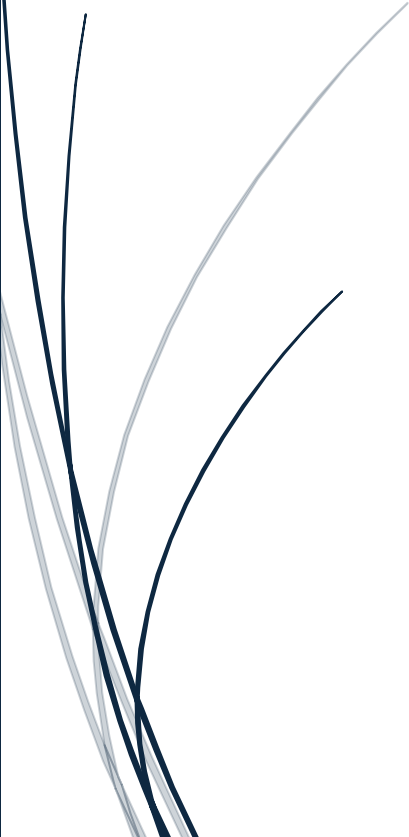




June 2025

# **Investigation into Experiences of Victims and Survivors of HCCA**

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## Acknowledgements

It has been a great privilege to be entrusted by the Executive Office and by victims/survivors of historical clerical child abuse to engage in this important research. We begin by acknowledging, with deep respect and gratitude, the survivors who came forward to share their experiences of sexual abuse for this report. We recognise that telling your story can reopen wounds that never fully close. For many, recounting trauma is not simply a matter of memory, but a reliving of pain, shame, fear, confusion, and loss.

You chose to speak, to be heard with the hope that your voice might help protect others. That no other child, no other person, should have to endure what you did. Your strength is not only in survival, but in the fierce compassion that seeks change. We also acknowledge the many who could not come forward, for whom silence was necessary for safety, survival, or peace. Your truth is no less real.

This report exists because of your courage, your clarity, and your call for justice. May it serve not only as a record of harm, but as a catalyst for meaningful reform so that the systems to protect children no longer fail them, and so no one is ever made to feel alone in their suffering.

We would like to express our gratitude to Karen Beattie of the Health Research Authority (HSCNI Research and Development Division), who generously advised us on the ethical approval process. This process took more time than originally anticipated in the project timeline, resulting in a delay in the recruitment of victims/survivors who had expressed a willingness to participate in the study. Given the urgency of the project, particularly in light of the prolonged period many victims/survivors had waited to share their experiences, adherence to strict deadlines was a significant consideration. We acknowledge with gratitude the understanding and flexibility of the Executive Office and Lisa Caldwell, the Independent Chair to the Inter-Departmental Working Group throughout the project.

We extend our deep appreciation to the research team for their essential contributions to the success of this research, and in particular, navigating the complex logistical challenges and ensuring the project remained aligned with its critical milestones. We are equally grateful to the team conducting the participant interviews, who approached this sensitive work with care, empathy, and respect. Given the emotionally demanding nature of the interviews and analysis, the team's mutual support was invaluable and reflected a shared commitment to ethical and compassionate research practice. The collaborative efforts of all team members ensured both the integrity of the research and the respectful treatment of the voices at its heart.

# 1. Introduction

The research team was honoured to meet so many survivors and to hear their stories of being abused within church congregations, in schools, and in youth organisations run by churches. For some individuals, this was the first time that they had had the opportunity to tell another person what had happened to them. We recognised the courage and resilience that it took to address their trauma and to tell their story. We admired the generosity and sense of responsibility in their motivation to have their story told so that others may avoid suffering as they did.

The survivors welcomed this research very much. Many had felt excluded and neglected by the previous inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse. At last, they felt that their voices would be heard and would influence change. They know that they have experienced directly how people can use the power and opportunities that position offers to exploit vulnerable children for their own gratification. They have lived through the impact of such abuse, and we have heard the wisdom of their lived experience. This wisdom should be respected, valued and embraced to enhance the professional knowledge and expertise of policy makers, senior managers and practitioners and motivate them to do better in the future.

Our responsibility was to listen with open hearts and minds to the voice of victims and survivors of clerical child abuse and to report their authentic experience. We were challenged by the complexity of the emotional, psychological, spiritual and social impact of the abuse. We admired their struggles to recover from the trauma and to undo the injustice of child abuse and valued their views on future action to reduce this happening to others. We have strived to report accurately the powerful stories of the victims and survivors and to do justice to what we heard.

The bulk of this report contains the words of victims and survivors. Their words are in italics. Our commentary and analysis on what they told us is in common script. The chapters follow the areas that were listed in the research specification. Most chapters begin with a summary of what we learnt from listening to victims and survivors. This is followed by the words of the victims and survivors and is accompanied by comments intended to guide the reader. Most chapters end with a discussion of the practical implications of what the participants in the research told us.

Participant codes were randomly assigned and recorded in the format *[P59]* to denote, for example, Participant 59; this approach enables a clear representation of the breadth of experiences across different topics while supporting equity in the inclusion and visibility of participant voices throughout the report.

We warn readers that this report will not be easy to read. Readers are invited to be aware of any past experiences being triggered and to take care of themselves. These are authentic oral histories. Consequently, the descriptions of abuse are sometimes graphic and explicit. The distress and anger of survivors are reflected in the language. It is strong and has not been censored.

To provide readers with an indication of potentially distressing content, a content warning symbol (◆) will appear with the message: ◆ ***Content Warning - The following section includes victim/survivor accounts of abuse. The language has not been censored.***

## 2. Methodology: Gathering Stories

### Historical Clerical Child Abuse Research - Investigation into Experiences of Victims and Survivors

#### Project Origins

Between 2014 and 2016, in response to the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, the Northern Ireland Executive conducted a Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry to investigate the abuse of children in residential institutions. The scope of the inquiry covered institutions in Northern Ireland that provided residential care for children, from 1922 to 1995, but excluded most church-run schools.

In October 2016, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed that an inter-departmental group should be established to take forward work on historic Mother and Baby Homes/Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse, which fell outside the terms of reference of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry. A research report on historical Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries between 1922 and 1990 was published by the Northern Ireland Executive in 2021 but no research has been conducted on Historical Clerical Child Abuse.

The survivor reference group have been calling for investigations into HCCA for some time, and they were involved in the drafting of the Terms of Reference for this study. They have been consulted on the methodology, ethics, and overall protocol of this study.

#### Aim

The aim of this research was to explore the nature of historical clerical child abuse (HCCA) in Northern Ireland and its impact on victims and survivors. It provides a narrative of how victims and survivors experienced the impact of the abuse as well as an analysis and reflection on cultures and systems implicated in how the abuse has happened. The study will also inform recommendations for any future action required for an effective investigation into HCCA and effective policies and actions to address the needs of victims and survivors.

Historical clerical child abuse can refer to a broad spectrum of abuse types. In this research, it covers neglect, exploitation and physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse perpetrated by a member of the clergy or an individual performing a role related to the ministry of a religious institution/faith group.

This research was focused specifically on the experience of victims and survivors of historical clerical abuse in Northern Ireland, outside residential institutions. It includes abuse in schools.

Our primary aim is to give victims and survivors an opportunity to express what was important to them—to say what they want to say in their own way.

The terms ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ have specific connotations and meanings for those affected by abusive behaviour. The term ‘victim’ expresses the harm done, but for some, it is associated with an incorrect connotation of passivity. The term ‘survivor’ is preferred by some people because it expresses resistance to oppressive conditions and a refusal to be defined by abuse. Others, however, feel that the term ‘survivor’ implies a pressure to overcome the harm and trauma. We acknowledge these controversies and, as such, both terms will be used in this research recognising both the courage and choice involved in dealing with the ongoing effects that trauma may play in life.

## Relevant Studies and Analysis

The world has witnessed a stream of revelations about child clerical abuse in multiple institutions and sectors in the last two decades, prompting numerous research studies and government-led inquiries in this area. The Catholic Church has been at the centre of most investigations and media attention, following revelations of high-profile cases within local churches and Catholic institutions. It is important to note that clerical child abuse has also occurred in various Protestant denominations. Instances of abuse in the Buddhist and Muslim communities have also started to emerge (Chowdhury et al, 2021). This study engaged with victims/survivors of clerical abuse within a range of Christian faith communities. No participants from other religions came forward to participate.

Inquiries have been undertaken in several countries, including Canada (Rogers Report, 1990), Germany (Kowalski, 2018), Portugal (Comissão Independente, 2023), Ireland (Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin, 2009; Ryan Commission, 2009; Dublin Archdiocese Commission of Investigation, 2011; Hart et al, 2017), and England and Wales (Wright, 2017; Jay et al. 2018; 2020). These have been accompanied by a series of Church-led inquiries, namely in Belgium (Adriaenssens, 2010), the Netherlands (Deetman et al, 2011), and England (Gibb, 2017).

The investigations have collectively revealed patterns of self-preservation, silence and secrecy, lack of accountability (particularly by those in senior leadership), a failure to abide by safeguarding policies and structures, and movement and re-assignment of abusers to other roles post-offending. In many cases, the police also abused their power by colluding with the church and adopting a hands-off policy toward the abuse. The reports have produced similar findings and recommendations for preventing abuse in the future, including better education and training about abuse; the need to respond quickly and thoroughly to victims/survivors; transparency in response to abuse; and coordinated responses with civil authorities.

Research published recently on the impact and implications of clerical child sexual abuse (CSA) in the Catholic Church in England and Wales (Jones et al, 2024) found that those who had experienced sexual abuse in a Catholic setting when they were children were treated inadequately by a representative of the Church when they came forward with an allegation or sought support around a disclosure. Many disclosures were met with denial, disbelief or a lack of compassion for the person and their pain.

In the same study, the researchers found that the trauma and aftermath of the abuse continue today for most victims and survivors (forty or even fifty years later). Participants reported not being able to maintain a job or succeed in their careers, struggling with addiction, depression, and with their own sexuality. A systematic review of existing studies also highlights medical, psychological, behavioural and sexual difficulties for those who experienced sexual abuse as children (Maniglio, 2009).

The trauma experienced by victims and survivors, however, goes beyond emotional and psychological effects - it can also impact their spirituality. Evidence suggests that victims and survivors of clerical abuse feel abused and robbed of their faith and spiritual support (Gerdes, et al, 1996; Rossetti, 1995).

The intensity and destructive effects of the trauma associated with clergy abuse are directly related to the emotional bond between the victim and the abuser. This bond is grounded in factors that are described as “spiritual” when in fact they are toxic and abusive, leading to a complex, traumatic relationship (Doyle, 2009). For this reason, clergy abuse is often regarded as a form of both institutional childhood abuse and spiritual abuse, as it is perpetrated by a representative of the institution and the faith they represent (Wolfe et al, 2003).

A secondary consequence for the victims and survivors is a sense of alienation not only from God and the Church, as a community, but also from the family who do not believe them. McAlinden (2013) labels this phenomenon ‘social denial’ embedded in a ‘culture of disbelief’ around clerical abuse (p.23). This adds to the stigma surrounding the abuse and exacerbates their trauma, making victims feel guilty, ashamed, and silenced (Sicilia et al, 2024).

It is thus not surprising that a key goal for victims and survivors is to be believed. Many desire to tell their stories about what happened in their own words—and to be heard in a meaningful way (Herman, 2003, p.60). Studies suggest that motivations to disclose the abuse often derive from a need to “have a voice”, “tell their story”, or “set the record straight” (Lundy, 2020 P. 260).

Daly (2014) examined the “justice interests” of victims of historical institutional abuse in civil litigation, public inquiries and redress schemes in Australia and Canada, and identified five key elements: victim participation in the design of justice responses, victim voice, validation,

vindication and offender accountability. Similarly, Lundy (2020) identified 12 complementary survivor justice needs in her work on the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry in Northern Ireland: voice, acknowledgement, authoritative historical record, vindication (including validation), apology, redress (monetary/ symbolic), rehabilitation measures, intergenerational needs, access to records.

Disclosure of sensitive topics in research settings has also been described by victims and survivors as beneficial to their psychological and emotional well-being (McClain & Amar, 2013). Storytelling allows victims and survivors to reclaim their personal narrative and potentially turn a negative experience into a positive one, which can be seen as a mechanism to make sense of the experience. Nonetheless, the impact of disclosure on the victim-survivor should never be underestimated and researchers should be sensitive to the impact of recalling traumatic events. It is critical that the person feels safe with and trusts the researcher. Clarity about the purpose of the research, who will have access to it, how it will be used and any limits to confidentiality is paramount.

As mentioned above, the aim of this research is to explore the nature of HCCA in Northern Ireland and its impact on victims and survivors. Due to the nature of the method chosen the interviews will not follow a structured format or a set of pre-determined questions. Instead, it will follow an inductive, open-ended model. The underlying presupposition is that the perspective of the interviewee is best revealed in stories where the informant is using their own spontaneous language in the narration of events. In our study, this model gave victims and survivors an opportunity to put their experiences in context and take control of their narrative by letting them choose how they want to tell their story (i.e., when to start, what to cover, use their own words, a pace that suits them, no pressure, etc.)

A number of topics will be covered, including:

- Nature of the abuse
- Impact of the abuse (as a child and later in life)
- Victims' and survivors' first disclosure
- Justice needs and expectations
- Extent of and deficits in service provision (i.e. if any services or agencies were sought)
- The responses of families, faith organisations and/or statutory agencies to reports of abuse
- Barriers that have prevented victims and survivors from having any form of meaningful redress
- Barriers that have prevented victims and survivors from accessing justice

## Methodology

This research is based upon narrative inquiry (Caine et al., 2022) and informed by the insights of symbolic Interactionism theory. Symbolic interactionists view social reality from the perspectives of the social actor(s). Knowledge of the social world is found through engaging with concrete situations and with how people interact with others, and construe, symbolically, the problems they face. Construing the world is a practical, situated activity – rather than an abstract one – for subjects and researchers alike (Blumer, 1986). Although focusing on the individual, symbolic interactionists stress that individual behaviour is understood in the context of interaction. Thus, rather than relying on quantitatively derived data that were collected through representative survey research and analysed using statistics, symbolic interactionists primarily collect and analyse qualitative data from people's experiences in naturalistic settings.

In light of this, qualitative methodology is best suited for this study. Qualitative methods are typically used for providing an in-depth understanding of the research issues that embrace the perspectives of the study population and the context in which they live (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020). One limitation of this method is sampling, which is hardly ever statistically representative of a population. However, this study does not aim or claim to be representative of the population object of study. The purpose is to achieve depth of information rather than statistical representativeness. Each victim and survivor's story is unique.

The study will use oral history as a research method. Oral histories are well suited for accessing people's subjective experiences of historical events and offers a unique way to capture the lived experiences of participants and how cultural frames shaped their experiences (Leavy, 2011).

The techniques used in oral history research can be found in other types of qualitative research - data typically consist of interviews, documents, and observations (Yow, 2015). In this study, oral histories will involve interviews (i.e. conversations) with victims and survivors of clerical abuse. This will allow researchers to explore the emotions, views and perceptions of participants through an inductive, open-ended model. Participants are given space to reflect, reconstruct, and build meaning out of their past experiences. While individuals' perceptions may be limited or inaccurate at times, they are still felt and experienced, which is what matters.

The choice of oral history as a method takes into consideration that there is no existing alternative source which provides evidence from the perspective of victims and survivors of clerical abuse outside residential institutions in Northern Ireland. Oral histories have also

been used in similar studies, including the Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries Research Report (McCormick, 2021).

## The Data Collection Process

Once the victim/survivor agreed to participate in the research, the Chief Investigator allocated interviews internally amongst researchers. The interviews were conducted virtually (e.g. via zoom) or in person. Interviewees were offered the choice of online or in-person meetings and male or female researcher. Where face-to-face interviews took place, they were conducted in a venue considered safe and convenient by the participant (e.g. private meeting rooms in hotels or a community centre or their home). The interviews were scheduled with participants at a location, date and time that suited them.

The aim of the study was reiterated in full at the start of the interview and participants were asked if they had any questions. The researcher then explained the structure of the interview. It was important that victims and survivors felt in control of the interview process. The researcher needed to take every reasonable precaution to avoid the participant feeling that they were misled or taken advantage of in any way. All interviews were recorded, and consent was given.

The interviews were broadly split into four parts: 1) Elaboration of story, 2) Extraction of examples and additional information, 3) Additional questions, 4) Conclusion.

The interviewer asked a single question at the start of the interview: *“What would you like to tell me about the abuse that you suffered and its impact on your life?”*

The question was designed to elicit the full narrative from participants. Interviewees shared their stories without any interruptions or prompts from the researcher. The narration continued until the interviewee indicated that they had no more to say. During the narration, the researcher took notes for later clarification and focused on full, active listening.

The conversation was recorded through an online software or a portable voice recorder.

As the narration came to a “natural” end, the interviewer asked participants for examples or additional information to fill in any gaps.

The researcher checked whether all the themes had been addressed. Additional questions were asked on

- Nature of the abuse
- Impact of the abuse

- Victims' and survivors' first disclosure
- Justice needs and expectations
- Extent of and deficits in service provision (i.e. if any services or agencies were sought)
- The responses of families, faith organisations and/or statutory agencies to reports of abuse
- Barriers that have prevented victims and survivors from having any form of meaningful redress
- Barriers that have prevented victims and survivors from accessing justice

Before bringing the interview to an end, the interviewer asked the participant if there was anything else they would like to share, giving them an opportunity to talk about anything they might consider relevant or were initially reluctant to talk about.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim from digital recordings. Interviewers read the transcripts and highlighted any sections they may consider relevant to support data analysis.

The data analysis was conducted by two researchers who read the transcripts several times to immerse themselves in the data (Anderson & Jack, 1991). The researchers then used both software and their own reading of the transcripts to ensure a comprehensive analysis which reflected the research participants' stories and views.

## Confidentiality, Anonymity, and Data Storage

Anonymity and confidentiality are key considerations in qualitative research ethics, and the two constructs are theoretically distinct. Confidentiality refers to the management of private information, communicated between two or more people in trust of confidence, disclosure of which could bring particular prejudice to informants. Anonymity means that the identity of subjects is protected. All participants were assured that the information provided will be treated in confidence. Researchers, however, made it clear that, should a participant name an abuser, and that person may still be living, they are under an obligation to inform a designated officer in the Police Service for Northern Ireland. In such a case, the participant will be named as a possible witness and may be interviewed by the police.

Part of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality is the storage, transferring, and destruction of research data. In the UK, the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018 govern the processing (acquiring, holding, using, etc.) of personal data in the UK. While the legislation has not been specifically designed for research, it is still viewed as the appropriate approach to the governance of lawful, fair, and transparent data processing.

A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) was completed and reviewed and approved by the commissioner of this project and their Data Protection Officer.

A number of strategies were developed to ensure that participation in the study remains confidential:

- 1) All data was transported and held securely. Digital recordings, transcripts and other files containing personal data were moved onto the secure server at the earliest possible opportunity and held there exclusively thereafter. Any paper based notes taken during the interview were destroyed immediately after the interview. Virtual interviews were recorded within a videoconferencing platform (e.g. zoom) and were moved to the server immediately after. The device used to record face to face interviews encrypted the files at the point of recording and will require a code to be played. The only paper documentation which could be used to identify participants – the consent forms and demographic questionnaires– will be scanned and uploaded to the server. The paper copy will be destroyed afterwards (i.e. shredded).
- 2) The data presented in the final report will not disclose the identity (or contain any identifying information) of participants. For the purpose of record keeping, each participant will be identified by an ID code or letter, which will ensure that they cannot be identified. The research material will only be accessible by the researchers and the Chief Investigator and all electronic files (e.g. transcripts) will be password protected.
- 3) Where the data revealed contextual information that could be used to identify participants (e.g. geographic location) it was removed or replaced with a phrase to protect their identity. This will be followed for both interview transcripts and any quotes used in the study.
- 4) The researchers established in advance whether comments from the interviews may be quoted in anonymised form or, alternatively, not included in any research outputs at all.

The data from this investigation has been incorporated into this report. If the data from this investigation is used in any other publication (e.g. academic publications) the same protections will be adopted to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. As mentioned above, no participant will be identifiable from any publication arising from this investigation.

Individual transcripts were made available to research participants and they were asked if there was anything they would like to remove from it. The researchers will also share a draft

of the final report with participants before its publication and will welcome/invite comments if they wish to do so.

No data will be transferred to the commissioner of this project or any other organisation, apart from the data incorporated into the final report which will be fully anonymised. The digital recordings and the consent forms will be securely held for a period of 6 months and then destroyed.

### **Inclusion criteria for participation in the research**

- Dates/period covered: 1922-2024
- Nature of the abuse:
  - a) Sexual, physical, spiritual, and/or emotional abuse
  - b) The abuse must have taken place in NI
  - b) Must have occurred within the community (i.e., outside residential institutions).
- Age: over 18
- Gender, ethnicity, and religious faith: any

To be included, participants must be ready, willing and able to talk about their experience and have time available without interruption to be interviewed. The study aimed to interview between 40 and 50 victims/survivors.

The impact of disclosure on the victim/survivor should never be underestimated and researchers should be sensitive to the impact of recalling traumatic events and their impact. The key concerns are the well-being and the safety of victims and survivors and ensuring that there is support available post-research. While researchers have extensive experience of working with victims of HCCA, they acknowledge that they are not counsellors or therapists. The Executive Office (TEO) contracted a counselling organisation to provide initial support of up to three counselling sessions to research participants through a team of therapist/counsellors, who would also be responsible for signposting participants to other services as appropriate. Contact details will be provided to participants at the end of the interview session.

### **The narrative approach**

A narrative approach can be criticised for its reliability. The evidence included is solely from victims'/survivors' accounts of what happened. The accuracy has not been independently verified. The validity of a person's narrative is the individual's unique memory of the experience, a memory that continues to trouble them. The incidents of the abuse may be in the past. The impact of the abuse is not just historical but often experienced in the present.

It should also be acknowledged that this report is of the oral histories of victims/survivors. It does not contain the narratives of perpetrators, or the families of victims/survivors and perpetrators, or the managers and colleagues of the perpetrators in the churches and schools in which the abuse took place and was addressed, or the members of the congregations or the students of the schools who may have witnessed the abuse. The report contains the truths of the victims/survivors who participated in the research. It does not claim to be a complete account of the abuse.

## Engagement of the Victims and Survivors

In consultation with The Executive Office a target number of 40 to 50 oral histories was agreed. A strategy of engagement was also agreed. This included approaching existing contacts, a press release and lastly appearances on television and radio by two survivors. The survivor media appearances proved the most effective.

67 people contacted us regarding participation in the research. They were all sent an e-mail inviting them to participate and explaining the research process, a participant information sheet, a consent form and a short demographic questionnaire:

- 14 never responded to the invitation
- 16 did not meet the eligibility criteria
- 41 were interviewed (4 proved ineligible according to the criteria)
- 37 valid interviews took place

The first meeting with a survivor took place on 30 December 2024 and the final meeting was on 4 April 2025.

## Demographic Profile of Participants

A total of 37 participants were interviewed in the study, comprising 24 males and 13 females. The age distribution indicated that the largest proportion of participants fell within the 51–60 and 61–70 age groups (n = 13 each). Fewer participants were represented in the 70+ (n = 5), 41–50 (n = 4), and 31–40 (n = 2) age brackets. The overall demographic profile suggests a predominantly older sample, with limited representation from younger age groups.

### Gender

Female = 13    Male = 24

### Age Groups

| 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60 | 61-70 | 70+ |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| 2     | 4     | 13    | 13    | 5   |

People of all religions were invited to participate. But all those who came forward to be interviewed came from a Christian background. These statistics relate to the religious denomination in which the abuse took place. Many of the participants indicated that they had stopped practising their faith due to the abuse.

#### **Current Religious Affiliation**

| Catholic | Protestant | No religion |
|----------|------------|-------------|
| 25       | 10         | 2           |

#### **Religion-Gender Correlation**

| Religion   | Male | Female |
|------------|------|--------|
| Catholic   | 18   | 7      |
| Protestant | 5    | 5      |

This research is based on a small sample size. While public awareness of clerical abuse has been predominantly within the Catholic Church, this research contributes to the growing recognition that clerical abuse is an institutional issue across most religious denominations.

One Protestant woman [P12] stated that her motivation to take part in the research was in part:

*Well, basically, the background really was when there was so much publicity about abuse in the Roman Catholic Church, I thought it was time to mention that it had happened in other churches.*

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### 3. The Nature of the Abuse

#### **What have we learnt from listening to survivors?**

Sections A and B summarise key themes in the narratives told by victims/survivors. Section C contains excerpts from these narratives which provide evidence supporting the themes. Section D contains recommendations arising from the chapter.

#### **A. The Significance of Context**

20 participants in this research reported abuse by clerics in schools run by the Catholic Church, 12 survivors reported abuses by clerics in parishes or congregations and 5 people were abused by lay people working with children within church youth organisations.

Many of the research participants provided details of the context in which the abuse took place. This may have included:

1. Their life prior to the abuse;
2. Their family background including their family's relationship with the church;
3. The respect accorded to perpetrator's role, authority and personality;
4. The culture of the school;
5. The impact of the violent conflict in Northern Ireland.

##### **(i) Life prior to the abuse**

Some victims/survivors described pre-existing vulnerabilities such as familial issues, community-related conflicts and prior trauma including bereavement and earlier experiences of abuse. Not everyone who becomes a victim of abuse is already vulnerable. Some survivors spoke about their family and their religion as very positive aspects of life. In some cases the strength of the family supported their recovery from abuse.

##### **(ii) Family Background including the Family's Relationship with the Church**

Many survivors came from families who were devoted to their church. This research identified similar findings to that of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (2021)<sup>1</sup> where parents trusted their child to develop a relationship with a cleric. Whilst some deemed the clerics as trustworthy and inherently moral, other parents were unable to conceive that abuse

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<https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/cp-religious-organisations-settings/part-c-barriers-reporting-child-sexual-abuse-religious-organisations/c5-abuse-power-religious-leaders.html> - point 23.

could occur in the church. Victims/survivors have described how this compounded the harm and delayed interventions for recovery. Victims/survivors were very aware that parents or, in some cases, one parent would not be able to believe or to cope with the reality that a cleric could abuse their child.

### (iii) The Respect accorded to the Perpetrator's Status, Authority and Personality

Most churches encourage their members to revere their priests, ministers or pastors. It would be normal for priests to befriend families in their parish. This would have been seen as an honour and experienced as supportive in most cases. However, if the priest was a predator, this could become part of the grooming process and provide opportunities to identify potential children who might be vulnerable.

Many of the perpetrators were described as being charismatic, charming, and very skilful in making people feel special and building trust. Some used theology, rituals and religious practices as opportunities to abuse and to discourage disclosure.

### (iv) School Culture

The accounts of victims/survivors indicate that physical violence, alongside other abusive behaviours, in schools, became an integral part of the grooming process. Previous to the introduction of the Education (Corporal Punishment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, adults in schools could use their entitlement to administer corporal means as a method to instil moral behaviour, respect and obedience. Victims/survivors have described how this provided opportunities for perpetrators to isolate children and mask the use of their abusive power as discipline. This power was used to instil fear, silence and/or groom children to acquiesce to acts of sexual abuse. Other perpetrators may offer sanctuary from the violence as an incentive to comply with the abuse.

### (v) The Violent Civil Conflict in Northern Ireland

Many incidents of abuse described took place during the Northern Irish civil conflict. When acts of violence are normalised as a means of asserting power, the breakdown of protective systems often weakens efforts to prevent, detect or intervene in incidents of abuse. The Nationalist Catholic population were reluctant to engage with the police, especially prior to reform. Victims/survivors across religious denominations in this research articulated concerns that perpetrators were protected by the police in exchange for information. Those of the Catholic community expressed the belief within the community that reporting may also be seen as being disloyal to the Catholic Community. This led to fewer reports of abuse. Several

survivors suggested that one prolific clerical abuser was protected by the police and colluded with them.

## B. The Process of Abuse

In most cases abuse was not a specific incident. There was a process of developing the relationship and opportunity, engaging in abusive acts, resisting and stopping it. While there are some recurring phases, tactics, and behaviours, the process of abuse is unique to each individual.

### (i) Grooming

Grooming is a process that involves the perpetrator building a relationship with a child, and sometimes with the family, gaining their trust and a position of power over the child, in preparation for abuse<sup>2</sup>. The behaviours described below often seemed normal because of the deference shown to clerics.

Perpetrators have been characterised as situational (taking advantage as situational presents itself), opportunistic (impulsively taking advantage of an opportunity) or predatory<sup>3</sup> (seeking and manipulating environments with a view to sexually abusing children). Predatory perpetrators can be very subtle and skilful in their grooming technique. The grooming process, including length of time, private access to the victim, cultural norms, environmental stressors and motivations, varies depending on the perpetrator. Children assume that the perpetrator likes them, thinks that they are special and wants to be an adult friend. They are, of course, naïve and innocent in their belief that adults are always honest in their intentions. Most survivors only realise they were being groomed when the unwanted and abusive behaviour begins or even years later as result of counselling.

Grooming may begin with the young person being made to feel special by a person in authority. The perpetrator may offer treats or special privileges such as outings or trips to the beach or swimming pool. A perpetrator may know that a child is going through a difficult time at home and offers empathy and support because he sees an opportunity to groom. Often the grooming will begin by the cleric comforting a child who is upset, for example due to a bereavement. Another stage of grooming can be playful and tactile, such as lifting a child up or tickling, or sexualised behaviour that seems innocent, such as coming out of a shower wearing only a towel.

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<sup>2</sup> CEOP (2022) in <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/grooming>)

<sup>3</sup> Research Report - Grooming and child sexual abuse in institutional contexts - Prevention pp 13-14  
[www.icmec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Research-Report-Grooming-and-child-sexual-abuse-in-institutional-contexts-Prevention.pdf](http://www.icmec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Research-Report-Grooming-and-child-sexual-abuse-in-institutional-contexts-Prevention.pdf)

We heard several stories which included the theme of perpetrators introducing sex inappropriately into conversations with very young boys and girls. A recurrent theme in victims'/survivors' stories is grooming in the guise of sex or moral education. It offers the predator an opportunity to assess vulnerability and naivety.

The perpetrator may disclose that he sees a girl in a sexual way, and she is flattered and intrigued. Next the grooming may escalate into crude sexual behaviour, but at a safe distance, such as telling a girl that he masturbates thinking about her. After an initial sexualised contact, he may admit that it was wrong and promise not to do it again. In doing this he is giving the impression of being a responsible adult who intends no harm.

Of significance are the narrations that highlight the subtlety in the complexity of sexual abuse. A survivor tells how her complex traumatic experiences in her family, and the availability and special interest of the priest were part of an abuse continuum that continued into adulthood. While the overt abuse happened as an adult, the grooming and power dynamics that began in childhood (both at home, in the community and at school) shaped that trajectory and this context is really important in understanding the complexity of abuse. It highlights that the lived experiences of abuse do not often fit into the legal categories, and as a result, the burden of proof is placed on the victim to translate this 'crossover' and 'blurring' of boundaries from deeply personal experiences. This disconnect presents a significant challenge in seeking justice and addressing the full impact of abuse.

