



Twice Silenced: The Underreporting of Child Sexual Abuse in Orthodox Jewish Communities

David Katzenstein & Lisa Aronson Fontes

To cite this article: David Katzenstein & Lisa Aronson Fontes (2017): Twice Silenced: The Underreporting of Child Sexual Abuse in Orthodox Jewish Communities, Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, DOI: [10.1080/10538712.2017.1336505](https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2017.1336505)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2017.1336505>



Published online: 17 Jul 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Twice Silenced: The Underreporting of Child Sexual Abuse in Orthodox Jewish Communities

David Katzenstein^a and Lisa Aronson Fontes^b

^aSilver School of Social Work, New York University, New York, New York, USA; ^bUniversity of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA

ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse remains an underreported crime throughout the world, despite extensive research and resources dedicated both to improving investigative techniques and helping children disclose their experiences. The discovery of rampant cover-ups within the Catholic Church has exposed some of the ways religious and cultural issues can impede reporting to authorities. This article examines specific factors that contribute to the underreporting of child sexual abuse within Orthodox Jewish communities. It also explores ways in which these communities have handled child sexual abuse reporting in the past and describes recent progress. Implications are offered for CSA prevention, detection, and recovery in Orthodox Jewish communities as well as other minority religious groups.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 28 March 2017
Revised 22 May 2017
Accepted 22 May 2017

KEYWORDS

Child sexual abuse; cultural factors; Jews; religion; underreporting

Child sexual abuse (CSA) exists to some extent in most communities (Finkelhor, 2009; Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gómez-Benito, 2009) and is acknowledged as a vast worldwide public health problem with wide-ranging negative effects for victims, their families, and society as a whole (Putnam, 2003). Recent research explores variations in the ways CSA appears and is handled in culturally and religiously distinct communities (e.g., Graham, Lanier, Johnson-Motoyama, 2016; Tishelman & Fontes, 2017). Although research is limited, CSA appears to be as prevalent in Orthodox Jewish communities as elsewhere (Yehuda, Friedman, Rosenbaum, Labinsky, & Schmeidler, 2007), despite strict and clear guidelines about sexually (in)appropriate relationships. Some rabbis have called CSA a “matter of life and death” because of its far-reaching harm (Horowitz, 2012; Schere, 2016). This article explores the specific cultural issues that appear to impede the reporting of CSA in Orthodox Jewish communities as well as recent efforts to overcome these, so that all children can be protected.

For an incident of CSA to reach authorities in the form of a police or child protective services report, a responsible adult has to become aware of the abuse, either through disclosure or discovery. In addition, that adult has to make the decision to report the abuse (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). Unfortunately, cultural barriers can make both of these steps—the disclosure/discovery and the reporting

process—more difficult for members of cultural and religious minority groups (Fontes, Cruz, & Tabachnick, 2001).

Children and adolescents reveal their experiences of CSA in only a minority of cases, often after repeated abuse over a period of years (Paine & Hansen, 2002). CSA victims are often loath to come forward and report their exploitation to guardians or authorities, instead blaming themselves and experiencing guilt and shame for the abuse (Fontes, 2007; McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014). One child forensic interviewer reported that strong religious beliefs can increase these feelings of shame:

For any kid coming from a significantly religious background, there's many layers of shame and self-blame and fear of disclosure. We've definitely had White kids from Evangelical Christianity, Black kids, too, really from all ethnicities. The level of religion in the family definitely has an impact on the child's fear, shame, self-blame. (Tishelman & Fontes, 2017, p. 126)

Adults often fail to report the incidents of CSA that reach their awareness (e.g., Dinehart & Kenny, 2015). Health care professionals commonly overlook evidence of CSA in their young patients (Savell, 2005), and although most early child care and educational providers receive mandatory child abuse training, few have actually made any reports, and they are often unsure of reporting guidelines and laws (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015). Caretakers who receive disclosures or who suspect CSA have to make delicate decisions about whether to report their concerns to anyone or “handle” the abuse themselves (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). If they do make the decision to report, they often choose authorities within their communities who are more familiar to them rather than authorities who might be seen as alien and threatening. In this vein, people who are deeply religious often report their abuse suspicions to religious leaders rather than to secular authorities, handling this delicate situation in the same way they handle their other worries. Although clergy and religious teachers are required by law to report suspicions of CSA in most states (Children's Bureau, 2015), religious authorities—like other authorities—sometimes fail to fulfill this mandate (Tishelman & Fontes, 2017).

Religious influences on CSA disclosure and reporting constitute one of the most understudied issues in CSA, despite the fact that over three quarters of people in the United States report a religious affiliation (Pew Research Center, 2017). Widely publicized abuse within the Catholic Church demonstrates how religious beliefs and institutions can silence children and allow abuse to flourish (e.g. Collins, O'Neill, Fontes, & Ossege, 2014; Dale & Alpert, 2007). Research on sexual abuse in other religious communities remains sparse (e.g., McGuigan & Stephenson, 2015; Neustein, 2009). Where religious authorities do not follow their legal obligations to report CSA, those children who are isolated from institutions outside the religious community, such as when they are schooled either at home or in religious institutions, appear to be at special risk for

continued abuse over time without intervention (e.g., Bottoms, Goodman, Tolou-Shams, Diviak, & Shaver, 2015; West, 2009).

