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To cite this article: Sara Zalcborg (2017) The Place of Culture and Religion in Patterns of Disclosure and Reporting Sexual Abuse of Males: A Case Study of Ultra Orthodox Male Victims, Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 26:5, 590-607, DOI: [10.1080/10538712.2017.1316335](https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2017.1316335)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2017.1316335>



Published online: 11 Jul 2017.



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The Place of Culture and Religion in Patterns of Disclosure and Reporting Sexual Abuse of Males: A Case Study of Ultra Orthodox Male Victims

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with reporting patterns of sexual abuse in males in a religious-cultural context through a case study of ultra-Orthodox Jewish (Haredi) men who were young victims of sexual abuse. The study is based on in-depth interviews with 40 Haredi men. The results indicate that sexual abuse involving ultra-Orthodox boys was and is underreported. Moreover, the results indicate that even when such incidents were reported, the avenues for disclosure were parents, educational-religious figures, and friends. It was also found that silencing in matters related to sexuality, viewing sexual abuse in boys as a serious sin and taboo, and encouraging blind obedience—all of which characterize Haredi society—were factors in the underreporting. The results also show a strong tendency to cover up incidents of sexual abuse on an individual level, on a family level, and at the community level. The findings indicate a linkage between the religious and cultural background of male victims of sexual abuse and their reporting patterns.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 February 2016
Revised 13 February 2017
Accepted 21 March 2017

KEYWORDS

collective denial; male victims; religious context; reporting patterns; sexual abuse; sexual prohibitions; taboo; ultra-Orthodox

One of the central issues in the discussion of sexual violence focuses on the victim's disclosure of the abuse (Bunting, 2014; London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005; Tener & Murphy, 2014). Professional literature places great importance on disclosure for its significant effect on the victims' ability to cope with the abuse—with fewer negative psychological symptoms and with symptoms that are more likely to be ameliorated, for the therapeutic value of the co-survivor for the victim and his major support, for preventing victimization, and for estimating the prevalence and seriousness of the phenomenon (Hébert, Tourigny, Cyr, McDuff, & Joly, 2009; Nofziger & Stein, 2006; Roberts, Watlington, Nett, Herbert, & Batten, 2010).

Despite the great importance attached to disclosure of sexual abuse, many victims report the sexual abuse only years after it has occurred or do not report at all (Smith, et al.; Ullman, 2007). Several variables affect the willingness of a victim to disclose an episode of sexual abuse. One of the dominant factors is the gender of the victim: underreporting of sexual

abuse is far more prominent among male victims (Hébert et al., 2009; McLean, 2013; Ullman, & Filipas, 2005). Priebe and Svedin (2008) found that whereas 81% of female victims reported sexual abuse, only 69% of males ever disclosed it. These gender differences are a consequence of both the widely held myths and stereotypes regarding male victims, which deter them from reporting, and the beliefs of men themselves who may view abuse as a reflection of personal weakness and a lack of masculinity (Doherty & Anderson, 2004; McLean, 2013; Sable, Danis, Mauzy, & Gallagher, 2006).

Other variables likely to influence reporting are the religious and cultural background of the victim. Specific culturally dominant values and characteristics may affect the disclosure patterns (Fontes, & Plummer, 2010). In closed cultures characterized by religious fundamentalism, strong religious prohibitions regarding sexuality, isolation from mainstream society, and taboos that may deter discussion of certain issues or contribute to silencing, victims are less likely to disclose incidents of sexual abuse (Fontes, 2005, 2007; Shoham, 2012; Szwarcberg & Somer, 2004).

Despite the great importance of reporting sexual abuse and the awareness of the underreporting on the part of male victims as well as the significance of the religious and cultural background of the victim in reporting patterns, with the exception of the well-studied phenomenon of victims of the Catholic clergy after years of cover-up (Isely, Isely, Freiburgerc, & McMackindef, 2008; McMackin, Keane, & Kline, 2008; Plante, 2004), very little research has been done on reporting patterns of male victims in the context of specific religious-cultural backgrounds. This article is designed to contribute to closing this gap by examining reporting patterns of males in a religious-cultural context: a case study of the reporting patterns of ultra-Orthodox Jewish (henceforth, Haredi) men who were sexually abused. This group was selected because of its religious fundamentalism, isolation, and silencing (Stadler, 2008) and because of its rigid religious prohibitions regarding sexuality and strong social control (Zalcborg & Zalcborg, 2012)—characteristics that have been identified with underreporting.

