



REPORT

A review of current safeguarding policies and practices within the faith sector

Ms. Georgina Anderson & Dr. Orla Drummond

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Executive established the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI) in 2012 to investigate the abuse of children in residential institutions between 1922 and 1995, with its findings published in 2017. However, the inquiry did not investigate child abuse occurring in faith-based contexts outside of residential settings, despite concerns raised by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). Recognising the significance of this issue, the Executive Office (TEO) in 2016 commissioned a single Interdepartmental Working Group (IDWG) to examine evidence related to Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes, and Historical Clerical Child Abuse in Northern Ireland. This study focuses specifically on historical clerical child abuse in non-residential, faith-based settings, engaging all faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland.

Unlike a public inquiry, this research does not aim to establish the prevalence or definitive impact of historical child abuse in the faith sector but rather seeks to develop an initial understanding of the issue and assess the need for further investigation. The study will also provide recommendations for policymakers on how best to support survivors. The research comprises three interconnected studies: one reviewing historical clerical records of child abuse (Study 1), another investigating victims' and survivors' experiences and expectations for addressing clerical child abuse (Study 2) and a third examining safeguarding policies and practices within faith-based organisations (Study 3). This effort represents a continuation of the work initiated by the HIAI, ensuring that the broader scope of clerical child abuse is better understood and addressed.

The study aims to investigate how faith-based organisations implement and enforce safeguarding measures, providing insights into how they have addressed these issues over time. As part of a broader effort to understand the nature, prevalence, and impact of historical child abuse in the faith-sector, this research will support the Interdepartmental Working Group (IDWG) in making informed recommendations to Ministers on effective child safeguarding in faith-based settings. Specifically, this study focuses on reviewing current safeguarding policies and practices across faith-based organisations, including the support services available to survivors, assessing their alignment with national standards. It seeks to determine whether these policies effectively address past failures and identify necessary improvements in safeguarding measures and survivor support services in Northern Ireland.

The methodology employed in this study is designed to ensure a rigorous, systematic, and objective approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The approach integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to gather both numerical data and contextual insights. The study was structured in distinct phases, including desk-based research, initial engagement/scoping, data collection, and analytical review. Data collection was conducted through multiple channels. Primary data sources included a survey sent in January to all places of worship that a) belong to a denomination listed in the NI 2021 Census and, b) those that we were able to obtain email addresses for. The survey responses then led to the selection of respondents for semi-structured interviews that took place from January to March. Additionally, secondary data was gathered from study and inquiry reports, academic literature, and publicly available sources to supplement findings and provide contextual grounding. Quantitative data analysis involved descriptive analytics while qualitative data was analysed through thematic coding and content analysis to extract meaningful patterns and insights. Triangulation was applied to enhance the robustness of the findings.

Findings – Policies

The review of current child safeguarding policies in faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland highlights significant progress in the development and implementation of safeguarding measures yet also reveals notable challenges and inconsistencies. Structured faith-based organisations, particularly those with national or regional governance, demonstrate a strong commitment to safeguarding, with comprehensive policies aligned with legislative frameworks and statutory guidance. These organisations often have dedicated safeguarding teams or boards responsible for developing, reviewing, and disseminating policies to ensure compliance and best practice.

However, smaller independent faith-based organisations, which operate without any oversight, present a blindspot in the safeguarding landscape. Due to the difficulty in identifying these organisations and a lack of information available online, the extent of safeguarding in these organisations remains unclear, yet instances of child abuse in independent churches exist, raising concerns about the consistency of child protection across the faith sector. The absence of external oversight in these organisations underscores the need for broader engagement and potential regulatory considerations.

The evolution of safeguarding policies has been influenced by legal changes, societal awareness, and historical concerns regarding child abuse in religious institutions. While safeguarding policies are intended to be regularly reviewed and updated, concerns persist about the complexity and bureaucratic nature of some policies, which can hinder their practical implementation. Efforts to balance legal compliance with accessibility and usability at the local level remain a challenge.

Transparency and engagement with victims and survivors remain areas for improvement. Faith-based organisations have been criticised for prioritising reputational management over genuine cultural change in safeguarding. This raises concerns about the depth of the commitment to child protection beyond policy documentation. The involvement of statutory bodies in reviewing and approving policies adds a level of accountability but requires a streamlined approach.

In terms of dissemination, while most places of worship report having safeguarding policies in place, there are discrepancies in how these policies are communicated. Faith-based organisations with sufficient resources effectively use websites, printed materials, and training sessions, while others lack visible safeguarding information. A lack of integration of safeguarding can impact awareness and understanding of child safeguarding across congregations.

Findings – Practices

The review of current safeguarding practices highlights a structured yet evolving approach to child safeguarding, with strong procedures in place. The presence of safeguarding structures at national, regional, and local levels ensures oversight and accountability, with designated safeguarding leads playing a key role in policy implementation. Recruitment and vetting processes are generally robust, with faith-based organisations adhering to AccessNI checks and other safeguarding protocols. Nevertheless, inconsistencies in the vetting of voluntary roles and the need for clearer guidelines on role-specific vetting requirements in faith-based settings remain areas for improvement.

Risk assessments, record-keeping, and safeguarding audits demonstrate a commitment to safeguarding and accountability. The integration of safeguarding training is well-established, with mandatory initial and refresher courses, though variations in content and frequency highlight the absence of a standardised training framework. Continued efforts to enhance transparency, training consistency, and accountability are essential in ensuring that safeguarding policies are not only in place but actively upheld in practice across all faith-based organisations.

While safeguarding compliance levels are high across many participating organisations, disparities exist between well-resourced, larger institutions and smaller, rural places of worship with fewer resources. Effective safeguarding leadership and the embedding of safeguarding as a core value in religious practice have been identified as key contributing factors in preventing abuse. There are reports, however, of some resistance to adopting safeguarding measures from long-standing clergy and volunteers, particularly regarding recurrent training and vetting. This underscores the need for cultural shifts in some faith organisations to fully embrace safeguarding as a fundamental responsibility rather than a regulatory obligation.

There is strong evidence that reporting mechanisms are well-established at all levels of faith-based organisations, with clear guidelines ensuring concerns are escalated to statutory authorities. The role of designated safeguarding officers in managing disclosures and liaising with police and social services reinforces a structured approach to safeguarding.

Historical abuse cases remain a dominant issue, with many disclosures involving incidents from several decades ago. The handling of such allegations presents unique challenges, particularly when accused individuals are deceased or no longer active in ministry. There is a notable effort among faith-based organisations to adopt trauma-informed responses, ensuring that survivors receive appropriate support. Nevertheless, a legacy of past failures in handling abuse cases has eroded trust, making some victims hesitant to engage with faith-based organisations.

The investigation and prosecution process further complicates safeguarding responses, as lengthy legal proceedings leave accused individuals in limbo. While faith-based organisations adhere to the presumption of innocence, at present they also implement precautionary measures, such as temporary removal from ministry, to mitigate risks. In cases where individuals are removed permanently, ongoing financial and pastoral support remains a standard practice.

Faith-based organisations generally report positive relationships with statutory safeguarding bodies. Having a single point of contact within the police and social services is said to facilitate contact between faith-based organisations and statutory agencies. The presence of former statutory representatives on safeguarding panels and participation in the Interfaith Committee hosted by the Safeguarding Board in Northern Ireland are seen as beneficial. However, some faith-based organisations express concerns a perceived lack of specialised understanding of their structures and governance.

Findings — Support for Survivors and Victims

Support services for victims and survivors of child abuse provided by faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland remain inconsistent, with variations in availability, accessibility, and approach. While some faith-based organisations offer dedicated national services, others rely on referrals to external agencies. Financial support for independent counselling is sometimes provided, and designated support personnel are available in certain cases to act as intermediaries between victims, the organisation, and statutory authorities. However, these measures are not uniformly applied across all faith-based organisations, leaving some victims without adequate support.

There is growing recognition of the need for trauma-informed approaches within faith-based organisations, with calls for improved training for safeguarding personnel and church leaders. A victim-led approach is increasingly emphasised, although historical failures to prioritise victims' needs and the perception that public apologies are driven more by reputational concerns than genuine remorse continue to damage trust.

Survivors report feeling excluded from internal investigations and remain apprehensive about engaging with faith-based organisations due to past experiences of denial or victim-blaming. While redress schemes and formal apologies have been introduced in some cases, their effectiveness in fostering healing remains debated. Ensuring a consistent, transparent, and survivor-focused response will be essential in rebuilding trust and providing meaningful support to those affected.

Recommendations

The study highlights the need for transparent and independent oversight of safeguarding policies across faith-based organisations. Respondents advocate for equipping a statutory agency in Northern Ireland, such as the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), with the authority to audit safeguarding practices, provide guidance, and enforce compliance. This would help standardise training, policy implementation, and safeguarding procedures across faith-based settings. Additionally, faith organisations should be required to report their safeguarding practices in the same manner as statutory agencies. This will require an expansion of SBNI's mandate and resources.

A finding is the challenge in identifying independent churches, which are often outside formal oversight and may lack proper safeguarding measures. To address this, the creation of an official register of faith-based organisations—maintained by the Charity Commission or the Department for Communities—is recommended. This register should identify child-related activities beyond places of worship, such as in schools, youth clubs, or hospitals, ensuring these institutions are integrated into statutory safeguarding processes.

Cases of child abuse in school settings, including those affiliated with faith-based organisations, are well-documented in research and require further investigation. While this review focused on safeguarding in non-institutional faith-based settings, studies highlight the prevalence of educator sexual misconduct and have exposed widespread abuse in religious-run schools. The recent IICSA (2022) report also underscores the need for greater oversight in faith-based education settings. Given the significant evidence of abuse in schools, a dedicated review is necessary to assess the nature and prevalence of school-based child abuse, and its impact on victims and survivors.

Future inquiries should prioritise professional collection of victim statements to ensure they are comprehensive and legally viable, reducing the need for victims to repeat traumatic testimonies. If police are not directly taking statements, those responsible for collection must be trained to maintain evidentiary quality for potential prosecutions. Similarly, speeding up prosecution services would also help reduce further trauma to victims and survivors.

The NI Assembly could consider appointing charitable organisations to deliver specialised support services for victims and survivors of child abuse in faith-based settings. Currently, clerical child abuse survivors do not have the same statutory protections or access to dedicated services as HIAI survivors. By recognising and financially supporting expert organisations, survivors can receive equal access to trauma-informed care, counselling, and advocacy. This step is critical to safeguarding vulnerable adults who come forward with allegations of abuse, ensuring they are not left without essential support.

There is a strong emphasis on avoiding complacency in safeguarding efforts. Faith organisations must acknowledge that past abuse cases, even when perpetrators are deceased, do not eliminate present risks. Continuous self-assessment, vigilance, and survivor involvement in safeguarding strategies are necessary, though efforts must be made to ensure survivor engagement is meaningful rather than tokenistic.

Faith-based organisations should be supported and encouraged to adopt trauma-informed and victim-centric approaches, ensuring that disclosures of abuse are met with appropriate psychological and emotional support. Child protection must always take precedence over institutional reputation, and apologies for past abuse should be sincere and demonstrate accountability. Faith-based organisations should also eliminate victim-blaming and foster a culture of safeguarding awareness. An open and honest dialogue between faith-based organisations and survivors should be promoted and facilitated.

To improve transparency, independent professional panels could be established within faith organisations to handle safeguarding decisions, removing clergy from direct involvement in cases of abuse allegations. Independent audits and performance indicators should be introduced to ensure objectivity and accountability in internal safeguarding reviews.

Finally, places of worship that do not do so already should visibly commit to safeguarding by making policies publicly accessible and fostering awareness among children to help them recognise and report abuse. Increased cooperation between different faith groups, such as through the Interfaith Committee, is encouraged to facilitate the sharing of resources, knowledge, and best practices. Strengthening collaboration can lead to more effective safeguarding measures, particularly for smaller religious communities with limited resources.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	1
Findings – Policies	2
Findings – Practices	2
Findings – Support for Survivors and Victims	3
Recommendations	4
Acronyms	7
Background	7
Introduction	8
Objective	10
Scope	10
Ethics and GDPR	11
Methodology	11
Document Review	12
Sampling	12
1st Stage of Sampling – Survey	14
2nd Stage of Sampling – Interviews	14
Data Collection	15
Initial Stakeholder Engagement	15
Survey	15
Interviews	16
Data Analysis	18
Findings	18
Legislative and Policy Frameworks	18
Institutional Context	19
Legislative Context	19
Policy frameworks	20
Child Safeguarding Policies	21
Safeguarding Practices	25
Child Safeguarding Prevention	25
Child Safeguarding Response	30
Support Services for Victims and Survivors	33
Conclusion	35

Recommendations	36
Annexes	39
Annex 1: Specifications	39
Annex 2: Inception Report	47
Annex 3: Consent forms	62
Annex 4: Data collection tools	63
Annex 4.a: Survey Qs	63
Annex 4.b: Faith-based organisations Interview Guide	71
Annex 4.c: Statutory Agencies Interview Guide	73
Annex 4.d: Victim/Survivor Support Services Interviews	75

Acronyms

DoH	Department of Health
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
HIAI	Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry
HSCT	Health and Social Care Trusts
IICSA	Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse
IDWG	Inter-Departmental Working Group
MLA	Members of the Legislative Assembly
NI	Northern Ireland
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
PSNI	Police Services for Northern Ireland
RQ	Research Questions
SBNI	Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland
TEO	The Executive Office
UK	United Kingdom
UNOCINI	Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland

Background

In September 2011, the Northern Ireland Executive announced that it intended to set up an Inquiry into abuse in residential homes in Northern Ireland (NI), and in May 2012 the First Minister and Deputy First Minister announced the agreed Terms of Reference for the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (the HIAI). The HIAI was an independent inquiry into the abuse of children in residential institutions (other than schools) in Northern Ireland between 1922 and 1995. The HIAI report was published in 2017.

While the HIAI focused on abuse in residential institutions, the specific issues related to clerical child abuse in religious settings, i.e. that did not take place in a residential setting, have remained underexamined but were raised as an issue by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) Committee and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) at the start of the HIAI. The position of Ministers in relation to abuse perpetrated by the clergy and members of religious bodies outside of an institutional setting has been that “the issue of clerical abuse is no less important or emotive than institutional abuse and we are mindful of the equally destructive impact it has had on many individuals, and following the HIAI, it will be for the Executive to consider how to deal with clerical child abuse that did not fall within the Inquiry’s terms of reference”.

In October 2016, The Executive Office (TEO) agreed that a single Interdepartmental Working Group (IDWG), with an independent chair, should be set up to review the evidence relating to Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes and Historical Clerical Child Abuse in Northern Ireland. This piece of research into historical clerical child abuse in Northern Ireland is therefore a legacy of the HIAI as it was not included in the HIAI Terms of Reference. It is consciously being restricted to the abuse of children (those under the age of 18) and to non-residential faith-based settings. All faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland have been invited to participate in the study, despite the use of the term “clerical” which is a term associated with Christian organisations.

This piece of research, however, is not a public inquiry and will therefore not be generating the same participation levels or yielding conclusive statements about the prevalence or nature of historical clerical child abuse and its impact on victims and survivors in Northern Ireland past and present. Instead, this piece of research will allow an initial understanding of historical clerical child abuse, will assess the need for further research, as well as form the basis for recommendations to the OFMDFM and the MLAs on how best to support survivors of historical clerical child abuse.

This current piece of research comprises three separate studies; one, this study, focused on safeguarding policies and practices within faith-based organisations (Study 3), and two further studies taking place concurrently, one to review historical clerical records of child abuse (Study 1), and another to investigate Victim and Survivors experiences and expectations to prevent and address child abuse in faith-based settings (Study 2).

Introduction

The interest in a focused study into child abuse across faith-based organisations in NI has emerged from a growing recognition of the unique dynamics of child abuse within faith-based organisations, as opposed to abuse in institutional settings, which therefore require distinct investigation and targeted reforms. Child abuse in faith settings involves the abuse of trust and authority by religious leaders, who are often highly regarded pillars of the community. With a marked increase in allegations of child abuse at the hand of faith-based organisations globally, there are growing concerns about whether and how faith-based organisations have implemented safeguarding measures to prevent and respond to child abuse. Several other key events and developments suggest the need for a better understanding of child abuse across different faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland, and further afield.

The HIAI, which investigated child abuse in institutional settings, provided valuable insights into how abuse occurred in residential institutions run by religious organisations and the state. Many survivors of clerical abuse were not residents of institutions but were victims of abuse within their local religious communities. This distinct setting, along with the different forms of power and trust that clergy wield, highlights the need to specifically examine how safeguarding measures have been implemented within religious organisations themselves, rather than focusing on broader institutional environments.

Investigations in other jurisdictions, such as in the Republic of Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, Australia and beyond, have revealed significant failures in how faith-based organisations have implemented and enforced safeguarding policies. Reports such as the Fern Report (2005), the Ryan and Murphy Reports (2009 respectively) and the Cloyne Report (2011) in Ireland uncovered widespread mishandling of abuse allegations in Catholic run institutions, with religious leaders often prioritising the protection of clergy and the church over the protection of children. Despite official policies, internal documents showed that safeguarding guidelines were often ignored, abusers were relocated rather than reported, and victims were left without justice. In Northern Ireland, there is growing concern that similar safeguarding failures may have occurred across different denominations, but a lot is still unknown about the nature and prevalence of child abuse in non-institutional faith-based settings, including the effectiveness of safeguarding policies and how religious bodies record and respond to allegations of abuse.

In recent decades, survivors of historical child abuse from various religious backgrounds have come forward, highlighting the failures of religious organisations to protect and support them and adequately respond to their reports of abuse. Many survivors have emphasised the lack of safeguarding measures in place at the time of their abuse and the inadequate responses they received when they tried to report the abuse. As more survivors share their experiences, it became evident that safeguarding policies and practices in non-institutional faith-based settings have historically been inconsistent and, in many cases, insufficient. The rising demand for justice from survivors and their advocates has placed increased pressure on both religious organisations and the government to thoroughly examine and improve safeguarding practices across all religious contexts.

One of the central issues related to historical child abuse in the faith sector is the lack of transparency and accountability within faith-based organisations. While many have implemented safeguarding guidelines in recent years, there are ongoing concerns about whether these policies are being properly enforced. Historically, cases of child abuse were dealt with internally, with abusers being relocated or given new roles rather than facing legal consequences. This culture of secrecy and internal handling of abuse cases often meant that safeguarding policies were ineffective. A focused study is needed to examine whether faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland have made meaningful changes in their safeguarding practices and whether these changes are robust enough to prevent future abuse and respond appropriately when allegations arise.

While much of the focus on child abuse has been on the Catholic Church, it is increasingly clear that safeguarding failures are not confined to one denomination. Allegations of clerical abuse and safeguarding failures have also surfaced in Protestant denominations, such as the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church, and Methodist Church, as well as smaller, and sometimes independent, faith groups. Each denomination has its own structures, policies, and approaches to safeguarding, and a comprehensive study will assess how these policies compare to national standards, where weaknesses may exist, and how they can be improved. This cross-denominational approach is vital to ensuring that safeguarding practices are consistent, effective, and protective of all children, regardless of their religious background.

In other countries, dedicated inquiries into clerical abuse have led to significant reforms in how religious institutions handle safeguarding. For example, the UK's 2022 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in 2017 revealed widespread failures in safeguarding within religious organisations, leading to recommendations for improved oversight, mandatory reporting, and victim support services. Northern Ireland can learn from these international inquiries and adapt best practices to ensure that its religious organisations are held to the highest standards of safeguarding.