Some of the factors that contribute to the underreporting of sexual abuse in Orthodox communities are consistent with reasons for underreporting in other minority communities or religions, but each culture also has its own issues. This article explores these cultural factors for Orthodox Jews. The more we know about factors contributing to the nonreporting of sexual abuse that may be particular to Orthodox communities, the more effectively we will be able to address the problem and ultimately reduce the incidence of CSA and its traumatic aftermath in these communities.

Much of the available information about CSA among Orthodox Jews comes from non-peer-reviewed sources because so little empirical investigation has been conducted on this group. These texts—including popular publications and websites—require careful examination, as they may reflect a bias to attack or protect Orthodox communities. We have cautiously drawn on some of these sources in this article.

Overview of Orthodox communities

The total population of Orthodox Jews in the United States is about 530,000 (Pew Research Center, 2015), representing 1 in 10 U.S. Jews. About 850,000 Jews who identify as Orthodox live in Israel, with smaller but still significant communities in France, the UK, the Soviet Union, and parts of Latin America. The Orthodox constitute a relatively young and growing population, because of high rates of childbearing. Orthodox Jews are not a uniform group. While many Orthodox Jews defy easy categorization, the communities can be broadly divided into three groups: Modern Orthodox, Yeshiva Orthodox, and Hassidic. Each group is progressively more insular and has less interaction with those outside the community, in particular non-Jews (Loewenthal, 2006). In all three, religion is the primary *modus operandi* of life itself, with *Halacha* (Jewish Law) and *Mussar* (Jewish ethical teachings) guiding all facets of life, including civil law and criminality.

The “modern Orthodox” may mingle in educational and work settings with their non-Jewish or less observant peers. They follow religious commands regarding diet, clothing, family life, and prayer—but may not be noticeable to outsiders who don’t recognize the telltale signs of their observance in their clothing or eating habits. While they are apt to belong to a synagogue, their communities typically are not as insular and tight-knit as their more observant counterparts.

Those who consider themselves “Yeshiva Orthodox” closely follow the teachings of the Torah and are stringent in their religious practice. However, compared to members of Hassidic communities (called Hassidim), who are guided by a singular leader whom they view as their liaison to God, Yeshiva Orthodoxy is

centered on affiliation to a Yeshiva (in this case, meaning a center of Torah scholarship rather than the strict definition of a “school”) or a particular synagogue; and Torah scholarship is seen as the ultimate in achieving connection and servitude to God.

Hassidic Jewish communities tend to live as separately as possible from others—often educating their children in independent schools, establishing firms where their coworkers are from the same group, and obeying hundreds of laws regarding all aspects of their lives. Hassidim tend to dress quite distinctively, including men typically wearing dark coats and hats and married women wearing high-necked dresses and covering their hair with wigs or scarves. Often, the more observant given families are, the more they rely on their religious communities for all their needs and the less connected they typically are to secular institutions and authorities. Living separately from mainstream society has enabled Orthodox Jewish communities to survive and often flourish in hostile environments. We would like to note that these three categories of Orthodox Jews (modern, Yeshiva, and Hassidic) in no way cover all issues of diversity within Orthodox Jewish communities, who vary in terms of their geographic origin and location, language, their income and education levels, their clothing, their ideas about gender roles, etc.

The most observant Orthodox Jewish groups are tight-knit, gender-segregated, and highly insular. These communities value their own systems of sanction and support, with both positive and negative influences. On the positive side, many Orthodox communities have robust organizations that serve as safety nets for people with a low income, illness, or disabilities. However, when considering the reporting of CSA, the desire to live separately can isolate victims and lead to a lack of protection.

With each subgroup maintaining distinct cultural values and norms, how they handle CSA can also vary greatly. The response to suspected or proven CSA depends in part on specific rabbinic leaders, who are the primary community authorities. The more insular subgroups tend to fear outside systems, and particularly the government and secular legal authorities (Schnall, 2006). Their rabbis determine how they will relate to outside authorities.

Child sexual abuse in Orthodox communities

“There is no nice way of saying it,” a mother of a child who was abused by a perpetrator later protected by community leaders stated. “Our community protects molesters. Other than that, we are wonderful” (Otterman & Rivera, 2012). Shortly after CSA came into clinical and popular awareness in the mid-1980s, writing on Jews and CSA began to appear (e.g., Featherman, 1995; Russ, Weber, & Ledley, 1993). There was some indication that CSA was prevalent, but few in the Orthodox community were ready to listen, and there was a lack of uniform response to suspicions, disclosures, or discovery (Russ et al., 1993, p. 23). As two

of the early scholars in the field wrote, “Too many victims met with cover-ups instead of compassion (Neustein & Leshner, 2002, p. 37).” As a minority culture with a long history of persecution, Jews have learned not to draw attention to their differences or take actions that might bring shame or notoriety to their families, including reporting CSA to secular authorities (Featherman, 1995). Although research is limited, scholars believe rates of abuse within ultra-Orthodox circles are virtually the same as in the general population and have been so for generations (Otterman & Rivera, 2012).

