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## Case Studies Using the Polygraph to Assist in Assessing Sexual Risk in Three Clerics

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### Introduction

A psychological assessment is commonly used in a range of clinical, occupational and forensic settings. Increasingly, religious organisations have recognised the value of secular, independent assessments for both novices and experienced clerics, which can address areas relevant to emotional wellbeing, vocational aptitude, and possible social risk (Jack & Wilcox, 2018). Notably, when addressing risk concerns, there is often a paucity of documentation in cleric assessments compared to that accessible

in traditional forensic settings (e.g. probation, family courts, prisons). As such, it can be helpful to augment standard interview and psychometric practices with additional tools to try to achieve a more informed risk assessment, particularly when allegations of harm remain unresolved. In some such cases, the polygraph is utilised as part of that assessment process.

The polygraph is a scientific instrument which records and displays psychophysiological arousal associated with lying (Walczyk, Sewell, & DiBenedetto, 2018). Nonetheless, there is debate about the accuracy of the polygraph with noted critics, such as Ben-Shahkar (2008), and counter arguments offered by proponents like Grubin (2008). Relatedly, a comprehensive study was undertaken by the National Research Council (2003) in the United States, which found that the accuracy rate of Polygraph testing is likely to be in the region of 80%–90%. This, the authors would suggest, is considerably better than chance and even the efforts of skilled and experienced professionals (Ekman, 1985) but short of irrefutable accuracy. However, Wilcox in *The Economist*, (2019) highlighted that “(the polygraph is) more useful as a truth facilitator than a lie detector”. That is, the polygraph process can lead to fuller reporting of often key relevant information that extends beyond the simple matter of determining a ‘pass’ or ‘fail’ on the test.

In relation to the above, a review of the polygraph, conducted by the British Psychological Society (BPS; 2004) referenced concerns about the polygraph’s ethical employment, its accuracy and its usefulness. However, the review also noted that, in deviating from the original remit for employment of this tool, as a straightforward ‘lie detector’, within the context of examining sexual risk issues, the tool appeared to have some clinical utility. Specifically, it was reported that “there is growing evidence that (this technology) encourages offenders to disclose their deviant thoughts and actions and may also help them to exercise self-control”. Continuing, the BPS review also described, “It may help with relapse prevention”. However, the report added, “More research is needed to ascertain its effectiveness in practice”.

The present authors note that within a population of convicted sexual offenders (Grubin, Madsen, Parsons, Sosnowski, Warberg 2004) found that the likelihood of a polygraphed offender making disclosures relevant to their treatment and supervision was fourteen times greater than for non-polygraphed offenders. In relation to this, in the lead up to the Offender Management Act (2007) being passed, Wilcox and Donathy (2008) reviewed the voluntary use of the polygraph with convicted sex offenders, as it was employed on this basis in early studies in the

UK. Among those probation officers and other professionals employing the polygraph, 92% “opposed the withdrawal” of the polygraph from voluntary use, as they considered it a useful adjunct to the other public protection measures they had at their disposal. Further, largely through Grubin’s (2006) report on extensive polygraph trials in the UK, this technology is now included in the Offender Management Act (2007) for compulsory use in sex offender risk assessment and community supervision of serious offenders. In addition, Wilcox and Donathy (2014) noted that police in Hereford, in the UK, completed a successful pilot polygraph scheme, significantly reducing investigation time and often providing additional information relating to unreported offences amongst suspected sex offenders, who volunteered in advance of bringing charges. The efficacy of polygraph use in this context, has been further supported in a recent study that has investigated disclosure rates as a consequence of polygraph examination (Wood, Alleyne, Ó Ciardha, & Gannon, 2020). Lastly, Collins (2019) has shown the utility and reliability of this technology even with mentally disordered sex offenders.

