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Special points of interest:

Between 1997 and 1999...

- 7 in every 10 clergy had experienced some form of violence.
- 7 in every 10 of clergy were verbally abused .
- 1 in 5 clergy were threatened with harm.
- 12% of clergy were physically assaulted.
- 4 in every 10 clergy felt afraid of being a victim of violence while at work.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST PROFESSIONALS IN THE COMMUNITY STUDY -

The accounts and experiences of Anglican Clergy

Increasing concern about violence to Anglican Clergy

In recent years there has been growing concern about violence against clergy. Reports of violent assaults upon clergy, some of which have resulted in fatalities, have featured with increasing regularity in the media.

The concern about violence amongst parish and diocesan clergy across the UK has been raised at various levels, from individual clergy through to a special advisory committee convened to examine clergy security across the country.

Furthermore, organisations representing members of the clergy and ministry work have added their voices to the debate and have supported those clergy who have been victims of violence.

These developments set the context within which researchers in the Department of Social and Political Science, Royal Holloway, University of London, enquired about the nature and prevalence of violence against clergy in the south east of England.

What we know about violence against Clergy

At the outset of this project, there were no comprehensive national or local systems for routinely monitoring violence against clergy. At the time of writing this report the situation is unchanged.

Official statistics show considerable variations in estimates

of assault rates. But as these are estimates, they need to be treated with caution. Even less is known about the contexts in which against violence clergy occur or the various ways in which it is managed.

There is equal diversity in perceptions as to why violence

occurs. Some studies suggest that violence is the result of a breakdown of the traditional trust and respect between professionals and the public in general. For others, violence to clergy reflects a wider increase in anti-social and aggressive behaviour in society generally.

Aims, Methods and Profile of Participants

The definition used in the survey questionnaire

Any behaviour or act which has harmful, or potentially harmful physical and emotional impacts –specifically verbal abuse, threats and assaults (physical and sexual)

Aims:

Our inquiry into violence against clergy is part of a wider study of violence against three community based professions (GPs, Anglican Clergy and Probation Officers). The aims of this independent study are to

- Identify the extent and nature of violence against clergy;
- Highlight the ways in which violence is managed by clergy;
- Identify the impact violence has on clergy's professional practices.

Methods:

The study involved a large scale postal survey of all stipendiary clergy in the South East of England. Response rate = 71% (N= 959). In depth interviews were undertaken with 25 Clergy who had been threatened and assaulted while undertaking their work.

The data were analysed using SPSS and Atlasti.

Profile of participants:

Age:

Average age= 51
Age Range = [27 –93]

Gender:

Male= 86%
Female=13%

Location:

Inner City = 19%
Suburban = 67%
Rural = 14%

Career:

Average Years in ministry = 7.6

I would, within the spectrum of violence include verbal, personally abusive behaviour...I think the language or attitude that showed that as far as you were concerned you were rubbish or ought not to be there is violence.
-Male Vicar

Verbal Abuse and Threats...

Amongst the many forms of violence experienced by clergy in the course of their work, the most common is verbal abuse.

Between 1997 and 1999, seven out of 10 clergy were verbally abused in the course of their work.

Verbal abuse takes many forms but according to the clergy interviewed it includes being sworn at, shouted at, and being called derisory

names.

For the most part clergy, when faced with verbal abuse, reportedly tried to ignore it or to prevent it escalating into more aggressive behaviour by calming the person down.

While verbal abuse didn't always develop into threats, some threats made to harm clergy included verbal abuse.

Approximately 1 in 5 clergy

were threatened with harm in the two years prior to the survey. Almost half of the clergy were in their own home when the threats were made.

Almost half of threats were made by callers to the door seeking pastoral care or money.

For the most part clergy tried to defuse the situation by walking away before it escalated into more serious violence.

Assaults on Clergy...

The survey data indicate that the least prevalent form of violence experienced is an assault. The majority of clergy did not experience an assault in the two years prior to the survey. However 12% of clergy surveyed did.

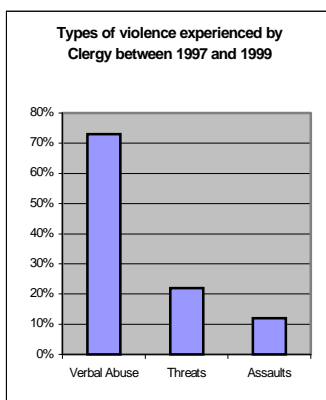
For these clergy, the most common form of violence experienced involved being pushed or shoved with no

physical injury.

