

# Is homosexuality to blame for church scandal?

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By Marilyn Elias, USA TODAY

Many Americans — including some officials of the U.S. Catholic Church — see a connection between homosexuality and the current crisis of child sexual abuse by priests.

Several bishops and cardinals have referred to a link, and 40% of Catholics think there is one, according to a Le Moyne College/Zogby poll last month.

Perhaps it's an understandable assumption, since most of the reported victims of sexual abuse by priests are boys.

Biology, injury play role

By Marilyn Elias, USA TODAY

Scientists aren't sure what causes pedophilia or why most pedophiles are men, but they have some intriguing clues.

An abnormality in the chromosomes is one plausible cause, says Johns Hopkins University psychiatrist Frederick Berlin. Patients with one type of abnormality have a high rate of pedophilia.

Brain injury also might trigger the disorder, says Berlin, because normal adults have developed pedophilia after suffering brain injuries in car accidents.

Pedophiles also are more likely than average to have suffered childhood sexual abuse, usually by a man. Abused girls may become sexually promiscuous, but they don't turn to children, says Berlin.

Molested boys, however, are more likely to "fixate" at an immature sexual level, like a broken CD player that keeps playing the first few notes over and over again.

Boys may notice sexual arousal more easily than girls because their penises become erect, "and that may sexualize the childhood experience for them in a way it doesn't for girls," says Kinsey Institute director John Bancroft. But sex with an adult makes them feel out of control, "and there's a pattern of reasserting control by turning to children when they're grown up," Bancroft speculates.

Men overall are vulnerable to many more sexual fetishes and disorders than women, with pedophilia just one more biology-based "way of going awry," he says.

There's been hardly any research into the causes, prevention or treatment of pedophilia, Berlin says. "We're at the point we were at with alcoholism a few decades ago, the 'bum in the gutter,' pre-Betty Ford Clinic stage where we see it only as a moral issue.

"It is a moral issue," he says, "but it's also a public health problem, and we need to do a lot more research if we're going to stop it."

However, researchers who study sexual disorders say that homosexuality is not the same as pedophilia and similar conditions, in which an adult is attracted to children or teens.

Although no large-scale national research has been done, several small studies find homosexuals are no more likely than heterosexuals to molest kids, says San Diego psychologist Robert Gelfner, editor of *The Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, a professional research journal.

Still, some groups put out statistics to the contrary. One is the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), a group that promotes therapy to change the sexual orientation of homosexuals.

NARTH states on its Web site that gay men are three times more likely than heterosexuals to have sex with minors; it also says about 35% of pedophiles are gay. It attributes these figures to studies published in 1984 and 1992 by Kurt Freund, a Toronto researcher who died a few years ago.

USA TODAY asked experts on pedophilia and sex behavior research to evaluate these studies.

The verdict: They don't support a claim that gay men are more likely than heterosexuals to abuse minors. In fact, Freund explicitly points this out, says physician John Bancroft, director of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction.

Freund's sample of sex offenders finds that male pedophiles are more likely to molest boys than girls.

A 'separate sexual orientation'

But NARTH's claim that 35% of pedophiles are gay stems from "a flawed assumption" that men who prey on young boys also are attracted to grown men, says Johns Hopkins University psychiatrist Frederick Berlin, an expert on sexual disorders.