This case-study based article is presented to demonstrate that information obtained when employing the polygraph, as part of a structured psychological sexual risk assessment, can enhance the comprehensiveness of the report, irrespective of whether the individual passes the polygraph or not (Jack & Wilcox, 2018). Three cases are presented to communicate the utility of the polygraph within this context. Notably, one priest failed the polygraph examination, and a second passed, giving indications that he was providing truthful responses about past sexual behaviour, such that, no deception was noted during examination. A third cleric withdrew from the polygraph process during a pre-polygraph interview.

We discuss how such information can inform the psychological assessment, subsequent decision-making, and safeguard the assessed individual, organisation, and members of the community. We briefly consider ethical concerns, though note that fuller implications for the use of polygraph (Heil & English, 2009) along with a detailed consideration of ethical factors are beyond the scope of the present paper. These issues are further explored elsewhere (Wilcox, 2013; 2019).

Some descriptive information about these priests, viewed as irrelevant to their risk assessment, has been altered to preserve their anonymity. Each author contributed to the psychological risk assessments of the three priests reported upon herein.

## Case Study 1 – Fr James (Failed Polygraph)

Fr James was a 62-year-old male of white European Ethnicity and Irish Nationality. He was an ordained Catholic priest, referred for a clinical psychological assessment of his continuing suitability for ministry. Reported concerns initially related to his reliability, motivation and psychological wellbeing with regard to conducting day-to-day tasks relevant to his work. However, a reference was also made to an earlier reported concern, and an associated psychological assessment, wherein Fr James had reportedly instigated sexual contact with a young male in his previous parish. Related concerns about possible grooming behaviours towards other young male parishioners had also been raised.

In relation to the above, the assessors engaged with the church safeguarding body to clarify that this potential risk element should also be pursued within the psychological evaluation. In progressing along these lines, it became apparent that Fr James' sexualised thoughts and behaviours were more pervasive, troubling and potentially illegal than had initially been judged. For this reason, the assessment progressed from having a clinical psychological focus to incorporate a key forensic / risk assessment element. Indeed, as the interview process proceeded, it was agreed with church safeguarding and Fr James' superiors that efforts to explore the earlier noted indications of sexual deviance should include specialised psychometric measures, a structured risk evaluation, tailored interviews, and an adapted polygraph examination protocol (Wilcox, 2009). The present paper will focus key attention on the polygraph element of the assessment (Sosnowski & Wilcox, 2009; Wilcox, Sosnowski, Warburg & Beech, 2005).

### Assessment Process

As the assessment progressed, on the first occasion that Fr James attended with the reported intention of engaging in a polygraph examination, he was familiarised with the instrument and the administration procedure. He was acquainted with the physiological measures of respiration, blood pressure and galvanic skin response (GSR) and how they would be recorded continuously. Fr James was asked to provide 'yes' or 'no' responses to irrelevant questions, comparison questions and relevant questions, the last of which would explore the areas of alleged sexually deviant behaviour being investigated. Whilst Fr James made some concerning disclosures during the pre-polygraph interview, he reported high level stress elevations and, as such, it was judged not to be appropriate to employ the

polygraph with him at that time. Rather, Fr James was requested to record and detail past perceived sexual transgressions or deviance and, where possible (via a sexual history disclosure form), expand upon them in preparation for his further meeting. Another appointment was scheduled to focus specifically on sexual risk and during this session, the polygraph examination was completed.

The authors note that within the assessment process a thorough review of relevant documentation was considered appropriate, though we have observed that within cleric assessments there is often little historical information, beyond medical records, to be reviewed, coupled with brief notes from the church, often referencing areas of concern or interest that are, at that stage, not well elaborated upon. As a consequence, much of the historical information gained about this cleric was derived from his self-reporting during a structured interview. After this, relevant psychometric measures were administered, and a second interview was conducted which focused upon issues particularly pertinent to the instructions given for the assessment. Although it was noted that depressed mood was identified early in the clinical evaluation, the concerns flagged up around Fr James' sexual behaviour led to a shift of focus from a clinical to a forensic evaluation over the course of his appointments. As such, the employment of the polygraph was considered appropriate to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of any concerning sexual behaviours historically (and currently) presented by Fr James. The aim, therefore, was to work towards achieving a level of transparency and openness from Fr James to reassure church superiors with regard to the judgements they would have to make in their efforts to determine his future as a Catholic priest.

