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Media 'panic' over pedophilia mars prevention

by Carol Glatz by Catholic News Service

ROME -- A lack of expert opinion in media coverage of the clerical sex abuse scandal has led to a climate of "moral panic," which does nothing to help people understand the tragedy of abuse or keep children safe, said an influential Jesuit journal.

By presenting existing problems as being brand new and not providing accurate statistics, media outlets have helped create a sense of alarmism, and the resulting "moral panic doesn't help anybody," said *La Civiltà Cattolica*.

The media "distort people's awareness of the problem and compromise the effectiveness of measures meant to solve it," the journal said.

The May 15 article, released to journalists May 14, was a follow-up to a May 1 article examining the social and psychological characteristics of sex offenders. The Rome-based biweekly magazine is reviewed by the Vatican Secretariat of State before publication.

The article, titled "Fighting the Culture of Pedophilia," was written by Jesuit Fathers Giovanni Cucci, a professor of ethics, and Hans Zollner, a licensed psychologist and psychotherapist.

The authors lamented what they called "a strange silence" in the media regarding expert commentary on the crisis in newspaper articles, talk shows and television programs.

However, there has been an abundance of hearsay and commentary by "unqualified people," the article said.

The problem of diagnosing pedophilia and determining effective therapies is very problematic, and still needs more study and research, it said.

The psychological state of pedophiles seems to be increasingly pernicious and worrisome, it said.

Sex offenders "do not recognize there is a problem, they are very resistant to therapy, most of all they seem to not be aware of the seriousness of their acts, and their painful situation often ends in suicide," it said.

One of the driving forces behind perversions and abusive behavior such as pedophilia is extreme narcissism, it said.

Clinical studies have shown many pedophiles suffer from "a pathological narcissistic personality ... and sexual activity with prepubescent children can boost the fragile self-esteem of the pedophile," it said. It also cited a study that found an abnormal attraction to weaker creatures also reflects a need to feel powerful.

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Because pedophilia is a mental disorder thought to be linked to forms of brain damage and stunted neurological development, the problem cannot be solved by punishment alone, it said.

The current cultural climate of permissiveness and extreme liberalism, especially seen with groups seeking to legitimize or legalize pedophilia, for example, in Holland, Germany and Italy, also contribute to the problem, it said.

To truly address the scandal of pedophilia and other perversions, people need to combat a skewed sense of liberty and civil rights, which seek to legitimize many unethical and immoral behaviors, it said.

"A merely penal-judicial approach (to pedophilia) ends up being useless and ineffective if the courage is not found to confront" the problem's ethical and cultural roots, it said.

"Pedophilia is a perversion and, in order to be recognized as such and fought, the recognition of ethical and psychological norms" is necessary, it said.

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