There is a tendency among Haredim to silence any discourse related to sexuality in general and to sexual violence particularly when it involves men since this particular abuse involves a religious taboo, a strong religious condemnation of homosexual relations (Bedihi, 2008; Zalcborg & Zalcborg, 2012). In recent years Neustein (2009) and Neustein and Lesher (2009, 2012) related in their papers to the phenomenon of sexual exploitation of boys by religious and educational figures—rabbis and teachers—among various streams of religious Jews and among Haredim in North America. These studies emphasized the tendency to cover up incidences of sexual exploitation and stressed the importance of disclosure.

The few articles published on sexual abuse among Haredi males in Israel (for example Bedihi, 2008; Ben Meir & Levavi, 2010) have focused on the

uniqueness of this violence and the complexity and importance of disclosure but are not based on research. The current study will analyze the reporting patterns of Israeli Haredi males who experienced sexual abuse and recognized it as such.

Haredi society in Israel: Characteristics and description

Haredi society is a minority culture in Israel and within Jewish society in general. It comprises several main groups that share a commitment to Torah study and follow a strict interpretation of Jewish religious law (*halakha*) (Friedman, 1991.) Many maintain anti-Zionist attitudes toward the existence of the State of Israel (Friedman, 1991). For many years, Haredi society chose to remain isolated from modernity and the secular world. More recently, however, there has been more openness to modernity and secular society among more mainstream Haredim (Caplan & Stadler, 2012).

Haredi society maintains its own educational systems, with separate schools for boys and girls. In Israel, most of the girls attend schools that are part of the *Beit-Ya'acov* system (Friedman, 1995), and most of the boys study in *talmudei torah* (elementary schools that focus on religious studies), until adolescence when they attend *yeshivas*. The *yeshiva* remains the central framework for study and socializing of Haredi boys and men until their marriage (Stadler, 2008). Most of the learning focuses on the Talmud (Oral Law), which is studied with a *hevruta*, a study partner (Stadler, 2008). When Haredi men marry, they usually attend a *kollel*, a *yeshiva* that pays them a monthly stipend (Friedman, 1995). This educational pattern reflects “a society of learners”—Haredi men dedicate themselves to Torah learning throughout their lives while their wives assume responsibility for child care and supporting the family (Friedman, 1995).

Throughout their lives, Haredim rely on the authority of rabbis in matters relating to religious law and in managing their everyday affairs (Caplan & Stadler, 2009). Haredi culture encourages external sources of authority and obedience (Goodman, 2013). In keeping with that, Haredi society uses strict control mechanisms in every area of life, particularly in matters concerned with sexuality (Zalcberg & Zalcberg, 2012). Like other Orthodox Jews, Haredim believe that sexual relationships should be restricted to married couples in accordance with Jewish law, as specified in the laws of *Nidda* (family purity) and *Isurey-Arayot* (prohibitions against incest) (Knohl, 2008). These laws forbid “spilling the seed in vain” (Pachter, 2006), masturbation, and homosexual relations, which is considered a very severe sin (Steinberg, 1994). Considering this, Haredi society views homosexual acts as well as any sexual relationship out of wedlock as transgressions, and control mechanisms are utilized to prevent them. These measures include strict separation of the sexes, numerous restrictions and prohibitions concerning the body, strict

norms of modesty, early marriages arranged by matchmakers, and avoidance of any discussion relating to sexuality (Zalcborg & Zalcborg, 2012). Despite the strong restrictions on sexuality or perhaps as a result, harmful sexual behavior exists in masculine Haredi society (Bedihi, 2008; Ben Meir, & Levavi, 2010; Zalcborg, 2013, 2015a). Although many studies on Haredi society in Israel have appeared in recent years (Ben Yehuda, 2010; Caplan & Stadler, 2009, 2012; Hakak, 2012; Shechory Bitton, 2014), there has been little research concerning sexual violence among boys in Haredi society and the reporting patterns of such abuse.