This review into the safeguarding policies of religious organisations in Northern Ireland allows unique insight into the current policy and practice landscape, how they compare against international standards and where improvements could be made. While many faith-based organisations have developed and updated their safeguarding policies in recent years, there is concern that these policies may not be comprehensive or consistently enforced. A recent rise in public and political pressure has highlighted the need for a more thorough examination of how religious bodies are implementing their safeguarding responsibilities.

Against this background, this study assesses whether current policies are in place to prevent child abuse in faith-based organisations and whether religious organisations are responding effectively and transparently when allegations are made. Furthermore, the study will attempt to evaluate the extent to which faith-based organisations are cooperating with civil authorities and adhering to mandatory reporting laws, as well as their internal disciplinary procedures when safeguarding failures are identified.

Objective

By investigating how religious organisations are implementing and enforcing safeguarding measures, this study hopes to provide valuable insights into how faith-based organisations have sought to address safeguarding issues and the systems and processes they have developed to respond to them over time, as well as to make recommendations for future safeguarding reforms where appropriate.

The collective objective of the three commissioned studies is to better understand the nature and prevalence of historical clerical child abuse, and the impact it has on victims / survivors. This improved understanding of clerical child abuse will support the IDWG to make informed recommendations to Ministers on any future action required for a) effective investigations into historical clerical child abuse and b) support avenues for victims.

Scope

In line with the above objective, this study (Study 3) sought to conduct an in-depth review of current safeguarding policies and practices across different faith-based organisations – including the support services offered to victims and survivors of child abuse in a faith setting – and assess their alignment to national standards. It assesses improvements in safeguarding and determine whether current safeguarding policies and practices effectively address lessons from the past. The findings gathered from this study form the basis for developing recommendations for potential improvements required to policies, practices and victim/survivor support services related to clerical child abuse in Northern Ireland.

The term ‘child abuse in the faith sector’ in the scope of this review, i.e.: as per the funder’s specifications (Annex 1), refers to:

- “abuse in the faith sector” – neglect, exploitation and physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse that is perpetrated by a member of the clergy or an individual performing a role related to the ministry of a religious institution / faith group and that did not take place in an institutional setting.
- “child” – those under 18 years of age.

The specific research questions (RQ) that guide this study are outlined below in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Research Questions

RQ1	What are the overarching legislative and policy frameworks as it regards historical and current child abuse in faith settings?
RQ2	How do current safeguarding policies in faith organisations align with the overarching legislative and policy framework and what are areas for improvement in policies?
RQ3	How are current safeguarding policies implemented and what are areas for improvement in practices?
RQ4	Are there sufficient support services available for victims when reporting abuse (during and following investigations)?

Ethics and GDPR

Aware of the sensitivities inherent in this research and committed to ensuring the confidentiality of research subject is carefully managed, we a) ensured only vetted individuals worked on this piece of work, b) obtained informed consent from participants, and c) adhered to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) throughout all data processing.

We also ensured that reporting lines are respected and that, where possible, senior faith-based organisation representatives were consulted about the study prior to contacting any other member of that organisation. Participation in the survey and interviews was preceded by informed consent (Annex 3). The consent clearly guarantees anonymity to respondents and outlines data processing standards i.e.: all data will be stored on a password protected internal drive with limitations set to only allow those vetted to work on this project to access the content.

Methodology

This review adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a) a comprehensive review of policy documents, legislative frameworks, reports or studies, academic literature, b) a survey sent out to places of worship across denominations to build a snapshot of the safeguarding landscape, c) interviews with key stakeholders, including representatives of faith-based organisations and statutory agencies to gain insights into the implementation of policies, and d) experiences from survivors of child abuse in faith settings, safeguarding experts and providers of support services. Collaboration with the two concurrent studies allowed for sense checking the methodology, cross-referencing and validating findings. The study will consider how current safeguarding practices are implemented across a range of faith organisations and identify good safeguarding practice that can be promoted across all faith organisations.

Document Review

A comprehensive review of a range of documents to better understand what is known already about the nature and prevalence of historical and current child abuse within faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland and internationally was conducted. We also reviewed studies or inquiries conducted on child abuse in other environments, such as schools and care institutions, and in other countries. We gathered legislative and policy documents pertinent to child safeguarding in Northern Ireland to understand statutory requirements and guidance. We explored international best practices in child safeguarding in faith-based settings.

Documents included for review included:

- Previous inquiries, studies and reports on child abuse in religious contexts.
- Child safeguarding policies, statements, guidance, reports, reviews developed by faith-based organisations.
- Legislation and statutory instruments, protocols and guidance in relation to protecting children from abuse in NI.
- International regulations, standards, studies.
- International best practices in effective safeguarding policies, practices and support services for victims-survivors.
- Available support services for victims-survivors of child abuse in faith-based settings in NI.

The document review not only provided the study with an overall understanding of what is known about child abuse in faith based organisations nationally and globally, but also informs RQ1: What are the overarching legislative and policy frameworks as it regards historical and current child abuse in the faith sector? and partly informed RQ2: How do current safeguarding policies in faith organisations align with the overarching legislative and policy framework?

To do this, we undertook a mapping exercise of who has and has not adopted a safeguarding policy and conducted a review of safeguarding policies across faith-based organisations to assess their alignment with current legislative and policy frameworks in Northern Ireland and identify specific areas where safeguarding policies fall short of the established benchmarks.

Sampling

The sampling strategy aimed to ensure the inclusion of a broad enough sample of faith-based organisations in the study but also aimed to target organisations where allegations of child abuse have taken place. This was to ensure that the study is delving into real practices related to actual allegations of child abuse, rather than investigating practices as stipulated by the organisation's policy or protocols, i.e.: the hypothetical practice that would be adhered to if an allegation were made.

Whilst the latter is pertinent to this study, particularly in terms of assessing knowledge levels of safeguarding practices, the former is more likely to yield insights about the variety and forms of current and past practices related to allegations of child abuse which will be more helpful in answering RQ3: How are current safeguarding policies implemented and what are areas for improvement in practices?" and RQ4: Are there sufficient support services available for victims when reporting abuse (during and following investigations)?".

To achieve this, sampling adopted a two-staged approach, with each stage providing information to different research questions. According to the 2021 census, the main denominations in Northern Ireland were Catholic (42%), Presbyterian (17%), Church of Ireland (12%), Methodist (2%), other Christian denominations including Baptist, Protestant, Pentecostal, Free Presbyterian, Evangelical, Orthodox, Brethren, Jehovah's Witness and over 60 others (collectively 7%) as well as other, non-Christian religions, mostly Muslim (0,57%) and Hindu (0,22%).

Table 2 lists the intermediate results related to religion in the 2021 NI Census; highlighted in blue are the faith-based organisations that this study was requested to engage with as per the funder's Specifications (Annex A in Annex 1) and highlighted in green are other denominations that were additionally selected for the first stage sampling (survey).

This additional selection was based on two factors. Firstly, it was agreed to limit sampling to denominations reported by at least 0.1% of the population according to the 2021 NI Census. Secondly, the need for sufficient information in the denomination category from which to identify faith-based organisations, e.g.: "Christian" or "Protestant" are broad denominational categories that refer to a person's faith but does not provide detail about the faith-based organisations they may (or may not) belong to (in purple in Table 2).

A disadvantage of this sampling approach of using census denominations is that the sample favours large denominations and omits independent churches since, by default they are independent organisations and therefore not attached or organised through any structure. There is no database or list of independent churches in Northern Ireland meaning there is no sampling frame from which to identify, select or engage with independent churches.

Table 2: Denominations in Northern Ireland (Source: 2021 Census)

Religion / Denomination	Population #	%
Catholic Church, incl. 5 Diocese	805,151	42.31%
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	316,103	16.61%

Religion / Denomination	Population #	%
Church of Ireland, inc. 6 Diocese	219,788	11.55%
Methodist Church in Ireland	44,728	2.35%
Christian	22,361	1.17%
Protestant	16,210	0.85%
Baptist	16,053	0.84%
Other Christian denominations	12,220	0.64%
Pentecostal	11,199	0.59%
Muslim	10,871	0.57%
Other Religions	8,917	0.47%
Free Presbyterian	8,432	0.44%
Evangelical	7,053	0.37%
Church of England	4,981	0.26%
Orthodox Church	4,918	0.26%
Brethren	4,862	0.26%
Hindu	4,191	0.22%
Non-Denominational	3,959	0.21%
Congregational Church	2,656	0.14%
Protestant (Mixed)	2,501	0.13%
Jehovah's Witness	2,107	0.11%

1st Stage of Sampling – Survey

Using the list of selected denominations in Table 2, we compiled a comprehensive list of names and email contacts for all places of worship in each denomination to be approached for the survey (the sampling frame). The sampling frame was created using a) an in-depth online search of faith-based organisations in each denomination, cross-checked against b) a database compiled by Study 1 from the charity commission's database on organisations and their extensive online search, and c) a snowball approach requesting updated lists and emails for places of worship during initial engagement with leaders of faith-based organisations at the start of the review. A key inclusion criterion was therefore the availability of an email for the place of worship to send the survey link.

The survey and interviews with faith-based organisations were targeted to safeguarding leads or focal points. Should no safeguarding lead be available, we reached out to the highest authority in the targeted organisation to participate or suggest suitable individuals to approach instead.

2nd Stage of Sampling – Interviews

Faith-Based Organisations

Once survey responses received, we obtained a better understanding of a) faith-based organisations who are willing to engage in the study, b) the safeguarding policy landscape across faith-based organisations and c) where allegations of child abuse had been made in the past 10 years. From this landscape, we identified the specific organisations to be invited to participate in qualitative interviews (approx. 40 interviews).

In order to investigate practices as they occurred (rather than hypothetical procedures that would be followed in the event of a child abuse concern being raised), a key inclusion criterion for the 2nd stage of sampling was whether there has been an allegation of child abuse reported in the survey (Q33). A key exclusion criterion for interviews was places of worship that report a currently open investigation into child abuse. For each allegation reported, the review reached out to the place of worship reporting the allegation, as well as their regional and national representation where relevant.

Statutory Agencies and Victim/Survivor Support Services

The review planned to approach safeguarding professionals representing statutory agencies such as the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), The Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT) and the Police Services for Northern Ireland (PSNI) for interview to include their important expertise with handling cases of child abuse and their experience of safeguarding policies and practices in faith-based organisations. Sampling statutory agencies adopted a snowball approach whereby names and contact details for professionals from statutory agencies with experience handling child abuse cases within faith organisations were requested during interviews.

Similarly, investigating the support services that victim and survivors are offered was done through a number of ways; a) through interviews with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or a senior decision-makers in faith-based organisations, b) engagement with the firm carrying out research on the experiences of victim/survivors and c) interviews with organisations that could (or do) offer supporting services for victim/survivors of child abuse in non-institutional faith settings, e.g.: Victims and Survivors Services, Towards Healing, Nexus.

Data Collection

Initial Stakeholder Engagement

Once the denominations to be included in the study selected, we organised a series of meetings with the highest authority in that organisation. In some cases, we contacted the leadership responsible for a region or Diocese, (esp. where the faith-based organisation is organised in a regional structure), in others, we reached out directly to the national leadership of the denomination.

The purpose of this initial engagement was to inform leadership of the review, allow questions to be asked about the review and obtain support from faith-based organisation leadership for the review. In some cases, the leadership informed their places of worship of the review and encouraged places of worship to participate. Between November and December 2024, we reached out to 23 organisations across 11 denominations, we met with 21 individuals representing 16 organisations across 7 denominations.

Survey

A Survey Monkey link was sent out via email on the 6th of January 2025 and remained open until the 27th of January – extended by a week upon request from places of worship who needed more time to fill the survey. The survey includes 48 questions in total, with skip logics included, and explores (See Annex 4a for full survey questions):

- a) availability of safeguarding policies.
- b) safeguarding trainings.
- c) vetting requirements.
- d) allegations of child abuse.
- e) accountability.

The survey was sent to 1004 places of worship, took an average of 13 minutes to complete and yielded 342 responses across 12 denominations. Of those responses, 46 were empty submissions and 3 were double entries leaving a total of 291 responses for analysis, which equates to a 29% response rate. This is a lower response rate than hoped for, especially given the support the study was given by leaders of faith-based organisation.

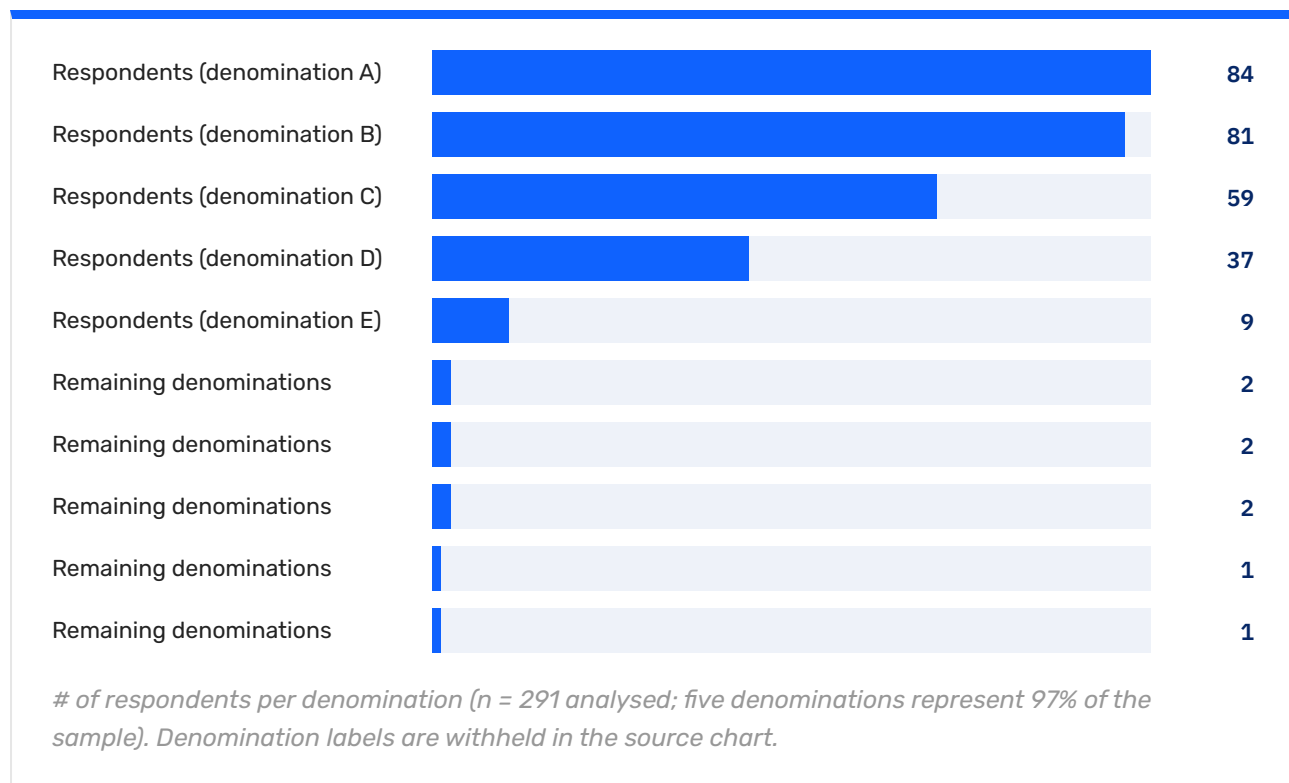
While the commitment to safeguarding is high, a concern raised during initial engagement with faith leaders is that motivated individuals are feeling challenged by a) several years of inquiries relating to child safeguarding, b) regular internal audits and reviews carried out on safeguarding and c) a recent survey sent by study 1 in relation to records which took an average of 1 hour to complete.

Sample Distribution

Overall, the survey received responses from places of worship across 10 denominations. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the denominations that responded to the survey and clearly shows that some denominations are better represented than others. This skewed representation in responses means the survey findings mostly relate to 5 denominations which collectively represent 97% of the sample.

The survey found that 98% of places of worship surveyed have activities with children, with these activities mostly located at the place of worship (96%), as well as schools (48%), outings (29%), clubs (26%), home visits (22%), residential (15%) and hospitals (9%).

Figure 1: Sample Distribution by Denomination



Interviews

Of the 291 responses collected through the survey, 10 places reported an allegation in the past 10 years, allowing the review to follow up with those 10 places of worship, as well as, where relevant, the regional (or Diocese) and national representation of that organisation. One additional case that met the inclusion criteria was provided by a survivor in relation to an independent church, however, the church chose not to participate in the survey or in an interview. Interviews began on the 21st of January and continued into early March.

Interviews with safeguarding leads of faith-based organisations explored a) alignment of safeguarding policies with legislative frameworks, b) their implementation in practice, and c) the adequacy of support services for victims. We also asked for any additional data or studies/reviews on child abuse or safeguarding to be shared with the study. See Annex 4b for the full interview guide with faith-based organisation.

Interviews with statutory agencies and victim and survivor support services aimed to 1) obtain guidance on minimum statutory requirements and compliance thereof, 2) ask for any data available and 3) capture their knowledge about the nature and prevalence of past and current clerical child abuse, including any safeguarding best practices. See Annex 4c for the full interview guide with statutory agencies and Annex 4d for the interview guide with victim and survivor support services.

Interviews took place online via Teams, with recording and transcription activated when consent was granted. Recordings were managed with strict confidentiality and according to the GDPR. Where a respondent refused to be recorded, no recording took place and handwritten notes were taken instead. Interviews took between 45 minutes and 1 hour.

The review was granted an interview with SBNI who host an interfaith committee to support a 2-way dialogue about safeguarding between faith-based organisations and the authorities. The review also interviewed a safeguarding expert and two survivors of child abuse by members of faith organisations. Attempts to interview organisations providing support services were unsuccessful. These interviews have allowed the review to further explore the policies and practices in faith-based organisations, including survivor support, from different perspectives.

Contact details for representatives of statutory agencies (PSNI and HSCT) that have handled cases of child abuse in faith-based organisations were requested from interview respondents and from TEO, but the review received no contacts at HSCT and only few at PSNI.

Table 4: Distribution of Interviews

Respondent		# Reached	# Interviewed
Faith-based organisations	Local level	11	5
	Regional level	12	8
	National level	7	6
Statutory Agencies	SBNI	1	1
	PSNI	2	1
	HSCT	0	0
Support Services		3	0
Safeguarding Expert		1	1
Victims and survivors		2	2
Total		39	24

Data Analysis

The data collected from this study underwent a rigorous and systematic analysis to ensure that the research questions are addressed comprehensively. The analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods, corresponding to the types of data collected in the two stages of the sampling process.

Quantitative Analysis - The first stage of sampling involved the online survey distributed to safeguarding leads or focal points within the selected faith-based organisations. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the quantitative responses to the survey. These provide an overview of the current safeguarding landscape across faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland, including the percentage of organisations that have safeguarding policies in place, the frequency of safeguarding trainings, and the distribution of reported child abuse allegations across faith-based organisations.

Qualitative Analysis - The second stage of sampling involved qualitative interviews with safeguarding leads from selected faith-based organisations, statutory agencies, and support services. The qualitative data from these interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis. This process involves coding the transcribed interviews to identify recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to safeguarding practices, support for victims, and challenges in addressing clerical child abuse. A qualitative data analysis technique was employed to systematically code and categorise responses, enabling the identification of themes that reflect both best practices and areas for improvement in safeguarding.

