Situational Risk Factors Associated with Child Sexual Abuse in the Black Church and the Interventions to Keep Black Children Safe

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Abstract
This dissertation explores the problem of Child Sexual Abuse within the Black Church by applying a situational crime prevention (SCP) lens to this issue in four stages. First, this dissertation traces the origins and application of situational crime prevention by criminologists in order to explore situational indicators that put children at risk within institutions. Second, this dissertation traces the emergence of the Black Church as a protective factor from historical trauma experienced by African Americans. Third, it identifies how some of these same protective factors have become situational risk factors within the Black Church that pose serious threats to children's safety. These factors include a patriarchal leadership structure, the legacy of independent churches, the lack of organizational oversight, racial loyalty, and the rejection of formal training for ministry. Finally, this dissertation outlines comprehensive interventions which can protect black children from sexual abuse in the Black Church. Implications for policy, practice and research are provided.

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Situational Risk Factors Associated with Child Sexual Abuse in the Black Church and the Interventions to Keep Black Children Safe

Ebony Speakes-Hall

A DISSERTATION

In

Social Work

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Social Work

2019

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Supervisor of Dissertation

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Situational Risk Factors Associated with Child Sexual Abuse in the Black Church and the
Interventions to Keep Black Children Safe

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Ebony Speakes-Hall
DEDICATION
To all my ancestors who have paved the way for generations to come.

To Black Women.

To Black Children.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my husband, Arlynn Hall, who has been a rock throughout my doctoral journey. He has carried the load as I travelled and studied to meet my professional and academic obligations. As I retreated to my office at 3:00am to 7:00am, he reminded our son Jaxson that I was studying and could not be disturbed. Arlynn’s love and commitment to lightening my load during this time will never go unappreciated.

I wish to thank my son, Jaxson Hall, who is daily reminder of my commitment to the next generation. Jaxson’s curiosity and innocence invigorates me to continue my work specifically for black and brown children entangled in oppressive systems that seek to annihilate them based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, religion, sexual orientation, and abilities. Jaxson has taught me more about how the world is supposed to be.

I also would like to thank Lani Nelson-Zlupko, my chair, who made me believe I could do anything during this entire process. Lani’s energy was contagious and motivating. She inspired me to dig deep within to present a balanced perspective in my research. Her guidance through the doctoral process has been priceless. I want to thank Lani again for lending her brilliance and intelligence to helping me through this amazing voyage.

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I wish to thank the School of Theology at Virginia Union University (STVU) where I was theologically trained by a host of brilliant African American biblical scholars. STVU challenged me to look at the biblical text through the lens of social justice. The lens I developed has been transformative throughout my professional journey as a social worker. When I arrived at STVU I was blinded to the injustices that existed within black and brown communities but now I see! STVU changed my life forever.

Finally, I would like to thank the Black Church for being a beacon of hope for black people who have endured historical trauma and the continuous sting of racism today. I want to thank the Black Church for cultivating my identity as a child and allowing me to exercise my gifts. The Black Church exposed me to role models who pushed me to pursue higher education and I am forever grateful for them. I am madly in love with the Black Church!
ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the problem of Child Sexual Abuse within the Black Church by applying a situational crime prevention (SCP) lens to this issue in four stages. First, this dissertation traces the origins and application of situational crime prevention by criminologists in order to explore situational indicators that put children at risk within institutions. Second, this dissertation traces the emergence of the Black Church as a protective factor from historical trauma experienced by African Americans. Third, it identifies how some of these same protective factors have become situational risk factors within the Black Church that pose serious threats to children’s safety. These factors include a patriarchal leadership structure, the legacy of independent churches, the lack of organizational oversight, racial loyalty, and the rejection of formal training for ministry. Finally, this dissertation outlines comprehensive interventions which can protect black children from sexual abuse in the Black Church. Implications for policy, practice and research are provided.
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SITUATIONAL RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE BLACK CHURCH

Child Sexual Abuse in the United States among Black Children

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a prevalent problem impacting children, families and communities. Townsend and Rheingold (2013) reveal the grim truth about CSA in that nearly one in ten children will be sexually abused by their 18th birthday. When these statistics are classified by gender the numbers are even more astounding with one out of seven girls and one out of 25 boys sexually abused before they turn 18 (Townsend & Rheingold, 2013). In 2014 there were a total of 810,557 victims of maltreatment in the United States and 58,105 of these cases were due to sexual abuse (United States (U.S.) Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families). Unfortunately, the Child Maltreatment Report of 2014 fails to capture the racial demographic of victims of maltreatment types thus making it difficult to assess the prevalence of African American children who are victims of sexual abuse in that particular year (Ibid).

On the other hand, the 2011 Maltreatment Report captures maltreatment data by racial demographics and it is evident that of the 90,000 children who were victims of child sexual abuse, 21.9% (19,710) were African American. African Americans represent around 13% of the U.S. population (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau [UHHS], 2011 as cited by Perry-Burney, Thomas & McDonald, 2014). Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) highlighted that 8.6% of black high school students admitted they had been forced to have sexual intercourse at some time in their lives. In 2010, 12% of African American females and 7.9% of African American males reported having been
physically forced to have sexual intercourse (Centers for Disease Control, 2010 as cited by Perry-Burney, Thomas & McDonald, 2014). Also, 60% of black girls experience sexual assault by the time they reach 18 years of age (Black Women Blueprint, n.d.). These startling statistics reveal that sexual abuse of black children is a public health issue worthy of attention.

**Protestant Preachers as Sexual Predators**

Although it is unclear how many of these black children were sexually victimized by clergy in the Black Church, we do know that Protestant clergy have been perpetrators of sexual abuse but have managed to fly under the radar because the “denominations are less centralized than the Catholic Church and independent making it difficult to report” (Associated Press, 2007, p. 1). Church Mutual Insurance Company, GuideOne Insurance Company and the Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company insure 165,495 churches and worship centers-mostly Protestant (Ibid). Insurers reported they “receive upward to 260 reports a year of children younger than 18 being sexually abused by members of clergy, church staff members, volunteers or congregants” (Ibid). It is important to note insurers are clear that reports of abuse do not mean guilt and do not necessarily result in financial awards (Ibid).

In addition to the data made available from insurers, technology has made stories about Protestant clergy who have sexually victimized children more accessible on websites like Clergy Gone Wild (clergygonewild.com), thus demonstrating that the Protestant churches are not immune to hiring clergy members who have the same propensity to sexually abuse children as the Catholic Church (Tarico, 2010). With the access to insurance data and technology the Black Church can no longer deny it has a problem: steps must be taken to ensure that children are safe within the institution.
This paper seeks to study the problem of CSA within the Black Church by applying a situational crime prevention (SCP) lens to this issue in three stages. First, this paper explores child sexual abuse trends in the U.S. at large, the origins of SCP as a way to respond to CSA, and how criminologists have applied this framework to institutions to examine situational indicators that put children at risk within churches in general. Second, this paper will examine the emergence of the Black Church in response to the historical trauma of African Americans, and the role of the Black Church has played in the lives of the black community to mitigate the ongoing brutality of white supremacy. Finally, this paper will explore how several of the very protective factors aimed to buffer the psychological, sexual, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being of African Americans inadvertently place black children at increased risk for sexual abuse. Key unique risk factors for CSA within the Black Church are identified which include 1) a patriarchal leadership structure; 2) the legacy of independent churches; 3) the lack of organizational oversight; 4) racial loyalty; and 5) the rejection of formal training for ministry.