## Background

Fr James reported a 'normal' upbringing though noted a lack of emotional connection and support in relation to his parents. He described adequate performance at school and transitioning into paid employment in the service industry before moving to Spain at the age of 24. Fr James said that he had converted to Catholicism and decided to join a Catholic order where he remained for several years. However, he said that after leaving, he remained in Spain, asserting that his faith had not developed whilst in the order. Subsequently, he spent five more years there before returning to the UK, where he joined a second Catholic order which he asserted was "the perfect fit for (him)".

During interview, Fr James' sexual and relationship history were explored, and he stated that he was homosexual. In early adulthood, he reported a few relationships

before moving to Spain and “some fleeting sexual flings” after leaving the Spanish order. He acknowledged that his interest in these relationships was physical, offering “sexual gratification”. However, he denied any relationship involvements subsequent to joining the further Catholic order in the UK. Relatedly, he stated, “I’ve become more aware of my sexuality, but I have made the decision not to follow those urges”. Nonetheless, given his later disclosures during the assessment process, the authors note the paucity of information he was actually describing at that time, compared with that obtained by the conclusion of the psychological assessment appointments and polygraph administration.

During his assessment, Fr James evidenced a significant self-focus noting, for example, that he had previously engaged in a psychological assessment and received extensive counselling support which he found to be helpful with regard to “learning about (him)self”. Indeed, he seemed to take the view that the current psychological assessment had a primary focus of helping him to grow and integrate his own psychological processes and deal with his personal struggle, rather than giving significant empathic consideration to the impact that his behaviour had had on others. Notably, whilst reporting feelings of shame and guilt, more often Fr James displayed a ‘victim posturing’ manner with an inclination to project accountability for his actions onto others and thereby, from the perspective of the authors, diminish his true capacity for future self-directed risk management. It was also noted that Fr James was guarded throughout when responding to questions of key significance to the risk assessment.

Psychometric measures deemed appropriate for this assessment were administered to enhance the authors’ understanding of Fr James, covering clinical, occupational and forensic domains. However, many of these tools are quite transparent and there was evidence that Fr James responded in a socially desirable manner, which was in keeping with his general approach to the assessment, preferring to dissimulate, rather than be open in responding. Nevertheless, as referenced above, these measures provided some useful information that aided in developing Fr James’ psychological formulation. This reflected him as a depressed and rather psychologically fragmented individual with a tendency to distrust emotional expression and avoid dealing with uncomfortable issues, as a general self-protective strategy. This approach was evident throughout, particularly around discussion of sexual deviancy issues.

## Polygraph Administration

The sexual history disclosure form (SHDF) was found to be a useful adjunct to the assessment of Fr James' sexual deviancy, particularly in combination with the polygraph. The SHDF was given to Fr James after his second appointment in preparation for the polygraph assessment scheduled for his follow-up meeting. Within these assessments, the SHDF is important for two reasons, firstly it is a tool that can, in itself, examine a range of sexual deviance issues, if the respondent is encouraged to be forthcoming. Secondly, it can offer important clarifying information to develop the questions that will be used in the polygraph examination. Notably, it is in the interest of the assessed individual to answer questions fully in the first instance as not doing so can result in a failed polygraph in relation to the specific question "have you provided answers on the SHDF that are completely honest" (Wilcox & Sosnowski, 2005).

