people. The abuse, they wrote, affected 921 people.

"The situations identified surely amount to only the tip of the iceberg," said the historians Monika Dommann and Marietta Meier in a statement.

Among other findings, which were admittedly not exhaustive, over half — 56% — of the cases of sexual abuse involved men or boys. Some 39% of victims were women or girls, while sourcing did not allow for the remaining 5% percent to be identified by gender, according to the study.

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The researchers pored over thousands of pages of secret documents, assembled by church authorities since the mid-20th century. But they said many sources of information haven't been fully studied. They cited some cases where documents were destroyed to cover up any alleged wrongdoing.

The study reported that abuse happened across the country. More than half of the cases took place during pastoral care and about 30% occurred in places like schools, homes and boarding schools. Some incidents took place during confessions or consultations. The researchers found many cases were "concealed, covered up or downplayed."

"Church officials routinely transferred accused and convicted clerics, sometimes even abroad, in an effort to avoid secular criminal prosecution and secure reassignment for clerics," they wrote. "In doing so, the interests of the Catholic Church and its leaders were placed before the well-being and protection of parishioners."

The report marks the latest attempt by a national bishops' conference to provide a historic reckoning of abuse that the hierarchy has known about for decades but rarely took action to sanction.

In recent years, such national reports in places like Germany and France have prompted demands for restitution for victims and fueled calls for the bishops, cardinals and religious superiors who covered up the abuse to be punished.

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