**Child Sexual Abuse within the Black Church**

The Black Church, like churches everywhere, has struggled with how to handle allegations of sexual abuse against clergy. In November, 2017, three African American pastors accused of exploiting and abusing teenage girls were indicted on federal child sex trafficking charges in Toledo, Ohio (Hauser, 2017). Kenneth Butler, pastor of Kingdom Encounter Family Worship Center located in Detroit, Michigan, Anthony Haynes pastor of Greater Life Christian Center located in Toledo and Cordell Jenkins, pastor of Abundant Life Ministries in Toledo knew each other through their affiliation within the Black Church (Hauser, 2017). It is unclear the Black Church’s reaction to the indictment of these pastors; however, documents indicate that Pastor Butler posted a video on the church’s Facebook stating, “It is never my intention to hurt or
displease God. Let alone you, the people” (Hauser, 2017). Pastor Butler’s statement indicates some remorse toward God and the people in his church but fails to acknowledge the damage done to the children he victimized.

Also, Bishop Eddie Long provides a high-profile case that also highlights the Black Church’s difficulty in dealing with sexual victimization. Bishop Eddie Long (the former pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia) passed away on January 15, 2017, from an aggressive form of cancer. His death rekindled immense controversy among members of the Black Church community because of his tainted legacy of child sexual abuse allegations brought against him by four young black males (“Bishop Eddie L. Long,” 2017). Jamal Parris one of the victims described the impact of the sexual abuse as such, “I cannot get the sound of his voice out of my head, I cannot forget the smell of his cologne, and I cannot forget the way he made me cry when I drove in his car on the way home, not able to take enough showers to get the smell of that man off my body” (Osunsami, Tanglao, & Netter, 2010, p. 1). Members of the Black Church community were divided on social media outlets nationwide over whether to sanitize the legacy of Bishop Long or stand in solidarity with the victims who were sexually violated by him. This scandal highlights the Black Church’s potential for sexual victimization and difficulty holding clergy and church leadership accountable for CSA.

**Attempts to Address Child Sexual Abuse in the Black Church**

When it comes to exercising power to address the abuse of children in the Black Church, few advocates can be found attempting to break the silence (Moore et al., 2015). Examples of courageous exposure can be found in the survivors of sexual abuse in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and in Baptist denominations. These groups have created online tools to report sexual abuse within their churches and have created a pictorial gallery of clergy who are alleged
offenders to create some form of accountability and ensure public safety (Moore et al., 2015). In another attempt to address sexual trauma experienced by African Americans within the church, Coleman (2004) points to the Dinah Project (2004) that deals primarily with sexual assault of black women in the church. The Dinah Project provides the following: thematic worship services addressing sexual assault; educational workshops in partnership with clergy and local agencies; and group therapy provided at the church in partnership with a local rape crisis center. In addition, Sisters of Tamar is a faith-based support group for women who are survivors of sexual abuse. The Sisters of Tamar fosters group facilitation to assist black women with coping with feelings of isolation by increasing supportive networks and incorporating faith (Monford-Dent, 2011).

These services for victims and accountability structures serve to address matters after abuse has occurred but fail to create preventative measure to keep children safe from being victims of sexual abuse altogether. With limited advocacy within the Black Church, black children continue to be at risk of becoming victims. Additionally, the limited models of intervention that do exist focus on the individual victims instead of cultivating ways to mitigate situations of risk; in this way, individuals remain vulnerable to sexual assault within the Black Church. These efforts are commendable and serve as starting places for the accountability of the perpetrator and healing for the victims; however, these efforts do not go far enough in developing preventative measures within the environment of the Black Church to eradicate sexual victimization.

**Similarities between Catholic Clergy Sex Offenders and Non-Clergy Sex Offenders**

The Catholic Church was pressured to deal with CSA scandals in 2002 because of the pervasive media coverage of allegations made against priests. Prior to public exposure of CSA
scandals in the Catholic Church few research studies could be found addressing the issue of CSA by clergy (Terry & Ackerman, 2008). Terry and Ackerman (2008) viewed this problem as an opportunity to apply the lens of situational crime prevention - a framework used in other areas of crime investigation – to begin to identify the factors existing within the Catholic Church that make children vulnerable to being sexually abused by clergy.

Terry & Ackerman (2008) compared the findings regarding the nature and scope of child sexual abuse by priests to convicted sex offenders utilizing a SCP framework. A descriptive study was conducted utilizing the data from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice who collected evidence on the nature and scope of child sexual victimization in the Catholic Church, which provided a national account of the data as well as the substantial body of descriptive information about child sexual abuse, abusers, victims, and the situations in which they were abused (John Jay College, 2004, 2006 as cited by Terry & Ackerman, 2006, p. 647). The study found that 4,392 priests and deacons had allegations of abuse against 10,667 victims from 1950 to 2002 (Terry & Ackerman, 2008, p. 648). The comparison data utilized were the results of a study conducted in Queensland, Australia, that examined the data of 323 convicted child sex offenders, 169 of whom admitted their offences and agreed to provide detailed self-report data on psychosocial/psychosexual histories and offending behaviors (Wortley & Smallwood, 2006, p.11). Terry and Ackerman’s (2008) findings are detailed in the following table to demonstrate comparison of situational indicators of sexual abuse in the John Jay College (2004) and Wortley and Smallbone (2006) studies (p.649):
Empirical Evidence of Situational Opportunities

Table 1: Comparison of Situational Indicators of Sexual Abuse in the John Jay College (2004) and Worley and Smallbone (2006) Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situational Indicators</th>
<th>John Jay College</th>
<th>Worley and Smallbone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late onset behavior</td>
<td>Average age of onset: 39 years</td>
<td>Average age of onset: 32.4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No chronic sexual offending</td>
<td>55.7% had 1 victim; 3.5% persistent offenders (abused 10 or more children), accounting for 26% of victimization</td>
<td>Approximately half of offenders had 1 victim; fewer than 10% sexually abused more than 10 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level of paraphilic behavior</td>
<td>2% committed behavior consistent with pedophilia (abusing 2 or more children younger than age of 10); ephebophilia (abusing 2 or more adolescent boys at least 13 years of age)</td>
<td>Fewer than 10% of the sample had any given paraphilia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low incidence of stranger abuse</td>
<td>High level of socialization with family of child; many grooming techniques, enticements</td>
<td>93.5% abused a child whom they know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level networking</td>
<td>5.4% of victims were abused by multiple priests</td>
<td>8% talked to other offenders prior to committing abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level of child pornography</td>
<td>3.35% of priests showed their victims pornographic videos; 4.59% showed pornographic pictures or images; 3.85% took pictures of victims</td>
<td>10% admitted to using child pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations of opportunity</td>
<td>41% committed abuse in parish residence (25% of abusers were pastors, 42% associate pastors); 12.4 % committed abuse in victim’s home; 17.8% committed abuse during travel</td>
<td>68% committed abuse in offender’s residence; 19.5% committed abuse in victim’s home; 20% committed abuse on overnight trip.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Terry and Ackerman’s (2008) work suggests the importance of mitigating situational factors often utilized to manipulate and exploit children. The data also suggest stark similarities between clergy child sex offenders and non-clergy child sex offenders, thus challenging religious communities to take their responsibility of protecting children seriously. These situational indicators remind laity not to be mesmerized by charismatic leaders who deliver powerful litanies, visit the sick and care for the poor. Religious institutions must be diligent about implementing preventative tools to make it difficult for clergy to perpetrate against children. Unfortunately, the data also reflects that background checks are not enough to protect children due to the late onset of the behavior and often lack of chronic sexual offending behavior that make it difficult to determine if clergy members are sex offenders. Clearly, religious institutions must invest in policies and practices that focus on modifying situations of opportunity to stop the sexual victimization of children by clergy.