One of the first and most infamous cases of CSA reported to law enforcement was that of Rabbi Boruch Lanner, a yeshiva high school principal in Ocean Township, New Jersey, who physically and sexually abused dozens of boys and girls for over 30 years (Smothers, 2002). While this case ultimately did go to trial and resulted in Lanner’s conviction, it came to light that the Orthodox Union, an umbrella Jewish organization overseeing Lanner’s school, did their own investigation years earlier and found that there was credible evidence that Lanner had engaged in inappropriate sexual activity with minors for years. The Orthodox Union did not file reports with a single law enforcement agency and permitted Lanner continued contact with children (Cooperman, 2002). Prior to Lanner’s case, the district attorney’s office in Brooklyn investigated just a handful of cases involving Orthodox Jews, despite the fact that they made up almost 10% of the population (Otterman & Rivera, 2012). Undoubtedly, underreporting contributed to this lack of investigation.

Following the Lanner case, Yehuda Kolko, a first grade Yeshiva teacher, was allowed to remain in his position by the prominent Brooklyn Jewish school where he was employed, permitting him access to children for years after allegations had been brought to school officials. This ultimately resulted in legal settlements of more than two million dollars (Kolker, 2006). Once again, school officials failed to file the legally mandated reports and permitted the alleged offender continued access to children. When the Kolko case came to light in 2006, almost immediately Orthodox communities began to confront CSA, with the knowledge that cover-ups had occurred for decades (Friedman, 2013). Some Orthodox communities engaged in deep self-examination about how the abuse and its concealment had occurred. Members asked themselves many questions, including, “Why is this happening? How widespread is this problem? Have community elements been involved in keeping these stories secret?” (Friedman, 2013).

Examining the factors that appear to be especially prevalent in the lack of CSA reporting in Orthodox communities, five overarching themes emerge. These themes are (a) *Mesira* and *Loshon Hora*, prohibitions against reporting to secular authorities and of speaking ill of a fellow Jew; (b) fear and intimidation; (c) stigma and shame; (d) reliance on rabbinical courts; and (e) patriarchal gender roles.

Mesira and Loshon Hora

The law of *Mesira* equates communication with secular authorities to report another Jew's transgressions with treason (Kolker, 2006). Throughout history, Jews have lived in places where governments were restrictive, oppressive, and at times murderous toward Jews. Protecting fellow Jews from the threat of government scrutiny was a matter of life and death, and the law of *Mesira* was a protective factor within Jewish quarters. In many subcommunities, particularly among the Hassidim, *Mesira* is still seen as absolute, without exception, and reporting transgressions to authorities outside Hassidic communities is an excommunicable offense. The concept behind *Mesira* is strongly tied with the Orthodox Jewish value of *Chillul Hashem* (desecration of G-D's name), which many interpret as a commandment not to air the community's dirty laundry in public or allow the adjudication of Jews in non-Jewish courts (Featherman, 1995).

Loshon Hora, a prohibition against speaking ill of others, is often considered to be the reason that abusers cannot be publicly named (Chayil, 2010; Silberg & Dallam, 2009). *Loshon Hora* is a serious biblical sin that encompasses all manners of speech including gossip, slander, and derogatory speech against a fellow Jew.

While the intricacies of Jewish law go beyond the scope of this article, many have used these laws as a means to disavow all knowledge that CSA was occurring (Salamon, 2011). This would appear to contravene the *Halachic* (Jewish legal) requirement to report cases of sexual abuse (Broyde, 2001) as well as, certainly, the reporting requirements of the secular state. Many rabbis have dismissed *Mesira* and *Loshon Hora* as inapplicable in cases of CSA (Otterman & Rivera, 2012; Salamon, 2011; Schachter, 2007). Indeed, Dratch (1992) proposed that "it is a mitzvah [commandment] to report a child abuser to the civil authorities" (p. 11). In 2003, major Jewish rabbinical organizations including the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) proclaimed that reporting cases of sexual abuse does not violate the law of *Mesira* and encouraged the reporting of abuse cases to the appropriate authorities (Salamon, 2011).

Many scholars and community members agree that Jewish law itself dictates the obligation to speak up against abuse (Dorff, 2003). Rabbi Yona Reiss (2012), an attorney and noted rabbinical authority, warns against withholding cases from the public sphere, pointing out that "a much larger specter of *Chillul Hashem* (desecration of G-D's name) would ensue from a perception that child molesters are being protected and shielded from disciplinary action" (p. 15). Reiss affirms that when it comes to issues of child abuse, there is often a convolution of Judaic values, which are misunderstood and which breed misinformation, leading to misplaced and even dangerous zealotry that leaves children at risk.

Fear and intimidation

Friedman (2013) quotes a survivor of sexual abuse within the Orthodox community:

What they have done to me since is a lot worse than even the original abuse. They cut me off in the most complete way I can imagine. What's even worse, I don't think it's only about me. They've made an example of me for the rest of the community to make sure that nobody else speaks out about abuse. (p. 1)

This willful hiding of offenders is not exclusive to Orthodox communities; indeed it seems characteristic of tightknit religious communities. Tishelman and Fontes (2017) describe numerous instances of children and families from cloistered religious communities of a variety of faiths being pressured not to disclose and not to cooperate with secular authorities. According to Salamon, “Closed societies are more likely to conceal offenders within their midst” (2011, p. 112).