Triangulation - To ensure the robustness of findings, data from all sources were triangulated. This triangulation enables the research team to check the consistency and validity of responses and identify discrepancies between findings. By employing both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, the review provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how safeguarding policies are implemented in faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland and to what extent they provide adequate protection and support to victims of child abuse.

Findings

Legislative and Policy Frameworks

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

What are the overarching legislative and policy frameworks as it regards historical and current child abuse in the faith sector?

Institutional Context

Department of Health

The Northern Ireland Executive, through the Department of Health (DoH), is responsible for child protection in Northern Ireland. They set out policy, legislation and statutory guidance on how the child protection system should work. In 2017, the DoH revised the national child safeguarding policy “Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland”, replacing the guidance issued in 2003. It provides the overarching policy framework for safeguarding children and young people in the statutory, private, independent, community, voluntary and faith sectors. It outlines how communities, organisations and individuals must work both individually and in partnership to ensure children and young people are safeguarded as effectively as possible (DoH, 2017).

Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI)

The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) co-ordinates and ensures the effectiveness of work to protect and promote the welfare of children. SBNI is a statutory body set up in 2012 under the Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Its overall role is to promote sound safeguarding practice and learning in relation to safeguarding in NI within the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. The board includes representatives from health, social care, the police, the probation board, youth justice, education, district councils and the NSPCC.

SBNI is responsible for developing policies and procedures to improve how different agencies work together, it provides training and guidance on adopting a trauma informed approach to safeguarding and hosts several committees. The SBNI is a partnership body and does not govern or regulate its member agencies, which function within their own governance structures. Collaboration is essential, but agencies are required by law to provide information to SBNI when requested. Some community and voluntary organisations, though not legislated members, participate in safeguarding panels to contribute expertise (e.g., Women's Aid, Nexus).

SBNI also carries out Section 12 audits across statutory members to ensure they are providing their services in a way that fits in with the safeguarding criteria that is given to the SBNI by the Department of Health. Section 12 audits are not conducted with the voluntary sector. As such, neither SBNI nor any other statutory body in NI, has statutory powers to assess safeguarding policies or practices within voluntary organisations, including faith-based organisation.

Given the SBNI's mandate to work with voluntary sector and given the well-known influence of faith-based organisations in youth service provision in NI, SBNI established the Interfaith Committee. The Interfaith Committee allows for a two-way dialogue about safeguarding across faith organisations, including sharing information and best practices, new legislation or updates as well as a space to obtain advice when needed. Other agencies sitting on the Interfaith Committee include NSPCC, PSNI, HSCT.

Legislative Context

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides a framework for understanding child abuse in international law. Article 19 of the UNCRC requires states to protect children from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse".

The Children Order (Northern Ireland) 1995, provides the legislative framework that governs the response to, and services provided for: (a) Children in need of support (b) Children at risk of harm and/or children who have suffered abuse and harm. It sets out parental responsibilities and rights, and the duties and powers public authorities must support children. Under Section 5 of the Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967, it is an offence not to report a 'relevant offence' to the police. This includes offences against children.

The creation of the regional Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) set out in law in the Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, also established five Safeguarding Panels to support the SBNI's work at a HSCT level. The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 requires public authorities to co-operate in contributing to the wellbeing of children and young people, in the areas of physical and mental health, enjoyment of play and leisure, learning and achievement, living conditions, rights, and economic wellbeing.

Table 5: Legislation related to Safeguarding Children in Northern Ireland

Legislation	Description
Criminal Law Act 1967	Section 5 makes it an offence not to report a 'relevant offence' to the police, including offences against children.
UN Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) 1989	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally binding international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities.
The Children Order 1995	Governs the care, upbringing, and protection of children in Northern Ireland. It aims to balance parental responsibility support with social workers' judicial powers.
Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Order 2008	Prevents unsuitable individuals from working with children, young people, and adults at risk by mandating safeguarding policies and record-keeping in organisations working with vulnerable populations.
Safeguarding Board Act 2011	Provides the legislative framework for the creation of a regional Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland and establishes Safeguarding Panels to support child protection efforts at a local level.
Children's Services Cooperation Act 2015	Strengthens the imperative for children's agencies to collaborate, with a focus on improving children's overall wellbeing, including physical, mental, economic, and educational aspects.
Historical Institutional Abuse Act 2019	Establishes the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board; confers an entitlement to compensation in connection with children who were resident in certain institutions in Northern Ireland; and establishes the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse.

Policy frameworks

Co-operating to Safeguard Children and young people in Northern Ireland, provides the overarching policy framework for safeguarding children and young people in the statutory, private, independent, community, voluntary and faith sectors, including guidance on reporting concerns. The Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, published by the Department for Education in 2021, sets out the strategic framework to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people in Northern Ireland as required by the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015.

The Regional core child protection policies and procedures for Northern Ireland guidance, published in 2018 by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, explains the actions that must be taken when there are concerns about the welfare of a child or young person, including core procedures, individuals who pose a risk to children and young people, learning and improvement to support and develop child protection, the roles and responsibilities of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, and interagency guidance and protocols.

The Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland (UNOCINI) framework, published in 2011 and currently under review, is used to identify a child's needs at an early stage and prevent problems from escalating. It can also be used to make a referral to children's social services and to help children's social services make decisions about the appropriate response.

Table 6: Policy frameworks related to Safeguarding Children in Northern Ireland

Policy Framework	Description
Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland (UNOCINI) Guidance 2011 (DoH)	An assessment framework designed to help professionals in assessing and planning to meet children's needs, providing a structured process for preliminary assessment by agency professionals.
Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2017 (DoH)	Outlines a framework for safeguarding children and young people, promoting welfare and protecting from harm through early risk identification and timely intervention.
Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027 (DoE)	Aims to improve children's wellbeing and deliver positive outcomes through effective partnership and multi-agency collaboration.
Regional Core Child Protection Policies and Procedures 2018 (SBNI)	A set of policies and procedures supporting professionals and agencies in working effectively to protect children and young people from abuse or neglect.
Keeping Children Safe; Our Duty to Care 2022 (Volunteer Now/DoH)	A set of 7 standards and related guidance for safeguarding children and young people for Northern Ireland.

Child Safeguarding Policies

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

How do current safeguarding policies in faith-based organisations align with the overarching legislative and policy framework?

Faith-based organisations

The review began with a wide online search into child safeguarding across faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland. Websites of faith-based organisations were explored which quickly revealed that some organisations are hierarchically structured with a national (or central) body representation responsible for developing, revising, disseminating and reviewing safeguarding across the organisation. At present, most national representations cover both the jurisdictions of Northern Ireland and The Republic of Ireland (RoI) and have a "one church" policy covering, and adapted to, both jurisdictions. Some organisations have a regional safeguarding representation (or Diocese), providing an additional link between national and local levels of the organisation, and facilitating the dissemination and implementation of safeguarding.

Other faith-based organisations are independent and do not belong to a large organisational structure. These independent faith-based organisations are therefore responsible for developing their own policy and implementing their own safeguarding measures at the place of worship, without the support, or oversight, of a central or regional office, or a statutory body. This review is unfortunately not able to report on safeguarding policies and procedures across independent churches given they were not well represented in the sample, due to the difficulty with obtaining the list of churches and their contact details, and because they did not respond to requests to participate in the review.

Policy Landscape

Child safeguarding policies in faith-based organisations began in the mid to late 90's with the introduction of the 1995 Northern Ireland Children's order and when concerns about child abuse by clerics started to emerge. In most cases, faith-based organisations began with a policy statement and later went on to recruit a safeguarding team or even establish a national safeguarding board or committee made up of professionals with strong safeguarding experience (former social workers, teachers, police officers) tasked with developing and implementing safeguarding across the organisation. Safeguarding policies have matured over time, reflecting both changing societal contexts and legal requirements.

Safeguarding policies are supposed to be updated regularly, with many denominations aiming for revisions on a three-year cycle. These revisions reflect new learnings, legal changes, and emerging issues, such as the increasing role of technology in youth groups (e.g., social media, email, and web-based interactions). There's a recognition that policies must adapt to both new legislative frameworks and real-world developments in safeguarding practices.

National policies recommend adapting central policies to local circumstances, to ensure the information in the policy is tailored to the place it relates to. Places of worship, parishes, dioceses, or regional bodies often modify central policies to meet local needs and realities, although some simply adopt the national policy without adapting it to their local context. Some policies are criticised for being overly detailed or bureaucratic, making them difficult to navigate and implement at the local level. Some local organisations create "concise" versions of national policies, with references to the comprehensive policy, to ensure they are practical and usable at the local level.

Faith-based organisations recognise the ongoing challenge with involving victims and survivors in the safeguarding strategy, both during and after an allegation has been made. The goal is to be more victim-centred and trauma-informed. Safeguarding policies have historically focused on the protection of children. However, there is an increasing recognition of the need to protect vulnerable adults as well, and many denominations are revising their safeguarding frameworks to include this demographic.

Faith-based organisations also report engaging in consultations with other denominations, sharing knowledge and learning from one another regarding child protection. This collaborative approach allows for the sharing of best practices, collaborative policy development and alignment on key safeguarding issues across different religious groups.

Safeguarding Policy Development

Developing (or revising) a child safeguarding policy is a time and resource intensive process lasting up to several years (including statutory reviews). The process entails not only aligning the policy with national statutory requirements - or two national statutory standards when the organisation spans both NI and RoI - but also aligning with the denominations' internal theological rules and processes. The policy requires embedding into other internal policies and processes (recruitment, risk assessments, codes of conducts for adults and children, accountability) and is usually accompanied by guidance and templates to help implement the policy.

The policy is then reviewed internally, as well as externally in some cases, before being approved by the organisations' management body. If the policy is developed nationally or regionally, once it is approved by management, it then requires disseminating to every place of worship, often accompanied by training to ensure all staff and volunteers understand the policy, the revisions and ensuing implementation requirements.

While responses from faith-based organisations highlight the positive commitment to developing safeguarding policies and structures, concerns were raised by those who had been actively involved at the inception of safeguarding initiatives. It was expressed that the underlying and existing culture of faith-based organisations influenced the development and adherence to guidance. In particular, it was noted that the initial enthusiasm and positivity for developing safeguarding structures was swiftly replaced by apprehension at the influence of reputational management as the driving factor for organisational change. It was advanced that this rationale for the development of safeguarding policies and practices in faith-based organisations was therefore placed as a higher priority than the protection of the vulnerable and created an environment of denial and concealment.

Concerns were also raised regarding the superficiality of organisational change, which ultimately gave the impression of change – such as having elaborate policies – but did not enable tangible safeguarding outcomes. Communication strategies were questioned, with the use of safeguarding vocabulary disconnecting organisational action from the reality of application. The transparency of safeguarding processes within the faith-sector was also questioned, with some noting that they do not consider that there have been significant improvements in safeguarding within the faith-sector.

Alignment with National Legislation

Adherence to civil law and national legislation is a priority for all faith-based organisations that participated in this review. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that policies are in full compliance with national and regional laws. This legal compliance is often emphasised across organisations as a core element of safeguarding policies. There are however no statutory oversight mechanisms or mandatory reporting requirements to assess the compliance of faith-based organisations with NI safeguarding legislation.

Several countries have adopted stringent statutory safeguarding compliance mechanisms. Australia's clergy are subject to mandatory reporting laws, regardless of religious confidentiality doctrines, and the National Office for Child Safety ensures safeguarding compliance in religious organisations. France, Canada, New Zealand, Chile, among others, carry out audits across faith-based organisations to ensure alignment with national child safeguarding legislation. In contrast, Northern Ireland's framework remains largely self-regulatory. Respondents from within and outside of faith-based organisations agree on the need for stronger statutory oversight mechanisms to support faith-based organisations and enforce safeguarding frameworks.

Safeguarding policies are sometimes reviewed or approved by statutory bodies however (e.g., Tusla in the Republic of Ireland or the Department of Health in Northern Ireland). This adds an important layer of accountability, though this is not a requirement in NI. However, the process of receiving approval from statutory bodies sometimes causes delays to the implementation of the revised policies. One organisation mentioned the revision of their policy has been ongoing since 2022.

Faith-based organisations are adapting their policies to reflect legislative differences between the North and South of Ireland. The difference between the two can create a challenge for faith-based organisations that operate across both jurisdictions and necessitates tailored policies for each jurisdiction. Some faith-based organisations are addressing these differences by creating separate safeguarding policies or procedures for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Several report that policies were developed with significant consultation with statutory bodies, ensuring that the policies are aligned with the most current legal requirements and best practices. This consultation helps ensure that faith-based organisations are not operating in isolation but are working alongside statutory services. Faith-based organisations need to stay updated and make necessary adjustments to their policies, which can be a time-consuming process.

There is a clear sentiment that safeguarding policies can be complex or cumbersome, when they should be simple, clear, and concise. While alignment with legislation is essential, there is also a desire for policies to be straightforward and not overly complex to make the policies them more practical for implementation at the local level, ensuring they are easily understood and can be followed effectively without being overly burdensome.

Dissemination of Policy

The survey found that 98% of places of worship, report having a child safeguarding policy available. Just under a fifth (18%) of places of worship develop their own policy locally, another fifth (21%) use a regionally developed policy and 59% report using a nationally developed policy. Almost all (98%) report that the policy has been revised, 99% confirm that the policy applies to all staff and volunteers in the organisation and 87% report that the policy is publicised, promoted and distributed to the congregation, including children and parents/caregivers. More than two-thirds (68%) of the sample report having their policy up on a noticeboard, 59% report having printed materials (posters, leaflets, booklets or contact cards), another 58% report their policy is available on their website or Facebook page and a third (33%) include their policy in their newsletters, magazines or bulletins.

Leaflets and contact cards are widely distributed to both children and parents, with clear information about what constitutes safe environments and how to report concerns, sometimes available in multiple languages to accommodate diverse communities. These resources help foster an understanding of safeguarding within the community, ensuring that everyone understands what constitutes abuse and knows how to get help if needed.

Regular meetings are held at different levels—such as parish or church meetings, information nights, annual conferences, and leadership sessions—to disseminate and discuss safeguarding policies. In some meetings, safeguarding is a permanent agenda point. In some places, key aspects of the safeguarding policy are communicated through sermons or church services, reinforcing the importance of safeguarding at the congregation level.

All faith-based organisations offer training sessions for staff, volunteers, and church leaders to equip them with the knowledge to recognise abuse and respond appropriately. There are also dedicated support roles where safeguarding officers are available to advise places of worship and respond to any concerns. Other methods of disseminating the policy include trainings, emails upon initial registration and in some cases, printed copies are available in the office or upon request.

According to faith-based organisations, many safeguarding policies, guidance, and resources are accessible on dedicated websites, often with accompanying tools like templates that can be customised by individual places of worship. One organisation mentioned the use of QR codes linking to online resources for easy access. An online search through a random sample of places of worship's websites revealed great variation in the prominence given to safeguarding on faith-based organisations' websites:

- Approximately half of places of worship have websites, others don't.
- Of those who have a website, some have an entire page dedicated to safeguarding, including resources, templates and links.

- Others have a child safeguarding policy in the links or resources webpages and/or the designated safeguarding person's contacts and/or links to the national safeguarding policy.
- Others have no mention of safeguarding on the website at all.

This inconsistency in publishing safeguarding policies online was found across denominations, meaning that even places of worship from larger structured organisations sometimes had no mention of safeguarding on their website, or no website at all. Independent organisations more often lacked websites or information on safeguarding than larger organisations.

Safeguarding Practices

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

How are current child safeguarding policies being implemented in practice?

Child Safeguarding Prevention

Safeguarding Structures

The organisations that participated in this review all have a safeguarding committee, advisory panel, or board, often chaired by a professional from fields like social work, law enforcement, or education, and plays a key role in overseeing safeguarding practices across the organisation nationally or regionally. These organisations also have national and regional safeguarding officers or coordinators who play a crucial role in providing support and oversight, ensuring policies are properly implemented, offering training, and coordinating between local and national safeguarding efforts, including audits and reviews.

In addition to safeguarding committees, organisations have specific national or regional panels to handle more complex cases, often including retired or part-time senior professionals, such as teachers, social workers, and legal or police professionals, bringing additional authority and confidence to the process. The safeguarding structures generally include staff and volunteers to ensure a broad skill set is applied to safeguarding issues.

At the local level, most places of worship (81% in the survey) typically have a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or liaison person responsible for ensuring safeguarding policies are implemented at the local level. These individuals often have additional training in safeguarding and are supported by volunteers. The survey reveals that 75% of places of worship have trained DSL and 79% state that the DSL have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. There are also local safeguarding panels that consist of the local minister along with a few volunteers from the community, to ensure that safeguarding is integrated at the local level.

There were some concerns from those who have had experience of developing safeguarding policies and practices with religious organisations, regarding external professionals overseeing safeguarding within faith-based organisations, particularly in relation to whether they sufficiently understand the culture of the faith organisation. It was suggested that there was an atmosphere of inappropriate deference towards the hierarchy of faith-based organisations, and that some professionals may apply a secular approach to religious environments.

Recruitment

The large majority of places of worship (86%) report that they adhere to robust safeguarding protocols during recruitment. When asked to list the specific measures taken during recruitment, 86% report carrying out AccessNI or criminal record checks, just under three-quarters (73%) carry out interviews, 65% ask for written references, 63% request that the applicant fills out an application form with past experience, 57% request a declaration form to be completed and just over half (53%) report having an open recruitment process. When asked whether codes of conducts are available at the place of worship, 81% replied there is a code for appropriate behaviour between adults and children, 72% had codes for appropriate behaviour between children and children and another 72% confirmed they had a policy for handling breaches in codes of conduct.

Figure 2: Recruitment processes adopted by faith-based organisations



Vetting

All clergy, staff, and volunteers who work with children or vulnerable adults are required to undergo vetting through Access NI (Northern Ireland) or Garda Vetting (Republic of Ireland). Vetting applies to both paid and volunteer roles in regulated activities, though the application of vetting requirements to voluntary roles varies. Clear policies and recruitment guidelines outline the vetting process, often aligning with national safeguarding regulations.

Differences in terminology between church roles and statutory vetting bodies (e.g., Access NI) have led to efforts to harmonise definitions for a smoother vetting process. Vetting rules in statutory organisations do not always align well with faith settings. For example, a caretaker in a school might require vetting, whereas a church caretaker may not. Some denominations have recently updated their vetting policies to provide clearer guidelines on which roles require vetting.

Vetting is typically conducted once upon appointment and again if the individual moves into a new role. Upon appointment, safeguarding induction packs are provided, including codes of conduct, key contacts, and policies. Vetting is often linked to mandatory safeguarding training, meaning individuals cannot volunteer or work in a safeguarding role without both. Some faith groups have introduced mandatory re-vetting every three years as best practice. Post-COVID re-vetting was required in some places due to long gaps in activity.

Dedicated safeguarding officers or parish representatives ensure compliance with vetting procedures, maintain records, and provide training. Some faith-based organisations have centralised vetting processes to ensure consistency and accountability across multiple locations. Spreadsheets and tracking systems are used to remind safeguarding leads of upcoming re-vetting needs. Small, close-knit congregations sometimes take an informal approach to vetting, relying on personal knowledge rather than structured procedures. However, reminders are in place to ensure formal reference checks and declarations are still completed.

Training

Safeguarding training is compulsory for all clergy, staff, and volunteers who work with children and vulnerable adults. Most organisations follow a three-year retraining cycle, ensuring continuous safeguarding awareness. However, some require training every two years for those in child-focused roles. Initial safeguarding training is extensive, often lasting a full day, and includes legal responsibilities, recognising abuse, responding to disclosures, and reporting procedures. Refresher training is regularly provided to ensure policies and procedures remain current.