**The Rise of Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) Model**

Situational crime opportunities theory emerged out of two seminal works. The first, by Mayhem, Clarke, Sturman and Hough (1973) was entitled, “Crime as Opportunity,” a book which mainly focused on physical means of reducing crime opportunities. In Mayhem et al, (1976) opportunity for crime was defined as follows:

“[T]he stimulus conditions, including opportunities for action presented by the immediate environment, are seen to provide - in a variety of ways - the inducement of criminality. These are modified by the perceived risks involved in committing a criminal act; the anticipated consequences of doing so; and-in a complex, interrelated way- the individual’s past experience of the stimulus conditions and of the rewards and costs involved” (pp. 2-3).

Mayhem et al. (1976) were the first to actually empirically study the influence of opportunity in reducing crime. Opportunity reduction was demonstrated by studies conducted by Mayhem et al. (1976) where these researchers conducted two studies. The first study wanted to
explore whether the use of steering wheel locks prevented car theft. The introduction of the steering wheel locks to all new cars in the UK, from 1971, reduced their theft but with some displacement of older cars, meaning the greater security in new cars redirected thieves to easier targets. The second study looked at the presence of or absence of conductor as a factor that minimizes bus vandalism. They found that areas of buses that were not staffed experienced far higher levels of vandalism verses those areas that were staffed (Tilley & SIDEBOTTOM, 1994) Both studies found that situational variables were important in generating the crime patterns of interests. It was evident in the research that the implementation of certain stimulus decreased opportunities of criminality.

In addition, a second key work influencing the rise in SCP theory was Clarke’s (1980) work entitled, “Situational Crime Prevention” which posits looking at crimes as a result of rational choices made during situated opportunities that present the least amount of risk and consequences (Tilley & SIDEBOTTOM, 1994). Clarke’s (1980) situational crime prevention framework allowed for the examination of the opportunities of all types of crimes - including child sexual assault.

Wortley and Smallbone (2006) were the first two researchers to specifically apply situational crime principles to sexual offences against children. Wortley and Smallbone indicated that crime is not a “spur-of-the moment” reaction but is often premeditated and is a well thought out process. They adapted the work of Cornish and Clark (2003) who proposed the following three offender types: anti-social predator; mundane/opportunistic offender; and provoked offender whose criminal dispositions were suggested to play a significant role in how he or she manipulates situational factors when offending.

First, anti-social predators who possesses ingrained criminal disposition and their motivations for offending derive from the intrinsically rewarding nature of the crimes
they committed. Next, is the mundane/opportunist offenders who are ambiguous in their criminal commitment and opportunistic in their offending. Their motivations for offending is the same as for predatory offenders; they have greater stake in conformity and are therefore subject to stronger personal and social constraints on their behavior. These constraints, however weaken from time to time. Finally, the provoked offenders who react to a particular set of environmental circumstances—situational frustrations, irritations, social pressures and the like, that induce them to commit crimes they would not have otherwise committed (pp.14-15).

Wortley and Smallbone (2006) placed these three types of offenders within the context of sexual offending against children. The antisocial predator/persistent sex offenders who equate with the stereotypic predatory child molesters are high frequency and chronic offenders taking calculated steps to obtain victims and developing a repertoire of skills and techniques to allow them to carry out their intent. The aforementioned study suggests that 23% of the sample were identified as persistent sexual offenders having previous sexual offence convictions (p.14). Mundane or the opportunists sex offenders are another category of offenders who are typically intermittent in their sexual offending behavior. The mundane sex offenders represent 41% of their child molesters sample who were serving their first sentence (p.15). Finally, provoked or situational sex offenders will have no criminal involvement; their offending will be a relatively isolated event. Situational sex offenders represented 36% of the sample with their current convictions as their first offences” (p.16). In addition, Wortley and Smallbone’s (2006) research revealed offenders identified multiple settings where they sexually abused children, which fall into three categories: domestic (home of perpetrator); institutional (churches, day care centers, and schools); and public (parks, public toilets, and shopping malls) (pp.19,22). Although domestic settings are far more common for accessing children at about a 69% rate, we should not underestimate the accessibility to children within institutional settings which is around 10.5%; these situations present access to multiple potential victims.
The challenges facing the Black Church surrounding child sexual abuse, including a tendency towards silence, protection of clergy and a response that comes after abuse rather than in preventing it, are similar to those of churches across the religious and racial spectrum. The Black Church is an institution that must give considerable attention to situational risk factors. Importantly, it must examine its own unique characteristics – many of them emerging from protective factors during times of historical trauma against African Americans – that serve to further complicate transparency, promote privacy, protect clergy, and more – all of which serve to weaken the protection of children against its own clergy. This paper applies a Situational Crime Prevention lens to a thorough examination of the historical foundation of the Black Church, highlighting specific current conditions which make children particularly vulnerable to sexual victimization from within the church.

**Historical Trauma of African Americans and the Foundation of the Black Church**

To explore a socio-cultural issue within African American culture without examining the impact of the trauma caused by slavery, Black Codes, Jim Crow and the racial discrimination still in existence today would be academically negligent (Butler, 2007; Degruy, 2005). It would be negligent to explore a socio-cultural issue and develop assumptions without fully exploring the implications of systemic oppression. Although there were many forces used to maintain these systems of oppression, such as beatings, rapes, lynching, castrations, burning of bodies, enforced physical labor, fear, intimidation, separation of families, and even death, the Bible was one of the most influential instruments creating the rationale for a spiritual sanction of a system used to torture and brutalize African Americans (Cannon, 1995). To survive the atrocities of human suffering, African Americans cultivated their own religious practices which eventually led to the creation of the Black Church as a safe haven from inhumane treatment (Alexander, 2011).
The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, also known as the “middle passage,” was a global industry that transported black bodies as commodities to the “West Indies, Europe and the United States among others” to be exploited for labor (Degruy, 2005, p. 73). Slaves were forced into the bowels of ships either “tightly” or “loosely” packed where they suffered together in toxic conditions throughout the treacherous journey over the Atlantic Ocean (Degruy, 2005). Degruy (2005) argues it has been estimated that millions of Africans who died en route exceeded the number of those killed in the Jewish holocaust of the 1930’s and 1940’s (Ibid). If the slaves survived the journey to North America, they were sold into an “institution of chattel slavery and its corollary, white supremacy and racial bigotry, which excluded Black people from every normal human consideration” (Cannon, 1995). Cannon asserts “the humanity of Black people had to be denied, or the evil of the slave system would be evident” (p. 121).

Furthermore, Cannon (1995) posits the following three myths that were perpetuated through biblical interpretation that aided in the sustainability of the institution of slavery to minimize any threat to the economic gain of southern white plantation owners: 1) the mythology of black inferiority; 2) the mythologizing of enslavement; and 3) remythologizing divine will. Black inferiority was crafted through interpretation of biblical texts such as Genesis 9:25-27 where Ham, who is seen as the “progenitor of the Black race and the story of the curse, which Noah pronounced against Canaan, the son of his son Ham, was symbolically linked to the institution of racial slavery” (p.121). In other words, Black peoples’ “inferior status” was validated within the sacred text, making the institution of slavery a direct result of that status. Slave owners also held a myth of enslavement where they viewed themselves as Christian missionaries sent to the “wilds of Africa” to civilize Black people from “ignorance, superstition, and corruption” (p. 122). Ultimately, if whites could relegate Africans to something other than
human, slavery was justifiable, even benevolent. In fact, “slave apologists maintained that
slavery was constantly spoken of in the Bible without any direct prohibition” concluding it must
be the divine will of God (p.125).

Cannon’s (1995) three myths have significant implications of why Black people
formulated their own religious practices leading to the development of the Black Church as an
institution. Black people understood biblical interpretation left in the hands of slave apologists
would only serve to undergird the economic interests of southern white plantation owners.
Therefore, slaves leaned on “traditional African spirituality made up of no one cohesive system
of belief but several strands which could be seen in slave worship and black religious life”
(Alexander, 2011, p. 31).