Some people within Orthodox communities have pressured, intimidated, and threatened others to impede their CSA reporting. Kolker (2006) describes individuals concealing offenders, misrepresenting facts, shunning victims' families, and threatening excommunication as part of a concerted effort to prevent survivors from coming forward. There have been instances in which families, allegedly on the advice of a community leader, went so far as to cut ties with their own children who came forward to describe experiences of abuse (Friedman, 2013). The businesses of victims' families may be boycotted (Persky, 2013), and stories abound of attempted bribes to drop criminal charges against alleged perpetrators (Aviv, 2014). Often, those brave enough to become involved and help victims through the reporting process have been subject to threats themselves, and there have been some instances of actual physical violence against them (Resnicoff, 2012). The then Brooklyn district attorney, Charles Hynes, described “Mafia-like intimidation” of CSA victims and their families who spoke out against abuse (Edelman, 2014).

One might ask why a community would work so hard to deny and conceal CSA from secular authorities and even—sometimes—from itself. The answer falls into three categories: stigma and shame, reliance on rabbinical courts, and traditional gender roles (patriarchy).

Stigma and shame

Both stigma (Deitz, Williams, Rife, & Cantrell, 2015) and shame (Zalcborg, 2015) commonly appear in discussions of the nonreporting of sexual abuse in various cultures, but they take on special significance within the Orthodox community due to the importance of family name, history, and reputation within community circles (Featherman, 1995). Because many marriages are arranged in Orthodox communities, particularly among Hassidic sects, the

question of a family's reputation takes on great practical significance. A family's reputation is of some significance when families are considering a match. The smallest "strike" against a family can tarnish their reputation and severely impact the chances of prospective matches. This would be true even if a family member is a *victim* of sexual abuse. As Schnall (2006) concurs, there is a real and palpable fear that reporting sexual abuse will adversely affect family standing in the community and marital prospects for family members. (Abu-Baker and Dwairy [2003] made a similar observation for Arab families.)

In terms of reporting CSA, the cultural values that influence the ways shame and stigma are attached to mental health problems may also impact responses to sexual abuse (Haboush & Alyan, 2013). Given that many sexual abuse incidents occur in circumstances in which both perpetrator and victim are in the same family (Yehuda et al., 2007), as opposed to the popular myth of the "creepy stranger" who abuses children (Finkelhor, 2009), a family's ruined reputation is a reporting cost that a family may consider too heavy to bear. Families who are deeply connected to their religious communities or institutions face significant implicit and often explicit pressure not to report a child's abuse (Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Tishelman & Fontes, 2017).

Shalom bayit (peace within the home) is a strong Jewish cultural value. Perversely, those who expose shameful activities within the home such as CSA may be seen as interfering with a family's peaceful equilibrium and therefore blameworthy—sometimes even more blameworthy than the offender, who conducted the shameful acts in private. In this way, the positive value of family harmony may contribute to denial of CSA and other forms of family violence (Featherman 1995).

Reliance on rabbinical courts

Rabbinical leaders serve as the governing authority in Orthodox communities, leading congregants to seek their advice when sensitive matters arise (Schnall, 2006). For generations, rabbinical courts have adjudicated civil matters among Jews, although, unlike legal entities within secular governments, they had no power to detain, arrest, or jail. Nevertheless, Orthodox Jews have taken concerns about possible CSA to rabbinical courts (Neustein & Leshner, 2008), which have sometimes investigated the allegations, pledged to monitor the accused, and at times ordered restitution to a survivor but typically did not inform secular law enforcement authorities (Otterman & Rivera, 2012). According to multiple reports, these courts are woefully unequipped for forensic investigation of allegations (Matthews, 2002). These authorities have at times rejected the ameliorative steps prescribed by secular law.

Rabbis who are asked to render judgment on cases of sexual abuse often have serious conflicts of interest. In many communities a rabbi may have multiple roles, including, in Hassidic communities, being the absolute authority for all

communal matters and the guardian of a community's reputation. This makes it likely that a rabbi will worry about how a CSA report may affect his community, therefore reducing any semblance of impartiality (Friedman, 2013). Even more troubling, in some cases, it appears that these rabbis have feebly permitted and in some cases encouraged reprisals against those who have reported abuse, including victims and their families (Resnicoff, 2012).

Orthodox Jewish communities are not alone in trying to handle CSA "in-house" without informing authorities beyond the community. Similar phenomena have been observed and analyzed in Caribbean communities (Reid, Reddock, & Nickenig, 2014), in indigenous populations (Bailey, Mace, & Powell, 2016), among Mennonites and Evangelical Christians (Tishelman & Fontes, 2017), among African Americans (Abney & Priest, 1995), and among Latinos (Fontes et al., 2001), among others. When a minority religious, racial, or cultural community feels under threat, it is not apt to reach out to institutions of the threatening society for "help" with stigmatizing problems; these communities may also want to avoid sending members to jail (Fontes & Plummer, 2010).

