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## **Reporting of Sexual Assault and Abuse of Males in the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Community**

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**Reporting of Sexual Assault and Abuse of Males in the Ultra-Orthodox  
Jewish Community**

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Criminal Justice  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
City University of New York

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Reporting of Sexual Assault and Abuse of Males in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Community

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This thesis has been presented and accepted by the Criminal Justice Master's Program,  
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fulfillment of the requirements of Master of Arts in Criminal Justice.

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## Abstract

This study explores religious, societal, and intrafamilial factors that prevent Ultra-Orthodox Jewish male survivors of child sexual abuse from reporting the incidents. Five men were recruited and participated in in-depth interviews. The findings indicate that child sexual abuse in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities was and is underreported. The factors that were identified as influential on the reporting decisions included religious rules and regulations, lack or deficient sexual and legal education, and communal and intrafamilial efforts to silence a child and cover up the abuse. The results link the religious and educational background of male survivors of sexual abuse and their reporting patterns.

*Keywords:* Child abuse; Reporting; Judaism; Male Victims; Collective Denial; Disclosure

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## **Reporting of Sexual Assault and Abuse of Males in the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Community**

Sexual abuse of children represents one of the largest concerns for both mainstream society and the criminal justice system. The recent increase in the disclosure of sexual assault and abuse of children in religious institutions and communities reveals the enormous number of incidents. Many of these incidents have occurred in Catholic schools, churches, synagogues, religious summer camps, *Yeshivas*, and other places where children should feel safe and be protected by the authorities, teachers, and clergy (Spröber et al., 2014).

Despite the increased disclosure in recent years, there is still a dearth of knowledge about prevalence, mechanics, consequences, reporting issues, treatment of victims, punishment of abusers, and many other areas related to sexual assault and abuse of children in religious diasporas. This study aims to fill some gaps in knowledge about the reporting of sexual assault and abuse of boys in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in New York City. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS), approximately 11.7% of men reported experiencing unwanted sexual contact in their lifetime (Basil et al., 2011). The same source states that 27.8% of those who had experienced an unwanted sexual contact, reported that they were victims of completed rape when they were 10 years old or younger (Basil et al., 2011). Despite its prevalence, sexual abuse is hugely underreported. Only about 10% of abused males reported the incident(s) to authorities (Basil et al., 2011; Ullman, 2002; Ullman et al., 2010). This number is even smaller for the victims of such crimes in religious communities (Katzenstein & Fontes, 2017). The literature suggests that rates of

childhood sexual abuse for the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community are similar to that for the general population (Yehuda et al., 2007). The main purpose of this study is to examine religious, societal, and intrafamilial factors that prevent Ultra-Orthodox Jewish male survivors of sexual assault and abuse from reporting the incident. Following are the questions that this study attempts to answer:

1. Which factors impact reporting of sexual assault and abuse in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities?
2. If the victim reported the incident, what were the factors that influenced his decision?
3. If a child's sexual assault was reported to the parents, how did the parents handle the incident?
4. How does the community and family members react when a child reports a sexual assault?

The proposal for this study was submitted to the Human Research Protection Program and approved by the Institutional Research Board on March 11, 2020. Thus, this study follows all federal and state rules and regulations and holds the highest ethical standards.

## **Literature review**

### ***Introduction***

For over thirty years social scientists have been working hard to understand the topic of sexual assault and abuse of males and increase both social and scientific knowledge about dynamics, prevalence, reporting patterns, and consequences of such incidents. The existing literature on male survivors of sexual abuse and assault, however, remains scarce.

The reasons for this scarcity include but are not limited to underreporting, sexism, social unawareness, stigmatization of victims, predominance of childhood abuse, victims' inability to recognize the fact that they were sexually abused (Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Machado et al., 2016; Sable et al., 2006; Walker et al., 2019). It is evident that much more data and research are needed to better understand victimization of males and issues associated with male survivors of sexual abuse and assault,

The scarcity of literature can be partially explained by underreporting of the incidents of sexual victimization by males (Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Hlavka, 2017; Sable et al., 2006;). In addition, researchers have mostly focused on females as victims of sex crimes. Coxell and King (2010) support the claim that the scientific community to a certain extent subscribed to the popular view that sexual victimization of males is rather improbable, especially if the perpetrator of the assault is a female. They posit that up to 1980 the literature used the pronoun "she" when referred to survivors of sexual abuse. Hence, there is a dearth of knowledge about the reporting patterns of male victims of sexual assault and abuse. Also, very little research is done on the reporting patterns of male victims of sex crimes with religious backgrounds, except for the victims of Catholic clergy (D'alton et al., 2013; Langeland et al., 2015; Terry, 2015). The least studied groups are those that are highly secluded and live in accordance with their religious set of rules, such as Mennonites, Amish, and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities.

### ***Definition of Sexual Abuse***

While legal terminology and definitions of sexual abuse and assault vary by state, the online source USLegal.com defines sexual assault as:

...an assault of a sexual nature on another person. It can include a wide range of unwanted sexual contact such as rape, forced vaginal, anal or oral penetration, forced sexual intercourse, inappropriate touching, forced kissing, child molestation, exhibitionism, voyeurism, obscene phone calls, torture of a victim in a sexual manner etc. The actor causes submission of the victim by means that is reasonably calculated to cause submission against the victim's will. (Sexual Assault Law, n.d.)

The American Psychological Association defines it as an “unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent” (Sexual Abuse, n.d.). Terry (2013) divided criminal sexual acts into four types: (1) sexual acts with contact; (2) noncontact sexual behavior; (3) viewing, possessing, or producing child pornography; and (4) sexual solicitation or trafficking. While she was able to categorize illegal sexual behavior, she stated that these four categories were not mutually exclusive (Terry, 2013). It is evident from definitions that the key feature of any illegal sexual act is the lack of consent on victims end due to either use of force, coercion, threats, or due to incapability of the victim to give consent because of their age, mental or physical condition, or their subordinate position (e.g., children, prisoners).

The definition of sexual assault and abuse in cases of male victims also varies from the very specific such as “anal penetration obtained through physical force and perpetrated by a female partner” (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) to “behavior carried out with the aim of making another person engage in sexual activity despite his or her unwillingness to do so” (Krahe et al., 2003). The differences in definitions impact results of research and lead to considerable variety in prevalence and dynamics of male victimization. While many

researchers and legal sources offer a variety of possible definitions of sexual assault and abuse, the current study uses the definition proposed by the American Psychological Association. This definition includes wide array of sexual abuse since “sexual activity” might be anything from fondling to a rape episode. It also incorporates the victims of child sexual abuse as they cannot give a legal consent.

### ***Prevalence of Sexual Abuse in Males***

According to the NIPSVS’s 2011 report, approximately 11.7% of males (an estimated 13 million men in the United States) reported experiencing various types of unwanted sexual contact in their lifetime (Basil et al., 2011). A review of recent studies shows that 3.8% to 22.2% of males experience rape in their lifetime (Tewksbury, 2007). The 12-month prevalence of unwanted sexual contact reported by men was 2.3% (Basil et al., 2011). The literature suggests that rates of childhood sexual abuse in religious Jewish community are similar to that of the secular population (Yehuda et al., 2007). Additionally, the rates of child sexual abuse are similar for various religious groups when compared to one another (Doxey et al., 1997; Elliot, 1994; Spröber et al., 2014).

### ***Age of Victims***

Finkelhor (1994), states that the peak age of vulnerability for victims of sexual abuse is between 7 and 13 years. According to NIPSVS, almost 28% of male survivors reported that they were victims of completed rape when they were 10 years old or younger (Basil et al., 2011). Additionally, the FBI’s National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) reports that males are more likely to become a victim when they are a juvenile (18%) than as an adult (4%). The NIBRS also supports the NIPSVS findings that more than quarter of males (27%) were victimized as children younger than 12 years old (Snyder,

2000). In their study of victims of child sexual abuse, Hurcombe and colleagues (2019) conducted qualitative analysis of the data collected from 12 individuals, six males and six females, who experienced sexual abuse as children. They found that 73% of participants abused in religious contexts reported that they were eight years old or older, compared to 56% of people abused in non-religious contexts, others were aged less than eight years old (Hurcombe et al., 2019). In both groups, victims aged 16-17 years old constituted 3% of the total number of participants.

### *Perpetrators*

Considering that most male victims are abused as children, it is important to state that in most of the cases a victim knows his perpetrator. According to the NIPSVS 2010 Summary Report, female victims of rape reported that in 51.1% of cases the perpetrator was current or former intimate partner, 12.5% were raped by a family member, 2.5% of cases involved a person of authority, 40.8% of perpetrators were acquaintances, and 13.8% of rapes were committed by a complete stranger (Basil et al., 2011). The same source points out that in cases of sexual violence other than rape such as sexual coercion, made to penetrate, unwanted sexual contact, and non-contact unwanted sexual experiences where a victim of a crime was female 35% of victims were abused by their current or former intimate partner, 16.1% were perpetrated by a family member, 7.9% by a person of authority, 42.1% by an acquaintance, and 44.8% by a stranger (Basil et al., 2011).

The NIPSVS report on male victims of rape shows that 52.4% of responders were raped by acquaintances and 15.1% by strangers (Basil et al., 2011). In cases of other sexual violence against males 36.0% of the respondents were perpetrated by current or former intimate partner, 6.2% by a family member, 7.5% by a person of authority, 50.6% by an

acquaintance, and 31.1% by a stranger (Basil et al., 2011). The information on prevalence of offenders who are known to a victim prior to offence is supported throughout the existing literature (Hohendorf et al., 2017; Lambie & Johnston, 2016; O’Leary & Gould, 2010; Terry, 2013). The Bureau of Justice statistics in their 2000 report, also stated that only 14.7% of female victims, and 7.3% of male victims of sexual assault were abused by a stranger (Snyder, 2000). Familiarity with the perpetrator in many cases prevents a victim from reporting sexual abuse and assault to authorities.