It is important to note that grooming does not always lead to abuse and that not all abuse entails grooming. We need to be open to the possibility that predatory perpetrators attempt to groom many more children than they actually abuse. They may assess that the child is likely to tell someone or their parents, or a change of circumstances results in contact being lost. However, if contact is resumed many years later, they may see the opportunity to continue grooming towards abuse.

## (ii) Spiritual and Emotional Abuse

The sexual abuse that a survivor experienced may not have been perceived as being at the most severe end of the scale. Yet a number of victims/survivors were deeply distressed and traumatised by the experience of spiritual abuse and it had had devastating emotional, psychological and social effects.

We have highlighted one story later in this chapter which illustrates this. This woman's narrative encapsulates how the patriarchal power, which characterises most religions'

hierarchy<sup>4</sup>, can use the authority of Biblical scriptures to deny young women's autonomy, and to impose coercive control sustained by physical violence on them and to not disclose the abuse to the authorities. Another described the impact as 'soul murder' whilst many expressed their loss of spiritual connection with the harrowing reality of having nowhere to go to reconnect aside from the institutions and communities who represent the abuse and who unknowingly use the very scripture and lessons that were used to inflict the abuse.

### (iii) Getting Physical

The narratives within this study further highlight a broad spectrum of behaviours and boundary crossing, including emotional boundary crossing that are harmful towards children. Actions that make a child feel worthless, unloved or inadequate are included in this. In one narration, violations of a child's dignity and sexual comments about a child's appearance, telling inappropriate jokes, or making lewd gestures, subjected a child to humiliation, psychological distress and behavioural issues that lasted into adulthood impacting both personal and professional aspects of life. These were amplified by the silence, and thereby compliant nature, of all other adults who joined in on the public humiliation while others, at a later time, exploited the vulnerability of the humiliation and exploited a power imbalance to move the emotional abuse to physical abuse. Feelings of shame, guilt and confusion as to why adults would do that to a child has manifested in this survivor for many decades, who has chosen to share this solely for the purpose of this research, in the hope that it prevents harm to another child.

This chapter describes in some detail the range of physical, sexual abuses that survivors suffered. Due to the sensitive, and sometimes, distressing nature of the content, readers are advised to approach these materials with caution and care.

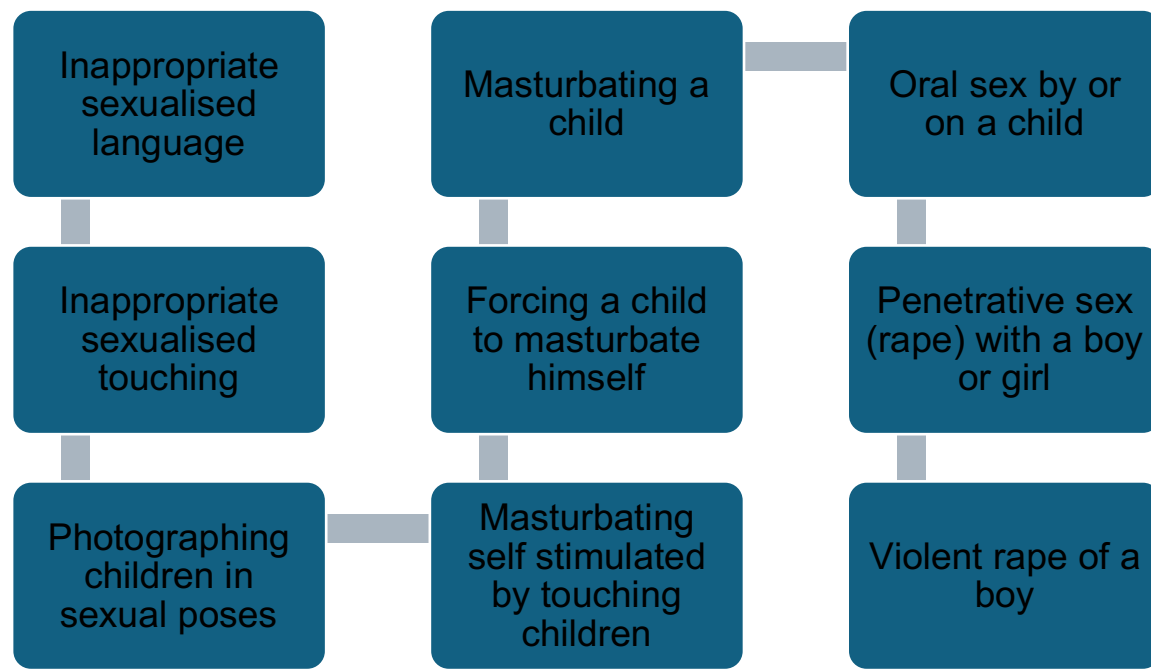
The severity of sexual abuse is not a predictor of the nature of the victim's experience or its lasting impact. Other factors, reported by survivors, such as the duration of the abuse, the relationship of the perpetrator to the family and/or within the community, and other adverse childhood experiences, determine the experience, impact and pathway to recovery or healing. Nevertheless, the diagram below indicates the range of and levels of severity of the abuse that was disclosed in survivors' stories

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<sup>4</sup> Stopler, Gila, 'A Rank Usurpation of Power' - The Role of Patriarchal Religion and Culture in the Subordination of Women. *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy*, Vol. 15, 2008.

Perales, F. and Bouma, G. (2018) Religion, religiosity and patriarchal gender beliefs: Understanding the Australian experience. *Journal of Sociology* 55:2

### The range of types of child sexual abuse reported



Some perpetrators may engage in just one of these or more, or gradually escalate their actions over time.

Examples of the use of sacraments or religious rituals to abuse children:

- A Catholic man described how a priest used the sacrament of confession to coerce a boy to stimulate his sexual pleasure by pressing his head close to the priest's groin.
- "Exorcising demons" by "laying on of hands" on intimate parts of a girl's body.
- Rubbing an erect penis against a child's body while praying for her or him in front of the congregation.

#### (iv) The Cessation of the Abuse

The abuse eventually stops. Several survivors gave an account of how the abuse that they suffered ended. This may be the result of one factor or a gradual accumulation of factors. Clearly the decision to disclose the abuse is often critical. Once an investigation is initiated, the perpetrator will usually desist. Some survivors disclose due to guilt over other children being at risk. For example, one woman was motivated to report the abuse to the police by the knowledge that he had not changed and had put himself in a position to abuse more vulnerable women.

One survivor told of how receiving support from someone, who helped him to see that the situation was not "OK" and should not be accepted, enabled him to find the courage to face

a reality that he had been avoiding. A survivor may be protected by people who care, and this engenders the belief that it is possible to stop the abuse.

Sometimes an arbitrary decision or random event brings the abuse to an end. This could include moving home to another place or changing school.

## (v) Resistance

Survivors' stories also contained examples of courageous resistance to grooming and abuse.

### An aggressive refusal

One man remembered when as a boy he stopped the priest in his tracks. By rejecting his advances and telling him to f... off! One boy in bed turned his back on the abuser and passively resisted. The perpetrator backed off. Another man reported that he punched the perpetrator who was openly masturbating in his presence. The person fell to the ground crying out with pain and another person rushed in to see him still holding his penis. The boy was not reported for assaulting a member of staff.

### Stopping contact

After one incident of abuse, several people who spoke to us simply refused to have any contact with the abuser again. They made sure that they never put themselves into any unsafe place again.

### Becoming "bad"

Sometimes a young man chooses to become "bad" and join forces with the other "bad boys" in the school as the most effective way to survive and to stop the perpetrator bothering him. Most perpetrators want to abuse compliant children. Another boy found that being labelled a troublemaker is sometimes effective in ensuring that an abuser keeps his distance.

It is worth the authorities considering that bad behaviour may be a coping mechanism to deal with the abuse when they are confronted with disciplinary issues.

## (vi) Later Encounters with the Perpetrator

Unfortunately, even when the abuse stops, there is always a risk that the survivor will encounter the abuser maybe years later. These meetings may be coincidental or arranged by either the perpetrator or the survivor. One man saw his abuser at a GAA game in a large stadium long after the abuse. A woman was surprised to be accosted by her abuser in an airport. Both survivors became very distressed. They had thought that they had recovered,

but then realised that the trauma was still active, and that the perpetrator demonstrated no accountability or remorse.

Sometimes the encounter is surprising and confusing. A priest, who had abused a boy, asked to meet him. The survivor was now an adult. It turned out that the priest was seeking his forgiveness. A further meeting with the perpetrator can reverse the power imbalance. An adult man, who had been abused as a child, was told that the priest was still abusing at the school his brothers were attending. He went to the school and told the priest that, if touched his brothers, there would be serious consequences.

The next session contains extracts from the accounts of victims/survivors supporting the summaries above.

## C. Survivors' Stories

◆ **Content Warning - The following section includes victim/survivor accounts of abuse. The language has not been censored.**

### (i) Family and Religious Context Prior to the Abuse

Many survivors were clearly vulnerable prior to being abused by a cleric. A woman [P14] reported on her early life.

*It started in my life very young. I was physically and mentally abused as a child. Right. I was very neglected. You know, I, myself and my brother, we were put in a psychiatric hospital for children. Growing up in West Belfast, I was obviously a Catholic child, part of the local parish. So, from when we were very young, my brother and some of his friends started sexually abusing me.*

Another male survivor [P07] was struggling with being unhappy at home due to mental abuse before being abused sexually.

*When I was really young my dad died. And then a year later, my mum remarried a church minister. From the start, he was a very nice person. But it was very clear over the years, it seemed to be my personality that attracted the very unwanted put downs on a constant level. We moved to another city, which...was, to be honest, nine years of hell for me as a child. Did have good times, but in my head, a lot of it was just total mental torture, a lot of physical torture. Thankfully it didn't go any further. But I think the hardest thing was watching him preach every week at church. I actually couldn't walk into church now.*

*Domestic violence in my home was constant. He was the financial provider. She would stay at home looking after family, it being the duty of the minister's wife. Before she met him, she was working.*

*It later transpired that he had actually abused my brother sexually. The church knew what had happened and basically had got him to resign his ministry and leave completely. I know there were church leaders who would have seen the way he spoke to me. There were ones who witnessed him beating me in the church. I suppose it was the 80s then. People just didn't step in or else he had such control over the people in that church that nothing was ever done. It transpired actually that he was gay, which is fine. He did not come out as gay then. But the church knew everything that had been going on throughout the church, and all his abuse of lots of different people that would have*

*frequented the church. He abused his position because that's how he was actually caught because he was having guys frequent the church offices and stuff. I just found it really hard why the church didn't actually step in. My mum told me that the whole establishment knew what was going on. She was terrified, and didn't do anything either.*

*Once he was forced to relocate, she then, within nine months, got divorced and he was forced to leave or he left the house anyway. To me that was my freedom day. I just burst out again into this person. I was free to speak. I wasn't scared to walk down to the kitchen in the morning. I could do anything I wanted. My mum also then came back into my life as well. You feel you sort of lost your mum for a while. Then my brother admitted the abuse shortly after my stepdad left the house. But I remember the police saying, because the abuse was committed outside their jurisdiction they weren't taking any action at all and I remember the effect that had on my brother and my mum.*

A few years later, while still a boy, the same man [P07] was abused by a man connected to the church. This is described later in this chapter.

This is a further example of the stresses that a young girl [P01] contended with leading up to abuse by a priest.

*At that time, my mum and dad were going through like a separation. My mum was very unwell. And my dad hadn't actually left at this time, but he had been a victim of the troubles, and he had been shot. So, he had been very unwell. My mum had taken a bit of a breakdown after all of that happened because it turned out that the night he was shot, he was with another woman. So just to sort of set it in context to you as to what my family life was like. I had to grow up very quickly because, as I say, mum was very ill. Daddy had left the house. We went from having loads of money to having no money.*

It would be normal for priests to befriend families. This would have been seen as an honour and experienced as supportive in most cases. However, if the priest was a predator, this could become part of the grooming process and provide opportunities to identify potential children who might be vulnerable.

*[P24] You know we were a very devout Catholic family. His access to me was entirely because he was a friend of the family. He was a trusted person.*

Here is another example of how a priest nurtures a relationship with a family.

*[P36] A new parish priest arrived in my parish, and he asks my dad, could he befriend him? And of course, my dad being my dad, said 'Yes, of course no problem'. I think a sort of family relationship started around then. That came about through regular visits to our*

*house. It was almost like a real privilege for the parish priest to come and visit our house, and you know we probably felt a bit special because of that. And then, when we were out in the community, of course, you know, he was very friendly to us. There was always a little bit of distance when we were in the community.*

Sometimes a church's theology and practices increase the risk of abuse. This church insisted that their ministers were 'revered' and even feared.

*[P25] I wasn't aware of the true origins of the church that my parents belonged to. The ministers are celibate. They normally stay in the homes of the members of the group. And I think, very importantly, they're put on a very high pedestal. These people are revered and they basically take it upon themselves to have the right to basically excommunicate people if they don't obey the 'rules,' and as far as the people that are concerned in the group, the majority are brainwashed, to the extent that they believe everybody's going to hell apart from them. So not only are they revered, a lot of them are feared. Now there's a spectrum there. There's some you know are pretty nice individuals, and there are others that are nasty, and abuse their power. So, the background was that this guy and a colleague would come stay at our home.*

*They call it 'profess.' You have to make it known that you want to become a member of the group. And in the meeting where I 'professed,' I was 13, I thought I was being targeted. You know that they're picking out bits of Scripture, and misinterpreting things. And you're feeling, this is God speaking to you and prompting you to join the one true way. It really is a form of child abuse, the pressure that kids are put under to profess. And then, once they profess. Then they're expected to have something to say in these meetings which is an absolute nightmare, you know... From 13 and a half until I was 23, I was trying to pretend to be a signed up member of the group and it was just a nightmare, you know, absolute nightmare.*

In another case, home life was very stressful. The boy's mother wanted him to be involved in the church. It would have been impossible for her to believe that the church could do anything wrong.

*[P26] My mother was suffering from depression at that time and was depressed for the rest of her life. But she stood beside me in this, and I remember walking into the future abuser's big office, and he was a very big man, tall, broad, slightly overweight, smelt of smoke. I maybe served mass for him; I don't know how many times. I sort of felt like, almost privileged to be chosen if you know what I mean.*

*My mother was in the ETU getting electric shock treatments, and everybody was on me, and I hated the school even though I would have been quite popular, and sort of*

*seemed to get on. My father was unemployed, and he had heart trouble. My mother was in the hospital. So I was involved in the church as well. My mum wanted me to be involved in the Church, and for her to think that the Church could do something wrong was unthinkable.*

Combining devotion to the church and vulnerability at home was recognised in hindsight by a victim/survivor providing an opportunity for a perpetrator.

*[P18] I come from a single-parent large family, of which I was [the youngest] and faith was important growing up, and important to mummy, and it was passed down so we would go to mass in the church where we lived at that time. I suppose I started kind of maybe growing more into the faith. So, the youth group initially had their own type of weekends. Now I look back and I know that that all set me up as being somebody that was vulnerable. You know, and we know abusers seek out kids who are vulnerable. I was vulnerable and our family was vulnerable. Because of family history and, you know, the effect of the troubles, conflict, mum and dad's marriage, and you have the traumas that come with that.*

This part of a survivor's story demonstrates how an abuser might think when they realise how a mother can be manipulated. The perpetrator will see the mother responsible for keeping the child safe. He will test boundaries to identify if he can get access to the child and/or if he needs to continue to build a relationship with the mother to appear trustworthy and reliable.

*[P37] He attended my mum and dad's house under the guise of a pastoral visit. I have to give you a little bit of context. I come from a very Catholic holy background, grandfathers, grandmothers etc. My mum was not a particularly educated lady. She left school [before 16], which wasn't unusual in those days. She came in from the country and met Dad and married him. She wasn't illiterate, but she certainly wasn't well-read or well-schooled. The one thing that she did have was an unswerving belief in her faith in the Catholic Church. I'm telling you that because this is the context within which this man managed to infiltrate the family. It wasn't specifically me. But he used his pastoral faith teachings to manipulate completely and dominate completely my mum, my beloved mum, God rest her soul. Why is that relevant? It's relevant from 2 points of view. The priests were above criticism, they were sacred. And, secondly, he knew that, and he used that very, very cleverly to manipulate his way into my family and to manipulate his way into the subconscious, and conscious of my poor mum.*

One mother encouraged her son to develop a relationship with a priest. Unwittingly, she had brought her son to the attention of a perpetrating priest.

*[P29] I was brought up in a very Catholic family. My mother and father were very, very religious, so they wanted me to be an altar boy. I ended up becoming an altar boy. And [the perpetrator] came to our parish. My mother wanted me to go the whole way to the Vatican. She thought hanging out with the priest was probably the best thing ever, you know. Little did she know.*

Not everyone who becomes a victim of abuse is vulnerable. For this Protestant woman, her life in the church was very positive before she was abused.

*[P02] And I became a Christian in November of that year. I loved it. Very different to the Sunday schools that I'd been to before. This was an independent church, very lively. There was drums, there was guitars, there was lights, you know it was very different, but I really, really enjoyed it. So, I joined the church. It was just a matter of declaring that I wanted to be a Christian and that was it.*

## (ii) Culture of Violence in Schools

*[P04] I went to secondary school, and I witnessed a fist on the back of the head, the desk breaking in two. I will never forget that horrific act of brutality.*

It has become clear from the accounts of victims that physical violence in schools had a facilitating role in the grooming process. Perpetrators may have used their entitlement to administer corporal punishment as a means of instilling sufficient fear in a child that he or she will acquiesce to acts of sexual abuse. Other perpetrators may offer sanctuary from the culture of violence as an incentive to comply with the abuse. A man [P04] told us:

*Well, there was a culture of violent physicality at the school. Other students went through the same thing, you know. it wasn't as if you were isolated. I mean it was right across the board for the first, possibly three up to four years. I have had a kind of almost schizophrenic relationship with the school. In the sense that it was very much the making of you. I got a lot out of the school. In some ways, I look back with extreme fondness. This is a very difficult feeling to articulate.*

*The phrase 'attempted grooming' isn't technically correct because it's either grooming or it's not. Now, of course, what many, many others, literally hundreds of others went through. It was almost like sort of a normalization that this is just what happened, and you certainly didn't speak to your parents about it, or you didn't speak to anybody about it. You just kind of kept it within yourself and it stayed with you.*

Another survivor [P27] reported that one of the Brothers in his school pulled his head down, and kicked him in the head. These are just two examples which illustrate how the fear of violence supports perpetrators to groom children for abuse.

### (iii) Grooming

A recurrent theme in survivors' stories is grooming in the guise of sex or moral education. It introduces sex into conversations and offers the predatory perpetrator an opportunity to assess vulnerability and naivety.

*[P11] The priest arrived in our town. We had a couple of very stern priests in the parish at the time, and he was adopted like a breath of fresh air. I used to sing at that time and joined the choir and he was in charge of that along with a nun. In the course of my being in the choir, I had occasion to go to confession. Mother would have made us go to confession. I was eight years old, and the priest asked me if I ever had unclean thoughts. I didn't know what he meant. Did I ever think about girls? This was at eight years old. If I ever had nice feelings between my legs? Did I ever touch or play with myself down there? He would have been meaning my penis. I felt extremely uncomfortable. I was upset.*

Multiple narratives collected during the course of this inquiry highlighted a recurring theme: the inappropriate introduction of sexual content into interactions with very young children, both boys and girls. The following account, provided by a male participant [P24], exemplifies this:

*At that stage, he started his classic pattern of grooming. There were two main aspects to it. Every so often he would suggest that we go and play golf together. I wasn't a golfer in those days, you know, but it was time out of school sort of stuff. Even when we were golfing, it was always, you know, 'give me a hug' when he was leaving, and shit like that. But then he would take you out of class or out of the study hall to 'private' mass. Up in his private chapel. He gives you a bear hug, and he'd cop a feel usually on the ass more than anything else. Then you got these impromptu confessions. If I had impure thoughts. What did I do when I was alone? Does it ever get hard? No matter if you're as stiff as a poker, don't touch yourself.*

Another example of grooming. Under the guise of sex education, the perpetrator is testing how far he can go in sexual abuse with a young boy who is helping him.

*[P29] I'm going to help Father move stuff. We got in the car, and we picked up boxes from the parochial house. We are driving, and then he starts talking about sex. He says to me do you ever wank, you know? I was taken back. And I just sort of said, no. Well,*

*do you ever talk about women in school when you're with your friends? Do you talk that you'd like to have sex? I'm 11 years old. And he kept putting his hand over and touching my private parts as he was driving. I said, I don't know anything about it. I was more interested in playing cowboys and Indians. We unloaded boxes and dropped them off. Then he came back out, and we drove back, and he was still talking about wanking and all sorts, which made me very nervous. We had an ice cream. We drove back and he took me into the parochial house. He pulled the curtains. He started to grab me. He wanted to masturbate me. And he says, this is sexual education. I said nothing to my mother and father absolutely nothing, you know.*

This also happened with girls as a prelude to sexual abuse as one woman [P01] remembered:

*This was the other thing that he started to do. He started to tell us the facts of life. He was the person who told us the facts of life so obviously when I look back on it now, I understand why. But he kept asking us, had we had our periods, had we menstruated. Do you know what your parents do, et cetera, et cetera. My friend had found this book and had taken it round to show him. Her parents must have had one of those pornography magazines. That's when he started then to tell us in more intimate details what men and women do to create children, et cetera, et cetera. I remember he took them away and asked them to pose in the same way as the two people who were obviously having sex in this pornography book. He took photographs of them. It was one of those new Polaroid ones. You know, where it produced the picture right away. He didn't get it developed. I wasn't there. My reason for telling you about the pictures, was my friend then got a bit nervous about him having these photographs and she said to me; "Will you come around with me to and ask him for them back?" And we went around one night and called at the parochial house. And he said; "I don't have them anymore. I've burnt them".*

This young Protestant woman [P02] gave a detailed account of the grooming process that she experienced. Her understanding of it is in hindsight as she was unaware of it at the time.

*So, they created a new Christians' course and that would have happened sort of an hour before Sunday morning services and that was just going through like kind of key principles and stories within the Bible. I absolutely loved it and it was a guy who led this. I think I was probably one of the most enthusiastic in the class. He noticed this and asked me to lead those discussions. In hindsight, that was a weird thing to do for someone that was 13 and had just joined the church and was one of the youngest in the class. In hindsight, that's probably when the grooming began. But I didn't recognize that at the time.*

Grooming often begins with the young person being made to feel special by a person in authority. The next stage of grooming was playful and tactile or sexualised behaviour that seems innocent.

*[P02] We went on a kind of a youth weekend with him. And again, in hindsight, there's some things that are dodgy. But at the time it was just, oh, that's just him. You know, things like maybe stand in the hallway in a towel after he was at the shower like. You know that's weird when you're on a youth weekend. But for everybody else, it was just that's just him. You know, we would have lifted some of the girls up into, you know, like a fireman's lift and things like that. So just really playful and tactile, I suppose are the proper words.*

Once the youth leader realises that the girl is going through a difficult time at home, he sees an opportunity to develop the relationship.

*[P02] My uncle was found dead. My mother was already suffering with depression but that really made things even more difficult for her. He was my youth leader. But he knew my uncle and started to text me quite often, you know, How are you? How's it going? It was a kind of support there for me.*

Within a few months, those messages were being received every single day.

*[P02] And we were constantly talking. But that's when it became inappropriate. I just remember sitting in class one day and him texting me and saying are you at school? Why? Oh, well, that's good. That means you're wearing a skirt. And at that stage, I was still 14 and I had never really seen him like that. He was 38 and married. So that never entered my head at all. But when that did happen, I thought, oh, he sees me like that that's you know and I was quite flattered as shocked as I was.*

He discloses that he sees her in a sexual way, and she is flattered. He is encouraged. So now the grooming escalates into crude sexual behaviour, but at a safe distance.

*[P02] I remember him telling me that he was masturbating to the conversation at work. That's really the only details that I remember. So, I know it was highly sexual but again I don't remember the details. That kind of conversation happened maybe another four or five times.*

He gives the impression of being a responsible adult who intends no harm. Yet this reassurance was soon followed by sexual contact as described in the next section.

*[P02] I was going to a friend's party that night and I remember I was texting him and he was complaining about feeling old and I think I said something like try being 15. I was having teenage annoyance about having to be home at a certain time and having to explain everything to my dad before I went out. And he said, oh, I thought you were 18. I was like, No, no, I've just turned 15. And he was like, I shouldn't have sent you them messages. I'm really sorry. I says, okay. Which, to be honest, I was kind of disappointed about because I did start to have feelings for him then and oh well that's over now.*

Another Protestant woman [P10] describes how being made to feel special led to inappropriate sexual touching.

*As a 17-year-old girl, I was going to the Youth Fellowship (YF) in this church and the leader took an interest in me, got alongside me. Now my understanding was he was never in a paid capacity, all voluntary, but he was working for the church. He basically took extra interest, offered to go out for extra coffees and turn up here and there. And that was fine, I appreciated the support at the time, just thought it was a Christian leader doing what they do. Showing support, offering prayer.*

*It was our Christmas social. So, the YF leader was married at the time, and it was held in their home. Just a big Christmas celebration and party and food and games and Secret Santa, all the normal stuff. We were watching a DVD in the evening. There was a room full of people and it had gone late into the evening. His wife had gone on up to bed. But there was easily six or seven people in the room. We were on the sofa, and he put his hand down the back of my jeans without other people seeing. That's the moment everything changed for me, that was the very first assault. I wasn't able to talk about this or even say his name for years and years. I've had a lot of work, been to a lot of counsellors, to get to where I am today and to be able to actually tell my story. I just couldn't. I was frightened but also just didn't know what to do, almost still in a state of shock. This level of betrayal, disappointment, hurt, the trauma.*

A woman [P14] describes how, through her stealing food for her family, a priest was able to exploit her vulnerability and used the incident to gain compliance and silence.

*My abuse from the Catholic Church started when I was about nine. Because I had a wee family, my mummy had a complete mental breakdown (after three of her family died in an accident). I ended up being mother to a wee family. My two wee sisters and my wee brother. And I was out stealing. I was doing all sorts to get money, you know, to try and get them food and to survive, you know, day in day, you know, so.*

*I was, one day, in the church, and there's a money box. I knew how to get it open. So, I am breaking in the money box. But do you ever get that sense of somebody standing*

*behind you watching you? I felt that. I was so scared to turn around. But when I turned around, the priest was standing behind me, and I literally wet myself with fear. Because I had all this money, the box wasn't closed, and he stood, and he was horrified. He was looking at me like he was about to kill me, if you know what I mean.*

*He asked me what I think I was doing. And I says, I'm sorry, Father, I had to do this. I mean, I've got a wee brother and two wee sisters, and they need food. And I told him the whole story, you know, about home. He says, I have to take you home and tell your mum. I begged him. I said, my mummy's going to hammer me. My mummy was very physical. My brother was hateful and physical. He says let's think about this. I can't go to your mummy because you're so frightened. I told him about my brother abusing us and stuff like that there. So, we sat for a while and talked. He says, I don't have to inform your mum, if you come around the chapel and help the women do the flowers every other day and help clean it. I thought it was amazing because I was doing that for like months. I loved it and I kind of cleansed myself from stealing the money.*

Often the grooming will begin by the priest comforting a child who is upset, in this case due to a bereavement.

*[P31] I would have spent a lot of time very upset in class and crying. The word obviously got to [him]. He would have taken me to his office. And initially he was quite nice, and he was a different man from who he was in class. There was no shouting and there was no screaming at us, no threat of violence. And you know he would have talked to me about, you know, well, it's very sad, but your brother is in heaven. And you know there was very much the kind of what you would have expected as pastoral comfort when someone has a death in the family.*

This offered the perpetrator the opportunity for physical contact, a hug, a pat on the back and then stroking the back. The risk of grooming is often not recognised. In another case, it just seems that someone in authority is being nice to a child and starts to pick her to do things that make her feel special.

*[P18] This Father was the spiritual leader of the group and he was really charismatic and he was good craic [fun]. And you know, we were young and smoking and stuff and he knew that we were smoking. But there was prayer and singing and sharing and so the relationship kind of developed from there...He got on well with everybody and somewhere at a point in time, I got singled out or he would ask me to do things for him like, get him water, get his tea. So, it was kind of singling out me to be special...I remember when he said something to me very directly, very explicitly that I was like this special person out of everyone else and that we had this special friendship. I probably would have been between about 13 and 14 when that happened...*

*I remember on my [birthday]...he had like a housekeeper and organised like a party, a good tea party for me. There's that type of, I suppose now I know to be, grooming behaviour...special treatment and stuff. And for a young girl from a broken family and no father figure, you know, it was good. And somewhere in that timeframe, around 14, I started staying over. I don't remember the first time how that came about, how that happened, that I would stay over.*

Behaviours, which with other men would be viewed with suspicion, seemed normal because of the deference shown to priests.

*[P37] He used to take me to the south of Ireland conveniently away from the parish, or anybody who'd know us. I mean, what's he doing with a young [pre-teen] boy on full show. You know he was not even hiding. Society accepted this.*

Inviting children to go to the swimming pool outside of the regular school schedule was an opportunity for one priest.

*[P32] On a Saturday morning, he opened up the swimming pool. Now he wasn't a swimming teacher, he wasn't a PE teacher. Now this happened probably for most of the 3 years where he would have arranged to open the pool and then he would have come in and watched us undress and shower.*

One woman's story [P21] explained that grooming can take place years before the sexual abuse occurs in a manner that may be linked to the 'opportunistic perpetrator'<sup>5</sup>. As a teenager, she received a 'lesson' from the priest at school on sexual morality:

*How we teenage girls needed to protect boys from ourselves, basically, by not being sexual, not being pretty, not wearing makeup.*

Due to her own intrafamilial sexual abuse:

*This priest was like music to my ears, because he was telling me, anything about sex is bad.*

So when the girls were sent on a residential retreat and the priest was there, she sought spiritual guidance from him. His advice seemed wise to her, and one-on-one meetings made her feel heard and special.

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<sup>5</sup> Terry, KJ & Tallon, J 2004, *Child sexual abuse: a review of the literature*, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York.

*He said, even from the very start, he said, it doesn't matter that you don't believe in God because I believe in God. So I can believe in God for you...he created this really weird, you know, connection between himself and me.*

After the retreat she had no reason or opportunity to meet him until many years later when she was a young adult who still had no support or escape from the intrafamilial abuse. She was at university and suffering from many mental health problems with nowhere to go. So when the priest happened to come to where she was living away from home, he offered to support her therapeutically. But his therapy became a means of controlling her and eventually manipulating her into a coercive, pseudo-spiritual sexually abusive relationship framed as 'atonement' or 'cleansing' for the intrafamilial sexual abuse that she endured as a child. The perpetrator manipulated her trauma and internalised shame to maintain control as an adult. This experience, that the survivor named as "*soul murder*", shares many of the elements of the spiritual abuse described in the next session.