Methodology

The findings presented in this article are based on an extensive study conducted on sexual assault among male victims from Haredi backgrounds as part of a doctoral dissertation in sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Haredi society includes both Ashkenazim, Jews whose origins are in Central and Eastern Europe who comprise the mainstream, authentic Haredi public, and Sephardim, whose origins are from Islamic countries (Siebzehner, & Lehmann, 2012). The population selected for this study comprised men from the entire spectrum of Ashkenazi Haredi groups who experienced sexual abuse ranging from sexual harassment involving indecent acts—“an act for sexual stimulation, satisfaction, or humiliation” (the Israeli Penal Code of 1977 [section 348:6])—to rape. According to the Israeli Penal Code of 1977 (Section 345:A), rape is defined as a sexual offense against women, whereas sodomy, for which the punishment is the same, is not gender-specific (Section 347). This definition of sexual abuse is based on that of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel (2012).

The characteristics relevant to this study—the stringencies concerning body and sexuality—are more evident among Ashkenazi Haredi groups than among Sephardi Haredim (Zalcborg, 2013), so the latter group were not included in the research population. The minimal age of this population was 18. The study was conducted using “convenience sampling” (Wint, Boxil, & Chambers, 2000), that is, approaching potential subjects in the most feasible way. Three methods were used to find suitable subjects: the “snowball effect”—interviewees referred to me by other interviewees and by my acquaintances, direct contact with Haredi men whom I met randomly, and responses to ads on bulletin boards and on Haredi websites calling on Haredi men to participate in the study. The ads specified only that the study involves Haredi men without mentioning the specific topic of the research.¹

The process produced a sample that included 40 men who had been sexually abused, mainly by acquaintances who were educational figures or religious leaders, such as rabbis and teachers, by friends from their peer group, and by older friends from the *yeshiva* or the neighborhood (Zalcborg,

2015b). The age range of the subjects was from 18 to 44 years old. Mean age was 29. Half of the sample was reportedly married and reported having families. More than half of the sample worked in education, sales, marketing, business, Kashrut supervision, and as ritual scribes. The remaining sample studied in *yeshivas* and *kollels*.

Data were obtained through in-depth interviews (Healey-Etten, & Sharp, 2010), which make it possible to learn firsthand about the subjects' experiences from their perspectives. Interviewees were asked to relate to different aspects of the sexual abuse they experienced and if they had ever disclosed the abuse, and, if so, when, to whom, and why. They were also questioned about the reactions of people to whom the disclosure was made and their thoughts and feelings during and following the disclosure. If the interviewee had not disclosed the abuse, he was asked to explain the reasons.

To put the interviewees at ease, the interviewer asked them to choose the location for their meeting. Most of them had no preference, so interviewer suggested the lobby of a modest hotel in the center of Jerusalem. This venue was chosen, rather than conducting the interviews in ultra-Orthodox areas, because the interviewees would not wish people from the community to see them speaking with the interviewer, and non-ultra-Orthodox locations might have been uncomfortable for them as well. Furthermore, some of the interviewees observe the prohibition of *yihud*—seclusion with a person of the opposite sex to whom one is not married—and as hotel lobbies are open spaces the issue does not arise. Many young ultra-Orthodox men meet potential brides in hotel lobbies, so it seems they are viewed as legitimate meeting places. Most interviewees accepted my suggestion and agreed to have the interviews in hotel lobbies. Interviews at the hotel took place in an isolated, quiet corner of a spacious lobby, which ensured as much privacy as feasible in a public location. The interviews were recorded and documented in writing with the approval of the interviewees. According to the ethical standards set forth by the American Psychological Association (2002), the privacy of the interviewees was maintained, and thus all interviewee names used are pseudonyms.

Despite the sensitivity of the topic and the difficulty of sharing memories of sexual abuse with a stranger, and especially a woman, as was the case with the interviewer in this study, it seems that these factors contributed to the willingness of these men to talk to me (Zalberg, 2015b). In their perspective, as an outsider, the interviewer could not harm their social status within their communities, which made it easier for them to open and share their experiences. Moreover, during the interview it seems as though the men saw an opportunity to talk to a nonjudgmental, sympathetic listener, to ask questions and receive honest answers, and get emotional support and help (Zalberg, 2015b). For example, one of the interviewees noted at the end of our conversation, “I already feel better” (personal communication, June

2010). When interviewees clearly needed or asked for professional intervention, they were referred to appropriate professionals.