A quarter of these incidents occurred in the vicarage, a third occurred in the church/grounds and a further quarter occurred on the street/on estates. Half of the assailants were not known to the clergy.

The majority of assailants were male and over 80% were of similar ethnicity to the clergy.

Two thirds of those who were assaulted reported that the incident had affected them, specifically in terms of dealing with certain people; the ways they undertook their work and their own emotional well-being.



Fear of violence...

In understanding violence against professionals, we also need to look at fear of violence because it affects the ways in which professionals work and deal with situations where they may be at risk of violence.

Two out of every five clergy (39% of male and 51% of female clergy) reported being afraid of becoming a victim of violence while undertaking their work.

Feeling afraid was reported by more inner city clergy than their rural counterparts.

Where do clergy feel afraid ?

During the day 3 out of every 10 respondents reported being afraid of becoming a victim of violence in the vicarage while a further third felt fear while in church or on the street.

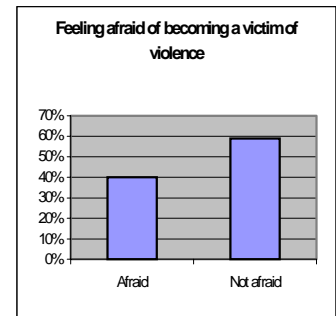
Similar fears were evident at night time.

For many clergy, fear is associated with being unfamiliar with the areas/estates they visit.

Fear is also associated with callers whose behaviour is unpredictable because of illness

or addictions.

For some clergy there was also fear for the safety of their families when they were out in the parish.



Safety and risk management in ministry work

How is violence managed by clergy?

The survey suggests that almost 80% of clergy do not have a policy or guidelines on what to do if faced with aggression.

Of the 20% who have some form of policy in place most are informal in nature (verbal advice or general advice which may also include reporting incidents of violence to police).

Many of these policies are seen as guidelines rather than rules.

Over two thirds of clergy do not undertake risk assessments. Of those who do, most are undertaken after an incident has occurred.

What about safety devices ?

Three quarters of vicarages have some security devices—mainly locks or panic alarms.

However many clergy take individual precautions to enhance their safety. The most popular of these practices include:

- Leaving their schedule with another person;
- Carrying their mobile phone for safety reasons;
- Taking precautions when answering the door to casual callers.

Whatever situations are put down in these guidelines, you have actually got to be able to assess the situation you're in and react appropriately... you can't say 'I've got to look up in my book what I do in such and such a situation. You have to learn to assess what's happening' Female vicar

Staying Safe

While the majority of clergy surveyed were not assaulted during the 2 years prior to the survey, we were keen to ask what recommendations they would make to reduce violence at work.

At the time of the survey, almost 90% of clergy had never undertaken training on how to manage violence. Of the 11% who had undertaken training

under two thirds considered it to be effective.

In order to improve their own safety, the two most frequently mentioned suggestions included:

- More guidelines and advice on how clergy and their families can handle violence;
- More training on personal safety and the availability of

more personal safety devices.

Concluding thoughts:

What is apparent from this research is that although rates of serious violence (like assaults) are low, verbal abuse and threats are relatively high. These forms of violence have an impact on clergy well-being and their professional practice.

I prepare myself carefully now for whatever I do, whether it's working for an organisation in a counselling field or working as a priest. I take my cue from the environment I find myself in. I don't make assumptions, I'm cautious but not to the point where it inhibits me. Male Vicar



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Further findings and project details are on our VAP webpage:
<http://www.rhnc.ac.uk/sociopolitical-science/>
Look under the research menu for the VAP site.

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Professor Betsy Stanko. Professor Stanko is Professor of Criminology at Royal Holloway, University of London.

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Useful resources and references

USEFUL REFERENCES ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CLERGY

Kuhrt G (1997) Clergy Security—A discussion paper. Advisory Board of Ministry. Church of England.

Budd, T., (1999) *Violence at work: Findings from the British Crime Survey*. London: Home Office.

MSF (1993) Prevention of Violence at work—guidance for MSF Members and Safety representatives: - a guide to health and safety. MSF information sheet no 32.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Health and Safety Executive

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/>

Home Office:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

Victim Support:

<http://www.victimsupport.com/>