The polygraph was attempted with Fr James on two occasions during the follow-up appointment, though his lack of openness on the SHDF was apparent as, during the pre-test interview when discussing his SHDF responses, he amended his self-report. Having made further disclosures, the polygraph was again abandoned during this follow-up session because of Fr James' further disclosures during which he described significant emotional distress that made the polygraph administration inadvisable at that time. However, the pre-polygraph interview and discussion around the SHDF proved to be of considerable value with Fr James disclosing sexualised behaviours that were sufficiently concerning that the authors considered that his removal from ministry was likely warranted. These areas of concern included voyeuristic behaviours and professional sexual misconduct including several situations where he had used his role in the priesthood to coerce young men into sexual acts, together with indications that he had been viewing indecent images.

When Fr James attended again, questions relating to his possible sexual risk were carefully discussed and agreed. As such, the following four questions were asked, requiring "yes" or "no" responses and interspersed with irrelevant and comparison questions.

The four questions were

*Q1. Since being an adult, have you ever touched any child under sixteen for your own sexual gratification?*



*Q2. Since you joined the priesthood, have you ever touched any child under sixteen for your own sexual gratification?*

*Q3. Apart from what you have admitted, since being an adult, have you ever involved any child under sixteen in any sexual activities?*

*Q4. Have you ever searched for any images of children that you knew or believed were under fourteen for masturbatory reasons?*

Notably, Fr James failed the polygraph. Subsequently, he disclosed that he had downloaded “hundreds” of images of teenage boys, under the age of 16. He further acknowledged that he had engaged in incidents of mutual masturbation with boys under the age of consent. Worryingly, Fr James concluded that there were “many other” behaviours that could “get [him] in trouble”, though he declined to make further disclosures.

### Case Summary

At the conclusion of this assessment, which incorporated the polygraph in the formal examination of sexual risk employing the RSVP (Hart et al, 2003), a structured professional judgement tool, along with the polygraph-obtained disclosures, Fr James’ superiors were promptly informed of the assessment findings. In addition, the police were immediately involved, as several disclosures were considered to have met criminal thresholds.

On the basis of Fr James’ early reporting it was, in the judgement of the authors, apparent that he was a psychologically conflicted man with some problematic sexual proclivities. However, the extent of his harmful behaviour and obsessional interest in young males would not, in our opinion, have been revealed without bringing the polygraph into the assessment process. Furthermore, even though Fr James failed the polygraph examination, he did report matters of key concern to the church with regard to his future in ministry and the level of risk he may pose to the public generally. In addition, he acknowledged having engaged in other past misbehaviours that, by his account, exceeded in seriousness those that he had actually disclosed, but about which he was not willing to speak.

Notably, during the post-assessment interview, Fr James reported that he had “thought (he) could beat the polygraph”. In addition, the authors gained the impression that, at times, Fr James employed shows of distress to avoid engagement,



as well as making what appeared to be rather calculated disclosures to put the assessors off-track in targeting other behaviours that were even more concerning. Nevertheless, the psychological risk assessment, supported by employment of the polygraph, served to confirm that Fr James posed a significant risk of sexual harm and produced a more thorough understanding of Fr James' threat to parishioners and the community, leading to the involvement of police and external authorities to investigate these issues further. It was only via a robust assessment strategy that an extensive range of concerning sexual behaviours were elicited from Fr James. Importantly, the polygraph played a key role, incorporating pre- and post-assessment interviews which were instrumental in gaining a fuller understanding of the risk posed by this cleric.

### Case Study 2 – Fr William (Passed Polygraph)

Fr William was a fifty-eight-year old priest who was referred for psychological assessment in relation to concerns regarding potential sexual risk posed to vulnerable male adults. From the outset, the concerns that were raised were of a sexual nature and, as such, alongside a comprehensive forensic psychological assessment, Fr William was informed that (with his consent) the polygraph would be employed. Fr William disclosed that as a homosexual man, he had engaged in sexual activity with other adult males. However, he also acknowledged, to some extent, that these men were vulnerable and that he had engaged in grooming behaviours. Fr William also reported sexual fantasy involving masochistic themes.