The study used the qualitative paradigm, eliciting information about the world as viewed by the interviewees, thus providing insight into their experiences and their conceptual world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). All personal experiences of the interviewees are reported in their own words. The analysis was based on grounded theory development (Holton & Walsh, 2016), which is appropriate for studies with a general research question, and no hypotheses to prove or disprove, as is the case in this study. The analysis consists of two levels: The first is a general thematic analysis, looking for major themes and patterns in the interviews, while the second consists of finding the meanings underlying the more obvious ideas in the data as well as the meanings of the first-level categories.

Findings

The majority of interviewees (65%) did not report the sexual abuse they had experienced until this interview. This is consistent with other research findings that illustrate victim's tendency to underreporting (London et al., 2005; Lyon, 2002; Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, & Grossman, 2008). Some did not report the incident since they were not aware that the sexual interaction they had experienced was abuse. For example, Moshe, one of the interviewees, said, "I had no idea what he wanted from me" (personal communication, April 2008). Among those who did understand that these were acts of sexual abuse, the majority did not disclose them. A small minority of the interviewees disclosed the sexual abuse immediately, primarily to their parents, or to religious or educational figures: rabbis, *mashgihim* (spiritual supervisors that responsible for the moral behavior of the children), and teachers, or even to friends. Most of the interviewees who said that they had reported the abuse did so years after the abuse had occurred.

Avoiding disclosure immediately after the abuse

Avoiding disclosure to family members

Most of the interviewees did not disclose the abuse to any adults, including family members, immediately or shortly after it occurred (Table 1). Arye, one of the interviewees, explained that the abuse he experienced was and still is a subject that cannot be discussed, especially with his family: "Heaven forbid! It is unacceptable! It is taboo!" (personal communication, January 2007). Natan, another interviewee, explained that he avoided discussing the abuse with his parents because of the atmosphere of secrecy pervasive in Haredi society: "In the Haredi world, life is one big secret, a

Table 1. Reports Made Immediately Following the Abuse²

To whom the report was made	Number of interviewees who were forced to report		Number of interviewees who reported on their own		Total
	Some episodes	All episodes	Some episodes	All episodes	
Fathers only or both parents	1	0	0	3	4
Mother only	1	0	1	2	4
Total—parents	2	0	1	5	8
Educational-religious authority figures	3	0	3	1	7
Friends	0	0	1	1	2

great deal is concealed. My mouth was automatically sealed” (personal communication, May 2009).

Another reason many interviewees did not disclose the abuse to their parents is a sense of detachment that pervades their relationship with their parents, which prevents them from sharing personal topics, especially anything related to sex or sexuality. Isaac explained, “To speak about these things is viewed as profanity. And this is why I was afraid to tell my father. I thought if I would have spoken about this he would have beaten me” (personal communication, August 2007). Interviewees who reported closer relationships with their parents indicated that they would not discuss this type of problem with them. As Shlomo put it, “Because of embarrassment—emanating from feelings of shame and guilt—I would not discuss the abuse” (personal communication, April 2008). Shlomo explained that, despite the warm and caring relationship between he and his parents, he avoided involving them because, “I thought they would think I am a pervert and would blame me” (personal communication, April 2008).

Other interviewees said that they avoided involving their parents in order not to upset them, and they did not believe that involving them would be advantageous in any way. Natan said, “I did not want to hurt them, and I knew that it would not help” (personal communication, May 2009). Another reason for not disclosing abuse to parents was the fear of the reaction of the perpetrator. Eli explained:

I did not say anything to my parents because the perpetrator threatened that if I told anyone, he would tell everyone in the *yeshiva* what he did to me—which would be a serious threat to the life of a *yeshiva* student! (personal communication, November 2008)

Some interviewees were critical of their parents, whom they believed might have actually known what had happened but chose to ignore it. Shuki, for example, said, “I imagine that they knew,” since “father often went to the *mikveh* (ritual bath), which was known as a place where youngsters are abused” (personal communication, February 2008).