Alexander (2011) describes it as such:

Each of these elements-universal beliefs in a supreme being; a pervasive sense of reality
of the spirit world; blurring of the lines between the sacred and profane; practical use of
religion in all of life; surrender of excessive individualism for community solidarity;
reverence for ancestors and their symbolic communal presence; greater involvement of
women in ritual and community leadership; and creative use of rhythm, singing and
dance in life and worship (p.31).

African spirituality was the bedrock of slave Christianity and became the lens in which the slaves
developed their own religious practices, and through their spirituality, resisted the external
culture enslaving them (Alexander, 2011). For example, slaves would sneak away late at night
into the brush harbor where they would preach, sing and dance as a form of worship (Alexander,
2011, Raboteau, 2004). Slaves refused to receive a Christian message from a slave owner who
endorsed a system that imposed the dehumanization of a people based on their race (Alexander,
2011 Degruy, 2005). It was within this context black preachers rose to prominence retelling
stories of the Bible that affirmed the humanity and freedom of black people (Alexander, 2011).
Blassingame argues, “that many of the earliest black ministers in the missions of the Baptist
churches, for example, were former river-cult priests from traditional religions in Africa” (as cited in Alexander, 2011, p. 41). Hence, the black preacher came to be revered as a pillar in the black community.

Black preachers were also abolitionists who joined forces with white abolitionists to end the institution of slavery (Alexander, 2011, Degruy, 2005). Although the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863, black people continued to be subjugated to institutionalized oppression through Black Codes in 1865 where “laws controlled movement and activities of those recently freed” (Degruy, 2005, p. 81). The Black Codes gave way to sharecropping which lasted from 1866-1955 because southern whites needed free labor to tend to the care of plantations. This system was used to continue to exploit freed Black people who had no means to care for themselves and families (Degruy, 2005).

It was during this period the Black Church became institutionalized and became a source of identity and refuge for many. Demonstrating that the Black churches continued the resistance through religion they had found refuge in during slavery, the African Baptist and Methodist churches went on to play a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement (Pitts, 2012). “In the North, African Baptists and Methodists took on a more conservative worship style mirroring that white churches they emerged out of. (Alexander, 2011, p.41). In contrast, Black Pentecostalism embraced the African roots of spiritual expression which were evident during the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 which occurred in Los Angeles, California led by William Seymour the founder of the movement (Ibid). Black Pentecostalism appealed not only to black working-class individuals but people of all races, classes and even genders. People traveled from across the United States to partake of speaking in tongues, “anointing of oil, laying on of hands and praying
over material objects, such as prayer cloths as a point of contact for those in distress” (Alexander, 2011, p. 48).

The Black Church embodies several denominations who adopted distinct theological tenets that inform not only ritual, but style of worship; however, no other black denomination is more reflective of the African Traditional Religions than Black Pentecostalism (Alexander, 2011). Black Pentecostalism is unique in its church polity structure, style of worship and theological tenets that have set them apart from other black denominations. Specifically, the Black Pentecostal Church possesses some of the following distinct church structure: patriarchal polity structures; establishment of independent churches; and the devaluing of formal training for ministers (Ibid). Although the Black Pentecostalism’s distinct church structure has been the very foundation, or the glue that has held it together, it has been these very attributes that have become maladaptive making her susceptible to conditions of exploitation of the most vulnerable within her—women and children.

**Black Pentecostalism & Patriarchal Leadership Structure**

As Black Pentecostalism expanded its influence, many denominations along with independent churches were established, and although it was a bastion of resistance to the enslaved, the church has elements of oppression within its own congregations (Alexander, 2011). The Church of God in Christ is the largest Black Pentecostal organization, boasting more than six million members (Chism, 2016). COGIC has a membership that is 60 to 70 percent women; however, the church bans women from “ecclesial authority” (Alexander, 2011, p.311). Women can only be licensed evangelists or missionaries where they can teach and preach to other women and support the local church financially (Ibid). In other words, women are not worthy enough to have authority to instruct men, yet their financial support is accepted without reservation. These
patriarchal limitations within the Church of God in Christ birthed from a desire to “protect womanhood” within the African American community which had been decimated by “lynching, sexual violence, and other crimes” (Butler, 2007, p.33). Black women were fed messages that they were to be “chaste and good homemakers who upheld sanctity of femininity” (Ibid). Butler (2007) argues “the deification of southern womanhood and the vilification of black women and men pushed African American churches to design a role for black women similar to that of white women for the dual purpose of saving the race and promoting Christianity” (p.33). In other words, black women’s femininity became the backbone to sustaining the black family and the church.

Furthermore, this idea of patriarchy is directly related to the authority given to a perceived literal interpretation of scripture in Black Churches (Ward, 2005). This idea of patriarchy reinforces a hierarchy of first God, second is the black man, third is the black woman (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Children are at the bottom of the hierarchy. The positioning of women and children within the system patriarchal leaves them vulnerable to abuse.

Unfortunately, COGIC’s sexist ideology came from its Baptist roots where women are forbidden from leadership roles within the church (Alexander, 2011). COGIC is just one example of how patriarchy was embedded in black male church leaders who attempted to model church structures after white churches (Ibid). Ironically, black ministers and congregations have been distrustful of white-dominated approaches to biblical text (Ward, 2005) however, they readily accept this idea of patriarchy that informs church leadership and governance which developed out of white supremacy.
The Legacy of Independent Churches & Lack of Organizational Oversight

COGIC along with other Black Pentecostal Organizations ignored the role women played in the Azusa Street Revival “where they led worship, preached, spoke in tongues and interpreted, and prayed which is very reflective to African spirituality and communal life” (Alexander, 2011, pp.48-49). Consequently, women left these organizations to pastor independent churches and established Black Pentecostal organizations such as Mt. Sinai Holy Church of America because of the sexist practices within the process of ordination and administrative oversight (Alexander, 2011). Boyd-Franklin (2003) contextualizes this framework within Pentecostal and Apostolic Churches by highlighting that a growing number of small congregations are typical in Black urban communities where intimate relationships can be established between ministers and congregations (p.129). Boyd-Franklin illustrates a trend prominent in the Black Pentecostal legacy known as independent churches who have broken away from ecclesial structures (Alexander, 2011). It is not uncommon to see independent churches existing without any relationship to a governing body providing oversight and accountability (Alexander, 2011). In other words, these self-governing churches establish themselves in isolation of any form of accountability and oversight lending itself over to “power with no corresponding requirement of accountability” (Perry-Burney, Thomas, & McDonald, 2014, cited Flynn, 2003, p. 20).

Embedded in the clergy and laity is a dynamic of an imbalance of power. Clergy are given an enormous amount of power that is organizationally sanctioned and promoted (Perry-Burney, Thomas & McDonald, 2014, p. 988 cited Flynn, 2005).

Fogler, Shipherd, Rowe, Jensen and Clark (2008) cite Franz (2002) and Rossetti (1995) to describe how sexual exploitation may be facilitated by the patriarchal structure of Christian faiths and the exalted role of priests and ministers by arguing:
In Christian faiths (and one could argue all of the world’s dominant monotheistic religions), the pastor’s leadership and love of his church and congregation are proxy for the leadership and love of God. Whether a clergyman counsels a congregant or suggests a plan for the church’s growth and development, the wisdom and correctness of his decisions are understood to stem from the depth of his spiritual connection. Within the context, a survivor may believe that to deny a perpetrating clergyman’s advances are to deny the wishes and moral authority of God. This basic example holds whether the survivor is an adult or child (p. 307).

The imbalance of power between clergy and laity conjoined with the Black Pentecostal legacy of independent churches governed by patriarchy serves to exacerbate the power dynamic rendering women and children powerless in situations of sexual exploitation.

