

SPINNING THE ABUSE REPORT

Following the report on clergy sex abuse in 2010, the reaction from the media was varied.

“New Sex Abuse Allegations Down Slightly in 2010” was the main headline in the Catholic News Service (CNS) story, but the *National Catholic Reporter* wasn’t happy with this positive connotation. Ergo, it ran the CNS story under the banner, “505 Sex Abuse Allegations in 2010.”

Reuters misleadingly reported that “there were 428 new allegations of sexual abuse against a minor in 2010, seven of which related to child abuse that was said to occur during the year.” The 428 figure is for dioceses and eparchies; when religious institutes are counted, the number is 505. The number of seven refers to the total number of credible accusations made of incidents alleged to have happened in 2010.

AFP, the global news agency, reported that “Allegations of sexual abuse involving the Roman Catholic clergy in the United States rose sharply last year to nearly 700 from around 400 in 2009.” While there were 653 allegations, the number deemed credible was 505. AFP offered the unsubstantiated number and then rounded it up from 653 to 700. It was also wrong to report that “only eight were deemed credible.” The correct figure is seven. The number eight represents the disaggregated number reported by dioceses and eparchies, but does not factor in religious institutes: “None of the new allegations reported by religious institutes in 2010 involved children under the age of eighteen in 2010,” the report said. When weighted and averaged, the number is seven.

Huffington Post took the cake for getting it wrong. It ran the news story by the Religion News Service (RNS) but instead of using the RNS headline, “Catholic Bishops Report Seven Abuse Cases During 2010,” it managed to spin it with, “Catholic Bishops Report Increase in Abuse Accusations.” Wrong. The number of credible accusations declined.