### Assessment Process

As with Fr James, the purpose of the polygraph and its administration were explained to Fr William. We explained that we would be exploring aspects of his past sexual history and his sexual interests/behaviours over the course of his life and, as such, he agreed to complete the SHDF. Fr William also reported, at this point, that he had transgressed boundaries in the past and he described succumbing to 'temptation'. Furthermore, he appeared to berate himself for not accessing support services during these times. Fr William consented to the polygraph examination and the questions that were to be asked. His physiological reactions to control, relevant and comparison questions were recorded.

## Background

Fr William reported close family bonds growing up and into adult life. There were no indications of adverse childhood experiences during his early years. Fr William said that he knew from quite a young age that he was homosexual, recalling a fascination with the naked male body. He did not report any professional involvement with his family during his formative years and did not consider that anyone in the family (including himself), had had any mental health challenges.

Fr William was a man of average intelligence who, nevertheless, considered himself as an underachiever in school. He also described some socialisation difficulties growing up, expressing the view that he was rather different than his peers. Despite Fr William reported difficulties with education, he went on to complete formal qualifications after leaving school and, later in life, became ordained as a priest. At the time of referral, Fr William had voluntarily withdrawn from ministry, reporting that this related to the transgressions (noted above).

Fr William described exploring his sexuality prior to joining the priesthood, though he expressed the view that emotional attraction was more important to him than sexual. He also described some limited heterosexual exploration, though expressed regret in this regard. Fr William said that he had had sexual encounters but no lasting relationships.

As with Fr James, relevant psychometric measures were administered with Fr William, though unlike Fr James, Fr William did not respond in a socially desirable manner. Rather, he appeared to overstate psychopathology, suggesting that he felt overwhelmed by his problems. There was a self-denigrating aspect to Fr William reporting and he described significant levels of emotional upset and obsessive ruminations. There was evidence of exceptionally high generalized fear during testing, though the authors formed the view that these features were largely transient in nature, and a result of the risk and safeguarding concerns that he was facing at the time of his referral.

## Polygraph Administration

Fr William said that he was endeavouring to be as open and honest as he could about his past sexually motivated behaviours, in an effort to 'pass' the polygraph. A question put to Fr William during the examination was:

*Q1. Since you became a priest, apart from the two people you have admitted to, have you had sexual activity with anyone else?*

Fr William responded, “No”. The polygraph charts were scored with the support of the latest computerised software, as well as being manually checked. At this point, based on the polygraph results, augmented by investigative interviewing, Fr William was found to be deceptive. We discussed these results with him, and he made some further disclosures of a sexual nature. He went on to disclose that he had not been open and honest during interviews and the subsequent polygraph examination, concealing important risk-related information.

Subsequently, Fr William provided what he reported to be a full disclosure and he was given the opportunity to have a second polygraph. By this stage, he had reported several further sexual transgressions than he referenced in his original account. He acknowledged sexually inappropriate behaviours, including voyeurism and froitage, and reflected that he had engaged in ‘lots of self-deception’ in the past.

Fr William completed a further polygraph examination with one question, namely:

*Q1: Since you became a priest, is there anything of a physical sexual nature that you have purposely omitted to inform (the authors) about?*

Fr William responded “No”. The result of this examination revealed ‘no deception indicated’, revealing a high probability that Fr William had made a full and frank disclosure about past sexual activity.