**Racial Loyalty**

In addition to sanctioned and oppressive power differentials in the Black Church, loyalty to the Black race has served as a protective factor throughout history, however, racial loyalty has the potential of being a risk factor for laity to be sexually exploited by clergy members. Racial loyalty played a significant role in creating cohesion between African Americans as they suffered through the slavery, Black Codes, and the Civil Rights Movement. Racial loyalty became the necessary ingredient to overcome white supremacy. Racial loyalty often birthed a collective identity. Hargrove (2014) acknowledges that African Americans are a collectivist culture who “will sacrifice the individual for what is best interest of the group because of the group” (p.2). The collectivist culture way African Americans have coped with “systemic oppression, intergenerational transmission of abuse and personal culpability” (Ibid). African Americans have been socialized to protect their families and communities by “keeping family business” private and not disclosing to “white institutions” (Hargrove, 2014, Moore, Robinson, & Thompson, 2015, p.152). This culture of secrecy developed during slavery as survival tool to cope with the atrocities of being enslaved. Slaves learned to keep secrets regarding the whereabouts of runaway slaves, female slaves who were sexually victimized by slave masters,
and late-night worship services held in the brush harbor (LaReux, 2015; Raboteau, 2004). Secrecy is still a protective measure African Americans utilize to avoid potential interactions with the institutions that have been notorious for promoting systemic oppression against Blacks, such as the criminal justice system, child welfare system, and educational system (Rose, 2012). Therefore, the culture of secrecy within the context of independent churches who have isolated themselves from a formal governing structure might serve to foster a “self-contained environment” where the only form of accountability is from members of the clergy without involvement of “government, police or social service agencies” (Perry-Burney, Thomas, & McDonald, 2014, p.989). This accountability model becomes maladaptive when it perpetuates a culture of secrecy and renders children who are sexually victimized without any recourse and vulnerable to being revictimized.

**Lack of Formal Training**

Often members of the Black Pentecostal church leadership and governance are not formally educated due to the emphasis on divine call “to engage in the work of the ministry” (Alexander, 2011, Pitt & Behnke, 2012, p. 8). God is viewed as the primary teacher, therefore Bible college, divinity school or seminary training are not deemed necessary (Pitt & Behnke, 2012). Some Black Pentecostal “ministers denigrate educational credentialing as an illegitimate means of certifying one’s calling, thereby claiming less easily challenged evidence of their positions as religious laborers” (Pitt & Behnke, 2012, p.15). The lack of formal training among Black Pentecostal ministers limits their exposure to appropriate tools for interpreting the Bible in a way that is going to dismantle the patriarchal structure that is still so prevalent today. Formal training in ministry offers members of clergy pastoral care classes as a way to understand the clergy and laity relational dynamic and ethics (Association of Theological Schools, 2012). Black
Pentecostal ministers’ lack of formal education can be a contributing factor to clergy who violate ethical practices with laity.

**Unique Risk Factors within the Black Church**

When examined through a historical lens, a picture emerges of several unique risk factors for child sexual abuse existing in the Black Church. These factors include 1) the Black Church’s patriarchal governing structure, 2) the legacy of independent churches, 3) racial loyalty and 4) lack of formally trained ministers. These all serve to increase opportunities for children being sexually abuse and for abuse to go unchecked.

Social workers, clergy members and child advocates must examine the risk factors and develop a comprehensive strategy to protect black children within the very churches they attend to be empowered and receive guidance. In order to keep black children safe, advocates and professionals must work together to systematically empower the Black Church to reduce situational opportunities for child abuse while still ensuring the cultural strengths of the institution. Members of the Black Church must be equipped with tangible tools that can be implemented to minimize risk and harm to children.
INTERVENTIONS TO KEEP BLACK CHILDREN SAFE FROM CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE BLACK CHURCH

Child Sexual Abuse in the United States and Black Children Victims

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) impacts children from all demographics in the United States. The 2016 Child Maltreatment report revealed a total 671,622 victims of child abuse and neglect and 57,329 were sexual abuse victims (p.43). However, Sedlak et. al., (2010) demonstrate that race and ethnicity are an important factor in identified sexual abuse. They assert African American children have almost twice the risk of sexual abuse than white children. Children of Hispanic ethnicity have a slightly greater risk than non-Hispanic white children (Ibid). Speakes-Hall asserted (2018) previous research from the 2011 Maltreatment Report captures maltreatment data by racial demographics and it is evident that of the 90,000 children who were victims of child sexual abuse, 21.9 % (19,710) were African American. African Americans represent around 13% of the U.S. population (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau [UHHS], 2011 as cited by Perry-Burney, Thomas & McDonald, 2014). Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) highlighted that 8.6% of black high school students admitted they had been forced to have sexual intercourse at some time in their lives (Speakes-Hall, 2018). In 2010, 12% of African American females and 7.9% of African American males reported having been physically forced to have sexual intercourse (Speakes-Hall, 2018; Centers for Disease Control, 2010 as cited by Perry-Burney, Thomas & McDonald, 2014). Also, 60% of black girls experience sexual assault by the time they reach 18 years of age (Speakes-Hall, 2018; Black Women Blueprint, n.d.). Through the adoption and
implementation of preventative strategies these opportunities of sexual exploitation of black children can be greatly reduced.

**Unique Factors of Black Church and Situational Interventions to Keep Black Children Safe**

This paper draws on the examination of the following unique factors of the Black Church: patriarchal governance structure; the legacy of independent churches; racial loyalty; and untrained clergy within the Black Church as situational risk factors that create opportunities for clergy members to offend against children (Speakes-Hall, 2018). The work posits that the implementation of situational interventions proposed by Wortley and Smallbone (2006) who employed Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) strategies (Cornish & Clark, 2003) can be applied systematically in order to ensure the safety of Black children. This work will make a series of recommendations based on Wortley and Smallbone’s (2006) following precipitator-control strategies: increasing effort; target hardening; increasing risk; controlling prompts; and reducing permissibility to minimize child sexual abuse within institutional settings. The implementation of these preventative measures serves to address those blind spots in the Black Church which have contributed to the vulnerability of children.

**Increasing Effort within Black Church’s Patriarchal Structure and Independent Churches**

Patriarchy and legacy of independent churches are unseen areas that have created opportunities for children to be exploited. Independent churches are congregations who have broken away from ecclesial structures (Alexander, 2011; Speakes-Hall, 2018). Patriarchy within the Black Church reinforces a hierarchy that places God first, the black man second directly under God, and the black woman third (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Speakes-Hall, 2018). Patriarchy has been a prevailing structure within the Black Church for years leaving women and children powerless within a male dominated system. Black male clergy have been able to operate
within structures governed by patriarchy and independent churches with little accountability (Speakes-Hall, 2018). It is the responsibility of the Black Church to ensure the safety and well-being of every child within all its congregations. The ability to protect children must start with the pre-employment screening process. The Black Church must be assigned the responsibility to increase effort which involves making the offending behavior more difficult or inconvenient to carry out (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). The Black Church’s ability to invest on the front end to do its due diligence during the hiring process can greatly reduce its employment of potential sex offenders as clergy. Sex offenders might be slowed down by this strategy, while situational and opportunistic offenders may be fully deterred (Ibid). According to Speakes-Hall (2018), researchers Wortley and Smallbone (2006) adapted the work of Cornish and Clark (2003) who proposed the following three offender types: anti-social predator; mundane/opportunistic offender; and provoked offender whose criminal dispositions were suggested to play a significant role in how he or she manipulates situational factors when offending.