### ***Myths Surrounding Sexual Abuse of Males***

While there is a similarity between male and female victims of sexual assault and abuse in terms of familiarity with perpetrator, there is a number of differences in prevalence, dynamics, consequences, and coping mechanisms related to the victim’s gender. For many years, the sexual assault and abuse was seen and studied based on the male perpetrator, female victim paradigm resulting in misconceptions about male victimization (Davies & Rogers, 2006; Leal, 2014; Stemple & Meyer, 2014). Thus, the knowledge about female victims of sexual abuse is more extensive than that about male victims. Nevertheless, there is a recent recognition of male victimization and more attention has been given to this issue. What is known so far, is that there is no typical profile of a victim of sexual abuse; most of incidents occur indoors, predominantly in residential settings; sexual abuse of males is hugely underreported, only 10% of incidents are reported to authorities (Basil et al., 2011; Ullman, 2002; Ullman et al., 2010).

Underreporting leads to some level of scientific ignorance surrounding sexual assault and abuse of males and results in the development of myths about such assaults. These myths in return become one of the important and impactful factors that diminish

reporting sexual abuse. In their introduction to the literature on the sexual assault of males, Coxell and King (2010), challenged some myths concerning survivors, perpetrators, and plausibility of sexual abuse of men. One of such myths is that the sexual arousal of the victim is a sign of consent on behalf of survivor. Unfortunately for the victims of sexual abuse, this belief was shared even by lawyers (Coxell & King, 2010). However, this myth does not find its support in scientific literature reviewed by Coxell and King. There is evidence that any emotional response including anxiety, fear, anger, pain can lead to involuntary erection and ejaculation (Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Coxell & King, 2010). The victims of sexual assault who experienced erection and/or ejaculation during sexual abuse can be distressed by this and think that something “isn’t right” with them (Davies et al., 2010; Lowe & Balfur, 2015).

Another impactful myth about sexual abuse of males is that a male who abuses other males must be gay (Burt & Demello, 2003; Coxell & King, 2010). The inference that the sexual act between two persons of the same sex is a homosexual act is false and has been disproved. The extant literature suggests that many male perpetrators assault their victims to dominate them, to display power rather than for sexual gratification (Buchhandler-Raphael, 2010; Coxell & King, 2010; Javaid, 2016; Reynaert, 2015). The same myth exists about male victims of sexual assault. While it is evident that some of the victims of sexual abuse are gay, many of them are heterosexual individuals who as a result of being perpetrated by the other male often have issues with coming in terms with their sexuality. Many of such victims start questioning themselves suggesting that they might have been giving off “gay signals” which resulted in their victimization (Burt & Demello, 2003; Coxell & King, 2010; Javaid, 2016).

Finally, there is a belief that a male cannot be forced into sex against his will. The widespread opinion that men must be capable of defending themselves finds no support in the existing literature (Coxell & King, 2010; Davies et al., 2012; Davies & Rogers, 2006). The actual state of affairs for men who have experienced sexual abuse is quite the opposite. Many of subjects of various qualitative studies admitted feeling helpless and passive during their assaults (Burt & Demello, 2003; Coxell & King, 2010).

### ***Dynamics of Sexual Abuse of Boys***

The sense of helplessness might be intensified by the fact that very often the perpetrator of the crime is known by the victim and holds a supreme position in relation to the victim. To have a deeper understanding of how prevalence, familiarity with a perpetrator, and reporting issues interrelated, it is important to examine the nature of the abuse itself. A study conducted in Brazil by Hohendorff et al. (2017), presented the dynamics of sexual violence against boys. The study contributes a great deal to understanding of the dynamics of sexual crimes against young males aged between 6 and 18 years and systemic and social issues related to visibility of sexual violence and maltreatment of victims of such crimes. Though having numerous limitations such as convenience sampling, sample size, and insufficient length of interviews, the authors were able to identify and describe in great detail six themes that represented various stages in the dynamics of sexual abuse: (1) Preparation, (2) Episodes, (3) Silencing, (4) Narrative, (5) Repression, and (6) Overcoming (Hohendorff et al., 2017).

Preparation is the first stage in the dynamics of sexual abuse and encompasses all data related to facilitators of sexual abuse and strategies used by offenders to get access to victims. Data collected on this stage of the abuse once again revealed that the abuser in

most cases was known to the victim prior to the offence (Crosson-Tower, 2015; Sgroi et al., 1982; Spiegel, 2003). The strategies used by offenders included playing games, bargaining, and the abuse of power imbalance (Crosson-Tower, 2015; Hohendorff et al., 2017; Sgroi et al., 1982; Spiegel, 2003). Episodes is the second stage of the dynamics and describes the type and frequency of sexual abuse. During this stage, perpetrators often used physical force and/or victims' vulnerability to force boys into sexual contact (Hohendorff et al., 2017). The third stage is silencing, and it refers to the factors that contribute to keeping an offence a secret. The understanding of this stage is crucially important since it is known that sexual abuse is underreported, especially in cases of the abuse against males, and usually disclosed in adulthood (Easton et al., 2014; Sorsoli et al., 2008). Hohendorff et al. (2017) found that on a personal level, victims were afraid to disclose the abuse, while practitioners mentioned the fact that victims did not see interactions with a perpetrator of the abuse. Age of the victim also contributed to the secrecy: older victims found it more difficult to disclose). Other factors that affected disclosure included disbelief by others, fear of family punishment, blame on the victim, fear of retaliation by the abuser, and family secret (Easton et al., 2014; Hohendorff et al., 2017; Holmes & Slap, 1998; Sorsoli et al., 2008).

The fourth stage of dynamics of sexual abuse against boys is narrative. This stage refers to the end of abuse due to either disclosure or discovery of the abuse. Disclosure during this stage of dynamics in one of the episodes happened after the victim realized what was happening to him; another victim disclosed the abuse after his older sister, who have been a victim as well, disclosed her victimization. Family reactions and victim's feelings were important too. Some of the victims felt courage to disclose the abuse to their

families, while others were stressed and angry and never disclosed the abuse (Hohendorff et al., 2017).

The next stage of dynamics of sexual abuse is repression, which mainly refers to a denial of the sexual abuse by the perpetrator, the victim's family and even by the victims themselves. This stage includes avoidance of discussions about the incident by the victim and the victim's family, presence of perpetrator, attempts "to lock away" bad memories, low visibility of such incidents, stigmatization, and blaming the victim. (Hohendorff et al., 2017). As it is evident those themes repeat themselves in findings of many studies. Social view of male sexual victimization and stereotypes such as "he must be gay," "could have protected himself," "no way a boy or a man can be a victim of sexual assault," and an abused-abuser paradigm enormously affect reporting rates, mental health of the victim, and many other aspects of male victimization through stigma.

The last stage of the dynamics of sexual abuse is overcoming. This stage incorporates protection and recovery of the victims as well as the role of the system. Some of the coping mechanisms described by the abused boys included the distance from the offender, family support, reduction of the stress after talking to an interviewer, medical care, examination, and psychological intervention, which was perceived by some of the victims as "really cool" (Hohendorff et al., 2017; O'Leary & Gould, 2010).

The role of the system includes several negative subtopics such as difficulties navigating the justice system, flawed perceptions of the abuse, complicated processes, and discrimination of the victims demonstrated by the representatives of the system. One of the cases included a judge who directly asked a victim: "Okay, but you went there because you wanted to, right?" (Hohendorff et al., 2017). In addition, some of the victims admitted that

they had to face the stereotype that since they have been abused, now they are at higher risk of becoming an abuser. Researchers deem such systemic flaws as one of the barriers to reporting sexual assaults and abuse to authorities. Additionally, they are not of any help for an individual who has been abused and cause a lot of psychological distress.

### ***Sexual Abuse in Religious Communities***

It is well established that sexual victimization results in wide variety of mental health, social, sexual, and behavioral issues (Mullen et al., 1996; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2013; Richter et al., 2018; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). It is possible that in order to prevent or avoid these negative outcomes religious communities have established moral standards that govern sexual behavior of community members (Farmer et al., 2009; Longest & Uecker, 2018). Additionally, the existing literature suggests that religious individuals are less impulsive and participate in crimes less frequently (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Pirutinsky, 2014). Nevertheless, other sources support the fact that the prevalence of sexual abuse in religious communities has the same rate with those in secular groups (Doxey et al., 1997; Elliott, 1994; Spröber et al., 2014). Yet, boys with religious background are 3.3 times more likely to be abused than their secular counterparts (Schein et al., 2000).

While most of the existing literature on sexual abuse of children within religious institutions discusses the problem within the scope of Catholic Church, Morrison (2005) posits that child sexual abuse is a phenomenon that occurs within a large spectrum of religious institutions. Furthermore, in his book, Jenkins (2001) suggests that there are probably thousands of children who were sexually abused since the 1980s. Numerous studies suggest that child sexual abuse take place in other religious groups such as Buddhists, Hindus, Baptists, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Protestants, Jews, and

Muslims (Bryant & Ekstrand, 2004; Jenkins, 2003; Spröber et al., 2014; Terry, 2011). While the information about prevalence and nature of child sexual abuse in religious communities remains scarce, with an exception of Catholic Church, it is known that males in religious communities are as vulnerable as females; in Jewish communities males are 3.3 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than their secular counterparts while females are less likely to be victimized (Al-Fayez et al., 2012; Holt & Massey, 2013; Schein et al., 2000). The high rates of boys' victimization in Jewish communities can be explained by somewhat easy access of perpetrators to victims due to religious gender segregation.

### ***Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Community***

Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) society is a Jewish minority group that lives strictly by the Jewish Law (*Halacha*). Ultra-Orthodox Jews (*Haredim*) believe that Halacha is given by G-d<sup>1</sup>, and that it cannot be changed (Charnyi, 2009). The core principles of *Haredim* include but are not limited to understanding and accepting the fact that the Written Torah (Bible)<sup>2</sup> was given to Moses by G-d on mountain Sinai; passing the knowledge given in Torah to the subsequent generations without changing the story; strictly following *Torah Sheba'al Peh* (Oral Law)<sup>3</sup> in addition to the Written Torah (Charnyi, 2009; Finnegan, 1970; Schnall, 2006). These laws regulate day-to-day Jewish lives in every step including strict dietary laws (*Kashrut*), home keeping (*Shalom Bayit*), and sexual behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the Name of G-d written in full is a holy object in Judaism. The author replaces full spelling of the Name with "G-d" to avoid possible erasure or defacement of the Name.

<sup>2</sup> Perceived as the "given" wisdom and will of G-d transcribed by Moses. It is known as the Five Books of Moses and contained within Torah Scroll.

