



Fall 2019

Sexual Misconduct in the UMC: South-West Katanga

General Commission on the Status
and Role of Women in the UMC



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The United Methodist Church, through the work of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, has been addressing sexual misconduct in the United States for over 25 years, the first study mandated by the General Conference of 1988, and published in 1990. A second assessment was done in 2005 and a third was completed in 2017. That third report led a number of the Central Conference Bishops to request data collection in their regions, so they can better understand the issues and address the concerns. In response, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women sponsored a sexual ethics training event for the South Congo and Zambia Episcopal Area, conducted by a local consultant. A survey was distributed to those participants.

The Sample

Paper surveys were distributed and collected in the fall of 2019, and 34 women, both clergy and lay were able to complete it. The surveys were prepared and completed in French. Because the first survey of its kind, the focus was on understanding the basic issues: types and locations of sexual misconduct experienced, responses made, and knowledge of resources for help. Suggestions for what the church can do were also invited in open ended questions. The full survey (in English) appears as the Appendix to this report. Key findings appear in the report in bold.

Table 1: Demographics of the Respondents (N=34)

Demographics	%	n
STATUS		
Clergy	35.3	12
Laity	50.0	17
Unidentified	14.7	5
AGE		
Under 30	8.8	3
30-49	35.3	12
50-69	44.1	15
70+	5.9	2
Unidentified	5.9	2

Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown of the respondents, including those who did not indicate their status and/or age. Note throughout the tables that totals do not always add up to 100%, either because of rounding, or because participants were allowed to select more than one response. Also, when differences between groups can be generalized to the larger population of women in the church, statistical significance will be indicated.

Experiences of Sexual Misconduct

Every woman who completed that part of the survey (n=34) reported having experienced at least one kind of sexual misconduct, as seen in Table 2. The average number of types of misconduct experienced, on a scale of 1 to 9, was 2.58 for clergywomen and 1.88 for lay

women, a difference that is not statistically significant. It is unusual that 100% of participants would report experiences of sexual misconduct.

Table 2: Percent (n)s Reporting Number of Types of Misconduct Experienced

Number of Types	All	Clergy	Laity
1	50.0 (17)	41.7 (5)	64.7 (11)
2-3	26.5 (9)	33.3 (4)	23.5 (4)
4 or more	23.5 (8)	24.9 (3)	11.8 (2)
TOTAL	100.0 (34)	100.0 (12)	100.0 (17)

Table 3 delineates the locations of the misconduct; respondents could select more than one place. Although communities were slightly more likely to be sites of misconduct, the differences between the locations is very small. It appears that **sexual misconduct is not only commonly experienced, but present across society. One notable difference was in churches, where clergywomen were quite likely to report having had problems.** Any other differences between clergy and laity, by location, were not statistically significant.

Table 3: Percent (n)s Reporting Misconduct by Location

Location	All	Clergy	Laity
Church	29.4 (10)	50.0 (6)*	5.9 (1)*
Work	29.4 (10)	33.3 (4)	29.4 (5)
Community	32.4 (11)	16.7 (2)	41.2 (7)
School	26.5 (9)	33.3 (4)	17.6 (3)
Home	26.5 (9)	8.3 (1)	41.2 (7)

* $p \leq .05$ for χ^2 test of correlation

Table 4 shows the different types of sexual misconduct experienced and the percent (number) of respondents reporting each type. Again, respondents were able to select multiple options. Statistically, there is only one type of misconduct experienced differently by clergywomen versus laity. **Clergywomen are much more likely to report having experienced harassing comments or jokes than are lay women.**

Table 4: Percent (n)s Experiencing Specific Types of Sexual Misconduct

Behaviors	All	Clergy	Laity
Looks/Leers	50.0 (17)	66.7 (8)	35.3 (6)
Touching/Closeness	32.4 (11)	33.3 (4)	23.5 (4)
Fondle/Kiss	29.4 (10)	25.0 (3)	35.3 (6)
Comments/Jokes	41.2 (14)	66.7 (8)*	29.4 (5)*
Mail/Phone	29.4 (10)	25.0 (3)	23.5 (4)
Pressure to Date	8.8 (3)	8.3 (1)	5.9 (1)
Physical Aggression	26.5 (9)	25.0 (3)	29.4 (5)
Sexual Assault	8.8 (3)	8.3 (1)	5.9 (1)
TOTALS	$n = 34$	$n = 12$	$n = 17$

* $p \leq .05$ for χ^2 test of correlation

Reactions to Sexual Misconduct

Reactions to sexual misconduct appear in Table 5, with differences noted between clergywomen and laity. Note that in both cases of statistically significant difference, **clergywomen were more likely to avoid the person or tell the person to stop than lay women.**

Table 5: Percent (n) Reactions to Sexual Misconduct

Reaction	All	Clergy	Laity
Avoided the Person	50.0 (17)	83.3 (10)**	23.5 (4)**
Told them to Stop	35.3 (12)	58.3 (7)*	17.6 (3)*
Threatened to Tell	35.5 (12)	33.3 (4)	41.2 (7)
Ignored the Behavior	29.4 (10)	8.3 (1)	35.3 (6)
Told an Authority	23.5 (8)	33.3 (4)	17.6 (3)
Felt Anxious or Depressed	17.6 (6)	16.7 (2)	11.8 (2)
Requested Transfer or Quit	8.8 (3)	16.7 (2)	5.9 (1)
Sought Medical Help	8.8 (3)	16.7 (2)	5.9 (1)
TOTALS	<i>n</i> = 34	<i>n</i> = 12	<i>n</i> = 17

