

You are in: [World: Europe](#)[Front Page](#) Wednesday, 21 March, 2001, 02:31 GMT[World](#)[Africa](#)[Americas](#)[Asia-Pacific](#)[Europe](#)[Middle East](#)[South Asia](#)[From Our Own Correspondent](#)[Letter From America](#)[UK](#)[UK Politics](#)[Business](#)[Sci/Tech](#)[Health](#)[Education](#)[Entertainment](#)[Talking Point](#)[In Depth](#)[AudioVideo](#)

AP

The Vatican says the problem is "limited"

The Vatican has accepted allegations that nuns suffer sexual abuse by priests, but says the problem is a limited one.

The Catholic Church was responding to allegations published last week in the United States weekly the National Catholic Reporter.

The newspaper said that in some cases priests impregnated nuns and then encouraged them to have abortions.

The detailed article was based on five reports prepared by members of Catholic orders, dating back to 1994.

The Vatican's official spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, said the problem was "known about and restricted to a limited geographical area".

“ I think the abuse described is happening - it is a serious matter, and we need to discuss it

”
Benedictine abbot Nokter Wolf

Worldwide reports

But the National Catholic Reporter listed 23 countries, including the US, Italy, Ireland, Brazil and India, where abuse was alleged to have taken place.

Most of the reports come from Africa, where fear of Aids has made celibate women a target of male clergy who see them as "safe" sexual partners.

Father Robert J Vitillo, now executive director of the US Bishops' Campaign for Human Development, gave a talk on the

Search BBC News Online

[Advanced search options](#)Launch console
for latest audio/video[BBC RADIO NEWS](#)[BBC ONE TV NEWS](#)[WORLD NEWS SUMMARY](#)[BBC NEWS 24 BULLETIN](#)[PROGRAMMES GUIDE](#)

See also:

[19 Jul 00 | UK
Paedophile cases haunt the church](#)[12 Jan 01 | Northern Ireland
Apology to sex abuse victims](#)[11 Jul 98 | Americas
Church pays \\$31m to sex abuse victims](#)[14 Apr 98 | Europe
'Exile' for disgraced Austrian cardinal](#)

Internet links:

[National Catholic Reporter](#)[The Vatican](#)

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites

Top Europe stories now:

[Ultimatum for Macedonian rebels](#)[European shares open lower](#)[Vatican plays down abuse report](#)[Foot-and-mouth spreads to Netherlands](#)[Spanish politician shot dead](#)[Haider sparks anti-Semitism debate](#)[EU considers breast implant](#)

► Nation Catholic
Reporter editor,
Pamela Shaeffer
"This has not
come out in
public before"
real **28k**

problem in 1994.

"I myself have heard the tragic stories of religious women who were forced to have sex with the local priest or with a spiritual counselor who insisted that this activity was 'good' for the both of them", he is reported to have said.

Women who were targeted found little sympathy when they complained, a report found.



In her 1994 report, Sister Maura O'Donohue, a physician, wrote: "Groups of sisters from local congregations have made passionate appeals for help to members of international congregations and explain that, when they themselves try to make representations to church authorities about harrassment by priests, they simply 'are not heard'. "

Nuns are vulnerable the world over

Vatican response

The official Vatican response said the Church was working to solve the problem and that it should not overshadow the good works done by members of the clergy.

"Some negative cases cannot let us forget the often heroic faith expressed by the large majority of those men and women in religious orders," the Vatican said.

A Benedictine abbot told the National Catholic Reporter he believes the Church is facing a serious problem.

"I think the abuse described is happening," said Father Nokter Wolf.

"How much it happens, what the numbers are, I have no way of knowing. But it is a serious matter, and we need to discuss it."

Links to more Europe stories

[measures](#)

[Russian diplomat 'was spy'](#)

Links to more Europe stories are at the foot of the page.



^^ [Back to top](#)

[News Front Page](#) | [World](#) | [UK](#) | [UK Politics](#) | [Business](#) | [Sci/Tech](#) | [Health](#) | [Education](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Talking Point](#) | [In Depth](#) | [AudioVideo](#)

[To BBC Sport>>](#)

[News Sources](#)