<sup>3</sup> Incorporates the traditions prescribed by Written Torah as well as interpretations and rules developed by sages from different generations. On a very simplified level can be understood as a Rabbinical expansion on and clarification of Written Torah. Both Written and Oral Torah regarded by Ultra-Orthodox Jews with the same level of respect

### ***Sexual Regulations in Judaism***

As with other religions, Judaism has sexual behavior regulations that outlaw certain sexual acts. Many of them are listed in the chapter 18 of the Book of Leviticus and have a specific name in Hebrew: עֲרִיזוֹת (*arayot*) (Eisenberg, 2015). *Arayot* include incestuous relationships, anal intercourse between two males, bestiality, and intercourse with a woman who is on her period (Knohl, 2008). While the Written Torah does not explicitly prohibit sexual relationships with children, there are numerous places in the Torah from where such an inference can be made. For example, Deuteronomy 22:25 (ArtScroll Series, Stone Edition) says, “But if it is in the field that the man will find the betrothed girl, and the man will seize her and lie with her, only the man who lies with her shall die,” which is a prohibition of rape. Exodus 22:15 (ArtScroll Series, Stone Edition) prohibits seduction by stating “If a man shall seduce a virgin who was not betrothed and lie with her, he shall provide her with a marriage contract as his wife.” Deuteronomy 23:18 (ArtScroll Series, Stone Edition) prohibits any extramarital sexual activities, including the consensual ones. Additionally, in Leviticus 19:16 (ArtScroll Series, Stone Edition) there is a prohibition on disregarding someone who is in danger, and while it does not mention sexual abuse explicitly, it can be inferred that failing to report such an incident when it is known can be considered a sin.

### ***Barriers to Reporting Sexual Abuse in Jewish Communities***

Yet, sexual abuse of children in Jewish Ultra-Orthodox communities remains highly underreported due to strict regulations, isolation, and silencing (Stadler, 2008; Zalberg & Zalberg, 2012). To better understand the barriers that can be faced by male survivors of sexual abuse in Jewish communities, there is a need to review and explain

several terms and concepts in Ultra-Orthodox Judaism. One of the major controllers of reporting of any crimes is a concept of *מסירה* (*Mesirah*). *Mesirah* if translated literally, means “giving over.” The real-life application of this concept prohibits giving over a Jewish criminal to the non-Jewish legal system. A derived noun, *Moser*, describes a person who repeatedly violated the law of *Mesirah*. As it is stated in *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>4</sup>, it is permissible to kill a *Moser* (Karo & Kadushin, 1917). According to Rabbi Michael Broyde (2002, p.3), one of the prominent modern Rabbinic scholars, summarizing Halachical prohibition, explains:

Jewish law discusses three different problems: informing a bandit that a person has money or some other item of value; informing an abusive government of the same and informing the government that someone has violated its laws. As is obvious to anyone with even a vague familiarity with the flow of Jewish history, Jews have generally lived in situations where government was unjust (or unjust towards Jews) or bandits formed the basis for government, and telling the abusive government that a Jew had money or that a Jew had broken the law was a dangerous act. Indeed, this conduct clearly, readily and directly caused people to have their money taken, themselves beaten or tortured and sometimes simply murdered. The Talmudic Sages had no choice but to enact rabbinic decrees prohibiting such informing.

The concept of *Mesirah*, if taken too literally, leads to simply not reporting any Jewish criminal to non-Jewish authorities. Thus, it can be very difficult for a religiously observant Ultra-Orthodox Jewish individual to go ahead and report any crime committed against him or herself.

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<sup>4</sup> Authored by Yosef Karo and published in Venice in 1563, *Shulchan Aruch* with its commentaries represents the most widely accepted description of Halacha (Jewish Law) and its application in Jewish life.

The next important concept is a concept of *Lashon Hara*, which literally means “evil tongue.” *Lashon Hara* is a Halachic term that is used to describe a defamatory speech (Diamond, 2006; Komisar, 2011; Lewis, 2015). According to Komisar (2011), “The Talmud (Arachin 15b) states that each act of lashon hará does irreparable harm to three people: the victim of the gossip, the person who listened to it, and the perpetrator him/herself”(p. 1). While it is not explained how exactly it harms these three people, it is still used to prevent victims of crime from reporting their perpetrators to avoid a sin of defamation. Sexual abuse allegations are most definitely a source of defamation, whether the abuse took place or not.

Another impactful concept is *Hillul Hashem*, or Desecrating G-d’s Name. This complex concept can be evoked by the trial if a Jewish abuser will become known publicly. That sort of embarrassment considered to be *Hillul Hashem* since it might promote bad views of the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Community as a whole. Discussing issues in relation to *Hillul Hashem* and sexual abuse in Jewish communities, Brofsky (2017) says: “In addition to the obvious injustice caused to the survivors, and to others who may fall victim to abuse due to communal silence, this phenomenon causes many to lose trust in the community, its leadership, and ultimately in G[-]d”(p. 74).

There is also a concept of *Tzniyut*, or personal modesty. This concept manifested itself in almost every aspect of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish lives. Clothing, education, speech, behavior, manners, sexual activities, and views on sexuality: everything is dictated by *Tzniyut*. Boys and girls study in gender separated schools. Men and women pray in synagogues on different sides of divider in . Regarding sexuality, pre-marital and extra-marital sexual interactions are considered to be sinful activities. Additionally, there is no

sexual education for unmarried men and women (Shalev et al., 2013). As a result of such regulations, Jewish children do not know anything about sexual abuse, and even if they did it would be highly complicated if not impossible to discuss such matters with their parents.

Having all these concepts in place, the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community has its own mechanism of addressing crimes committed by community members. *Beit Din* is a Jewish religious court that “handles all areas of Jewish law, including questions of marriage, divorce, and conversion” (Law, 2018). While *Beit Din* has seemingly important place in settling business, marriage, and divorce matters amongst Jewish people, its role in cases such as sexual abuse of children is somewhat questionable. This stems from the fact that Rabbis, who are also judges, strictly rely on Halacha in these matters, and as it can be understood from the previously stated facts, *Halacha* gives little to no support to survivors of child sexual abuse. Rather it creates a great deal of obstacles that prevent victims from reporting the abuse. One might argue that it is impossible to adjudicate the case, if the crime is not explicitly described by the law, which is the case of child sexual abuse and *Halacha*.

In addition to all the reporting issues that might arise due to cultural views and Halachic regulations, it is noteworthy to state that Ultra-Orthodox Jews for the most part speak only Yiddish. According to the Modern Language Association (2015), in the year of 2000, the majority of residents of Borough Park area in Brooklyn, NY, 11219 spoke Yiddish. Out of 58,881 respondents who were speaking 34 languages in total, 19,925 spoke Yiddish as their first language. Additionally, 3,854 persons spoke Hebrew. That can cause a language barrier for reporting crimes to civil, primarily English-speaking authorities. The problem of language barrier and crime reporting discussed widely in the existing literature (Cullota, 2005; Fathi, 2013; Sable et al., 2006; Shah et al., 2007; Vidales, 2010).

While there are no empirical studies on reporting patterns of sexually abused males in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities conducted in the United States, the existing literature suggests that the phenomenon of sexual abuse of boys is as prevalent in Jewish community as it is in other religious and secular groups (Yehuda et al., 2007). Additionally, there is some evidence gleaned from religious texts, that reporting such incidents can be if not impossible, then very complicated. Even more so would be seeking for justice inside of the community itself since the religious authorities heavily rely on the religious law that does not even have a definition of child sexual abuse.

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

The sample for this study was comprised of five male survivors of sexual assault and abuse who are Jewish and share Ultra-Orthodox Jewish background and upbringing recruited in New York City. To be recruited for this study, prospective participants must have been 18 years old or older, raised in Ultra-Orthodox religious Jewish community, and had a history of sexual assault or abuse while lived in their community prior to the age of 18. Another requirement condition was related to the abusers of participants. The abusers must have been Jewish males with the religious Ultra-Orthodox Jewish background. Participants' pseudonyms, age at the time of the abuse, religious group they belonged to, and abusers' position in the community are presented in Table 1. All participants of this study grew up in Jewish religious Ultra-Orthodox communities. Age range of the participants at the moment of the interview was 23-45 years old. Three men identified themselves as straight and two as gay. Four out of five men left the Ultra-Orthodox community, while one participant remains a member of it.

**Table 1***Participants' background information*

Name	Age	Hasidic sect	Age range of abuse	Abuser(s)
Dov	23	Satmar	10-12	Community member, summer camp personnel
Yaakov	37	Satmar	8-12	<i>Yeshiva</i> teachers
Menashe	30	Chabad Lubavitcher	6-10	Extended family member
Sam	45	Skver	11-12	<i>Yeshiva</i> teacher
Ezra	45	Chabad Lubavitcher	13	Community member

*Note.* Participants real names were replaced with pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality.

The range of sexual abuse varied from sexual harassment (physical touching, fondling) to completed rape. The exclusive focus on Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities is explained by high levels of seclusion of community members from the mainstream society and the strict adherence to *Halacha* which dictates determined rules regarding body, sexuality, and sexual life. Participant who were *ba'al teshuvah* (those who were not raised Ultra-Orthodox, but later became observant members of the community) were excluded from the study since they have a set of different religious regulations and codes of behavior. Converts into Judaism were excluded for the same reason. The minimum age for participation in the study was 18 years old and older. To protect participants' confidentiality their real names were not recorded and were replaced with pseudonyms. In order to be eligible to partake in the current study, potential participants required to give consent. Due to confidentiality concerns, the consent to be a part of this study was obtained orally.

***Sampling***

Five participants were selected using convenience sampling strategy in New York City. While convenience sampling imposes numerous challenges for generalization of the

study since the sample is not representative of the entire population, it allowed for obtaining information about general trends in reporting patterns of sexually abused males who were willing to participate (Given & Gale Group, 2008; Johnston & Christensen, 2017). The small size of the sample is explained by unwillingness of people to speak about highly traumatic incidents as well as their fear of being exposed and stigmatized based on their experiences. The subject of sexual abuse is very sensitive and complex, thus recruiting of participants presented a challenge, especially recruiting from the given population due to the high levels of seclusion of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities. The initial contact with potential participants was established through an activist, who is working on exposing the cases of sexual abuse of boys by Ultra-Orthodox religious authorities to secular law enforcement agencies and authorities. The first contact with the above-mentioned person was established through Facebook via adding them to the researcher's friends list. They assisted the author with the recruitment of potential participants. This qualitative study will consequently be used for generation of hypothesis which consequently will be tested with the larger sample size.