** $p \leq .01$ and * $p \leq .05$ for χ^2 test of correlation

As can be seen in Table 5, **the most common response in general was to avoid the person**, but this was selected much **more often by clergy than by laity**. For laity, the most common response was to threaten to tell someone. **Perhaps the clergywomen feel that they have enough authority to tell the person to stop directly, while lay women are more dependent on others** to support them, hence they threaten to tell someone else.

When asked if respondents knew of resources for support, not a single respondent knew of one. In other United Methodist populations studied, respondents often “said” they knew of a resource but many were unable to name one. Others identified the police, friends or family members, in cases where they didn’t know of a church resource. Among these respondents though, **no one, neither clergy nor lay, even said they “knew” of a resource**. This group appears to be completely unaware of where to turn.

Respondents were also asked how serious the problem of sexual misconduct is in their communities. Responses were scored on a scale of 3 (very serious) to 0 (not serious at all). Among all who responded to that question ($n = 34$) the average seriousness score was 2.17 which is higher than the center of the scale score of 1.5; that is, **on average, respondents see the problem as just a bit more than “fairly serious.”** The average across all Central Conferences in Africa was virtually the same, at 2.21.

Respondents were also asked if the church can do anything to help, and if so, what. A full 70.6% reported that the church can do something. Among laity, the percentage was 93.8%, while for clergy it was lower, at 63.3%, yet the difference was not statistically significant. Suffice to say that the large majority of respondents felt the church can do something to address the

problem. When asked to name specific things, most people were at a loss, but **the largest single group of respondents (20.6%) referred to teaching/preaching against sexual misconduct**. One person named prayer, and another suggested that the church select “good” people in the first place. One person specifically said that women in particular needed to be made aware of their rights.

The last part of the survey asked if there was anything else participants wanted to share. Almost 80% ($n = 27$) of the respondents wrote in something, a very high response rate to such an open-ended question. Answers fell into three main categories: **protection of women** (40.7% of responses included this topic), **respect for women as leaders** (29.6%), and the **training and development of women** (14.8%). Clearly there is a lot of concern about protection of women in general and of women pastors in particular. Three other respondents mentioned something quite specific, but difficult to interpret. They cited concern about women who had become **pregnant as a result of sexual misconduct**, and hoped that the church would step in to help raise the children. It is not clear whether these pregnancies were the result of assault by strangers, or forced sex with a spouse or someone else known to the woman. It is also not clear why they would not be able to care for their children. Are those children, if born to unknown or unacknowledged fathers, stigmatized in their communities? Do these women lose custody of the children to the fathers? Do the women fall in status due to these pregnancies and then are stigmatized themselves, such that they cannot raise their children? Or is there concern that these women would seek abortions, to avoid having to raise these children? There are a number of possible interpretations, but what is clear, when combined with the primary concern noted above around protecting women, is widespread concern for women’s safety and the safety of their children. And in response, it is hoped that the church will be a site of safety and protection, and that women should be respected as leaders in that work. One respondent summarized it this way: “Women must be respected; they are not only there to have children.”

Appendix

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women

Sexual harassment is commonly defined as harassment in a workplace, or other professional or social situation, involving the making of unwanted sexual advances or obscene remarks.

The following survey is designed to measure sexual harassment and determine the effects it has on individuals. You are free to skip any questions, although complete surveys are the most useful for analysis. All responses are anonymous and data will only be reported in the aggregate.

Thank you so much for taking a few minutes to help make the UMC a safe and welcoming place for everyone.

Have you experienced any of the following unwanted sexual behaviors? (Check all that apply)

- Looks and leers
- Touching and closeness
- Fondling or kissing
- Comments or jokes
- Mail, phone, or online messages
- Minor Physical Aggression
- Sexual assault
- Other (please describe):

Where did this happen? (Check all that apply)

- In the church
- In the workplace
- In the community
- In school
- At home
- Other (please identify):

How did you respond? (Check all that apply)

- Avoided the person
- Ignored the behavior
- Told the person to stop
- Told someone in authority
- Threatened to tell someone
- Asked for a transfer or quit
- Sought medical help
- Felt anxiety or depression
- Other (please describe):

Are you aware of resources for reporting?

- Yes (please name at least one):
- No

How serious is the problem of sexual harassment/assault in your community?

- Very serious
- Fairly serious
- Not too serious
- Not serious at all

Do you believe the church can do something about this?

- Yes (if possible, name at least one thing):
- Not sure
- No

I am :

- Female
- Male

I am:

- Clergy
- Lay

I am:

- Under 30 years old
- 30-49 years old
- 50-69 years old
- 70 or older

My Annual Conference is in:

- Africa
- Europe
- the Philippines

My Annual Conference is:

Is there anything else you'd like to share with the Commission on the Status and Role of Women of the United Methodist Church?