### Case Summary

Fr William ‘failed’ his first polygraph examination. However, it was the view of the authors that he thought he could ‘beat’ the test on the basis that he had made some (though not all) disclosures regarding his sexual history. Notably, over the course of our involvement with Fr William, we formed the view that he engaged in a great deal of self-analysis (particularly following the first polygraph), reflecting at length on his emotions and motivations that led to the various ‘transgressions’. This ultimately led to him passing the polygraph examination by disclosing his sexual interests and fantasies, as well as some sexual encounters. Fr William expressed the view during the assessment process that his behaviours and motivations were not socially appropriate, at times. Specifically, he noted that some of these people were parishioners or vulnerable individuals seeking his support at a time of personal

need. Nevertheless, by the time the assessment had concluded, the authors considered that Fr William's self-reflections had the potential for seriously damaging his sense of self-worth and thereby increasing his potential risk, in becoming so self-disparaging. The authors recommended therapeutic interventions to address his self-esteem issues and, in doing so, better manage future risk. We also recommended psycho-educational work focusing on healthy relationships. Fr William has subsequently engaged successfully with both of these interventions.

### Case Study 3 – (Withdrew from Polygraph Examination): Fr Matthew

Fr Matthew was a sixty-three-year old priest referred for a psychological risk assessment surrounding safeguarding concerns. Specifically, Fr Matthew had been accused of raping a male teenage student some fifteen years previously. Within the context of this assessment Fr Matthew was informed that, with his consent, a thorough sexual history review would be undertaken followed by a polygraph examination to explore the veracity of this serious allegation as well as any additional concerns of a sexual nature that might impact on decisions about his continuing role in the church. Fr Matthew gave his agreement to engage in this process.

#### Assessment Process

As noted previously, the purpose and administration of all aspects of the polygraph were explained to Fr Matthew. It was also emphasised that the assessment would explore elements of Fr Matthew's sexual history and his behaviours/interests during his life with a particular focus on his time in the priesthood. In preparation he filled out the Sexual History Disclosure Form (SHDF), which, owing to variations in his self-reporting, he completed on three occasions in total.

#### Background

Fr Matthew described fond memories of his early life and close, supportive relationships with his parents. He reported being well cared for within his family. Fr Matthew recalled a 'sheltered' childhood with no significant accidents or injuries, though said his parents' marriage came to an end during his adolescence. He did not report any professional involvement or mental health issues associated with his family. Fr Matthew did, however, describe being sexually assaulted as a boy, noting that he never reported this and had always "tried not to think about it". He

referenced oral/digital genital contact with an older male friend of the family. He asserted that no threat or coercion was involved and he did not consider that this experience had negatively impacted upon him in the longer term.

Fr Matthew noted that he had a relatively uneventful school life, though described feeling “different”, due to his perception of being from a lower socioeconomic standing within the school. Nevertheless, he stated that he did not have any academic difficulties and developed positive friendships. Fr Matthew said he then attended university and later worked in the private sector for some years, whilst becoming more involved within his local church community. He indicated that he gradually felt a ‘calling’ to the priesthood, and after completing seminary training has remained in this vocation. Fr Matthew went on to state that his current imposed withdrawal from ministry has been his only break from service to the church. Relatedly, he described experiencing high levels of anxiety and depression at the time of the assessment, as well as some suicidal thoughts.

Fr Matthew described himself as bisexual. He said that he had become interested in women during his teenage years and had a series of casual sexual encounters, as well as a few longer-term involvements. He noted that when his last relationship came to an end he was beginning to give more serious thought to joining the priesthood. Fr Matthew then referenced a homosexual encounter he had had earlier in his life, noting that he had been curious though felt a sense of ‘shame’ due to his perception of the social stigma around such behaviour at that time.

Fr Matthew completed relevant psychometric measures. He did not appear to present with socially desirable responding. He reported significant emotional upset at levels that might interfere with memory, concentration and judgement. Psychometric measures also highlighted clinically elevated symptoms of anxiety and depression, with Fr Matthew reporting feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. He further presented as a relatively introverted and private individual who has difficulties with self-disclosure and is more inclined than many to feel overwhelmed.

### Polygraph Administration

During the first pre-polygraph interview undertaken with Fr Matthew, he initially presented as confused, then visibly distressed. He denied involvement in any sexual activity such as rape and asserted that, although this had been a fabricated allegation, he would nonetheless continue with the assessment process.