### ***Study design***

This study uses a qualitative approach, collecting information about the world as perceived by the participant, thus allowing for deeper insight into the participants' experiences (Patton, 2014). The exploratory type of research is used due to the recency of this field of inquiry and it is important to collect initial information about sexual assault and abuse of males in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, understand the magnitude and extent of the problem, as well as examine the feasibility of future more extensive studies on the matter. This preliminary study uses in-depth interview as the best

instrument to allow the participants to describe their experience and identify concepts that are of the crucial importance in relation to the reporting decision-making process (see Appendix 1 for instrument). The instrument was developed in accordance with four-phase process of Interview Protocol Refinement (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Furthermore, it is held that in-depth interviews provide an opportunity for the efficient interaction between the researcher and the participants, resulting in a very detailed examination of the participants' experiences, thoughts, opinions, perceptions and views about a specific research matter(s) under inquiry (Esch & Esch, 2013; Malinowski, 1932; Miller and Crabtree, 2005; Warren, 2002).

### ***Data Collection***

Using the semi-structured in-depth interviews comprised majorly of the open-ended questions, the participants were asked to describe their background, including religious life, education, family, communal life. The interview questions then slowly transitioned to questions about the history of abuse, perpetrators, and reporting. The place for the interview was discussed beforehand and chosen based on the participants' preference. This allowed participants to feel more comfortable and secure. The participants were notified that if they did not feel comfortable answering certain questions they could refuse, as well as they were free to withdraw from the study at any point in time. Additionally, there was contact information of hotlines for survivors of sexual abuse, people in distress, and people with suicidal inclinations available. Two out of five interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed to improve the accuracy of the information obtained throughout the interview. Transcriptions were compared to the recordings to ensure its accuracy. The other three participants refused to be recorded, thus

the information obtained from them was written down manually. Notetaking resulted in slightly longer interviews.

In order to protect participants' confidentiality, the author did not ask participant for their legal names. Instead, all participants were addressed using pseudonyms. The confidentiality of the participants of this study was maintained in accordance with the ethical guidelines from the Institutional Research Board via following mechanisms: 1) Data collected throughout research procedures was securely stored in a locked cabinet in the office of the principal investigator's advisor's office; 2) Digital data, such as voice recordings, were securely stored on the encrypted hard drive (HDD) which only could be used with the credentials of the principal investigator (login and password); 3) No personal identifiers were used in writing out the results of the research, instead pseudonyms were used as references to the participants; 4) Contact information such as emails and phone numbers was destroyed immediately after the interview process was completed; 5) Voice recordings and handwritten notes did not have participants' identifiers in order to ensure that the participants are not explicitly connected to the research topic.

### ***Data Analysis***

In attempt to identify motives, commonalities, and possible variables for future research, five interviews were analyzed for content. The data collected through audiotaping were transcribed for the analysis. The transcriptions were compared against audiotapes to ensure that there were no mistakes made during the transcription process. The revision and analysis of transcription was conducted based on two criteria: based on questions and based on themes. Grounded theory approach was used to identify common

motives as well as unique narratives. Grounded theory uses inductive reasoning and starts with questions and data collection rather than hypothetico-deductive model typically used in quantitative studies (Charmaz, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, certain interview questions were constructed to obtain very specific information. For example, some of them were structured using words such as “reporting,” “secret,” “believe,” “prohibited,” “trust,” “fear,” “share,” and other words that could possibly illicit thoughts and memories of the participants in relation to reporting the incident(s) of abuse. It was expected that some of the questions could remain unanswered by some participants due to unwillingness or recollection issues, yet all the participants responded to each interview question. Analysis based on questions provided very detailed and specific information about personal experiences of the participants.

The analysis by theme revealed general commonalities in experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of the matter of inquiry. The researcher was looking for themes that were discussed by all, or by most participants regardless of the questions asked by the researcher. The thematic analysis was conducted in accordance with Braun and Clarke (2012) instructions. Each interview was analyzed in following six phases: 1) reading and rereading textual materials aiming to make materials as familiar as it was possible. Transcripts were compared against the voice recordings to ensure their correctness; 2) the initial codes were generated for the variety of similar concepts presented by the participants; 3) the initial codes were revised in order to establish their fitness for the categories; 4) the analysis was refined to make sure that the themes emerged were not overlapping, had meaning and enough data to support them; 5) the themes were defined and listed with the supporting examples from the interviews; 6) the report was produced.

This strategy was used to reveal information that is not known yet, or is known but the knowledge remains scarce, which is true about sexual abuse of males and their reporting patterns. The themes for analysis were not predetermined and were identified based on the information provided by the participants throughout their interviews. The following themes and sub-themes were identified as being associated with disclosure: lack of trust in the criminal justice system, family trust or the lack of thereof, communal and family pressure and silencing, family support, lack of legal education, fear of punishment, religious constraints, lack of sex education, language barrier, shame. Throughout the data analysis efforts were made to ensure that there were no overlapping factors, however, community and family were found to impact reporting patterns via similar mechanisms.

### ***Maintaining Trustworthiness of the Analysis***

When evaluating trustworthiness of qualitative research analysis there are four major components to be considered: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility must be ensured by avoiding biases while interpreting the information obtained through interviews. Some of these biases might include personal experiences, thoughts, or feelings of the researchers. To ensure credibility of this study, the researcher uses the verbatim information provided by the participants. Quotes of original utterances are used throughout the study report.

The second method used to increase credibility is avoiding generalization of the information obtained from only one or two participants. Information that was not supported by at least four out of five participants was not considered as a theme and is not presented in this report.

The generalizability, or external validity is typically hard to ensure. This is specifically true about preliminary exploratory studies with small samples, where the sample was collected using convenience sampling technique. Yet, this study has a potential of replicating it with the larger sample size and using different more generalizable approaches, e.g., mixed methods study.

To satisfy the dependability requirement of inquiry, external audit was conducted by an outside researcher. All evaluations and conclusions were inspected to establish whether they are supported by the actual data and do not contradict the information collected from the participants. To ensure confirmability of the analysis an audit trail was used to write out in great detail the process of collection, analysis and interpretation of the obtained information and emerged themes.

## **Results**

This section discusses the results of the analysis of the factors that according to the participants either promoted or prevented disclosure and reporting of sexual abuse. The major themes that were identified as influencing reporting decisions of the participants were education, religion, community, family, and individual factors. These themes were spoken about by all interviewees. Themes were broken down in sub-themes that were identified and are represented in Table 2. The factors discussed by men in this study might impact reporting decisions of those from different religious and secular communities and might not be unique for Ultra-Orthodox Jewish survivors. However, they were claimed by the participants as highly influential on their disclosure and reporting decisions. None of the five participants reported sexual abuse to legal authorities immediately or soon after it happened to them.

**Table 2***Themes and sub-themes discussed by the participants*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Theme</b>	<b>Example</b>
Education	Language barrier	“I call 911 and then what?” (Sam) “At 12 I don't think I speak [English]” (Dov)
	Lack of sexual education	“There was never anything related to sex, sexuality, um, promiscuity, pornography, anything like that” (Sam) “There was no discussion about a consent” (Yaakov) “I thought puberty was some kind of illness. Honestly, I was afraid to tell my parents that I have this illness because, well, I figured it out by touching something I'm not supposed to” (Dov)
Education	Lack or misleading legal education	“I had no idea about the police, for example, I had no idea that I could go to law enforcement” (Yaakov) “It was taught that calling the police if something happens is the worst thing in the world to do” (Sam) “So, you feel that sometimes you shouldn't call the police and deal with problem” (Ezra)
Religion	Halacha and its regulations	“If the word gets out that a Hasidic Jew raped someone that was shaming the name of G[-]d, it's called <i>Hillul Hashem</i> . So, we cannot do anything that will shame the name of G[-]d” (Dov) “We were always told that one of the worst things that you can do to another Jew or in general, is basically tell on another Jew to the authorities” (Dov)
Community	Control over the information	“The community has a tight, um, information flow control” (Dov)
	Cover up and protection of offenders	“When somebody does go to trial, there's, you know, the community would raise money for their lawyers and show so much support” (Ezra) “There've been a lot of documented cases of cover ups, payoffs, payouts” (Yaakov)
	Pressure on the survivors and their families	“If somebody tries to stand up against sexual assault, they get out from the community pretty quickly” (Dov) “Threats of out... of outing people or families from the community” (Sam)
	Abuser's position in the community	“There's no way this rabbi or teacher could've done it would've done that” (Dov)
	Lack of support and services	“There are no services, no therapists in the community” (Menashe)
Family	Distrust to children	“So, any kid that says something that doesn't match with their word must be lying” (Yaakov) “I mean, I, I did try, I did try to talk to people and it was basically a joke” (Dov) “Are you sure that what you say happened, is what actually happened?” (Dov)
	Fear of punishment	“My teacher physically abused me for talking about it, I was not sure if won't get the same reaction from my parents” (Yaakov)
	Distrust in parents	“There was no one I really trusted, including my parents. There was not a single person in the world” (Dov)
Personal	Self-blame	“I was told, and I felt that something was wrong with me, thus it was my fault”
	Shame	“I was very ashamed, and it felt like uh... I did something wrong” (Menashe)

Soon after the incident have occurred, Yaakov (37) spoke about it with a schoolteacher. Instead of reporting the assault to the principal, child services, or police, the teacher “slapped [him] across the face and told ‘we don’t talk about such things.’” After the unsuccessful attempt to report the abuse, Yaakov never spoke to anybody about it until many years later, when he left the community. Sam (45) had the same exact outcome when he reported the abuse to his father. He physically punished the boy for using “dirty words.” Ezra (45) never reported his abuse prior to this study. Menashe (30) reported his abuse to a family friend who later disclosed it to the school principle who in his turn shared the information about the abuse with Menashe’s father. Dov (23) reported the abuse to his father after six years of silence. This pattern is concordant with the previously conducted studies of reporting sexual assault and abuse (Basil et al., 2011; Katzenstein & Fontes, 2017; Ullman, 2002; Sorsoli et al., 2008; Ullman et al., 2010).

