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'Spotlight' on the 26 million men who will experience sexual violence in their lifetime

Christopher M. Anderson, Executive Director of MaleSurvivor Published 1:04 pm, Friday, November 27, 2015

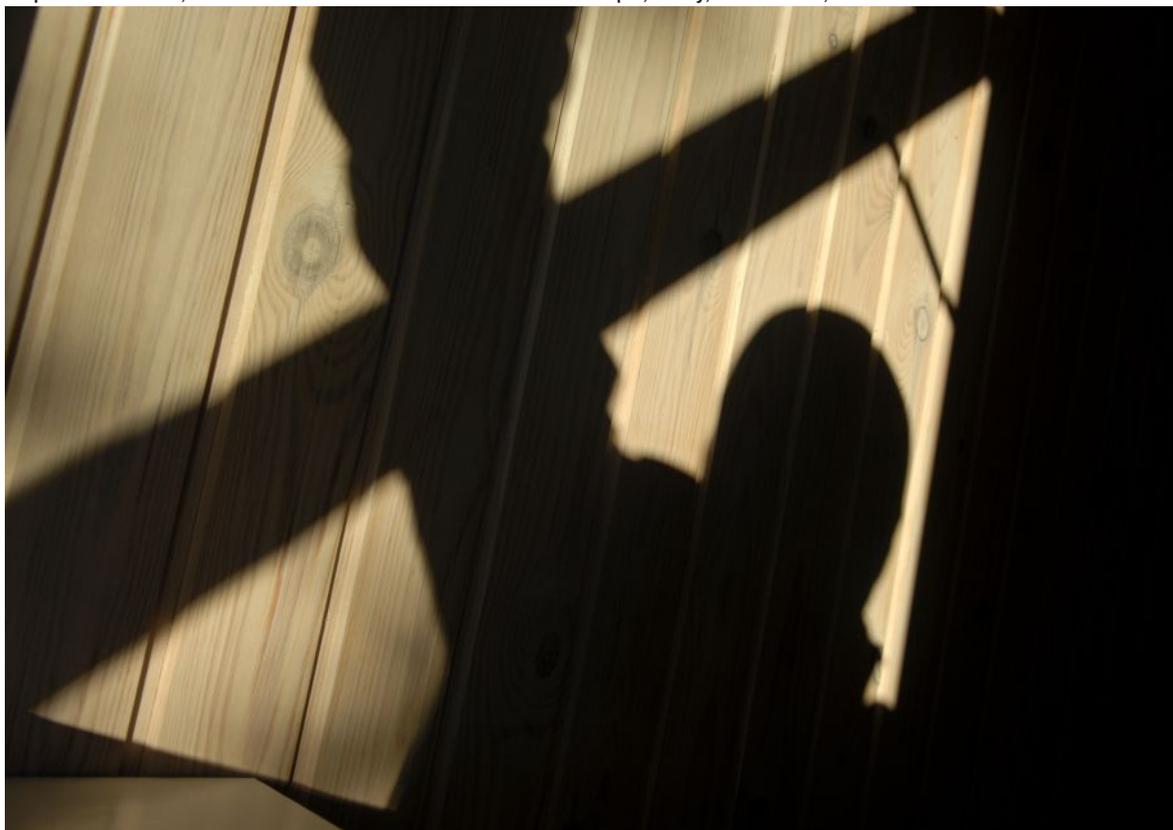


Photo: Martin Lladó / Getty Images

COMMENTARY

With the release of the feature film *Spotlight*, attention is once again being focused on the Catholic Church's flawed response to sexual abuse. However it's important to use the attention the film is generating to shine some light on male victims of sexual abuse. In virtually every community (both religious and secular) the sexual victimization of boys and men remains vastly under-reported and poorly addressed.

Research indicates that male sexual victimization occurs at staggeringly high rates. Data from the most recent National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) from the CDC estimates that more than 26 million males will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. A recent study from 2014 reported that 43% of high school and college aged males reported submitting to unwanted sexual activity. It also is widely accepted among child advocates that at least 1 in 6 boys is sexually abused in childhood.

However, because of a technical distinction in how sexual assaults are categorized, a significant number of men's experiences of sexual abuse are minimized and, in reality, ignored. NISVS excludes from the category of rape incidents where a victim is "made to penetrate" someone (or something) else.

Why does this matter? First, many mental health professionals recognize that any instance of coerced penetration can cause significant physical and emotional harm to the victim. In addition, while NISVS data reported no instances of male "rape" in the 12 months prior to data collection, it reported over 1.9 million males suffered a "made to penetrate" victimization over that same time period. This number is almost equal to the estimated number of female victims of rape. Excluding these male victims of a serious

sexual crime from the category of rape changes public perception of the severity of male victimization, and contributes to an environment where male survivors' disclosures are routinely minimized, mocked, and routinely rejected. This bias has helped to foster an environment where male survivors delay disclosing abuse for more than 20 years on average. Often these are decades filled with pain, isolation, and self-harm.

Tens of millions of men and boys experience sexual violence in this country as well as women and girls. Every survivor, regardless of gender, deserves to be heard, believed and supported. If a male needs help, he can find hope, healing, and support through various organizations like malesurvivor.org. Help is available. There is no need to confront these issues alone.

Christopher M. Anderson is the Executive Director of [MaleSurvivor](http://malesurvivor.org).

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