Fr Matthew completed the SHDF, though reported confusion when doing so, expressing surprise that some questions reflected enquires about possible past sexual involvements with young or vulnerable individuals as well as children. Nevertheless, over the course of the two polygraph appointments, Fr Matthew's range of disclosures increased and, as such, he was given the opportunity to amend his SHDF responses on multiple occasions.

Concerning sexual behaviour while in the priesthood, Fr Matthew initially denied any public involvement in such activity, for example, going to gay clubs. However, he subsequently acknowledged, further to noted inconsistencies in his self-reporting, having done so with considerable regularity, where he would observe other males having sex. In terms of his own sexual activity with men, during his pre-polygraph interview, Fr Matthew expanded on his initial assertion of having had a single homosexual encounter, decades previously, to acknowledging "more than a hundred" such experiences, progressing through unabated, over his thirty years in the clergy.

Specifically, discussing the allegation of rape that had been made against him, Fr Matthew initially reported that the "the man fabricated the whole thing". The complainant was a late adolescent who was also attending an event organised by the church. While initially denying any sexual activity or transgressions, as the interview proceeded, Fr Matthew acknowledged that, during this religious retreat, he had accompanied the eighteen-year-old male to his room, where they engaged in consensual, 'masturbation and oral sex'. Fr Matthew denied the young person's assertion that he had been subjected to anal rape. As we discussed these issues, Fr Matthew reported that while he had 'confessed his sins' in the past, he now thought it likely that he would be required to 'leave the priesthood' suggesting to the authors that he had previously understated the seriousness of his actions during confession.

In view of his continuing disclosures and further details given regarding the principal allegation made against him, neither of the two scheduled polygraphs were achievable. This, in part, related to a polygraph question he would need to respond to "have you left anything out when completing the SHDF?" It was deemed that Fr Matthew had not shared all relevant information and the polygraph would likely indicate deception on his part, in response to this question alone.

Fr Matthew was instead asked to provide a full and frank written account of his involvement with the alleged victim. At the time of his second scheduled polygraph appointment, Fr Matthew reported some suicidal thoughts at the pre-polygraph stage describing significant reservations and distress about proceeding. He there-

fore withdrew his approval to undertake the polygraph and the session was terminated. As such the polygraph examination was not completed during Fr Matthew's psychological risk assessment.

### Case Summary

Over the course of the assessment, Fr Matthew gave varying accounts of the evening in question and his past sexual behaviour more generally. Initially, he totally denied the veracity of the alleged assault. However, through the process of investigative interviewing in preparation for polygraph examination, Fr Matthew reported that he had engaged in sexual activity with the alleged victim on the evening identified. However, in the authors' experience, individuals often provide bits of information in order to satisfy others that they are being honest, whilst withholding important and incriminating details about events in question (Blair, 2009). Ultimately, the polygraph could not be undertaken following further relevant disclosures owing to Fr Matthew's expressed suicidal thoughts.

In the opinion of the authors, Fr Matthew was not open and disclosing. Rather, he was intentionally seeking to deceive others into believing that the allegations made against him were completely fabricated. It was not however, possible to clarify whether his sexual engagement was consensual, a key point about which Fr Matthew and the complainant were in total disagreement. Nevertheless, Fr Matthew's position over the course of the assessment changed to reflect previously denied sexual involvement with this individual, as well as a great many other illicit sexual encounters while in the priesthood. Further, Fr Matthew's withdrawal from the assessment process, in the opinion of the authors, gave significant cause to believe that he had still not made a full disclosure.