Training is provided in-person, online, or through blended learning. Some national representations deliver weekly training sessions across places of worship to ensure widespread accessibility. Online training has become more prominent, with some organisations delivering up to 80% of their training virtually. Training registers track who has completed training and when it needs to be renewed. Some organisations audit parishes to ensure safeguarding training is being implemented effectively. Volunteers must sign off on training completion, ensuring accountability.

In Northern Ireland, there is no official standard for safeguarding training content, leading to varied training quality across denominations. Many organisations use nationally developed training programs, which are then delivered locally. Some organisations operate a 'train the trainer' model, where safeguarding leads or clergy receive training and then cascade knowledge within their locality or region. National safeguarding teams oversee compliance, and in some cases, training records are centrally maintained to track completion and renewal dates.

Training covers legal frameworks, including national and international safeguarding laws (e.g., UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland legislation). Focus on recognising, responding to, and reporting abuse ensures that volunteers and clergy understand their responsibilities and links with statutory services (e.g., police, social services, Gateway teams).

Some safeguarding leads tailor training with local statistics on child protection concerns, helping attendees grasp real-world risks in their communities. Some clergy have expressed discomfort with real-life case examples, but trainers emphasise the importance of victim-centred learning, especially given younger recruits are often unaware of child abuse cases, even the most notorious ones. There is an emerging focus on trauma-informed practice and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), aiming to equip clergy with better pastoral skills.

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments are an internal mandatory requirement and are regularly reviewed, often on an annual basis. They cover both existing and new activities, ensuring that any new programs (e.g., youth clubs, summer camps) are assessed for safeguarding risks before they begin. Risk assessments are said to be framed within legal and faith-based governance structures, including civil law and canon law, ensuring compliance with safeguarding regulations.

Risk assessments include health and safety aspects, such as evacuation procedures, building safety, and general welfare considerations for children and vulnerable individuals. Larger organisations emphasise the importance of documentation and accountability, such as keeping records of evacuation drills and health and safety checks.

Some faith-based organisations acknowledge that risk assessments were not always a strong focus in the past, and efforts are now being made to embed them as a core safeguarding practice. A few individuals find risk management policies and tools overwhelming or difficult to implement, which can lead to resistance or inconsistency in their use. A key challenge is how to handle individuals with past offenses or serious allegations, ensuring that safeguarding policies protect the community while also managing legal and ethical considerations.

Record Keeping

Record-keeping is recognised as a critical area requiring ongoing action and resources. Historical safeguarding cases highlight gaps in past record-keeping. Some incidents from decades ago lack sufficient documentation, making it difficult to address allegations effectively. These gaps are being used in training to emphasise the importance of proper documentation, reinforcing the need for thorough and timely records to withstand scrutiny in future inquiries.

Safeguarding officers are typically responsible for overseeing the case management process and record retention, ensuring consistency and accountability. Some faith-based organisations have strong and structured record-keeping systems, with records being signed, stored, and audited to ensure compliance. Registers are maintained for attendance and safeguarding-related activities, requiring individuals to sign in and out, which helps track participation and accountability. Locations hosting external organisations (e.g., Scouts groups) require formal protocols to ensure those groups comply with safeguarding policies.

Records at the local level include details of safeguarding meetings, initial reports, conversations, and formal reporting forms. Safeguarding information is stored securely but separate from case management records. For example, local offices may contain safeguarding-related documents such as audit reports and appointment letters, but not sensitive case details. However, some churches, especially small or rural ones, lack consistent record-keeping practices, with efforts being made to establish standardised protocols across all locations.

Yet concerns were raised regarding the lack of records in existence and reluctance in sharing of records and information, even within denominations. It was suggested that this suppression of information sharing has shrouded the true incidence of abuse within the faith-sector in Northern Ireland.

Reviews and Audits

There is a growing recognition that safeguarding audits need to happen more frequently. Some faith-based organisations have annual self-audits, while others conduct triennial or five-yearly reviews. Some audits have been repeated every eight to ten years, but there is a push for them to occur more often. In some cases, annual reports compile audit results for review by leadership, committees, or national safeguarding bodies, if relevant.

A majority of these larger faith-based organisations are moving away from trust-based audits and emphasising evidence to demonstrate compliance (e.g., vetting records, safeguarding policies, training logs). Traffic light systems (Red, Amber, Green) were mentioned as tools to categorise compliance and highlight urgent issues. National level safeguarding leads are using audits to analyse training needs and inform future safeguarding efforts.

There is concern about conflict of interest when audits are conducted internally and a lack of independent oversight of safeguarding processes and reviews. Faith-based organisations are now engaging external auditors (e.g., retired social workers, law enforcement officials). External audits enhance credibility and help ensure safeguarding policies are being properly implemented. Hybrid approaches are becoming more common, with internal audits conducted more frequently and external audits at longer intervals.

In some cases, audit results feed into strategic plans that outline safeguarding improvements over the next 3–5 years. Action plans are developed for areas needing improvement, with follow-up reviews to ensure compliance. Some faith-based organisations at national level align their processes with statutory requirements (e.g., Section 12 audits) to ensure best practices.

Some struggles with full compliance exist (e.g., missing records, late audit submissions, lack of response from places of worship). There is apparently an effort to improve record-keeping and ensure documents (e.g., training logs, safeguarding policies) are readily available during audits with follow-ups conducted if records are missing.

Safeguarding Compliance Levels

Organisations that took part in the study emphasised that safeguarding has become a central value, ingrained in religious operations. Faith-based organisations consistently report having well-defined safeguarding policies and practices. A challenge mentioned in implementing safeguarding was the cultural shift required within faith-based organisations to fully embrace safeguarding. This includes overcoming perceptions that safeguarding is an inconvenient or secondary issue or just a legal requirement and ensuring that all members, particularly in leadership, understand the importance of safeguarding. Resistance to safeguarding policies was mentioned particularly from long-standing staff, volunteers, and clergy, such as sacristans or older priests, show some reluctance to embrace new technology or to comply with new vetting procedures or training, perceiving it as unnecessary or intrusive.

A recurring issue is the perceived burden of having to renew safeguarding training and vetting every three years (compulsory in RoI and requested by some organisations in NI). Some volunteers, particularly those with professional backgrounds (e.g., teachers or health officials), questioned the necessity of this frequency, as their own professional organisations might not have similar requirements. Faith-based organisations face the challenge of balancing safeguarding with other organisational needs, such as finance and governance.

While many organisations have robust safeguarding policies, there are challenges in ensuring that they are consistently implemented at the local level. There are concerns about ensuring that all relevant personnel (e.g., volunteers, clergy, staff) are properly trained and equipped to consistently follow safeguarding procedures, or whether local congregations are adequately engaged and informed about the policies.

Other concerns include ensuring that safeguarding measures are sensitive to local culture and context, as places of worship vary widely in their size and resources. Differences in compliance levels were noted between larger faith-based organisations with more resources, and smaller, rural ones, where there are fewer volunteers and less capacity for rigorous record-keeping, staff training and ensuring compliance with required ratios for children's activities.

Effective safeguarding leadership and communication is often highlighted as key to stronger safeguarding practices. Places with an audible and visible commitment to safeguarding such as embedding safeguarding into all religious activities and promoting it as a value central to the place of worship, are said to be more likely to deter predators from operating in that location.

Child Safeguarding Response

Reporting Concerns

A majority of child abuse disclosures are historical, with many cases dating back to the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and 90s. This is the case across different faith-based organisations, with many of the accused individuals now deceased, retired, having moved to other regions or otherwise no longer in active ministry. Recent allegations of child abuse are reportedly rare. The survey found that 10 places of worship reported an allegation of child abuse in the last 10 years, however, of those, most were not allegations against members of the faith-based organisations but concerns about members of the congregation or instances of child abuse happening in the home. Others, on the other hand, are allegations brought forward in the last 10 years relating to historical abuse, some of which are currently open civil litigations.

There is a well-defined process for reporting allegations which are immediately reported to statutory authorities such as the police and social services, if the situation requires it according to national legislation and guidance. The designated safeguarding officer (DLP) or local safeguarding teams or panels would usually be the point of contact for managing the response, reporting to relevant authorities and escalating concerns. Places of worship usually have guidelines in place about who should report, what to report, and how to do so (i.e., reporting forms, phone numbers, etc.).

In almost all cases, faith-based organisations at all levels emphasise that statutory bodies like the police and social services take the lead in investigating allegations once a concern is reported. Safeguarding officers would remain in contact with these bodies to obtain advice on how to proceed with the accused, provide information when requested and ensure coordination internally. Safeguarding officers must be careful about the information shared with the accused or other parties about the accused to avoid interference with police investigations. In some cases, information on who made the complaint or the exact details of the allegations may not be shared with the accused until later. The police will usually advise on what information can be shared or not. Faith-based organisations are sometimes unaware of ongoing criminal proceedings, receiving updates only if the police proactively contact them and some learn about cases through media reports.

Clergy-related allegations are said to be handled with additional layers of scrutiny and care by faith-based organisations. Risk assessments are conducted with input from both the highest authority and the safeguarding officer. If the allegation involves a clergy member, they are typically suspended from ministry during the investigation process. In some cases, a local-level panel is convened, usually within a week, to discuss the case and advise on risk management.

Dealing with allegations against deceased clergy creates a unique challenge, as the risk to children is no longer present, but the organisation still needs to demonstrate sincere compassion and offer adequate support to victims and survivors of abuse within their organisation. Many organisations place emphasis on training for safeguarding leads and others who may be involved in receiving allegations to ensure they adopt a trauma-informed approach when handling disclosures of child abuse.

Investigations and Prosecutions

There are well-founded concerns regarding the inconsistent handling of allegations of child abuse in the past, with many accusations not being acted upon immediately, or at all. Past inquiries and studies internationally have systematically revealed a failure by faith-based organisations to act swiftly or decisively, which may have enabled the accused to remain in ministry or continue in a position of authority despite allegations of child abuse against them. It can be challenging for victims to engage with the faith-based organisation, especially when they view the organisation as an inherent part of the system of abuse.

At present, some victims refuse to come forward due to the negative perception of the way faith-based allegations have handled allegations in the past and the lack of trust that they will receive an adequate response. In some instances, victims are reluctant to interact with the faith-based organisations at all and prefer to engage with external bodies, reflecting the lack of trust in the faith-based organisations' handling of abuse cases. There is a common understanding that investigating the allegation is not the role of religious members; their role is to report and support the statutory authorities.

Criminal cases often take years to conclude, forcing the victim to endure prolonged trauma. Furthermore, the long prosecution process leaves the accused individuals in limbo and complicates safeguarding decisions at all levels of the organisation. If the accused pleads guilty, legal proceedings move faster (as little as six months), but contested cases can take 18 months or more. The faith-based organisation must sometimes refrain from naming accused individuals until legal outcomes are determined, further delaying public awareness.

Some allegations cannot be substantiated due to a lack of evidence, such as in cases where the victim does not engage or there is a long-time gap since the abuse occurred. This makes it difficult to pursue investigations or take appropriate action. Time lapses in reporting abuse have also impacted prosecutions. The importance of timely action to ensure that individuals are held accountable and that victims receive support is highlighted as an area for improvement.

Internal investigations are paused once statutory authorities begin their inquiries. Faith organisations are prohibited from conducting parallel investigations to avoid interfering with legal processes. Once the legal process concludes, internal investigations resume, sometimes resulting in disciplinary actions even if there was no criminal conviction. When an allegation involves clergy, leadership is required to notify higher authorities immediately. Serious cases, such as child sexual abuse, are referred to the highest authority (internationally if required), where decisions on disciplinary actions are made.

Many outside of faith-based organisations feel that decisions by faith-based organisation leaders on how they handle cases of child abuse perpetrated by members of their organisation are more influenced by concerns for reputational management and maintaining public trust, than by getting to the truth due to a genuine concern for the protection of children and for the harm caused to those who have been abused.

Internal Disciplinary Actions

There is acknowledgment by faith-based organisations of past failures, where accused clergy were simply transferred to different locations rather than removed, often resulting in further abuse perpetrated in the new location. Studies into child abuse in religious settings, institutional or non-institutional, provide ample evidence of preexisting knowledge of perpetrators, whose abuse was overlooked or unjustifiably excused, and therefore knowingly allowing their continuation in clerical posts.

Faith-based organisations interviewed all emphasise the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, however, policies generally dictate that an individual must be removed from their role during an investigation and trainings reinforce that removal is a standard safeguarding procedure rather than an assumption of guilt. This means that individuals accused of abuse are often required to step aside from their roles while investigations take place. This is framed as a protective measure rather than an assumption of guilt.

If religious or lay leaders accused of abuse refuse to step down, the organisation leadership may seek advice from higher authorities, such as national or international governing bodies. In some cases, even if no formal charges are filed, individuals may still be removed due to ethical or safeguarding concerns. Some accused individuals may be assigned non-public or administrative roles (e.g., working in archives) if they are deemed a lower risk. Each case is assessed individually, considering factors such as the legal status (criminal charges or convictions vs. allegations), current risk to children or others, as well as reputational risk to the organisation.

If an individual is removed from ministry, most say that there would be strict boundaries in place, with, in some cases, a management plan that includes periodic check-ins and restrictions on movement. Regularly cited implemented boundaries include being forbidden to a) act in a clerical role, b) to leave the jurisdiction without informing authorities and c) to interact with children or young people. Even when members are permanently removed from ministry, many faith-based organisations would provide housing and financial support (sometimes for life), mental health support and pastoral care. This is seen as an obligation to the individual, even if they will never return to active ministry.

In small or rural places, allegations create additional difficulties when both the alleged offender and victim belong to the same community. Ministers face conflicts in managing pastoral care while adhering to legal confidentiality restrictions. The limited information from police makes proactive safeguarding more difficult in these settings.

Relations with Statutory Agencies

The majority of faith-based organisations report positive and collaborative relationships with statutory bodies such as social services, police, and the safeguarding board. Representatives from statutory bodies, including police officers and social workers, are seen as valuable sources of expertise, and faith-based representatives appreciate the opportunity to seek advice from these professionals. A few organisations report having limited or no contact with statutory bodies unless an allegation arises.

Having a single point of contact within agencies (e.g., a specific PSNI officer or social worker) is said to greatly improve relationships and understanding. Some organisations benefit from having former statutory representatives sitting on their safeguarding committees at various levels of the organisation, providing valuable guidance and insight. Some faith-based organisations benefit from Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with statutory agencies, ensuring clarity in reporting and information-sharing. Participation in the interfaith committee (hosted by SBNI) and the public protection agencies' committee (hosted by PPANI) is seen as beneficial to support policy development and share information about best practices.

Delays in responses from agencies, particularly police (PSNI) and social services, are a concern. Some safeguarding leads struggle with long waiting times for case updates following investigations of child abuse or lack of feedback after referrals due to GDPR and confidentiality policies. Social services tend to respond quickly to initial contact, but follow-up communication is often weaker. Some cases are said to take months to be processed before a decision is made about whether to proceed with an investigation. Court delays in handling safeguarding cases can cause frustration.

Some faith-based organisations feel that statutory agencies need have a specialised understanding of the way faith-based organisations function. Some interviewees express a desire for faith-based organisations to be more included in broader safeguarding discussions. Conferences, workshops, and safeguarding forums are recognised as valuable, but there is a sense among faith-based organisations that they are left out of broader safeguarding initiatives. More structured opportunities to share best practices across faith communities and statutory bodies would be appreciated.

Support Services for Victims and Survivors

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

Are there sufficient support services available for victims when reporting abuse?

Survivors of clerical abuse often require extensive support due to the profound and long-lasting impact of their experiences¹. The unique nature of clerical abuse, which involves a betrayal of trust by religious authority figures, can lead to severe psychological, emotional, and spiritual trauma that may persist for years or even decades after the abuse has occurred.

Research has consistently shown that survivors of clerical abuse face a range of challenges that necessitate specialised support. A study by Guido² (2008) found that victims of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse often experience complex trauma, characterised by symptoms such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships. These psychological effects can be particularly severe due to the spiritual dimension of the abuse, which may shatter the survivor's faith and sense of meaning.

Moreover, the institutional response to clerical abuse has often compounded the trauma experienced by survivors. The Ryan Report (2009) and the Murphy Report (2009) in Ireland revealed widespread mishandling of abuse allegations in Catholic-run institutions, with religious leaders frequently prioritising the protection of clergy and the church over the well-being of victims. This institutional betrayal can lead to feelings of abandonment, distrust in authority figures, and a sense of isolation that further emphasises the need for comprehensive support services.

Support for survivors of clerical abuse is crucial not only for individual healing but also for addressing the broader societal impact of such abuse. Effective support services can help survivors rebuild their lives, regain trust in institutions, and potentially prevent the intergenerational transmission of trauma. As our understanding of the complex needs of clerical abuse survivors continues to evolve, it is essential that support services are tailored to address the unique challenges faced by this population.

Our research found that support offered to victims and survivors is varied and inconsistent across faith-based organisations and locations. Some denominations offer support through their own national services like Towards Healing (counselling) and Towards Peace (spiritual accompaniment). Some provide their own support persons or counsellors, while others rely on external referrals, such as to Nexus and Barnardo's.

There are reported instances of faith organisations providing financial support for independent counselling. Some organisations offer a dedicated support person to act as liaisons between victims, the organisation, and statutory authorities. These individuals provide guidance but are not counsellors. A parallel support system exists for respondents (those accused), often managed by a different team. Support is provided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the victim's needs.

Apprehension was expressed concerning faith-based organisations' attitude and responses to victims, advising for a revised willingness of denominations to acknowledge the true incidence of abuse and dispense reputational concerns. Continued 'spiritual abuse' of those alleging abuse was also cited. This type of abuse in particular refers to situations where religious beliefs and practices are used to coerce, control, or harm others, often through manipulation, justification of harmful actions, or the misuse of religious authority.³ One repeated accusation has been of victim-blaming by faith-based organisations following abuse disclosures.

There is a growing recognition that safeguarding personnel and church leaders need trauma-informed training to effectively support survivors of clerical abuse, minimise the risk of secondary victimisation, and ensure faith communities become safe and restorative spaces for those impacted by trauma. Guiking and Jakob (2022)⁴ indicates that many church leaders lack formal education in handling abuse cases, often relying on simplistic scriptural interpretations that may inadvertently cause harm. Implementing structured, trauma-informed training programs has been shown to improve clergy responses, prevent further trauma, and promote systemic change within religious institutions.

Trauma-informed care, according to the US Department of Health, is characterised by six core principles: safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural competence⁵. Within religious contexts, these principles must be adapted to account for the spiritual dimensions of trauma. Statements like "I believe you" and "I'm sorry for what happened to you" have been highlighted as powerful in building trust. Some faith-based organisations are currently formalising policies and procedures to ensure victims receive the right support. The role of external safeguarding bodies is key in advising faith-based organisations on best practices.

Some victims come forward decades later due to personal circumstances (e.g., after a parent's passing or when children are grown). There is no set template for how victims engage with the process; each case is different. Some victims feel excluded from internal investigations. Redress schemes and public apologies have been issued in certain cases, offering another avenue for victims to come forward. However, apologies are still perceived as insincere and driven by the need to protect the organisation's reputation over a genuine concern about the harm that has been caused.

¹ Beste, J. (2021). Envisioning a Just Response to the Catholic Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis. *Theological studies*, 82(1), 29-54.