Non-reporting in Orthodox communities is similar to non-reporting in cases of CSA in the Catholic Church (Dale & Alpert, 2007; Parkinson, 2014). While the Catholic Church is structurally one centralized institution with a single authoritative figurehead and in this way differs from the array of institutions in Orthodox Jewish communities, the propensity to protect the reputation of communities, institutions, and leaders over protecting and safeguarding child victims is sadly similar.

Gender roles

Gender roles can contribute to the challenges of disclosing and reporting CSA in Orthodox communities. From an early age, Orthodox Jewish boys and girls are usually educated separately. In more insular Orthodox communities, conversing socially with someone of the other gender is considered inappropriate, leading to a high degree of gender segregation outside the home.

In addition, in these communities, sex is a taboo subject and not discussed (Zalcberg, 2015). Due to their lack of sex education, Orthodox Jewish CSA victims have been groomed for abuse while not realizing what was occurring (Sherwood, 2006).

Within these circles, men are often viewed as the ultimate authority, particularly when it comes to religious matters, while women are seen as the caretakers of the home and the family's material needs. This can contribute to an imbalance of power favoring men. In addition, one of the basic tenets of Judaism is a respect for elders and deference to authority (Wolfson, 2016). Accordingly, if the abuser was an authority figure, victims and nonoffending family might assume that he could not possibly be doing anything that would be considered wrong (Sherwood, 2006). The combination of these elements can doubly silence

victims, impeding both the disclosure and reporting of abuse. This deference to (often male) authority is also seen in cases where influential members of the community are alleged to have perpetrated sex crimes but are defended vociferously by fellow community members who cannot fathom that these men of faith and great reputation would be capable of committing such horrific actions (Blackler, 2012).

While the vast majority of abusers across all communities and cultures are male, most of the prosecuted cases at the Brooklyn district attorney's office involving Orthodox Jews also involved male victims, differing from what is found in the wider society, in which more girls than boys are CSA victims (Edelman, 2011). There are several potential reasons why male Orthodox victims may be more commonly reported. Perhaps Orthodox female victims are especially hesitant to voice their accusations in public, because of gendered submission and concerns about their reputation and marriageability. Another possibility is that the perpetrators abuse boys because they have access to them, since there are few circumstances in which it is deemed appropriate for an adult male to be in the presence of a female child. (Of course, Orthodox men do have access to girls within their own immediate families.) More research in this area is clearly necessary.

Discussion

In this article we have identified several barriers to the reporting of CSA in Orthodox Jewish communities. Many of these barriers silence both disclosures by children to their caretakers and reporting by adults to secular authorities.

Over the past 10 years, we note improvements in how some Orthodox communities address CSA (Sokol, 2015). There are signs that grassroots activism is beginning to combat the phenomenon through talks given in schools to children about identifying abuse (Berry, 2014), funding for those who wish to seek psychiatric help for their trauma after experiencing CSA (Jewish Link of New Jersey Staff, 2015), and parents talking with children about this once-taboo topic (Ettinger & Hasson, 2013). A variety of local, national, and international organizations have sprung up that seek justice and protection for vulnerable children, including Survivors for Justice, Project Jewish Kids, Jewish Community Watch, Amudim, and others. Many of these organizations have websites with plentiful resources for CSA prevention, education, prosecution, and recovery.

Victim support organizations have cropped up in many of the world's Orthodox communities, run by Orthodox lay people and mental health professionals. Most important, Orthodox survivors and family members are utilizing these services (Friedman, 2013). Some rabbis support victims and their families through CSA investigations, and some even invite child abuse professionals to join in community presentations related to CSA (Tishelman & Fontes, 2017).

In addition, secular authorities are working to improve their ability to address CSA in Orthodox communities. In 2009, the district attorney in Brooklyn implemented a project aimed at combating CSA and encouraging reporting within Orthodox communities (Weichselbaum, 2009). In the project's first three years it netted 83 men and 2 women accused of abusing more than 100 children and obtained dozens of convictions (Edelman, 2011). Some defendants walked free because of lack of evidence and/or community pressure to maintain silence (Edelman, 2011). Other suspects escaped to Israel, which has refused to extradite Jewish CSA suspects (Rivera, 2012). The district attorney's office was accused of keeping secret the names of Orthodox Jews charged with sex crimes and "going easy" on alleged sex offenders from this community (Edelman, 2014).

The phenomenon of underreporting is itself paralleled by a lack of research on stigmatized issues such as CSA in this community. Outsiders to the community fear they will not be trusted and therefore respondents will not speak truthfully, rendering their research invalid. (Interestingly, Zalcborg [2015] suggests that her respondents confided in her in part because she was not a member of their insular community and therefore they felt their secrets were safe with her]. In addition, few Orthodox Jews pursue the higher education that would enable them to conduct such a study and wish to shine a light on stigmatizing problems within their own community. To do so might put them at risk of being accused of behaving shamefully by publicizing community problems.

To effectively address CSA in Orthodox Jewish communities, we must understand the specific cultural factors that lead to its occurrence and underreporting. There is a dearth of research on CSA in Orthodox communities, and many references in this article come from newspaper articles and books that do not have the same scholarly standards as an academic journal. The section on rabbinical courts was particularly difficult to research because virtually no documents from these courts are publicly available. Qualitative and quantitative research of every kind would help us understand CSA in Orthodox communities, including its prevalence, how cases occur and are uncovered, prevention programming, and the kinds of help that are most useful for victims.