It was advised that further structured pre-polygraph investigative interviewing would likely lead to additional relevant disclosures as this had occurred during each of Fr Matthew's previous interviews. He was in our opinion, pre-contemplative (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983), regarding his willingness to adopt a mindset conducive to making needed change. Structured CBT work was recommended, focusing on improving emotional resilience and anxiety management skills necessary for enhancing his general psychological wellbeing. However, this was not considered to likely afford Fr Matthew the required motivation and commitment to demonstrate responsible safeguarding such that he could return to ministry. In particular, the authors formed the view that, Fr. Matthew's capacity for maintaining



responsible sexual boundaries was limited and that his preoccupation with sexual matters would likely continue to make him vulnerable to exploiting his position of authority at times, for his sexual gratification.

## General Discussion

In this paper, we have presented three case studies to demonstrate how the polygraph can be incorporated into the forensic assessment of clerics. In the first case, we described how the polygraph examination elicited significant information pertaining to sexual risk. In the second, it was shown that the polygraph can motivate truthful responding, while also extracting information of substantial relevance to risk concerns, and finally, the third case highlighted that the pre-polygraph interview alone can secure important risk-related information to inform risk management and safeguarding decision-making.

As demonstrated, the polygraph can enhance a level of “truth facilitation” (Wilcox, 2019) that extends beyond determination of truth or deceit. Rather, the examination process can elicit information that is more broadly relevant to safeguarding and risk management. Indeed, a key purpose of the present paper is to clarify that, whether the individual passes the polygraph or not, is not an issue of much significance, as compared with the acquisition of further relevant information, that is gained within this process, which, at best, would otherwise be exceptionally difficult and time-consuming to obtain. The authors have endeavoured to produce psychological risk assessments that were as thorough and robust as possible to help the safeguarding bodies, and their church superiors, make well informed decisions, each of very significant magnitude. These decisions would impact on the future role of the cleric as well as having public protection implications for parishioners and members of the wider community. As identified in this paper, we note that the judicious employment of the polygraph can, in a time effective way, offer further, more detailed information that can be essential to the achievement of a comprehensive report upon concerns raised by the referring bodies.

It will be noted that within the context of our assessments, some clerics have reported that they experienced the polygraph examination to be interrogative and intrusive. However, in the experience of the lead author, criticism of the polygraph more often occurs among those who do not engage openly in the process and therefore fail to produce a No Deception Indicated outcome (having also disclosed engagement in some relevant abusive or inappropriate behaviour). In these circumstances,

withdrawal or failure to pass the polygraph can precipitate the examined cleric describing the polygraph experience as having been psychologically harmful. Conversely, there is some evidence to suggest that individuals who pass the polygraph describe it as having promoted their greater honesty rather than as having been unduly harsh (Khan, Nelson & Handler, 2009; Wilcox, O'Keeffe & Oliver, 2009).

Nonetheless, the authors accept that polygraph examination will likely, in varying degrees, be an uncomfortable experience for examinees, irrespective of the outcome. Indeed, the polygraph examination is designed to create a level of stress to promote psychological focus and an acceptance of the importance of responding honestly. Relatedly, Wilcox (2000) reported that it is assumed that almost everyone is fearful of being discovered to be lying, particularly about issues of heightened personal significance. Therefore, the polygraph can be employed to monitor physiological responses associated with such fears and apprehensions during testing to establish whether the person is likely lying. However, Wilcox (2013) noted that only issues specifically connected to referral concerns are explored during the polygraph examination. In this instance, the examination would aim at assessing aspects of the perceived legal and moral acceptability of the behaviour of the referred priest. As such, as a starting point, the SHDF explores the cleric's sexual history very broadly to achieve a full and clear context within which to address current index issues of forensic concern. It is, however, the concluding view of the authors that referring bodies must, for themselves, decide whether the polygraph meets with their ethical approval, as employed in this way to evaluate sexual risk issues.

In summary, the authors consider the polygraph to be a useful adjunct to standard psychological risk assessment, particularly in its application to the population defined in this paper. We further consider that where matters of key concern are unclear or relevant information is unavailable, the polygraph examination can help to elicit responses that inform appropriate decision-making at investigative, church safeguarding and, at times, criminal justice levels.

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