### ***Education***

**Lack of sexual education.** All five participants clearly indicated the deficiencies of education in Hasidic communities. One of the major deficiencies of *Yeshivas* is the fact that education that is provided for boys is either lacking secular disciplines or providing a very limited number of classes that teach children only basic information. Most of the classes are centered around Torah and other religious texts. Yaakov, who grew up in Satmar community, a very secluded and extremely religious sect of Hasidic Judaism, stated:

I went up until 14 years old to *Yeshivas* that were run by Hasidish people. After that, I went to different types of schools. My education, it was very little secular

education. I first started getting any sort of secular education when I was, I mean, like a decent amount [of education] when I went to a different type of high school which was not run by, uh, people who come from Hasidish backgrounds.

The most problematic part of Hasidic education according to all five participants was the lack of sexual education. Sex was not something discussed in *Yeshivas*, at home, or by the community. “It's like the secret that you been told about when you get married,” explained Dov. He was abused by the community member and summer camp staff, remembered difficulties processing and making sense out of what has happened to him due to “the lack of education, the lack of knowledge.” Sexual education in Hasidic schools is virtually absent. Recalling his puberty, Dov said:

There was no mention of it. There was none, it just doesn't exist. That's it. I never had a conversation with my parents about my body changing or anything related. I remember it happening and me being very confused about what the hell is going on with me. I thought I was sick for a while. I thought puberty was some kind of illness.

Other participants supported this information. When he was trying to discuss the initial episode of his continued abuses, Yaakov faced the fact that he could not even describe what happened because he did not know any words to describe the body parts that were touched by his abuser. Neither did he know how to describe the process of the abuse. He explained: “there was just no words that we knew was not part of our vocabulary, you know.” Sam also struggled reporting being abused by a *Yeshiva* teacher due to the vocabulary deficit. Explaining his struggle, Sam said:

I had no clue how; I didn't have the vocabulary to even explain what happened. Because every, all the parts that were touched, were dealt with are the parts that we ignore that we couldn't talk about it, that we didn't even, we didn't even know the names of these parts, you know. We, we basically, um, every, everything from, uh, from our feet till our stomach was called foot, because there was nothing in between there. There was no vocabulary that we knew. If our knees hurt, that was our foot hurts because that was already too close for a comfort to have to mention the name.

According to all five men, being unable to understand the essence of incidents due to the lack of sexual education was partially responsible for either delayed reporting, or not reporting the incidents at all. Ezra was abused by a religious man in a close vicinity of his *Yeshiva*. He stated that he did not immediately realize what happened because he did not know anything about sex and sexual abuse. He argued that “it is not discussed in schools, but it needs to be. If I would know that what happened was wrong, I would at least try to report it.”

In addition to not educating children about anatomy, puberty, sex and sexuality, Ezra and Menashe who identify themselves as gay men, were constantly made believe that “something was wrong” with them. Ezra recalled being told by Rabbis that he “need[s] to calm down, or otherwise the chances were to be kicked out from the *Yeshiva*.” Menashe said that there was a belief that homosexuality and abuse are correlated he claims that “it sends a message to survivors who are gay that they're damaged.” As a result, people start to believe that the problem is them and not an abuser, thus reporting will not result in punishment for the abuser. According to all five

participants, Hasidic views on homosexuality are largely explained by the influence of the religious texts and absolute rejection of sex education.

**Lack of or misleading legal education.** Interviews with the participants revealed another influential aspect of the Hasidic education. Teachers in *Yeshivas* do not educate children on their legal rights. Hasidic youths for the most part unaware about mechanisms and ways of reporting mistreatment and crimes committed against them. For them people who represent authorities are the Rabbis. However, Rabbis do not have any proper training or resources, thus they are not qualified to address abuse reports properly. Nevertheless, they refuse this fact and deprive their children of proper education that could help them to report the abuse done to them. Children and adults in the community are taught to address any crimes or other issues with the religious authorities, which is not an effective way to prevent crimes or punish offenders. When asked why it is ineffective Menashe stated: “Well, because they don't have the resources that the, uh, law enforcement has. They can't arrest people. They can't charge people. They can't indict people. They can't, um, they can't do anything. So, no.”

Other respondents mentioned that not only they were not taught to report crimes to the police, but also were highly discouraged to do so. That was explained by the fact that the majority of law enforcement agents are not Jews and should not be involved in “Jewish matters.” Speaking of his reporting options Sam stated “as of reporting to the police, that was never an option in my mind. We were... we were so trained that the *goy*<sup>5</sup> hates us. The *goy* will, is not interesting. You know, the fact that there's an option of getting help from a *goy* was never a thought in my mind.” Yaakov stated that he “had no

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<sup>5</sup> *Goy* – from Hebrew גוי - nation, in modern Hebrew language means a gentile, a non-Jewish person. Plural גוים *goyim*.

idea about the police, for example, I had no idea that I could go to law enforcement.” He also mentioned that “Because it didn't fit [educational standards] you were being shamed or whatever. Um, and so I, the authorities were never involved, and the school definitely would never involve the authorities.”

Ezra’s statement helped to understand one of the reasons behind such an attitude from *Yeshiva* teachers. According to his opinion “Teachers taught [them] that this is the worst thing that [they] could do: call the police. According to them, [students] were supposed to talk to a teacher if something happens. Now, as an adult I understand why. It is because teaching us to report would reveal a lot of abuse within the school.”

**Language barrier.** In addition to misleading or absent sexual and legal education the participants discussed language barrier as one of the factors that contributed to their inability to report sexual assault and abuse against them. Yiddish is the language that is commonly spoken in Hasidic communities. It is a primary language of instruction in *Yeshivas*. English as a language is regarded as a secular subject and thus typically is not taught in schools. Describing his education and skills obtained in his school Sam stated: “My father probably cannot say a full sentence in English. Um, I was the exact same way till I was till I was 18, 19 years old when I started, uh, learning English.” In his opinion, not teaching English is one of the tools used by the religious authorities to keep the community secluded, to do not allow outsiders in, to prevent scrutiny thus keeping the image of “pious and G-dly” people. “We couldn't communicate with outside world because we didn't know the language of the country” said Sam. Recalling his abuse, he maintained that he was abused in a room in the basement of the *Yeshiva*. According to him, that room had a phone which he could use to call the police, yet when he thought

about it, he immediately realized that he could not express himself in English. “I call 911 and then what?” said Sam referring to his inability to speak English.

Yaakov said that while the English was not a critical issue for him because of his mother who was from England and spoke English with children at home, his English was not great. He could “read, and write, and talk more or less” but clearly did not know English words to describe sexual abuse to the authorities. He also stated that he was somewhat unique because his English “was definitely A LOT better than, than my classmates and my colleagues, contemporaries at the time.” He said that not speaking English “most definitely impacts Hasidish abilities to report any crime to the [legal] authorities.”

Speaking about his education and English skills at the time when he was abused, Dov claimed: “At 12 I don't think I speak.” When asked whether the level of English impacted his decision to do not report his abuse, he responded: “in addition to all the factors that stopped me, English was sure one more. I think I could have made it work if I walked into a police station, but it is a different story.” He explained that the presence of a distressed child in a precinct could have compensated for poor English skills. Ezra mentioned that he did not learn English until he turned 18, thus he “was deprived of any opportunity to let it out of the community because the outside world does not speak Yiddish.”

### ***Religion***

**Mesirah.** According to all five participants, religion virtually regulates every aspect of Hasidic life. Even though the participants represented three different sects of Hasidic Judaism, they all maintained that religion dictates everything that happens within

the community, crime reporting included. The major religious regulation that has impacted every participant's reporting decision in this study was *Mesirah*. Dov shared his experience: "We were always told that one of the worst things that you can do to another Jew or in general, is basically tell on another Jew to the authorities. If you do that, it's like. You know, it's like one of the worst things you could possibly do." Describing his own religious conflicts and the impact of *Mesirah* on his reporting decision, Yaakov said: "I was taught to be a G[-]d fearing person, you know, you have to fear Hashem and you know, and do everything He says. And if a rabbi tells me, if you tell the police you're, you're going against G[-]d, what am I supposed to do? There's nothing I can do."

Ezra, who is still living in the religious community, said that he did not call the police and would never try to do so "because it's always like a, it feels like the worst thing in the world to call somebody, you should call a school person, or somebody else first. No one wants to be a *Moser*." Sam's statement gave even deeper insight into the impact of *Mesirah* on the reporting decision:

Let me tell you, first of all, um, there, there's the problem with *Mesirah*. You know, I mean, we were always told, *Mesirah* is one of the only things that you're allowed to kill someone for if you know that they're gonna, um, tattletale you and you're allowed to kill them. So *Mesirah* is a huge thing. It was, it was always a huge thing. And then, and then going into the, going to *goyim* and telling that this happened is definitely *Mesirah*.

Thus, Jews who want to report a crime that was committed against them by another Jews to a non-Jewish authority according to Halacha can be killed. The child who grew up

believing in this rule understandably avoids reporting or even discussing anything with gentiles.

**Lashon Hara.** Another religious rule that was described by all five participants was *Lashon Hara*, one of the aspects of which is the prohibition on defamation of a person. When Yaakov tried to report his abuse to another teacher in the school, he was not believed and quickly deemed as a liar and troublemaker. His teacher explained to him that he cannot accuse his assailant because it was *Lashon Hara*. The way that Yaakov understood the situation at that point was that he is committing a sin by accusing somebody with no evidence at hand:

So, if I would make the claim that I was being sexually abused. Then, the concept would be, who are we going to believe? This crazy boy who's acting out or this pious rabbi and teacher who has been a teacher for 20 or 30 years, who has a large family who, you know, who plays a part and things like that.