Avoiding disclosure to educational-religious figures

Most of the interviewees did not disclose the sexual abuse they had experienced to educational-religious figures despite the fact that such figures are considered influential and viewed as an acceptable avenue for individuals in distress in the Haredi community. Some of the interviewees considered disclosure to be a form of slander, and, as Shali said, “I had no desire to gossip.” Others predicted that these people would not help them in their distress. Arye revealed that he tried to involve the spiritual supervisor and the *Rebbe* after his first experience of sexual abuse, but neither of them took his distress seriously, “So I lost faith in them” (personal communication, January 2007). Natan, who was abused by his teacher in the *Talmud Torah*, explained, “I knew that at best, the principal of the *Talmud Torah* would do nothing, and at worst, he would beat me or tell my father that I can’t stay there” (personal communication, May 2009).

Other interviewees avoided reporting their experience to educational-religious figures because they believed it would lead to exposure and would harm their social image. Yehiel explained, “Things like this lower one’s status in the eyes of others” (personal communication, June 2009). Another reason some interviewees avoided reporting the abuse, similar to their explanation for avoiding disclosure to family members, was their perception that the topic was taboo in a culture of secrecy.

Divulging shortly after the incident

Divulging to family members and how they dealt with it

Despite the reluctance of the interviewees to revealing their experiences, a few did divulge the abuse to their parents at their own initiative immediately or shortly after the episode. The majority (Table 1) told their mothers, with whom they felt closer. Rafi, who was brutally raped, said:

Out of fear, a few weeks afterwards, I told my mother. When she heard about it, she was very upset and burst into tears. Since the rape, she always checks up on me to see if I am all right, and only allows me to leave the house for short periods. (personal communication, March 2008)

Daniel said that after he became a victim of sexual assaults he immediately told his parents and his father rushed to “take care of the person” (personal communication, February 2008).

Three other interviewees indicated that their parents learned about the incidents although they had not told them. Yaakov, who was abused by a well-known figure in the community, did not tell his parents. However, at a certain point his parents understood. Yaakov said, “My father shouted at me. He said, ‘I warn you not to associate with that man, and if I ever find out that

you meet him—the next time I will punish you” (personal communication, February 2007). Yaakov emphasized:

All of the warnings and threats were directed against me. My parents totally ignored any possible consequences the sexual abuse had on me. N-E-V-E-R did they try to understand how much he hurt me, and they never opened the discussion. It was as if it never happened! (personal communication, February 2007)

Some of the interviewees were forced to reveal their experiences. For example, Benny said that his mother met him on the way home right after he had been sexually abused.

My mother saw that I was very upset and kept asking me what had happened. She did not give up until I had no choice and told her. She told my father and they both were very angry and blamed me. (personal communication, September 2007)

Rafi’s mother reported the assault to the police, which is not commonly done in Haredi society, where people avoid approaching authorities outside the community with sensitive issues (Friedman, 2006; Neustein & Leshner, 2009, 2012). One could understand the mother’s response since the attack against Rafi was extremely violent, life-threatening, and the perpetrator was from outside the community.

It appears that some of the victims’ parents expressed grief and pain, others tried to calm their sons, some tried to determine the identity of the perpetrator and see to it that he was punished, and others increased their supervision and efforts to protect their children. However, there were also parents who found fault with the victim: they blamed the attack on their victimized son and totally ignored his emotional state.

Disclosure to educational-religious figures shortly after the abuse

There were boys who decided to report the abuse to educational-religious figures whom they perceived as the first avenue for their distress (Table 1). Arye said that against his expectations, when he turned to the spiritual supervisor for support and advice, he reacted in the following way:

[He] did not relate to me personally, [but] only said that religion forbids doing these things and he sent me to the *Rebbe*, who, to my shock, did not relate to my distress at all—only to the religious prohibitions involved. (personal communication, January 2007)

Similarly, other interviewees said that they did not get any support from educational or religious figures when they told them about the abuse. More than that, some of the interviewees added that these same individuals blamed them, the victims. Yosef, for example, said that after he fell victim to sexual abuse “they expelled me from the *yeshiva*, claiming that I was a sexual object” (personal communication, June 2007). Menachem also said that the *yeshiva* suspended him for a week and expelled the boy who abused him. “What did I

do? They claimed that I should have run away” (personal communication, February 2008).