While this article primarily concerns Orthodox Jewish communities in the United States, many of the issues are relevant both to Orthodox Jewish communities in other countries and to other minority religious communities. The concept of *Loshon Hora* is parallel to the concept of avoiding washing one's dirty laundry in public, an idea that has been found to silence CSA reporting among members of many minority cultural groups (Fontes, 1995). Fear and intimidation exerted by members of the community may be seen in other situations where powerful figures are accused of CSA. For instance, Lindsey (2014) writes vividly about how Mormon communities silence people who denounce problems such as CSA by shunning, harassing, and excommunicating outspoken members. Stigma and shame are reported by most CSA survivors but may be especially problematic for people who are members of minority racial, cultural, or religious groups, where

the shame is seen to reflect on the entire group and not just an individual or family (Fontes, 2007). The way some Orthodox Jews rely on rabbinical courts and fail to report CSA to secular authorities has easy parallels in other religious communities where churches “handle” abuse internally (Tishelman & Fontes, 2017). Finally, patriarchal gender roles characterize most major religions and have been found to silence disclosures and reports of CSA where they have been studied (e.g., Collins et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Given that humanity’s inherent capacity for goodness is one of Orthodox Judaism’s central values, the community’s response to CSA has been notably sluggish, both in acknowledging that this is a major concern and in confronting it on a practical level. While in many Orthodox subcommunities there has been a vast paradigm shift toward the awareness, prevention, and reporting of CSA, in other subcommunities progress in this area has been slow at best. The seriousness of CSA in Orthodox communities requires exploration of this problem, including research on prevention and the creation of interventions that encourage reporting, victim and community recovery, and the appropriate prosecution of perpetrators.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to report.

Notes on contributors

David Katzenstein, LCSW-R, is the clinical coordinator of the Department of Behavioral Health at Premium Health Center. He has served as an adjunct faculty member at Touro College, Wurzweiler, and NYU Schools of Social Work and is currently a doctoral candidate at NYU- Silver School of Social Work.

Lisa Aronson Fontes, PhD, is a senior lecturer at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and author of the book *Interviewing Clients Across Cultures* as well as numerous publications related to cultural issues in child abuse and violence against women.

References

- Abney, V. D., & Priest, R. (1995). African Americans and sexual child abuse. In L. A. Fontes (Ed.), *Sexual Abuse in Nine North American Cultures: Treatment and Prevention* (pp. 11–30). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Abu-Baker, K., & Dwairy, M. (2003). Cultural norms versus state law in treating incest: A suggested model for Arab families. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27, 109–123. doi:[10.1016/S0145-2134\(02\)00505-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00505-7)

- Aviv, R. (2014, November 10). The outcast. *New Yorker*. Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/11/10/outcast-3>
- Bailey, C., Mace, G., & Powell, M. (2016). Measuring community and service provider attitudes to child sexual abuse in remote indigenous communities in Western Australia. *Psychiatry Psychology & Law*, 23(3), 435–445. doi:10.1080/13218719.2015.1080147
- Berry, J. (2014, June 18). Magen teaches Jewish children about sexual abuse. *Forest Hills Times*. Retrieved from http://www.foresthillstimes.com/view/full_story/25308243/article-Magen-teaches-Jewish-children-about-sexual-abuse?instance=lead_story_left_column
- Blackler, Z. (2012, May 16). Brooklyn's Orthodox Jews rally behind accused in child abuse case. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/16/orthodox-sex-abuse-scandal-new-york>
- Bottoms, B. L., Goodman, G. S., Tolou-Shams, M., Diviak, K. R., & Shaver, P. R. (2015). Religion-related child maltreatment: A profile of cases encountered by legal and social service agencies. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 33, 561–579. doi:10.1002/bsl.v33.4
- Broyde, M. J. (2001). Informing on others for violating American law: A Jewish law view. *Jewish Law Articles*. Retrieved from <http://www.jlaw.com/Articles/mesiralaw2.html>
- Chayil, E. (2010). *Hush: A novel*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Children's Bureau. (2015). *Clergy as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect*. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/clergymandated.pdf>
- Collins, C., O'Neill, M., Fontes, L. A., & Ossege, J. (2014). Catholicism and childhood sexual abuse: Women's coping and psychotherapy. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 23, 519–537. doi:10.1080/10538712.2014.918071
- Cooperman, A. (2002, June 29). Sexual abuse scandal hits Orthodox Jews. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/06/29/sexual-abuse-scandal-hits-orthodox-jews/ecf7b15c-30fb-412e-b637-e5449700534a/>
- Dale, K. A., & Alpert, J. L. (2007). Hiding behind the cloth: Child sexual abuse and the Catholic Church. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 16(3), 59–74. doi:10.1300/J070v16n03_04
- Deitz, M. F., Williams, S. L., Rife, S. C., & Cantrell, P. (2015). Examining cultural, social, and self-related aspects of stigma in relation to sexual assault and trauma symptoms. *Violence Against Women*, 21(5), 598–615. doi:10.1177/1077801215573330
- Dinehart, L., & Kenny, M. C. (2015). Knowledge of child abuse and reporting practices among early care and education providers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 29(4), 429–443. doi:10.1080/02568543.2015.1073818
- Dorff, E. (2003). Jewish law and tradition regarding sexual abuse and incest. In R. Lev (Ed.), *Shine the light: Sexual abuse and healing in the Jewish community* (pp. 46–60). Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Dratch, M. (1992). The physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children. Retrieved <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=9971>
- Edelman, S. (December 11 2011). Orthodox sex abuse scandal. *The New York Post*. Retrieved from <http://nypost.com/2011/12/11/orthodox-sex-abuse-scandal/>
- Edelman, S. (August 10, 2014). Brooklyn DA exposes hidden Orthodox sex cases. *New York Post*. Retrieved from <http://nypost.com/2014/08/10/brooklyn-da-exposes-hidden-orthodox-sex-cases-kept-secret/>
- Ettinger, Y., & Hasson, N. (2013, February 8). Breaking Israel's ultra-Orthodox taboo on discussing sexual abuse. *Haaretz*. Retrieved from <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/breaking-israel-s-ultra-orthodox-taboo-on-discussing-sexual-abuse.premium-1.502383>
- Featherman, J. M. (1995). Jews and sexual child abuse. In L. A. Fontes (Ed.), *Sexual abuse in nine North American cultures: Treatment and prevention* (pp. 128–155). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press.