This suggests that some clerics may groom many more children and young people than they actually abuse. They contrive relationships with potential victims to test whether they can take advantage of them. But they may not go further because circumstances change or because the child or young person may prove resistant.

#### (iv) Spiritual Abuse and its Emotional Impact

A woman [P03] who was a member of a Protestant church described her abuse. Her narrative encapsulates how the patriarchal power, which characterises many religions' hierarchies, can enable perpetrators of abuse to use the authority of Biblical scriptures to deny young women's autonomy, and to impose coercive control sustained by physical violence on them and sexual abuse. This abuse of power can have a devastating impact upon their emotional and psychological well-being and deprive them of their faith and their community.

*[P03] So, I think there was abuse of every sort in our church. The worst everybody homes in on is the sexual part. But to me, the worst was the control and what I would call emotional, spiritual abuse. The sexual side, don't get me wrong, it wasn't nice that he was kind of pursuing you that way. That's nothing compared to thinking my children are going to die. You know, those things go way deeper. I'd rather somebody punched me and broke my ribs.*

Before explaining what spiritual abuse meant to her, she describes the sexual abuse that pastor indulged in.

*[P03] Back as far as Sunday school days he would put his hand up your dress and run his hand around your groin and stuff. But he seemed to take a really keen interest when you*

*sort of hit about 12. You know it was always younger girls that he was particularly interested in. I remember him saying to me you know your daddy doesn't love you. But I love you. And I want you to always remember, I'll always be here for you. And it was the counsellor who said to me you know that's grooming behaviour. I was horrified when she said that to me.*

*There was one night he had made quite serious sexual advances, and I had to push him off. The pastor says, I always pick you up first because you're the only one I can fully trust and I know you would never say things about me. So, he had picked me up in the van this night. But he took a back road, a really, really dark back road. And it's a road I don't even like driving up during the day. It's forested areas on both sides. We pulled over. He turned the engine off and turned the lights off and it was pitch black. He had started turn towards me. And I just remember this look in his face. It was like a smirk. I said to him, what are you doing? He sat for a minute and just looked at me. And he put his hand right into my groin and he squeezed. He said, the Bible tells you that you're to present your body as a living sacrifice wholly acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. I remember he spat the word 'reasonable'. And then he pulled his thing out and he was trying to take my hand obviously to masturbate him. And I fought him off. He eventually then finished the job himself.*

This resistance to his advances did not go unpunished.

*[P03] I did not want to go to church that Sunday. He phoned her. He said meet me at the bottom of the road in 15 minutes. He took me to a very busy car park and parked in a very public place. And he proceeded to tell me that God had spoken to him. And God had said that I had to be taught humility. And he gives me a list of 17 points. He said the biggest part of this was that I must never ever sit in front of anybody. I was only to sit at the back of the church. And I believe that if you are able to humble yourself and abide by these 17 points that God will really bless you and you'll see your mummy saved. For five or six years after that I was only allowed to sit at the back of the church. And people were not to talk to me because I was being taught humility.*

Inappropriate sexual contact continued under the guise of religious ritual.

*[P03] I don't class myself as being sexually abused because I fought him off. But he would do things like this. He would call you to the front of the church for prayer in front of the whole church and he would stand with his hand in the back of your head, the hand in your forehead with an erection pumping against your body while he was praying for you in the name of Jesus. The whole church was watching. They probably wouldn't have known he had an erection. They could see that you were very, very uncomfortable. Another thing he was very good at he would always lay hands on your chest area. If you*

*reacted badly, you had a spirit of Jezebel. But a 14 year old would react to it. Because that's the way you react when somebody touches your chest.*

She also suffered violent physical abuse in the course of being delivered from demons.

*[P03] In the church the pastor was very much into demon culture. Basically, deliverance as he called it. You know the slightest thing that you said or done would lead you to the back room for a deliverance session which was never pleasant. There I was beaten so bad, at one stage, I truly believe I had broken ribs.*

It was made clear to her that women were at the bottom of a hierarchy of power.

*[P03] He explained that God was like an umbrella of protection. So, being a single female you were right down the bottom of the list and then if you had a husband or a partner, they would be above you. If you didn't, then your mother would be above you first and your father above her. And then up this list would come your pastor, and he had spiritual authority over you. So, he was obviously more important. He said that once you think that you know best and you bring yourself out from that chain of authority, you're no longer under God's protection.*

This doctrine had serious consequences for this woman. Years later she had a baby who was 14 weeks premature. The pastor told her that God would heal her baby and that she should not visit her baby in the hospital. The baby later died and the pastor said that this was because her family was cursed.

## **(v) Physical and Sexual Abuse**

Actions that make a child feel worthless, unloved or inadequate are included in this. In one narration [P20], violations of a child's dignity and sexual comments about a child's appearance, telling inappropriate jokes, or making lewd gestures, subjected a child to humiliation, psychological distress and behavioural issues that lasted into adulthood causing impacting both personal and professional aspects of life. These were amplified by the silence, and thereby compliant nature, of all other adults who joined in on the public humiliation while others, at a later time, exploited the vulnerability of the humiliation and exploited a power imbalance to move the emotional abuse to physical abuse. Feelings of shame, guilt and confusion as to why adults would do that to a child has manifested in this survivor for many decades, who has only chosen to disclose for this research in the hope that it does not happen to another child. It is an important reminder for those adults employed by religious organisations (or other organisations) to supervise children's activities, that their responsibilities towards safeguarding the emotional, as well as physical, wellbeing of children

is paramount. Regardless of intention, the emotional impact of their words and actions is enduring, and its effect - not the intention - is what defines the harm.

A Catholic man [P11] described how a priest used the sacrament of confession to coerce a boy to stimulate his sexual pleasure.

*The priest had a caravan. Have you ever watched Father Ted? Did you ever see the episode where they're all in the caravan bouncing about? This was the same sort of caravan, but he held confession in it. More bizarre, because the school was directly opposite the chapel. Why didn't he just lead us across the road into the church, instead of having it in the caravan? Well, you can probably guess why, hiding in plain sight.*

*When I had my confession in it, after the usual preliminaries, he had his hand on my pants. Another priest, even more inappropriately, would pull back his robe in order to press my head down sideways onto his thigh, firmly holding me there for some minutes as he prayed over me. I know he was thoroughly enjoying it because his trousers were gathered about the fly crotch and out of the side of my eye, I could see the shape of his penis in what I now know to be a state of erection, or arousal.*

*I didn't know what was going on. I wouldn't have had a notion. You knew something was not right. It was too forceful. You know, it wasn't sort of a gentle act. He had all the power. You see, I vividly remember his yellow fingers, he was a heavy smoker, the smell of stale cigarette smoke, his heavy stubble. And the sheen on his black trousers. And what I now know to be a trace of semen.*

*I remember feeling what I now know to be anxiety, and the trauma stayed with me for some weeks with flashbacks that I found very hard to put out of my mind, troubled sleep patterns, thoughts of what could have happened.*

Another priest would blatantly pleasure himself with a boy who was too naïve to understand what was happening.

*[P16] He would stand me between his legs, and he would ask me about who did you play with, where did you play? And then it moved to playing with boys and girls genitalia. All the time I was being stood between his legs. I was naïve at that stage. Knew nothing about the facts of life. That man was masturbating under his gowns. That I now know is what he was doing. He was pleasuring himself, having me between his legs.*

A young Protestant woman [P02] realises that the friendly relationship with a youth worker from her church is entering a sexual phase.

*I went to a party that night and we were all drinking as we shouldn't have been, but I had far too much. And I don't know if I texted him or what happened, but I remember him calling me. And he said, I'm coming to pick you up. Like, okay. And he turned up. He was actually driving a taxi which I think was a friend's. A woman at the party thought that he was a taxi so she kept trying to put people in the car and he was saying, no, I'm only taking her. But he drove me home. We parked outside my house, and I think I broke down because I just felt so guilty about getting so drunk. You know, supposed to be a Christian and that's what I'm doing. And he gave me a hug. I blacked in and out, but there was sexual touching at that point.*

He takes advantage of her emotional state, offering to comfort her and he touches her for his own gratification.

*[P02] The next day, again over text exchange, it was you know, we can't do that again. From him, it was we both need to repent because we both committed a sin. And he says, can we agree, not to tell? But I was like, of course. Because to me, why would I tell anybody that I did such a bad, awful thing? But he then said, you know, if you go back on it, now that we've agreed, I'll deny it and people will believe me. I've had affairs before and when I have, I've admitted it. So, if I deny it, people will believe me.*

As the abuse develops, the perpetrator takes care to ensure that it is kept a secret and uses his power to generate fear which will inhibit disclosure.

*[P02] On another five occasions, maybe over that summer he would have picked me up at say one or two in the morning at the house. I would have snuck out. We would have parked somewhere quite secluded close to my home and again a sort of sexual activity in the car took place. And he would have left me home then. And again, same conversation every time. You know we shouldn't have done that. We need to repent. We can't tell anyone. Can't happen again. But then of course it happened again.*

*There was another woman who had joined the church's leadership at that point. Me and her daughter were quite good friends. I did tell her about what had happened and asked her to promise not to tell anyone.*

*He texted her. What did I say to her about me and him? And I said, nothing. I didn't say anything. And then panicking, I rang her to ask her what he was talking about, and she said she didn't know and hung up and he then give me a range of abuse about how I can't keep my word. I can't hold my water. I was a slut and nothing else. She denied from that day ever telling him anything.*

The man reacts angrily and abusively with insults and victim blaming. The impact of this affects her academic performance which results in her parents paying more attention to her doing her homework.

*[P02] At the youth club I got messages. Meet him in the toilets. I said, no. Children would normally meet him in the kitchen and he says we can't do what I want to do there. We'll go into the church building where there wasn't anyone. So eventually I met him in there. He lifts up my skirt, put me on his knee and I froze. I knew there was other youth in the building, and I was just really terrified that someone would find us. So, I wasn't really engaging. There was like a sound desk at the back. And he put me onto the desk and was just standing between my legs. But all I remember is seeing through the kind of foyer doors other youth members. And at that point, I asked him to stop. He wouldn't and I eventually pushed him off me. I got my jacket and stuff and went back into the room where there was other youth. And he followed a few minutes later and sat beside me, clearly to make sure I wouldn't tell anyone.*

The perpetrator is becoming more sexually aggressive and coercive. She resists. There was no physical contact after this until she was 17. They continued to meet at the church and youth club. Years later she discovered that he was seeing other vulnerable young women, who were over 18. Those pastors, who had supported him and forgave him, left the church. Those who replaced them were not so tolerant. So, the abuser eventually also left the church.

Another Protestant woman [P10] describes how the abuse developed through the perpetrator exerting increasing control over her and insisting that the relationship had to be a secret.

*In those days, I didn't even know it was abuse. You just felt this was wrong. In that moment, my whole body froze. I felt paralysed. I couldn't hear anything. My eyesight went blurry. My body literally shut down. My senses were in shock. I don't remember getting home that night. I don't remember speaking to anyone.*

*That led on to an eight-month period of him having control over me and my life: where I went, and who I was with, and what I did. It was all a big secret. It was all our secret. There was emotional blackmail, manipulation. He threatened to kill himself if I told anyone or tried to leave him. He promised me he was going to leave his wife, and we were going to run away together. Just chaos during those eight months.*

*Morally I was like, what's going on? A Christian man going against all your teachings, going against everything that I believe to be true and right. Then it sort of progressed. I was big into my fitness, still am. I would have been out for a run, the car would have pulled up. Or he'd be texting me, where are you going, what are you doing tonight. I've*

*got homework to do. And then, because this town is a small place, he knew where I lived, he knew where my route from the house would generally be. He was obsessed with himself and what he wanted. Down the line, I found out I was not the only one. There were others involved, who were over 18, who were his peers. But I was the youngest, as far as I'm aware.*

*Down the line, intercourse was involved. The first time I was in my school uniform. He would have told me to do certain things. I didn't know what I was doing. I was very inexperienced. I was a tomboy and just into my sport and into my friends and into my school. He would have said, do this. He automatically just took control, and I was just a dummy. Mostly, I was literally just a body because my mind developed this coping mechanism of dissociation. Physically, I didn't even feel anything. Just wasn't even there. Just was obviously trying to protect myself. Just waiting for him to stop. Waiting for him to get what he wanted and move on.*

This young Catholic girl [P14] had already been abused sexually before her abuse by the priest.

*Over the months we started to get really friendly, and it was really touchy feely. Because I was being so badly abused it wasn't abnormal to me. It was just another man having a go, abusing me, it didn't bother me. It started from the physical, sitting on his knee, the gentle wee strokes, him pushing the boundaries. He gave me money, and that money I used to get the kids something to eat. I was nine, ten years old, and I was acting as an adult, right? So, the sex abuse started taking place in the parochial house. That went on for a couple of years.*

*My mum had to go to jail for neglect, child abuse, and then the sex abuse and stuff like that. Because people were abusing her as well as abusing us you know. We had men coming into our flat and physically and mentally abused us from when we were really small. So, I was taken into the children's home. It was the best thing that ever happened to us.*

Having been abused by the priest, she suffered abuse by a nun in a Catholic school. It is difficult to determine whether the intention of the abuse was sexual or punitive. Whichever it was, it was experienced by the young girl as humiliating.

*[P14] I started at secondary school. From when I started there it was just absolute torture mentally and physical torture. The principal, who was a nun, picked on me and she was so horrible. She didn't like any of the girls that didn't look clean and tidy and she would trail us up on stage in front of everyone to point out the wee dirt birds that hadn't got much. I was a bed-wetter. I would go into school with really bad urine smells. I was*

*getting into bother in school. I was outside her office for hours on end. I really hated when she made me stand with my nose against the wall in her office.*

*She used to take me down and force me to get a shower in the PE part and give me other kids' clothes. Because obviously you could smell urine from me and stuff. But she would stand and watch me while I was washing my body down. Once I put my hand downstairs. She was screaming, don't you dare touch that, don't you dare go near that. She'd beat the crap out of me. One day I went into school, and I just had a bad weekend from being abused sexually and physically. As soon as I came in, she looks at me and smells me and she says you know where you're going. She scrubbed me naked in the shower with a hard brush.*

*It was just abuse after abuse after abuse, and every time I moved, the abuse followed me. I haven't had the best life. Mummy was murdered. Her body was found in a house in a Protestant area. She had been beaten to death.*

A Catholic man [P06] gave this account of his abuse by a youth worker working in a youth club attached to a Catholic church.

*I was reared with brothers, and a sister, and in a nationalist background, and the club was near our home. We used to go to the club, so we did gymnastics, table tennis, snooker, you know, stuff like that. It was a big club, you know, and all the brothers used to go to it.*

There were two youth leaders under the supervision of the church. One of them organised camps at the weekend. Four or five young boys at a time would go.

*[P06] But one night in the tent, he came around and started touching me and feeling me up, and at that age, I just hadn't a clue. You would have been eight or nine. You wouldn't have really understood. We went up the mountain the next day and he said to me, if you tell anybody what happened last night, I'll kill you. That was just as simple as that. So, it went on. It was just like the end of the world was really happening. You know even at that age being aware that he has all the power. I'm defenceless.*

*I started running and he started to train me as a runner. I think the youth club closed down. He went up to another youth club where he trained gymnastics. This abuse went on. It was masturbation and rape, or whatever you call it. He actually started to come down to our house. A lot of it would have took place up the stairs. He would have went up and laid out in the front room. So, it was day in, day out.*

*There was four or five of us in the hotel room. But the two boys went out for a pint, and he was abusing me. And the two boys come into the hotel room, closed the door and walked out again. They would have seen something. But they didn't say anything. These were two adults at that time.*

Another man [P08] from the same city told this story about his abuse.

*Right. I was abused when I was 10 years of age. I was in a boys' club run by the church. I played football. There was a man in charge of us, who coached us. He was a well-known footballer. He changed everything in the club that they never had. He brought different things in.*

*After a time, about a couple of months, he used to take me and another young fella, who's dead now, used to take us in his car. Used to run us home when he was taking us in his car. He'd set us on his knee. And then it got worse. That's when it all started. I sat on the bed. He had his sister in the spare room. And he sat in the middle of the bed, I sat on one side, and the other fella was on the other side. He was touching them and masturbating.*

*This had been going on for years, five, six years. And then, we used to go camping down south. And he used to pick his six young boys. He'd sleep in his tent. And everyone had a sleeping bag. So, every night, in a different way, in his sleeping bag, I'd be abused by him.*

*And then we grew up. I knew then what the man was doing. I didn't understand it. You would have been too young to know about sex or anything like that. I never told nobody. It doesn't leave you. But you don't have it every day. I wanted it to come on the news. You think about it at the start. It fades, but it's always there. As years went on, it has had an impact. Just in your head, really, and you're just thinking about it. Yeah, it's something like that, you know. I always walked on my own. I don't trust anybody. That's a common thing. When something like that happens, you don't trust. So that makes you sort of quite on your own. No, I don't trust. It's sad, but that's the way it is.*

The Bishop knew about the abuse. But nothing was done about it.

*[P08] The one that knew was a Bishop. He was like a god here. He knew all about it. There was a wee man there, and I think he was abusing a couple of people. When he walked by, the Bishop said, I hope you're not at that game again. So he knew about it. So basically the church would have known about it. But they didn't really do anything about it.*

This abuse caused this man to have a very solitary life. He could never bring himself to trust another person.

This is the story of a young Protestant boy [P13] about an incident of abuse over 50 years ago.

*I'll tell you what happened to me as an 11-year-old, I went to what was called an inter-schools camp. I think it was all boys who were transferring from primary to secondary school.*

*The person who abused me was somebody that most of us admired as a key figure in schools, and an upstanding member of the Presbyterian Church, etc. I can't remember whether this was the first night or a later evening event over the residential camp. But he did say to a group of us all sharing a room with him, are we all able to get to sleep? And I said, no, I'm not able to get to sleep. I heard nothing from the other three boys in the room, all of whom I'm still in close contact with. And this subject has never come up with them.*

*He asked me then to come and join him in his bed. And I didn't really think twice about that. It didn't seem to me to be strange. But as I was getting into his bed, he asked me to, or he took my pyjama bottoms off. He told me that he wanted me to touch his penis and it was erect. And he wanted me to rub it. And I think he did the same to me. And that is the extent of the encounter that I had with him. Except that he said, right, go back to bed now. I went to sleep.*

*There was never any further discussion about the matter. And I didn't tell anybody. But undoubtedly, I felt really affected by it to the extent that anytime I met him, you know, I was deeply embarrassed. He would have had a role as a visiting speaker in different churches. I didn't go to the church he went to, but he would have been invited to come and talk to young people in our church that I grew up in, probably on an annual basis. And every time he came, he would have had a session with boys talking about sex. And he would have addressed issues like masturbation. All of that just brought this experience back into my mind.*

*So that's over 50 years ago. It's still something that I don't talk about very much. But even rehearsing it today, I guess it does bring it into my mind in terms of the impact of it. It probably had more of an emotional impact than anything else. It may have had some impact on me believing that I was an able young person who could navigate the world. I left college. I set up a business. I was reasonably successful. I went off and worked with a Christian organization for almost four years in India. I've travelled and my horizons broadened, and you know in some ways this became irrelevant until the court case.*

This young boy grew up to commit himself to serving his religion and it may be that his faith enabled him to cope effectively with the abuse. It caused embarrassment on social occasions. But he did not carry the shame and trauma that was attached to many survivors for most of their lives. It may also have helped that when he reported his abuse to the church, it was handled sensitively, and he was believed and validated. He was relieved that the perpetrator eventually received a custodial sentence.

Another Protestant man [P07] described his abuse by an older man.

*But then when I was about 14 coming 15 then, a man around the corner befriended me, getting me around to do odd jobs and stuff. He was an organist in a Presbyterian church. When somebody gives you cigarettes and money, starts giving you a drink, I can see it was a total grooming process. I shouldn't have fell into that trap. My issue then was obviously somebody liked me. It led to sexual contact and stuff. He was a church organist. He used that connection. I can see now I was just stupid. I was probably just looking at the odd beer, getting cigarettes, getting the odd 20 quid down. It was a hell of a lot of money. So, to me it was a pain worth going through too. But it shouldn't have been what I was doing.*

*I was working and stuff when I was in college, but weirdly I seemed to call down the odd time still to get drunk. But it wasn't as frequent. I think the reason I called down mainly was that he was still threatening to tell my mum. He used to phone the house and hang up, and she kept saying to me, whose number is this room? And I knew whose number it was.*

*Then one day I was getting ready for work. There was knocking on my mum's front door. Thankfully she was working. It was two detectives from the RUC, and a Land Rover also from the RUC. Not something they're used to in the street. They asked my name. I asked them to come in. They asked me did I know this person and I said yes. They told me he had been arrested. Then they asked if I would accompany them to the station.*

*I was petrified. I didn't want my mum to know, so I didn't phone anyone. They brought me in for an interview. To be honest, I was so scared that I didn't probably say what I should have said. I think I said enough. This guy had obviously been abusing somebody else who was younger than me. Was I helping him to abuse this other person? But I had never met this other person. I did tell my mum later that day, because I was in big trouble.*

*Her friend knew the detective that had spoken to me. She took over the contact with that detective and very quickly I was told then there'd be nothing against me. I didn't go to*

*court. I wasn't called as a witness. I think he admitted in court. I just felt disgusted afterwards. I think I was just glad that was over. My mum told me the court case was done and he got a couple of years in prison. I moved out of the house, and I just pushed my mum away. It was only when she got really, really sick that we just got so close again. Probably had an amazing six months at the end.*

A Catholic man [P05] who grew up in west Belfast at a time of extreme violence, disorder and poverty describes his abuse at school.

*I cannot be anonymous in this because my abuse started because of my name. My name is Michael O'Hare<sup>6</sup> and it's Micheál O'Hare<sup>7</sup> in Irish [pronounced differently]. I was in a class. I was 10 or 11 years old. The Brother who would abuse me came into the room. We all stood up and said, morning sir, you know as you normally do. Every boy had to stand up and give their name one at a time. When it got to me he sniggered. Right away, I knew I was fucked. He's going to pick on me.*

*He laughed about my name because of the GAA, because I didn't know at the time that he was a commentator. He made a fool of me and all the other kids are laughing. So that's what he preyed on, and he kept going at me.*

*So, one other day he called me by my real name and I thought, Jesus, this guy really likes me. You know, I was sucked into that, making me feel comfortable first. You know, that's what hurts the most. Being sucked in.*

*What I see looking back is this young fella, this kid who was so excited about him liking me. For a split second, he caught me on a name. Yeah. It was like that was his fucking plan. But sometimes you feel good about your name. That's what did it for me. So that put your defenses down. Everything. And I couldn't wait to go, I'm up here, come on in. You know, and he says, take a nice lolly there. It was like Disneyland, you know, with the excitement and all. And me taking the ice lolly and everything and come over and he sat me on his knee. He said, what do you do to your girlfriend? As if he was teaching you. He wanted to feel me up, my pants down, and then he pulled me into him, I still have the lollipop stick in my mouth.*

*It's a tough thing to remember. It's tough because it just doesn't go away. I just pulled up my wee shorts whatever I had on and out the door and I remember running. I remember not going into the class when he said go back to the classroom. I run on out across the road and up the street. I run from the school over round to a neighbour's*

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<sup>6</sup> Because his name is such a critical factor in his abuse, this participant has formally consented to waiving his anonymity.

<sup>7</sup> Micheál O'Hare was a very well-known television commentator of Gaelic matches.

*house. He's like, you go to the toilet. And that's when I started coming back and felt safe. His toilet.*

*What he did to me physically, like, was sore, but wasn't, you know, the main thing. The main thing I couldn't get out of my mind was, why did he do that to me? You know, he made me more scared of him, you know, that way? He sucked me in and betrayed me. Betrayal is worse than abuse.*

*I always said, you know, for us as kids, it was like a horror fucking movie, but nobody seems to understand what I mean. But the horror movie was outside, so what was going on outside, which we thought was norm, you know, no fear, burning buses, burning lorries and fucking all sorts. Did it have to do with the conflict? Constantly, constantly, you know, and it was right in the heart of it at that stage. You know, as a kid, it was a playground. So in terms of just the general violence in this area, in the 70s and 80s, that wasn't that, that was sort of exciting for you. That's what I mean. Not fearful.*

*But this was fearful. Yeah. Isn't that amazing? Isn't it? When you think of it. And I called it, but then I said, describe that. Yeah. And this is what it's like, the horror movie when all the kids run up the stairs and get into the room. Lock, lock the fucking door. But then I realized the monster's in there. And that's the fucking thing. That's the shock. When you turn around and you see the man standing against the wall after you've locked all the doors.*

The abuse caused him more fear than the extreme political violence at that time in his neighbourhood. This survivor uses a great metaphor for the impossibility of protecting yourself from trauma.

*[P05] I knew we were going back to the school. But that smell of the hops from the brewery always sticks out in my mind. Back with a sense of what, dread? Well, it takes you back to the football, you get a wee bit of joy. And then you realise what it came after. And him standing up above, watching children playing football.*

*They knew something's happened to you when I went back to class, even though I ran away that day. But you knew that the kids knew. They're just glad it wasn't them that day. They're quiet, they're keeping their heads down. But this is what happened to him. I still see these kids' heads, faces. Touched up. They all knew because he called me.*

The shame and the stigma isolates survivors from their peers. He was abused at the age of 10. By the age of 12 he was drinking alcohol to deal with it.

In some schools, the abuse by a cleric became routine and normalised.

*[P32] This Brother was our form teacher, and we had him usually 2 sessions a day for the week. Now, this happened most days. There were a number of boys in the class whom*

*he would have called into his office, which was adjoining. And he would have brought me in, sat me on his knee and felt around my groin area. Now, frankly, he didn't touch my genitals, but he felt around the groin area and then felt around the breast area, and kind of generally fondled. Now, he did that repeatedly. Probably, for, I would say it probably happened most of the 3 years that I was there.*

This pattern of behaviour was reported by several survivors.

*[P31] But as the meetings went on, he, the hugs get longer and more uncomfortable and his hands would have strayed to my backside and just rubbing there, and maybe lingering. At 11 years of age, we certainly weren't anywhere near as savvy as people and young people are today. There was no talk of safeguarding. There was no talk of abuse. The culture is, the priests were seen as the leaders, and you know they were people you could trust and you were safe with. But the touching was becoming more uncomfortable. He was rubbing me around my penis and testicles. But he would lean over me, and then he would then start inappropriate touching, and at one stage he grabbed me so hard that he really hurt me and I started crying. And then he started rubbing more to say, oh, don't be worrying, I didn't mean to do that, sorry, my hand slipped.*

Here is another account of abuse which followed the same pattern.

*[P34] You know, when I was being sent to the office and he used to set you on his knees. There was one particular time then I was out of school, and there used to be a little shop at the bottom of the hill where the school was, and they used to have like baskets. This one time particularly sticks in my head. They used to have like baskets of fruit outside the shop, but I pinched an apple from the baskets, and obviously the shop had caught me doing this and reported me to the school. Whenever I was sent to the principal's office, he strapped me a couple of times. So, he was pulling over closer towards me, and he started going: "Tell me your bad words. You know better bad words than that. I was going "fuck" and stuff like this, and he was laughing, and he was going "that's better. It'll be our wee secret". So, he had a pen in his hand, and he started touching my privates with the pen, and asking me, "Does your privates ever get hard when you're with your girlfriend?" and like I was 7 or 8 years of age, and I well, I didn't. I didn't even know what he was on about. He pulls his chair over closer to me and starts squeezing me, and like rubbing me through my trousers and rubbing me and pulling me closer to him and asks me about my girlfriend, do I know what breasts, he was saying like titties and what titties were, this sort of things and kept touching me and that particular time stuck in my head.*

A group of young girls had been groomed by the parish priest so that he could take photographs of them naked.

*[P01] It must have been something in my head, but I put my swimsuit on before I got there. He took us into the bedroom in his house before we went swimming down to the beach and he asked them all to get changed and they got changed in front of him. And my friends weren't like me. I was a very prudish sort of child. I would have covered myself up. Maybe, because I matured a wee bit quicker than the rest of them. I didn't want them seeing me naked. I had thought ahead, but they just stripped off and he was taking photographs of them, naked.*

*They got changed into their underwear or into their swimming costumes and off we went swimming on the beach. He always sat in the car; never got out of the car. Just kept an eye on us. When we came back after the swimming, he was watching us changing in the back of the car. And I always remember trying to cover myself over with a towel and him, you know, stern and looking. I remember the towel slipped and him staring and I remember feeling very, very uneasy about it. I just stopped kind of going. But my friends continued to go.*

*I remember another particular time. But he never had sexual intercourse with me. I don't know whether he ever did with the other children. And this is the one thing that would kind of haunt me. He used to wear like a black robe, you know, with all buttons all down the front. Do you call them a cassock or something like that? On this particular day we went around, and he started this carry on, you know, come how tall you are up against my buttons. And over I went. And I had a wee bit of a chest. My God, I mean it wasn't that much. And I remember him grabbing me by the chest and just feeling it and me pulling away.*

This woman [P01] remembers how a priest contrived situations when he could see young girls naked and photograph them. She seemed to understand what was going on and took precautions to keep herself safe.

A woman told this story.

*[P35] The incident with me, as far as I know, was the only time he took matters further at our school. I've never heard anyone else say he had done anything more with anybody apart from sitting on the knee and taking people out to tea. He took me out of the convent on my own for tea, and then he took me to the hotel where he was staying. He took me to his bedroom, and he laid me on his bed and kissed me, and then, as he was kissing me, I think he became aroused, he took [my]hand and tried to get me to rub his penis through his trousers. I didn't respond or react. I was absolutely frozen with sort of fear and shock. I mean, it was beyond my experience completely. He started to rub my pubic area through my gym slip. He continued to kiss me, and he was breathing heavily and rubbing himself up against me. He put his hand under my gym slip and into my pants,*

*and he was feeling between my legs. Then he continued, breathing heavily, rubbing himself up, and then he inserted his finger. He never penetrated me with his penis. He didn't do that. At that point. I thought I needed to go to the toilet. I said to him, I need to go to the toilet, and at that time the toilet was a separate room in the corridor, in the hotel corridor, and I locked myself in the toilet, and I thought, I've got to escape. Get away from here, and I don't know what to do. So, I basically pretended to be sick. I filled the glass with water and kept pouring it into the toilet, pretending that I was being sick, and he was in the corridor outside waiting for me, and I came out, and I just said to him, I wasn't feeling well. I put splashed water on my face as if I'd been crying and things, and said, I've been sick. I want to go back to the convent, and he took me back straight away.*

*I was very upset by the incident. I can remember crying in a study period, probably a couple of days later, and a friend taking me to see the sister in charge that day, and I saw her and another nun on my own, but just told them that the priest had tried to touch me somewhere that he shouldn't have.*

Another girl's experience describes how naïve and innocent young girls were.