It seems that the main reaction of the educational and religious figures to the complaints focused on the religious perspective of sexual abuse, ignoring the distress of the victim as well as the problem of the perpetrator of the abuse. However, in some institutions, the perpetrators were reprimanded and even suspended temporarily. In two of the institutions, the pattern of “blaming the victim” was predominant, as was the case among parents who found out about the abuse their children experienced.

Involving friends shortly after the abuse

A few interviewees indicated that they told friends right after the abuse or shortly thereafter (Table 1). They saw the friend as a possible source of support and empathy. Avrum, for example, said, “I told a friend who calmed me down and removed all feelings of guilt on my part” (personal communication, February 2008). This finding is consistent with the literature that relates to the therapeutic significance of immediate disclosure and considers it an essential element in rehabilitation and recovery as long as it includes empathy (Hébert et al., 2009; Szwarcberg & Somer, 2004). However, the fact that only a few interviewees involved a friend shortly after the abuse speaks for itself and demonstrates the great difficulty of disclosure even to close friends.

Delayed report: Involving others years after the abuse

Most of those interviewed, as in other studies, avoided involving others in the secret of the abuse just after it had occurred (Herbert et al., 2009; Ullman, 2007). A significant number, however, did disclose the abuse well after it had occurred but only indirectly. Even when 10 to 20 years had elapsed, the interviewees found it difficult to disclose the episode.

Some of the interviewees told their siblings years after the abuse. Sroluk, for example, said that only years afterward did he dare to ask his brother if “he had ever experienced ‘immoral acts’ as a child and he told me that he had” (personal communication, June 2007).

Some of the interviewees hinted to their parent’s years later, because they did not want to cause their parents anguish. David explained, “Why upset them? I hinted it, but I did not exactly tell them. I couldn’t tell my father, he would have had a heart attack” (personal communication, February 2007).

Among the married interviewees, most said that it would not even occur to them to tell their wives. As Josh said, “It would have caused my wife great distress and she would have respected me less; it would have harmed our relationship” (personal communication, December 2008). Only two interviewees told their wives about some of their experiences. Eli told his wife so that

she would be aware of the dangers to their children. He explained, “I told her what happens in *mikvehs*, and I told her my own story. She understood that I was not the only one” (personal communication, November 2008).

Some of the interviewees said that they could disclose the sexual abuse to friends later on, and they chose to do so instead of involving family members: “There are things that you can only say to friends,” Zalman said. The main reason for involving friends is the fact that gradually, some of the interviewees began to understand that their friends had experienced similar abuse. Some of the interviewees pointed out they got support from their friends, while others reported that they were criticized, as with Aharon, whose friend asked, “Why didn’t you run away? You did not behave properly” (personal communication, May 2008).

Despite the difficulty of divulging the abuse, some interviewees did so years after it had occurred, but others chose not to disclose the difficult abuse to anyone, even years later, until their meeting with me, and still found it difficult to speak about what had happened. Meir, for example, emphasized that “I never said a word about this; I couldn’t talk about it” (personal communication, September 2007).

Changes in the coping of Haredi society and the effects on patterns of reporting

Some of the interviewees noted recent changes in Haredi society regarding the issue of sexual abuse. Benny said that “in Haredi society today, parents are much more aware of the existence of sexual abuse and they speak about it more with their children” (personal communication, September 2007). Shlomo claimed that “in the past, teachers could do whatever they wanted, and children were afraid to tell their parents. Today the situation is better” (personal communication, April 2008).

According to the interviewees, the greater openness in Haredi society and its newfound willingness to cope with these issues facilitates discourse between young people and their parents; there is also a concomitant increase in rates of reporting sexual abuse by the victims and their families. Support for this can be seen in a comparison of the data appearing in *The State of the Child in Israel* 2005 and 2006 (Ben-Arieh, Zionit, & Kimchi, 2005, 2006) to that of 2010 (Zionit, Berman, & Ben-Arieh, 2010), which indicates a rise in the reporting of sexual abuse among children in Haredi community.