First, anti-social predators possess ingrained criminal dispositions and their motivations for offending derive from the intrinsically rewarding nature of the crimes that are committed. Next, the mundane/opportunistic offenders are ambiguous in their criminal commitment and opportunistic in their offending. Their motivations for offending are the same as for predatory offenders but they have a greater stake in conformity and are therefore subject to stronger personal and social constraints on their behavior. These constraints, however weaken from time to time. Finally, the provoked offenders are reacting to a particular set of environmental circumstances---situational frustrations, irritations, social pressures and the like, that induce them to commit crimes they would not have otherwise committed (pp.14-15).

Increasing effort involves the implementation of required extensive background checks (multistate, federal, county and national sex offender checks) for all potential clergy applicants. These strategies would be more effective within black denominations who are attached to formal
governing bodies who provide oversight and accountability (Moore, Robinson, Dailey & Thompson, 2015; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006; Jack & Wilcox, 2017).

Next, the Black Church’s responsibility is to determine the criminal propensity for clergy to ensure the safety of children. It is important to acknowledge the Black Church might feel apprehensive with implementation of increasing effort strategies due to the over-representation of black men who have interfaced with the criminal justice system. Black congregants have to balance the need to protect black males from unnecessary or unwarranted exposure to the criminal justice system with protecting children from harm committed at the hands of black adults. Therefore, the Black Church cannot minimize or dismiss the findings related to the background checks for potential clergy members and prioritize the safety of black children.

Therefore, background checks are an imperative component during the pre-screening process of clergy applicants because it allows the Black Church to determine the potential for criminality based off of sexual offenses and non-sexual offenses. Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005) remind the Black Church that “13.7% of most sex offenders were not caught for another sexual offense; on average, they were more likely to recidivate with non-sexual offense than a sexual offense (overall recidivism rate of 36.2%) (p.1158). All background checks with questionable non-sexual offenses should be a red flag to the Black Church to proceed with caution before hiring those clergy to serve. The hiring committee should explore whether these non-sexual offenses were preceded by sexual offenses. Background checks also assist with identifying risk factors of clergy applicants who are sex offenders. Hanson and Morton-Bourgon suggest “sexual deviancy and antisocial orientation were the major predictors of sexual recidivism for both adult and adolescent sex offenders” (p.1158). If the background check yields evidence of previous convictions associated with sexual offenses potential candidates should be
denied the opportunity of employment to ensure safety of laity. The Black Church would benefit greatly from following the precedents and hiring practices of institutions such as schools and daycares, who refuse to employ individuals with sex crime convictions. Terry and Ackerman (2008) highlight the limitations of background checks as it relates to Catholic clergy by noting that the onset of sex offending behavior was around 39 and 55 years of age (Speakes-Hall, 2018). Non-clergy sex offenders’ onset of sex offending behavior was around 32 years of age and almost half reported having restricted their offending to one victim (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006; Speakes-Hall, 2018). Jack and Wilcox (2017) cite Haywood, Kravitz, Grossman, Wasyliw, and Hardy (1996) to reaffirm the distinctions between clergy sex offenders versus non-clergy sex offenders by arguing:

    Clerics convicted of sex offending tend to be older, better educated, and single when compared to other sex offenders. Clerics who offended were more likely to target fewer victims and direct their attention to older adolescents in comparison to non-clergy sexually abusive controls, who proportionally abused more victims and were more likely to target younger children (p.58).

With that being said, these risk factors are difficult to capture through standard background checks, therefore the Black Church must invest in modifications to the institution to make it difficult to commit crimes against children. The Black Church’s implementation of background checks are pre-screening tools for potential clergy applicants serve as increasing effort strategies making offending behavior more difficult to carry out against black children. The Black Church’s ability to be pro-active during the pre-screening of potential applicants enables them to mitigate the risk of black children being sexually victimized by clergy members.

“Target Hardening” as a Protective Factor for Black Children in Independent Churches

In addition to increasing effort, another intervention which the Black Church must employ is known as “target hardening,” refers to “obstructing offenders in their illegal pursuits”
with items such as "physical barriers, locks or screens" (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006, p.24). The Black Church must consider the installation of glass windows in children’s classrooms to allow for the behaviors of clergy and staff to be observed by laity. It should also consider investing in a surveillance system to monitor activity throughout the building. The Black Church should consider installation of cypher lock systems to children’s areas to monitor the movements of clergy and staff. Target hardening in the case of the sexual abuse of children may be operationalized by the teaching of so-called preventative strategies to children” (Wortley & Smallbone (2006) cited Wyles, 1988, p.24). It is true that both black children within formal denominations and independent churches would benefit from child sexual abuse preventative education measures. However, for black children within independent churches target hardening might be the first line of defense in keeping them safe within a church governed by potential sexual perpetrators. Most independent churches are established by minsters or congregations who have broken away from a formal denominational structure and lack accountability and oversight (Alexander, 2011; Speakes-Hall, 2018). The implementation of target hardening might be difficult initially due to the intimate relationships between ministers and congregations within independent churches along with the patriarchal influence that exist within Black Church culture (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Speakes-Hall, 2018). Congregants might find it hard to conceptualize that Black Clergy might be sex offenders because of the historical significance black ministers have played in this community dating back to slavery (Raboteau, 2004). The institution of slavery was justified based on faulty biblical interpretation (Cannon, 1995; Speakes-Hall, 2018). However, slaves refused to receive a Christian message from slave owners who endorsed a system that imposed the dehumanization of a people based on their race (Alexander, 2011 Degruy, 2005; Speakes-Hall, 2018). It was within this context black preachers rose to prominence retelling
stories of the Bible that affirmed the humanity and freedom of black people (Alexander, 2011; Speakes-Hall, 2018). Blassingame argues, “many of the earliest black ministers in the missions of the Baptist churches, for example, were former river-cult priests from traditional religions in Africa” (as cited in Alexander, 2011, p. 41). Hence, black preachers came to be revered as pillars in the black community (Speakes-Hall, 2018). They have been conceptualized through a salvific lens within the black community which keeps them insulated from accountability measures for indiscretions. As a result, black church members have often been dismissive of sexual allegations leveraged against their own due to maladaptive application of racial loyalty and protection of patriarchy.

Additionally, parents are responsible for educating children about the potential dangers of child sexual abuse wherever they may go. The literature is consistent that “risk and consequences of sexual abuse are known to be reduced in secure, protective families” (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006, cited Conte, Wolf, & Smith, 1989, Kendall-Tackett, Williams, and Finkelor, 1993). Parents have to encourage children to be “assertive” and say “no” if approached by perpetrators; and this has been shown to be the most successful tactic in deterring potential perpetrators (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006, cited Smallbone & Wortley, 2001, 2000). This tactic runs contrary to African American children who are taught to obey their elders. African American parents have to allow their children to say no to adults who make them feel uncomfortable even if they are clergy members. Parents should advocate for child sexual abuse preventative programs to be hosted by the church that focus on teaching confidence and assertiveness. (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Parents who desire to minimize the risk of CSA within the Black Church can reach out to organizations, such as Darkness to Light, to assist with trainings and resources (Darkness to Light, 2017).
However, the close relationship created within the independent church structure serves to foster the idea that the Black Church is an extended family member for many in the black community. Boyd-Franklin (2003) argues that a growing number of small congregations are typical in black urban communities where intimate relationships can be established between ministers and congregations (p.129). While that has been a strength historically, it must be tempered with diligence for protecting children. Church members and child advocates cannot allow the intimate relationship within the Black Church to impede the implementation of strategies that keep children safe from sexual victimization.

**“Increasing Risks” as a Tool to Help the Black Church Keep Kids Safe**

Also, the Black Church has a responsibility to increase surveillance of clergy and staff who have access to children. This approach is known as increasing risks which involves making it more likely that the offenders’ behaviors will be observed or detected by the following interventions: extending guardianship; strengthening formal surveillance; increasing natural surveillance; and utilizing place managers (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006, p.25; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006, p. 25 cited Cornish & Clark, 2003). Increasing risks fosters an environment of intensified supervision making clergy and staff’s interactions with children observable by multiple parties.

