Reviewer’s report

Title: Patterns of Child Sexual Abuse in Religiously-affiliated and Non-religiously-affiliated Institutions: Results of the Liaison Office of the Independent Commissioner for Victims in Germany

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Reviewer: Danilo Baltieri

Reviewer’s report:

This is an interesting paper that aims to compare patterns of child sexual abuse and its consequences for the victims in religious institutions (catholic and protestant ones) and non-religiously-affiliated institutions. The sample size seems to be surprisingly high for this type of study, and the authors conclude that the obtained results do not support the allegation that sexual abuse has been a problem specific to Roman Catholic institutions, or even a phenomenon that is linked to religiously-affiliated institutions in general. Similarly to other seminal works, as the book Pedophiles and Priests – Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis (Jenkins, P), the results of this manuscript are not counter-intuitive.

That said, I consider this manuscript is very important to the current literature on the sexual abuse. However, there are some but serious problems that should be readdressed by the authors. Among these, I cite four problems I consider of major concern:

a) The text is too long and the authors have repeated certain phases across the manuscript. I suggest an edition;

b) The number of missing data is very high for certain variables. This compromises the quality of this paper and the interpretation of the data. There are variables with missingness rates at 50% !! I have two suggestions: to reduce the sample size by eliminating these missing data; or to suppress the variables with higher number of missing data. If the authors followed this recommendation, they should explain why they took one or another decision. In addition, with a cleaner sample, the authors could carry out more sophisticated analyses;

c) The authors reported that no specific instrument (or inventory) was used to diagnose this population, and that the interviewers were not trained to make diagnosis. Therefore, it is difficult to believe in these clinical pictures that were shown by the authors as consequences of sexual abuse. It is very well known that depression, anxiety disorders, and PTSD are common consequences of child sexual abuse but the way as these “disorders” were diagnosed in this study needs to be better clarified;

d) Was some strategy to detect feigned symptoms (or even lies) used for this study ? Ambiguous answers ? improbable answers ?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.