Avigdor related to the greater willingness of parents today to oppose harmful forces: “Teachers today are aware that nothing like this will pass quietly and that parents can protest” (personal communication, June 2008).

These changes demonstrate that changes that occur on the outside eventually occur within the Haredi world as well (Caplan & Stadler, 2009; Sivan & Caplan, 2003). The outside influences encourage discourse on matters related

to sexual abuse and bring about changes in coping and reporting patterns in the Haredi community.

Yitz, however, is convinced that Haredi society still suffers from a tendency to cover up such abuse. “I still know many people who touch youngsters and nothing happens to them. Everyone knows about it and no one dares breathe a word because they are considered respectable” (personal communication, June 2007).

Discussion and summary

The research findings show that most interviewees did not disclose the sexual abuse they experienced. They can be seen as “dark figures”—victims characterized by underreporting of abuse (Coleman & Moynihan, 1996). Some of the victims did not disclose their experience because they were unaware that what had transpired was sexual abuse. However, even those who understood that they had been sexually abused, for the most part did not reveal the experience either to their family, to educational-religious figures, or to friends for several reasons: They wanted to avoid what could be interpreted as gossip or slander, they worried about damaging their reputation and how educational-religious figures or their parents would react, they did not believe that their parents or educational-religious figures would be able to help, they wanted to spare their parents any distress, and they felt shame and embarrassment. These explanations might also apply to other societies but are more noteworthy given religious-cultural context of Haredi society—a cultural milieu that regards sexual abuse among men as a severe sin, a transgression even of the victims.

These reasons indicate a linkage between the underreporting of the interviewees and the religious-cultural elements endemic in Haredi society, characterized by a culture of silence, in which it is unacceptable to involve others with personal issues, especially in sexual matters (Friedman, 2006; Zalcborg, 2015a). An additional element in Haredi society that might also account for the underreporting is the tradition of showing respect for and obeying educational-religious figures. (Goodman, 2013; Caplan, & Stadler, 2009). Consequently, when a parent, teacher, or rabbi forbids the victim from discussing the topic, the victim usually obeys. These findings are consistent with the works of Schwartzberg and Zomer (2004) and Aronson and colleagues (2010), who suggest similar reasons for underreporting and emphasize the impact of cultural and religious elements on reporting patterns.

Most of the interviewees avoided involving their parents in the abuse. However, some of the interviewees indicated that although their parents were aware of the abuse, they chose to ignore the consequences and not to confront the perpetrators. At the same time, a number of the interviewees indicated that if their parents had been aware of what they had gone through,

they would have been extremely upset. This complicated picture can be explained by the collective mechanism of denial, which characterizes Haredi society. This mechanism is derived from collective efforts to ignore or to deny certain phenomena (Zerubavel, 2006), and it characterizes societies with a high degree of social control, to protect their members from exposure. Collective denial is extreme in Haredi society, with its attempts to silence and conceal personal matters, especially those related to sexual deviance (Friedman, 2006). Therefore, it is possible that parents who were aware of the abuse their children experienced perceived the involvement in issues of sexual abuse, including discussing the topic and finding suitable treatment, as a risk to the reputation of the family. The family's reputation is a crucial element in Haredi society, especially regarding parental responsibility for finding suitable marriage partners for their children (Friedman, 2006; Zalcberg Black, 2013). Families do everything possible to protect their reputation in the community even at the cost of not offering assistance in cases of sexual abuse.

This is consistent with the research of Neustein and Leshar (2002, 2012) on the systematic silencing of episodes of sexual abuse among Jewish communities in the United States. They concluded that one of the central factors responsible for silencing of such episodes is the fear of harming the reputation of communities and families, or, in the language of Haredi community, the *shandeh* (disgrace in Yiddish). Shoham (2012, p. 76) points out that “both leading figures in the communities and victims themselves prefer to sacrifice the individual incident to protect the standing and the image of the entire community.” This suggests an explanation for another finding: the silence of the educational-religious figures regarding sexual abuse and the resulting underreporting of victims to these individuals. Haredi society is characterized by a strong tendency to cover up incidents of sexual abuse on an individual level, on a family level, and at the communal level.