*[P36] I honestly don't know when it started. He became quite cuddly with me, not with the friend that I brought. It was always with me, or at least I can't remember it being with a friend that I brought, and I've never, ever spoken to them about it. He would sit in that chair, and he would pull me over. He would start with like just hugs and some cuddles. He would then kind of start kissing my neck, kissing my face, kissing around my mouth. What I do remember is that I never reciprocated because I had no idea what he was doing. I was kind of mouth shut, and you know, just kind of not knowing what was going on. And then that kind of progressed from that kind of tickling, cuddling, kissing, to taking me, and kind of rubbing me up and down his private parts. I was very small then, and very skinny. I understand what those noises were, but at the time I had no idea what they were. I think he was orgasming. Meanwhile my friend was always looking on, so it was never just me and him. But it was never talked about, because we were very, very young at the time*

The story of a woman about how she was abused as a girl. The way she tells it reflects how little control she felt that she had. She had no choice but to go along with his demands.

*[P18] I still went up to his house and stayed on a Friday night and from that it proceeded to me being in his bedroom and that's when we kind of started sexually. I don't have a clear memory of the very first time that I went to his bedroom or how that happened. So, that continued for that period then, [for about six months], regular, weekly, sometimes twice weekly. And there was kissing, touching, fondling, and he would have me masturbate him. There was never full penetration. He expressed his desire to do so.*

*On one occasion, making a comment that how he was going to be in trouble, because I was under 16, but in a way that was something he really wanted to do, but couldn't, because he would really get into trouble. Afterwards, whenever he was finished, and it was over, and it was bedtime, and I would go out into the living room, and sit in darkness, and feel very cold, like trembling, just kind of the way I'm sort of feeling it about now, and just very alone, and confused. Afraid, really afraid that somebody was going to find out because I thought it was my fault.*

*That's how it was for those six months. I remember Valentine's night of that year and in his bedroom, he gave me a card with 20 pound in it. And 20 pounds to a 15 year old back then was a lot of money. And I just think about that now and the act of what had happened and being given that money and not fully understanding or comprehending, but it just really didn't feel nice.*

A Protestant man describes how he was raped as a 6 year old.

*[P33] I was first raped by two unknown men in the church as a 6-year-old. All I can remember is, one had a hairy chest, and one had a check shirt and a smell of an aftershave. Then my adopted mother beat the absolute living shit out of me when we got home from church, because she said I'd messed myself. How you don't know the difference between semen and faeces is well, you know, go figure. Maybe that was my punishment, but that was a weird one.*

The same boy had to learn to survive and in doing so retain some power. It came at a cost of great cynicism in someone so young.

*[P33] It was always the men that did something to me, and I thought that was my power. What I realise now that was just my survival instinct kicking in. And I thought, well, best way to survive, make them come. You do that, you've got them, cause they're weakened, and you can just walk away and just say, oh well, hey ho.*

This account demonstrates how fear facilitates sexual abuse.

*[P15] He was a big man and a big character, nearly blocked the light out and that's the first time I felt scared and you know by the way he wanted this closer look. And it very quickly went that he put his hands down my trousers and was fondling me and then was making me do the same to him. What annoyed me for many years before I ever had counselling, that I didn't scream. And the other thing was he started to give me money for the tuck shop. And I took it.*

A man told a similar story about being raped by a priest and how as a boy he was subdued by violence and felt that, although he was strong, he could not resist or protest because his perpetrator was a priest.

*[P22] I went back to the school. My father would not hear that I would not go back. This priest came into our dormitory and huffed and puffed and ordered me to his room. When we got there, he took down a bamboo cane from his bookshelf and told me to put my hand out. He was going to punish me for not having the dormitory lights out on time. I was the head prefect and frankly, I just thought he was having a laugh. I refused.*

*His attitude to that was one whack across my shoulder with the cane, the next whack was across my neck and left ear, which was extremely painful, and he then grabbed me by the hair and pushed me down, flung off his cassock and stood there naked. He tried to make me perform fellatio on him, and there was a bit of a struggle, and then he threw me over and grabbed me by the neck and pushed my face into his sofa and raped me.*

*It was very distressing, and I must admit I always think to myself I was like a young bull at the time I was very fit. You know I played senior football when I was 16 years old. And always, I used to think to myself, I could have taken this drunk bastard. I could have beaten the crap out of him. But he was a priest and that was like kryptonite to me – I just couldn't attack him.*

Another man describes a well-rehearsed strategy which suggests that this was not the first time the priest had abused a child so violently. The priest was part of his extended family.

*[P15] You know, people don't behave the way he did that night, the aggressive physical bullying, you know, with the moves that he had perfected. These were well rehearsed and practiced moves. He started to be more abusive in what he was doing to me and at times he was hurting me and on one occasion when he was masturbating me and it was (as if he needed to be somewhere else, but I'm doing this first) really, really rough and I roared out and he stopped, and I went back up to the dorm. The skin, you know, there was like a wee kind of a blister, how aggressive he had been.*

*[P15]* continued to describe one of the many times he was taken away from the other boys when playing football.

*He took me into the store-room in the gym and started as he always did up close and he always smelled of cigarettes and sometimes alcohol, even when he was walking in the dormitories at night. I was very aware of that smell of him. Again, I had shorts on, we'd*

*been outside playing, and he turned me round, and he penetrated me, and I remember that I was wet round my bottom, and I thought I was bleeding, and I was crying.*

#### (vi) What Led up to the Cessation of the Abuse?

The abuse eventually stops for each victim/survivor. This section outlines the many causes for cessation. As this boy discovered, unfortunately there may be a cost to the relief of abuse stopping.

*[P16] The abuse stopped literally on that day. But having gone from best boy, to actually serving in the tuck shop and everything else. I all of a sudden was persona non grata. It didn't matter what I did wrong, I would get the leather belt at least twice a week, if not three times, without any justification whatsoever.*

Sometimes a victim/survivor [P14] can be rescued and helped to heal by people who care.

*Eventually they wanted me to have freedom and separate me from my brother and sisters. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. I went to a children's home. I've got a friendship with one of the staff. She is like my earth mother. She treats me like her daughter. Yeah. I mean, she, like, everything about the relationship we have is absolutely fantastic, and I adore her.*

*I used to know a policeman. He was a community policeman. I'd known him from I was about eight. The only man who never put a hand on me or expected anything off me. And I remember we were watching a wedding. And I said to him when I get married, why don't you give me away? And he gave me away when I was 28.*

*My police friend knew I was neglected, he knew I wasn't looked after, he always knew that. He was clearly upset. Why didn't you tell me, why didn't you tell me, I would have saved you. But I'm very lucky that the IRA didn't find out, because I could have been one of the disappeared.*

Sometimes an arbitrary decision or random event brings the abuse to an end.

*[P32] I was transferred up to the other campus. That happened naturally. It wasn't a case of you did something, and you were transferred, that happened automatically after year 3. The perpetrator disappeared.*

Another priest walked in while abuse was taking place.

*[P15] I was 100% certain that a member of staff had seen what happened. After that year of hell, I didn't go back. I went to another school.*

*Another example of abuse being interrupted.*

*[P16] The reason he had actually come to [my school] was known by the headmaster . And that was because a young man had accused him of abusing him in [another school run by the same order]. So, [another cleric], being very wary and knowing his history, walked in the door and caught him in a compromised position with me. That was the end of the abuse. I was told to tidy myself up and go home. I wasn't to worry about my books or anything, just go home. That's what I did.*

Receiving support from someone who helps the survivor to see that the situation is not OK and should not be accepted can help survivors to find the courage to face a reality that they have been avoiding.

*[P18] I went [on] one of the exchange programmes... [the perpetrator] didn't want me to go thinking about what he was going to do and how he was going to manage, cope when I was gone. And then when I did go and was away, he was phoning really quite often, and I couldn't settle...(The person became very emotional remembering this).*

*There was one particular weekend that [the priest] was really distressed and crying and talking to me about suicide and saying how I had saved him from that, was saving him from having a mental breakdown. I got really upset and told some of my wee friends..and that I needed to go back...The hostess took me out that evening for dinner, just me and her. And there was a conversation, but she didn't directly ask me if anything was happening, I don't think she needed to, but she had a conversation with me in a way that let me know that whatever was happening was not okay and something within me knew that it was not okay, and that when I went home it was not going to happen...*

*[P18] continues to describe what happened on her return home.*

*So somewhere along the way I mustered up within me this strength to have a conversation with him to say that what was happening was not going to happen anymore and that I really need to not come up anymore and not see him anymore and it kind of went like that... I think just it slowly faded then and a few months into the new year then of the following year, or maybe that went on a bit longer, in terms of it ending.*

*We moved then, from where we were living at that time. We moved to this house. And so, that really helped to sever the ties once and for all. They weren't kind of fully severed,*

*until we moved. So I just tried to start getting on with life. Moved here, and it was a fresh start.*

Sometimes just moving home breaks the pattern of abuse. A different case told by another woman.

*[P36] We moved house and he began to visit less and we thought it was because our house was in a more public place. It was right on the street front, and we thought he didn't like coming anymore. But it kind of coincided with me coming to the end of my first or second year at secondary school.*

*[P17]* describes how his mum saw the welts on his legs three weeks after he was beaten. She went directly to the perpetrator.

*My ma went up, so she did. My ma dove on him, tried to scrape the face off him. They pulled her off. So then my ma says, you better not fucking touch him again. Because if you touch him again, his da will be up...my ma was a wee strong woman, you know...nobody would hit us. She'd go mad you know. But that's more or less what happened.*

Unfortunately for this survivor, the damage had been done and what followed was a lot of missing school and being brought back by courts, visits from welfare officers desperate to get the child back to school. At no point was the abuse addressed. This was this survivor's way of putting an end to abuse.

### **(vii) Survivors' Resistance**

Survivors' stories also contained examples of resistance to grooming and abuse. This man remembers as a boy, he sensed that something was not right, and he simply left the room. This will have sent a signal that the grooming was not going to work.

*[P04] So, there's another issue I just want to touch upon - my own experience. You're 14 years of age. You're sitting in the perpetrator's room. As a child you're a child, you're trying to process what's going on. And with these very uncomfortable questions. Nothing happened. But it was clearly an attempt to look for vulnerabilities. And so, I look back on that moment as a really significant sliding doors moment. I went out the door and that was it. But for others, they either didn't get out the door at that time or they were back in the door again.*

One man remembered when as a boy he assertively stopped the priest in his tracks.

*[P26] He was there and he comes in at me, and I just said, "This isn't on, Stop! Stop! This is not happening. This is not right, Father blah blah..." But you know, he panicked. 'Oh,*

*no, no, no! You misunderstand me. No, no, no,' you know this sort of shit. So, he had sort of a guy, who was relatively intelligent, who was, for want of a better word, from a prominent family. But this wasn't, you know, a lad who he could front up and say he's lying, or whatever you know. This was a problem. If he didn't back off from it right, if he pushed it, he knew he was going to be in trouble right. So, to that extent I got off relatively lucky right in the sense that that was the one major incident.*

Similarly, a man remembers that by turning his back on the abuser and passively resisting, the perpetrator backed off.

*[P25] I had gone to bed, and he came up the stairs. It was actually a bunk bed. He was incredibly brazen because my brother was in the in the bunk above, and I was actually reading a Children's Encyclopaedia, and when he came in, I knew what was going to happen, so I turned onto my stomach to protect myself, and pushed the encyclopaedia under the pillow and held it and resisted. He got the message and left. I actually resolved at that point, if he ever tried again, that I would shoot him. My father had a point 22 rifle. But I think he sensed that. You know that the game was up, that I wasn't going to. Because, you know, in the first instance, I was in just a state of shock and had no idea what was going on.*

A man describes how making a courageous choice to say no can change everything.

*[P26] But the last night that I boarded, I woke up in the middle of the night aware that there was somebody in my room. There was a man in the room. I woke up, and he was there with a torch. He said there was a noise, and I'm like 'Father, I didn't hear anything,' and he's talking to me, and he smells of alcohol, and he smoked as well. So, there's this stench, and he's just standing there, and he didn't do anything. He just talked.*

*I was so freaked by the proximity. That he could just walk in. And the next day I just said to my friends, I can't stay. I didn't actually explain to them. I'm just like, 'I'm not doing this anymore.' So I put the quilt and the pillow under my arm and he comes out to the bus and says, "Exactly, where are you going?" All I said was, Father, 'I'm going home.'*

*I went home and I got on the phone, took control of my own life. So, at 16, and I've got my mother, who was sick, and we went to another school, and the head of the school, the man is a saint. I can nearly cry thinking about how important he was in my life. That man changed my life because he sent me on a Camp and my life suddenly took a completely different direction.*

A different man resorted to violence to defend himself against the abuse.

*[P37] I was strong enough psychologically to put my foot down and say, 'I don't want you to do this anymore'. He became quite aggressive, very sexually aroused, and started to masturbate in front of me. And it was at that point, and I am not particularly proud of it, but I gave him a smack. I was quite big for my age. And he howled, and the young Brother came running into the room, and there he is, in flagrante with his hand on his penis and me standing over while he's on the floor. So, the young Brother had a clear picture of what had gone on, and I left. I fully expected him to report me for assault or something, but I was quite prepared for that stuff, and I had had enough at that stage.*

Significantly, he was not reported or disciplined for striking a member of staff.

Another young man forcefully rejects the abuse and leaves the unsafe place.

*[P19] It was roughly about twenty past 11. It was pitch darkness. I could see it in a bit of a light. I was half asleep and this figure came over to the bed. I was completely petrified. I didn't know what was going on here. This figure got into bed and endeavoured to put his hands down my pants. I just jumped out of the bed. When I saw who it was, I said, what the fuck are you doing in my bed? What are you doing here? Knowing how unwell I have been, and you did this. And he just said, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, and he got out. And he just went out of the room, and I closed the door, and I got the wardrobe and moved it against the door.*

Sometimes a young man chooses to become “bad” and join forces with the other “bad boys” as the most effective way to survive and to stop the perpetrator bothering him. It is worth the authorities considering that problematic behaviour may be a product of abuse before they consider disciplining.

*[P32] Then by age of 15, I decided that, this is the I think the survivor in me, this can't go on and otherwise he's going to rape me. I knew that was his next step. I thought, I'm joining the bullies. So, the big fellas from Dublin and London and Belfast and whatever, who knew much more, much more about the world than I did. And I eventually made my way, and I became a bully as well. This was my way, the only way I stopped it, you know. I would occasionally not wear my tie. I would argue against the Dean if I needed my hair cut. So, I would start to become a problem. I started acting up, but it worked. It worked, and the perpetrator called me to his room, and he said, I see you've changed. And, I said I'm growing up. And from that point he started to pull back from me. So, I was no longer this sweet little innocent boy, but I was one of the rogues. And he wasn't interested in rogues.*

Being labelled a troublemaker is sometimes effective in ensuring that an abuser keeps his distance.

*[P31] I was offered the chance to go on a ski trip with the school...We were standing in a portion of the school known as the day boys' entrance. My aunt had knitted me a jumper, and Mum had said, wear that, that'll be very good in the snow. But he came up to me, there was no one else in the corridor. He plunged his hand down inside the thing... He started caressing my chest and my nipple. And I was so cross, I actually just said F off. And he looked at me, and he said, that's not very nice language to use to a priest. What would your father say if he heard you saying that? And I was so cross and so angry, I said, well, let's tell them what you have been doing in your office to me and then we'll find out what he thinks of me saying F off... But after that the abuse became less and less. He never invited me to his office and whatever... I started regaining my ability in my subjects, and it's even in my school reports you can see me doing better. But I made sure I was as far away from him as I could be.*

One Protestant woman [P12] experienced one abusive episode and then decided to make sure it never happened again.

*My father was a clergyman, and he was ill at home. This clergyman came by train from Dublin to take the services. My mother was busy looking after my father in bed upstairs and I had three younger brothers. My older brother was away at boarding school. There were quite a few local clergy who used to visit my father and they were always friendly, and they always got along well with the children, and you know I was used to playing games with them and reading books with them and you know I regard clergymen as friendly people.*

*After Sunday lunch my mother said, go and talk to him. He was taking the morning service and then there was going to be an evening service and there was a break in the afternoon. He was sitting in the study and my mother was doing all the other things you had to do. So, I went. I presumed I was going to talk to him or tell stories or something like that. I was 10 years old. I just thought it was going to be like the other clergyman whom I was used to talking with. He was sitting in a big armchair. It was normally my mother's, and I don't know how he got me to sit on his knee, but he did and then the next thing he had his hands in my private parts. I didn't know what to do. I presumably moved away.*

*My mother had already told me about periods. What to expect. So, that evening there was blood. I'd been bleeding, and I just thought it was the beginning of the first period. I didn't ever say anything. She'd say to me, you know, the next Sunday when he came, go and talk to him, entertain him. I refused to go. But I didn't say why. He came for about four Sundays, and then my father was better.*

*It just happened that I went to school by train. My mother was on the train, bringing me down and he happened to be on the train. My mother stopped and talked to him. She just thought he was just, you know, a normal person that she got to know. Then he said, come sit beside me and I refused but I didn't tell my mother why. That was the last time I saw him.*

This girl's inner strength and resilience supported by a happy family life enabled her to resist being abused again.

#### (viii) Later Encounters with the Perpetrator

This man [P05] went with friends to a game at a big stadium. He goes to get them some refreshments. He is very distressed at seeing his abuser again after so many years. He had thought that he had recovered. But he realized that the trauma was still active.

*I just came out and opened the double door and there he is, (the abuser) boom! I opened the door, he opens the door from the other side. Our eyes meet. He was looking well. He hadn't aged.*

*It was scary. I felt real fear. I just tried to get outside, get down and get back to the mates. I got back there, and I said, I gotta get out of here, I've got to get out of here. And then where is he? How did he get away like that? And then part of me as well was running. Yeah. Like to get away. It was like part of you was into fight and a part of you was into flight. My mate that was with me, because we had to leave, right, so we're at the fucking thing, half time, I go and I can't stand there. I thought he was dead. There's nearly 80 fucking thousand in there. Yeah. And I'm the only one. I want to go to the cops, fuck it. Because I say, I have enough of this. But we have a thing in us that we don't go to the cops. The cops didn't exist, apart from wanting to kill them. So, I ended up, I didn't go. I just let it go again.*

You can tell by the way he describes the encounter in short, urgent sentences that meeting the abuser many years after the abuse was extremely traumatising. In a similar manner, a woman [P14] describes a chance meeting with her abuser at an airport.

*I had a complete mental breakdown 10 years ago. I was coming through the airport with the kids. We're standing waiting for the suitcase to come around and all I felt was, these hands on the shoulder and, oh my god, I can't believe it's him, the priest who abused me. It was him there, in the airport. He had the cheek to walk over behind me and put his hands on my shoulder and made the comment, my special wee friend.*

*I couldn't say anything verbally out of my mouth because I was in shock. I was worrying where my three were hiding because they were messing about while I was waiting on*

*the suitcases. I got them into a car. I had to sit for 10 minutes and take a deep breath and realize what I just witnessed and felt that all those memories which you had under control, you sort of locked them away somewhere, they were all released all at once and then I started self-harming. My kids always ask me mummy why have you got the marks. I told them I was running away from soldiers and I jumped on barbed wire. But now as adults, they know. I've had to talk to them about things over the years. I was so protective.*

*I reported the priest to the police. They told me that the Prosecution Service would not prosecute because there was no medical evidence. After 25 years! Like how would there be medical evidence? I was able to tell them about his private parts and birthmarks. So, he got moved to another parish and he was given the honorary title of Canon. I mean that's a disgrace. The church knew that the police had investigated him for abuse, and he was still preaching.*

This man describes the intrusion of the perpetrator into a private family event feigning empathy and how he internalised his anger in order to protect his mother and prioritise his mother's emotional wellbeing in an already painful moment.

*[P30] My sister said, "[The priest] is in the kitchen". I just thought, at this time in my life you're invading my home...I was thinking of my mother. It wasn't about me. I was thinking about my mother. I go into the kitchen, and [he] is sitting in my father's chair. Had there been a gun in the drawer he would have got it between the eyes. So, big man, big hugs,..I'm so sorry to hear about your father....He gave me this hug, and it was an extended hug, and he pressed himself against me. He had an erection. And I thought, and my mother was sitting in her chair, and I thought, you fucking dog. How dare you? And there he had me trapped again that I couldn't say anything, a bit like when I was a child. Here I was my early thirties, he was sexually abusing me again.*

This encounter with the perpetrator surprised and confused the survivor.

*[P18] I was under 18 when I got a job. One day, there was a knock. I was upstairs, Mammy was downstairs, and she called me. And she said, [a priest] is looking to speak to you. He just basically said that they'd had a message from Father X (who had abused her). So I said, aye sure, no bother. That's grand. Not even thinking that I could choose then not to respond to that. To say no. Also maybe curious, you know, why did he want to speak to me now? I had probably been away over a year, I would say, roughly, from when I'd had any contact or seen him. I wasn't going to the youth group or anything at that stage anymore. I wasn't doing anything like that.*

*So, I made arrangements to go and see him in his house, usual set up, in the same seat and whoever was in the house on that occasion, let me in, made me tea, and he did look like he had deteriorated from when I'd last seen him, and I think he'd had a period of not being well... I think he might have maybe thought that he was maybe going to die or something. The reason why he wanted to see me was he wanted to ask for my forgiveness for the part that he played in leading me into temptation.*

The survivor [P18] became very emotional when she told this part of the story.

*And I think that probably actually really hurt more than the actual sexual abuse, because it very clearly put the responsibility and the burden for what happened on me. And he needed to use the bathroom. Whoever was in the house came in, helped him to the bathroom and I just sat there, and it felt like forever. Then he sent whoever was in the house in to apologise, to say that he wasn't well, and I could leave if I wanted. And so I left.*

Another survivor described how a further meeting with the perpetrator can reverse the power imbalance positively.

*[P37] But on one occasion, I happened to be back home visiting Mum and Dad and the family around Christmas time. And I was chatting with a couple of my contemporaries and having a few drinks. They mentioned that my perpetrator was at it again. And I talked to them about this, and it was pretty common knowledge that he was fiddling about with the boys. But what was relevant and why I mentioned this is my two younger brothers were at the college. So the very next day I got in my car and drove up to the college. Forced my way, I tell you, because he wouldn't see me, forced my way into his office. He was then principal of the college, and I told him in concise, and clear language, that if he ever touched my brothers, then he would answer to me directly. That's how serious I took it, and that's how damaging I believed it to be. As far as I am aware, although it's not openly discussed, I do believe he behaved himself with my two young brothers. They never mentioned to me anything about it. But I did become aware that he had been pulled on a number of other occasions by parents with younger boys.*

## D. Recommendations Arising from this Chapter

1. When developing a prevention or safeguarding strategy on clerical child abuse, take into account the contextual conditions that offer opportunities and cover to predatory perpetrators. Contextual safeguarding<sup>8</sup> is a child protection approach that recognizes the significant impact of environments outside the family on a young person's safety and well-being. It focuses on understanding and responding to risks and harms that young people face in places like schools, communities, and online, where parents and carers have limited influence. This approach expands the scope of traditional child protection to include a broader range of settings and relationships.
2. Raise awareness among children, parents, clerics, elders and their congregations of the subtleties of grooming and indicators to look out for so that steps can be taken to stop it.
3. Clerics should receive training in spiritual abuse and how religious scripture can be used to “gaslight” and to coercively control victims of abuse and how the sacraments and rituals can be used to conceal abuse.
4. Safeguarding policies, procedures and training should include the full range of types of abuse including those activities which are not intentionally abusive.
5. Safeguarding policies, procedures and training should remove any obstacles to a child reporting their abuse or fear of abuse.
6. Children should have access to adults trained to support children to make disclosures of abuse.
7. Children should be reassured that it is OK to say NO! forcefully, and if necessary, rudely to adults who make abusive suggestions or advances, and trained, to avoid places or relationships which put them at risk in relation to a potential perpetrator.
8. When responding to bad behaviour, clerics and school staff should consider whether the behaviour could be a strategy for avoiding being abused.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk>

## 4. The Impact of the Abuse

### What have we learnt from listening to survivors?

1. Several survivors presented very informative and comprehensive descriptions of trauma based upon their authentic lived experience. Those wishing to understand trauma from the point of view of those experiencing it will benefit from studying these accounts.
2. The insights included:
  - The difficulty of fully escaping from trauma; even after many years of struggling to recover a chance encounter can cause severe anxiety and panic.
  - The ever-present threat of triggers can undermine a person's autonomy and affect their relationships.
  - How flashbacks can be experienced somatically, generating actual physical feelings and reactions in the body.
  - The mental torment experienced through trauma.
3. Specific impacts of abuse on mental health were described including;
  - Misophonia, noises that trigger emotional reactions, and stuttering.
  - How shame affects mental health.
  - How abuse can result in despair, fear and loss.
  - Depression and suicidal thoughts were mentioned.
  - How abuse can stimulate destructive impulses such as aggression, harmful behaviour towards others, addiction and suicidal ideation.
4. The emotional impact of abuse can include;
  - Shame and guilt.
  - Anger and rage.
  - Leading to long-term emotional difficulties.
  - Ultimately when the emotions become too distressing, it is sometimes necessary to stop feeling.
5. The trauma of abuse was described as having a significant on personality;
  - A young woman completely changed her outgoing and positive personality for a significant period of time;

- A man reflected on how the trauma created a new identity and radically influenced his beliefs and behaviours.
6. Trauma was identified as having a devastating social impact on individuals;
- Survivors struggle with relationships.
  - They often have difficulties with people in authority.
  - Even when the abuse is not severe, the survivor will notice subtle impacts on behaviour and coping strategies.
  - It can, on the other hand, arouse stronger sensitivities to injustice.
  - Abuse can have detrimental impact on survivors sexual relations and women's relations with men generally.
  - Being known as a survivor of clerical abuse can have a stigmatising impact on one's relationship with the local community.
7. Impact on faith and participation in religion;
- Negative impacts
- Loss of religious faith and belief.
  - Loss of respect for the clergy.
  - Abandoning the church in which you were brought up.
  - Anger at the abuse of power in the church.
  - Going to church simply for the benefit of the children.
  - Influencing career choices.
- Positive impacts
- Some survivors can maintain their faith and attendance at church while also being critical of the church's response to abuse.
  - Some survivors still have faith and seek to change the church from within.
  - Others will only return to the church if there is reform.
  - Some survivors believe that there are still many good people in the church and that change is possible.
8. While coping strategies enable the person to manage the symptoms of the trauma, they may also produce other problems. The strategies that were mentioned included;
- Numbing the pain with alcohol and drugs
  - The distraction of work and achievement
  - A focus on fitness
  - Erasing the memory
  - Justifying the perpetrator
  - Toxic relationships
  - Hiding and escaping
  - A dark sense of humour

9. Survivors also reported positive outcomes after recovering from the trauma of abuse.
- One Protestant boy, who was abused by a church leader, became a pastor as an adult. He made it clear that his experience of abuse has made him sensitive to risks to his congregation's safety and determined to have rigorous safeguarding practices in place.
  - The experience of clerical abuse gave an individual the courage and conviction to fight to ensure that everything is done to prevent a cleric, who was a known abuser, from hurting more children.
  - A person who had been abused succeeded in transforming a culture of fear of being abused in a school to a culture of safety, respect and healthy love.
  - A protestant woman who had been abused by a church youth leader expresses a strong commitment to justice and a wish to influence change that would protect vulnerable young people.
  - One Catholic woman, who was repeatedly and seriously abused when she was a very young child, now works to support girls and women who have been abused.

## A. Survivors' Stories

◆ *Content Warning - The following section includes victim/survivor accounts of abuse. The language has not been censored.*

This research is part of a programme focusing on finding out more about Historical Clerical Child Abuse. It is true that the abuse was in the past, and, thus, historical. However, the impact is experienced in the present for many survivors.

### (i) Trauma

While trauma is a common theme in many survivors' stories, the way each individual experiences and copes with trauma is unique.

One survivor [P05] found that it is very difficult to escape the trauma of the abuse. His life was going well until he was triggered by watching a film.

*A friend died in a car accident. But, after he died, I just said, I can't have coffins, I'm sick of this. I've just got to get out of here, I prayed to God, I always just prayed. God, please get me out of this. Anyway, it ended up taking me out of Ireland. Then I met a girl and she got pregnant. My life just changed there. And I thought, you know, everything changed. That's when life, that's when, like, real life began.*

*I happened to watch the movie called Sleepers. Robert De Niro was a priest in it, and these kids were like us, growing up. My abuser was as far away from my mind, as far as you could go, you know, he was gone, definitely. The movie was about ten kids. Four of them get into trouble and get sentenced to detention in Boston where they were abused. This brought the abuse back bouncing around my head.*

*It's devastating. People don't realise it. No, they just think, oh, sure, it happened years ago. That's what I've learned, anyway. Well, that's what triggered me off. I started drinking heavy again. I started hiding bottles around the fucking garden from my wife and stuff like that and then she had enough and what happened then was my dad was sick and me and her were at each other and then the next thing she fucked me out and then my dad died.*

*I knew I had a problem, and then I returned to Ireland in 2001. And then 2005 was when I stopped drinking. I'm in AA and I started doing the program.*

Here is a description of how triggers affect a man traumatised by abuse. This, in turn, has an impact on family members.

*[P15] I have two sons and a daughter that were all affected by what happened to me. They didn't have an easy life with me before I told anybody. 'What's wrong with dad?'*

*My mental health was suffering badly because I was telling no one and I was drinking, and you know when things were triggering me and sometimes silly things like smells and a certain pair of shoes to this day still trigger me. Thankfully I don't see them very often, but I was struggling and my doctor had sent me to the psychiatrist.*

*I was triggered and my wife came from a big family and there was always birthdays and weddings and sometimes I felt, I don't want to go to that because I have nothing to celebrate. And you know, and then you know, when my kids were in their teens and all. And what's wrong dad? And my wife and friends, 'what's wrong?' I couldn't tell them what was wrong. I just wanted to blend into the sofa and say look stop and leave me alone, you know.*

Another survivor [P17] describes how his instinct to survive the beatings by becoming a fighter became the common survival feature in his life especially during the times of heightened conflict when he had to fight to survive again - to find safety, stability and a sense of worth in a world that is repeatedly failing to support him. And of deepest regret and grief is the impact on his own children:

*I was in a bad way, so I ended up trying to take my own life. And I ended up going to lifeline. My son, it's my son who caught me trying to hang myself...I was in a dark place.*

*It's the impact on your kids...They wouldn't leave me, you know, they'd just take it and just stay around me.*

More triggers, including having children, were described in another survivor's [P28] story.