- Finkelhor, D. (2009). The prevention of childhood sexual abuse. *The Future of Children*, 19 (2), 169–194. doi:[10.1353/foc.0.0035](https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.0.0035)
- Fontes, L. A. (1995). *Sexual Abuse in Nine North American Cultures: Treatment and Prevention*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fontes, L., & Plummer, C. (2010). Cultural issues in disclosures of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 19(5), 491–518. doi:[10.1080/10538712.2010.512520](https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2010.512520)
- Fontes, L. A. (2007). *Sin vergüenza*: Addressing shame with Latino victims of child sexual abuse and their families. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 16, 61–83. doi:[10.1300/J070v16n01_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/J070v16n01_04)
- Fontes, L. A., Cruz, M., & Tabachnick, J. (2001). Views of child sexual abuse in two cultural communities: An exploratory study among African Americans and Latinos. *Child Maltreatment*, 6, 103–117. doi:[10.1177/1077559501006002003](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559501006002003)
- Friedman, A. (2013). Breaking the codes of silence. *The Jerusalem Report*, 24, 6.
- Graham, L. M., Lanier, P., Johnson-Motoyama, M. (2016). National profile of Latino/Latina children reported to the child welfare system for sexual abuse. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 66, 18–27.
- Haboush, K. L., & Alyan, H. (2013). “Who can you tell?” Features of Arab culture that influence conceptualization and treatment of childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 22(5), 499–518. doi:[10.1080/10538712.2013.800935](https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2013.800935)
- Horowitz, Y. (April 4, 2012). *Speak to Your Children* by Emes Ve-Emunah. Accessed at: <http://haemtza.blogspot.com/2012/04/speak-to-your-children.html?m=1>
- Jewish Link of New Jersey Staff. (2015, March 4). Philanthropists announce \$1 million abuse victims therapy fund. *Jewish Link of New Jersey*. Retrieved from http://www.jewishlinkbc.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7228:philanthropists-announce-1-million-abuse-victims-therapy-fund&catid=151:community-news&Itemid=584
- Kolker, R. (2006, May 22). On the rabbi’s knee. *New York*. Retrieved from <http://nymag.com/news/features/17010/>
- Lindsey, L. (2014). *Recovering agency: Lifting the veil on Mormon mind control*. Charleston, SC:CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Loewenthal, K. M. (2006). Orthodox Judaism: Features and issues for psychotherapy. In E. T. Dowd, & S. L. Nielson (Eds.), *The psychologies in religion*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Matthews, K. (2002, April 16). Jewish court stymies abuse. The Associated Press. Retrieved from <https://culteducation.com/group/874-clergy-abuse/4768-jewish-court-stymies-reports.html>
- McElvaney, R., Greene, S., & Hogan, D. (2014). To tell or not to tell? Factors influencing young people’s informal disclosures of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29, 928–947. doi:[10.1177/0886260513506281](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260513506281)
- McGuigan, W. M. & Stephenson, S. J. (2015). A single case study of resiliency after extreme incest in an Old Order Amish family. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 24, 526–537.
- Neustein, A. (Ed.). (2009). *The tempest in the temple*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press.
- Neustein, A. and Leshner, M. (2002). Does the Jewish community sacrifice victims of sexual abuse? *Jewish Exponent*, 211(22), 37.
- Neustein, A., & Leshner, M. (2008). A single-case study of rabbinic sexual abuse in the Orthodox Jewish community. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 17(3–4), 270–289. doi:[10.1080/10538710802329783](https://doi.org/10.1080/10538710802329783)
- Otterman, S., & Rivera, R. (2012, May 9). Ultra-Orthodox shun their own for reporting child sexual abuse. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/nyregion/ultra-orthodox-jews-shun-their-own-for-reporting-child-sexual-abuse.html?_r=3
- Paine, M. L., & Hansen, D. J. (2002). Factors influencing children to self-disclose sexual abuse. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 22, 271–295. doi:[10.1016/S0272-7358\(01\)00091-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358(01)00091-5)