The absence of capable guardians is one of the prerequisites for crime to occur (LeClerc, Wortley & Smallbone, 2011, cited Cohen & Felson, 1979). In other words, supervision is a deterrent for individuals who commit crime and is more effective than background checks. Capable guardians provide another level of surveillance for clergy members who have flown under the radar due to late onset of sexual predatory behavior or clean background checks. Extended guardianship is a form of supervision that encourages individuals to become “crime
watchers” within informal spheres of influence such as one’s home (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Likewise, in the context of CSA, parents become the extended guardians who monitor and supervise individuals who have access to children (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Most sexual offenses against children occur within the home and parents are perpetrators in just 15% of the cases indicating that 85% of the other cases involve non-parental perpetrators (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006, cited Simon & Zgoba, 2006). The Black Church must partner with parents to be diligent regarding the safety and security of their children (Ibid). In fact, the Black Church and parents have a responsibility to exercise caution with individuals who display the following characteristics: overenthusiastic adults who seek long-term and repetitive access to children; individuals who are more interested in the children than in the parents; and beware of “over-loving” or “over-affectionate” type of people (LeClerc et al., 2011; Elliot, Browne, & Kilcoyne, 1995). This list is in no way exhaustive and parents and church officials must stay persistent about monitoring and supervising their children. Many schools administer programming to educate parents about “stranger danger” (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006; Elliot et al., 1995; Terry & Ackerman, 2008). For example, the Ohio Department of Education educates teens about the importance of stranger danger (Ohio Department of Education, 2018). However, it imperative that the Black Church and parents realize that clergy, family members and friends can sexually victimize children. It is important that the Black Church partner with parents and community members to decrease situational opportunities to sexually victimize black children.

In addition to extended guardianship, official guardianship takes place when institutions assume the responsibility for providing supervision and monitoring thus allowing for strategies to increase the levels of formal surveillance (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). To contextualize strategies within the Black Church it is important that formal denominations and independent
churches consider adopting policies that require all clergy, staff and volunteers to participate in trainings; such as, Sexually Safer Best Practice Congregation hosted by the Religious Institute (2015). The training covers the following areas: board-clergy commitment; designated committee for sexually safer congregation; written policy for sexually safer congregation; sexual harassment policies; written code of conduct; professional training; education on preventing abuse; screening forms; staff and volunteer training; policies ensuring two unrelated adults are present at all times around children; spaces for counseling and education; youth guidelines; youth group guidelines; technology (church computers; social media); sex offenders; adolescent/child offenders; and ongoing commitment (Religious Institute, 2015). Granted many small independent churches might not have the economic resources to pay for formal trainings for clergy, staff and volunteers but money should not be barrier to making a commitment to ensure the safety of children through the development of policies and practices within the church setting. However, church leaders of financially distressed congregations can become familiar with the curricula and decide how they might adopt, amend or implement the components of the training and opt not to purchase the training. The Black Church can apply for grants to supplement the training costs associated with becoming an organization that supports best practices ensure children are not sexually victimized. It can consider engaging in a partnership with social service agencies to provide local trainings within the Black Church. A single most cost-effective tool for formal denominations and independent churches would be to develop procedures that “forbid employees and volunteers from being alone with children” (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). With that being said, the Black Church can become a safer place for kids through grant writing, relationship building within the community and prohibiting adults from being alone with kids.
Spousal Teams vs. Unrelated Adults Working with Kids

It is further recommended Black Churches shy away from employing spousal teams to work directly with children and require two unrelated adults work with children.

Pflugradt and Allen (2014) cite Wijkman, Biileveld, and Hendriks (2011) whose research provides the rationale for not employing spousal teams to work with children by describing distinct female sex offending behavior, arguing:

Although they concluded that the personality and offending characteristics of female sexual perpetrators were generally similar to male sex offenders, there was a significant difference: most of the females sexually offended in the “active presence” of a male co-offender who was also their “romantic partner.” Consequently, these interactions with male accomplices not only alter the setting where the offences occur; these characteristics of the female offender may also become “blurred” with those of her co-offender.

The literature is a gentle reminder to the Black Church that females can also be sex offenders. The Black Church cannot allow social stereotypes of women being nurturing and caring to distort our vision when creating formal surveillance to ensure the safety of black children. The portrayal of women in stereotypical ways allows many females who are sexual offenders to fly under the radar, thus the scant research on female sex offenders (Pflugrandt & Allen, 2014). Research further highlights how intimate connection between sex offenders is a risk factor for children. Intimate connection decreases inhibition and accountability of perpetrators who sexually victimize children. Therefore, the Black Church cannot allow its patriarchal commitment to gender roles among women and men to blind them to the risk factors that females can pose to children. It is imperative Black Church establish policies that support formal surveillance requiring two unrelated adults be present to ensure accountability and safety for children.
“Controlling Prompts” Limits Perpetrating Preachers

In addition to increasing risks measures, controlling prompts is another preventative measure which involves identifying and removing situational triggers within the environment to reduce opportunities of crime (Wortley 2001 as cited by Wortley & Smallbone, 2006, p. 27). Situational triggers might involve the following: children changing clothes at a swimming event; traveling with clergy; or allowing children to be alone with clergy (Terry & Ackerman, 2008). Learning theories emphasize the role of immediate environments in curing behavior. Situations, then, may contain within them the impetus to offend. Sexual offenses can occur against children in “provocative” (from the perspective of the offender) or vulnerable situations (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). With that being said, the Black Church has been the place where racial identity and collectivism has been cultivated by relationship with clergy members (Speakes-Hall, 2018). Yet, the cultural matrix of Black Church’s emphasis on relationships with clergy members has created opportunities for black children to be sexually exploited. Furthermore, unsupervised relationships with clergy members are vulnerabilities that pose risks to children and often go unrecognized due to the perceptions that clergy members possess unquestionable authority.

Moreover, African American single mothers might be especially susceptible to the risks of unsupervised relationships with clergy members. Many African American single parent mothers often look to the Black Church as an extended family member to assist with raising children (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Single mothers are looking to the Black Church to provide mentorship and role-modeling for their children (Ibid). Befriending single mothers is one technique often utilized by sex offenders to gain access to children (Elliot et al., 1995). The assumption made by sex offenders is that single mothers are more susceptible to grooming.
strategies because they are stressed and overwhelmed with the responsibility of parenting. For example, one of the more controversial cases in the Black Church was the case of the late Bishop Eddie Long, the Pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta who was accused of sexually exploiting four African American men. Many of Eddie Long’s victims were from single-parent households who entrusted him to be a mentor and role model for their sons. Eddie Long recruited his victims from his LongFellows Youth Academy where he served as pastor, counselor, confidant and mentor to boys ages 13-18 in this tuition-based program which purported to train young men to love, live and lead as they proceed on their “masculine journey” (Flagg v. Long; New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Inc.; and the LongFellows Youth Academy, Inc., 2010). Anthony Flagg, one of Eddie Long’s accusers, was the son of a single black mother who looked to Pastor Eddie Long to assist with developing and mentoring her fatherless son as revealed by the deposition:

Plaintiff Flagg spent significant time alone with the Defendant Long and opened up to Bishop Eddie Long about the difficulties he had without a father in his life. In or about May 2007, when Plaintiff Anthony Flagg was in the Eleventh (11) grade and had recently been arrested for simple assault, Defendant Long asked Plaintiff Flag to move into a home located at [an undisclosed address], Plaintiff Flagg’s mother agreed to allow Plaintiff Flagg’s mother agreed to allow, Plaintiff Flagg to move in [an undisclosed location] since Defendant Long suggested it and she believed it would provide Plaintiff Flagg stability and more opportunity to learn and grow with such an important spiritual mentor in her son’s life (Ibid).