*I wouldn't go back (to where it happened). I have never been back. Well, I won't even go to the town. I would always want to avoid that area. It's just my instinct.*

*There was a priest come into my work last year and he expected that he should be treated differently than everybody else. I know I'm diverting from the subject. But he turned around. He put his hand on my shoulder. I just pulled away automatically, and I was just like, 'Don't touch me,' you know, I've never said that to a person in my life, but for him to put his hand my shoulder, I felt dirty after. I very much would class myself as a Christian. You know, and I would go to worship, and I would watch worship on TV, and I would pray a lot and communicate a lot with God, but not through clergy, not through a 3rd party. I don't trust them. Don't like them.*

*When she (her daughter) was 5, I had a breakdown. Well, not, I don't mean a breakdown of the 'Oh, I went into a mental hospital,' I mean the walls came down, you know, everything came back. Which apparently is quite common. I've since been told.*

*I would still be very hypervigilant, you know. Around the clergy. I know that people have said to me in the past, (they don't know the story,) but they know that I've no time for, for you know religion and such, but people say to me, 'Oh, no, they're not all the same... You know there may have been (may have been!) the odd bad one.' But in my mind, they're all the same, because if they didn't do it, they covered it up, so to me they're all the same. I can't separate; you know their thoughts from their actions.*

This man spoke of how the trauma affected him mentally. The impact of the abuse was amplified by the reality that many other boys knew it was happening and, rather than protecting him, they humiliated and bullied him.

*[P24] There's two elements to the abuse. One was the sexual abuse, and I'll continue down that path. But there's also the mental abuse for want of a better word. The sexual abuse continued, and you know it's insidious. With the benefit of hindsight it is relatively traumatizing in of itself, because you're always, you know. 'Fuck! Is he going to try it on this time,' you know he hasn't yet, but is he going to try it now?*

*You know the mental stuff, But the thing that I am most angry about, or the thing that has scarred me more as a result of my interactions with him and the whole, you know however you dress it up, I was a favourite, you know, however warped, that is and how it comes about. As a result of which my secondary school, my time at the college was a fucking misery. You know, like all this bullshit about school days, the happiest days of your life. Kiss my royal ass, I mean it was like - you're in study hall. I don't know if you've seen it, and I don't assume it's still the same, but the study hall was 4 or 5 rows of 30, 40 lads. Maybe there's probably 100 -120 lads in this room. Teacher in the corner, bored out of his arse reading his book. Supposedly keeping control when you're supposed to be doing your homework or studying.*

*The perpetrator comes in. Place goes quiet. And he strolls up and down between the aisles of the study hall. And you know he's coming for you. You know everybody else in the fucking room knows he's coming for you as well. Right. But he goes through this pretence. And then he taps you on the shoulder. 'Come on, come on, we'll go for Mass.' And you walk out, and you get a fucking volley of kissing noises, and nicknames. I was slagged as a homo for fucking every day I was there right, and you walk out, and the teacher has lost control. You're fucking mortified.*

*There's sex abuse in the pattern of grooming, the primary incident, and then me managing to shut it off. The bullying which he left me open to was, I would say, probably more harmful. I'm a complete mental fuck up. So, I've had to be examined by my psychologist or psychiatrist, or whatever. So, he's called out a bunch of things which, just from the conversation. I wouldn't have thought. The primary one is, I have a ferociously short temper. It's bad. I've gotten better over the years as I've gotten older, but I got it bad. I'm very quick to take offense to perceived slights. I'm very wary in social situations.*

*Vigilance. I think they said in a report the other day, "heightened vigilance in social situations" – I'm very willing to believe that someone's whispering about me behind hands and stuff like that.*

*I have a couple of other habits which the guy I met was very interested in. I have an awful bad habit of, in conversation, or even when I'm watching TV, or whatever, picking out a phrase or a sentence, or hearing something like 'peripatetic.' For example, I'll be working out where the middle of the phrase, or the word, or the sentence is... I'll just sort of dissociate from the conversation. I don't use the word boss. I've never used the word. I've never had a boss in my life. I have people who I've been forced to report to, but I've never had a boss. I have a very strong distrust of authority.*

This survivor [P23] felt like he had breathing space after the perpetrator passed away and he moved, however, that space was frequently overtaken by recurrent dissociative flashbacks:

*...sort of terrible nightmares, sometimes, even coming in the middle of the day where I would have to lie down;*

*...one of the ways that the flashback comes back is a feeling of his anatomy in my mouth and it's sort of a choking sensation...actually feeling and tasting that, and feeling suffocated. Actually, I don't mean suffocated in an emotional way. I meant physically suffocated.*

He describes how this manifested into panic attacks and feelings where he couldn't swallow or that he was going to swallow his own tongue.

*Another one is a feeling of being oppressed, pushed down onto, what...you'd call sofas.*

The flashbacks were so intense that the survivor would experience the fullness of the past abuse:

*with the same feelings, with the same level of pain and discomfort.*

Understanding that abusive experiences are not simply recollections but full-body reactivations of the original trauma, helps explain why daily functioning is greatly impacted by many trauma survivors.

## **(ii) Impact on Mental Health**

The trauma caused by sexual abuse can have serious impacts on mental health. Survivors find that their thoughts and actions are affected. They may find that they are struggling with new psychological conditions and that they find it difficult to do things that others take for granted.

*[P22] The other aspect that caused me 'difficulty,' is a condition which I now know is called Misophonia.*

This is a condition in which common noises trigger an abnormal reaction in you. Another person was affected by the abuse in a verbal way.

*[P29] I ended up with a stutter after this. I couldn't, I could hardly put 2 words together without stuttering. And I put it down to him. Every time anybody in authority was present, I felt threatened. It didn't matter where it was. I became very much a recluse. I didn't feel comfortable around people. I've never been a person to get depressed, you know. Only maybe in my teenage years, not being able to cope with meeting women and being able, feeling comfortable, you know. Particularly with people in authority. I always struggled with that up until, up until I got married, let's say. And then I started to get my confidence back.*

This man struggled with the impact of shame on his mental health. This story also reflected how the harm of abusive relationships can ripple out into the family.

*[P25] The immediate impact was a sense of shame. Why had I allowed it to happen? And why had he managed to get a physical response from me? So, that stayed with me, I think, until my early twenties. And then I realised that I was in no way to blame. But for my teenage years, you know, there was a sense of shame.*

*I pretty much had written off the religion and had planned to take over the home farm and be a farmer. But I had a doubt in my head that, if I didn't belong to this particular religion, then I couldn't inherit the farm, and I couldn't be a farmer. I had a complete breakdown when I was 16. I couldn't risk going back to the farm. So I went to university, did a degree and in the middle of that I had a major breakdown. It was just after I finished my primary degree.*

*The next big thing was probably the thing that affected me most. My parents were excommunicated, because they had a TV. My father had just retired, and then he was*

*diagnosed with a terminal illness. My father was glad to have been thrown out, because he was disillusioned, but my mother was totally traumatised. She believed that she was going to hell, because she was no longer in good standing.*

*I have struggled with depression on and off most of my life. Well, from 16 onwards. I had an encounter with the new Head of School, [in the university where he worked]. I had a very bruising encounter with him and reacted quite badly in that I just fell apart completely and ended up off work. I had a bit of a breakdown and went to see my GP. And I said to my GP, 'perhaps the reason I react quite badly to being treated with disrespect is because of what happened to me as a child.'*

*I ended up off work for 6 months, and then had to take early retirement. So I did manage to get ill health retirement. But I did have to retire early from work because I just couldn't cope any longer, and I'm still on medication, and just limping along. I talk to my GP, or psychiatrists, they all attribute the depression and the mental health problems to this abuse. To grow up in an environment where you know I actually did hear my mother once say, you know it'd be better if 'You'd never been born.'*

Another man described the despair, fear and loss caused by abuse.

*[P26] I went down the stairs, and then threw myself on the floor in the living room and said, I didn't want to die, and they're all like, what do you mean you don't want to die? 'What's wrong?' 'What did you do?' And I said, "I took mummy's tablets" and they got salt water, and I vomited, and the tablets were already dissolved, and then I just sort of faded off, and then I woke up at hospital with my father and my uncle.*

*But I was afraid of him, and sick of seeing him in the school, and wanting to just sort of stay. And then you're going through your own journey of sexuality, and I maybe would have been on the spectrum of being curious about lads, I mean. So, then you sort of feel like, maybe you sort of like, this is the way it is, or something like that. For me it was the fear, and the thing that has left its mark on me. I still have this from time to time, I can wake up from a nightmare, where there's a man dressed in black who comes down on me. I have scared my wife. I've scared her because I've woken up, and I'm so distraught. I've done it on ski trips. It's like I can dream it.*

*He stole from me the innocence, the support in life and the feeling of community, and the sense of belonging. It has changed me. Being in school where you should be protected. You get up every morning, and you go off to this place where your life should be built, and your life was being taken apart.*

The sense of loss expressed here is associated by some survivors with depression. Suicidal thoughts were a recurring theme in many of the stories. This man became verbally aggressive, and anti-social due to the abuse that he experienced.

*[P30] I found we had an English pupil. But I remember one of the bullies said, I think it's about time you went and got the Brit. I said what do you mean? He said go and get him and let him know he's a Brit, and he's not wanted here. I remember I went up to him, and I said, I can remember my words, you Imperialist bastard. And I give him the biggest slap across the face, and I shocked myself. I never forget what I did. And he cowered away, and he cried, and everyone laughed. Maybe about 8 or 9 years ago, I wrote to him. I just want to apologize for the day that I hit you. He never contacted me. I saved myself, I saved myself from the abuser, but the offshoot was that I abused others.*

The same man reported that later depression led to suicide attempts.

*[P30] There were two suicide attempts within weeks of one another. The first by taking tablets and my sleep being interrupted by dog's bark. A military patrol which had entered the family home. Confronting a soldier threatening to shoot my dog was probably a proxi-suicide attempt by challenging him to pull the trigger.*

*The second attempt. I walked for 2-3 miles. I remember wading into the water, shocked by the cold of it. I was chest deep when I was interrupted. Again, by my dog who had followed me into the water. I hadn't noticed him during the walk from home. I was a complete automaton.*

### **(iii) Emotional Impact**

Trauma generates many strong, distressing emotions and weakens an individual's ability to control or regulate feelings. One man tried to cope with this by inhibiting emotion.

*[P22] I found it very difficult to cry, because I knew that if I cried, I would let everything go. I couldn't even cry at my mother's or my father's funerals – I was really afraid that I would lose control of my emotions.*

He used this ability to suppress distressing emotions to regulate the anger that he felt due the trauma of abuse. This coping strategy prevented angry outbursts at home and involved internalising distress which couldn't be voiced - a silence that ultimately undermined emotional connection with a loved one.

*[P22] Trauma often produces anger. Anger engenders a sense of power. So, in the aftermath of trauma, we can all find ourselves feeling very angry and taking it out on*

*those that we love the most. We may find ourselves seeking out conflict in order not to feel fragile. So, I used to go for a long walk and sometimes talk to any horses I met.*

*My wife used to always complain to me that whenever we were having an argument about something that was difficult to resolve, I would leave the house and go for a walk. She said I was always, I was what she called, an 'avoidant'. I was always getting up, and didn't have a dog to go for a walk, but I'd take my wellies, I'd go and put on my wellies and have a walk along the river and have a chat to myself and any animals who cared to listen. And then come back in a couple of hours.*

Shame and guilt are recurring emotions in survivors accounts. Some survivors feel shame about the abuse, and about feelings of complicity and regrets that they did not resist more actively. They also feel guilt over not disclosing the abuse and, perhaps, preventing other children being abused by the perpetrator.

*[P15] What annoyed me for many years before I ever had counselling. I mean I know now how these people work. But I was angry with myself as a teenager, a 20 year old, even a 30 year old, that I didn't scream. And the other thing was he started to give me money for the tuck shop. And I took it. He had abused 53 boys in his care. It was made public. So, I had that guilt trip for years. I could have prevented it.*

*[P35] I was, I was embarrassed, you know, very embarrassed. I felt it was dirty. I felt guilty, for some reason. I just hated it, and the nuns were absolutely horrified. They were very shocked. I think they were probably as innocent and naive as we were, really.*

Abuse can leave a person [P07] with long-term emotional difficulties and social isolation.

*I'm not an overly confident person, I do suffer anxiety, I have been feeling depressed. I've gone through episodes where I can't even face going out. I haven't worked properly since COVID. I had a relationship breakdown just before, or indeed two years before COVID. I totally broke down on medication. I just started a job just before COVID, but after that, I haven't worked. I am on loads of tablets and stuff but I think it's just in stages that my brain just goes into meltdown. If it was a coffee shop I'll walk by 10 times before I go in because I need to know where I'm going. I know it is probably an effect of lack of confidence and there always is a voice in my head going, people are looking at you. I don't trust anyone at all. My partner at the minute, we're going through a bit of a patch at the minute, but I would say I would count friends in a hand. I have no friends from school. I wouldn't say I have any friends at all. I have a couple of acquaintances. Maybe I'd have a drink with the odd time, ex-work colleague the odd time, but I wouldn't have friends call to the door.*

Ultimately when the emotions become too distressing, it is necessary to stop feeling and survive only for their own children as one woman [P03] concluded.

*I feel so numb. I just feel dead inside. There's nothing anymore that gives me any enjoyment or pleasure and I'm literally only here because God gave my children with special needs. And nobody will ever protect them the way I do. So, I'm here for the duration, whether I like it or not.*

#### **(iv) Impact on Personality**

This section covers how the experience of abuse changes how some survivors learn to survive and to interact with their world. A woman [P10] remembers the devastating impact of the abuse on her personality, her engagement with others, and suicidal thoughts.

*All the sports staff at school had a lot of respect for me. They noticed something was going on. My personality flipped from being always up for a laugh, bubbly and sociable. They noticed you sort of seemed to shrink into yourself. I was avoiding things. I was making excuses to get out of things. I literally turned up to school, sat in class, went home, and slept. That was my life for a year. It was like my body was just in shock and it was just my way of surviving for a year. Sleep was an escape.*

*Church was my life. I gave it everything and took over the YF when they were stuck for people. Me and a friend stepped in doing kids clubs and holiday bible clubs and in the praise band. I was singing solos and everything. I was there a lot, a place where you're supposed to feel safe and at home and free.*

*He ended up leaving the church, but then Christmas time, there he was. Easter service, there he was. His mum was heavily involved in the church and a well-liked, well-respected member. And it was her wish that her son and daughters would come and join her for the service. Did she know anything about it? No.*

*Then there was one Easter, and I was singing a solo at the front and he's sitting in the congregation. I don't remember singing that solo. No. I don't even know how it sounded. You can just feel his eyes on you.*

*I don't want to do this anymore. I can't be here. And I was just bawling. I said, Mum, I can't do this anymore. I don't want to be here. Suicidal. It's devastating. There was a time where I literally had all my ducks in a row, if you like, and wrote a few letters. I cannot do this anymore. I need to end it.*

*I think it was the weight of what happened, but also the weight of the secrecy. Having to carry it. Then also the exhaustion of trying to live a life that wasn't actually me, trying to portray that everything was normal. Secrets and lies. You're told to keep something that's devastating a secret. You're having to lie, and you try and keep a happy face and yet underneath you're in turmoil.*

For the same woman [P10] the unanswered questions arising from the abuse prolonged its impact.

*In 2014 I started counselling. So, this is a while afterwards. But it's still inside you. It's still in your head. So, over the years, things just started, bubbles started coming to the surface, like massive question marks to me.*

This man reflects on how the trauma of abuse changed him and influenced his beliefs and behaviour and potential. At the age of 12 he was labelled by adults as promiscuous. This form of victim-blaming enables the abusers and those who knew abuse was taking place to deny victimhood to 'neutralise'<sup>9</sup> their responsibility.

*[P33] I was exposed to hypersexuality at such an early age. What leads onto is this sort of promiscuity. But even putting that label of promiscuity on somebody who's under 12 years old it's not right. It's just that you're fucked up. And one of the guys that run the camp, burly, muscle guy, every night in the showers in the basement, yep, there I was, and there he was, and away we went at it. And I just thought this was completely normal...*

*[P33] There was women. They didn't do anything to me, but it was always the men that did something to me, and I thought that was my power. What I realise now that was just my survival instinct kicking in. And I thought, well, best way to survive, make them come. You do that, you've got them, cause they're weakened, and you can just walk away. But it did lead to a bit of a crappy life. There's addictions, there's using alcohol. And now, because I'm physically disabled, there's the great thing of opiates which, is a horrible thing.*

[P33] describes further abuse at school and in the community, and then continues:

*But yeah, self-harm and suicidal ideation and attempts, that's fun. Well, it's not really, it's messy. That's one of the things that really is so fucking messy. If you hit an artery, which I did, and it hit the ceiling. And I was like, bloody hell, they don't show that in a TV*

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<sup>9</sup> Sykes, Gresham and David Matza. 1957. "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency." *American Sociological Review* 22: 664–70.

*show, you know. It damages people for the rest of their life. But no, your emotions, it's harder to regulate them...There's explosive anger, which I still do. I did the other day about the most trivial little thing... And I just said, fuck it, because nobody gives a shit in the end anyway.*

[P33] continues to describe the dangerous situations that he put himself that continued into adulthood and concludes with:

*So much I could have achieved that I didn't, because I was stuck in this, whenever your brain's being evolving and forming as a young kid, and then it's like, oh God, trauma, trauma, trauma, trauma, trauma! It's the wasted potential. You mourn what I could have been. But I can't, I can't go back*

Trauma had a very different impact on this man.

*[P37] When I was [in my teens], I asked to go to a seminary to train as a priest. That is completely bonkers, really, because perhaps I was running away. Perhaps I was trying to avoid confrontation with him. I very quickly realized that the priesthood was not for me.*

*Absolutely shifted my life to this very day. My wife, who's very tolerant of me, and is well aware of how homophobic I am. All the way through university I was so homophobic you would not believe it. Sadly, the effect on me as a human being was so deep that when my middle daughter decided to declare that she was a lesbian, that finished me. I haven't spoken to her in 27 years. That's the damage that this had.*

*I recognize now, as I got older, that I was never really a very good team player. I always had to be the one that led, I had to be at the front. I didn't like the close confines. Even to this day, I only have one close male friend. I didn't foster good relationships with males so there are lots of underlying psychological features which I'm old enough and wise enough to recognize the damage that is done.*

## **(v) Social Impact**

Social impact refers to how trauma affects the survivors relationships and participation in society. As one survivor put it:

*[P22] It has probably, (in a nutshell,) delayed my education, further education, tertiary education. It has coloured my relationship with people completely, all of my life. It has alienated me from anybody who wears a cassock, or anybody who is in any church, not just the Catholic Church. The effect it (the abuse,) has had on me, is in my relationships*

*to people and to authority in particular. This is referring indirectly to the people who listened but said, "There's nothing I can do about that." It took years for me to not get triggered by somebody wearing a cassock or a white collar.*

*When I was a teenager, after I was 13 or so, I didn't go out much anywhere. So that is the disruptive part of how it has affected me, and how it's affected my relationship with my father and towards authority figures in any way, shape or form. I've been pretty distant from them. I've been pretty dismissive of them.*

*I'm not a shrinking violet. I'm able to hold my own in any debate, but in a situation where you're in a school as a teenager, where you're being sexually and physically abused, your whole concentration level is diverted into survival mode.*

Another survivor spoke of his struggles with relationships and authority.

*[P34] I find that it's made it hard to keep relationships. I was married and I had a couple of kids, and I ended up divorced...I still sit and think to myself, what if this didn't happen? Or what if? Is this why, I can't keep relationships? It's definitely a fact that I've never liked going to church. I don't like them people full stop.*

*I feel it gives me a sense of hatred for male authority. I can't take any authority from anybody, you know. Like I went to a lot of training camps, and walked out, because I can't have somebody telling me what to do. I think that's an authority thing that I don't like somebody telling me what to do, and I think that's part of it... I'm not a very affectionate person. If that makes sense, I wouldn't be very affectionate or wouldn't be, you know, when it comes down to relationships.*

Sometimes the impact is not severe. But even then, it does affect behaviours and coping strategies. The following example shows the impact on a man who has internalised one of myths of sexual abuse and did not allow himself to be left alone with any one of his children. The reality is that most boys and men who are sexually abused or assaulted will not go on to sexually abuse or assault others<sup>10</sup>.

*[P26] I don't think it's had a huge impact. Like the abuse wasn't, you know, the extreme end of the scale. I started a family late in life, and so I have two young children, but I would always make sure that I'm never caught in a car with just one child, you know. I'm just hyper about that, never getting into situations where I'm alone in a room with a single child, you know, just hyper about that. Because, if something were to happen and a kid accused me, somebody might say, "Well, he was abused as a child, and it's just,*

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<sup>10</sup> <https://sarac.org.uk/myths-and-facts/>

*that's what happens." So, I always make sure I'm never, never, ever, ever, ever, ever, in that situation where I'm alone with a child. I don't know how it's affected me like, I like to drink, but I know that it's not the answer to things, and I'll be aware of being addicted to things, because, you know, sometimes your mind goes in the wrong places and addiction is never the answer like. So, in some ways it's given me hypersensitivity to stay away from things that could lead me to the wrong area.*

This man developed a great sensitivity to injustice due to the abuse of power that he experienced through the abuse though he too felt inhibited when it came to showing affection for his children.

*[P32] I thought a lot about instances where I suffered abuses of power. And I have had a number of those throughout my life, some very severe actually, where I've had to deal with challenges to my honesty or integrity, or just downright bullying. That would have triggered the memories in relation to it right. You might find this a little bit surprising, but I was always very conscious of how I treated my own children when my children were growing up. I have 4 children. I was always very conscious of how I interacted with them, and how I showed affection. I always avoided anything like that. Now, what does that say? Does it say that if I hadn't experienced it, I might have, might have been more relaxed or different about it? I don't know. But that's how I felt.*

*I suffer from severe anxiety, even though I've been in very high, high-ranking jobs, I've always suffered from severe anxiety. I can't put my hand on my heart and say that that had anything to do with what happened at school, can't say that, I don't know. But that's a fact. I was relating it to the counsellor and this incidentally, and I suppose it was a nervous breakdown that happened to me in my mid-fifties. It happened as a direct result of mistreatment in the workplace. I was in a very, very senior position. And basically, to cut a long story short, a senior lawyer decided to make my life difficult. And I made a complaint about that. I left the organisation with a substantial compensation package over it. But the problem for me was the abuse of power, and the fact that my life had been basically considered to be dispensable, the whim of somebody who just decided for no basis other than a power play to make my life difficult. So, I sought psychiatric help as a result of that. It was a combination of CBT and medication. They take a full history of your life and all of the issues. And that came up, the issue around clerical abuse. And the counsellor said to me, did you not recognize that at the time as being wrong, as being abuse of power at least abusive of power? And it was that, really that then started me thinking about how it impacted my life. Bottom line is it was wrong.*

A woman [P01] mourns the loss she suffered because of the abuse and its effect on her marriage.

*My physical relationship with my husband was affected because I was haunted by the sort of things that had happened to me. And I ended up telling him. Without going into an awful lot of detail, you could have been maybe in the middle of having (sexual) relationships and I would have to push him away. I can't continue. So, we went through some kind of therapy many times over the years to try and make things better. We're still married and, you know, I have a lot of respect for him. Relationships aren't great at times and I've struggled with it all my life. Even recently in the last two years have gone again to try and get some kind of help in therapy.*

*The one thing that actually makes me really, really sad is the effect that it had on him because he's such a good person. And he's stuck by me all these years. I mean, I have tried my best and at times been fine and then other times it's been an absolute nightmare.*

*My husband tried to deal with it over the years. He became a bit of an alcoholic over my rejection at times and thankfully he went into treatment and sorted himself out. But I mean, with many, many years of terrible trauma on both of our accounts. And he always said; "You know, darling, you have to understand the worst thing anybody can have is that rejection when you're trying to make love to somebody and they push you away. You know it's very, very traumatic".*

*I've had breakdowns over the years, you know, four or five sort of major ones. Where I've been off sick for a long time. And I've always been sensible enough to know if I needed counselling or if I needed support at that stage. I'm pretty good at knowing when my mental health needs attention. But it still never goes away. You just live with it constantly all of the time.*

A woman describes the impact of the abuse on her in relation to men, to her compulsive behaviour and to her very vigilant approach to protecting her children.

*[P35] I was very withdrawn. I was already quite shy. I didn't like being with adult men on my own. I remember one incident where I went away with one of my friends to her family for a long weekend. When I realized I was going to be on my own with her father, I remember, sort of my immediate reaction was, oh, no, I can't. I can't travel with him on my own! And you know the poor man. Nothing that he'd done at all, you know they'd been kindness personified, but I was just frightened of being on my own with a man, and very made it all very uncomfortable.*

*I know that there must have been some psychological impact, because for a short period, about 6 months, I started doing some very odd behaviour. It was mental, but it was more.*

*It was quite OCD. I had a sort of repetitive behaviour, repetitive gestures, that I had to do otherwise I felt peculiar in myself.*

*I have children of my own who are grown up now, but I've always been very protective about them. I do feel safety in numbers. I would never leave them on their own when they were younger with an individual person. They would always have to have several people. That's not necessarily entirely successful in protecting children, but it tends to be individuals who do this sort of thing. I never left them with babysitters. I did my best to make sure that I would always be supervising, maybe at a distance. They always felt safe, and there was never any problem or any potential for them to be left on their own.*

Being known as a survivor of clerical abuse can have an impact on one's relationship with the local community.

*[P30] Shame and embarrassment. These are 2 critical issues. I still feel ashamed. I still feel embarrassed. In our society, particularly in my locality, I'm in a small farming community, everybody knows everybody. I went home for the funeral and I'm on the country road. I meet a family coming down, people who I know, and they crossed the other side of the road. And the road is very small anyway. They were embarrassed I suspect. They were embarrassed about meeting me. So, it's the whole thing that, you know, that goes under the radar is how child sexual abuse is dealt with by local communities. They pretend that it didn't happen, or the people are just not ready to cross over the road and shake hands and say, listen, you know I'm sorry, I'm sorry to hear about what happened to you.*

## **(vi) Impact on Faith and Participation in Religion**

One of the most significant impacts of clerical abuse is on the survivors' faith, participation in religion and a sense of belonging to a faith community. These are extracts from several stories.

- *[P33] The day they raped me, I realised that there was no such thing as a God. There was absolutely nothing, nothing in place. I said it's all a myth. It's just to scare and control and to take too much control of kids, you know, to the point of where you're just abusing them.*
- *[P18] The impact on my faith was another huge loss and that push-pull of wanting to be involved but not feeling I could be, not feeling I belonged, you know. Did God love me, does God not love me, am I going to be punished, all that kind of nonsense that we were taught but also knowing that there's something about the faith or a faith in something that has been always within me, like something's been always within me, like something, spiritual that you know.*

- *[P18] I don't know what the whole research is around the kind of spiritual abuse and the harm around that and how I've had it really to work personally on myself over the past few years to try and establish that connection with a God that makes sense to me. And that I can fulfil that part of my life and I have to say that I've had some experiences with some lovely men who are lovely good genuine priests. And I've had moments of consolation through the practices of the faith in recent years with bereavements. And it's quite complex for a survivor of abuse by a priest or priests to reconcile that. I do believe in God and you know I still pray and talk to God every day. I've had personal moments and experiences that I would say confirm for me what my faith is, what my belief is.*
- *[P19] At the end of the day, you know, the Catholic Church is supposed to be a great institution for everybody who goes to Mass. I didn't, I gave up the church many years ago. I've been a Christian now over nine years now. I worship one person, my first person in my life is God. My family always comes second, but first is God first. Always God first, family always second. I put God first always. I walk with God. I walk in God's word. I don't walk in the Catholic church because to me the Catholic church has just made a complete mockery of it all.*
- *[P34] I have totally lost my faith, totally. I've never. I've never had any faith and my family's fairly religious, you know my mum, my dad, my sisters, my brother. And I feel that at times that I do have to go to the mass. I'm sitting there in the mass, should it be a funeral, should it be a wedding, and I am looking at that person that's preaching, and just saying to myself, you know, "paedophile!" I know that's not right, or I say to myself, you can't paint them all with the one brush, etc. You can't. And then I'm saying to myself like this guy was put to look after us, teach us, and protect us. And he was able to do these things to the likes of me.*
- *[P34] Like he stood in court, and he said that he never knew me. He's still a member of [the Order]. He's in in prison, found guilty and charged, and still a member of [the Order]...Are they taking his word over ours?*
- *[P35] I'm very cynical about churches. I think the Catholic Church hasn't dealt well at all with incidents of abuse in the past. I mean, they've been appalling. Their attitudes seem to brush it under the carpet, to ignore it or to move the abuser to another parish and hope they don't hear about them again. Currently, the Anglican Church is going through the same similar things with revelations of abuse in England as well.*
- *[P36] So, when my eldest was born, I started going back to mass again but as I sat through the masses looking at the priest on the altar, I have to say there hasn't been*

*one mass where I haven't questioned the presence of the priest on the altar. And is he who he says he is? And is he doing the same to other people that the priest did to me?*

- *[P37] I got out of Northern Ireland and I've never went to a church ever again in my life, never, never been inside the Catholic Church again, and ever since, from that day onwards. So that shows you how determined an individual I am. I had already determined that I was pretty much an agnostic by the time I was probably seventeen, eighteen. The defining point was when I left Northern Ireland to come to university in England.*
- *[P12] He stole from me the innocence, the support in life and the feeling of community, and the sense of belonging.*

Sometimes the loss is in respect for the clergy.

- *[P28] I've no love for the clergy in any way. I just have a relationship with God. Yes, but not the clergy.*
- *[P28] I very much would class myself as a Christian. You know, and I would go to worship, and I would watch worship on TV, and I would pray a lot and communicate a lot with God, but not through clergy, not through a 3rd party. I don't trust them. Don't like them.*
- *[P22] When people ask me my religion, I don't even tell them I'm a Catholic, you know. I tell them I'm a Celtic Christian, because we don't include priests.*
- *[P28] I just believe everything everybody says about priests, because they're just wrong, even if they don't intend to be. If they're not physically, mentally, or sexually abusive; to me, they're still abusing their power, and they very much, I find, do that across the board, even in my work.*
- *[P31] I am very angry at the church. I have a lot of respect for a lot of priests, but for the whole process of it, I have no belief in it. I have no confidence in it, you know.*
- *[P31] Faith is still very important to me, but I'm very, very lost, and that's another impact that this abuse has done. I was invested enough in my faith in Christ to give up my life. But then got to a stage where it's just because of what I was experiencing, I couldn't do that anymore.*

This woman [P01] still has faith in spite of how she was treated by the church.

*I still have my faith and I still go to church. I've just become a granny and we're back going to mass every Sunday for her sake as well. And I do want her to be brought up a Catholic. But I just feel so let down that they still seem to want to cover it up.*

Participation in religion is not important for this woman. She only goes to mass for her children.

*[P28] You know I'm divorced. My ex-husband would have been very much, you know. 'We're going to mass,' and we're going. From the day that him and I split up, I never went back to weekly Mass again. Funerals and weddings... Or occasions. When my children made the Holy Communion or Confirmation. Obviously, I went then, and they went to Catholic schools, so they had to do that. From when they've been old enough to decide whether or not, they want to go to religion, and that's entirely up to them.*

This loss can lead to very strong feelings.

*[P22] I harboured a deep-seated resentment and overwhelming dislike of all Catholic priests. I always felt an uncontrollable urge to spit in the faces of these clergy who told me what to do, and I always struggle not to spit on them - many times. I had to excuse myself and walk away. I thought to myself that if I listen to people talking religious rubbish to me, I'd have an overwhelming desire to spit on their face.*

It can influence career choices.