Dov recollects his understanding of how *Lashon Hara* was used to suppress and control children in *Yeshivas*. According to him, “It was not as much about whether you are a trustworthy kid or not, is it's about, Hey, this guy right here, so holy. It's impossible that he's lying. So, whatever you're saying about him, it can't be true because he's so holy. It's impossible that he's lying.” If a boy uses defamatory speech against his teacher in a Hasidic school, he is rapidly deemed as a troublemaker and efforts are made to expel that boy from the *Yeshiva*. Thus, the likelihood of boys reporting sexual crimes against them decreases. Ezra recalled that one of the boys in his *Yeshiva* reported an episode of physical abuse against him by one of the teachers. The principle expelled that boy and many teachers were using that boy as an example of what happens when the person

speaks *Lashon Hara*. Later when he was abused, Ezra decided against reporting. His explanation was: “I remembered how much shame was brought upon that boy who tried to defame a teacher. I wouldn’t want to go through the same shame.”

Another two participants supported the above statements and mentioned that in cases where a child accuses a teacher of anything, other teachers, school principle and Rabbis immediately invoke the concept of *Lashon Hara* and present children as sinners and troublemakers. They often imply that this is a result of “bad” parenting, they speak with parents and remove the child from the *Yeshiva*. Expelling children from schools for any type of unacceptable behavior is a common practice in Hasidic communities.

**Tzniyut.** In addition to *Lashon Hara* and *Mesirah*, the participants explained that in religious Jewish world one must be modest. The concept of modesty, or *Tzniyut*, is highly respected and strictly abidden by. Yaakov explained: “So, because modesty was something that was extremely, um, spoken about, not just mixing between men and women, but everything, the types of clothes I would wear, types of glasses I would have, types of shoes I would have. So, everything was supposedly about modesty.” Consequently, children are taught to be modest from the very early age. The topic of *Tzniyut* was discussed by the participants in connection to almost every category that was found relevant to the reporting decisions of the participants of this study.

When discussing sexual education or the lack of thereof, every respondent mentioned that it is not acceptable by the teachers to teach about sex, body parts, pregnancy, puberty, nudity, promiscuity, or any other matter that is directly or otherwise related to sex and human anatomy. The explanation was that it goes against the concept of *Tzniyut*. Not only talking about these matters is not “modest” it is also considered to be

a sin. Thus, the participants that attempted to report sexual abuse faced a choice speak up and try to receive help or keep it a secret to avoid punishment for using “dirty words” and being an immodest sinner. Sam and Yaakov who tried to report their abuse soon after it took place both mentioned that they were quickly explained that it was immodest “to speak about these things.” In both cases the attempt to report resulted in physical violence against boys.

**Hillul Hashem.** The last religious concept that was discussed by the participants is *Hillul Hashem*, or desecration of G-d’s name. Hasidic people believe that they were chosen by G-d and are the representatives of His code. Thus, any indecent or shameful behavior constitutes *Hillul Hashem*. To do not violate this concept Jews must act in an upstanding manner 100% of time. Any act or the person who might possibly undermine an image of a Jew or Jewish community is frowned upon. When talking about the correlation between the Name of G-d, image of the community, and reporting of sexual abuse, Dov explained:

A lot of cover up is done in the name of God because they say if the, if the word gets out that a Hasidic Jew rapes someone that was shame the name of God, it's called *Hillul Hashem*. Right? So, we cannot do anything that will shame the name of God. Um, even if that means protecting your rapist, because on the one hand, yeah, maybe they'll get justice. On the other hand, either way this is going to be a shame for God's name, so we can't let that happen. So, for them, that's more important. Uh, and, and that plays a factor in, in deciding whether we should report or not.

Ezra supported this statement and explained: “the image of the community is the most important thing, damaging image is *Hillul Hashem*, reporting sexual abuse damages the image of the community and thus is *Hillul Hashem*. So, we are not allowed to report.” When Yaakov was asked what the strongest preventive factors were when it comes to reporting of sexual abuse, he immediately responded: “Uh, image. Uh, to me, it’s all, to me it's all about the image and the preservation of we are, G[-]d-fearing we are perfect.” Sam, speaking about *Hillul Hashem* and priorities, also said: “it is all about the image, and not about the victims.” The religious concepts discussed above played a crucial role in the decision-making process of all five participants.

### ***Community***

**Control over information.** The communal attitudes towards both sex crimes and the survivors of sexual assault and abuse were found to impact reporting decisions of the participants of this study extremely strongly. One of the first things discussed by the interviewees was control over information, both incoming and outgoing. Sam maintained that everything that they were allowed to know, any information that was provided for children in schools was investigated on presence of anything secular. There is no television, no internet, no secular movies or books, no secular music allowed inside the community. Dov explained in great details how his disclosure was impacted by information flow control:

Well, the community has a tight, um, information flow control. So, information coming in is controlled as well as information going out, information coming in, is controlled by, you know, most people just listening to their headlines, reading their newspapers, listen to their music. [...] And the same thing is with

information going out. If they control the information that reaches the news and the police, the government, then they can, control the numbers. So, and if they minimize the numbers going out, that get reported, um, they can do it for their own reasons: to keep the image clear.

Other respondents also maintained that the control over information was one of the strong factors that prevented their disclosure. Incoming information control deprives victims of knowledge about possible ways of reporting sexual abuse, while control over the outgoing information prevents reporting of children who attempted to disclose their abuse to teachers, Rabbis, or parents.

**Cover up and protection of offenders.** The next influential factor discussed by the survivors was their knowledge about cover ups of offenders. All the participants stated that they grew up knowing that no matter what they are expected to protect a “fellow Jew” especially from legal non-Jewish authorities due to *Mesirah*. Thus, the community as a whole would use any means available to prevent the disclosure of sexual abuse due to the seriousness of potential consequences. “The community would raise money for their lawyers and show so much support that it's honestly a disappoint,” said Dov. He added that he and his family “would lose that battle way before it was started.” Another example provided by Dov, was a court trial of a person who was accused of rape. The way community spoke about it was: “not about there's a rapist on trial. It talked about our friend is on trial for innocence and we need to save him. [...] so, they like completely skipped out on the whole sexual abuse part of the trial.”

Yaakov supported the impact of cover ups, and stated that he was “shushed” by his teachers because they knew about the pervasiveness of child sexual abuse in the

community, He said: “I definitely believed they realized it was a problem and they pro-actively did everything they could to pretend as if it didn't happen. Cover it up, keep it quiet and not bring scrutiny to the community.” Menashe said that cover up included not only prevention of legal reporting but also spreading information within the community which impacted the awareness of people about both sexual abuse and perpetrators. He explained: “My family was constantly warning me not to speak so openly about it and not to have people find out and definitely not to have my cousin's family find out.” That cousin was Menashe’s assailant, yet his own parents were protecting him, by not allowing their son to speak about what happened to him.

Sam stated that his experience with his father made him understand that even if he would keep trying to disclose his abuse it would remain inside of the community and will not go anywhere, instead of reporting he submitted himself to his assailant who kept sexually abusing him for another year. “I think I made peace with it, that this is happening, and this is, you know, he would call me into the room and I had no choice,” said Sam. Ezra suggested that according to his Rabbi protecting those who “lost their way is in the best interests of the community.” Every participant stated that witnessing various forms of cover up within the community highly discouraged them then and later when they became adults and were considering reporting of what happened to them to legal authorities.

**Abuser’s position in the community.** As it was mentioned, some of the abusers were schoolteachers, summer camp instructors, and an older family member who were actively participating in religious and communal life and were well known by the community. The position of the perpetrator was the factor that impacted the reporting

decisions of four out of five participants. Based on the participants' statements they knew that reporting against the person who is respected by the community would lead them nowhere. Teachers, for example, are highly respected in the community. Dov stated: "it was because the teacher and the principal, their job is to teach the word of God. So, for some reason they're like untouchable. So, it's kind of like impossible that they would do something wrong." Ezra stated that if someone reports a respected person "it sends a shock to the community, but they still can't do anything with this person because of the position thing. I don't know."

**Pressure on the survivors and their families.** Banishing from the community is another instrument that is used by Hasidic people to suppress reporting of sexual abuse. "If somebody tries to stand up against sexual assault, they get out of it from the community pretty quickly" stated Dov. Ezra supported this argument by saying that reporting "is the quickest way out of the *Yeshiva*, then another *Yeshiva*, and so on. In the case where the accuser supported by his family, they will kick out the entire family from the community." When asked how they could possibly kick people out of their homes and jobs, Yaakov said:

I think the community would go on attack whether it would be... uh, depending on how my parents would have reacted... uh, if my parents would've taken my allegation seriously, they would have attacked my father. They would've attacked my mother. Uh, they... they would not allow membership in synagogues. They would uh, boycott his businesses, you know, things like that. There would be repercussions. There was just... it would, it would have done more damage reporting it because to get to a place where this rabbi would've been held, you

know, accountable for his crimes the odds reach there were so insurmountable that it was better for me not to talk about it.

**Lack of support and services.** In addition to the discussed communal influences on disclosure of sexual abuse, the participants stated that there is absence of any services that could help, protect, or support children who were sexually abused. “There was nada, zip, zilch, there was no services. Um, and if there was, I definitely did not know about it” stated Yaakov. According to him, children who have no education, no language, no understanding what happened to them need help reporting sexual abuse and must be protected after disclosing it. Yet, Hasidic communities do not provide any sources of help. However, Menashe mentioned the Jewish Community Watch (JCW), which is non-for-profit Jewish organization that allegedly fights against pedophilia in Jewish communities. Yet he stated: “I mean, like there's Jewish community watch [...] I just wouldn't entrust them with the, uh, the wellbeing of survivors. I believe that when you're helping people, you need to be professional and you need to put them first. And if you can't do that, you should... you shouldn't be doing it.” The implication is that people who work for JCW are the members of the same communities and they cannot provide adequate help since they are heavily relying on the same set of religious rules and regulations instead of hiring professionals with the secular education in psychology, sociology, and child services.

According to the participants, community take pro-active measures to suppress reporting of child sexual abuse via variety of actions such as control over information, cover up the incidents of abuse, protecting perpetrators, denying services to the survivors, threatening, bribing, or banishing survivors and their families, and protecting the abusers

who are in privileged and respected positions in the community. All participants claimed that going against the community would never lead them to any success, thus, they preferred not to report the incidents of sexual abuse that occurred in their lives.