² Guido, J. J. (2008). A unique betrayal: Clergy sexual abuse in the context of the Catholic religious tradition. *Journal of child sexual abuse*, 17(3-4), 255-269.

³ Oakley, L., Kinmond, K. and Humphreys, J. (2018). Spiritual abuse in Christian faith settings: Definition, policy and practice guidance. *The Journal of Adult Protection*, 20(3/4), pp.144-154.

⁴ Guiking, K., & Jacob, A. (2022). Exploring church staff knowledge of trauma and trauma-informed care. *Social Work and Christianity*, 49(3), 241-255.

⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2014). SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884.

Conclusion

This review of child safeguarding practices in faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland highlights significant advancements in policy development and implementation, yet persistent challenges remain. Structured organisations with national or regional oversight demonstrate strong adherence to safeguarding protocols, ensuring compliance with legislative frameworks and statutory guidance. These organisations typically have dedicated safeguarding teams that oversee policy development, training, and reporting mechanisms. However, independent faith-based organisations, which lack central governance, present a notable gap in safeguarding practices. Limited data on their procedures raises concerns about inconsistencies in child protection measures across the faith sector, underscoring the need for greater oversight and engagement.

While safeguarding policies are regularly reviewed and updated in response to legal changes and societal awareness, concerns persist regarding their complexity and bureaucratic nature, which may hinder practical implementation at the local level. Transparency remains an area for improvement, with some denominations perceived as prioritising reputational management over cultural change. Discrepancies in policy dissemination further contribute to inconsistencies, as some local level organisations actively communicate safeguarding measures through training, websites, and printed materials, while others lack visible safeguarding information, potentially impacting awareness and reporting mechanisms.

The implementation of safeguarding procedures varies across organisations, with designated safeguarding officers playing a critical role in managing disclosures and liaising with statutory authorities. Reporting mechanisms are generally well-established, ensuring concerns are escalated appropriately. However, the handling of historical abuse cases presents ongoing challenges, particularly when accused individuals are deceased or no longer in ministry. While many participating organisations are adopting trauma-informed approaches to support survivors, past failures in responding to abuse have damaged trust, making some victims hesitant to engage with faith-based institutions.

Faith-based organisations report generally positive relationships with statutory safeguarding bodies, though engagement gaps remain. Participation in interfaith safeguarding committees and the inclusion of former statutory representatives on safeguarding panels have been beneficial. However, concerns persist regarding slow responses from police and social services, as well as a perceived lack of specialised understanding of faith-based governance structures.

Current support services for victims and survivors remain inconsistent, with some organisations offering dedicated national services and others relying on external referrals. Financial support for counselling and the provision of designated support personnel are available in some cases, but these measures are not uniformly applied, leaving gaps in victim care. There is increasing recognition of the need for trauma-informed training for safeguarding personnel and religious leaders. While some faith-based organisations are taking steps to implement a victim-led approach, concerns remain that public apologies and redress schemes are often perceived as being driven more by reputational concerns than genuine remorse. Ensuring a survivor-focused, transparent, and consistent response will be crucial in rebuilding trust and improving support mechanisms for victims of abuse.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this section build upon the extensive work already undertaken by the academic and policy communities in the field of child protection and institutional safeguarding. Scholars and practitioners have long emphasised the complexities of safeguarding within faith-based settings, particularly in relation to the intersection of theological doctrine, institutional accountability, and trauma-informed care. Drawing upon this research, our recommendations aim to provide ministers with insights and recommendations to strengthen existing safeguarding frameworks to ensure that faith communities uphold the highest standards of child protection and survivor support.

- There is a need for transparent and independent scrutiny of safeguarding policies and procedures. Respondents argue for the establishment of a statutory agency in Northern Ireland (such as the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, SBNI) with the authority to oversee and audit safeguarding practices in faith-based organisations. Such a body would be tasked with ensuring that organisations meet minimum standards, providing guidance, and monitoring compliance. It was noted that this was the only pathway to enabling safeguarding within the faith-sector. This would help standardise

training, audits, and strengthen policy implementations across faith-based organisations. Many emphasise that given the influence of faith-based organisations in NI communities, they should be made to report their safeguarding practices in the same way that statutory agencies are. This will require equipping SBNI with the resources to expand their mandate.

- The fact that independent churches were hard to identify suggests they are not clearly identified through a government database. Yet, these are specifically the locations that are less likely to have adequate safeguarding in place, partly due to resources, partly due to the lack of obligation or oversight to do so. It is recommended to create and maintain an official register of all faith-based organisations, either in the Charity Commission or through the Department of Communities. This register could simultaneously identify the different activities involving children beyond the place of worship, such as in schools, youth clubs or in hospitals. Once this list is available, it will be easier to liaise with faith-based organisations and include them in statutory processes (training/audits/policy reviews).
- Further research is required to examine child abuse in schools, including those affiliated with faith-based organisations, as this issue was beyond the scope of the current review but remains well-documented in existing studies. Investigations such as the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) (2022) in England and Wales have highlighted systemic failures in safeguarding within both secular and faith-linked educational settings. Similarly, the Ryan Report (2009) in Ireland uncovered widespread abuse in religious-run schools, emphasising institutional negligence and inadequate safeguarding measures. Research by Erooga (2012)⁶ further underscores how power dynamics in educational institutions can enable abuse, while Shakeshaft (2004)⁷ provides evidence of the prevalence of educator-perpetrated abuse in school settings. Given these findings, a comprehensive review of safeguarding policies and practices in schools, including those with religious affiliations, is necessary to adequately assess whether current protections are effective and to identify areas requiring urgent reform.
- Should further inquiries take place, the way in which victim statements are taken (in the case where the police are not taking statements directly) is vital to the outcome of prosecutions further down the line; “a good statement can be the difference between a prosecution or not”. To avoid retraumatising victims by taking repeated statements, initial victim and survivor statements should be professionally collected, comprehensive and fit for use in further investigations and prosecutions. If the police are not taking the statements, such as in the case of an inquiry, those taking statements should receive adequate training to ensure the statement quality can be relied on for prosecution. Efforts to speed up prosecution services would also reduce the trauma inflicted on victims and survivors.
- The NI Assembly could consider formally designating charitable organisations to provide dedicated support services for victims and survivors of child abuse in faith-based settings. Unlike Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI) survivors, clerical abuse survivors currently lack statutory protection and access to specialised services due to the absence of an inquiry or a dedicated budget. By identifying and funding expert organisations, TEO can ensure that survivors receive the same level of support, regardless of whether an inquiry takes place. This measure is essential to safeguarding and protecting vulnerable adults coming forward with allegations of abuse, ensuring they have access to trauma-informed care, counselling, and advocacy services.

- There is a clear emphasis on the risk of complacency, with faith-based organisations urged to avoid thinking that safeguarding is “done”. Cases where the perpetrator has died before the abuse comes to light common lead to a belief across faith-organisations that the safeguarding risk within the organisation is also historical. While this is a comfortable conclusion, it should ultimately be avoided to ensure adequate safeguarding practices. There is a need for continual assessment, improvement, and vigilance in safeguarding efforts to stay up-to-date with evolving challenges and risks. The importance of involving victims and survivors of abuse in the development and review of safeguarding strategies has been highlighted. However, there are challenges to achieving this in a meaningful way, without tokenism. There is a call to establish a platform for more open and ongoing dialogue between faith-based organisations and survivors to ensure their voices are heard and incorporated into safeguarding processes.
- Faith-based organisations need to be encouraged and supported to adopt trauma-informed and victim-centric approaches. There is a need to safeguard children and vulnerable adults, particularly victims, when disclosing abuse and to offer holistic support pathways to justice. This means tailoring safeguarding responses to be more sensitive to the emotional and psychological needs of victims, with an emphasis on understanding trauma and its long-term impact on survivors. Training should be standardised across denominations and include best practices from psychology, social work, and law enforcement on responding to disclosures of abuse. Apologies must be sincere and demonstrate genuine remorse for the harm inflicted on people through abuse. Faith-based organisations must refrain from victim blaming and must place child protection over the organisation’s reputation.
- Some suggest creating independent professional panels within faith organisations to handle safeguarding issues, particularly decision-making processes. The idea is to remove clergy from the safeguarding decision-making process in situations involving accusations of abuse, as it may be difficult for a senior clergy member to make objective decisions regarding individuals they know personally. This could help improve impartiality and transparency in safeguarding decisions. Similarly, many argue for internal reviews and audits to be conducted independently to ensure objectivity throughout reviews and for the use of well-defined performance indicators to measure progress.
- It is recommended to encourage places of worship to actively demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding. A church that visibly understands and implements safeguarding measures is less likely to attract individuals with malicious intent. This recommendation stresses the importance of transparency and making safeguarding policies publicly accessible. Similarly, the more children are supported to understand safe boundaries, the more they are likely to recognise abusive behaviours. Many express the value of increased cooperation across different faith settings through committees such as the Interfaith Committee. This collaboration is seen as beneficial for sharing resources, knowledge, and strategies. Such cooperation could lead to more unified and effective safeguarding practices across diverse religious communities, especially those with fewer resources.

⁶ Erooga, M. (2012). *Creating safer organisations: Practical steps to prevent the abuse of children by those working with them*. Wiley-Blackwell.

⁷ Shakeshaft, C. (2004). *Educator sexual misconduct: A synthesis of existing literature*. U.S. Department of Education.

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Annexes

Annex 1: Specifications

SPECIFICATION

ID 5364299 – TEO – Victims and Survivors Division

A Review of Current Safeguarding Policies and Practices Within the Faith Sector

1. Introduction

1.1 The Interdepartmental Working Group⁸ (IDWG), is commissioning a programme of work to help understand the nature and prevalence of historical clerical child abuse (HCCA) and the impact on victims / survivors of HCCA in Northern Ireland.

1.2 The purpose of this programme of work is to support the IDWG to provide informed evidence-based recommendations to Ministers on any future action required, including any future action required for an effective investigation into HCCA and possible remedies for victims.

1.3 The works are all commissioned by the IDWG, through the Executive Office (TEO).

1.4 For the purposes of this work, the term 'clerical abuse' includes 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.

1.5 Typically, an eligible person will be considered to be:

- **Category A** – Any person who has a designated religious title, ordained and who provided or provides ministry;
- **Category B** – Any person acting in a religious / ministry role which is directed by a person in Category A; and
- **Category C** – Any person who was accountable to a religious person who had decision making authority and responsibility for taking action to protect children or young people from harm.

1.6 The Supplier must complete a piece of work to review current safeguarding policies and practices within the faith sector.

1.7 In addition to this piece of work, there are two further separate studies – one to review historical clerical records of child abuse, and another to investigate HCCA Victim and Survivors experiences and expectations to prevent clerical child abuse.

1.8 The Supplier is expected to be available to engage with and inform the wider programme of work.

2. Background

2.1 The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI) was an independent inquiry into the abuse of children (those under the age of 18) in residential institutions (other than schools) in Northern Ireland between 1922 and 1995. Details of the inquiry, including its terms of reference, can be found at <https://www.hiainquiry.org/>

2.2 Historical clerical abuse that fell outside the HIAI terms of reference, i.e. that did not take place in a residential setting, was raised as an issue by the then Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM Committee and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) at various junctures when the HIA Inquiry was established and operational. The position of Ministers in relation to abuse perpetrated by the clergy and members of religious bodies outside of an institutional setting has been that:

- The issue of clerical abuse is no less important or emotive than institutional abuse and we are mindful of the equally destructive impact it has had on many individuals; and
- Following the HIAI, it will be for the Executive to consider how to deal with clerical child abuse that did not fall within the Inquiry's terms of reference.

2.3 In October 2016, the NI Executive agreed that a single interdepartmental working group (IDWG), with an independent chair, should be set up to review the evidence relating to Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes and HCCA in Northern Ireland.

2.4 This piece of work is a legacy of the HIAI as it was not included within the Inquiry Terms of Reference. It is consciously being restricted to the abuse of children (those under the age of 18). Should issues relating to the abuse of vulnerable adults emerge in the course of the research, these will be considered as a separate matter.

3. Contract Requirements

3.1 The Supplier must investigate:

- How current safeguarding policies in faith organisations align with the overarching legislative and policy framework, including the identification of any areas for improvement in policies.
- How current safeguarding policies are implemented, including the identification of any areas of improvement in safeguarding practice.
- Whether sufficient support services are available for victims when reporting abuse, throughout any subsequent investigation and following conclusion of investigation.

3.2 The research must take the form of an in-depth review of safeguarding policies within faith organisations and a consideration of relevant case studies to allow for an assessment of current practices. It will assess improvements in safeguarding over the past 40 years and determine whether current safeguarding policies and practices effectively address lessons from the past.

3.3 In carrying out their work, the Supplier must consider the reports published by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in England and Wales, and in the Republic of Ireland the report of the Ryan Commission in 2009, and other relevant reports in relation to clerical abuse, e.g. the Murphy Report in 2009, the Ferns Report in 2005 and the Cloyne Report in 2011.

3.4 The IDWG will encourage all relevant organisations and persons to provide information and access to documents where possible. This is anticipated to include policy material and the results of reviews as necessary. The IDWG will emphasise the benefit to all organisations of identifying best practice. However, if organisations are unwilling / unable to share information this should be recorded.

3.5 The Supplier must consider how current safeguarding practices are implemented across a range of faith organisations (to include, where possible, all the faith organisations in Annex A and a sample of others in Annex B) and identify good safeguarding practice that can be promoted across all faith organisations. The Supplier must refer to the Census 2021 data on religious denominations in Northern Ireland at Annex B to identify the range of faith organisations to be included in this study. In addition to contacting the faith organisations and any relevant statutory agencies directly, the Supplier must liaise with the Interfaith Committee of the Safeguarding Board for NI (SBNI) and the other organisations shown in Annex A.

3.6 This project must examine different issues, including, but not limited to:

- The extent to which safeguarding practice is driven by the rights and best interests of the child;
- The definition and scope of safeguarding applied by the organisation, including what constitutes abuse;
- Reporting and other information sharing procedures, including how well and how widely these are understood and applied;
- Responsibility and accountability for safeguarding;
- How safeguarding practices are monitored and evaluated and how any lessons learned/improvements identified are disseminated; and
- The professionalism of safeguarding within the faith sector and professional recognition of staff working in safeguarding.

3.7 The study must identify whether there are any further or new lessons to be learnt for current practice from the experience of victims of the past. In considering current practice, the Supplier must consider relevant Criminal Justice Inspection reports and the Gillen Review Report of 2019.

3.8 Should any new safeguarding concerns come to light during the course of this work, it should be reported to the relevant authorities.

3.9 In terms of governance, the research is being commissioned by, and the Supplier is ultimately accountable to the IDWG.

3.10 Any particular conflicts of interest will be reported to TEO and recorded by the Suppliers at the start of, and throughout, the process.

4. Reporting Requirements and Timescales

4.1 The Suppliers must work closely with the Historical Institutional Abuse Implementation Branch within TEO, who will provide assistance as required.

4.2 The Supplier must provide updates to the IDWG and its Reference Group in the early stages including an inception report; at final report stage; and otherwise as required.

4.3 The expected timescale for key outputs is:

- **[At contract commencement]:** Initial project meeting with TEO officials

- **[Within 1 month of contract award]:** Inception Report submitted to TEO detailing how the work is going to be done, including timeline and budget.
- **[Every 1 month]:** Meet with TEO officials to review progress and discuss any emerging findings. Midway between these meetings a short email progress update is to be provided to TEO officials.
- **[4 months after study commences]:** Draft final report to be submitted to TEO. Following a response from IDWG (to be given within 2 weeks), a final report is to be submitted 2 weeks after response received.

The Supplier must provide a presentation of their findings to the IDWG (and to Ministers if requested by IDWG).

5. Contract Period

5.1 The Contract will commence in September 2024, for a period of 4-months. There will be an optional extension of 1 month for contingency purposes only.

5.2 If the completion of all the key objectives detailed above exceeds the initial contract period and the optional extension is needed to complete them, the maximum £40,000 budget is still applicable regardless of the extension to the contract period.

6. Contract Management and Review

6.1 This contract will be managed in line with Annex C. The Supplier must appoint a main point of contact to manage the Contract and liaise with TEO. The Supplier must provide updates to TEO as per section 4 on the progress of the works, identifying any constraints or risks to the delivery of the objectives which require to be addressed.

7. Data Protection / GDPR

7.1 Ethical principles regarding sensitivity and confidentiality must be demonstrated throughout the research process.

- Details of anyone reporting abuse will not be gathered.
- Names/personal data of the alleged abuser(s) may be required to be gathered in order to inform the work. However, all such information should be appropriately anonymised using unique numeric indicators.
- All information shall be stored and kept in accordance with UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

In cases where fresh reports of abuse arise, data protection is not a barrier to sharing information with relevant statutory agencies to safeguard children.

8. Payment

8.1 In line with the Northern Ireland Executive's commitment to pay suppliers as quickly as possible, payment will ideally be made in respect of a validated invoice within 10 working days but certainly within 30 days.

8.2 Staged payments will be made as follows:

- 30% of the contract value on receipt of an agreed methodology statement and workplan (in inception report);
- 40% on receipt of a satisfactory Draft Report; and
- 30% on receipt of a satisfactory Final Report.

9. Budget

9.1 A maximum budget of £40,000 ex VAT has been set for the initial contract period. If Tenderers exceed this budget they will be excluded from the competition. Whilst this is the maximum budget available, to gain a competitive advantage tenderer should price their bids accordingly.

10. Fair Work

On 5 July 2021 the Northern Ireland Executive approved a revised policy on Scoring Social Value. The policy is set out in Procurement Policy Note 01/21 – Scoring Social Value. This new policy requires, from the 1 September 2021, the following requirements to be incorporated into all government contracts:

- compliance with relevant employment, equality and health and safety law and human rights standards;
- adherence to relevant collective agreements; and
- adoption of fair work practices for all workers engaged in the delivery of the contract.

There is a growing body of evidence about the importance of fair work practices and its impact on employees, employers and economic performance. Fair work plays a key role in supporting the positive behaviours and attitudes of employees that can lead to improved business performance, innovation and productivity, and can lead to better quality jobs.

Fair work practices should be respected by Suppliers that deliver public contracts, including sub-contractors. Suppliers should be able to demonstrate that they are good employers who have policies that adopt fair work practices for all workers engaged on delivering the contract.

The Executive is committed to the delivery of high-quality public services and recognises that this is critically dependent on a workforce that is well rewarded, well-motivated, and has access to appropriate opportunities for training and skills development.

In order to ensure the highest standards of service quality in this contract we expect Suppliers to take a similarly positive approach to fair work practices.

11. Living Wage

New Decade New Approach (NDNA) commits the Northern Ireland Executive to becoming a Living Wage Employer. The Living Wage is an estimate of the hourly wage that would provide a full-time worker with a reasonable standard of living calculated by the Living Wage Foundation. In line with NDNA, the Supplier must ensure that the Living Wage Foundations rates are applied to staff residing in the UK and, if applicable, their sub-contractors are on no less favourable terms. (See Living Wage Foundation | For the real cost of living for further information).

Annex A

Faith Groups and other organisations the Research Team will engage with.

Churches and Faith Groups

- Methodist Church in Ireland
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Catholic Church, including all Dioceses that cover any part of Northern Ireland
- Church of Ireland, including all Dioceses that cover any part of Northern Ireland
- Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland
- Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster
- Elim Church
- Evangelical Alliance
- The Muslim Community
- The Hindu Community

Possible Other Organisations

- Interfaith Committee of the Safeguarding Board for NI
- Towards Healing
- NICVA Faith Engagement Project

Annex B

National Statistics Theme: Census 2021. Data subset: Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion. Dataset title: Religion - intermediate detail MS-B20. Coverage: Northern Ireland. Source: NISRA.