*[P36] I went for a job as [a leader of Catholic schools]. I thought, do you know what I'm going to give it a go, because it means that I'm in charge, and I can make sure that it doesn't happen. They offered me the job, which was just a job of a lifetime. I talked it over with the husband. I said, 'just something doesn't feel right. I don't think that I can sit there in a room full of the clergy, the bishops, and be differential to them, and not challenge them. I'm not sure this is the job for me'. And I'll be honest with you, I think I actually self-sabotaged the next stage...*

*I honestly think that's the biggest impact. You know. I go to mass occasionally and there's not one mass I've been to where I haven't sat and thought, these men are held in such high regard, and they have access to children. And is it happening to somebody else? And I'm just sitting there being part of it? And I so much want to be part of my faith. And I think that's the other thing. I feel like I'm betraying the Catholic Church by telling, this is like betraying my own tradition and my own identity.*

Others wish for change before they can return to the church.

*[P26] There's loads of things that for me to become a real full member and active in the church again, would have to change. It basically would have to become a bit more Protestant, which is very hard for people to accept.*

*[P26] I know that there are good people in the church. I've seen my brother's parish. I know that there's good people, but it's just that I don't know what it was with the church in the forties, fifties and sixties, and the type of people that they processed. And then there's that whole veil of secrecy.*

## **(vii) Coping Strategies**

Trauma presents survivors with pain and with real or imagined threats. Survivors will have little choice but to find a way to cope with the disruption and suffering that the trauma causes, at least until they find a way to recover. The way survivors cope with the various problems of abuse can become problems in themselves.

### **Numbing the Pain with Alcohol and Drugs**

*[P20] I'm bothered sometimes with anxieties. Sometimes it's hard to get up. I don't drink. I used to drink a lot, years ago. Don't drink, don't do drugs, don't smoke. Unfortunately, I've tried them all. Happiness isn't found in any of them. Trust me, I've tried. At my lowest of times, I was thinking, 'seriously, is this the way you'll go - drugs in your system...how am I going to speak to you in 10 mins God? But I'm here by the Grace.*

*[P31] It's in the nights that it hits me which is why I possibly drank so much. I don't know whether I drank to forget or, in a kind of funny way, to remember in terms of whenever I would have had a few drinks on me, I would have maybe written down what I was thinking or feeling. And the next day it, it seemed like it was authentic, although I was thinking, don't be showing anyone that, that's just silly, you know.*

*[P19] After my wife died and I came back to Ireland, I had a bit of an issue with drink, got that sorted out. I've been 35 years without alcohol. And then I started, in later life, drugs. I'd taken cannabis for about nine years, but I went and got help for that. I was in rehab for that too. I'm drug free as well.*

### **The Distraction of Work and Achievement**

*[P29] I always had a good job, high paying jobs. I always made good money. I worked mega hours, I mean mega. My wife would tell me now, you work too much. I would work 7 days a week, sometimes 12 hours a day, sometimes 16, you know. Maybe it was, maybe it was my way of dealing with the abuse thing.*

*[P30] The latter part of my career when I was in management, you know, I had high expectations of the teams that I was responsible for, and what we would deliver on, and I expected them to be ready to put in the extra evenings work, or the weekends work, or whatever it was, because that's what I did. I had complaints made to me by my staff members that I was being too demanding on them. The only criticism I ever got in my annual appraisals was that I was too demanding on my staff. People who have been abused as children, many lead different lives. Some of them move towards drink, and drugs on the fringe of society. Others get really stuck in, you know, and become successful in their jobs. But then that success is a function of this focus in your life. Because then you close out everything else. Your one objective is just to be the best on the job, and I suppose that, that's what was true, and that part of, I sort of look back on it now and I thought I sacrificed a significant amount of my personal life for my job. I didn't have time for friends, I don't have many friends. I didn't have time for personal relationships, or whatever so, and I was, I was essentially a loner, despite being the, you mean the one who's great craic at the Christmas dinner and all these sorts of things. You know everybody liked me. But I've led a lonely life and lonely in my personal life and lonely in my family, and I think that's the biggest thing. The most hurtful thing was that I'm lonely in my family.*

*[P37] I put all my energies into being successful and almost driven to be successful. And that, I suppose that was my refuge. I'm wise enough to know how much damage was done to me and I had to make compensations for that on, in my humble opinion unnecessarily.*

### **A Focus on Fitness**

*[P34] One thing that has helped me is I chose a lot of fitness throughout my life. You know I was always very active, always done a lot of running. I ran marathons all over the world, and I think that that sort of kept me focused. And I've achieved a lot through running, and boxing. I've done a lot of boxing. And I think that those things sort of kept me focused and kept me straight.*

### **Erasing the Memory**

*[P35] I experienced abuse when I was younger. I've always had a bit of a problem about it, because I think, as a survival tactic, I sort of wiped the whole episode from my memory. I sort of deliberately forgot about it in a strange way. I don't really understand how it works, but it only resurfaced a few years later, and then I didn't want to think about it. Really, I didn't want to consider what had happened. Now I feel frustrated*

*because I can't remember certain details, and I'm a person who likes to be quite precise about things, so I can't. I don't know the exact date of the abuse.*

### **Justifying the Perpetrator's abuse**

*[P36] I justified it in my head for a lot of years that he wasn't married, you know. He's a man like any other man, and he probably had urges. And he, you know it would have been a huge scandal if he had those urges with a woman. In my head, I was kind of thinking, well, you know he's done what he's done because he can't do it with women. But obviously now, in this whole era where we do talk openly about paedophilia and what that means, and what that looks like, I can see it in a completely different light. I just don't think that we should be brushing it off anymore. They're not dirty old men. We have to call them what they are, and they're paedophiles, you know.*

### **Toxic Relationships**

*[P07] I met the wife, started drinking, and I just grabbed her, hugged there, and I just needed support, I needed somebody to hold on to. It was a toxic, toxic relationship, two-timing, and fighting her, and I still kept her, still forgave her. It's often the way survivors struggle with relationships, and struggle with sex.*

### **Hiding and Escaping**

*[P20] You just always try to hide yourself. You know, jumpers, coats, all sorts of things, I've always done, and it's the whole thing of crowds. I don't like crowds looking at me. I left a job because they wanted me to wear a t-shirt. Isn't that ridiculous? I left because I wouldn't wear a t-shirt because I couldn't hide myself.*

*[P23] I even still feel, in a room, or anything like that, I still kind of feel like I need to know where the way out is...how I can get out. And if I can get out.*

### **A Dark Sense of Humour**

*[P33] And then I told my husband, and I was really embarrassed about the perpetrator. Because I thought, he's so ugly, I could do so much better than that at that age. That was the most embarrassing thought in my head. It wasn't the abuse, it wasn't the crossing the lines, it wasn't the hands going up really high on my school trousers and fiddling. It was like, oh God. At least the PE teacher was hot. There's a dark humour from people who have been abused. And I'm glad of that, because it's a really sick, twisted humour.*

## Unexpected Outcomes

Trauma can destroy lives. But there is such a thing as post-traumatic growth<sup>11</sup>. Sometimes the experience of extreme distress can lead to a stronger sense of purpose and meaning in life.

One Protestant boy [P13], who was abused by a church leader, became a pastor as an adult.

*So, in terms of justice needs and expectations as a pastor in a church you know I feel that if anything, this has informed me and our group of churches regarding safeguarding, and you know that's an important issue. In fact, as it happens, I met with the community police today just to ask questions for somebody who's coming to the church and I have some concerns about safety. That issue is becoming increasingly common, and we need to be vigilant and follow very clear guidelines and have a safeguarding officer who is fully informed.*

It is clear that his experience of abuse has made him sensitive to risks to his congregation's safety and determined to have rigorous safeguarding practices in place.

The following story illustrates how an experience of clerical abuse can give an individual the courage and conviction to fight to ensure that everything is done to prevent a cleric, who is a known abuser, from hurting more children.

*[P36] A person from a Catholic Religious organisation came to visit the school, and a member of staff reported to me that he had been removed from post years earlier, because the rumour was that he had interfered with some boys. And I was incredulous that he was still (A) a free man, and (B) walking around a school full of students and doing assemblies and whatever. So I went straight to the principal, and I asked him, was it true. And he asked me how I found out about it. It was a very stressful time for me, because they didn't want to do anything about it, and I had to really push hard for something to be done. And through that process it made me again look back on what had happened to me and that sense of injustice.*

*And I'm not going to let this happen to anybody else, and I am going to stand up, and I am going to have my voice heard, and I'm not going to let these people get away with it anymore. This man was moved. In the end I went to the school solicitor, and I said to him, 'we are breaking the law if we know that a law has been broken, and we don't report it. He has broken the law. It's been covered up, and nobody's done anything. So, either you're going to do something about it, or I will'. I don't know what happened. I*

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<sup>11</sup> Tedeschi R, Shakespeare-Finch J, Taku K, Calhoun L (2018). *Posttraumatic growth: Theory, research and applications*. Taylor & Francis.

*was kind of kept out of the next bit, but he received a jail sentence. It firmed up for me how it's still going on today, and how it's still being covered up today you know.*

Another survivor, who had been abused, succeeded in transforming a culture of fear of being abused to a culture of safety, respect and healthy love.

*[P31] I was appointed to the school where the abuse had taken place. Now I taught there. I love teaching. I'm a very happy teacher, and I love the whole interaction with young people, and you know, and just learning, I do love that. But I was always uneasy in the place. So, I would have been trying to change that culture. I wanted to be very sure that every boy was safe and every boy was respected. And one of the nicest things said to me; the school inspector says, these boys love you. And I laughed. I said, well, doesn't seem like that when I'm giving out to them. But he says, no, they are really safe here. He says you've done a great job here.*

A protestant woman [P10] who had been abused by a church youth leader expresses a strong commitment to justice and a wish to influence change that would protect vulnerable young people.

*Like I said I've put in the work over the years to be able to talk about it and I'm absolutely happy to contribute to something that might actually make positive change down the line. I hope so because one of the things in my life is my pursuit of justice. Closure, call it whatever you like, is making sure that this does not happen again. I was then the YF leader for a time and there were quite often periods of reflection where I look at the young people that were so vulnerable. Not even because they had difficult stuff going on in their life, just because of their age and their stage of life. And I look and think, how could you even do that? But if you were a predator, you would say, they're an easy target. Yeah, it's so sick. I will never understand. I mean, it's been happening all the time, but we're hearing of it more and more.*

One Catholic woman [P14], who was repeatedly and seriously abused when she was a very young child, now works to support girls and women who have been abused.

*I've had a pretty rough life. But I'm married, I have three great kids, and they went to university. I've done pretty well with my kids. But I was lucky enough to give them a good start and teach them their values and teach them to have respect. And they're putting this all on their own kids. I think the staff in the children's unit taught me these things. They taught me values. They taught me respect. They taught me that I am a person, and I should be loved, and I should be taken care of.*

*I've always had a goodness in me. What I do now, what my profession is, I work with young women coming through the justice system. I work with young girls who have been abused mentally and physically, and ones who have drug problems.*

*I didn't know I was going to end up marrying my husband. He's a great guy like he doesn't expect things, he doesn't put me through things, and he doesn't hurt me. He's reared the kids. I watched him how he was being with the kids. I'm a fierce mother and a grandma.*

## **B. What Should Be Done?**

The survivors' stories have highlighted in some detail the devastating impact of clerical child abuse on their mental health and quality of life. The stories contain failed relationships, career setbacks, addictions, and suicidal ideation. There are also stories of resilience, growth, courage, and wisdom. Victims and survivors of clerical child abuse not only require support to recover but also have much to contribute to reducing further abuse.

1. Lived experience is a rich source of learning. Survivors should be actively involved in training and the development of policy initiatives.
2. In addition to existing therapeutic services, a service led by survivors offering support groups and/or healing circles should be established to reduce the sense of stigma, shame and social isolation and to generate coping strategies that aid recovery rather than cause more problems.
3. Post-traumatic growth and wisdom should be actively valued and channelled into programmes and services addressing the trauma of abuse.
4. The impact of abuse has a ripple effect into the community. While individual healing opportunities for those directly impacted has been noted; opportunities for the collective to understand and address the impact of the harm are important in building/rebuilding safer environments for our children, families and communities.

## 5. Disclosure and the Responses of Families, Faith Organisations and the Criminal Justice System

### **What have we learnt from listening to survivors?**

It might have been expected that when victims disclose child sexual abuse to their parents, to the hierarchy of the faith organisation in which the abuse occurred or to the criminal justice system, they will be responded to with sensitivity, respect and the offer of support to get justice and to heal. Unfortunately, in most of the cases reported in this study, they do not receive a satisfactory response. To families who are devout members of a church, they may struggle to believe that clerics would abuse children. They may fear that disclosure will draw unwelcome attention from the congregation and become the focus of salacious gossip. To the churches they represent a threat to their reputation and moral authority. To the criminal justice system, they are evaluated according to their value as witnesses or sources of evidence.

1. Victims/Survivors reported that the shame and fear of conflicting with their parents' devotion to the church can inhibit disclosure and their wish to seek the security and comfort of their parents.
2. Responses to disclosure in families are mixed. One man remembers the day that he told his father about the abuse as the happiest day of his life and a great relief. Another survivor received a positive response from his mother. But another mother's response was one of regret. Other parents listened but never talked about it again.
3. Fathers tended to be less supportive than mothers.
4. One man appreciated the support received from both his wife and daughter.
5. The responses of friends and colleagues were unpredictable ranging from increasing distance to bringing people closer together.
6. In some cases, the disclosure was not planned but provoked by distress. These, too, had mixed results.
7. Victims of clerical abuse often assume that the faith organisation will protect them and will hold perpetrators accountable for the harm that they have caused. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case.
8. The culture of silence and the taboo about talking about abuse seriously hinders survivors' recovery and access to justice.
9. People, who are attached to the school and the church, are inclined to criticise, shun or blame victims who speak up about their abuse. It is as if this is easier than having to address the depravity of the abuse and the suffering that it has caused to so many people.

10. Often the perpetrator seems to be welcomed, supported and, even, celebrated while the victim is shunned and insulted.
11. The faith organisation may see itself as the victim and believe that the victim is only interested in financial gain.
12. This response can be devastating to a victim who experiences loss of a sense of belonging to a community.
13. Some clerics will exert considerable coercive control over survivors to enforce secrecy and to restrain them from making the abuse public.
14. Complaints to the church hierarchy may often appear to be ignored.
15. In one case many survivors suspected that a prolific abuser was being protected by the security forces in exchange for information..
16. Two instances of inquiries into safeguarding were reported. Neither resulted in improvements that satisfied the survivors.
17. Reports of police investigations ranged from excellent to deeply unsatisfactory.
18. One survivor argued that the criminal justice system discriminated against victims.
19. There were reports of successful convictions and settlements.
20. A female survivor was very positive about a service that she received from Victim Support.

## A. Survivors' Stories

◆ **Content Warning** - The following section includes victim/survivor accounts of abuse. The language has not been censored.

### (i) Disclosure to Families

A man [P06] described how he eventually disclosed the abuse he was experiencing to his father. His father responded sensitively and effectively put an end to the abuse. The father's response caused the boy great relief.

*But at that time, the church was powerful. You know, the way it seemed to be was that everybody knew that I was being abused, but I could do nothing about it, right up to the time that I told my mother and father. My father asked me first, for the first time, is there anything about him you want to tell me? At this stage, he [the perpetrator] had been moving on to my brother. My dad asked me, do I have to worry about it? I said, daddy, don't be letting him touch him. Then that's when it all opened up, and that's when I really let it out of the bag, and the relief that I remember was the best feeling that I ever had in my whole life. Once I told my daddy, that was it finished. The abuse was finished, but the psychological stuff then continued then for about another two years.*

In some families the response of the father differs greatly with the mother's response.

*[P22] Well, my father wouldn't listen to anything bad being said about a priest. He just wouldn't listen. He didn't want to hear about it. He insisted that I went back to the school to continue my 'A' levels. I wouldn't do that. I just said no. But eventually he persuaded me to do it because there was no alternative. Otherwise, it was going to have to repeat the year to do my 'A' levels. We travelled the 30 miles in silence. My mother made a few phone calls, and she got me into other schools to complete my 'A' levels. So, she was able to organise things for me because of her persuasive manner on the phone. My father said he won't go back. 'I don't know what to do with him, you know. He's just refusing to go back there,' and my mother said to my father's friend, 'there's a lot more going on here than just refusing to go back to school.' 'Take a look at the side of his face,' where there was a big track mark from a cane. And the friend to his credit turned around and said to my father, if that priest had hit me with a cane across my face, he would not be walking this earth now, so how can you possibly ask him to go back there?' He said to my father, you have to listen to the boy. If there's something abusive going on here, and he's been hit across the face with a cane. He's not going back to that place, right?*

Disclosure was particularly difficult to parents who were deeply committed to an independent Christian church.

*[P24] We were sitting down to family supper, and it came up, his name came up in conversation. My father said something like, he's a good guy. He's a nice man, and I said, 'No, he's not,' and I lost my temper because I've got a very, very short fuse, which you know is undoubtedly a product of what I went through. I said "No, he assaulted me," I don't know what exactly I said, but he sexually abused, sexually assaulted me, or whatever. When I was 14 at the college." There was no discussion about it which is absolutely extraordinary.*

This account by another man demonstrates how disclosure of abuse to the police can be inhibited by the fear of others' reactions even when the victim is innocent.

*[P25] When I was 16. In the depths of this depression, I revealed to my father what had happened, and he immediately called my cousin's parents, and discovered that the same thing had happened to him. My father reported the matter to the senior workers there. I wanted to report it to the police, but my mother felt that she just couldn't cope with that. You know that there would be, you know, neighbours, and everyone would hear about it, so I was sort of hamstrung. But I did make an informal report to the police and tried to ensure that he was on the radar and hopefully, on an offenders list, and whatever.*

Some parents' immediate reaction is to blame the victim because they cannot bear to consider that a priest could abuse their son. So they refuse to believe it or do anything about it, leaving the child on his own to deal with the impact.

*[P26] I was getting hit in a way where I really did think that you could have died in that room. And when I try to say this, to be then told, What did you do to anger the priest? And then I remember just sort of capitulating and just thinking right, 'You're on your own, on this one.' I just said, "Hell is a fucking hotter place this day," and she's like, 'My God! How can you say that about the priest?' And I says, 'mummy, he was a kiddy fiddler'. We never talked about it again.*

*I think in her own life that she had been abused as a child. So, it was never anything that was going to be resolved. It was something that I did try to reach out to her one time to see, and I even asked her sister to try and help her to maybe deal with what was really darkening her mind. But we never got there. Some of the parents knew. I think a lot of the parents knew about it, but, you know, chose not to confront it.*

In this case, the mother was unable to talk about the abuse with her child even though she was horrified.

*[P35] I did tell my mother that I had been touched inappropriately by a priest. Again, I didn't tell her exactly what had happened, and she was absolutely horrified, shocked, and very upset about it. But you know it was beyond her experience. She didn't really know what to do or to say about it at that time. She was quite prudish, and it wasn't the sort of thing you would ever talk about in those days. She was a religious woman, and you know she looked up to the priest. The priest was someone of importance to her and someone who she trusted and would go to if she was in trouble or needed help. So, she was absolutely horrified at the whole thing.*

Fortunately, this survivor received support from his sister.

*[P29] My sister sent me an article about [the perpetrator] that was in one of the papers. She said to me, you were an altar boy? You used to be with him, you know. Did anything happen? And I broke down and told her. And she sent me the contacts of a solicitor.*

One man [P31] decided to tell his wife and daughter about his abuse as the perpetrator was to be brought to court.

*I thought, well, this isn't going to look good, that you weren't honest with your wife, and that actually I was starting to prolong the whole thing of when are you going to tell her. So, I just decided, we were driving one day and I thought you got to do this now. And I said, look, I have something I need to tell you. And she kind of looked at me and said, Okay. And I said, look, I said, when I was a wee boy, I was abused by that gay priest in school, and it went on for over a year. And I told her the bare basics. I didn't go into the details of it. And she just said, look, she says, that's okay, she says. That's no problem. Can I ask you, is that why you're going now to a new counsellor? Because she knew I'd been going to Care Call about the schools, and that. I said, yeah. And she says, well, that's good.*

*Now she was really supportive. When this was all happening, she was going through a lot herself, anxiety and whatever. And she said to me, look, she says I knew you were in pain, but I just wasn't in a place where I could help and I'm so sorry. And I said you don't have to apologise. So that was a relief there. And she has been nothing but supportive overall.*

*My daughter's...very wise and she's a very sensitive person and very empathetic. I'm very, very cross, and I can be very abrupt. I've been saying, look, I'm sorry I was angry earlier. It's not you. And she says I'm so sorry that happened to you. And obviously now*

*safeguarding has made young people more aware of this is happening, and also to maybe how to react if somebody makes a disclosure. So, she was very good.*

A Protestant woman [P10] described how the abuse was stopped.

*I didn't want to do it, but I just went with it. How did it stop? So, I went away on a family holiday for two weeks out of the country. Then I was off on study leave from school but my mum and dad were hosting a touring choir from Africa. I basically just tagged along with them for a couple of weeks. So, I think I naturally got to break away because of life circumstances.*

*Then it came into the summertime. He invited me and one of the older guys for a sleepover at his house. His wife was away for the weekend. We got a Chinese takeaway and watched a movie. He was in his room. I was in the spare room. I woke up the next morning and he'd already dropped the other guy to work. I was on my own in the house. That was probably the worst experience. In terms of sexually, but also physically. Then also a couple months later, a pregnancy scare. Because he only ever used a condom once. So, the only time he did, he handed me the condom. I opened it and gave it back to him, because I didn't know how to put a condom on. And it was on for about 30 seconds. I took one test and thankfully it was negative. I went on up the road to the shopping centre, bought another one just to be sure. It was positive. I thought right, that's it, my life's over. At this stage then, mum was aware, and I went home. She went out and bought four more tests, all negative.*

*All my friends were finishing school, and we ended up going on a holiday together. I was involved in the praise band so every Wednesday night we would have had praise band practice, and a friend said to me one night, are you all right? I went round to her house for lunch the next day. She had this way of just asking me good honest questions and I couldn't lie to her because she was my mate, and I trusted her, and she sensed something was up. I broke down in her office and sat in her study curled up in a ball for about six hours.*

*She encouraged to meet up with him and to stand up to him. Why don't you write down what you would say to him. I did that and put it in my pillowcase to try and hide them. My mum was trying to be nice and changed my bed while I was away and found the letter and she knew by the tone of it and by some of my wording. Like, I can't do this anymore. This has to stop. She knew something's not right here. She got his number and requested to meet him in a public place. She said I know what you've been doing with my daughter, and it stops now, and his reaction was please don't tell the Minister.*

*I have a good relationship with all my family. My support network is 100%. So, this one day the Minister was around for a pastoral visit and mum then disclosed what's been going on. He said, don't worry I'll handle it, I'll make sure he's struck off and I'll do all that needs to be done and mum's focus obviously and priority was me and looking after me because my health had started to decline.*

*My mum trusted the Minister. I've since found out that actually nothing was done. It was my friend who orchestrated for the Minister and him to come together. He said, I've been having an affair with her. He called it an affair. The Minister took him at his word. He lied and that gave the Minister the opportunity to say well you made a big mistake. Everybody makes mistakes. This isn't a big issue actually, go away and pray and ask for forgiveness - problem solved.*

The woman perceived this as just sweeping serious abuse of a child under the carpet.

## **(ii) People Outside the Family**

Young people may not appear to take abuse seriously and this could stem from limited understanding, emotional discomfort, fear of judgement, or an absence of appropriate language to speak out.

*[P34] I sort of told a couple of close mates. We were young lads in secondary school, and the lads would have sort of went "what?" you know. It wasn't a big deal about it, but it was still going on in my head, and I had totally got that the guys didn't show much interest in it. I was saying, "anything ever happened to you in school?" And the guys were like, "Naa".*

Sometimes distress stimulates a spontaneous disclosure with the right support.

*[P35] I was very upset by the incident. I can remember crying in a study period, probably a couple of days later, and a friend taking me to see the sister in charge that day, and I saw her and another nun on my own, but just told them that the priest had tried to touch me somewhere that he shouldn't have. That's all I said. I didn't tell them anything more.*

For another man, while the immediate response may not be that useful, a disclosure can motivate the individual to seek help.

*[P31] Then what happened was things got so bad in work because a new principal came in, and she was absolutely horrendous to work with. I was sitting in her office one day, and she started literally shouting at me that I wasn't doing my job. What the*

*hell was wrong? And I started crying, and she said to me, well, you've gone this far, you might as well tell me. She was the first person that I actually told I was abused by [the priest]. Now, at that stage there had been some stories in the papers, so people were aware of them. So, the first person I said that out loud to was no-one close to me and not one who really cared about me. So after that happened, I thought to myself, you're going to have to get help.*

This woman found that disclosing to friends or colleagues may create distance or closeness. So, it is a risk that a victim/survivor has to contend with.

*[P01] A close friend was quite shocked, I think. Some of them don't really know what to say to you. They just go, oh my God, I'm so sorry. They think that you were raped and all of that. And, you know, that didn't happen with me. Although I at times feel quite as traumatised. And I think they don't want to ask you because maybe they don't want to know.*

*[P01] This particular person was my line manager. I had to go to him with reasons why I was off sick, and I had to disclose that I was in the process of taking a case against the church for this abuse. And he actually declared to me that he was a victim of abuse. He had been a boarder in a school. Teachers abused him and he is actually a long-term friend of mine now. Others are uncomfortable with it, to be honest. They don't know what to say. Maybe it's my imagination, but I kind of think I've seen their minds ticking over and they're going that's why she does that or that's why she's like that.*

[P17] describes how even after disclosure, adults can become so focused on procedural checklists - mandatory reporting steps, documentation, protocol - that they lose sight of the child's lived reality. He describes how the system inadvertently retraumatised him and he 'pushed' to create his own safe boundaries:

*I told the school board. The school board was out with him. He [school board] asked me why I wasn't going to school. And I told him, 'Dunleavy beat the fuck out of me. He was asking me how my sex life was'. The school board didn't want to know. I don't know if he wrote it down or not. He just wanted to try and get us back to school. He kept coming and I started throwing stones at him to keep him away from my ma's door. So I did. And I told him, don't come fuckin' back. I just ended up taking the wrong path. Stealing. Sniffin' glue. Takin' drugs. Trying to just keep the black stuff out. And I ended up doing it for an awful long time.*

### **(iii) Disclosure to Faith Organisations**

Victims of clerical abuse often assume that the faith organisation will protect them and will hold perpetrators accountable for the harm that they have caused. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case.

The culture of silence and the taboo about talking about abuse seriously hinders survivors' recovery and access to justice. This survivor [P11] links this culture of silence to the power of the church.

*And then the next thing were the revelations on Spotlight. And of course, then the hierarchy was implicated. They stood by and watched while all this was going on. I think someone even tackled one of the teachers, saying you must have known this was going on, come on now. But the thing is, if they had acted, they would never have worked again, never mind in a Catholic school, probably anywhere. There is a sort of mafia code of silence.*

Some survivors reported that people, who are attached to the school and the church, are inclined to criticise, shun or blame victims who speak up about their abuse. It is as if this is easier than having to address the depravity of the abuse and the suffering that it has caused to so many people. This is an example from one man [P04].

*And it touches on another issue, and it's almost indifference. There is potentially a level of hostility. In addressing this, it's almost like you're besmirching or tarnishing the reputation of the institution. I suppose indirectly it's tied in with the church suppression of the truth of what happened. If the school is silent, that's giving tacit support. [At a reunion] There'll be no talk about it. It'll be the kind of elephant in the room. The academic and sporting success of an institution almost acts as a mask to the ugly, horrible reality of what's going on. But almost the sense of certain sectors that it is you, the survivor, brought this on yourself. But that feeds into the whole shame or internalizing or suppression of not wanting to have that exposed and highlighted.*

The same survivor reported that sadly, many victims are often met with victim blaming responses.

*[P04] I wasn't entirely happy with [the official church] announcement of the potential impecuniosity of the diocese and the need to sell off assets. Now, that's a kind of an almost a subtle form of victim blaming.*

After this young woman [P02] reported her abuse to the police, she was shunned.

*My best friend of maybe 15 years and his wife, who I was also really great friends with me stopped speaking to me. Their thoughts about me were that I was really selfish. I needed to think of myself, what about the church? I tried to speak to the pastor, and he cried and cried. He was that angry.*

*Obviously, they had found out because the police contacted the church. You know, to see what records they had. They were panicking about their reputation. The church I was trying at the time was a different one. A respected member of the church said, I don't want you here. So that was the end of me going to that church.*

*And then the current church did character references for him, which just shows how groomed they are. Even a conviction won't necessarily protect the people in that church. But what concerns me is you know he has been at that church for 12 years. There's no way he doesn't have victims there. They may not be under age. But they will still be vulnerable. And the chances of them coming forward and seeking help now, they have to be minimal, if any at all.*

*I was in the church up until, you know, I reported to police. I felt really safe under the first pastor. I'll have a panic attack if I go into church. Because I don't know what people are thinking of me. I don't feel safe. You know, where people saying things behind my back. I just can't do it.*

In this church the perpetrator [P02] is welcomed and supported while the victim is shunned and insulted.

*And I don't have a faith really anymore. I don't know what I believe. I struggled for years because I couldn't understand why I wasn't able to achieve such a close relationship with God that other people seem to have. Or that I had before the abuse began. And I think not being a part of a church having that experience, it's just destroyed any faith that I have had. And I have a daughter now. And I wouldn't take her into a church for love or money. Because these kinds of churches will not only allow space for people to be abused but would actively encourage them to shut up if they are.*

Something similar happened to a different survivor in the Catholic church.

*[P01] And it was nearly like after that happened, we were kind of blanked. Do you know what I mean? It was like, oh, these are people we don't really want to know. I expected them to come back or at least the parish priest to come back and say, look, this has been brought to my attention. I'm going to look into it one thing or another. I didn't hear anything.*

Another Protestant woman [P10] describes the reaction of the church to her attempts to address the injustice of the abuse.

*It's the shame that comes with that element of secrecy. You're innocent, and yet for some reason the victim gets blamed. When he comes back to church, he's welcomed with open arms, everyone's pleased to see him because he was such a big personality. He was well liked, he was loud, he was an extrovert, and everyone's, oh, great to see you, and the youth really miss you, and I'm hearing all this in the background, and I'm just convulsing inside. So unjust to me. He should be carrying the responsibility and accountability. He's been protected rather than punished. I'm having to live a lie. He's pandered to. He was close friends with the minister. So, I don't know if friendship got in the way there as well.*

She [P10] believes that the clergymen think that they are untouchable and can act with impunity. Like other survivors she wanted to meet those in authority to seek answers to her questions and to, perhaps, reclaim some personal power.

