

S.K. v White Plains Hosp. Ctr.

2023 NY Slip Op 33001(U)

August 25, 2023

Supreme Court, New York County

Docket Number: Index No. 951256/2021

Judge: Alexander M. Tisch

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**SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK COUNTY**

PRESENT: HON. ALEXANDER M. TISCH PART 18

Justice

-----X

S. K.,

Plaintiff,

- v -

WHITE PLAINS HOSPITAL CENTER, ARCHDIOCESE OF
NEW YORK, FATHER JOHN DOE

Defendant.

-----X

INDEX NO. 951256/2021

MOTION DATE 01/28/2022

MOTION SEQ. NO. 002

**DECISION + ORDER ON
MOTION**

The following e-filed documents, listed by NYSCEF document number (Motion 002) 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 36, 37, 38, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46

were read on this motion to/for DISMISS

Upon the foregoing documents, defendant Archdiocese of New York (Archdiocese) moves to dismiss the complaint insofar as asserted against it pursuant to CPLR 3211 (a) (7).

Plaintiff commenced the instant action seeking to recover damages for personal injuries sustained as a result of alleged sexual abuse inflicted by “Father John Doe” in November of 1971 when plaintiff was a patient in a facility owned or operated by co-defendant White Plains Hospital Center (WPH) (NYSCEF Doc No 1, complaint at ¶ 1). The complaint alleges that plaintiff, then 14 years old, sustained a back injury while playing football and was admitted to WPH’s facility for one week. During that time, Father John Doe visited plaintiff’s room “dressed in the clerical garb of a Roman Catholic priest, acting as a hospital approved chaplain” and sexually assaulted him (*id.* at ¶¶ 25-38). Plaintiff asserts claims for assault; battery; negligence; negligent hiring, supervision, and retention; and negligent infliction of emotional distress.

In determining dismissal under CPLR Rule 3211 (a) (7), the “complaint is to be afforded a liberal construction” (*Goldfarb v Schwartz*, 26 AD3d 462, 463 [2d Dept 2006]). The

“allegations are presumed to be true and accorded every favorable inference” (Godfrey v Spano, 13 NY3d 358, 373 [2009]). “[T]he sole criterion is whether the pleading states a cause of action, and if from its four corners factual allegations are discerned which taken together manifest any cause of action cognizable at law a motion for dismissal will fail” (Guggenheimer v Ginzburg, 43 NY2d 268, 275 [1977]). Additionally, “[w]hether a plaintiff can ultimately establish its allegations is not part of the calculus in determining a motion to dismiss” (EBC I, Inc. v Goldman, Sachs & Co., 5 NY3d 11, 19 [2005]).

Contrary to defendants’ contentions, the Court finds that plaintiff’s failure to specifically identify the alleged abuser is not fatally insufficient as to warrant dismissal of the complaint. The complaint alleges that plaintiff was in defendants’ custody and/or control and may therefore be owed a duty of care (see generally Mirand v City of New York, 84 NY2d 44, 49-50 [1994]; Sokola v Weinstein, 78 Misc 3d 842, 857, n 10 [Sup Ct, NY County 2023] [citing cases]). “Plaintiff’s inability to identify his assailant . . . does not preclude him from recovery” (Jones v Hiro Cocktail Lounge, 139 AD3d 608, 609 [1st Dept 2016], citing Burgos v Aqueduct Realty Corp., 92 NY2d 544, 550-51 [1998]). The Court finds this particularly applicable where, as here, a negligence claim is asserted based on a duty of care owing directly from defendants to the plaintiff (see generally Sokola, 78 Misc 3d at 845-846, citing, inter alia, Pulka v Edelman, 40 NY2d 781, 782 [1976]; Hamilton v Beretta U.S.A. Corp., 96 NY2d 222, 233 [2001], op after certified question answered, 264 F3d 21 [2d Cir 2001]).

Further, the complaint asserts that the alleged abuser was under defendants’ supervision, employ and/or control — if true, which this Court is required to assume (see Engelman v Rofe, 194 AD3d 26, 33-34 [1st Dept 2021]), the allegation would be sufficient to give rise to the negligent training, supervision, and/or retention claims, as set forth in the complaint. If not true,

because of a lack of an employment relationship or sufficient level of control over the alleged abuser, then the claim would be unsuccessful (see, e.g., Jones v Hiro Cocktail Lounge, 139 AD3d 608, 609 [1st Dept 2016] [“Since the assailant was not identified, plaintiff could not demonstrate that [defendants] knew of the assailant's propensity to commit such attacks”]; see generally Sokola, 78 Misc 3d at 846-847 [stating elements for negligent hiring, retention and/or supervision claim, including requisite employment relationship]). However, that fact has yet to be proven or disproven. Indeed, “[t]he manner in which the defendant acquired actual or constructive notice of the alleged abuse is an evidentiary fact, to be proved by the claimant at trial. In a pleading, ‘the plaintiff need not allege his [or her] evidence’” (Martinez v State, 215 AD3d 815, 819 [2d Dept 2023], quoting Mellen v Athens Hotel Co., 153 AD 891 [1st Dept 1912]). As plaintiff notes in opposition, the abuser’s identity may be revealed through minimal discovery (see generally Doe v Intercontinental Hotels Group, PLC, 193 AD3d 410, 411 [1st Dept 2021] [noting such facts may be supplemented in a bill of particulars]; G.T. v Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, N.Y., 211 AD3d 413, 413-14 [1st Dept 2022] [“While the movant argues that plaintiff fails to allege specific facts that it had notice of the priest's criminal proclivities, at this pre-answer stage of the litigation, such information is in the sole possession and control of the movant”]). Therefore, the Court declines to dismiss the complaint on the basis that the alleged abuser is not identified by name (see, e.g., O’Brien v Archdiocese of New York, index no 950092/2020, NYSCEF Doc No 30 [Sup Ct, NY County August 13, 2021] [Silver, J.] [denying motion to dismiss on similar grounds]).

Accordingly, it is hereby ORDERED that the motion is denied; and it is further ORDERED that the Archdiocese shall file and serve an answer to the complaint within (20) days after service of a copy of this order with notice of entry; and it is further

ORDERED that the parties shall proceed with discovery pursuant to CMO No. 2, Section IX (B) (1) and submit a first compliance conference order within 60 days from entry of this order.

This constitutes the decision and order of the Court.



<u>8/25/2023</u>			<u>ALEXANDER M. TISCH, J.S.C.</u>	
DATE				
CHECK ONE:	<input type="checkbox"/>	CASE DISPOSED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NON-FINAL DISPOSITION
	<input type="checkbox"/>	GRANTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	DENIED
APPLICATION:	<input type="checkbox"/>	SETTLE ORDER	<input type="checkbox"/>	GRANTED IN PART
CHECK IF APPROPRIATE:	<input type="checkbox"/>	INCLUDES TRANSFER/REASSIGN	<input type="checkbox"/>	SUBMIT ORDER
			<input type="checkbox"/>	FIDUCIARY APPOINTMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/>	OTHER
			<input type="checkbox"/>	REFERENCE