Religion, Religious Denomination or Body	Residents	%
Catholic	805,151	42.31%
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	316,103	16.61%
Church of Ireland	219,788	11.55%
Methodist Church in Ireland	44,725	2.35%
Christian	22,362	1.17%
Protestant	16,209	0.85%
Baptist	16,051	0.84%
Pentecostal	11,198	0.59%
Free Presbyterian	8,433	0.44%
Evangelical	7,052	0.37%
Church of England	4,984	0.26%
Orthodox Church	4,916	0.26%
Brethren	4,864	0.26%
Non Denominational	3,959	0.21%
Congregational Church	2,656	0.14%

Religion, Religious Denomination or Body	Residents	%
Protestant (Mixed)	2,503	0.13%
Jehovah's Witness	2,108	0.11%
Presbyterian	1,856	0.10%
Reformed Presbyterian	1,735	0.09%
Mixed Catholic / Protestant	1,690	0.09%
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons)	1,182	0.06%
Independent Methodist	1,156	0.06%
Non-Subscribing Presbyterian	1,096	0.06%
Romanian Orthodox Church	1,094	0.06%
Christian Fellowship Church	1,056	0.06%
Other Christian denominations	12,216	0.64%
Muslim	10,870	0.57%
Hindu	4,190	0.22%
Buddhist	1,542	0.08%
Other Religions	8,917	0.47%
No religion	330,983	17.39%
Religion not stated	30,529	1.60%

Annex C

Contract Management / Monitoring Schedule

If a Supplier has received more than one current Notice of Written Warning Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) at its discretion, can consider the Supplier's exclusion from future procurement competitions, being undertaken on behalf of bodies covered by the Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy, for a period of 12 months.

If a Supplier is subject to a Notice of Unsatisfactory Performance Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) at its discretion, can consider the Supplier's exclusion from future procurement competitions, being undertaken on behalf of bodies covered by the Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy, for a period of 3 years.

A central Register of Suppliers in receipt of current Notices and Terminations will be maintained by Construction & Procurement Delivery (CPD) and will be publicly available on its website. This Register will cover all procurements by bodies subject to Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy.

General Contract Management and Monitoring

It is essential to the delivery of this Contract that the Supplier has a robust management structure in place to ensure that all performance and day to day contractual matters can be resolved as early as possible so that services to this Contract are not disrupted.

By commencement of the Contract, the Supplier must appoint a Contract Manager who will be responsible for all day-to-day contractual matters in the delivery of these services.

Any shortfall in service provision whether resultant in any financial cost to The Executive Office or otherwise, will be the sole responsibility of the Supplier and will incur reimbursement to the Buyer as set out in the Terms and Conditions of Contract.

Performance & Contract Management Review Meetings

The Supplier will be required to participate in any annual Performance and Contract Management reviews. The Buyer will appoint a Contract Manager to oversee the day-to-day management of the contract. The Contract Manager will be first point of contact for all contractual issues and will meet with the Supplier on a regular basis. The Supplier must ensure that suitable representatives attend all contract review meetings as and when required.

Contract Monitoring – Periodical Performance Review

A Contract Monitoring Form (CM01) will be completed by the Buyer 6 months following contract commencement and annually thereafter to capture the Supplier's performance. The Buyer may adjust the frequency of these review periods during the life of the Contract depending on the Supplier's performance across the Contract. The Supplier's performance, including any poor performance or areas for improvement will be captured on the CM01 form and scored accordingly. The completed CM01 will be issued to the Supplier and CPD prior to scheduled contract review meetings.

The Suppliers performance is measured against a Satisfaction Indicator Scale as outlined on the CM01 form below. Where a 2,1,0 is assigned to a particular indicator, the Supplier will be required to undertake a root cause assessment and submit to the Buyer Contract Manager for review and agree measures to improve performance.

Where the Supplier wishes to query or contest any scores and/or comments they must do this in writing to the Contract Manager within 5 working days detailing their reasons. The scores and comments will be reviewed based on evidence presented by the Supplier and that held by the Buyer. The Buyer reserves the right to adjust weightings, remove and introduce new performance measures to these forms during the Contract Term.

Performance Satisfaction Indicator Scale

Where performance has been identified as acceptable, good, or excellent, no further action will be required unless the Buyer identifies and advises the Supplier of some minor improvements.

Where performance has been identified as below acceptable, poor, or unacceptable, the Supplier will be required to undertake a root cause assessment of the performance issues and submit detailed remedy plans to the Buyer on how performance will be improved. This must be submitted to the Contract Manager within 5 working days. The Supplier shall commit to improve its performance within 1 month from receipt of the plan.

Where performance is not improved from below acceptable, poor or unacceptable, after one month the matter will be immediately escalated by the Buyer and CPD. The Supplier will automatically be issued with a formal letter of unsatisfactory performance and will be required to remedy any deficiencies in contract performance within 10 working days or other such period as directed by the Buyer. Where there is no improvement in performance in the next review period the Supplier will be issued with a second formal letter of unsatisfactory performance. At this stage a poor performance meeting will be arranged with the Supplier, Buyer, Senior Management and CPD.

Again, the Supplier will be required to remedy any deficiencies in contract performance within 10 working days or other period as directed by the Buyer. If performance does not reach an acceptable standard after 3 consecutive months the Buyer may exercise its right depending on the gravity of the issue to terminate all or part of the Contract in accordance with the Terms and Conditions or introduce other comparable sanctions in lieu of termination.

Supplier's Performance Assessment (CM01)

Ref	Category	Weighting
Completion		
D1	Adherence to Response Times	10
D2	Work Completed Expeditiously	10
D3	Ease of Contact / Resolution of Queries	10
Service Provided		
Q1	Quality on Initial Completion	10
Q2	Quality of work or service on Final Completion	10
Q3	Competency/Skills of Workforce & Measures to support Health and Wellbeing of Employees	10
Finance and Administration		
F1	Accuracy of Invoices / Standard of Documentation	10
F2	Invoices/Contract Data Returned Fully & Promptly	10
F3	Costs in line with tendered rates	10
Total Score		out of 450

The representative of the customer most familiar with the work of the contract will complete the Scale of Satisfaction marking (Scale: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0).

⁸ The Interdepartmental Working Group for Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries (MBH/ML) and Historical Clerical Child Abuse (HCCA).

Annex 2: Inception Report

INCEPTION REPORT

A review of current safeguarding policies and practices within the faith sector

Georgina Anderson, Orla Drummond and Dr Julia Muraszkievicz • October 2024

Background

On 29 September 2011, the Northern Ireland Executive announced that it intended to set up an Inquiry into abuse in residential homes in Northern Ireland (NI), and on 31 May 2012 the First Minister and Deputy First Minister announced the agreed Terms of Reference for the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (the HIAI). The HIAI was an independent inquiry into the abuse of children (those under the age of 18) in residential institutions (other than schools) in Northern Ireland between 1922 and 1995. The HIAI report was published in 2017.

While the HIAI focused on abuse within residential institutions, the specific issues related to clerical child abuse in religious settings, i.e. that did not take place in a residential setting, have remained underexamined but were raised as an issue by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) Committee and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) at the start of the HIAI. The position of Ministers in relation to abuse perpetrated by the clergy and members of religious bodies outside of an institutional setting has been that “the issue of clerical abuse is no less important or emotive than institutional abuse and we are mindful of the equally destructive impact it has had on many individuals, and following the HIAI, it will be for the Executive to consider how to deal with clerical child abuse that did not fall within the Inquiry’s terms of reference”.

In October 2016, the NI Executive agreed that a single interdepartmental working group (IDWG), with an independent chair, should be set up to review the evidence relating to Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes and Historical Clerical Child Abuse (HCCA) in Northern Ireland. This piece of research into HCCA in Northern Ireland is therefore a legacy of the HIAI as it was not included in the HIAI Terms of Reference. It is consciously being restricted to the abuse of children (those under the age of 18) and to non-residential clerical settings. All faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland will be invited to participate in the study, despite the use of the term “clerical” which is a term used only in some faith-based organisations.

This piece of research, however, is not a public inquiry and will therefore not be generating the same participation levels or yielding conclusive statements about the prevalence or nature of HCCA and its impact on victims and survivors in Northern Ireland past and present. Instead, this piece of research will allow an initial understanding of HCCA, will assess the need for further research, as well as form the basis for recommendations to the OFMDFM and the MLAs on how best to support survivors of HCCA. This current piece of research comprises three separate studies; one, this study, focused on safeguarding policies and practices within faith-based organisations (Study 3), and two separate studies taking place concurrently, one to review historical clerical records of child abuse (Study 1), and another to investigate HCCA Victim and Survivors experiences and expectations to prevent and address clerical child abuse (Study 2).

Introduction

The interest in a focused study into child abuse across faith-based organisations in NI has emerged from a growing recognition of the unique dynamics of child abuse within faith-based organisations, as opposed to abuse in institutional settings, which therefore require distinct investigation and targeted reforms. Clerical abuse involves the abuse of trust and authority by religious leaders, who are often highly regarded pillars of the community. With a marked increase in allegations of HCCA globally, there are growing concerns about whether and how faith-based organisations have implemented safeguarding measures to prevent and address abuses in clerical settings. Several other key events and developments suggest the need for a better understanding of clerical child abuse across different faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland, and further afield.

The HIAI, which investigated child abuse within institutional settings, provided valuable insights into how abuse occurred in residential institutions run by religious organisations and the state. Many survivors of clerical abuse were not residents of institutions but were victims of abuse within their local religious communities. This distinct setting, along with the different forms of power and trust that clergy wielded, highlights the need to specifically examine how safeguarding measures have been implemented within religious organisations themselves, rather than focusing on broader institutional environments.

Investigations in other jurisdictions, such as in the Republic of Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, Australia and beyond, have revealed significant failures in how faith-based organisations have implemented and enforced safeguarding policies. Reports such as the Fern Report (2005), the Ryan and Murphy Reports (2009 respectively) and the Cloyne Report (2011) in Ireland uncovered widespread mishandling of abuse allegations in Catholic run institutions, with religious leaders often prioritising the protection of clergy over the protection of children. Despite official policies, internal documents showed that safeguarding guidelines were often ignored, abusers were relocated rather than reported, and victims were left without justice. In Northern Ireland, there is growing concern that similar safeguarding failures may have occurred across different denominations, but a lot is still unknown about the nature and prevalence of clerical child abuse, including the effectiveness of safeguarding policies and how religious bodies have recorded and responded to allegations of abuse.

Over recent years, survivors of HCCA from various religious backgrounds have come forward, highlighting the failures of religious organisations to protect and support them and adequately respond to their reports of abuse. Many survivors have emphasised the lack of safeguarding measures in place at the time of their abuse and the inadequate responses they received when they tried to report the abuse. As more survivors share their experiences, it has become evident that safeguarding policies and practices in non-institutional settings in faith-based organisations have been inconsistent and, in many cases, insufficient. The rising demand for justice from survivors and their advocates has placed increased pressure on both religious organisations and the government to thoroughly examine and improve safeguarding practices across all religious contexts.

One of the central issues related to HCCA is the lack of transparency and accountability within faith-based organisations. While many have implemented safeguarding guidelines in recent years, there are ongoing concerns about whether these policies are being properly enforced. Historically, cases of clerical child abuse were dealt with internally, with abusers being relocated or given new roles rather than facing legal consequences. This culture of secrecy and internal handling of abuse cases often meant that safeguarding policies were ineffective. A focused study is needed to examine whether faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland have made meaningful changes in their safeguarding practices and whether these changes are robust enough to prevent future abuse and respond appropriately when allegations arise.

While much of the focus on clerical abuse has been on the Catholic Church, it is increasingly clear that safeguarding failures are not confined to one denomination. Allegations of clerical abuse and safeguarding failures have also surfaced in Protestant denominations, such as the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church, and Methodist Church, as well as smaller faith groups. Each denomination has its own structures, policies, and approaches to safeguarding, and a comprehensive study will assess how these policies compare, where weaknesses may exist, and how they can be improved. This cross-denominational approach is vital to ensuring that safeguarding practices are consistent, effective, and protective of all children, regardless of their religious background.

In other countries, dedicated inquiries into clerical abuse have led to significant reforms in how religious institutions handle safeguarding. For example, the UK's 2022 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in 2017 revealed widespread failures in safeguarding within religious organisations, leading to recommendations for improved oversight, mandatory reporting, and victim support services. Northern Ireland can learn from these international inquiries and adapt best practices to ensure that its religious organisations are held to the highest standards of safeguarding. A study into the safeguarding policies of religious organisations in Northern Ireland can help determine how current practices compare against international standards and where improvements are needed.

While many faith-based organisations have updated their safeguarding policies in recent years, there is concern that these policies may not be comprehensive or consistently enforced. A recent rise in public and political pressure has highlighted the need for a more thorough examination of how religious bodies are implementing their safeguarding responsibilities.

Against this background, this study will assess whether policies are in place to prevent clerical child abuse and whether religious organisations are responding effectively and transparently when allegations are made. Furthermore, the study will attempt to evaluate the extent to which faith-based organisations are cooperating with civil authorities and adhering to mandatory reporting laws, as well as their internal disciplinary procedures when safeguarding failures are identified.

Objective

By investigating how religious organisations are implementing and enforcing safeguarding measures, this study hopes to provide valuable insights into how faith-based organisations have sought to address safeguarding issues and the systems and processes they have developed to respond to them over time, as well as to make recommendations for future safeguarding reforms where appropriate.

The collective objective of the three commissioned studies is to better understand the nature and prevalence of historical clerical child abuse (HCCA), and the impact it has on victims / survivors. This improved understanding of clerical child abuse will support the IDWG to make informed recommendations to Ministers on any future action required for a) effective investigations into HCCA and b) support avenues for victims.

Scope

In line with the above objective, this study (Study 3) seeks to conduct an in-depth review of current and past safeguarding policies and practices across different faith-based organisations - including the support services offered to victims and survivors of clerical abuse - and assess their alignment to national standards. It will assess improvements in safeguarding and determine whether current safeguarding policies and practices effectively address lessons from the past. The findings gathered from this study will form the basis for developing recommendations for potential improvements required to policies, practices and victim/survivor support services related to clerical child abuse in Northern Ireland.

The term 'clerical child abuse' here refers to:

- "clerical abuse" - neglect, exploitation and physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse that is perpetrated by a member of the clergy or an individual performing a role related to the ministry of a religious institution / faith group and that did not take place in an institutional setting.
- "child abuse" - abuse perpetrated on those under 18 years of age.

The specific research questions (RQ) that guide this study are outlined below in Table 7.

Table 7: Research Questions

RQ1	What are the overarching legislative and policy frameworks as it regards historical and current clerical child abuse?
RQ2	How do current safeguarding policies in faith organisations align with the overarching legislative and policy framework and what are areas for improvement in policies?
RQ3	How are current safeguarding policies implemented and what are areas for improvement in practices?
RQ4	Are there sufficient support services available for victims when reporting abuse (during and following investigations)?

Given the three studies are working towards a common objective, it is vital that the three teams collaborate closely throughout the studies, sharing insights and lessons learnt where relevant to capitalise on the knowledge acquired by each team, to streamline our efforts, to avoid duplication of efforts and to minimise repeated engagement for respondents where possible. This study will collaborate with the other two concurrent studies in different ways, namely;

- The study exploring historical clerical records of child abuse (Study 1) will hopefully have valuable past and present case studies to share with us, allowing us to investigate what has recorded with regards to the practices adopted during those cases.
- The study focusing on HCCA victim and survivors' experiences and expectations with regards to clerical child abuse (Study 2) will have direct access to victims/survivors, and will be exploring, among other things, the support received by victim/survivors when reporting abuse and subsequently, during abuse investigations.

Ethics and GDPR

We will ensure that the sensitivities inherent in this research and the confidentiality of research subject are carefully managed by a) ensuring only vetted individuals will work on this piece of work, b) obtaining informed consent from participants, and c) adhering to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) throughout all data processing. We will draft and sign data sharing agreements with organisations that are willing to share information that is not publicly available as well as with the firms conducting the other two studies.

We will ensure that reporting lines are respected and that senior faith-based organisation representatives are consulted about the study prior to contacting any other member of that organisation, including the safeguarding officer. Participation in interviews will be preceded by informed consent (Annex 2). The consent clearly guarantees anonymity to respondents and outlines data processing standards i.e.: all data will be stored on a password protected internal drive with limitations set to only allow those vetted to work on this project to access the content.

Details of anyone reporting abuse will not be gathered and the names/personal data of alleged abuser(s) may be gathered to inform the work will be appropriately anonymised using unique numeric indicators. Should any new safeguarding concerns come to light during this work, we will follow the protocol that will be agreed with IDWG.

Important: *In cases of new reports of abuse or if safeguarding concerns about an adult or child arise during the research, data protection will not be a barrier to sharing information with relevant statutory agencies to safeguard children, who will be informed of the concern.*

Risks

This study into safeguarding policies and practices of faith-based organisations to prevent and respond to clerical child abuse faces several potential risks, which may affect the scope and outcomes of the research. Some limitations include:

1. Gaining full access to internal documents, staff, and procedures within faith-based organisations may prove challenging. Some organisations may be reluctant to participate in the study due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter or concerns about reputation and liability. A lack of cooperation could limit the breadth and depth of insights gained.
2. Respondents, especially those recalling older abuse cases or outdated safeguarding policies, may experience recall bias. Their recollections of events and practices may be distorted or incomplete due to the passage of time, potentially leading to inaccuracies in the data collected. This could impact the validity of conclusions drawn regarding historical safeguarding practices.
3. Participants from faith-based organisations and statutory agencies may feel fatigued from repeated requests for engagement across the different studies (especially Studies 1 and 3) who will likely want to approach a similar selection of respondents both for the survey and interviews. A great deal of coordination is required between the 2 studies to mitigate this risk.
4. Given the sensitive nature of the topic under study, there is a possibility that new safeguarding concerns may come to light. If new safeguarding concerns are revealed, the study team will report concerns immediately to the IDWG to agree collectively on the way forward.

5. This study will not have direct access to survivors of clerical abuse. While this is important to avoid burdening individuals with repeated, and potentially traumatising, engagement, it also means the study may lack the first-hand accounts necessary to evaluate how effective safeguarding practices and support services are from a survivor's perspective. To mitigate for this, this study will collaborate with Study 2 to obtain the insights they have collected on practices implemented by faith-based organisations following and during an allegation of child abuse. However, the timing of data collection for Study 2 may not coincide with the analysis stage of this study which could lead to gaps in understanding victim and survivor's experience for this study. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that both studies have clear and distinct areas of investigation to avoid a duplication of efforts and deliverables by the two Study teams.
6. Access to clerical records under Study 1 is key to understanding the implementation of safeguarding policies and for identifying patterns in how abuse cases were handled, past and present. However, it is possible that some faith-based organisations may restrict access to these records due to confidentiality concerns, legal risks, or a lack of transparency. This limitation could hinder a comprehensive analysis of historical practices which would serve as a basis to identify where safeguarding policy and practice improvements have been made.
7. The short timeframe allocated to this piece of research (4 months) will limit the reach and breadth of the study. It should be further noted that the contract currently ends prior to the agreed delivery of deliverable 2 (draft report), 3 (final report) and 4 (presentation of findings), meaning the contingency month allocated in the contract will be necessary to complete the project as agreed, with no contingency left in case of any delays.