Except for one case, none of the interviewees considered reporting the abuse either to professionals or to law enforcement authorities outside the community. One plausible reason is the desire of Haredi society not to “wash its dirty laundry in public”—outside Haredi society—because of the lack of trust Haredi society has toward outside authorities (Goodman, 2013; Greenberg & Witztum, 2001). There may also be a lack of awareness of the existence of services available to help.

Current findings suggest both an increase in awareness in Haredi society regarding the existence of sexual abuse among their boys and attempts to cope with the problem. It will be interesting to investigate the effects of these changes on reporting patterns of such abuse in future research. In addition, further research examining the topic under discussion from a quantitative paradigm is recommended. It will provide data on the extent of disclosure to others and will contribute a comparative dimension to the analysis of

reporting patterns of men in Haredi society compared to the general society. The addition of a quantitative dimension is important, especially since the evolving relationship between interviewer and interviewee affects the interview process and colors the information that the researcher can derive from it, as may have happened in this study.

The results of this study suggest the need to examine the linkage between reporting patterns of sexual abuse among men and the cultural-religious characteristics of other communities in which sexual segregation and sexual prohibitions are found. It would be interesting to see whether there are similarities in reporting patterns of such communities—for example, in certain national religious Jewish communities, in some extreme Islamic cultures, and among certain fundamentalist Christian societies—and the reporting patterns that were found in this study.

Identifying the mechanisms and the patterns in the cultural-religious context of Haredi society indicate the need to increase awareness in parents and teachers regarding sexual abuse of their boys and young men and their resulting emotional distress. The findings also suggest the need for serious discourse focused on the importance of reporting and treating cases of sexual abuse. Moreover, we must realize that victims in these insular societies and their families are generally not aware of the existence of service centers or will not turn to them as they do not meet their special cultural/religious needs.

Understanding the reporting patterns may assist professionals in mapping the needs of Haredi victims of sexual abuse as well those of their parents and their communities in both that society and in other similar-type cultures. A better knowledge of those patterns may help promote culturally sensitive prevention and therapy systems that will accord with broader worldviews while preserving the values and dignity of these singular populations. In Haredi society, unlike girls, boys who are victims are seen as being somehow responsible for their involvement in the sexual attack, and they develop a sense of sinfulness that leads to deep feelings of guilt. Professionals must help victims to break free of these feelings, which come from religious perceptions. They must encourage the victims to open up and talk about their experiences while providing them with full legitimacy and support to express their feelings, even if those feelings are apparently in conflict with those internalized religious perceptions. Moreover, to improve the efficiency of the treatment, professionals should seek cooperation with educators and religious leaders and even involve them in the therapeutic process.

Notes

1. For more extensive information regarding finding subjects and collecting data, see Zalcberg (2015b).
2. It is important to point out that some of the interviewees reported the abuse to more than one individual.

Acknowledgments

This article is based in part on an article “The Silence of Males: Reporting and Under Reporting of Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Males Who Had Been Sexually Abused,” which appeared in In Y. Aviad-Wilchek and Y. Maze (Eds.), *Silent violence: Men as victims* (pp. 175-205). Ariel, West Bank: Ariel University Press [Heb]. This article is also based on my broader doctoral study of ultra-Orthodox men’s experiences as victims of sexual abuse, conducted under the supervision of Professor Nachman Ben-Yehuda of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Ben-Yehuda for his dedicated guidance. I would also like to thank several foundations for their support of my research: the Sigmund Freud Center for Study and Research in Psychoanalysis; the Levi Eshkol Institute for Social, Economic, and Political Research; and the Shine Center, all at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as the Research Unit of the Jerusalem Municipality and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, New York.

Disclosure of interest

The author declares no conflicts to report.

Ethical standards and informed consent

All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000. Informed consent was obtained from all patients for being included in the study.

Funding

The study was partially supported by the following grants: the Sigmund Freud Center for Study and Research in Psychoanalysis; the Levi Eshkol Institute for Social, Economic, and Political Research; and the Shine Center, all at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as the Research Unit of the Jerusalem Municipality and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, New York.

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