*I decided to leave the church. I requested to meet with the minister. Can I meet you for an hour and he wrote back an hour with three question marks as if an hour was too much of his time. I had notes. I was prepared to talk about my experience. "Please don't interrupt me while I'm speaking". I had questions to ask him. So, what's your understanding of what happened between X and me? Was the bishop informed? Yes, the bishop was informed. It's only down the line that I find out the bishop was informed of an apparently consensual sexual relationship between the youth leader and a member of the fellowship.*

*The police were never informed. Why were the police never involved? Because it wasn't reported as a crime. No, it wasn't seen as a crime. It wasn't even seen as a safeguarding issue. I went to the police and did my statement, sought legal advice. Basically, a criminal investigation didn't go too far because of the historical nature. Those cases are so hard to prove. They told me, like, there's no point in going civil here because it will only be emotional distress that you don't need any more of.*

*I can see why a solicitor would say, you know, civil action is going to be stressful, it's going to be expensive. But I still have a sense of injustice that has not been recognised. I need some acknowledgement. There's still blanks and they're still missing pieces. I'd already left the church, so the view then from the minister was, he washed his hands of me because I was no longer a member of the church.*

*So, then I wrote to the church requesting information on what documentation was kept. The reply - Dear Thank you for your letter I believe that we have done our best to let you have anything of relevance to the difficulties you had. We think it is too much for you to expect us to find the time to collate and give you the information referred to you in your letter. My colleagues and I, whether salaried or voluntary, have only so much time to devote to the parish and our parishioners and producing for you the details that you want will take a very considerable amount of time away from the work required on other parishioners' matters. I believe that the information available would not assist you in any case.*

*I felt like it was a shot in the face when I got that to be honest. I mean you're talking about an abuse that has had a terrible effect on you and they're saying it doesn't matter. We don't have the time. It's not a good look for a Christian organisation.*

*So, I went higher. The bishop is the minister's best friend. Is there going to be a conflict of interest? No, I'm able to keep my professional integrity. He was clearly taking his side. So, I had a few meetings with the Archbishop. He was lovely and I could not fault him. He and his safeguarding officer were fantastic and listened to my story. They did everything that they could to help me. Only their hands were tied because, yes, he's the Archbishop, but he doesn't have any power or control over this diocese.*

She [P10] did gain access to this email. It provides an insight into how an individual in authority in a church minimises a victims' experiences by questioning motive or implying that they are financially-driven. It also demonstrates how church leaders may see themselves as victims.

*[Email]: 'Thank you for your support during these last four years. I have had little or no sleep over the past four years due to this situation. This morning, I feel battered by this whole saga. I'm very exposed and vulnerable. As I have no way of defending myself without breaking pastoral confidentiality, which I have never done and have no wish to do now. I'm not sure anyone who has not been in this situation can understand the mental and emotional stress this has brought about in living with this shadow hanging over you. I have no understanding as to what the family hope to gain from this, other than a financial benefit, which I believe has been partly the motivation all along.'*

Her interactions with the church over the abuse had a shattering effect on her.

*[P10] It was my sanctuary. I've lost friendships. That sense of community, friendship, belonging, joy, love, you know, all those sort of Christian virtues and values have just been destroyed. I became a Christian at like 14, it's what I was and who I was and how I lived my life. The official line in the church is, I was having an affair. And then that becomes, it was a consensual sexual relationship to the bishop.*

*What I'm pushing for is an apology because at least that's them acknowledging and taking accountability and then assurances and periodic updates of safeguarding training and changes being put in place. I am pleased to say that since I've had my meetings with the bishop a new safeguarding website's been launched and changes have been put in place and now every three years anyone that's involved in leadership within this church have to undergo and update training regularly.*

Here is the account of another Protestant woman [P09] about what happened when she disclosed her abuse to the church.

*So, when I got saved and I was going to the church, he assigned an older woman to teach me Bible study. I was sort of struggling to believe that God was a loving caring father. So, she asked me, had I been abused, and I said yes. And she said, it's much too big for me to deal with. I'm going to have to ask the pastor, can we go for outside help? The pastor said, no, we'll deal with it in-house as they used to call it. So, I wasn't happy about that, but he sent for me in the next few weeks. It was just him and I in his front room.*

*He said, God has shown me what's wrong with you. He says, we'll be dealing with it by way of deliverance. But that can't happen until another pastor comes back. I just thank God it never happened because a friend of mine had to give him oral sex.*

*I went away and told the woman that I wasn't happy. She got this other boy, who wasn't long out of prison. He and his wife took me from Bible study one night and they kept me in a house till half four in the morning. They wouldn't let me go. They were delivering demons out of me and stuff. They were holding me down in the chair and he said, you have a spirit of Jezebel. This guy was absolutely crazy, and I had to get out of there. So, I started fighting like a pig to be honest with you. The more I fought, the more he said it was demons. I was riddled with demons. He had his hands all over my chest. I was really frightened so he said you know that's where he got the most reaction from the demons.*

*He said, look he says you're riddled with demons I can't hold you down. I used to lift weights in the prison. I'm fit. My wife's a policewoman and we can't hold you down. He says it's the demons. Eventually, the girls put their hands on my chest. I was more comfortable with that but still fighting them but eventually they let me go to the toilet.*

*I had the door locked and he's shouting you can't climb out that window. So, I shout, my mum will have the police out looking for me and I explain to them that my mum was very strict. So they agreed to let me go home at half four.*

*The woman must have got scared and she went and told the pastor, and he sent for me then. And we talked about what had happened and stuff and he says right I'll deal with that. So while he was there, I just said, look, I'm not happy with you and Sandy. Can I go for secular counselling with a woman, or if I can't go for that, can I go for Christian counselling? He said, no. But before any of that anyway he says, you'll have to ask God for forgiveness for your part in it.*

*I explained to him, I was a child. I had no part in it. He said, it takes two. I was just devastated. I said, no, look, there's no part of that I wanted. I can assure you it was excruciating. And he said, no, look, believe me if you don't even realize it, you know there was a part of you that wanted it. He quoted a verse in the Bible. Ask God to show you the parts that you need forgiveness for and then come back to me and we'll talk about it.*

*I felt that was much worse than the abuse and it's something I would never want anyone else to go through. Everything was a demon. You would have been taken to the back room to get the demons cast out of you. That's normal in our church. He's totally controlling. You know, he controlled every aspect of your life. There was church nearly every night of the week. You were expected to be there. He would ostracise your family members who were not saved. He tried to turn me against my sister. When we look back now, we could kick ourselves where we're so stupid. But we were brainwashed. There's no other word for it.*

The pastor exerted coercive control over the survivor and refused access to counselling or safeguarding. She was expected to ask for forgiveness and be punished. Yet she was a child and the victim.

Survivors of sexual abuse are sometimes misled by false or misleading legal documents, causing confusion about their rights and discouraging disclosure to statutory agencies. Many also remain silent due to feared repercussions for their family members adding to another layer of silence. This is what happened when the church suspected that a survivor [P22] was going to make a complaint over sexual abuse.

*That Easter weekend, [two priests] arrived at our house with a 'Deed of Secrecy', demanding that it be signed because they had been convinced, that after more than a week's absence, I definitely wasn't coming back to the College, and they wanted to ensure that I didn't speak out publicly against the College, the Catholic church or its priests. I now know, this is the standard treatment for people who might complain about sexual abuse. They called it a 'Deed of Secrecy,' that was to protect the*

*reputation of the Catholic Church in Ireland, as I said, not to talk to anybody, to protect the good reputation of the Church.*

(They made it clear that signing this was an act of solidarity with the Catholic Church and that on no account could people of the Protestant faith or the police find out about the abuse).

*My mother eventually signed it, because I was under 18, she was obliged to sign it by the Bishop and I was then also obliged to sign it. I thought that it was legal and believed that for decades until well after my father died. I promised my mother, I wouldn't talk about this subject until after my father had passed away. She didn't mind if I talked about it when she was alive, but unfortunately, she died first, and then I waited until my father died. I started making phone calls to go to see the Bishop.*

*They refused (to talk to me) until eventually the Bishop said to me, 'What is it in particular you want to talk to us about?' And I said, well, I signed the 'Deed of Secrecy' and I want you to take that Deed of Secrecy and to cancel it and tear it up because I don't want to talk to people until you tear it up, because I'm an honourable person.*

*And he said, 'Well, I have no knowledge of any secrecy agreements. We don't do anything like that, and if you did it with that Bishop, it would have been a personal thing. It's not got anything to do with the church. You know he's dead, and all of his effects have been destroyed, and we'll never find it.' This was to protect the church.*

*But it wasn't until I was then referred to the safeguarding people in the Diocese of and they in turn referred me to the Gardai and the police that I was informed that a "Deed of Secrecy" could never be imposed on anyone to cover up a crime. I was totally unaware of this. In any case, I was repeatedly refused an audience with the Bishop. This went on for 10 or more years.*

*I went to meet with a woman, Detective Garda and I told her I'd been sexually abused and raped by 5 different priests. She said to me. 'Why didn't you bring this to the attention of the authorities before now?' And I said, 'Well, I have this secrecy agreement, of which I don't have a copy, but I wanted to talk to them about cancelling that, so I could talk to professional people about the kind of trauma that this was causing to me all my life, and through me to my family, because it's affecting my wife and son, and so on. It's affecting my general family, because I'm pretty much a hermit and can't talk to them about this matter.*

*She said something to me which shocked me 'but you're talking about a criminal matter. You can't have a secrecy agreement. The Church can't bind you to a secrecy*

*agreement. If you're talking about a criminal matter, and this is a criminal matter, it's not a civil matter. You're approaching this as if this is a civil matter.'*

*She said, 'Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you, but they lied to you,' and I looked at her, and I thought, you know what? I'm not surprised, you know I've gone beyond the point of being surprised about anything that these bandits would do, and I then had a meeting with the people from safeguarding whom I wrote that background summary document for, because they said, 'We'll meet you, and we'll make a few notes about what you have to say. But in the meantime, if you could write down what happened to you, it would be most useful.'*

*When I was talking to this Garda detective, I became aware, through her, that one of the priests had been arrested. She said, well, there are things that we can do, and we can't do from a law enforcement perspective. What we can't do is seek justice from the dead and some of the people that you're telling me about are dead. So, all we can do is double check the truth because it is not unheard of that when we are informed by the Church, that some priest has died and been buried (to avoid prosecution and bad publicity) they have actually sent them off to work in South America.*

Furthermore, survivors are confronted with the profoundly distressing reality that other adults were aware of the abuse and either failed to intervene, actively concealed it, or facilitated the perpetrator's avoidance of accountability — a dynamic that compounds the trauma and sense of betrayal.

The following story concerning a much smaller independent Christian church bears some similarities to the story above concerning the Catholic church's preoccupation with secrecy and reputation.

*[P25] My father then reported the matter to the senior workers there. They convened a meeting. My father gave an account of what had happened to me. The head workers basically asked for the statement and tore it up. They got the guy's partner to get him across the border because I think they were afraid that he would be arrested. So, he was shipped across the border and proceeded to abuse more children down there. I actually met one of his victims who contacted me in a very strange way. I've never been in contact, via some sort of proxy email server, and then he eventually revealed who he was. And he was very, very angry to discover that he had been abused after it had been reported to the hierarchy in the organisation.*

*Another worker said to my father, you know, 'did he actually do anything?' You know, they just minimized it completely and viewed it as something. 'Oh, you know, if he said*

*he was sorry, and he prayed about it,' and whatever 'then that's in the past, we have to be forgiven.' There's that whole veil of secrecy especially around abuse.*

In spite of this obsession with secrecy, survivors are convinced that many people knew that abuse was taking place and chose to do nothing about it.

A man told this story.

*[P15] The priest came in, and he took me away, over to the washroom, and pulled my trousers down, and started masturbating me. Another priest walked in, while that was happening. It was obvious what was happening. I'm naked from the waist down, and he actually said, what's going on? Very quickly, he took the perpetrator out.*

No action was taken.

A female survivor [P18] reported abuse and no one responded.

*When I reflect on it now, knowing what I know now as an adult and all the therapy and work that I've done, I know looking back that there were people, adults, coming and going who knew what was happening. They might not have actually fully known what was happening, but they knew something was happening. And some of these people were in official capacity of state carers, and some informal like his neighbour and friends. And a friend of his who was in training to be a social worker, who used to visit him regularly and would be there when I was there. Now I think why did none of them ever question what was happening? So maybe someone may have at times been listening or hearing, but no one ever, to my knowledge, spoke up or queried it.*

*And so there was this feeling in me of like, there's just one more thing. If it's sorted out, everything's going to be fine. If I just go to confession, and if I just confess, then that's it. Grand. I'll get back on my feet. So, in the same church, there was another priest, a younger priest, like a real normal person that made God relatable. And I was at Mass one day and I just had this feeling inside me of like, he's someone that you could maybe talk to, that you could trust.*

*And I remember him being very upset about what I told him, and you know him saying that there's nothing that I needed to be sorry for, nothing I needed to confess. And he said because you have asked me for this confession if you like then you know we're just going to do like a general absolution thing, and we'll just say a hail Mary. And I said great because I kind of knew general absolution means that everything's done, the whole slate's wiped. I remember leaving there and walking down the lane and just*

*feeling so light. unburdened and thinking that that was it now. You know it's going be okay.*

*It wasn't until a few years later when I did report all of my abuse to the bishop, they became very focused on the idea that this priest may have broken the 'seal of confession' by using what he knew of my earlier abuse experience to initiate a relationship with me. My experience at that time was they (Bishop & Church leaders) were more concerned about this than anything else.*

An example from a survivor [P12] of a disclosure handled professionally and sensitively.

*I contacted the Church of Ireland safeguarding people and told my story to them, and they dealt with it and it was reported to the police in 2021. He had (the perpetrator) retired and he moved from Dublin to Bristol. Lambeth Palace were informed, and they made inquiries and discovered he had died in 1949. He hadn't married, but he'd had a son at some stage. I think the Church safeguarding people were very thorough, reported to the authorities and put the abuse on record. They offered me counselling. But you know so much in the past it wasn't really bothering me. Well, I think nowadays children are much more aware of that sort of thing, I just didn't know what was happening. When I reported it in 2021, they were willing to come and talk to me. That wouldn't have existed in those days, no sort of policies and procedures.*

## **Safeguarding**

This person engaged with other survivors in a group. The group then reviewed the safeguarding policy and procedures in its Diocese.

*[P30] So, we put together essentially an analysis of what we thought could be improved. What we found there was no specific Diocese safeguarding action plan. There were no specific safeguarding policies, despite the fact that the diocese was very much in the public eye across all of Ireland. There were no performance indicators to say, you know, this is where we are now, and this is what we would be in 18 months. For example, that we would train up to 50 priests this year, and another 25 the following year.*

*There were no reports of how things might be improving like a quarterly report or 6 monthly report, and there were no evaluations. The policy, essentially, was the national policy from Maynooth simply just brought into the diocese.*

The group passed on the report to the Church and participated in another review of safeguarding. But they were left feeling excluded from the process of improvement and very frustrated.

One survivor [P03] believes that there is insufficient independent monitoring and accountability in the safeguarding policy, procedures and practices in the independent churches.

*But if I take the Presbyterian Church, for example, there's many different people that a report has to go through and has to answer to and has to be made aware of. There's, you know, child protection policies.*

*My big bugbear with this is that independent churches often know obviously abuse happens in every church. The management committee, for example, is the pastor's wife. You know, so that's kind of that's the level of accountability and where these things go to and that's what makes me nervous, I suppose. They're okay with doing that. You know, I can understand from a Christian perspective. You know if that church that he was with now had said we'll welcome him, but we will put X, Y and Z in place to make sure people are safe. If they had said that, I would have been over the moon. Because, okay. You open your arms to everyone. But you're taking precautions. But that's not what they said. You know they might as well have said he's the best guy we've ever met. That's not possible that he did that.*

After a police investigation was completed the independent church decided to initiate an inquiry. A woman [P03] described what happened.

*They were holding an independent inquiry into the abuse. They sent a lady from England to meet us all individually in a hotel. She said things like, you know, I've never heard anything quite like it. I think, as far as I know, about 13 people gave evidence to that inquiry. She said, you know, I can already tell you, it's going to be a very, very damning report. She told us whenever the report was written, it'll be anonymized. You'll recognise your own part.*

*Then we were contacting them and saying, we haven't heard anything about the report. The head of safeguarding said, the reports been to my desk for a few weeks. We said to her, well, why have we not received it? We were told we would proofread it before the final draft. She said, you won't be seeing the report. And we said to her you know what do you mean? It was written about our lives. She just said to us, the report was written for us not you and you won't be seeing it.*

*So shortly after that the head of the whole church came from England to meet with us and read us an apology. It was like very sorry for things you may have been through and admitted that they had sacked him and that stripped him of his credentials. They had written to all the pastors in the country to tell him that he wasn't allowed to even open in prayer in their churches. But they had also made it clear that it was very strictly confidential, and it wasn't to be discussed. I had said to them, can I have a copy of the apology, and they were no, sorry, you can't.*

*They knew this was going on but still allowed it to happen. They just said, we wouldn't be touching on that. We had two solicitors coming down to speak to us. They were talking about compensation and I'm being honest, I don't want any of that. I want them to be stopped. I would have loved an open apology, just a real genuine apology that said we're sorry about what happened to my son. But, I said, you have sacked him under the table. You've done all this under the table. And they just said, well, we're sorry you feel that way.*

*He is still practicing. He's preaching in another independent church, I would see his name coming up sometimes. And since then, I found out that the pastor had been arrested in 2015, charged with four counts of sexual assault. He met a lady and assaulted her. Again, he got off with it. The PPS said that there wasn't enough evidence.*

#### **(iv) Institutional Inaction, Silence and Collusion**

Due to the civil conflict in Northern Ireland, many nationalists were reluctant to report abuse to the police due to mistrust of the authorities or fear of community backlash.

*[P37] I was asked by the psychologist when I went through counselling with her. She said, "Well, why didn't you report this to the police? Did you report this to them?" I said, "Look, I said, in the seventies when this was occurring, late sixties seventies, a young Catholic boy walking into an RUC station in Newry? His life expectancy would be very, very short".*

This reluctance to report crimes to the police during the civil conflict not only must have reduced disclosures of abuse to the criminal justice system but also led to reports to paramilitary organisations. This boy's [P06] father reported the abuse to the church and to a paramilitary organisation.

*My father went to the clergy, and at that time he probably went to [a local paramilitary organisation]. You know, that sort of was the done thing then. I think just a couple of weeks after that he was put out of town.*

In addition to the antagonism towards the police during the civil conflict amongst the Nationalist population, there was a specific priest who was suspected of working with the security forces as an informer. Consequently, many survivors believe that he was not investigated by the police even though he was a prolific abuser.

*[P15] So, there's that whole speculation. I'm not a believer in conspiracy theories at all. But this one could be plausible right. The speculation that he was cooperating with the authorities, keeping them apprised.*

A survivor [P23] describes the impact of the conflict on his family:

*we were outcast...you know we didn't tell the police things, but when things were brought to the police, and I know they were, nothing was done about it.*

He also shared:

*They (PSNI) had information that [the priest] was an informer against members of the [paramilitaries], and as a result, was in some sense, protected.*

## **(v) Criminal Justice System**

A female survivor [P03] reported her engagement with the police over her abuse.

*This police constable asked me to come into the station. I just want to take a few informal notes. They said there's new legislation about coercive control and I want to see if there's anything in that that we could work with. I went to the station. They said, we've no rooms. So, this is the store cupboard here where we store our leaflets. It was me and two other men sitting in a storeroom while he scribbled in the back of a scrap of paper. It wasn't easy sitting with two men in the storeroom. Well, it was probably about a week later. I was in the shopping centre. My phone rang and it was this police officer. He says, I am at your door with your statement. He said, I just need you to sign it for me. And I said, I haven't given a statement. He said, oh, don't worry about that. He says, I wrote one out for you to make it easier for you.*

*I come off the phone and I said to my sister, surely you need to be present even if he's writing it. But anyway, he'd obviously written it from a scrap of paper. When the statement come back it was full of inaccuracies and I sent it back three times and he kept bringing it back and pretended it had been fixed but it hadn't. He got really angry when he arrived one day in his tracksuit. It went to the PPS and they wrote back and said that they weren't going to pursue it because there was insufficient evidence. So even though I had given him examples of people who had been present when he said*

*a lot of these things. They had no interest whatsoever. So, I went through two years of hell basically for nothing.*

Our criminal justice process is adversarial. The prosecution attempts to provide evidence of guilt while the defence strives to challenge, undermine, and create doubt in relation to the prosecution's evidence. One consequence of this, is that a court can be a very hostile place for a victim of crime according to one man [P05].

*The perpetrator's sisters would have been, you know, you're a wee scumbag, piece of shit, fucking lying bastard, you're only here for money, you know. All this sort of shit they'd have to put up with, and then they're in the courtroom. It was hard to fucking take. But it wasn't me forgiving him, it was me forgiving, trying to forgive myself. Because to stop this self-destruct thing, you know? His family, all those lawyers, prison officers everybody was on his side. And then in court, you were being attacked for two weeks. That really gets me.*

*What I found hardest was basically the trial was horrendous. His defence team, basically they made me out to be a liar, saying that you were doing it for financial gain. And for you know, like you're basically making you out to be a liar.*

*This guy's actually been found guilty. He's been found guilty of all the charges. He's now serving thirty something years in jail because. He was, he was actually done again for another nine cases recently.*

Even though this man [P05] had been against cooperating with the police throughout the civil conflict, he was very positive about the female police officer who took on his case long after the peace agreement and the reform of the police.

*The police woman was absolutely with you the whole way through it, from start to finish, from the very first phone call to the very first statement to right up to the court case. She was absolutely amazing. She done everything for you. She made you feel comfortable. She talked you through it. She helped you, and she helped you go to court. She helped you to go into the box. She helped. She spoke to you, she cared for you, and she phoned you to make sure you were all right. I wouldn't be a fan of the police. But that lady was good at her job.*

Another female survivor [P02] found the contact from the police very supportive.

*I got another call from an officer, and I will never forget it. I don't want to come out to you because I'm in uniform and I have a marked car and I don't want to draw attention to you, but I want to make sure you're okay. And I just thought that was amazing. Especially because I was reporting someone that was also part of emergency services*

*And I thought, is this going to be a bit dodgy because I'm speaking to the police? Is there a comrade type situation? But the police were fantastic. They were amazing. The investigating officer then comes out to my house to take the statement; he has been the same investigating officer the whole way through. And there were times that were difficult. You know, I had to surrender my phone. I then had to be interviewed to explain things on my phone, things that I googled and searched. And none of it was easy. But he then sat me down and explained why he was doing x y and z what the purpose of it was. And that just made everything so much easier for me. If I understand, then I'm fine.*

And yet, for the same woman [P02] the court process was slow and difficult.

*His first court appearance, he didn't turn up. He was mentally unfit according to his solicitor. No evidence ever appeared. Another hearing was delayed and then they organized a preliminary inquiry. He requested for a preliminary investigation, which would mean that I would have to give evidence in the magistrates court. So, as I was preparing for that, he cancelled, and it went back to a preliminary inquiry. So delayed again. He was then arraigned in crown court a day after he should have been because his defence didn't turn up for the trial.*

*The trial was scheduled during Covid. My mother actually passed away then the week before it was supposed to happen, which was a big shock in my world. The defence made an application regarding conversations on Facebook between me and two of the witnesses. Those conversations didn't exist. And that's why the police hadn't declared them. But the defence were saying, well, we want proof from Facebook that they don't exist. There was no discussion about why the police can't provide this? Why can't I provide it and an expert look at it. There was nothing that had to come from Facebook. So that resulted in four years of delays.*

*I was very invested in the process. I was turning up to hearings. I wrote letters to the judge. But there had to be a point where I just had to step back because it was too much of me. And it wasn't getting anywhere. Then a different judge took responsibility for the case. She set a deadline on the information coming back. We got to the trial date and as I was waiting to give evidence, he then changed his plea. I was over the moon with it and they were very good at making sure I was happy and understood and was accepting of that. I was because you can't wipe away a guilty plea. You can't explain that away, you can't explain it. And he wrote a statement and the facts were correct.*

*What lessened his plea was that it was sexual touching rather than other sexual acts that happened. The PPS and the barrister were fantastic with me. They didn't breathe*

*without asking my permission first. They really included me in every decision. They made sure that I understood and was happy.*

*But on the other side, the system is horrendous. You know that that's allowed to happen. I wasn't expecting him to face any custodial time and that was lessened because he agreed to a rehabilitation order. I think it's like a sexual offenders course. 15 months on license after his eight months is served. He is on the sex offenders register for 10 years.*

Sometimes people's reaction to the survivor [P05] causes more pain than the actual abuse. One survivor described how victims are treated in the courts as discrimination. They are not acknowledged. Yet they are there, and the abuse happened to them. They are gaslighted.

You must be crazy, you've got it all wrong, you're not thinking straight, because you've been traumatized. They'll grab onto that, and say, you're at fault. It's just a very nasty thing. I mean, as if the abuse wasn't bad enough, it's the reaction of people that just piles it on.

So, I didn't know all this, but we weren't allowed back into the courtroom. So we had to watch it on TV, (Zoom) We were in a room with the detective, us two in this room, watching the TV of the verdict, getting read out. You know, 11 count guiltys. So that was it, and we bawled our eyes out, me and him.

He [P05] also experienced how powerful people manipulate the criminal justice process to buy time through delaying cases on technicalities.

*My court action started in 2016 and finished in 2022. I never got an apology or compensation. No one was challenged or held accountable. The abuses at the school were allowed to continue from 1964 to 1992. Why was it not challenged? People must have known. Nothing was done.*

A man fought successfully against the odds for the perpetrator's grave to be moved so that he would not have to pass it when visiting his mother's grave. He also wanted to meet the bishop.

*[P15] Well, this is only a few years ago. My solicitor got a letter from the bishop's solicitor, 'When we agreed to meet me, we didn't realise there was a posse coming'. That's what they said. 'They didn't realise there was a posse'. My daughter and two sons wanted to come to support their dad. They would allow one person to come with me. I don't know, did they think I was going to go in, lock the door and beat him up or something?*

*So, my ex-wife, who was very supportive through all this at the time, she came. When we sat down, I started to cry and we were in with him for an hour and 40 minutes and I cried the whole time. He actually got up and went and got me a box of tissues and I couldn't ask one single thing when I was there in front of him and I'm going to confront him. But my ex-wife had no notes, no nothing and she started to quote the stories and ask the questions. I couldn't speak.*

*I accepted the offer. There was an apology but no acceptance of liability. I'm not in it for the money. I wasn't in it for the money. I was in it for justice, more so for the victims and their families. The justice system needs to actually listen. The minute you walk in that door, and you make that complaint, you need proper equipped officers.*

A female survivor [P02] was very positive about the support that she received from Victim Support's Sexual Offences Legal Advisers (SOLAs), who are qualified lawyers who can offer legal advice and support to adult victims of a serious sexual offence.

*I did have kind of a support officer for a long time. But over the last couple of years, I have had the sexual offences legal advisor. They do an amazing job. She attended every hearing she possibly could. She did debriefs with me on a regular basis to make sure I understood everything. You know, kind of translating that legalese and what was allowed and what wasn't. That service would be far improved if they were allowed to represent the victim. Or if the victim had legal representation. But no one was speaking on my behalf because I'm a witness.*

*You know, and the judge during sentence and said about making sure the victim was a major part of the process and she's the only one that has I've seen done that and she did. But, you know, before that she said they've forgotten about you. You know like the defendant has my medical records since I was 14. You know, he has my phone records. He has all my counselling records. He has everything I've ever said to the police. But I'm not allowed to give my opinion.*

[P17] described how he volunteered to be a witness against a perpetrator and tell his story when he heard through his son that the perpetrator was arrested. He wanted the truth to be known: *He was abusing people.*

## **B. What Should Be Done?**

1. The status of victims needs to be enhanced in society, in the culture of faith organisations and in the criminal justice system. The shaming and blaming of victims needs to be challenged. They should not be treated as objects of sympathy, but rather as citizens who have been treated unjustly and who should have an influential voice. Organisations should recognise that time can be an exercise of power over victims and

can heighten their trauma. They should see engagement with victims both as an exercise in justice and compassion and as a means of improving the ethics of their work.

2. Efforts should be made to raise the awareness of the wider community so that people understand the impact of sexual abuse, how to create a safer society for all children, how to intervene and recognise risks and boundary crossing earlier.
3. People need to learn to talk about clerical abuse with victims without embarrassment and with sensitivity to trauma.
4. Safeguarding procedures should be transparent, and while confidentiality should be respected, no attempts should be made to enforce secrecy.
5. There should be an independent safeguarding agency where survivors, who are not satisfied with the faith organisation's response to their complaint, can seek a review of the process and decision-making.

## 6. Victims and Survivors Needs and Expectations

### What have the survivors told us about healing and justice?

It is more important for healing to be authentic and real than perfect. It may start with coming to terms with the reality of what happened and integrating it into the narrative of your life where shame loses its grip and no longer defines your worth or choices. This offers space for acceptance and taking pleasure in small, simple experiences. It is taking back the power and control over your life that were taken from you so cruelly by the abuse.

Justice is less about retribution than acknowledgement of what happened and how it was allowed to happen. For several survivors, justice is about accountability for not protecting children. They long for the injustice that they have endured to be undone through transparency and truth. Compensation is about paying for the wrongs that churches committed and recognising the impact that the abuse has had on victims'/survivors' life trajectories. Some (but not all) do want a personal apology for what happened.

### A. Survivors' Stories

◆ **Content Warning - The following section includes victim/survivor accounts of abuse. The language has not been censored.**

In this chapter we will focus on what survivors told us about two areas of need arising from their experience of clerical child abuse: healing and justice.

#### (i) Healing

A Protestant man [P07] talks about how the impact of the abuse that he suffered was resolved.

*The abuser is still alive. I have spoken to him and probably resolved some stuff with him. She (his mother) resolved quite a lot of stuff with him as well before she died. I think he came back looking for forgiveness. He probably got it because she was very, very into the church and Christian but not Presbyterian church at all or Church of Ireland. She went to Fellowship Church then so she was out of that and she couldn't go to a proper, traditional church.*

*Every time I actually see him (stepfather), I do turn into that child again, which is strange. Quite submissive and quiet. He just says his dad was bad to him. I didn't get*

*much resolution from him, but I think I felt braver by actually going to see him and stuff.*

*She was on to me as well to try and forgive and keep in contact because technically he was weirdly part of my life for a lot of time. And he did say he would look out for us. But he only looks after himself.*

*He's very old now and I know that doesn't change a thing. If I thought that there was a threat, the first thing I would do is phone the police. There's no threat at all from him so there's no need. He's never been in that position of power ever again. He's not been in an organisation. I don't see any point in naming him now.*

Several survivors have spoken about how important it was for them to meet the perpetrator or the church people who appeared to protect the perpetrator. It seemed that they felt stronger or more powerful for having done this. This man [P07] did not find the compensation scheme healing.