These risks should be carefully considered when interpreting the findings of this study, and where necessary, mitigation strategies will be employed to address them as effectively as possible.

Methodology

The study will adopt a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a) a comprehensive review of policy documents, legislative frameworks, and research findings, reports or case studies, where possible, b) a survey to be sent out to a wide range of faith-based organisations to assess the safeguarding policy landscape, c) interviews with key stakeholders, including faith-based organisation representatives, legal experts, and safeguarding professionals, to gain insights into the implementation of policies, and d) experiences from victims and survivors of clerical child abuse explored in collaboration with the researchers working directly with victim-survivors to evaluate the support they received during and after making the allegation. Collaboration with the two concurrent studies will allow for cross-referencing and validation of findings through historical records and case analyses.

Document Review

We will conduct a comprehensive review of a range of documents to better understand what is known already about the nature and prevalence of historical and current clerical child abuse across different faith-based organisation and across different countries. We will also look to studies conducted on sexual abuse in other environments, such as schools and care institutions. We will gather legislative and policy documents pertinent to child safeguarding in Northern Ireland to understand statutory requirements and guidance.

Documents included for review include:

- Previous inquiries, studies and reports on child abuse in religious contexts

- Safeguarding policies, statements, guidance, reports, reviews related to clerical child abuse within faith-based organisations.
- Laws and statutory instruments, protocols and guidance in relation to protecting children from abuse in NI.
- International regulations, standards, studies.
- International best practices in effective safeguarding policies, practices and support services for victims-survivors.
- Available support services for victims-survivors of clerical child abuse in NI.

Safeguarding Policies

The document review will not only allow the study to obtain an overall understanding of what is known about clerical child abuse nationally and globally, but it will also inform RQ1: What are the overarching legislative and policy frameworks as it regards historical and current clerical child abuse?

Building on this, the review will inform RQ2: How do current safeguarding policies in faith organisations align with the overarching legislative and policy framework? To address RQ2, we will firstly establish a baseline of “what good looks like” in terms of safeguarding policies, as benchmarked against legislation and recommendations from wider literature⁹.

Secondly, we will undertake a mapping exercise of who has and has not got a safeguarding policy and conduct a thorough review of safeguarding policies across faith-based organisations to assess their alignment with current legislative and policy frameworks in force in Northern Ireland and identify specific areas where safeguarding policies fall short of the established benchmarks.

Finally, the review will explore records of child abuse looking for amendments and improvements in historical clerical safeguarding policies over the years to determine whether current safeguarding policies effectively integrate lessons from the past. We will collaborate with the team working on Study 1 (historical clerical records) to obtain access and insight into the evolution of policies through records, where possible.

Sampling

The study will consider how current safeguarding practices are implemented across a range of faith organisations and identify good safeguarding practice that can be promoted across all faith organisations. According to the 2021 census, the main denominations in Northern Ireland were Catholic (42%), Presbyterian (17%), Church of Ireland (12%), Methodist (2%), other Christian denominations including Baptist, Protestant, Pentecostal, Free Presbyterian, Evangelical, Orthodox, Brethren, Jehovah’s Witness and over 60 others (collectively 7%) as well as other, non-Christian religions, mostly Muslim (0,57%) and Hindu (0,22%).

Table 8 lists the intermediate results related to religion in the 2021 Census who will be approached by the study in the first stage sampling (see below). Highlighted in blue are the faith-based organisations that this study must engage with as per the funder’s Specifications (Annex A in Annex 1).

Table 8: Denominations in Northern Ireland (Source: 2021 Census)

Religion / Denomination	Population #	%
Catholic Church, incl. 5 Diocese	805,151	42.31%
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	316,103	16.61%

Religion / Denomination	Population #	%
Church of Ireland, inc. 6 Diocese	219,788	11.55%
Methodist Church in Ireland	44,728	2.35%
Christian	22,361	1.17%
Protestant	16,210	0.85%
Baptist	16,053	0.84%
Pentecostal	11,199	0.59%
Free Presbyterian	8,432	0.44%
Evangelical	7,053	0.37%
Church of England	4,981	0.26%
Orthodox Church	4,918	0.26%
Brethren	4,862	0.26%
Non Denominational	3,959	0.21%
Congregational Church	2,656	0.14%
Protestant (Mixed)	2,501	0.13%
Jehovah's Witness	2,107	0.11%
Presbyterian	1,856	0.10%
Reformed Presbyterian	1,736	0.09%
Mixed Catholic / Protestant	1,689	0.09%
Church of J. Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons)	1,180	0.06%
Independent Methodist	1,157	0.06%
Non-Subscribing Presbyterian	1,092	0.06%
Romanian Orthodox Church	1,094	0.06%
Christian Fellowship Church	1,057	0.06%
Other Christian denominations	12,220	0.64%
Muslim	10,871	0.57%
Hindu	4,191	0.22%
Buddhist	1,542	0.08%
Other Religions	8,917	0.47%
No religion	330,983	17.39%
Religion not stated	30,529	1.60%

The sampling strategy aims to ensure a representative sample of faith-based organisations in the study, but also aims to target organisations where allegations of child abuse have taken place. This is to ensure that the study is delving into real practices related to actual allegations of child abuse, rather than investigate practices as stipulated by the organisation's policy or protocols, i.e.: the hypothetical practice that would be adhered to if an allegation were made.

Whilst the latter is pertinent to this study, particularly in terms of assessing knowledge levels of safeguarding practices, the former is more likely to yield insights about the variety and forms of current and past practices related to allegations of child abuse which will be more helpful in answering RQ3 "How are current safeguarding policies implemented and what are areas for improvement in practices?" and RQ4: "Are there sufficient support services available for victims when reporting abuse (during and following investigations)?" To achieve this, sampling will adopt a two-staged approach, with each stage providing information to different research questions.

1st Stage of Sampling

Using the list of denominations in Table 2, we will send out an online survey to explore (See Annex 3a for full survey questions):

- f) availability of safeguarding policies.
- g) challenges in implementing safeguarding policies.
- h) safeguarding trainings.
- i) vetting requirements.
- j) allegations of child abuse.

The exact definition, and therefore inclusion criteria, for faith-based organisations will need to be refined together with IDWG after this report submission. The online survey will be addressed to safeguarding leads or focal points. Should no safeguarding lead be available, we will reach out to the highest authority in that organisation. We will coordinate closely with Study 1 to ensure that we are not collecting the same data from the same organisations as they did during their survey and will instead ask to use data already collected by Study 1 where possible.

2nd Stage of sampling

Once responses to the survey are received, we will have a better understanding of a) faith-based organisations who are willing to engage in the study and b) the safeguarding policy landscape across faith-based organisations. From this landscape, and in consultation with the other studies, we will identify the specific organisations to be invited to participate in qualitative interviews (approx. 45 interviews). A key inclusion criterion for the 2nd stage of sampling therefore will be whether there has been an allegation of child abuse reported in the survey.

It is difficult to predict the number of faith-based organisations that will a) respond to the survey and b) report an allegations of child abuse. If no organisation reports an allegations of child abuse, we will approach organisations with known cases of abuse that have been covered in the media. If more allegations are reported than can be further investigated by the study, we will sample from organisations that have reported an allegation. Allegations that can be supported by way of historical records and/or victim/survivor testimonies will be prioritised and potentially considered as case studies.

Data Collection

Surveys and interviews with faith-based organisations and statutory agencies will be targeted to safeguarding leads or focal points. Should no safeguarding lead be available, we will reach out to the highest authority in the targeted organisation to suggest suitable individuals to approach for interview. We will limit interviews to Category A, B or C¹⁰ members of the clergy as per the Specifications (See Annex 1). Given the diversity of roles and functions across different organisations, we hope to discuss the exact definitions of the above Categories with IDWG during the next meeting.

Interviews will take place online via Teams or Google Meets, with the option for a face-to-face interview available where preferred. Interviews will take no longer than 1 hour and will be transcribed immediately after the interview. We will ask for permission to record the interviews via an audio recorder to enhance the accuracy of transcriptions. Recordings will be managed with strict confidentiality and according to the GDPR. Should a respondent not wish to be recorded, no recording will take place.

Engaging Stakeholders

Faith-Based Organisations. Enquiry into safeguarding policies and practices requires engagement with faith-based organisations and rests on their willingness to share information, such as safeguarding documents and information about safeguarding practices and victim support services. Participation is, and must remain, voluntary however the support of IDWG and the SBNIC in promoting participation in the study will help facilitate this engagement. IDWG will support TRI by encouraging all relevant organisations and persons to provide information and access to documents in as much as possible. This is anticipated to include policy and guidance materials, review and study results (where available) and, possibly, interviews exploring practices and what works and doesn't work. The IDWG will emphasise the benefit to all organisations of sharing documents, participating in interviews and identifying best practices. However, if organisations are unwilling / unable to participate or share information when requested by the research team, this will be recorded. The number of interviews will depend on the results of the survey sent out in the 1st stage of the sampling, i.e.: where there have been allegations of child abuse.

Victim/Survivors Support Services. Investigating the support services that victim and survivors received will be investigated through a number of ways; a) through interviews with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or a senior decision-makers in faith-based organisations, b) engagement with the firm carrying out research on the experiences of victim/survivors and c) interviews with organisations offering supporting services for victim/survivors, e.g.: Victims and Survivors Services, Wave Trauma Centre, Towards Healing, Towards Peace and the NICVA Faith Engagement Project. Sampling survivor support services will adopt a snowball approach whereby we will identify referred services in the literature and identify support services mentioned through interviews with statutory agencies and faith-based organisations. See Annex 3d for the interview guide with victim and survivor support services.

Experts and HCCA Study Teams. We will engage in consulting with legal and technical experts knowledgeable in safeguarding and child protection laws and practices to provide additional depth to the analysis, and validation thus ensuring that all legal nuances are appropriately considered. We will also meet regularly with the two other studies in this piece of research to a) share and capitalise on knowledge and lessons learned during the studies, b) coordinate activities and avoid overlap as much as possible and c) share data relevant for each other's studies.

Safeguarding Practices

To answer RQ3: How are current safeguarding policies being implemented in practice, we will conduct an in-depth review of safeguarding practices from the literature collected through the desk review, through the survey and from clerical records (in collaboration with Study 1), where available. We will subsequently conduct interviews with members of selected faith-based organisations (see sampling section above for details of selection process), safeguarding agencies, support service organisations and survivors / victims (in collaboration with Study 2).

These interviews aim to capture a range of perspectives on the way safeguarding takes place in different contexts, taking into consideration how organisations prevent, protect, respond and record instances of child abuse. We will conduct interviews with persons who have been directly involved in handling child abuse allegations to ascertain the various practices that followed the allegation. These persons could be from faith-based organisations as well as statutory agencies and support services who have had cases of clerical child abuse referred to them.

When reviewing safeguarding practices, we will pay particular attention to:

- The extent to which safeguarding practice is driven by the rights and best interests of the child.
- The definition and scope of safeguarding applied by the organisation, including what constitutes abuse.
- Reporting and other information sharing procedures, including how well and how widely these are understood and applied.
- Responsibility and accountability for safeguarding.
- How safeguarding practices are monitored and evaluated and how any lessons learned/improvements identified are disseminated.
- The professionalism (inc. vetting and training) of safeguarding within the faith sector and professional recognition of staff working in safeguarding.

To address the second part of RQ3: areas for improvement in safeguarding practice, in addition to interviews conducted with decision makers and safeguarding leads of faith-based organisations, safeguarding agencies, and victims/survivors support services, we hope to conduct an analysis of case studies selected from historical clerical records of child abuse. This will allow us, on the one hand, to assess improvements in current practices from the past, and, on the other hand, to identify whether there are any further or new lessons to be integrated into current practice from the experience of past survivors.

Support Services for Victims and Survivors

We will investigate the services available to victims and survivors to assess RQ4: Are sufficient support services available to victims reporting abuse? Support services refer to both support received once a report is made and an investigation is launched, as well as services available to victims once the investigation has concluded. Support includes support received from the faith-based organisation as well as other support networks available to the victims and survivors outside of the organisation.

To do this, we will gather information on current and previous support services from the organisations we engage with. Beyond asking for information on services, we will assess their effectiveness by obtaining insight from the interviews conducted with victims/survivors of clerical child abuse under Study 2 to understand the availability and quality of the support services offered to them following the report of abuse, including services they would have liked to receive but did not. We will also interview members of the clergy and safeguarding agencies about support services and their effectiveness as well as build a picture of the support services referenced in historical clerical records, if available.

We will also have carried out a review of national and international best practices for supporting victims and survivors of clerical child abuse during the document review stage of the study. Once all data is gathered, we will conduct an analysis and triangulation of data sources to capture the support services that are proving most effective, the support services that might be lacking or deficient, and the support services that were not supportive.

Data Analysis

The data collected from this study will undergo a rigorous and systematic analysis to ensure that the research questions are addressed comprehensively. The analysis will involve both quantitative and qualitative methods, corresponding to the types of data collected in the two stages of the sampling process.

Quantitative Analysis

The first stage of sampling will involve an online survey distributed to safeguarding leads or focal points within the selected faith-based organisations. This survey will yield quantitative data regarding the following areas:

- Availability of safeguarding policies, guidance, reviews, focal points.
- Safeguarding trainings and vetting processes.
- Allegations of child abuse within the organisation.

Descriptive statistics will be used to summarise the quantitative responses to the survey. These will provide an overview of the current safeguarding landscape across faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland, including the percentage of organisations that have safeguarding policies in place, the frequency of safeguarding trainings, and the distribution of reported child abuse allegations across faith-based organisations.

Qualitative Analysis

The second stage of sampling will involve qualitative interviews with safeguarding leads from selected faith-based organisations, statutory agencies, and support services. The qualitative data from these interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis. This process will involve coding the transcribed interviews to identify recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to safeguarding practices, support for victims, and challenges in addressing clerical child abuse. Key themes expected to emerge include:

- Implementation of safeguarding policies.
- Reporting and information-sharing procedures.
- Support services available for survivors.
- Challenges in investigating and handling abuse cases.

A qualitative data analysis technique will be employed to systematically code and categorise responses, enabling the identification of themes that reflect both best practices and areas for improvement in safeguarding.

Case Study Analysis

In cases where clerical records of child abuse are accessible, specific allegations of abuse may be examined through case study analysis. This analysis will focus on how the allegations were handled, the role of safeguarding policies in these cases, and the types of support services provided to victims. Case studies from clerical records will also be used to assess whether historical lessons have been incorporated into current safeguarding practices.

A key focus of the study is the support services available to victims and survivors of clerical child abuse. Survivor accounts of clerical child abuse are key to understanding the victim/survivor's experience of the support received once an allegation is made and, subsequently, throughout the investigation that follows the allegation. An analysis of these case studies will contribute to building a clearer picture regarding the effectiveness of current policies and practices in preventing and responding to abuse, including the support victims and survivors need to ease the traumatic process of reporting clerical child abuse.

Triangulation

To ensure the robustness of findings, data from multiple sources will be triangulated. This includes:

- Review of all documentation.
- Survey responses from faith-based organisations.
- Interviews data from clergy, safeguarding professionals, and support services.
- Secondary data from statutory agencies, Study 1 (historical records), Study 2 (survivor's experiences) and wider studies.

This triangulation will enable the research team to cross-verify the consistency and validity of responses and identify discrepancies between stated policies and actual practices. By employing both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, this study hopes to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how safeguarding policies are implemented in faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland and to what extent they provide adequate protection and support to victims of clerical child abuse.

Reporting

Trilateral Research will meet IDWG monthly to update on progress made and troubleshoot any challenges that arise. In between these meetings, Trilateral will provide updates to IDWG by way of an email. The different study teams will also meet at regular intervals (ideally monthly with ad-hoc meetings where relevant) to ensure regular knowledge exchange and activity planning. The detailed activities to be carried out to address the different research questions are:

Review safeguarding policies (RQ1 and RQ2):

- Review Northern Ireland legislative documents, standards and statutory requirements.
- Review national and international best practices.
- Establish benchmarks of what good looks like.
- Map organisations for study.
- Send our survey to faith-based organisations.
- Collect safeguarding policies from faith organisations or online.
- Collect relevant reports/reviews in relation to clerical abuse from faith organisations.
- Analyse relevant document.
- Conduct data collection (combined w/ data collection below)

- Conduct quantitative analysis of surveys.
- Prepare a gap analysis report of policies that do not comply with requirements.
- Draft recommendations for policy improvements.

Review safeguarding practices, including support available (RQ3 and RQ4):

- Review safeguarding practices from the documentation.
- Design data collection methods and tools, ensuring compliance with privacy and data protection laws (GDPR).
- Select respondents and obtain informed consent.
- Conduct data collection (combined w/ data collection above).
- Obtain and explore clerical records of cases of abuse (w/ Study 1).
- Select and analyse case studies from clerical records.
- Obtain and explore insights from victims and survivors on support services received (w/ Study 2).
- Carry out qualitative data analysis and triangulation.
- Compile findings into a safeguarding practice review report.
- Draft recommendations for areas of improvement in safeguarding practice.
- Draft recommendations for areas of improvements in support services.

Finally, the findings and recommendations for all RQs will be combined a detailed report on safeguarding policies and practices, including support services for survivors, across faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland. The report will first outline the policy landscape, together with an assessment of policies against national and international best practices.

The report will subsequently provide an analysis of current safeguarding practices, including support provided to victim/survivors or support services referred to them, from the time an allegation is made through to the end of the investigation into that allegation. The report will finally compile recommendations for policy and practice improvements based on the study findings, including recommendations on how best to support survivors during allegations.

Timeline and Deliverables

The study began in the week of the 23rd of September with a kick-off meeting between Trilateral and IDWG. Trilateral Research is submitting its proposed detailed methodology by way of this inception report (Deliverable 1). The next deliverable is the draft final report (Deliverable 2) and is due on the 31st of January 2025. The IDWG will provide their feedback to the report two weeks after submission and Trilateral Research will incorporate this feedback to submit the final report (Deliverable 3) on the 28th February 2025. Trilateral will also develop and deliver a presentation of findings (Deliverable 4) to IDWG (and other stakeholders if required by IDWG). See Figure 3 below for the study delivery timeline.

Figure 3: Study Timeline



⁹ Documents include those mentioned in the funder’s specification (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in England and Wales, the report of the Ryan Commission in 2009 in the Republic of Ireland, as well as other relevant reports in relation to clerical abuse, e.g. the Murphy Report in 2009, the Ferns Report in 2005 and the Cloyne Report in 2011).

¹⁰ Category A – Any person who has a designated religious title, ordained and who provided or provides ministry; Category B – Any person acting in a religious / ministry role which is directed by a person in Category A; and Category C – Any person who was accountable to a religious person who had decision making authority and responsibility for taking action to protect children or young people from harm.

Annex 3: Consent forms

Consent Form for Interviews

Purpose of the Study

The Executive Office has commissioned a programme of work to look into allegations of child abuse related to faith-based organisations that have not yet been examined by previous Inquiries such as the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI). The HIAI was an independent Inquiry into the abuse of children in residential institutions (other than schools) in N. Ireland (NI) between 1922 and 1995. Abuse that did not take place in a residential setting fell outside the scope of that Inquiry.