- Parkinson, P. (2014). Child sexual abuse and the churches: A story of moral failure? *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 26(1), 119–138. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2348413
- Pereda, N., Guilera, G., Forns, M., & Gómez-Benito, J. (2009). The international epidemiology of child sexual abuse: A continuation of Finkelhor (1994). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33(6), 331–342. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2008.07.007
- Persky, A. S. (2013). Prosecutors battle the wall of silence around sex assault in religious communities. *ABA Journal*, 99(12), 1.
- Pew Research Center. (2015). *A portrait of American orthodox jews*. Retrieved January 18, 2017, from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/08/26/a-portrait-of-american-orthodox-jews/>
- Pew Research Center. (2017). *Religious landscape study*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>
- Putnam, F. W. (2003). Ten-year research update review: Child sexual abuse. *The Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 42(3), 269–278. doi:10.1097/00004583-200303000-00006
- Reid, S. D., Reddock, R., & Nickenig, T. (2014). Breaking the silence of child sexual abuse in the Caribbean: A community-based action research intervention model. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 23(3), 256–277 22p. doi:10.1080/10538712.2014.888118
- Reiss, Y. (2012). Addressing child molestation in school settings: A halachic and religious perspective. *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, 4, 5.
- Resnicoff, S. H. (2012). Jewish law and the tragedy of sexual abuse of children—The dilemma within the Orthodox Jewish community. *Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion*, 13, 281–362.
- Rivera, R. (2012, June 28). Brooklyn prosecutor's role in case is examined. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/29/nyregion/hyness-claims-on-extradition-of-abuse-suspect-are-challenged.html>
- Russ, I., Weber, S., & Ledley, E. (1993). *Shalom bayit: A Jewish response to child abuse and domestic violence*. Panorama City, CA: Jewish Family Service.
- Salamon, M. (2011). *Abuse in the Jewish community: Religious and communal factors that undermine the apprehension of offenders and the treatment of victims*. Jerusalem, Israel: Urim Publications.
- Savell, S. (2005). Child sexual abuse: Are health care providers looking the other way? *Journal of Forensic Nursing*, 1(2), 78–81. doi:10.1097/01263942-200506000-00007
- Schachter, H. (2007). *Regarding mesirah*. Retrieved from https://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2007/rsch_mesirah.html
- Schere, D. (August 31, 2016). 300 Orthodox rabbis condemn child sexual abuse. *Baltimore Jewish Times*. Retrieved from <http://jewishtimes.com/51557/300-orthodox-rabbis-condemn-child-sexual-abuse/news/>
- Schnall, E. (2006). Multicultural counseling and the Orthodox Jew. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 84, 276–282. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2006.tb00406.x
- Sherwood, R. (2006, October 11). Child sex abuse case still haunts. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/story?id=2555575>
- Silberg, J. L., & Dallam, S. (2009). Out of the Jewish closet: Facing the hidden secrets of child sex abuse—And the damage done to victims. In A. Neustein (Ed.), *Tempest in the temple: Jewish communities and child sex scandals* (pp. 77–104). Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press.
- Smothers, R. (2002, October 12). Rabbi convicted of sexual abuse is freed on bail pending appeal. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/12/nyregion/rabbi-convicted-of-sexual-abuse-is-freed-on-bail-pending-appeal.html>
- Sokol, S. (2015, April 30). Major progress made on addressing sexual abuse in American Orthodox community, activist says. Rabbi Yakov Horowitz: Inroads in Hassidic, Lithuanian communities 'extraordinary'. *The Jerusalem Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.>

jpost.com/Diaspora/Major-progress-made-on-addressing-sexual-abuse-in-orthodox-community-400605

- Tishelman, A. C. & Fontes, L. A. (2017). Religion in child sexual abuse forensic interviews. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 63, 120–130.
- Weichselbaum, S. (2009, April 1). Hynes presses to expose sex abuse in Jewish community. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/brooklyn-da-charles-hynes-presses-expose-sex-abuse-jewish-community-article-1.361395>
- West, R. L. (2009, Summer/Fall). The harms of homeschooling. *Philosophy & Public Policy Quarterly*, 29, 7–12. doi:[10.13021/G8PPPQ.292009.104](https://doi.org/10.13021/G8PPPQ.292009.104)
- Wolfson, E. (2016, March 3). Child abuse allegations plague the Hasidic community. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/03/11/child-abuse-allegations-hasidic-ultraorthodox-jewish-community-brooklyn-432688.html>
- Yehuda, R., Friedman, M., Rosenbaum, T., Labinsky, E., & Schmeidler, J. (2007). History of past sexual abuse in married observant Jewish women. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 164 (11), 1700–1706. doi:[10.1176/appi.ajp.2007.06122030](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2007.06122030)
- Zalcborg, S. (2015). “They won’t speak to me, but they will talk to you”: On the challenges facing a woman researcher doing fieldwork among male ultra-Orthodox victims of sexual abuse. *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues*, 29, 108–132.