*There was a Victim Support contact to say there was a new scheme for if you'd ever been abused to go for compensation. So, I went ahead with the compensation thing, but I didn't really want to. Victim Support were very much pushy on that. This was a new scheme. Long story short, the compensation agency refused, said no, then I had to go to appeal. So I sat in front of three people, and I had to explain it. They basically on appeal said no, you put yourself forward for the abuse. They concluded that it was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that I was a non-consenting victim of sexual offense.*

*Well, the way they worded it was, you more or less called round to his place, and it was your choice. But I was 15. It was still your choice. You see, I think what failed me was my own fear. So that was 1990. So that panel in that building triggers me every time I drive by that building. They said, nobody believed in grooming at that point. It was a very new concept.*

The compensation panel blamed a 15-year-old for choosing to be abused by a mature man and in doing so, probably, hindered his healing.

For one female survivor [P03], counselling was serving to inform the church of any threat to its reputation.

*I eventually agreed to see a counsellor and she said, before you come, she said, I have to tell you, my husband is a pastor. I was horrified, absolutely horrified. And I said, no, no, definitely not. She started to say, look, I promise you that I'm not allowed to tell*

*him anything and he'll never know anything that has happened. And she said to me, there's one last thing I said, what is it and she said, my office is actually in a Church.*

*But she said all the right things she said things like you know if you come to the back door, you don't even have to see the actual church. I can take you in the back door and up a wee corridor. You know and you won't even have to see the church itself and eventually I agreed to it and I had counselling with her for a bit. But then her husband started to say things to me that made me realise that he knew all about me. So, the trust sort of started to go.*

*And then she arranged for me to meet the Superintendent of the church. He needs to know that these things go much further than what he knows. And we had a meeting with him and he was lovely. He said all the right things and convinced me that he felt so desperately bad for me. He walked out that night and he never spoke a word to me after that. He sent word through her husband that I'm not allowed to talk to the police. I went through two years of hell. I just see it as a sham from start to finish.*

So, both the counselling and the meeting with the Superintendent were meaningless to her recovery due a lack of authenticity.

In this case the counselling had a positive effect.

*[P31] It has been all about taking back control. I think I'm coping with it better. Toward Healing has been vital, you know. The counsellor is very, very good, and is on hand at any time, even if I'm feeling anxious, or whatever I just say to her, I feel anxious. And you know one of the things she's got me to work on is enjoying and celebrating things. Well, as I say, I took my daughter to an audition last week, and I just worked against, you know, feeling anxious about where's the Tubes and whatever? And just, there was one stage I was sitting on a summer seat, and I just thought, why don't you just sit here and enjoy sitting here for 5 min. And really did enjoy that. So, in spite of what they've done to me, I'm learning to live this period of my life well and happy.*

For this survivor [P05] the structure and stability that a programme like Alcoholics Anonymous supports their recovery from the trauma of abuse.

*I've been 20 years off drink this day next week. AA is the only way. But I mean, you need a programme, you need a structure. Most alcoholics wouldn't have any structure or any stability.*

This man [P15] made full use of the available counselling services and has benefited from them.

*Nexus was very helpful and I actually was triggered last year again and got back with Nexus for 12 sessions which I just needed. I'm a lot stronger now but it sort of put me back on course again.*

When involved in the legal process, he recalls:

*I think there was a wee bit of guilt as well. I'm probably the oldest, and maybe if I had spoke out when I was 14, 15, 16, or 17, or even 20, [others] wouldn't have been abused. Then they [Nexus] said, that's not your guilt, you know, that's not yours to carry. But there was a wee bit of that.*

*And when that was finished, I went to a thing called Towards Healing... It's a similar counselling service to Nexus, but it's paid for by the Catholic Church. Now, that's all the connection there is. There's no priests or anything involved... When my time with Nexus ran out, they actually put me in touch with Towards Healing. I ended up with a great counsellor [based in the North]... They were brilliant and again I took part in a forum with them and we met once a month for a full year...*

He continues:

*I had to do police interviews and stuff, you know, in relation to that. At the time she came with me and all. She was absolutely brilliant, you know, so I couldn't speak highly enough of the support.*

*They were so sympathetic, and you were believed instantly. There was just a warmth and a kindness and just wee nuggets of advice and what to do. There was one time in relation to 'Towards Healing'. I was badly triggered by a thing that was on TV that just hit me out of the blue and I was in bits. And my marriage had broken down as a result of all of this. So I was in a flat on my own and I was really struggling and I was feeling suicidal. Now I did attempt suicide once after I first divulged what had happened to me. I found it very difficult to cope. But this clerical abuse thing came on, and this is just an example of the counsellors, and I just didn't know where to turn, and I felt like I couldn't breathe.*

*And I rang. I had been down at one of the meetings in Dublin, and I rang, and I got speaking to one of the counsellors who was doing the group thing, so I knew the face, it wasn't that I couldn't picture who I was talking to. And I told her what was happening to me, and she could obviously hear it in my voice, and this is the kind of practical help. So, I was on my own, she knew I was really in a bad way, and she said right, get outside. I said, 'no, but it's raining'. 'all the better, get outside', and she says, before, and so she's talking me through from Dublin, on the phone. Take your socks and shoes off. Get out. Can you feel the wet on your ground? And you know that thing that they do about five things you can hear, five things you can see, and all of that. I was aware of the rain hitting me, but also she told me to take my socks and shoes off, so I could actually, you*

*know, feel it from the feet, and it just, you talk about the grounding, you know, you were literally grounding, because you were in your bare feet, and she talked, and talked about the group, and about different things we were doing, and she literally talked me back from a cliff face, you know, and, And then I went back in and I was to make myself a cup of coffee. Now she didn't hang up, she was there while "and I want to hear the thing, you know, pouring in" and, you know. And she rang me back twice that evening.*

*Do you see the group that I was with in the client forum and the group in Dublin? The nuggets that you get from them; you see when you sit in a group and they did that thing where, you know, one of the counsellors had this lovely Native American piece of carved wood and then if you wanted to speak you, you know, took it.*

*They were brilliant because these were people that had been through a similar thing as yourself. Both male and female and they would tell you 'oh do you see when I was triggered, I would do this or I would do that' and, even in the group that you know sometimes in those counselling sessions where you're with your peers, you're just hearing what they're saying. But you see maybe a couple of weeks down the line and something's come on you, and 'oh big John said do this or do that', you know, and it's so helpful.*

*I don't seem to be able to do so well in relationships. And the idea of counselling kind of came around then. And I went to a counsellor at Relate NI. So, I had six sessions at that time. Very powerful sessions for where I was at then. She was a lovely woman. It was around family stuff and a good experience. I know what I want to do now and that started me on my journey of training to become a counsellor.*

This woman [P01] worked on addressing her shame and to understand that a 10 year old cannot be responsible for an abusive relationship.

*I was able to go for treatment with Wave and she was actually very good. I had about six or seven maybe even more sessions with her. And I have come to terms with some of the stuff that's happening with me. To be able to live a bit better with myself in terms of my relationship with my husband and stuff like that.*

*I think the big positive is that you realise that, as I said to you, could I have prevented it by not going back? Why did I keep going back? And the one thing that I learned was you were a 10 year old child. How could they be in any position to make a decision as to what was right and wrong. Somebody took advantage of you. You were abused. And it's about the recognition of that. I still struggle with the things around the church and my beliefs and all of that. They've given me the tools in my dark days to be able to have the rationale to say, darling, why are you beating yourself up over this? This was not your fault. You were 10 years of age. You know this person took advantage of you. You know, all those things like, hearing about the facts of life should have come from your*

*parents. Your first kiss should have been a lovely experience. Your first sexual experience should have been a lovely experience. And I know in reality that doesn't always happen for everybody. But at the end of the day, it should not be by a priest.*

This is a statement of someone who has worked hard on healing and has come to a contented acceptance of what happened so that he can look forward to the future.

*[P31] I think I have about 4 or 5 years left in teaching, but I'm looking beyond that to things that maybe I can do after it. I hope for a fulfilled life. But the real fulfilled life for me will be my daughter. You know they have damaged me beyond repair. So, I look to her, and she's my joy. Suppose somewhere along the way all parents will say, well, it's your children that you know you enjoy. Not exactly. I know I helped a lot of people. I met a lot of wonderful people along the way, and had a lot of very, very happy memories for me. But so it's been important for me to be able to say those things and thank you very much. Where I go from this, I don't know but we'll go somewhere.*

Another survivor [P33] had achieved an element of acceptance of his psychological scars.

*I wear them well with pride, and you know, I just think well, fuck, I've got scars. So what? Body keeps the score. I may be an emotional screw up, and then maybe just this ball of insanity, but eventually the logic will come out. It just takes us a wee bit longer, because we're a bit broken, and we're kind of kept together with string and silly putty and tape, you know, and a lot of meditation, and sometimes other substances. But, you know, whatever gets you through. It's the wasted potential. You mourn what I could have been. I don't have a time machine. I can't go back.*

*It's just little wins that I get every day, this is our house, we bought it, you know. It's historical, it's got walls which are nearly 2 feet thick, which is great in the winter. You know it's near the sea. I can hear the sea and the waves in the morning, when I walk the dogs every morning, and I can just listen to the waves crashing on the rocks. That for me is great wins. Are the dogs healthy? I make their food from scratch. Did they crap outside instead of crapping on one of the mats because they don't like the rain? Rain traumatizes them. So I understand that. I just take daily wins. If I finish a painting, brilliant. I've got the structures built, you know, the walls are built.*

For another survivor, a sense of becoming stronger and having good friends are a foundation for contentment.

*[P15] I just feel myself getting stronger and stronger. I have some good friends, male friends here who go out walking every day. When I took the heart attack I was walking six miles every day and myself and another man who lives up the road here were cycling. I feel stronger and I do feel very lucky.*

This woman [P18] felt pride in adversity overcome and her achievements.

*I have since done more intensive therapy. And I think now I'm definitely much more at the point where I feel really okay within me here. And then, you know, when I get upset it's because the whole thing was just steeped in tremendous loss. And I don't try and look back too much. And I think the sadness is that actually I am okay, but I haven't been successful in relationships. And I never, I haven't met anyone. I never had children and that was part of the reason why I went back into therapy the past few years because that has been really painful, you know.*

*And if you go out there to my office then you'll see certificates and achievements and I know part of my experience has made me who I am and the therapist that I am but there's been a huge cost personally and on the outside people look at me and think, 'oh good she's doing great, she's done a great job, beautiful home' and all that which I'm so very grateful for.*

*I'm much more okay now in terms of boundaries and that's part of the problem is that I maybe am so okay and have no problem with saying to somebody. You know, don't treat or speak to me that way and, actually, way on you go.*

This man felt that he was getting his life back into control.

*[P19] You know why I went inside to get help with drugs, and I've come out, and I've learned so much as a person. I was labelled in my family as the idiot. That I hadn't grown up. I hadn't matured but I've learned so much over the years. Even though it was only three weeks of rehabilitation. It helped me a great deal. Made me into a better person, an understanding person. But at the same time, I do understand my son, I need to give him space. And I have given him space. But all I said as a father was whatever issues are going on, you know, you need to deal with them, I'd be with you 110 percent.*

By writing down the narrative of abuse this individual accepts that it is an integral part of her life and not something to be denied. This aids recovery.

*[P35] This is the first time I have written down what happened to me; first time I've told anybody exactly what happened to me and in writing it down it's actually become clear to me that he was grooming us quite systematically by the first meeting in a group. Then individually introducing physical contact, taking us out of the convent in the group, and then making a choice and taking me out on my own. I feel better about having written it down, because I think that it clarifies things in my mind. And by writing it down, and by seeing the sort of not timeline. But the sort of the way he's approached it, as I say, very systematically, I think. You know I never appreciated that before. You know, it's horrible to think someone would do that, but I can see what, how he did things and why he did it, which is just extraordinary, really. Why, anyone would do that I don't know.*

*I went to visit my mother in Northern Ireland, and she brought the subject up, and she had seen him on television, and she said to me, 'Oh, that priest who you know, who was involved in your incident'. And I thought, okay, because we'd not spoken about it ever, you know. That was the first time she'd mentioned it.*

Sometimes a survivor [P09] can find healing through an indirect route. Her counselling did not address the abuse. Yet it did relieve her of the shame that the abuse caused.

*Well, I feel that it's ruined my life completely. It wasn't until 2017 that I got some release from it. But I have since found out that the way he treated me with the child abuse he'd done with others as well.*

*After her mother died. I went for grief counselling in 2017. And it came out then and I was able to deal with it. But up until then I was just a mess. It was fantastic. Changed my life completely. Well, it was grief counselling so it's kind of took a strange turn that I was able to transfer my guilt and shame on to my mum. It alleviated my grief at the same time. Because, you know, I felt that she didn't protect me back then. I know now it wasn't my fault. But because of the church I just carried that with me my whole life. I needed an adult, believe it or not, to say to me, it wasn't your fault.*

Another survivor [P17] spoke of seeing many mental health counsellors to help him with adult life experiences until one asked him to describe his childhood and school days, and how all of the abuse came flooding back. He also describes his positive experience with Wave where he found a connection with a counsellor:

*I'll phone [the counsellor] today and tell her I've done all this here so [the counsellor] will probably say to me "you come up and see me and have a wee cup of tea and a chat". She listens, you know, she listens to you. She's very good with people.*

[P23] tells of the support that he receives professionally which has been a key part of his personal and professional journey.

*...it helps me understand myself.*

*So I'm one of the lucky ones, really, in that regard that I've got access to support, and I know through my own professional experience, how to access support.*

## (ii) Justice Needs

A woman [P02] remembers that on her birthday he contacted her again. The texts started again, and they met once. But her guilt led her to make another disclosure to the new pastors.

*To me, I thought I was having an affair with a married man. Those pastors' daughter was born outside of marriage. They had a relationship before they were married. So, I thought she would be the best person to speak to because I thought she might understand me a bit more. She made it very clear that it was abuse, not an affair. I had no responsibility whatsoever. She asked if she could bring in the pastor, her husband. I said, that was fine. They made it very clear to me that I had done nothing wrong. They would support me in any way that I wanted. And what did I want to do? It took a little while for it to sink in that it was abuse. Well, I told my mother when we were on holidays. And she told my dad, because I didn't want to tell my dad.*

This response provided validation of her story and vindication of any responsibility for the abusive relationship. These are so important in a survivor's struggle for acknowledgement and to her recovery.

The perpetrator met her father and promised not to contact her or work with young people again. The pastors then reluctantly agreed that she could have a meeting with the perpetrator. However, there was no preparation or facilitation provided for this meeting. It did not prove satisfactory to the survivor.

*[P02] I didn't have any contact with him for a long time. I couldn't understand for a long time why I couldn't just let it go. Why I couldn't just forget about it. It was a relationship, let it go. And when [in my early 20s], I was very depressed, really struggling mentally and suicidal. I'm not sure how we got to this conversation about getting my power back from him. I ended up meeting him under the supervision of my pastors. They hated the idea. So, they gave me six minutes to talk to him. And she timed it to the second. Just to tell him that I knew it was abuse and that I didn't forgive him, and I didn't need to feel sorry for him. He had done this to me. It made no difference to anything. It was an awful idea. But he took it, and he said that it was his daughter's first birthday. His daughter, I think, was very premature and he said that it should have been the happiest day of his life but he was destroyed over what he had done to me.*

*He told me what he thought I wanted to hear. I will never get from him the truth about why he did what he did. Why was it me? All that happened. Because he maybe doesn't even know it. But for me, it was just more manipulation. He's still just out for himself. Now, if I saw evidence of him actually genuinely being sorry It might be ok, but he's not. He's just really out for himself.*

The young woman had a strong wish to meet the man who abused her and to resolve issues in her relationship with him so that she could recover from its impact on her mental health and reclaim her personal power. The meeting, for the young woman, was not successful. For some survivors, the desire to meet their perpetrator can arise from the need for answers,

recognition of the harm caused or an opportunity to reclaim power and agency. However, while such meetings may provide an opportunity for justice, healing, or truth-telling, the experience of restorative justice demonstrates that they must be carefully planned and professionally facilitated to ensure the survivor's safety and well-being, and prevent the risk of further psychological harm. He continued to contact her on social media.

*[P02] But I just found myself in a really dark place again. So, I eventually cut off all contact and asked him not to contact me again. I needed to move on. And after talking to my doctor, I went to Nexus for counselling. And that was life changing for me. She really helped me understand the abuse. And the effects that it had on me. But also, the manipulative behaviour.*

He was continuing to cause her distress until counselling enabled her to see the abusive nature of the relationship and how he had manipulated and controlled her.

*[P02] I had found out during that summer that he was in a leadership position within another independent Church. So, he was in a prime position to do that again, and also, like I said, he had manipulated a lot of other vulnerable women. Now, they were of age, so it wasn't illegal, but it was still doing damage. So that's when I reported it to the police. Six years later, we eventually got to sentencing and he was convicted and imprisoned.*

She was motivated to report the abuse to the police by the knowledge that he had not changed and had put himself in a position to abuse more vulnerable women.

*[P02] I don't know what justice means in my case. I went through the court process with the motivation for other people. Because I went through an awful time, but I had great support. He's the type of person to target people who don't have that kind of support. So, what would happen to someone if they didn't? And that motivation kept me going for six years. If I had done it for my own justice and for my own healing, I would never have made it.*

*I've never felt angry at him. And I still don't. My challenge has been feeling sorry for him. So I never wanted him to be punished. That's what it felt like. I don't desire to punish him, but he's so out of control he needs to be punished. I didn't seek revenge. I just need everyone to know what he did and I needed him to be stopped.*

*But he had messed about that much. I think the judge had had enough of that. I think they were trying to make me cave. You know, if I had bowed out, that was the end of it. Turns out I'm more stubborn. There were times where I felt really sorry for him. And didn't want him to suffer, but I suppose the rational brain knew that I had to protect*

*other people. Because I do know of about 10 other women at the same time as me in the church that I was at. I know he was thrown out of a church before.*

This man [P06] described his search for justice through a direct meeting with the abuser in which he was in control.

*I went to Nexus for 26 sessions, and then another 26 sessions. Part of the counselling was to go back and meet your abuser and give the hurt back to your abuser that hurt you. I got his address from his niece. I went to the address. I knocked at the door. No one came to the door.*

*So, I got into the car and went to the places that we went whenever we were [away from home]. I went down looking for him, and jeez, there he was, standing there. And that was the place where kids would hang out. He said, what are you doing down here? I said, I'm down to see you. He got anxious. I said, I'm looking for a word with you outside. Just this power comes to me that I just don't know where it's coming from. I said, I'm looking to see you outside. He said, I'll be out.*

*I said, you're a paedophile bastard. I said, the Catholic Church has moved you from pillar to post. I said, you've abused more people. I said, I want you to hand yourself into the police station. And he said, they kneecapped me. I said, I know I got you kneecapped. He said, but I'm cured now, I'm cured. I said, you're still a paedophile bastard. And the church is covering you. And I want you to fucking hand yourself in. And I said, I'm away now.*

*Just feeling ecstatic, that I spoke to him, the way I spoke to him, I took the power. I drove up, and I saw the blue lights and I seen the ambulance there. I just slowed down and looked out, there he was, lying on the floor, heart attack. I stopped, the fear of God was on me, because somebody could accuse me. He died. I was out taxiing a couple of days after, and all the mourners were coming out from the cemetery, you know, after burial. He admitted to abusing over 40 children over the years. He abused about three or four or five people after me so he did. I hold a terrible guilt that I allowed them people to be abused.*

He did not feel guilty about the abuser's death. But he did have survivor's guilt because he did not disclose earlier and saved those who were abused after him.

*[P06] I went to the bishop and told him the same story as I told you. He said what do you want me to do? I said I want you to know about this paedophile ring. I offered to help him with my knowledge to safeguard others. He gave me a good hearing. So, you're allowed to talk about this now. So many grew up thinking we're not allowed to*

*talk about it.*

To this man [P06] it always seemed that the victim, who was a child, had to take responsibility for the abuse.

For [P23], when asked that justice might look like for you, he answered:

*I mean to be heard and to be listened to is the main thing. To have an understanding and to be able to point to.....some of the opportunities that I've missed; some of the ways in which I felt misunderstood...it helps me understand myself. And that's certainly been in terms of moving on from flashbacks to panic attacks, and through that whole process, there is some kind of...reconciliation.*

This man is still struggling to know what justice means. But he is not seeking punishment. He seeks education.

*[P22] I wouldn't know what justice looks like. They're all dead. You know, if there is a God they'll get their justice. But is there justice for the people who ignored what was going on here? You know, if you know that people are being abused and you sit idly by, or you look the other way. I couldn't do that, you know. The only satisfaction you can get is not putting a priest in prison, it's about educating the priest. It's about not punishing the Church. It's about educating the Church and getting them, a bit like truth and reconciliation in South Africa, getting them to say, it has happened. We didn't know about it. We didn't know it was as bad as it was. We have taken measures now to try and identify the people we're putting in positions where they are in daily contact with vulnerable children.*

Another survivor knows that retribution may be necessary, but it is not justice.

*[P26] I never really think about justice. Am I glad he went to prison? I am. Has it done me any good. I don't know. You see, all these ones on TV and there's serious stuff done to them, you know they've had family members murdered, and you know they get the perpetrator, and they go to prison and say, 'Oh, you know there's a great sense of justice.' It doesn't really do much. It doesn't really do a whole lot for me. In terms of justice, or wanting to get something back. I'm not looking for retribution or compensation. That was enough, his day in court and prison.*

Some survivors trust in karma, a day of reckoning. Others just want an honest acknowledgement of what happened, and that the hierarchy knew it was happening but not an apology. For several survivors' justice is more about accountability for not protecting children than punishment. Transparency and truth rather than secrecy and cover-up is

important to survivors. Survivors' motivations for seeking compensation varies from punishing the church to providing for loved ones.

*[P18] A settlement out of court and I got a lump sum of money. It didn't change anything. Didn't take anything away. It didn't magically make life any different.*

Some do want an apology for what happened to them. Others believe that an apology would not be genuine.

## 7. What Should Be Done to Support Survivors in The Future

### A. General Principles

Ultimately, these oral histories are urging faith organisations, policy makers, safeguarding professionals, parents and carers to listen to survivors and learn from the wisdom of lived experience.

- To understand the process of abuse from grooming through to serious abuse which leaves people traumatised for years and to work out how to spot the early indicators and prevent it.
- To understand what inhibits children and others from reporting their concerns to the authorities and to work out how to support victims to resist abuse and how whistleblowers can be encouraged and protected.
- To understand why churches choose to protect themselves rather than children and how to prevent them from using their power to cover up abuse.

### B. Specific Recommendations

1. Greater cooperation between the police and garda over cases of abuse.

The island of Ireland has two jurisdictions. However, most churches, including the Protestant ones, are governed and organised on an all-Ireland basis. This means that clerical abuse does not respect national borders. [P07]

2. Involve victim participation and representation in the criminal justice process.

*[P07] So, taking somebody out of the process actually is worse. Because then, obviously I forgot all about it, I didn't even know the trial was on, I didn't even know my mum was going to this, and then she came home and she just let me know, you're going to see it in the papers, he's got two years in prison. And you've maybe thought about this a lot, or maybe you haven't, or you don't know how to answer, whatever comes up for you. Now in your life at the moment, what would be the best help for you in your life at the minute.*

*[P02] I did have a kind of a support officer for a long time. But over the last couple of years, I have had the sexual offences legal advisor. They do an amazing job. She attended every hearing she possibly could. She did debriefs with me on a regular basis to make sure I understood everything. You know, kind of translating that legalese and what was allowed and what wasn't. That service would be far more improved if they were allowed*

*to represent the victim. Or if the victim had legal representation. But no one was speaking on my behalf because I'm a witness.*

3. More rigorous vetting of people who will be working with children.

*[P37] I would like to have thought that today there would be more rigorous checks to check the likelihood of a paedophile slipping into the likes of the priesthood.*

4. Youth leaders should not work on their own so that they can be with a child without another adult present.

Recommended by *[P08]* - a cleric or youth worker spending a lot of time with one child on their own should be viewed as a potential risk.

5. Smaller congregations should ensure that the safeguarding officer is completely independent and not related by family or close friendship to those in authority.

*[P03] I think schools and churches are meant to have policies on safeguarding because of all this. They're supposed to follow procedures, but that doesn't mean they follow them. I know it happened to me.*

*[P02] They need someone independent in charge of their safeguarding. It cannot be, within the family.*

*[P12] Definitely stop them from doing their own safeguarding. Being able to brush it under the carpet. That shouldn't be allowed. Should be something independent. Because everything was done in-house.*

6. There should be a way of managing risks to children and vulnerable adults among the members of the congregation.

*[P13] When ex-prisoners are welcomed into the church, there has to be a protective element for the sake of the rest of the congregation - vulnerable people, both adults and children and women.*

7. When a victim is referred to counselling, the counsellors should not be members of the congregation.

*[P02] Often, churches will send you to counsellors that they trust, a Christian counsellor. They can be Christian, but they shouldn't have a direct line to the church and rely on the church for their income.*

8. Do not continue to use facilities like the treatment centre at Stroud to rehabilitate priests.

This centre has no credibility in relation to treating paedophile priests.

9. There should be some sort of specialist support service for adult survivors.

Self-help support groups or healing circles made up of survivors will reduce isolation and aid their recovery and active participation in society.

10. Abuse has a ripple effect into families and communities.

*[P07] Try and help the family unit, because obviously my mum was embarrassed this had happened. She was in tatters as well.*

*[P07] I think some information is really good for people, phone numbers that can support a multi-agency approach so the police could have referred you on to services.*

11. There were different views on the value of a public inquiry.

One survivor who is determined to protect vulnerable people from abuse, stated.

*[P13] My own view is that a public inquiry is not what I would want as a victim. I hear other people calling for that and there's probably a majority who would push for that. And yet I think that what that does is to re-traumatise people who have lived with something and I think there may be other more appropriate mechanisms for addressing trauma rather than being dragged into a public arena.*

More participants support a public inquiry. Here are some of their comments.

*I think it should be brought out through a public inquiry because it was on all sides of the church, no matter what denomination, no matter what religion. It happened all over, but I think it's focused on one side of the community, and I think the other side of the community think nothing ever happened. I would probably celebrate if the church walked out and said, actually, we failed. But if it takes something like a public inquiry to push them to actually acknowledge it.*

*The Catholic Church, for one thing, is just interested in limiting their liability. It's all a money deal right, and they want to get it under the carpet. They want to - I don't know how they do it - move on. So, there's no justice coming from there. The only way we're*

*going to get justice from there, is if we drag them screaming and kicking into the court of Public Opinion.*

*We would like an inquiry. We would like an opportunity for people who maybe haven't come forward in the past but to come forward and for every priest that they've ever been made aware of that has abused children to be named. I don't know whether that's what an inquiry does. For example, here's Father X and here's the number of children he abused. If anybody has covered up, those people are brought to task for doing that.*

One woman reflected what some other Protestants felt.

*I think a public inquiry will be necessary. I think a lot of truth has to come out first. You know, the more charismatic or radical some of the churches are, the more they close their ranks. And I think it's very difficult for people to come out because it looks like they're going against their faith.*

*[P23] It is my hope that this will go to a proper public inquiry and that people can get answers in terms of, in my case, the Catholic Church.*

*[P30] So we're hoping for the public inquiry into certain issues in and around the diocese, but it probably will, given this cross denomination, go wider. We want a public inquiry, which would get us closer to the truth regarding the perpetrator and the police. The police would have to come forward and explain what contribution he did make. We believe the perpetrator had a special relationship with the security machine. And consequently, police were able to turn a blind eye. So he essentially got carte blanche, just to abuse as he wished.*

*[P23] expressed the need to investigate the PSNI to understand why [the priest] was not stopped and how he got away with such known prolific abuse:*

*What I would like to come out of the public inquiry is...to know what was happening in the years between 1994 and 2002? ...He seemed to have more or less free reign, even after it was known.*

## 12. Commission a rigorous examination of patriarchal power in churches.

All the perpetrators in these oral histories were men. All those in authority in the churches who made decisions about what to do when a disclosure or complaint was made were men. The victims were children, mainly young boys and some young girls and some young women. Scriptures are used by some churches to teach that there is a hierarchy of men over women.

One older woman believes that there are many religious people who have a high sexual drive.

*[P12] I don't know whether it's really a correlation, but people who are highly religious can often be highly sexed.*

13. Encourage a public discourse on child sexual abuse.

*[P35] I think public discussion helps people overcome feelings of shame and guilt by flipping the conversation so that it's clear it's the abuser who should be ashamed and who is guilty. That helps.*

14. Co-designing safe and accessible processes for survivor involvement moving forward.

This includes location, and where possible, when meetings will take place, timelines for activities and processes and updates if they fall behind. It is essential to recognise survivors as capable participants, of which some may be professionals, in shaping how inquiries and support systems are conducted.

*[P15] I actually took part in their client forum where we were helping...we had meetings with police about what they could do in relation to rape cases and hospitals and all of this, I got really strong and wanted to give back...*

*[P21] ...the investigation process...was led by people (the safeguarding officers, the police...) who didn't know the dynamics of the Catholic Church, and [was complicated by] the cultural 'norms' of being nice to the different sides of the Conflict.*

She continues:

*Victims are being asked to come forward to give their experiences to be able to inform whatever platform but they're not getting the remuneration for it...like it's free...so I think a bit more respect for victims.*

She includes understanding that some survivors are unable to work full-time or are on contractual work, and those that suffer from PTSD may be put into very difficult situations if asked to go to places that are busy, in city centres or triggering and so choosing 'a place convenient to me' was recommended for a survivor's emotional and psychological well-being.

## C. Last Words

*[P29] I'm glad I'm doing this with you. And I hope something comes out of it. And that's the reason why I came forward. Things have to change. Things have to change. People have, young kids have to be protected, you know. But there's a bottom line. Young innocent kids have to be protected. Not being always looked on as a means for these paedophiles.*

*[P34] I think it's a positive thing. That's why I came forward and said I would tell my story. I think it's a positive thing. I hope it's good. I hope something good comes out of it, and hope change comes out of it for the better.*

*[P29] It's been important for me to be able to say those things and thank you very much. Where I go from this, I don't know but we'll go somewhere*

*[P37] I have given your research the respect of reflecting on what we are doing today. So, I have not approached this on an ad hoc basis. I have actually given it some thought and I asked you at the start, what is your primary objective with this research? What mine is, and I think I've relayed that is, I want these people stopped.*

*[P37] What I'm pleading for is, please, bloody well, do something about it.*

*[P18] I suppose part of the reason for wanting to take part in the research was for future generations in the hope that this history cannot, will not, happen again. I know our culture has moved and evolved, from the time and culture that we lived in then and I think something that's really important and this comes up for me in my own thoughts around all of the historical abuse and the effects of that and for me personally, you know, the impact on my faith was another huge loss and that push-pull of wanting to be involved but not feeling I could be, not feeling I belonged, you know.*

*[P31] Speaking with someone like you allows me to know that I am believed, you know, and that that my story is worth hearing.*

*[P35] Nothing will change the past and what has happened, but what I can change, or what I have done is to try and protect my children and other children from such incidents happening in the future about barriers preventing access to justice.*