The highlights from the CSA case with Eddie Long insist African American parents need to be skeptical about clergy who seek to form close intimate relationships with their children through mentoring or engaging in activities where they are alone with black children (Leclerc et al, 2011; Terry & Ackerman, 2008). Clergy soliciting to be caregivers for children might be a more obvious sign to parents. However, clergy requesting to take children on overnight trips might not be so obvious. For instance, Eddie Long’s victims reported during interviews much of the sexual
abuse happened as they traveled with him domestically and internationally. Maurice Robinson, another of Eddie Long's victims, revealed in his deposition: “Defendant Long took Plaintiff Robinson on several overnight trips to various destinations including, New York, New York, Turks and Caicos and Auckland, New Zealand. During the New Zealand Trip, Defendant Long [sexually victimized] Robinson” (Robinson v. Long; New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Inc.; and The LongFellows Youth Academy, Inc., 2010). The fate of Mr. Flagg and Mr. Robinson might have been different if the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church had taken the necessary steps to control the prompts within to protect the children in LongFellows Academy.

Solidly put, “controlling prompts in the [Black Church] should, therefore, focus on controlling or eliminating any potentially intimate activity around clergy or activity when clergy is alone with a child” (Terry & Ackerman, 2008, p. 655). In other words, the Black Church must adopt policies and procedures that do not allow clergy to take children on overnight trips or be alone with children without the presence of another unrelated adult. The lack of alone time with clergy might seem a bit extreme for parishioners in the Black Church who look to clergy as counselors, pastors, mentors, and even surrogate fathers. It is imperative that laity understand that sex offenders utilize isolation to exploit victims. Children should not spend alone time with clergy because impedes the ability of potential perpetrators from forming emotional bonds with [black children] that can later be exploited (Terry & Ackerman, 2008). This strategy challenges the intimacy between pastors and laity especially within small independent churches; however, the safety of children must be valued beyond relationships with clergy.

“Reducing Permissibility”

As the Black Church implements controlling prompts it also must be willing to hold clergy accountable by reducing permissibility. Reducing permissibility is the act of recognizing
that situations can help obscure the offender’s contribution to the harm-doing and seek to employ strategies to help the offender clarify the role of his or her behavior (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). It is not uncommon for sex offenders to minimize or justify their behaviors through cognitive distortions to avoid confronting feelings of guilt and shame associated with their behaviors (Ibid). For this reason, the Black Church has the responsibility of reducing secrecy to protect clergy members who sexually offend against children. It must refuse the temptation to reassign clergy members to new churches and it must be willing to suspend them from ministerial duties. It must be willing to lead the charge in reporting sexual abuse of to the appropriate authorities and supporting the children who have been sexually victimized. CSA has no place in the Black Church

The Black Church’s refusal to hold clergy accountable for their actions and the lack of formal training serve to exacerbate the process of sex offenders taking responsibility for their actions. Wortley and Smallbone (2006) admit reducing permissibility are most effective with situational and opportunistic offenders who retain an underlying belief that sexual offending against children is morally wrong (p.28).

The Black Church must demonstrate courage by holding clergy accountable who offend sexually against children by creating structures within the denominations that hold clergy responsible for their actions. A 2016 Lifeway Research Study indicated that African-American pastors are more likely than other pastors to support remaining in the pulpit while being investigated for sexual misconduct (Blair, 2018). It is imperative the Black Church obtain an external governing body who have the authority to suspend clergy of ministerial duties while children services and law enforcement conduct their investigations. External governing bodies should require that all congregations obtain liability insurance as a matter of best practice to
reassure laity the congregation is operating at a high standard. Moore et al., (2015) insists clergy and administrators overseeing child-related events benefit by establishing a hierarchical system that promotes disclosure and responsibility (p.151). For example, some formal denomination structures, such as the Catholic Church, have now established profile databases that are accessible throughout the organization so congregations are aware of clergy indiscretions within the denomination (Bishop Accountability, 2003). So, if pastors are suspended or fired and attempt to pursue other opportunities within the organization those indiscretions can be found within the database so congregations can make an informed decision about employing clergy seeking new opportunities. In other words, this database adds an additional tool to the prescreening of applicants who might have the potential to sexually abuse children. Furthermore, denominations should develop a database to track preachers who commit sexual violence against children to demonstrate their commitment to the safety and well-being of its congregants. Next, the Black Church has to resist the urge to maintain the legacy of secrecy and collectivism in order to protect black male clergy in particular from involvement of law enforcement and child protective services. The Black Church must allow for outside authority involvement in substantiated abusive events understanding that many of the laws regulating mandate to report override any anonymity that churches have established within parishes (Moore et al., 2015, p.151). In fact, the Black Church stands to benefit from developing a reputation as an institution that will not tolerate clergy who sexually abuse children.

Unfortunately, the lack of formal training among clergy members serves as a barrier to reducing permissibility, thus creating more opportunities for children to be sexually exploited. Formal training involves clergy members who pursue vocational preparation through bible colleges, seminaries and schools of divinity (Speakes-Hall, 2018). Although, the lack of formal
training of clergy may seem of concern to only a small group of those who attend the Black Church, it should in fact concern anyone who cares about the safety and well-being of children. To reiterate, the lack of formal training limits clergy’s exposure to curricula that assist with Biblical interpretation and ministerial ethics. Patriarchy and other forms of abuse of power can be dismantled and challenged when individuals are trained in appropriated tools to interpret the Bible. The purpose of ministerial ethics allows clergy to distinguish between the power dynamic that exist between clergy and laity and how it can easily be exploited (Speakes-Hall, 2018; Association of Theological Schools, 2012). The Association of Theological Schools (2012) have made it a mission as an accrediting body to ensure seminaries’ curricula reflect some form of ministerial ethical training. Therefore, the Black Church should look to hire ministers who have acquired graduate training or some form of ethics training before pursuing a full-time ministry position. Adequate ministerial training can assist with reducing permissibility.

Conclusion

The Black Church is an institution that was birthed out of the historical trauma African Americans experienced during Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Jim Crow, Black Codes, and racial oppression today. The Black Church was and still is safe haven from the direct assault of white supremacy. It was the only institution African Americans trusted to protect them because they could exercise full autonomy within its structure. The Black Church adopted the following cultural customs: patriarchal governance structure; the legacy of independent churches; racial loyalty; and untrained clergy to protect them from the atrocities of racism. However, these cultural elements have become maladaptive over time and as a result have left black children vulnerable to being sexual exploited by the very clergy charged with safe guarding them. With
that being said, the Black Church has a responsibility to create a safe environment for black children. The Black Church should consider the implementation of the following strategies:

- Increasing effort to make the offending behavior more difficult to carry out by the implementation of extensive background checks during the pre-employment process;
- Target hardening by prioritizing preventative strategies, such as teaching black children about the potential danger of child sexual abuse;
- Increasing risks by increasing the supervision of behavior of clergy and staff who have access to children by ensuring two unrelated adults are present when working with black children;
- Controlling prompts by limiting unsupervised intimate relationships between clergy or other church volunteers and children.
- Reducing permissibility by requiring that clergy be held accountable when they sexually victimize black children. This accountability requires that the Black Church track and report incidents of sexual abuse to Children Services and law enforcement. It also requires that clergy be stripped of credentials and removed from ministerial positions.

The Black Church must be aware that these preventative strategies are in no way an exhaustive list; however, the implementation of these tactics will serve to promote best practices and keep black children safe from CSA in the Black Church.
References


Flagg v. Long; New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Inc; & the LongFellows Youth Academy, Inc, 10A32029-4, 2010.


Robinson v. Long; New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Inc; & the LongFellows Youth Academy, Inc, 10A32028-4, 2010.