### ***Family***

The information provided by the participants indicated that the impact of family on their disclosure was done via similar or the same preventive techniques and tactics that the participants faced in the community. That included physical abuse, preventing spread of information, refusing to support or help the boys, and using religious rules and norms to suppress the abuse disclosure. In addition to these, participants experienced fear of punishment, distrust from their parents, and distrust in their parents based on their experiences in and knowledge about the community. They stated that family did not function in any different way that the community as a whole, it was “like an extension of the community, the community is the family, and the family is like a family member if that makes sense,” said Ezra). Sam added: “I mean that was the first, the only time I ever discussed it with them, and at that point I saw right away it makes no sense discussing it with them, the same as with anybody else in my community.”

**Fear of punishment.** When Sam spoke with his father, he punished him physically for violating rules of *Tzniyut*, *Lashon Hara*, and disrespectful and inappropriate behavior in presence of father. That, according to Sam, discouraged any future attempts to report his abuse. “When it started to repeat itself, after Pesach, when he started to do that again, I just, I just decided to never ever speak about it because I felt like failed because there was no help coming, instead I probably would be beaten up again” explained Sam. Ezra mentioned: “I would never discuss that with my father

because he would kick the soul out of my body for that.” Other participants also mentioned that physical punishment for “sinning” was almost unavoidable. Thus, fear of punishment was a common concern for all five participants.

**Distrust in parents.** Another issue that was identified by the participants was lack of trust in their parents. Their parents shared the same beliefs as the rest of the community, participated in cover ups of “Jewish brothers who lost their way” and needed help, contributed money for hiring lawyers for criminals, showed their respect to the abusers who were teachers, and always questioned everything that their “troubled” child was saying. When recollecting his reasons to do not disclose the abuse, Dov said: “there, there was a few things that stood out. One, there was no one I really trusted, including my parents. There was not a single person in the world that I trusted enough to tell them the full story.” Menashe stated that he could not keep discussing his abuse with his parents because they betrayed him. He said that he could not trust them since “they went to his wedding after it happened. Um, they, you know, they like. He was a welcome guest in their home.” Such types of reactions by parents, according to the interviewees send wrong message to children and corrupts their trust in parents. Betraying, ignoring, and punishing children for something that they are not guilty of resulted in a decay of children-parent relationships and undermined the likelihood of reporting sex abuse since the boys could not trust or rely on their parents.

**Distrust in children.** In addition to the distrust to their parents, the participants expressed the issue with the trust of their parents in themselves. Convinced by the *Yeshiva* teachers that their kid was a trouble, parents questioned the attempts of the boys to disclose the abuse. Dov said that when years later he tried to discuss the incidents that

happened to him with his father, the question was: “Are you sure that what you say happened, is what actually happened?” Sam’s father never attempted to confirm or refute what was said by his son. Yaakov stated that he never expected his parents to believe him thus decided not to disclose the abuse to them. He explained: “I knew that I would get the same level of trust as my teachers demonstrated. I did not want to take any chances and be seen as a bad son. I just knew they wouldn’t trust me.” Overall, the lack of trust of parents in their children was identified by the participants as a big issue. They suggested that the topic of sexual abuse is very complicated to discuss, and when the closest people do not trust you it becomes almost impossible to “put it out there.”

### *Individual factors*

**Shame and self-blame.** One of the strongest preventive factors according to participants was a sense of guilt. All five interviewees mentioned that made believe that they were troubled kids, they blamed themselves for what happened. Yaakov stated that he was questioning himself, analyzing his behavior, all in order to understand what he did wrong to “receive such a treatment” Menashe said that he did not report because “it felt like uh... I did something wrong.” Ezra who identifies himself as a gay person stated: “I thought it was because of who I am, I thought he knew who I was, I thought I called it upon myself and it was entirely my fault.” The feeling of self-blame was induced by the views and representation of boys as troublemakers thus making them believe that at least partially it was their fault that they were abused.

Self-blame was always accompanied by the sense of shame. Menashe said: “Of course there is always certain amount of shame that is attached to admitting that something of such nature happened to you! I was very ashamed!” Recalling his

experiences with reporting, Sam stated: “of course it is embarrassing to admit that this happened. Especially in Hasidic community where sex considered as a dirty thing” Every participant considered their experiences as something shameful. At the time when they were evaluating what happened to them and whether they should have reported the abuse shame was one of the preventive factors. Yaakov, who still receives psychological help, admitted that “getting rid of the sense of shame is one of the most difficult tasks for me. It is a long way from being a victim to becoming a survivor and it definitely requires stopping feeling ashamed.”

When asked about any positive factors that could possibly help the participants to report the abuse, they stated that there were none at the time when they were concerned about disclosure. Yet, participants spoke about the changes that according to their opinions must be made in order to promote disclosure of child sexual abuse in Hasidic communities. While the opinions differed between the men, they all addressed the factors that according to their opinions prevent children from reporting sex crimes committed against them.

All participants mentioned that there should be better legal and sexual education in Hasidic *Yeshivas*. Sam said: “we need to tell people when something like this happened to you, you have to call 911. You have to report it. Kids need to know that.” He added that in order to solve the problem of underreporting of sex crimes against children in the Hasidic communities there should be decent amount of sexual education. According to Yaakov, the number of reports will increase “if kids will, if people will learn. There needs to be some basic sex education.” Ezra also admitted that sex education will improve current situation with understanding and disclosing child sexual abuse. He

said: “there needs to be basic, not like crazy, but a little sex education in schools so children understand when something bad happens and report it.”

Other suggestions included raising awareness about the problem, involving licensed specialists in fields like psychology, social work, and child services, suspending and investigating teachers who were accused by children, installing security cameras in *Yeshivas*, providing mental health assistance for the survivors of sexual assault and abuse, preventing participation in cover ups of the abuse on every possible level, dismantle or redirect Rabbinical authority and power, and stop protecting pedophiles simply because they are Jewish.

### **Discussion and conclusion.**

The main objective of the current study was to explore and understand which factors impact the reporting decisions of male survivors of sexual assault and abuse in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities. The data were collected by interviewing individuals who had first-hand experience of sexual assault and abuse in their childhood. The participants answered all the questions imposed by the researcher in interview. They provided very detailed information about their experiences, disclosure decisions, and factors that impacted their choices. However, there might be issues with the accuracy of recollection due to the time that has passed since the incidents of abuse occurred (Droit-Volet, 2012; Ono et al., 2016).

In view of sensitivity of the topic and complexity of the matter of inquiry accompanied by the low frequency of disclosure, only five males were recruited and interviewed in this study, thus making the findings less generalizable. The existing literature suggests that low rates of disclosure contribute a great deal to the scarcity of the

existing knowledge about reporting decisions of males who were sexually abused (Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Hlavka, 2017; Sable et al., 2006).

The findings of the current study contribute to the existing knowledge about the barriers to reporting sexual assault and abuse of children in Hasidic communities. The existing literature discusses shame, self-blame, abusers who are known to survivors prior to abuse, abusers who are in the position of respect and authority, age of the survivor, and other barriers (Rosmarin et al., 2018; Sorsoli et al., 2008). However, most studies were conducted using either secular or mixed Jewish samples and populations, whereas the present study examines exclusively the Hasidic Jewish community in New York City (Hurcombe et al., 2019; Rosemarin et al., 2018). The findings suggest that in addition to the barriers faced by the survivors of child sexual abuse from different communities, Hasidic Jews must overcome additional obstacles when they consider disclosure. As the results of the study suggest, these obstacles include strict religious and behavioral regulations imposed on them by the community, families, and religious authorities as well as deficient education, and communal pressure.

The findings produced by this study are found to be relevant to Hasidic Jewish communities. Yet, the dearth of knowledge about reporting decisions of male victims of child sexual assault and abuse in other communities does not allow for comparisons between this secluded religious group and other groups. Other secluded religious groups might have similar or the same barriers to disclosure and reporting of sex crimes committed against children. More research needs to be done in order to understand reporting patterns of male victims of child sexual assault and abuse in secluded religious settings. However, this study provides deeper insight into Hasidic communities and

allows for the better understanding of the factors that contribute to reporting decisions made by the survivors of sexual abuse.

The participants of the current study indicated that Hasidic Jewish communities live in accordance with *Halacha*, Jewish Law. *Halacha* is the set of religious rules and regulations that stem from the Rabbinical works written over the course of Jewish history (Goodman et al., 2011). Rabbis, also known as sages, translated Biblical texts into real life situations and established which norms and regulations should govern them. As a result of such, Jewish lives are controlled by those rules from the moment when person opens their eyes in the morning until the moment they fall asleep. Four specific concepts were introduced by the participants of this study and identified as closely related to the reporting decisions of the survivors of sexual assault and abuse: *Mesirah*, *Tzniyut*, *Lashon Hara*, and *Hillul Hashem*.

The first concept is *Mesirah* which refers to reporting on a Jewish person by another Jewish person to non-Jewish authorities. This regulation was found as a factor directly preventing the survivors from disclosing the incidents of sexual abuse. Children are taught from the early age that reporting another Jew is one of the worst things to do and is the greatest sin for which one can be killed. This finding corroborates the existing knowledge about reporting patterns of males in Hasidic communities and the impact of *Mesirah* (Mendes et al., 2019; Zalberg, 2017). This concept is not only preventing the survivors from reporting the crimes committed against them, but also impacts every other member of the community. Thus, even in the cases where the parents of the child find out about the abuse, they do not report it. They also make an effort to silence their own child. Consequently, fear to commit *Mesirah* prevents not only victims but everybody in the

community from reporting sexual abuse of children. This results in hindered statistics and consequently, insufficient knowledge about the nature of sexual abuse in Hasidic communities. Moreover, it signifies that for the Hasidic religious authorities keeping the image of pious, G-d-fearing people is so important to the point where they would invoke the strictest religious regulations to suppress reporting of child sex abuse, thus demonstrating that they are not willing to forgo that image even if the price is wellbeing of their children.

Another concept that was identified as a barrier to reporting was *Tzniyut*. The participants stated that this broad concept regulates everything in Jewish life. *Tzniyut* dictates how people act, talk, dress, interact, and even think. All five participants maintained that their reports were suppressed by their teachers because talking about sex, body parts, and accuse their teachers and Rabbis of anything was not modest for a child and thus was unacceptable. This finding is supported by the existing literature and demonstrates that in the secluded communities regulated almost exclusively by religious regulations victims of sexual assault and abuse have to overcome extra barriers on their path to reporting what happened to them (Brofsky, 2017, Zalcborg, 2017) .