Consequently, the Inter-Departmental Working group (IDWG) have commissioned three interrelated pieces of research on behalf of the Executive Office to explore child abuse in faith-based organisations. The collective aim the three pieces is to help understand the nature and prevalence of child abuse in non-residential settings across faith-based organisations and the impact on victims/ survivors. The research covers all faith-based organisations included in the NI 2021 Census, and a range of people who have been employed by, volunteered with or otherwise worked with or alongside faith-based organisations. The term ‘abuse’ includes neglect, exploitation, and physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse.

Trilateral Research has been commissioned by The Executive Office to conduct a study into safeguarding policies and practices across faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland, with a particular focus on how organisations prevent and respond to child abuse in non-residential faith-based settings as well as the support that is provided to survivors. The aim of this study is to assess the effectiveness of current policies, learn from best practice and provide recommendations for overall policy improvement, where necessary.

What Participation Involves

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will explore:

- Your organisation's safeguarding policies
- The implementation of these policies
- Support mechanisms in place for survivors of child abuse.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

We recognise the sensitivity of the topics discussed in this study, and we are committed to ensuring that your participation is handled with the utmost confidentiality. The following measures will be taken:

- **Only vetted individuals:** All researchers involved in this study have undergone thorough vetting to ensure they are qualified and sensitive to the topic at hand.
- **Informed Consent:** Your informed consent is required prior to participation. By reading and agreeing to this form, you acknowledge your understanding of the study and agree to participate.
- **Anonymity:** Your responses will be anonymised, and personal identifiers will not be included in the final reporting. Instead, and only if required, unique numeric indicators will be used to ensure confidentiality.
- **Recording:** With your consent, we will record the interview to support the quality of transcription. The recordings will be used exclusively by the research team and not shared with anyone outside the study team.
- **Data Storage:** All data collected during the interview, including the recording, will be stored on a password-protected internal drive with access restricted to vetted individuals only.
- **GDPR Compliance:** The study will adhere strictly to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). This means that your personal data will be protected, and you will have the right to access, rectify, or request deletion of any personal data you provide.
- **Safeguarding Protocols:** Please note that while confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research, if any safeguarding concerns regarding a child or adult emerge during the course of the interview, we are obligated to share this information with relevant statutory agencies in order to protect vulnerable individuals.

Your Rights

As a participant, you have the right to:

1. Access any data collected during the interview.
2. Withdraw from the study at any point, without needing to provide a reason.
3. Request that any personal data provided during the interview be deleted.
4. Refuse to answer any specific questions during the interview.

Researcher Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this research or your rights as a participant, please contact Georgina Anderson, Lead Researcher: georgina.anderson@trilateralresearch.com

Annex 4: Data collection tools

Annex 4.a: Survey Qs

About the Study

The Executive Office commissioned three interrelated pieces of research to better understand the prevalence and nature of child abuse within faith organisations. Trilateral Research has been commissioned to conduct one of these pieces, namely, a review of safeguarding policies and practices across faith organisations in Northern Ireland.

The aim of this review is to assess the effectiveness of current policies, learn from best practice and provide recommendations for overall policy improvement, where necessary. The research covers all faith organisations in NI, and includes those who have been employed by, volunteered with, or otherwise worked with or alongside faith organisations.

About the survey

- The survey should take no longer than 20 minutes and should be straight forward to complete, i.e.; you are not expected to consult with others, nor to look up any information.
- The survey should be completed by the leader of the place of worship (parish, church, religious order, mosque, temple...), or the safeguarding lead of that place, if available.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, please select the option "I don't know" rather than seek to find the information from others; there are no right or wrong answers.
- The survey covers topics such as: 1) availability of child safeguarding policy; 2) recruitment and training; 3) safeguarding procedures and allegations and; 4) safeguarding audits, evaluation, reviews.
- The survey will remain open until the 24th January, however responses will be analysed on a rolling basis and early responses are greatly appreciated.

If you need any assistance, please reach out by contacting georgina.anderson@trilateralresearch.com

Confidentiality and Data Protection

We recognise the sensitivity of the topics discussed in this study, and we are committed to ensuring that your participation is handled in complete confidentiality. The following measures will be taken:

- **GDPR Compliance:** The study will adhere strictly to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). This means that your personal data will be protected, and you will have the right to request access, rectification, or deletion of any personal data you provide.
- **Only vetted researchers:** All researchers involved in this study have undergone thorough vetting to ensure they are qualified and sensitive to the topic at hand.
- **Anonymity:** Your responses will be anonymised, and personal identifiers will not be included in the final reporting. Instead, and only if required, unique numeric indicators will be used to ensure confidentiality.

- **Data Storage:** All data collected will be stored on a password-protected internal drive with access restricted to vetted individuals only.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without consequence.

1. Do you consent to participate in this survey?

- Yes
- No

Your Organisation

This section collects some basic information about you and your organisation.

- "Your organisation" refers to the place of worship you currently represent (parish, church, religious order, temple, mosque...), please keep your answers specific to that place of worship.
- If you work in an organisation that spans the border, please provide your answers for Northern Ireland only.
- If you represent more than one place of worship: if the places you represent are under different administrations, please could you kindly fill one survey for each place you represent. If the places you represent are under one administration, please fill one survey on behalf of all the places under the same administration.

2. What is the name of the organisation that you are responding on behalf of?

3. What denomination is your organisation?

- Baptist
- Catholic
- Church of Ireland
- Free Presbyterian
- Hindu
- Methodist
- Islam
- Presbyterian
- Pentecostal
- Orthodox
- Jehovah's Witness
- Christian Brethren
- Congregational Church
- Other (please specify)

4. What is your name?

5. What is your role in this organisation?

6. What is your email address?

7. What geographical area do your responses relate to?

- Postcode
- Town
- County
- HSCT Gateway Team

8. Does your organisation carry out any activities with children?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

9. Could you specify the different locations where your organisation is involved in activities with children (please tick all that apply)?

- Place of worship
- Schools
- Hospitals
- Detention centres
- Clubs (Sports, youth, community)
- Outings
- Residentials
- Home-visits
- Other (please specify)

Policies

The section explores child safeguarding policies.

10. Does your organisation have a child safeguarding policy, namely, a policy that describes how the organisation is committed to preventing and responding to harm to children?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

11. Could you confirm which year the policy dates from please? (if you do not know, just leave blank)

12. Has the policy ever been revised or adapted?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

13. Please list the different years in which the policy was revised?

14. At which level of your organisation was the safeguarding policy developed?

- Local (place of worship, parish)
- Regional (county, diocese)
- National (NI/RoI)
- International
- I don't know

15. Has the child safeguarding policy been approved by the organisation's management body?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

16. Does the child safeguarding policy apply to all the organisation's personnel, volunteers and partners?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

17. Is the policy publicised, promoted and distributed to members of the congregation, including children and parents/caregivers?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

18. Please list channels/platforms where the policy is available?

- Posters / Leaflets
- Newsletters / Bulletins
- Website / Facebook
- Noticeboards
- Other (please specify)

19. Please could you share the policy with us by emailing

georgina.anderson@trilateralresearch.com?

- Yes
- No

People and volunteers

This section explores the way safeguarding is enhanced and promoted to personnel.

20. Does your organisation have recruitment processes with robust safeguarding measures in place?

- Yes

- No
- I don't know

21. Does the organisation carry out any of the actions below when recruiting a member of personnel, including volunteers (please tick all that apply)?

- Open recruitment process
- Application form with past experience
- Declaration form
- AccessNI check / Criminal record checks
- Interviews
- Written references

22. Does your organisation provide safeguarding trainings or ensure trainings are provided to all members of the organisation working with children?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

23. Does your organisation have written guidelines for the following situations (please tick all that apply)?

- Appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of adults towards children
- Appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of children towards other children
- Managing breaches in codes of conduct

24. Please specify how these guidelines are shared with:

- Children and parents/caregivers
- The public
- Partners
- Others (please specify)

25. Does your organisation have designated safeguarding focal points or leads?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

26. Are designated safeguarding focal points available at different levels of your organisation (please tick all that apply)?

- Local (at the place of worship)
- Regional (Diocese, county)
- National (NI/RoI)
- Other: please specify

27. Does the safeguarding focal point in your organisation receive additional training in safeguarding?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

28. Does the safeguarding focal point have clearly defined roles and responsibilities?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

29. Please could you share the name and email of the focal point for your organisation with us?

30. Does your organisation have a child safeguarding committee or panel who manages allegations?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Procedures

This section explores some of your organisations' procedures in relation to child safeguarding.

31. Does your organisation carry out child safeguarding risk assessments?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

32. Does your organisation have procedures for reporting and responding to an allegation of child abuse?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

33. To your knowledge, have there been any allegations of child abuse against personnel or volunteers, including former personnel and volunteers, of your organisation in the past 10 years?

Note: the incident may have taken place more than 10 years ago but the allegation needs to have been made in the past 10 years.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

34. Could you tell us how many allegations there have been in the past 10 years?

- 1
- 2 or 3

- 4 or 5
- More than 5, less than 10
- More than 10

35. Can you describe the type of child abuse that the allegation/s referred to (please select all that apply)?

- Physical
- Emotional
- Sexual
- Exploitation
- Neglect
- Other (please specify)

36. Can you confirm where the allegations are reported to have occurred (please select all that apply)?

- Place of worship
- School
- Hospital
- Detention centres
- Clubs (sports, youth, community ...)
- Outings
- Residentials
- Home visits
- Other (please specify)

37. Are there any current/open investigations into allegations of child abuse in your organisation?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

38. To your knowledge, when an allegation was made, were procedures followed?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

39. To your knowledge, were there any difficulties in following the procedures?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

40. Please elaborate on the difficulties experienced in implementing the procedures?

41. Does your organisation work with or refer victims/survivors of abuse to external support services?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

42. Could you list the main survivor support organisations you work with please?

- Organisation 1
- Organisation 2
- Organisation 3
- Organisation 4

43. Does your organisation integrate child safeguarding measures into other organisational processes and systems (please tick all that apply)?

- Planning
- Budgeting
- Recruitment
- Training
- Performance management
- Partner agreements
- Other (please specify)

Accountability

The section briefly explores the organisation's accountability in relation to child safeguarding.

44. Does your organisation internally monitor the implementation of child safeguarding policies and procedures?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

45. Does your organisation undergo audits or evaluations by external evaluators or auditors with regards to child safeguarding?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

46. Please confirm which organisation carried out the external audit/evaluation? (Please select all that apply)

- The regional/diocese safeguarding representation of my organisation
- The national safeguarding representation of my organisation

- The Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland (SBNI)
- Other (please specify)

47. How frequent are these evaluations/audits?

48. Please could you share the results of any reviews/evaluations/audits carried out in your organisation with us on georgina.anderson@trilateralresearch.com?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

End of Survey. You have reached the end of the survey. Thank you very much for your time and participation. All the best, The Research Team.

Annex 4.b: Faith-based organisations Interview Guide

Introduction

- Welcome and thanks
- Introduction.
- Brief overview of research context, focusing on safeguarding policies and practices in faith-based organisations.
- Explain confidentiality, data protection, and the use of data in the research.
- Any questions.
- Obtain verbal consent to a) proceed; b) record the interview.

Section 1: Current Safeguarding Policies and Alignment with Legislative Frameworks (RQ2)

1. Could you describe the safeguarding policies that your organisation has in place to protect children from abuse?
2. How are these policies developed and updated?
3. To what extent do you think your safeguarding policies align with the broader national or legislative frameworks?
4. Are there areas in your current safeguarding policies that could be improved to better align with national or legal standards?
5. Does your organisation face any challenges in ensuring full compliance with these standards?

Section 2: Safeguarding Implementation in Practice (RQ3)

6. How does your organisation work to prevent instances of child abuse?
7. Does your organisation ensure that staff working in safeguarding roles are vetted, trained and recognised within the organisation?
8. How do you ensure staff and volunteers understand and implement these preventative measures?

9. Can you walk me through the process followed when an allegation of child abuse is reported in your organisation?
 - How are cases escalated?
 - To whom are they reported?
 - How are records maintained throughout the process?
 - What happens to the alleged abuser during and after an investigation?
10. How is your collaboration with statutory agencies (PSNI and HSCT)?
 - *** If we know of an allegation*** How have responses to allegations been handled by statutory agencies?
 - *** If we know of an allegation*** Do you have the names of anyone at PSNI and HSCT that have handled allegations in the past we could contact please?
11. What mechanisms are in place to hold individuals accountable if safeguarding practices are not implemented correctly?
12. From your experience, what are the key challenges your organisation faces in implementing safeguarding policies effectively?
13. What additional resources or support could help improve the implementation of safeguarding practices?

Section 3: Support Services for Victims (RQ4)

14. When a case of child abuse is reported, what support services are available to victims during and after the investigation?
15. How does your organisation ensure victims are aware of these services?
16. Does your organisation collaborate with external agencies (e.g. community support, counselling, legal aid) to provide support to victims?
17. Are these services sufficient for meeting the needs of victims?
18. In your view, do victims face any challenges in accessing support services? If so, what are these challenges?
19. What changes could be made to improve the availability or quality of these services?

Section 4: Concluding Questions

20. Are there any key lessons you've learned from handling past cases of child abuse that you think could inform future safeguarding improvements?
21. Is there anything else you'd like to add about the safeguarding practices in your organisation?
22. Is there anyone else you think we should speak to about safeguarding in your organisation?

Closing Remarks

- Thank the interviewee for their time and insights.
- Reiterate the next steps of the research and how their input will contribute.
- Ask if they would be open to further follow-up if needed.

Annex 4.c: Statutory Agencies Interview Guide

Introduction

- Welcome and thank the participant for their time.
- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the interview.
- Provide a brief overview of the research context, focusing on safeguarding policies and practices in faith-based organisations.
- Explain confidentiality, data protection, and the use of their input in the research.
- Offer them the opportunity to ask any questions about the interview process.
- Obtain verbal consent to a) proceed and b) record the interview.

Section 1: Statutory Requirements and Compliance

1. What is the legal framework that governs child safeguarding within clerical contexts?
2. Could you outline the minimum statutory safeguarding requirements for faith-based organisations handling child abuse cases, particularly clerical child abuse (as opposed to institutional)?
3. How do statutory agencies ensure compliance with these safeguarding requirements in faith-based organisations?
 - What mechanisms are in place to audit or monitor safeguarding practices in these contexts?
4. Are there any notable challenges you've observed in faith-based organisations meeting these statutory requirements?
5. From your perspective, are there any areas where statutory safeguarding requirements could be improved or clarified for better protection of children in clerical settings?
6. How might faith-based organisations better comply with these statutory standards?

Section 2: Nature and Prevalence of Clerical Child Abuse

7. Based on your knowledge and available data, what can you tell us about the current prevalence of clerical child abuse in NI?
8. How has this changed over time (e.g., decreasing, increasing, or stable)?
9. Are there any particular risk factors or patterns you have observed that are unique to clerical environments in relation to child abuse?
10. In your experience, are there common issues in these contexts that hinder reporting or investigation of clerical child abuse?
11. Have you noticed any significant trends in the reporting of clerical child abuse in recent years?
12. Are there any emerging concerns or issues that statutory agencies need to be more aware of in dealing with clerical child abuse cases?
13. Are there any datasets or reports available that document cases of clerical child abuse?
 - If yes, could you describe the nature and scope of this data?
 - How frequently is this data updated and shared among relevant stakeholders?
 - Could you share this data with us?

Section 3: Data Sharing

14. What are the key procedures or protocols in place for sharing safeguarding information between statutory agencies and faith-based organisations?
15. How effective are these information-sharing mechanisms in ensuring prompt and appropriate safeguarding responses?
16. What are the main challenges faced in sharing or accessing safeguarding data related to clerical child abuse?

Section 4: Safeguarding Best Practices

17. From your experience, are there any best practices for safeguarding in clerical settings that you can share?
18. Are there specific approaches that have been particularly successful in preventing or addressing clerical child abuse?
19. Can you describe any successful collaborations between statutory agencies and faith-based organisations in improving safeguarding practices?
20. How could these collaborations be enhanced to further improve safeguarding outcomes?
21. Are there any systems in place to monitor and evaluate the safeguarding practices in clerical contexts?
22. Are the lessons learned from past cases integrated into current safeguarding strategies? If so, how?

Section 5: Improvements in Safeguarding and Support for Survivors

23. Have you observed any notable improvements in safeguarding policies and practices in clerical settings compared to the past? If so, why?
24. Have these changes had any impact on the protection of children in your opinion?
25. What support services are available to victims/survivors of clerical child abuse?
26. Are these services sufficient to meet the needs of victims when making an allegation and during investigations of child abuse?
27. What improvements could be made to better support victims/survivors of clerical child abuse?
28. In your experience, are there any gaps in the current support structures, either from statutory agencies or faith-based organisations?

Section 6: Concluding Questions

29. Are there any additional insights or recommendations you would like to share regarding safeguarding in faith-based settings?
30. Do you have any closing thoughts on how statutory agencies and faith-based organisations could work together more effectively to improve safeguarding practices?

Closing Remarks

- Thank the interviewee for their time and insights.
- Reiterate the importance of their contributions to the research.
- Ask if they would be open to further follow-up if needed.

Annex 4.d: Victim/Survivor Support Services Interviews

Introduction

- Welcome and thank the participant for their time.
- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the interview.
- Provide a brief overview of the research, emphasising its focus on understanding the support services available for victims/survivors of clerical child abuse and identifying areas for improvement.
- Explain confidentiality, data protection, and the use of their input in the research.
- Offer them the opportunity to ask any questions about the interview process.
- Obtain verbal consent to a) proceed and b) record the interview.

Section 1: Overview of the Organisation and Services

1. Can you provide a brief overview of your organisation and its mission?
2. What specific services does your organisation provide to victims/survivors of clerical child abuse?
3. Are there specific services designed for survivors of clerical child abuse compared to other forms of abuse?
4. Can you estimate the number of survivors of clerical child abuse you have worked with in recent years?
5. How do survivors typically find or get referred to your services (e.g., self-referral, referral by faith-based organisations, statutory agencies)?

Section 2: Challenges in Providing Support

6. Do you encounter challenges when working specifically with survivors of clerical child abuse? If so, what are the most common challenges?
7. In your experience, what barriers do survivors face when trying to access support services? (e.g., stigma, shame, lack of awareness, geographical distance, financial barriers)
8. Does your organisation collaborate with other service providers (e.g., statutory agencies, faith-based organisations)?
 - If so, how and are these partnerships effective in supporting survivors?

Section 3: Reflections on Safeguarding Policies and Practices

9. From your perspective, how well do current safeguarding policies align with the needs and experiences of survivors of clerical child abuse?
10. Based on your experience, what improvements do you think are needed in safeguarding practices, especially within faith-based organisations, to better support victims of clerical child abuse?
11. How can statutory agencies and faith-based organisations be more effective in preventing and responding to child abuse within faith organisations?

Section 4: Survivor Feedback and Service Evaluation

- 12.** Have you received feedback from survivors regarding the support services they've accessed?
- If so, what do survivors typically identify as the most helpful aspects of the support they receive?
 - What improvements have been suggested by survivors that could enhance the services offered (e.g., more tailored therapy, extended counselling, or legal support)?
 - Are there any unmet needs or gaps in support services that survivors of clerical child abuse frequently mention?

Section 5: Future Directions and Recommendations

- 13.** What specific recommendations would you offer to improve the support system for clerical child abuse survivors in terms of, e.g.: service provision, collaboration with other agencies, or legal reform?
- 14.** Are there any additional thoughts or suggestions you would like to share that we haven't covered?

Closing Remarks

- Thank the interviewee for their time and insights.
- Reiterate the importance of their contributions to the research.
- Ask if they would be open to further follow-up if needed.