The participants' information provided about the impact of *Lashon Hara* on their reporting decisions, suggested that this concept was one of the most impactful. *Lashon Hara* presents a mix of *Tzniyut* and *Mesirah* since the victim, according to Rabbinic views, must do both report a Jew to the secular authorities and tell "bad" things about the perpetrator. A child who discloses sexual abuse faces this concept every time. What makes the impact of this regulation even stronger is the fact that typically when an episode of sexual abuse happens there is no witnesses to support the victim's statement.

Thus, every time when a child attempts to report it he is deemed a liar and the lie is one of the prohibitions covered by *Lashon Hara*.

The last concept discussed and identified as the one that influenced reporting decisions of the participants of this study is the concept of *Hillul Hashem*, or desecration of the Name of G-d. According to *Halacha*, any deviation from the rules that a Jew must abide by is *Hillul Hashem*. Virtually everything that deviates from the concepts prescribed by *Halacha* represents *Hillul Hashem*. While *Mesirah* prohibits reporting of a Jew to non-Jewish authorities and *Lashon Hara* outlaws defamation and lies, *Hillul Hashem* prohibits unacceptable behavior and speech in the presence of another Jews as well as gentiles. It means that the reporting is suppressed by religious regulations on both communal and outside-of-community levels. Combined all together, religious rules and regulations in Hasidic communities deprive the victims of child sex abuse of almost every opportunity to disclose the incidents.

Hasidic communities ruled by religious laws are extremely vigilant. They protect the image of the community by any means possible. The tools that are used by Hasidic communities in addition to invoking religious restrictions, include control over both incoming and outgoing information, cover ups of pedophiles and sex abusers, threatening victims, expelling victims from *Yeshivas*, and banishing victims and their families from the community. Combined, these measures suppress reporting of child sexual abuse and limit the chance of prevention of it as well as the possibilities of punishing the offenders. Every participant in this study mentioned that people who abused them did not suffer any consequences and kept their jobs and social positions even after the abuse was reported.

In Yaakov's case two of his perpetrator remained in their teaching positions till the day they passed away of natural causes (personal interaction, April 18, 2020).

In addition to the above-mentioned barriers the impact of education on reporting decisions of male survivors of sexual abuse represents a groundbreaking finding, since it was not examined by previous researchers of the reporting patterns in cases of child sexual abuse, and consequently, is not discussed in the existing literature. This finding makes the present study unique and insightful. According to the participants, education was critically important component of their failure to disclose the abuse. The participants described in great detail the influence of education on their ability to report. They identified and explained three specific deficiencies of education in Hasidic *Yeshivas*. They are absence of sex education, lack of or incorrect legal education, and insufficient amount or complete absence of English classes.

The lack of sex education deprived them of knowledge about human anatomy, sexual interactions, concepts of consent and sexual abuse resulting in difficulties understanding and evaluating the incidents of sexual abuse that happened to them and consequent reporting. The questions that the interviewees had and struggled to find answers to were as basic as "What did just happen?" According to the study participants, the influence of lack of sexual education started to impact the disclosure immediately after the abuse took place. Their reasoning was that in order to report something they needed to know that it should be reported. Yet, the lack of understanding that their bodies were violated, that their private parts should have never been touched by somebody unless it is a consensual interaction and even if the consent was asked of them they could not give one due to their age at the time of the abuse resulted in the diminished reporting.

When a child does not understand the nature of the act, does not have the words to name the body parts, and is not even allowed to talk about them, the reporting becomes very challenging.

Not informing children about legal avenues of reporting sexual assault and abuse led to the silence of victims that lasted until many years after. Four out of five participants in this study left Hasidic communities due to various personal reasons. When they started to live secular lives, they finally acquired access to secular education. While only three of them were studying English, math, history, and geography, all four started to read about the nature of sexual abuse, about cover ups of the stories in their communities, review court cases, and finally understand what happened to them. Only after leaving the community, they realized that they could have reported their abuse to legal authorities, that there are services for the survivors of sexual abuse, that there are child services outside of their community. All participants consider the lack of legal education as a major deprivation of Hasidic children and believe that they would report their abuse if they knew they could.

When discussing changes that are required to improve the current situation with the disclosure of sexual assault and abuse of children in Hasidic communities, the participants suggested that in spite of the attention given to the issue by the media and legal system, Hasidic communities keep preserving their traditions, and still choose the image of the community over wellbeing of their children. Ezra, the only participant who did not leave the Hasidic community said that “The tradition is thousands of years old and people always followed it. Do you think it will change? Most likely not.” Which means that people are still making every effort to keep “Jewish things” inside of the

community and to prevent any involvement of *goyim* in the matters that according to Halacha should not concern anybody who is not of Jewish descent.

Other participants were more positive, yet realistic. Dov shared his opinion about the work that is being done by various organizations such as ZA'AKAH – an organization that fights child sexual abuse in the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. He said:

The one thing they all do is they all raise awareness. And it's not something you can't just not talk about anymore, because the awareness is here now. And, also, on a legal front, things are changing. ZA'AKAH recently had a really big win in courts. Um. That extended the time that somebody can use to report a sexual assault incident. And that is actually a very big step in the right direction.

However, Dov believes that despite the help that legal action provides through the awareness, Hasidic communities need their Rabbis to admit that child sex abuse is real, and to stop condoning the abusers. “Then, and only then the real change will be possible for them,” said Dov.

Though the participants of this study expressed their positivity about media attention to the problem and the consequent awareness, they also mentioned that the Hasidic community itself is “far from where it needs to be in terms of education, access to services, and understanding that knowing rights and using them should not be counted as a sin” (Ezra). Considering religious rules and regulations that are in place in the Hasidic community, it is hard to imagine that the information and services that are crucially important for the survivors of child sexual abuse, and are available outside of the communities, will be introduced to them. Having the total control over the

information flow and the heavy weight of religious precepts imposed on the Hassidic community, Rabbis will keep guarding their tradition by preventing changes in Hasidic education, presenting *goyim* as enemies, rejecting everything secular, silencing victims and their families, by means of religion, fear, physical, verbal, and mental abuse, and the expulsion of those who did not submit and stood against sexual abuse of children. Based on the information provided by the participants of this study, the changes that the Hasidic community requires in order to address the problem of child sexual abuse and its disclosure are not likely in the foreseen future.

The major concern of this study was understanding of reporting of child sexual assault and abuse by Hasidic male survivors and factors that impact it. This study discovered that Hasidic education is extremely deficient in terms of secular disciplines that are unacceptable by Hasidic Judaism. These disciplines include sexual education, legal studies, and English language. While language barriers associated with crime reporting were previously discussed in the existing literature (Cullota, 2005; Fathi, 2013; Sable et al., 2006; Shah et al., 2007; Vidales, 2010), the impact of sexual and legal education on reporting child sex abuse was a previously unknown factor. This finding makes this study groundbreaking. The impact of education on crime reporting decisions of Hasidic boys requires closer examination and analysis in a larger study that will use a larger sample and will be generalizable.

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## Appendix

### Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Introduction*

First, let me say thank you for taking your time and participate in this study. I'm really glad that you've agreed to talk to me. Before we begin, let me tell you a little bit about this study and what you can expect in this interview.

We are trying to understand the nature of sexual assault and abuse of boys in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities. We are primarily interested in understanding the factors that prevent the survivors from reporting incidents. This study will potentially help to prevent the occurrence of such incidents in the future.

To do this we are collecting information and getting opinions on what can be done to help people to come forward to report sexual assault and abuse. This interview will take anywhere between 1 and 2 hours. If you will need a break just let me know. We will stop interview and get back to it whenever you are ready.

I would like to emphasize that everything what you say is confidential. Although we may use some of the things you say in reports and possibly articles in scholarly

journals, no one will be able to identify any comments or opinions you specifically make.

Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym.

Now, do you have any questions before we proceed with the interview?

### *Questions*

1. To begin, I would like you to tell me a little bit about your background.
  - Tell me about you family (composition and religious practices)
  - Could you please describe your community?
  - What school, college, or university you went? (level of education: regular school, religious school, regular college, university)
2. How does the community and your family perceive sexuality?
  - Is this topic discussed in your family/school/community? (yes/no)
    - i. <NO>
      1. Tell me please, what do you think could be the reasons for refusing to educate or to talk with children about sexuality?
    - ii. <YES>
      1. Could you give me some insight in the areas that were discussed at home or covered in school? (general reproduction purpose, sexual behavior, diverse sexuality, consent, sexual abuse/assault, rape, pedophilia)
3. To the best of your knowledge how often sexual assault and abuse happens to children in your community?
  - Why do you think it happens?
  - What are your thoughts on community awareness about the problem?
  - In your opinion, what are the factors that allow abusers to do what they do?

- To the best of your knowledge, preventive measures are undertaken by your community?
4. I would like you to tell me about what happened to you.
- What was your age?
  - Where the incident(s) took place?
  - How your community and family reacted when they found out about the abuse?
  - How your abuser was involved in community life?
  - Why do you think it was possible?
5. I am very sorry that you had to go through that terrible experience! Have you ever reported to your family, community, or police?
- <NO>
    - i. What were the reasons to keep it a secret?
    - ii. Do you think the abuser would have been prosecuted if you reported?
    - iii. Which authorities do you think would have dealt with the abuser properly?
  - <YES>
    - i. Who were the first people that you shared with?
    - ii. Were there any legal actions undertaken in relation to your report?
    - iii. Was that effective? (abuse stopped, abuser was prosecuted or expelled from community)
  - Did you suffer any consequences because of your report?
6. Are there any community-based services available for the survivors of sexual assault and abuse?
- What types of services are provided?

- Who are the people who provide those services? (Are they educated in the field or are they just religious authorities?)
7. What are your thoughts about your community, sexual abuse of children, and reporting all together?
- What are the strongest preventive factors?
  - What are positive factors, if there are any?
  - What changes need to be done within the community to help the survivors come forward to report sexual assault and abuse?
8. Is there anything else that you think I did not mention, but it is important to know?

### ***Conclusion***

Once again, I want to thank you for your time and your participation in this study.